

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2021

Present:

Councillor Imarni (Chair)
Councillor Adeleke (Vice Chair)
Councillor Bassadone
Councillor Durrant
Councillor Barry
Councillor Arslan
Councillor Silwal

Councillor Banks
Councillor England
Councillor Freedman
Councillor Johnson
Councillor Pringle
Councillor Mahmood

Officers:

Matt Rawdon	Group Manager - People and Performance
Linda Roberts	Assistant Director – Performance, People & Innovation
Fiona Williamson	Assistant Director – Housing
Fiona Jump	Group Manager (Financial Services)
Mark Gaynor	Corporate Director (Housing & Regeneration)
Kayley Johnston	Corporate & Democratic Support Officer

Others:

Councillor Griffiths Portfolio Holder – Housing

*Before the meeting began a minutes silence was held by the committee, in memory of
Cllr Graham Sutton who sadly passed on Saturday 27th February 2021.*

HC/010/21 MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS

The committee agreed that the minutes from 1 December 2020 were an accurate record.

HC/011/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Adeleke informed the committee that due to commitments he could only attend until 7:30pm.
Apologies were received from Councillor Hollinghurst.

HC/012/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

HC/013/21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Chairman

There was no public participation.

HC/014/21 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO A CALL-IN

None.

HC/015/21 BUDGET MONITORING Q3 REPORT

The chair had received two request on rearranging the agenda items. It was agreed by the committee that the agenda items would be taken in the following order:
Item 6, 7, 10, 8, 9 and then item 11.

F Jump introduced the report, for recommendations that the committee note the financial position for the Council for 2020/21 as at quarter 3.

The report outlines the financial position for the Council for 2020/21 and in so quantifies the financial risk associated with service decisions, which are expected to be made for the financial year.

F Jump was happy to take questions from Members.

Cllr Adeleke said that as the report was prepared beforehand, are there any changes to the budget. He asked if there are any changes or effects on the current situation.

F Jump said no, there was nothing surprising in respect of the council's budget; she added that there would be more of an impact on 2021-2022 budget. She added that she would be in a better position to comment next time.

Cllr England referred to the HRA – there's a surplus due to COVID19 delays. To what extent is there cost and efficiency to when we do catch up? Because we will then have more cases. Has this been quantified at all?

F Williamson said that they had been doing some work to re-profile some of the project works, and they have had the opportunity to look at areas to address the building safety bill and the climate emergency. She said that Mark can give you an update on the work that they have been doing with the energy savings trust.
Whilst they haven't been able to spend the allocated budget this year it has enabled them to look at these two critical areas. The budget has been re-profiled accordingly.

Cllr Mahmood in terms of COVID19 when do we expect Osborn's and others to be back to full working shifts. He asked if we are still in under spend mode for the next three months.

F Williamson said in respect to the proposal we are following the Governments road map. The Team have met with Osbornes today to plan and review the delivery of the next financial year.

The only work that remains completely suspended are Kitchens and bathrooms due to the length of time it takes and it can interrupt the water supplies. We need to maintain good hand hygiene and limit the amount of trades going in and out.

We are hoping that we are able to return to business as usual next year; this will be incorporated into the plans.

F Williamson confirmed that we are taking day-to-day repairs and its business and usual.

Cllr Mahmood asked what was in place to check Osborne for COVID19 so we can get them out to work.

F Williamson said that this week they have started Lateral flow testing on all of their staff. They will be required to have tests twice a week. This is to reduce any risks to the household that they are going into.

Cllr England referred to 5.7. The pressure of 140.000 arising due to higher than expected insurance costs, is there any way that the cost is noted or recorded that the rise is due to climate change issues that we are trying to tackle.

F Jump said that this had been raised before and it's due to a number of reasons driving the cost. We do record in a lot of detail of what is causing the additional claims. The information is there and certainly, last year's summer did have an impact on the claims.

Cllr Freedman said that our targets are slipping and just wanted to know any new ways of working?

