

MINUTES

HOUSING & COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 JUNE 2021

Present:

Cllr Adeleke (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr Imarni (Chair)
Cllr Banks	Cllr Johnson
Cllr Durrant	Cllr Suqlain Mahmood
Cllr Freedman	Cllr Oguchi
Cllr Harden	Cllr Pringle
Cllr Hollinghurst	Cllr Ransley

Officers:

N. Beresford	Group Manager – Strategic Housing
L. Warden	Group Manager - Communities
M. Rawdon	Group Manager – People & Performance
O. Jackson	Group Manager – Tenants & Leaseholders
S. Turner	PA to the Corporate Directors (Minutes)

Also Present:

Councillor Griffiths	Portfolio Holder for Housing
Councillor Banks	Portfolio Holder for Community and Regulatory Services

The meeting began at 7.30 pm.

HC/021/21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2021 were agreed by the members present.

HC/022/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Ransley is substituting for Councillor Tindall. N. Beresford is substituting for F. Williamson. Councillor Bassadone and Mark Gaynor sent their apologies.

HC/023/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Harden advised that there was a report that mentions South Hill Centre as a partner that is working with the Council and he informed the Committee that he is an employee of South Hill Centre.

HC/024/21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation..

HC/025/21 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO A CALL-IN

None.

HC/026/21 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2020/21

Councillor Pringle wished to make a point of order regarding a comment made by Councillor Durrant. The Chair wanted to obtain some advice as there was not a Legal representative at the meeting. The Chair was advised that the matter needs to be referred to Member Support. The Chair will report back to Councillor Pringle.

Action: The Chair to report back to Councillor Pringle regarding the advice obtained in relation to the comment made by Councillor Durrant.

Councillor Mahmood explained to the Chair what had happened. Councillor Pringle wanted it recorded that she took offence to the comment.

Fiona Jump introduced the report and explained that it is provisional because it is subject to the final External Audit process which is due to commence in July. F. Jump summarised the position of the General Rate Fund and the recommendation to Cabinet that the £2.4m is supported from the Economy Recovery Reserve created to deal with the implications arising from the Pandemic.

F. Jump also summarised the position as per the report on the Housing Revenue Account budgets, Capital Schemes slippage, Garage Developments at Northend and Westerdale.

F. Jump asked for any questions.

Councillor Freedman firstly wished to congratulate Fiona and her team for the report. Councillor Freedman wished to point out that there was a slightly misleading policy with regard to the Depreciation Charge. The Depreciation Charge has an increased charge due to the properties being revalued however, the book value falls under a different Committee. If this was removed the challenge would turn into a surplus. Councillor Freedman feels to imply that the Housing Revenue Account needs to raise more revenue in order to account for the fact the properties have appreciated passively and feels this is wrong for this Scrutiny Committee.

F. Jump responded that the way that the Depreciation is accounted for is dictated by the Industry Code of Practice which is followed clearly. F. Jump is happy to deal with this outside of the meeting as it is very technical in nature and feels the points do need looking into to ensure that things are done in an appropriate way.

Councillor Freedman's wished to make a suggestion regarding the expected slippage and noted that most of the slippage was well described in the report, but asked if there was any scope to deliver a contingency and change the way that slippage is reported.

F. Jump replied that with any forecast a view is taken at a point in time and attempt to give in the report what is felt to be the most accurate assessment around slippage but there will always be sensitivities and unknowns around this. F. Jump will look into how best to present movements around slippage in the report in a way that is meaningful to Members.

Councillor Adeleke asked a question regarding point 5.2 of the report and whether it is known where the £362k, which has been recorded as surplus and transferred to Revenue Reserve for Capital requirements, will be spent as it is ring fenced in HRA.

F. Jump responded that where there is surplus on HRA those funds are clearly earmarked for the HRA and cannot be taken for use on any General Fund purposes. The recommendation has been to transfer any surplus at year end to a Revenue Reserve as this provides flexibility on how it can be used in the future. At the moment there is not a particular purpose for that reserve but there may well be. If the funds are sitting within a Revenue Reserve they can be applied to either Revenue or Capital projects but would have to be HRA in nature.

