

MINUTES

CABINET

23 JUNE 2020

Councillors: Williams (Leader)
Griffiths (Deputy
Leader)
Elliot
G Sutton
Anderson
Banks

Officers:	Natasha Beresford	Group Manager - Strategic Housing
	Mark Brookes	Assistant Director - Corporate and Contracted Services
	James Deane	Corporate Director - Finance and Operations
	Mark Gaynor	Corporate Director - Housing & Regeneration
	Sally Marshall	Chief Executive
	Katie Mogan	Corporate and Democratic Support Lead Officer
	Fiona Williamson	Assistant Director - Housing

Also in attendance:

Councillor John Birnie
Councillor Terry Douris
Councillor Adrian England
Councillor Nigel Taylor
Councillor Jane Timmis
Councillor Ron Tindall

The meeting began at 6.30 pm

CA/50/20 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2020 were agreed by Members present.

CA/51/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

CA/52/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

CA/53/20 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation

CA/54/20 REFERRALS TO CABINET

There were no referrals to Cabinet.

CA/55/20 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan was noted with the following change:

- Add Herts Growth Board for Hemel Garden Communities to the July meeting

CA/56/20 HOMELESS STRATEGY

Decision

That the 2020-24 Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Policy be approved.

Corporate objectives

Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those in most need.

Deputy Monitoring officer comments:

Further to Section 2 of the HA, local housing authorities are required to review homelessness in their district and formulate a strategy based on the result of the review. A new strategy is required every four years.

The proposed strategy meets the statutory duties under the HA.

Deputy S151 Officer comments:

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this strategy.

Advice

Councillor Griffiths introduced the report to members and said it had been to Housing & Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee. She said the housing team had been under a lot of pressures due to Covid-19 and said they had coped admirably. The strategy has been updated in line with the latest legislation and legal requirements.

N Beresford said it replaces the 2016-2020 strategy and it is a legal requirement to have an up to date strategy. There is a change in the title which is a requirement from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) to include 'rough sleeper'. The strategy outlines the five key commitments the team believes

are relevant to prevent homelessness. The report also includes the key challenges for the service, including the impact from Covid-19.

Recommendations agreed

CA/57/20 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY 2020

Decision

That the Private Sector Housing Strategy be approved.

Corporate objectives

The Strategic Housing Service's responsibilities and activity in relation to the Private Rented Sector contributes to the following corporate objectives:

- A clean, safe and enjoyable environment
- Building strong and vibrant communities

Deputy Monitoring Officer comments

Local authorities are under various statutory obligations in relation to the provision of, and standard of, accommodation in its district. The attached Strategy sets out how Dacorum will meet its obligations to ensure that accommodation in the private sector is maintained to the appropriate standard.

Deputy S151 Officer Comments

No direct financial requirements as a result of this strategy paper.

Advice

Councillor Griffiths introduced the report to members. The Private Sector Housing team moved under Housing two years ago and have been slowly developing new initiatives and policies. This strategy has been to Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

N Beresford said this strategy outlines the council's commitment to improving private sector housing standards in the borough. It focusses primarily on private sector accommodation but also have to have regard to registered providers and owner occupier accommodation. There is no legal requirement to adopt this strategy but after the service moved under the housing remit, it was felt that it was a good idea to have a strategy in place to outline the key priorities in addressing private sector housing standards. It has been informed by recent BRE stock model report undertaken earlier this year and is reflective of current housing condition in the borough.

Councillor Birnie referred to the 1148 HMOs in the borough of which 234 need to be licenced. He asked what evidence that was based on.

N Beresford said the information provided by the BRE is made up of data from a range of sources including DBC's information. The BRE compiled data from trading standards, revenue and benefits department, EPC data, energy companies and the electoral roll which provides detail overview of the stock within Dacorum and indicates high level of occupancy in properties. Only 234 HMOs require mandatory licensing which is set out in the regulations and governed by MHCLG. 100 have already been licenced, 32 in the process and the remainder are still to come forward and submit an application. The team will be prioritising the landlords that are yet to come forward.

Recommendations agreed.