He asked if we are in conversations with Osborne's or other councils. Are we trying to do any creative out of the box solutions for our backlog for skilled tradesman?

He asked if we are we in discussions for virtual inspections or taking pictures of things that need repairing.

F Williamson said in terms of the performance for completing repairs in target, in Q3 it showed that we were operating below target, but there has been a steady improvement since the end of Q3 into the current quarter.

In respect of using photos, they have always used this as an opportunity to provide additional information for before and after details for the valuations.

We also use this in the private rented sector, as it has been quite difficult for them to undertake inspections in houses in multiple occupancies.

The COVID backlog with Osborne's has now been completed and there has been a decrease in repairs that have been reported, we anticipate going forward that there will be an increase in repairs.

Cllr Freedman asked how confident are we that we have adapted to best practice?

F Williamson said that we are as confident as we can be. We do have officers that attend best practice working groups. They also work closely with House mark who have undertaken benchmarking throughout the pandemic. Dacorum receive a monthly report that benchmark their performance against other social housing landlords.

In the main we are performing in the top quartile in the majority of areas. F Williamson said that they have worked closely with the Unions to ensure safe practice for Osborne staff.

They do adopt any best practice that is known to them.

HC/016/21 Q3 REPORT – CHILDRENS SERVICES & COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP, CUSTOMER SERVICES, THE OLD TOWN HALL, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

M Rawdon introduced item 7 highlighting that the papers will provide an update on service performance over Q3 2020/2021 and also highlighted key achievements over this same period.

M Rawdon was happy to take questions from Members.

Cllr England referred to 3.5.5 the communication figures; he notes that the figures are difficult to judge, he asked how this compare with last year?

L Roberts said that we do not know tonight but she will get clarification from Kelvin.

Action: L Roberts to speak to Kelvin

Cllr England welcomed the figures and said we need to see how well we are engaging on what the Council see as the top 5 important issues.

We want to find out as a Council if our channels are being used by people.

It would be very useful as we go forward with these figures to identify those issues that we know have been important in the last period and to see how well we have engaged on those.

Cllr England also asked what the plans for the website are?

L Roberts said there are two different things, one is content and one is platform. The platform they will be looking at as part of a digital strategy that they are working on.

They have relied a lot more on digital offerings through the pandemic so they are looking to see what that means going forward.

They anticipate the work to take place between now and the summer and they will come back with any propositions.

Cllr Mahmood said that the elicits were good and informative, it gives us a good picture of who is keeping in touch with the council. Not for a response here, but in the future we need to see how our housing service is going digital.

Cllr Mahmood referred to the Old Town Hall which has nearly been closed for a year. Are we expecting the Café to open with the recent announcement?

M Rawdon said that they are working on a road map like other services to re-open safely. They are looking at the infrastructure needed around streaming live show etc to broaden their audience; in terms of the café re-opening it will be part of the road map.

Cllr Mahmood highlighted an observation. A lot more people are going to Gadebridge Park, and asked if we could publicise the Old Town Hall.

Cllr Barry referred to 3.1.1 its brilliant that people have been able to provide food for those that need it. She asked how DBC are checking if these organisations have the relevant safeguarding DBS checks, food hygiene rating and First Aid. Not just, for where they prepare the food but if they have an understanding of it.

M Rawdon said the people that are delivering those services, one being Dens which they are heavily involved with and the other being Youth Booth. M Rawdon said he would come back to the committee on that.

Action: M Rawdon

J Banks added to that, and confirmed that environmental officers are involved with both the organisations and have been able to offer advice and guidance and confirm that they are meeting the necessary regulations to deliver the service.

Cllr Barry asked if it would be possible to find out what those where? And if all volunteers would need First Aid etc.

Cllr Banks said yes having known both organisations they do have all the health and safety checks and the wider checks, which you are referring too.

ACTION: Cllr Banks to give a written response.

