



Report for:	Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	1 July 2020
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Garage Programme Update
Contact:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andrew Williams, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Contracted Services • Linda Roberts, AD People, Performance and Innovation, Author/Responsible Officer • James Deane, Corporate Director (Finance and Operations), Garage Programme Sponsor • Fiona Williamson, AD Housing, Garage Programme Sponsor
Purpose of report:	The purpose of this report is to update members on the progress of the Garage Programme review.
Recommendations	Note the progress of the programme and the impact of COVID-19 on this programme.
Period for post policy/project review	Propose another update with proposed investment strategy in November 2020
Corporate objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building strong and vibrant communities • Ensuring economic growth and prosperity
Implications:	<p><u>Financial</u> The review is essential to ensure the garage asset maximises revenue and is appropriately aligned to demand, so that alternative use options can be considered for the generation of capital receipts or alternative revenue streams. The review is being funded from reserves on the basis of spend to save.</p>
'Value for money' implications	<p><u>Value for money</u> The review is being undertaken at market rates for this nature of professional services support.</p>

Risk implications	<p>There is an active risk register for this programme review which is managed by the Programme Board.</p> <p>The main risk for the Council relating to Garages is without any intervention they will be a continued decline of revenue. There is a reputational risk to the Council for the perceived poor management of the garage stock.</p>
Community Impact Assessment	Community Impact Assessment carried out on 7 th January 2020.
Health and safety Implications	There are no specific H&S concerns in this review as such. However Health and Safety implications will be full considered as part of the recommendations that will be developed once the review is complete.
Consultees:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacts from within Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesley Jugoo, Empty Homes Team Leader • Theresa Miles, Garage Management Officer • Lucy Tash, Accountant: Housing, DBC (for budgets) • Ben Trueman, GM - Technology & Digital Transformation, DBC (for ICT systems) • Charlotte Courtney, Project Manager, Orchard Systems
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<p>CMT – Corporate Management Team CPW – Community Protection Warning CPN - Community protection Notice</p>

Executive Summary

1. The Garage Programme review commenced in November 2019 with the appointment of an external Programme Manager to lead the review and implement improvements.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the completion of the development of a mobile tool to collect garage survey data. This is due to the supplier furloughing staff until the beginning of June and the Council's priorities were focused on the transition to remote working and the immediate response to the lockdown and new ways of working. Due to the availability of Orchard staff to work on this development the upgrade work will not be completed until it is done over the weekend 4th and 5th July
3. Tenders were sent out to known external surveyors and the successful bidder was a local firm Aitchison Rafferty. They too had been severely impacted by the lockdown restrictions but will be able to start this work w/c 6th July. Based on the numbers of surveys to be done (6,855) they expect this week to be completed by 20th August.
4. The Garages team will continue to process garage application and returns whilst this work is being done. This will also help inform on the demand for

garages and if this changes as a result of the impact on the local economy of COVID-19.

5. Once the surveys are completed and the data mapped against demand this will inform and shape a garage investment strategy proposals and priorities.
6. It is planned to present this investment strategy for scrutiny and to Cabinet in October 2020.

Introduction

7. There have been a number of issues with the rental and management of Garage assets in Dacorum. Constructed around 1950/1960 a lot of the stock requires maintenance and investment, but it has not been known where this should be best spent. Although the garages as assets belong to the General Fund, they have been historically managed by the Housing directorate of the Council.
8. The Garage Programme review commenced in November 2019 with the appointment of an external Programme Manager to lead the review and implement improvements.

Progress

9. The approach and progress of the review was presented at the joint scrutiny meeting in February 2020. This report is an update of progress since February and shows the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has had on this project.
10. The main focus of the programme at the time of the outbreak of COVID-19 was:
 1. Completing the development of an IT tool to collect garage survey data and feed it directly in the ProMaster system (part of the Housing system Orchard).
 2. Send out a tender to known external surveying firms to enable the surveys to be done much more quickly than just relying on our internal surveying capability.
 3. Continue to process applications and returns of garages and setup new rental agreements.

Development of a mobile applications to capture garage survey data

11. The Council's contract Project Manager had instructed the software supplier (Orchard) in February 2020 about the changes that were required to enable the mobile application to work for DBC. In early March Orchard informed DBC that the tool would require an upgrade of the underlying database. The first part of this work was done w/c 23rd March but this coincided with the introduction of lockdown restrictions.

12. The Council's contract Project Manager was stood down on 30th March and at this time Orchard furloughed staff as we received emails with out of office message referring to them being unavailable until 1st June 2020. We had no consultation with Orchard in regard to this and so the work was put on hold, as their staff were unable to work if furloughed. In addition Orchard was in the final stages of an acquisition by a US company MRI, which was announced on 31st March, so they were unlikely to make any adverse information in respect of the COVID impact public at that stage.
13. In addition to Orchard's availability the Council's priorities were focused on the transition to remote working and the immediate response to the lockdown and new ways of working. There was a need to suspend any development work to ensure that all IT was focused on the support of the current environment to ensure that wholesale homeworking and necessary resilience was delivered.
14. At the end of May (27th May) we resumed contact with Orchard as this coincided with their planned to return to work. At this point there was still much work to be done to complete the upgrade. We received an email with a planned return date of 22nd July due to limited capacity for the upgrade team which we replied was unacceptable. We have now had this scheduled for over the weekend of the 4th and 5th July. This coincides with the wholesale survey work being starting w/c 6th July.

Tendering for external surveying capability

15. At the end of March a tender was sent out to three known firms of surveyors for them to bid to survey the garages on the Council's behalf. Surveying had continued with the internal team but it had made slow progress due to their other housing work commitments.
16. The tenders were reviewed in May as during April the Councils was focused on the transition to remote working and the immediate response to the lockdown and new ways of working.
17. Aitchison Rafferty (were successful with their tender and in consultation with them and the return of their staff to work it was agreed that the survey work would start w/c 6th July with an aim to complete all the garage stock that had not been updated (6,855 garages) by our internal team by the end of August. It was confirmed that this work can be done whilst maintaining COVID-19 guidelines.

Continue to process applications and returns of garages and setup new rental agreements

18. Although the development of the mobile tool was suspended during lockdown the Council's Garages Team continued to process garage applications and make garages available for rental. During this period (April to first two weeks

in June) there has been 263 e-form enquiries, 93 offers made, 60 commencements with 56 terminations. The DBC surveyors who have been unable to go into tenant buildings have carried out 756 inspections.

19. This is a good performance from the team that they have managed to respond to residents requests. However depending on the severity of the recession, there is a risk that garages may represent an early cost saving for a household in financial difficulties. Garages relinquished now could have a medium-term financial impact on the Council as they may prove challenging to re-let. This will be factored into the ongoing garage programme and subsequent investment strategy.

Next steps

20. A meeting was held this week (22nd June) between Orchard and DBC to finalise the arrangements for the work to be done on the upgrade and completion of the mobile tool. This will be closely monitored during the next couple of weeks to ensure that it completed on time.
21. There are plans for Aitchison Rafferty surveyors to come to The Forum to receive training in the mobile application before they commence with their surveys.
22. Once the surveys are completed and the data mapped against demand this will inform and shape a garage investment strategy proposals and priorities.
23. It is planned to present this investment strategy for scrutiny and to Cabinet in November 2020.