CA/58/20 COVID-19 IMPACT REPORT

Decision

1. That:
 - (a) The projected financial impact of Covid-19 for 2020/21 as set out in section 1 and;
 - (b) The proposed recovery framework as set out in section 2 be noted.
2. That the extension of the voluntary sector contracts as set out in paragraphs 3.2 – 3.5 and the new one year contract to DENS as highlighted in paragraph 3.7 be agreed.
3. That the Covid-19 Strategic Risk annexed to the report be agreed.

Corporate objectives

The financial impact and the Council's response to Covid-19 will impact all of the Council's Corporate Objectives.

Monitoring

Officer

comments

The Monitoring Officer continues to monitor the key issues raised by legislative changes and relevant government guidance and ensure that effective policies and procedures are in place to assist services to continue to deliver during the pandemic and subsequent recovery phase.

S151

Officer

comments

The Financial Implications section of the report have been written by the S151 officer and will continue to be monitored as actual costs become clearer. Members will be regularly updated on the financial implications of Covid-19 as they develop.

Advice

Councillor Williams introduced the report to members and wanted to place on record his thanks to the whole organisation for the way it has dealt with the current crises and how well all the staff have stepped up to meet the challenge. He said the report contains a number of sections and the impact of Covid-19. The financial implications are still speculation at this stage and a number of measures have been put in place to help businesses, vulnerable people and other organisations. This report is comprehensive in outlining the challenges faced and will continue to face.

S Marshall echoed the thanks to staff who have been working under extreme circumstances and thanked members for their support. This situation is unprecedented and the report identifies the impact on services and identifies the governance for the officer recovery team to work on the programme and this is linked and in line with broader work across Hertfordshire through the resilience forum and the chief executive group. The key recommendations are extending the voluntary sector contracts to give them greater financial security and the sector needs certainty to receive more financial support to continue services at a difficult time. The community grant scheme will be widened to include Covid-19 related projects and there has been a lot of support for local businesses and S Marshall gave credit to the finance and economic development teams for processing grant payments so quickly and effectively. It was also highlighted that the homelessness team had gone from 95 people presenting as homeless pre-pandemic to 185 and this has been done with existing resources. There have been some new services provided to the community such as the food parcels being delivered to vulnerable residents in partnership with the county council. The plans to return to The Forum are flexible dependant on government guidance on public buildings and are currently preparing the building with a 2m distance and there is scope to change to 1m if necessary. Work has been carried out with the town centre businesses and BID partners to help retail businesses to reopen. S Marshall highlighted to members the recommendation to include a new risk to be entered in the strategic risk register that will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, the Incident Management Team are meeting three times a week and members will be updated.

Councillor Tindall also added his thanks to all staff for their efforts over this period that came with very little warning. He asked if there was a date for a return to The Forum or if it would be judged on circumstances.

S Marshall said the building was in the final stages of work; access doors changed to limit touching of door handles and work has started this week on adding screens between the banks of desks and at the customer service unit. Once this has been completed and subject to government advice on public buildings, it is hoped that it will be open for limited access in July. Staff and members will be given a briefing in the next couple of weeks via a webinar.

Councillor Birnie asked why there was no member involvement on the Incident Management Team.

S Marshall said this was in line with normal arrangements for emergency planning and recovery, it is officer led and any decisions that need to be made are done through portfolio holder decisions or reports back to Cabinet. There will be an opportunity to review everything through the overview and scrutiny committees. The decisions made normally have an operational impact rather than strategic.