Councillor Adeleke asked a question regarding point 5.11 of the report and if the surplus of £433k would fall into the same category.

F. Jump responded that the £433k is part of the budgeted amount that is expected to be transferred in from Reserves and was specifically to fund an upfront Pensions Contributions payment. With the financial performance of the HRA there was no need to make that draw down from Reserves as it could be funded by surplus generated in year. The £433k was the expected position that was intended would have to be adopted when the budget was set but by the end of the financial year this was not required.

Councillor Adeleke asked what the balance is regarding the reserve of £581k for Covid-19 Hardship Reserve reported in 7.4 of the report.

F. Jump provided some further explanation of that reserve. Around £1m of funding was received from the Government to support the most vulnerable of the Council Tax payers. During the year around £600k of the support was distributed and the £581k is the balance remaining from the grant funding. The recommendation is that this is rolled forward into the current financial year 2021/22 to extend that scheme.

Councillor Harden asked for an explanation regarding the General Fund Reserve Summary and the difference between Rent Aid Guarantee Scheme and Rent Guaranteed Scheme Reserve.

F. Jump replied that they are both used for a very similar purpose and N. Beresford provided further explanation. Both budgets are set within the Private Sector Housing team and relate to previous deposit guarantee schemes that were won by DBC regarding a Help To Rent Scheme and was phased out when the Private Sector Housing Regulatory Services transferred into the Housing

Service and the Rent Aid Scheme relates to a Deposit Guarantee Scheme which is run by DENS on DBC behalf.

Councillor Harden asked what the route is to be able to access the Dacorum Rent Aid.

N. Beresford responded that the pathway for all homeless clients is a single homeless pathway that is an initial personalised housing plan that is developed by the Homeless Prevention team which will include a referral onto DENS, as any clients that are accommodated at The Elms and are then suitable to move on into private sector housing would then qualify for a Deposit Guarantee through Rent Aid Programme which is where the Guarantee Deposit is held.

Councillor Barry asked for more information regarding the underspend on the Garage Developments at Westerdale.

F. Jump replied that she does not have full details but is aware that there tends to be a contingency built in on these projects and feels that it is this contingency that was not spent.

Councillor Mahmood asked questions regarding 5.6 and 5.9, and the £3.7m that has not been spent on maintenance and repairs and the depreciation of £2.75m and wondered if there was an accounting reason for this.

F. Jump replied that there is a link in a sense in that the value of a property will depend on its maintenance but regarding the transactions that have passed through the account there is not a fix relating to the two figures, they are derived separately. The depreciation is calculated based on the information provided the External Valuers and independent of any work undertaken and gives the idea of the usage of the property.

Councillor Pringle said she was concerned about the management of the Garages as some residents have reported to her what they are experiencing as mis-management of some empty garages which are being used for anti-social behaviour.

F. Jump advised that the relevant Officer who looks after that area was not at this meeting but she was able to provide some in-sight. A lot of work has been carried out regarding identifying where investment is required, this includes demand & the works required. This programme of works has started and steps are being taken to address the concerns.

M. Rawdon also advised that there is an item going to the next Scrutiny meeting regarding the Garage Project Presentation.

The Chair advised that there were some microphones that were out of range and people should be sitting between the tape marks and also only two microphones can be pressed at any one time so please show hands.

HC/027/21 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT - HOUSING LANDLORD

N. Beresford presented the report for Q4 20/21 Housing Landlords. N. Beresford advised that the KPI outturn is contained in Appendix A and the Service Plan and Risk Register is contained in Appendix B. The Government Roadmap is continually reviewed and has enabled the Service delivery. Most of the Services within Housing have continued to be delivered remotely throughout the last 12 month period but there have been some exceptions with regard to face to face homeless interviews and outreach services being provided. Site visits have been undertaken by key officers based within the Private Sector Housing service and the Council's Property & Place team. Sheltered Housing Officers are back on-site.

