

Housing & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-2021

2020 Brought unprecedented challenges and the Housing team must be praised for their quick adaptation and continued flexibility throughout the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Within days of the national lockdown being announced, the housing service reviewed their service users and amended their priorities to ensure that the most vulnerable residents were contacted and given the support they needed to survive. One of many highlights was the team's calls to elderly residents in our sheltered accommodation schemes. Initially through phone contact, the team quickly assessed the revised pandemic induced needs of these tenants and adapted the housing service to ensure these needs were met. Staff at every level participated in contacting vulnerable tenants in Dacorum to ensure they were reached as quickly as possible. The team continued their outreach efforts throughout the year and must be commended for their compassion and quick action.

Despite the pandemic, the staff on both Housing and Communities teams stayed abreast of the forward plan and amend priorities where necessary.

The committee held 8 meetings covering a varied range of topics. In addition to budget monitoring these included:

- **ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR UPDATE**
- **CHILDREN SERVICES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**
- **CLIMATE CHANGE**
- **COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PERFORMANCE REPORTS**
- **CUSTOMER SERVICES**
- **EMPTY HOMES**
- **GARAGES**
- **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**
- **HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**
- **HOUSING HOUSEMARK COVID IMPACT**
- **HOUSING INCOME COLLECTION**
- **HOUSING PERFORMANCE UPDATE**
- **HRA BUSINESS PLAN**
- **OLD TOWN HALL UPDATE**
- **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORTS ACTION PLAN**
- **PRIVATE SECTOR ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME**
- **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY**
- **SUPPORTED HOUSING UPDATE**
- **SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE PROGRAMME THROUGH THE ACTIVE DACORUM HUB**
- **YOUTH PROPOSAL PAPER**

The Borough's housing team continued their commitment to eliminate homelessness in the Dacorum. For many years Dacorum have followed the 'No Second Night Out' strategy very successfully. The team had to add additional support for stresses and family breakdowns brought about by the extended lockdown and job losses. As always they adapted their resources to meet the needs of Dacorum's residents although additional temporary accommodation has had to be obtained due to the unforeseen onset of the pandemic.

The Private sector housing team continue to work with private landlords of homes with multiple occupancy. The team have put in new measures to ensure that landlords as well as national housing agencies to ensure homes rented in Dacorum meet the lettable standard. These initiatives include The Private Sector Housing Strategy and Private Sector Assistance Programme policies that were brought to the committee for scrutiny.

Understandably the pandemic left Dacorum's youth with limited activities. The committee had a robust discussion on what the future provision of youth activities in Dacorum consist of. Many members gave examples of needs within their wards and suggestions on facilities and activities that would give Dacorum's youth the best outcomes and the Council best value for money. The portfolio holder is currently reviewing these suggestions with the team and will return to the committee later in the year with an update.

Our valued heritage site The Old Town hall suffered as a result of required closures during this pandemic. It was both the officer's and the committee's priority to ensure residents safety was at the forefront of all decisions made. In light of this the Town hall remained closed for the majority of the year but has remained on the committee agenda to ensure the progress made in recent years is not lost.

The committee worked with officers to ensure that the council's housing and communities services offered the best service to Dacorum residents. This consisted of regular discussions and updates on which facilities were deemed safe to re-open during periods when national restrictions were lifted. The portfolio were wide, ranging from deciding when it was safe for planned works programme on council properties to be restarted through to managing opening times of adventure playgrounds.

In addition to in-house monitoring, the council was also part of a national benchmarking survey which highlighted that Dacorum is an unusual borough that caters for all demographics in equal measure. Despite Dacorum's wide remit, the council faired very well in the national survey. The teams must be commended for their adaptability and individual approach to residents needs.

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 Katie Mogan and Kayley Johnson for their excellent work in taking the minutes of our meetings.

Councillor Isy Imarni

Chairman, **Housing & Communities** Overview & Scrutiny Committee April 2021