J Deane ran through the financial aspects of the report. There is clearly a significant risk from a financial perspective in the current year and moving forward. The general fund will be significantly more affected than the housing revenue account. There is a predicted pressure of £5million for the General Fund which represents a third of the net cost of services and is driven largely by a reduced income rather than increased expenditure. These are high level estimates based on how an anticipated recession may unfold and its effect on the council's income streams. Referring to page 96, this gives some background on the figures and shows the key income streams for the council showing the council may potentially lose up to £6 million of budgeted income in the current year. This will be monitored on a monthly basis, some of these are intense and short bursts of loss of income suppressed, for example car parking which has had almost no income over the short term during the lockdown but hopefully it could recover quite quickly similarly, there are those that haven't been affected in the short term but could decrease moving forward, for example garages which could be at risk if there is a recession as household incomes become stretched. It is expected that there will not any more help from central government, the council have been given a grant of £1.6 million but this has been included in the net pressure. The council is part of groups lobbying the government for more funding, including the Local Government Association and the District Councils Network. For future years, there are questions around council tax collection. Although Council Tax collection rates are likely to be down, due to the technicalities of the Council Tax system, there will not be an impact on council tax funding this year. There are some disturbing trends in collection rates emerging— council tax collection was down 1.5% in the second month but take these figures with caution, as approximately 2,500 residents took the opportunity to move from 12 month instalments to 10 months and deferred the first payment until June. Business rates risk is in next year and the big unknown is how this is going to fit into the new government funding scheme. Both council tax collections and future government funding are being worked into a Medium Term Financial Strategy planning to bring to Cabinet in July but this could be delayed as need good quality analysis on June council tax collections. The Housing Revenue Account is forecasting a pressure of £500k and currently down 5% on rents and significant numbers of tenants have switched to Universal Credit. The pressure has been offset by a hold on spending due to restrictions in place and inability to access tenants houses.

Councillor Tindall asked if J Deane was aware of what was likely to happen with the new homes bonus. He said he had heard that the government are going to continue to roll it out.

J Deane said they are providing monthly returns to central government and they are drilling down more and more into local government finances to understand how they can deal with the pressures they are going to be under.

Councillor Elliot asked about the percentage of government funding that has been paid out

J Deane said it is about 90% given out to retail, leisure and hospitality businesses. Not going to see a full take up of the grant as some businesses in Dacorum won't be able to claim because they are claiming elsewhere and might get hit by state aid rules. At the end of the first two weeks of the Discretionary Fund, approximately a third (£500k) has been allocated and paid out.

Councillor Williams noted that the scheme is going to be extended this week which may encourage more applications.

J Deane said the premises overheads threshold will be lowered to 3,000 from 7,500 and we will be paying £2,000 grants to those organisations.

Councillor Birnie noted that it appears most impact will be coming in the next year rather than this year given the amount of slippage involved. He asked if the council was well covered with its reserves.

J Deane said there is a real pressure in the current year and can guess more accurately what the impact might be in the current year. The impact on future years depends on council tax collections and the severity of any recession. The council's reserves are earmarked for specific projects which will benefit the borough or deliver on efficiency savings. The reserves can only be used once and cannot be recovered. J Deane said he takes the view that the council needs to push hard for additional funding from government and use reserves as a last case scenario.

Councillor Williams said he has spoken to the MP for Hemel Hempstead and made the point that the reserves are not just sitting there, they have been allocated. Many councils will not survive without further government expenditure and is of the view that Dacorum should also get support.

J Deane supported this comment and said councils in a position of good financial health should not lose out to those in trouble that have taken greater risks. This fairness debate is going through the sector and conversations between central and local government.

Recommendations agreed.

CA/59/20 CLIMATE CHANGE

Decision

1. That the approach to the development and delivery of the Climate Emergency Strategy and Action plan as set out in the report be approved.
2. That the Climate Emergency Statement in Appendix 4 be approved

Resolved to recommend:

3. **The creation of a budget for the Climate Emergency of £75,000 in 2020/21 and authority be delegated for its expenditure be made to the Corporate Director Housing and Regeneration and the Assistant Director Corporate and Contracted Services in consultation with the Leader be approved**
4. That an annual review of the progress of the Strategy and Action Plan be made to Cabinet each year and an update be provided to Cabinet in September 2020 on initial progress
5. That a training and development programme for both staff and Members be delivered in 2020/21
6. That a 'Climate Emergency impact statement' be incorporated into Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny reports

Corporate

objectives

The Council's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan will help to support all 5 corporate objectives:

- *Safe and clean environment:* e.g. contains actions relating to the quality of existing environments and design and layout of new development that promote security and safe access;
- *Community Capacity:* e.g. provide a framework for local communities to be better informed and involved in climate emergency mitigation.;
- *New and Affordable housing:* through both direct delivery and setting improved sustainability requirements in new homes would help to reduce both the cost of energy and water and the carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions the homes would produce;
- *Dacorum delivers:* fulfilling the zero carbon pledge will make a huge contribution to local sustainability and assist in the national target to reach zero carbon as a nation by 2050;

- *Regeneration*: the strategy and action plan will provide improvements to air quality, biodiversity, opportunities for cycling and walking as well as major economic potential for 'green' businesses.