N. Beresford advised the performance highlights within the report. The Private Sector Housing team were successful in preventing illegal evictions, the increase in licensed HMOs within the Borough, the increase in production of the overall key to key time, the increase in households that have being supported within Temporary Accommodation by the Welfare Sustainment team which is a reflection of the continued pressure within the Homeless service this year and the Gas Compliance.

There has been a real success within the service in the Outturn Performance in relation to arrears, 3.9% of rent due which is an improvement on the proposed target of 5%. In relation to an increase in Rough Sleeping and associated street activity and anti-social behaviour there is a continued effort with cross-service work between Community Safety teams, Homelessness and external partners.

The Development team have been successful in receiving a further award for Corn Mill Court development.

N. Beresford highlighted the performance challenges in respect to the Osbourne contract, letting of sheltered housing stock and Lifeline contract.

N. Beresford asked for any questions.

Councillor Johnson asked what stage the Sheltered Housing Review is currently at.

O. Jackson replied that the Review has identified a number of schemes based on design layout, provision of amenities, proximity to local services and demand. Discussions have taken place with the Development team in terms of looking at initial feasibility studies to consider options. With regard to the other 29 schemes investment opportunities are being looked at to raise the standard of the buildings to bring them in-line with today's requirements.

Councillor Freedman asked for an overview with regard to restrictions on evictions due to Covid and how people are affected.

N. Beresford replied that there are around 117 households that we were working with at the end of April and at the current time this has been reduced to around 80. The remaining households will be supported either into alternative private sector accommodation or there will be ongoing negotiation with their existing landlords but there are 28 households that will become homeless due to their landlords needing to move back into their properties. These households are a primary focus to resolve their housing situation to prevent

them coming into temporary accommodation. The remaining families are being considered under the Reconsideration Process by the County Court process with the landlord being supported to re-apply for possession of their property and the earliest that these households are likely to go through this process is October 2021. There is currently a shortage within Dacorum area of private sector housing accommodation which places pressures on the service but there has been some success in engaging with a number of new partners within the private sector and local letting agents.

Councillor Johnson asked what would be the estimate of the unknown cases.

N. Beresford replied that figures with the clients that we have been working on is representative of what is happening in the local community and the figures have been aligned with Advice Bureau service who saw an 80% rise last year in households experiencing difficulties who have contacted them and a large number have been assisted with hardship measures to enable them to remain in their home. The area that is more difficult to gauge are the households that we are yet to see the impact from but we are expecting an increase demand in homelessness this year. Primarily the expectation is due to the result of other areas in addition to the eviction moratorium and changes in legislation in July.

Councillor Mahmood asked a question regarding Section 2 and non-essential repairs and is it Dacorum or Osbourne who decide on the timing of works.

N. Beresford replied there will be some impact on performance as a result of Covid and the ability to bring back in qualified staff. But in addition the stipulated days within the contract and the requirement to complete voids and works within a specific period of time are laid down. Any amendments would need to be agreed through the Legal and Procurement teams and is subject to the existing contract. The charter is expected to deal with and the addition of the new Client Manager giving a renewed focus on performance.

Councillor Mahmood also asked about Sheltered Housing and alternative use.

N. Beresford replied that everything is proactively being considered. With Covid there were significant increases in demand in respect of homelessness therefore it meant that there was a need to be creative and look at all options in terms of temporary accommodation usage which saw the use of appropriate units of Sheltered Housing Schemes. We are also in the midst of Service Planning which will enable all teams to be creative about options in respect of gaps in resource and areas where there is less demand. Sheltered Housing will be considered for remodelling, redevelopment and the opportunity to consider access to Grant Funding which could enable reclassification of some sites for alternative use.

Councillor Harden asked about the Rough Sleepers during lockdown and was very pleased that everyone was housed, and are we still endorsing the Everyone In Campaign and is there any budget costs for implementation.