Cllr England referred to 3.4.2 Dacorum football working group which has been launched along side the project board, can I ask what the group is? He is struggling to understand why there is a football group and how it relates to the sports strategy. He asked if there are any other specific groups planned.

L Roberts said that they decided to create this group as they have a lot of communication from football clubs, and football is by far the biggest sports activity that takes place. They have found that by creating this working group it enabling the clubs to talk with us at the same time, this way they are not replicating information and the conversations are a lot richer. They also get the Herts FA representatives and outside boards come along. It has been a positive experience.

M Rawdon said that they have just set up a sports and working infrastructure group, which wasn't in this quarter, so hasn't been mentioned. Sports England are helping to set these meetings up and it helps join up the local plan and the sporting infrastructure. Planning also sit on this as well, It was definitely a successful first meeting.

Cllr England said that he likes the sound of the latter and forma and makes perfect sense. He is worried that football dominates everything and that we don't get a round picture, He understands that your aware of this?

L Roberts said that it is about balancing it out and they have had a lots of different representatives that were there.

Cllr Adeleke referred to the adventure playground, he asked if we are keeping it closed permanently, or what are our plans and preparations to police and maintain? He also asked about the second quarter 2020. Is the 2020 event going to be repeated in 2021/22 so we can get a proper feel of what it was really like?

M Rawdon said that the playgrounds will have a roadmap of re opening and we need to be mindful of the dates. In preparation you will have noticed in the report that they have added a 3D pitch in Grovehill and the Adeyfield facilities have been improved. We are in good shape and have utilised the section 106 money to do that.

He said that we have to be mindful that indoor play is different from outdoor play as we have the Cabins, there are different rules and more requirements.

M Rawdon did explain that they opened it during the last lockdown (without the Cabins open) and the attendance numbers were low. it was a waste of staff time so instead they have supported other service areas.

He added to that, We may open the open space and then factor in the Cabins, we aim to be safe and open as soon as possible.

M Rawdon said that the Hertfordshire year of culture was unfortunate that it was during a pandemic, however our team did the best it could to deliver virtual cultural events. We have employed someone to continue the good work and cultural offerings to the community so it is now more sustainable.

Cllr Pringle referred to 3.5.1 the external communication portal as we have delivered on external PR campaigns and projects such as the local plan.

The Local Plan is a statutory plan exercise; she would suggest it requires a greater level of diligence form the community. It concerns her that it has been collected with other events.

L Roberts said that this is simply an oversight on the report and that's not how it's been treated within the department, it's very much part of the formal consultation and its treated very different. It's just how the report is written.

Cllr Pringle asked if this could be amended?

L Roberts said that they can get this looked at.

Cllr Pringle referred to the contact that had been circulated to all Cllrs, she is concerned they chose this contract. She said there is no requirement to deliver to every resident nor a requirement for the delivery of documents within any particular time frame. She would suggest that this might well be inadequate.

It is not adequate to send to every council taxpayer, they would be entitled to be aware of everything that are being planned. She has already been informed by the Leader of the Council that people in more rural areas because the proposals affect them more. She asked if there were voids and how we find out about them and what is the best choice of contract.

M Gaynor said that there will be a full report on this and you're looking at a level of detail that the committee doesn't have at this time.

Cllr Pringle asked if the contract could be circulated.

Cllr Imarni said that there would be a tracking report of where and when.

ACTION: M Gaynor – written response

Cllr Adeleke left the meeting at 19:32

Cllr Mahmood thanked them for the parking on Wheelers Lane.

Cllr Mahmood said under Dacorum Community Safety Partnership, Due to lock down and COVID has there been a rise in violent crime.

M Gaynor said yes domestic abuse has risen hugely, 52 households are in temporary accommodation due to violence. Nationally these figures have increased.

L Roberts added to that stating that we get this information from the police. Although these figures have risen other, crime has reduced.