Monitoring Officer comments

The Strategy and Action Plan will require continual review against the baseline data in order to measure the effectiveness of the agreed actions.

S151 Officer comments

The recommended £75k budget can be funded through draw down from the Climate Change and Sustainability Reserve.

Whilst the Council remains ambitious in the delivery of its Climate Change Action Plan, it should be acknowledged that there may be occasions when financial restrictions prevent the implementation of desirable service changes in the future.

Future recommendations to Members will need to be presented within the context of the Council's broader financial position in order to support evidence-based decision-making.

Advice

Councillor Williams introduced the report and asked for feedback from cabinet members about the comments from overview and scrutiny about their service areas.

Councillor Griffiths said she had concerns over the recommendation from SPAE OSC about increasing rents. This recommendation has not been discussed by H&C OSC and was not happy with the suggestion. The council needs to bring people along and some tenants are already in fuel poverty so increasing rents or forcing them to go all electric in their homes which is often more expensive than gas is not the right thing to do. There are government guidelines on rent increase, there has been a 1% decrease in the last four years which has now finished so the new guideline is the CPI plus 1%. She would not be supporting that recommendation.

Councillor Birnie said that he had some sympathy with what Councillor Griffiths said but said he was guided by the members on his committee. He said he would like to make the point that was brought up Councillor Timmis who is the borough's representative on the London Luton Airport Committee. There is no reference in the strategy about the massive expansion planned at the airport. 70% of western bound flights fly over Dacorum and there would be an increase in road pollution, noise pollution and fuel pollution from aircraft.

Councillor Elliot agreed with the comments made by Councillor Griffiths. He referred to the points about electric charging points and said it was quite costly to install these and the technology is always changing.

Councillor Anderson also agreed with the comments made by Councillor Griffiths. He stated that the council shouldn't get hung up on detail in this strategy or rule ideas either in or out. It is important to look at ideas where possible and the measures the council implements as part of this policy should be realistic, effective, proportionate and cost effective. He said he did not feel that a full on approach to installing electric charging vehicles fit in to that criteria. The council needs to have a flexible strategy to respond to emerging technology. It is important to consult the public but must avoid the mistakes of other authorities whereby people begin to passionately raise ideas that are not realistic. The report as a whole is excellent, and contains generalities under which the council can move forward.

Councillor Banks added support to comments made by the Cabinet and on a well-produced strategy and action plan. She noted that air quality was part of the plan but not specifically London Luton airport. She accepted that communication with residents and empowering them to take steps themselves is a critical part to delivering this strategy.

Councillor Timmis added to Councillor Birnie's point about London Luton airport. The airport's intention is to continue with applying for an expansion which would double its current passenger numbers and generate a significant amount of traffic. Luton airport continue to say that people will travel by train but at the same time, have built massive car parks. This will have a major impact on climate change and hopes that the council will raise its objections against the current application.

Councillor Sutton agreed with previous comments about rent and the electric charging points which he also believed was too early to make a decision on at this stage as the motor industry are working on different options for power. He also raised concerns that if every vehicle was electric whether there would be enough lithium to supply them. The council are using the Local Plan to include ways of making new homes and developments carbon neutral.

M Gaynor said London Luton airport did not feature in the strategy because the council already has a position of opposing the airport expansion. The strategy can be used to look at external factors which may have an effect on climate change inside the borough. There may be an impact from Covid-19 affecting the appetite for the air industry to expand. The electric charging points is not for the borough council to decide on its expansion, the technology falls to the county council and mainly relies on a push from the private sector. There is a requirement in the Local Plan that future developments must provide electric charging points.

Councillor Williams said that the airport had paused their application but didn't doubt that it would be paused forever but Dacorum and Herts County Council have objections against it. He said there was a huge difference between using electricity at home and electricity to power a car. For example, a house uses 7000kwh a year to power and driving 20,000 miles in a car would use 6000kwh so approximately 80% of electricity used in a house would have to be generated again. In some properties, it would be impractical to own an electric vehicle like in flat developments. He said some ideas like more tree planting and solar panels are more realistic.

Recommendations agreed.

The Meeting ended at 7.30 pm