N. Beresford replied the Everyone In requirement ended on 17 May along with the changes of the restrictions. Majority of Hertfordshire districts are continuing to accommodate those that were brought into accommodation at that time apart from North Herts District. A number of clients were brought into accommodation and have fallen out of accommodation during that period. 5 -6 individuals have had

placements of accommodation and for varying reasons such as anti-social behaviour etc. have returned to the streets and then have come back into accommodation but this is normal at this time of year. We continue to work with partners to break that repeated cycle. We are retaining everybody that has been brought into accommodation but we are not expected to continue to bring everybody in. We are undertaking to provide an individual assessment of everyone who is at risk of rough sleeping and there is a dedicated team working on this. Dacorum have led the Herts Accommodation Cell in partnership with Stevenage Borough Council and Welwyn Hatfield District. A number of initiatives are being put in place to deter residents from giving money inappropriately. In terms of finances we have spent in excess of £120k tackling single homeless, rough sleeping and bringing households into accommodation during the pandemic.

Councillor Harden asked about the Performance Challenges on page 29, point 3.0 of the report and if there was an expected figure of complaints regarding Osbourne and what was being done to try and reduce the numbers.

N. Beresford replied that she would draw attention to the Partnership Charter which is the focus on the 12 week improvement plan to tackle all aspects of performance and reinforce behaviours that are expected in line with the contract. In respect of the specific target, N. Beresford will feed that back.

Action: N. Beresford to feed back the target regarding complaints in relation to Osbourne.

Councillor Harden asked about if the Partnership Charter 4.0 of the report was available to Members.

Action: N. Beresford replied that she will liaise with J. Grace and distribute it to Members.

Councillor Barry commented on the touch points being installed in the town centre to enable people to donate and that care was needed that this is not just people with mental health issues that don't choose to be homeless it can happen to anyone. Also people may be encouraged to give people food as they may not have their card available to be able to donate.

N. Beresford replied that we have received some challenging behaviour in respect of street activity and her advice would be to encourage those that are either rough sleeping or partaking in street activity to engage with the organisations that are there to support them. The Day Centre is now fully open, DENS Day Centre is fully open, hot meals and access to showers and washing facilities is available and she would encourage residents to signpost to the Day Centre. There are small pockets of community groups who have been out giving meals and hot drinks and it is being aware from a safeguarding and personal safety perspective that even hot drinks can be used as weapons and therefore she would like to discourage residents from giving food. The Tap and Give devices are being done in partnership with Town Centre Management to enable us to identify the charity or organisation that we wish to give the donations to and these will be rotated on a quarterly basis.

Councillor Freedman asked a question regarding the Osbourne contract and is consideration being given if the performance concerns are not turned around in an acceptable time.

N. Beresford replied that we are coming to the end of the current contract and that is something that will be considered. J. Grace will have discussions with F. Williamson, Procurement and Legal teams in respect of the next steps should we need to escalate any contract extension.

Councillor Adeleke asked if there are any numbers available for those that are involved regarding rough sleeping and homelessness.

N. Beresford replied that they are in discussion with Member Support to provide an updated Member Briefing in relation to both homelessness and private sector housing. Currently the number of rough sleepers is 6 on any given night within Dacorum and this figure was taken from a recent Rough Sleep count undertaken by Officers in partnership with Community Safety unit and the Police on 17 May 2021. Homelessness currently there are 143 households in temporary accommodation, of which 3 households are in bed and breakfast and the remaining 140 in varying forms of DBC temporary accommodation. This is a significant increase on the pre-Covid situation where there was round 90 households in temporary accommodation but at this point last year around 179 households in temporary accommodation.

Councillor Griffiths wished to take the opportunity to formally put on record her thanks to everyone in Housing who she feels have stepped up and over the mark to provide a service during the pandemic.

The Chair seconded Councillor Griffiths comments and the speed at which Housing adapted within days to identify the most vulnerable in the community which is a phenomenal achievement when everyone has their own issues to deal with. The Chair said that the whole Committee would like to jointly commend the team.

