

## **Housing & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Annual Review 2019-20**

As in previous years, 2019 was a busy year for the Housing and Communities OSC and Housing Officers. The Housing Service showed a high standard of forward planning, which enabled Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) to stay ahead of upcoming changes in legislation with minimal disruption to our service users.

The committee held 9 meetings covering a varied range of topics. In addition to budget monitoring these included:

- **Private Housing Sector**
- **Tenancy Strategy**
- **Universal Credit Update**
- **Youth connections Update**
- **Homeless Reduction Update**
- **Total Asset Management Contract Year 5 Review**
- **Sports Strategy & Physical Activity Action Plan**
- **Anti-Social behaviour Update**
- **Children's Services & Community Safety Partnership**
- **Customer Services Review**
- **The Old Town Hall Update**
- **Hertfordshire Year of Culture 2020**
- **Housing Strategy**
- **Performance Review of Total Asset Management Contract & Gas Installation and Service Contract**
- **Supported Housing Service Update**
- **The Elms Contract**
- **Flexible Tenancy Update**
- **Rents and Other Charges**
- **Berkhampstead Sports Centre**
- **Garage Programme**
- **HRA Strategic Acquisitions Policy**
- **Help to move to a more suitable home**

In an unusual year, the service planned and adapted to meet the needs of residents. A new Private sector housing team was put in place to work with private landlords of homes with multiple occupancy. The team have settled well into their new roles and are building healthy relationship with landlords as well as nation housing agencies to ensure homes rented in Dacorum meet the lettable standard.

The Housing Service were also winners of two housing awards for their innovative design and build programmes, in particular the new development Klyna court. These were national competitions with tough criteria; achieving first place in such a competitions cannot be downplayed and reflects the commitment of the council and members to provide not only the best value but also the most desirable accommodation possible for our residents.

The on-going roll out of universal Credit required proper support planning to ensure our service users were equipped to transition to this new system. The Housing & Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Housing Service introduced a new post to specifically assist tenants in navigating the new system. Over the course of the year, the introduction of this position lead to

a reduction in the forecast losses and bad debt provision and again demonstrates our commitment to ensuring no one in our community is left behind.

We welcomed a new team member into the newly created post of Community Partnerships, Physical Activity and Sports Officer. This role will network all sports providers in Dacorum and help to put in place a leisure provision that considers the needs of the wide range of residents in the borough. So far the feedback from our partners has been good and we look forward to growth in partnership working in this area.

We recognise arts and leisure as important for the wellbeing of Dacorum residents. The committee has engaged robust discussions on ways of improving our leisure offer and on going reviews of council owned assets especially our heritage site The Old Town Hall. We look forward to communicating these outcomes in 2021.

Whilst the majority of residents live peacefully along side one another, a small minority display unacceptable levels of anti-social behaviour (ASB), which disrupts the whole community. During the 2019/20 year we reviewed our ASB policy to find ways to deter and better manage perpetrators to ensure greater fairness and safer communities with Dacorum.

The committee has reviewed our Supported Housing Scheme policies numerous times throughout the year. We recognise the important role of the elderly in our community play and our responsibility in ensuring their housing needs are met appropriately. This is an on-going work where members and residents are consulted to exchange experiences and put forward recommendations to optimise this area of our housing provision. Covi-19 landed unexpectedly and suddenly on the nation. I would like to commend the housing service on their proactivity, care and efficiency in managing the challenges that this presented. One example I wish to highlight is that within days, all tenants in our elderly persons dwelling were contacted personally by a member of the housing team to ensure that they were safe and knew where to access help if the need arose. This was exceptional and illustrates the care the team have for our Dacorum residents along with agility and a much needed common sense approach to housing provision.

I would like to thank my Vice-Chairman, Cllr Gbola Adeleke, the Committee, Portfolio Holders and Officers for their support.

I would also like specifically to thank Sarah Turner for her excellent work in taking the minutes of our meetings.

Councillor Isy Imarni

Chairman, **Housing & Communities** Overview & Scrutiny Committee July 2020