M Gaynor added to that saying those that are in temp accommodation weren't all council tenants before. He said that there would now be a greater focus on domestic abuse. County Council and the Government are making better use of resources.

Cllr Mahmood asked where we get our figures.

M Rawdon said that they are discussed at the Dacorum Community Safety Partnership Meeting (DCSP), and any Councillor is welcome to come along, which in the past many have done so.

Cllr Griffiths referred back to the local plan, it is a general category for communications. She explained that you will find the local plan in several places, it's also important to note that a PR campaign was run on the local plan. There was also a campaign on Facebook. She believes that the statement is correct because it refers to communications as a general heading.

The detail to any given subject, in this case the local plan it would be brought up with the relevant committee to scrutinising it. In this case, Cabinet when they are reporting back what the consultation delivered and how it was delivered etc etc.

She believed that having a conversation outside of the meeting is wasting officer's time as all the information is contained there and that is the right forum to have it in.

Cllr Pringle followed up on domestic abused and expressed her concerns. She is worried that the owners is on the victim, more often than not, the women with dependent children. There tends to be a cultural presumption that she might leave the home. Her concern is that where there is a tenancy, she would hope that priority would be given to keep them in their own home while correct legal remedies are followed to prevent the perpetrator from contacting them. She asked what communication is there with the court services and the police. She is concerned that most cases fail as people tend to go home as all the bay equipment is there.

M Gaynor said that we do have a policy and not to assume that the women has to leave the home. We remove the guilty party if the women requests we do request an out of Borough request and this is facilitates ASAP.

HC/017/21 Q3 HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT

F William gave an update on the Q3 report. She updated the committee on the performance and progress of the Housing Service Q3 2020/21.

F Williamson was happy to take question.

Cllr Bassadone ask if we had figures of how many people don't want to go in sheltered accommodation, and asked if it was because they are all one beds? She also asked about the properties in Kings Langley, the bedsits?

F Williamson said she could provide members with the data they have been doing analysis on the sheltered schemes. In terms of empty properties at the moment it varies from week to week.

F Williamson said she can provide the figures for the demand on each of the schemes. She expressed that there had been low demand for the two-bed scheme as well as others at the moment. A lot older people are fearful of moving under the current circumstances/restrictions and after the vaccines; they may be inclined to move.

ACTION: F Williamson to provide data

Cllr Mahmood said, with the key-to-key timings, not being able to do the work inside the houses, should be concentrating on that a lot more to reduce the times. Could we utilise the empty homes a lot more.

F Williamson said that they have been increasing the number of suppliers that have been working on empty homes, and Osborne have taken on two other sub-contractors to provide support. She expressed how they still had to work under COVID rules, which does mean they can't have as many working internally. Which is increasing the time to complete works.

HC/018/21 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE

M Gaynor introduced the report and provided Members with two presentations. The presentations were circulated to Members after the meeting.

M Gaynor was happy to take questions from Members.

Cllr England thanked Mark and said that there was a lot of good information in there, to go away and process a bit more. He said that there are a few instant reflections. It looks like

we face lots of barriers and he recognises that why we are where we are, But is worried that already 20% of the time we had to prevent the 1 degree increase on global temperature has already gone. So 1/5 of our time has already elapsed. We do not seem to have been able to get anything off the launch pad.

He said that is he right in thinking that both of the case study examples are 10 years old now. There good examples of what are capable and he accepts that, but he is worried that since 2019 we haven't put a flag in the ground with a project that is going to help us address the climate emergency.

He asked if there is an opportunity to put in a programme of insulating lofts of floors with this saving share that you talked about? He asked what are we doing to share our point of view and what are we doing to show that to government to get them to solve the problems and barriers.

M Gaynor said that they are working across Hertfordshire with other authorities, which there are four, that are stock holding and there is influence through the chartered institute of housing who do get the hearing with government. He stated that the government does know the changes in which it needs to make it's just been a difficult time over the year. He added that it would cost a lot more than 12 million to get the homes of the UK insulated.

In terms of projects that aim to have zero carbon, the pledge that the Council have made is for 2050 he stated that we simply can't do this any quicker. He added that we have proved the energy efficiency of our homes and any of the poorest categories will be moved first

F Williamson said that we are able to influence other areas. We are members of the Association of Public Sector Excellence.

She added that they have been undertaking some trials on alternative heating technologies.

Cllr England asked how significant is the right to buy problem for us? How much does it affect us to tackle whole blocks.

M Gaynor said that it's always best to deal with a whole row of terrace houses in terms of access and effectiveness to deliver the whole lot. What would be good is what we did at Seaton Road, to offer it at cost. This would speed up the process but it does make it more difficult as a lot of the homes which are sold under the right to buy and now being used for private renting.

Cllr England asked if there are any neighbourhood's targetable where we can take a no regrets approach such as the flat roof properties in Highfield?

F Williamson said we do have a number of different property architypes and some non-traditional construction so we are exploring options and technologies that are emerging at the moment to identify effective and efficient solutions. She believes it needs to be an incremental approach rather than a whole house approach, so that there is the opportunity to bring more properties up to a minimum EPC C.

Cllr England said when we will we see more projects like Longlands and Seaton Road?

F Williamson said that they are ongoing, Pelham Court had insulation and additional measures in terms of below window insulation. Gade Tower also had external wall insulation and new windows. This year has not been brilliant in terms of delivering any larger scale projects but it has given us the opportunity to collate the data on the stock and explore new technologies.

Cllr Mahmood said that the presentation was very informative and we need to prioritise. He said that there is a lot of planning but it needs to be realistic. He would be interested to see

in the future where the effort has to be, whether its new build to get more saving in terms of carbon footprint or if it's refurbishing the existing which F Williamson has been doing. He stated that the old houses will never be 100% carbon neutral. Cllr Mahmood said that in Seaton Road not all HA properties were done. Would it not have been easier to do all four rather than just the three? He stated that we need to be mindful of the budget, and would like to see figures and priorities at a later date.

Cllr Freedman thanked M Gaynor for the presentation. On a positive note there has been good consideration of alternatives, there has been some good data gathering to understand the issues and the plans going forward. He said the hardest thing is working out a place to start and we should be commended on a place to start looking at the under performing housing stock. The presentation was worth waiting for but we did wait a very long time. His first point is to fight for the priority of this order, that we have got work undertaken and that we are always thinking of the next. He believes that the Council have a community leadership role and there are things that we should be doing to encourage our residents. He wants to see us publicising what we can do, and who we have used and what barriers we have come across.

M Gaynor said we concluded this in this afternoons meeting. It's exactly what we have concluded. We are working on a clear programme with a clear priority.

Cllr Imarni asked if we ever got feedback on St Peters and did it deliver what it was supposed to? She also mentioned about the Governments fuel Poverty scheme, and asked if they was aware of it, and if we could offer this to private landlords. If the tenant is on benefits then they can claim for it.

M Gaynor said it's a case of making the information available to landlords. It is in the landlords interest to meet EPC3 as if they don't meet it they won't be able to legally let their properties.

Cllr Imarni said there is a Green Scheme and a Fuel Poverty Scheme which is separate and asked if M Gaynor could look more into this as it's only the tenant that can apply for this and not the landlord.

ACTION: M Gaynor to follow up with Vicky Nash

F Williamson referred to St Peters in Warners End. The block is a passive house and consultants monitored it for two years after it was completed and let to tenants. In the main it performed well. However, there were some issues with ensuring the controls were used effectively and which is a challenge with multiple users, it only takes one to throw the system out.

There needed to be regular maintenance and filters replaced to ensure that all tenants use the correct ventilation controls, as this was throwing out the balance and creating high temperatures in one flat.

Certainly, the energy costs are considerably lower than much of the existing stock.

M Gaynor added to that stating that some of their news build are getting similar results. One being the new Gadsden Row build.