N. Beresford said she appreciated the comments and thanks and would feed it back to the teams.

The Chair wished as a point of clarity that N. Beresford made it clear about the different groups of homeless people in Dacorum. It is not suggested that it is just people with mental health problems, the Chair has had a personal experience of people who have been housed, one stayed and got into employment and the other who chose voluntarily to return to rough sleeping. It is clear that you have identified these types of people and there are several groups of people who still fall into the homeless category.

N. Beresford replied that not everyone presenting to Dacorum has mental health issues but what we do have is high number of clients presenting with complex needs and this is seen across all Housing services. 50% of clients currently in temporary accommodation have complex needs and these are a range of issues. The Tenancy Sustainment team are currently supporting 220 households.

HC/028/21 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT - COMMUNITIES

L. Warden introduced herself in her new role as Group Manager – Communities and explained we are aware of the existing and future challenges that need to be addressed that are having significant implications on our communities, some are legislation changes, risks, some due to the pandemic. We also have an opportunity to identify partnership working to consider how we can build capacity within our communities. We need structure and resources that are efficient and can meet the objectives to empower the communities to take a more proactive approach and meet current and future challenges. In March L. Warden was appointed to a 12

month secondment to take temporary responsibility for day-to-day services in the Community Partnerships, Community Safety and Children's Services team. Alongside this responsibility L. Warden will be carrying out a review of the provision of community services across the Council. M. Rawdon will continue to be Group Manager for Customer Services, Internal and External Communications, the Old Town Hall and HR.

L. Warden presented the Q4 Performance report for Communities. L. Warden highlighted the performance areas within her Service.

Community Safety Partnership and Children's Services

Adventure Playgrounds have remain closed in Q4 and staff have been involved in other projects and we have been able to allow access to some groups where restrictions have permitted. Continuing to review the guidance to allow re-open sessions.

Community Partnerships

Many online and virtual courses to improve health & wellbeing, loneliness, isolation have been carried out by the team such as Walk Dacorum which was a virtual walking event when a125 people took part and there was very positive feedback.

Healthy Hub

The pandemic has had an impact on the ability to hold in person sessions but there has been an increased presence on social media and increased referrals in Q4 and hoping to build on this further with drop-in sessions.

M. Rawdon presented the remaining report on Customer Services, Old Town Hall and Communications.

The overall performance is a positive one with Customer Services team achieving all of their targets in Q4. The Old Town Hall has worked on training staff to support them ready for the re-opening. Recruitment is taking place. A host of activities and projects have been undertaken by the Communications team.

M. Rawdon asked for any questions.

Councillor Adeleke asked how and who the awards of the Community Grants and Climate Change were decided and why where the Ward Councillors not advised.

L. Warden replied that they are run by different teams and some more information can be obtained with regard to how the grants were administered and who is on the Board.

Action: L. Warden will obtain information regarding Community Grants and Climate Change.

The Community Grant scheme we have here has been run for some time. As a member of different organisations for example there are representatives from Community Action Dacorum that will sit in that, along with representatives from across Dacorum Borough Council including Housing teams, Community Partnership teams to ensure that we identify any bids that are being placed from Community and Voluntary groups with projects that could make a huge impact on the local area.

Each year we focus on a new area for example Climate Emergency. The new window has just been opened for bids and more information will be brought the next Scrutiny Committee regarding the grants that will be allocated in this quarter.

Councillor Harden would like some background around why and the purpose of the Healthy Hub.