HC/019/21 YOUTH PROPOSAL PAPERS

Cllr Banks read the following statement.

'..Following the presentation of the Youth Provision reserve fund paper last November in which officers presented a range of options to allocate the reserve to various projects to engage with young people. Officers and I took away, and have worked on members observations & recommendations that we could develop a wider consultation of young people and the organisations that represent them. This developed paper was due to come to you this evening. However, in light of the ever changing world we find ourselves in with regard to this COVID pandemic, the lockdown, coming out of lockdown etc. I have asked officers to reconsider how this fund can be used to address the early evidence now emerging with regard to the wellbeingness and indeed mental health of young people emerging from the pandemic.

It is clear that outdoor activity is going to be the first to open and is the safest place for people of all ages to interact. With that in mind and from feedback from fellow councillors and residents, I have asked The Communities and Wellbeing Team to work with the Parks and Open Spaces Team to identify infrastructure investment in existing play spaces which will have a longer lasting impact on wellbeing than time framed projects. To that end, a report will be going to Cabinet in due course, following due process for the spending of the Youth Provision reserve money...'

Cllr England asked if this paper would come to OCS?

Cllr Banks said that it's an expensive provision to equip open spaces and that they are not sure what we will get for our money. If there are projects that come forward the process would normally go to Cabinet and members are welcome to come in on that.

HC/020/21 HRA BUSINESS PLAN

F Williamson provided Members with an updated of the HRA Business Plans and explained the issues and assumptions, which required consideration, including the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. The report is to update members of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the content of the Business Plan and assumptions that have been made in the financial model, investment strategy and the ongoing development pipeline.

F Williamson was happy to take questions on the report.

Cllr Mahmood asked for clarity, we talked about climate change and the money that comes from the HRA, do we invest it back into properties. He asked if that is where we would get a lot of our money from for climate change and carbon, or will this come from somewhere else. Apart from grants?

F Williamson said that we have made provision within the business plan for capital investment in the current stock and as well as the component replacement. There is provision for energy efficiency measures and also for building safety bill as we know each of these will have financial implications.

She said that we may benefit from money that is not currently within the forecast within this business plan i.e. external funding that we may receive. They have secured some grant funding through the Greater South Eastern Energy Hub and are awaiting clarification of when this will be received.

F Williamson said that the Affordable Homes programme, the new affordable homes grant scheme which is administered by homes England will open in April and that will run from

2021-2026 and provide us with the opportunity to make bids for grant funding to supplement the new build programme.

Cllr Mahmood asked if we are looking at digitalising the housing market and managing the risks, he said he has been doing a lot of work on this and doesn't see it happening in the housing department, yet it's happening in the construction industry and suggests it's something worth looking at for the future.

F Williamson said that they have been looking at building information modelling for the new build, so they can have 3D models. In terms of data they have been looking at power BI and considering other suitable technology that can be used to support the data we hold on the stock.

Cllr England thanked F Williamson for the report and said when do you think we will begin to see the component in the HRA Business plan, which shows how we are trying to drive some of these projects to increase insulation and put new systems into properties.

F Williamson said that the focus for next financial year is a couple of the sheltered schemes and some additional loft and external insulation. Once the full programme is identified, she is happy to share that with Members.

Cllr England asked if she was ready to get good positive communications on these initiatives. He said that it is vital that we need to prime people to take the climate change seriously. We need to show people how it works with the schemes and get people excited. He added to that saying, he is only too happy to support this.

Cllr Griffiths welcomed Cllr England's suggestion about pushing this out. She has highlighted over the years the scheme that have been running and the energy that has been reducing. She explained to members about a government backed scheme where she got her walls insulated for free and said that this is something a private home owner might take up. She added that any communication, we should shout about what we are doing and encourage others to do it.

Cllr England said it might be a good idea to re visit some of the key things that have been milestones. He added that it's also important that the council channels pick those up to.

The meeting finished at 21:30