L. Warden replied that this is funded by Public Health and there were Grants for different Local Authorities to bid for. They identified a model on approach for each Borough to set up a Healthy Hub and this is to ensure there is a signposting service where individuals can be identified and referred onto a number of different community groups, partners and support agencies that can provide help. Public Health have a few key objectives that wanted to include for example reducing obesity, helping general health outcomes and wellbeing, reducing smoking. DBC have identified what those are within Dacorum which are for example Debt, money advice, mental health support and the Healthy Hub has been created and an Officer has been recruited who will bring all of the agencies and partners together. With the idea that it should provide a variety of drop-in sessions around the Borough but Covid has had an impact on that so things have moved online where possible and has received a lot of referrals. We have gathered some good information on the reasons why people have approached us and which agencies they are being referred to and we can then identify the needs and demands of our residents. Currently we are in the process of reviewing the last year but there is not sufficient information yet to be able to look at the long term plans and we are liaising with Public Health to identify if the funding is likely to be extended beyond April 2022.

Councillor Harden if there was some monitoring going on and what was the requirement from Public Health to measure what they wish to achieve.

L. Warden replied that there was and there are a number of outcomes they are looking to achieve and have numbers and figures they want DBC to provide. At the present time we are providing quarterly reports to understand the individual's needs. With a lot of the projects and activities that are being done within Community Partnership team we may have numbers of people attending but some of the personal outcomes can be very different to report on so it is about trying to find that information and where we can put a value on the improvement that someone has made.

Councillor Freedman asked why the improvement works at the Children's playground at Canal Fields have stopped.

M. Rawdon replied that it does not fall within the Service. We manage the 4 Council Adventure Playgrounds. The open playgrounds are managed by Clean Safe and Green and Matt will ask them to respond.

Action: M Rawdon will ask Clean Safe and Green to respond to Councillor Freedman regarding why the work at stopped at Canal Field playground.

Councillor Freedman asked what was the Council's position was on the Tring Park Run no longer being held at Tring Park.

L. Warden replied that she doesn't have the exact information at the moment. Senior management are aware of this and they have been liaising with The Woodland Trust and Park Run and other teams to look at possible ways that it can

continue as we are supportive of park runs and know the difference they make to bring people who attend and local businesses.

Councillor Mahmood asked about the future plans for re-opening the Old Town Hall.

M. Rawdon replied that some outdoor summer events are being planned to start and will include some children comedies in the park. We are looking to re-open in September for the Autumn production. Recruitment has been delayed but posts are now being filled and training will be undertaken so that they can begin with the outdoor summer events. The normal programme will take place in the Autumn when we have re-opened.

Councillor Mahmood asked whether the arches under the building could be utilised.

M. Rawdon replied that options are being looked at around how the arches can be utilised.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked about the Park Run at Tring Park which is looked after by the Woodland Trust and whether there are any clauses in the contract relating to the use and access of the public that we expect to maintain and develop.

M. Rawdon replied that he is aware that Legal have been involved and looking at the possibility and DBC are providing influence where we can.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked if there was any legal compulsion we can bring to bear on the contract as it is written currently.

M. Rawdon replied that he is hoping that if there was a legal opportunity we would be exploiting it.

Councillor Pringle asked whilst the issue of the children's playground was referred to Clean Safe and Green could the severity of the flooding at Canal Fields also be reported.

M. Rawdon asked if Councillor Pringle could provide the photographs she had received regarding the flooding.

Action: Councillor Pringle to provide photographs of flooding at Canal Fields.

Councillor Ransley asked if a statement or press release could be put out regarding what DBC are doing with regard to the Tring Park Run.

M. Rawdon replied that he will feed that back. L. Warden said there will be discussions with the teams and do what we can to reassure residents.

Chair announced that the next item was a Part II item and asked the member of the public to please leave the meeting for this agenda item.

HC/029/21 WATER CHARGES (PART 11 ITEM)

Full details can be found in Part II Minutes.

HC/030/21 ACTION POINTS

The majority of the action points have been completed. There is one outstanding with Chair which she is having ongoing discussions with M. Gaynor's team with regard to funds for low income households to have green energy. Chair will inform the Committee when it has been updated.

Action: The Chair to provide an update regarding funds being available for low income households to have green energy.

HC/031/21 WORK PROGRAMME

Noted.

The next Committee is due to take place on 21 July 2021.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm.