

**Dacorum Borough Council  
Housing and Community OSC  
Minutes of Meeting**

**DATE:** 13 October 2021

**TIME:**

**LOCATION:** Council Chambers, recorded via Teams

**ATTENDEES:**

**Councillors**

Isy Imarni	(Chair) (The Chairman)
Lara Pringle:	(Cllr Pringle)
Nick Hollinghurst:	(Cllr Hollinghurst)
Neil Harden:	(Cllr Harden)
Suqlain Mahmood:	(Cllr Mahmood)
Sammy Barry:	(Cllr Barry)
Hazel Bassadone:	(Cllr Bassadone)
Gbola Adeleke:	(Cllr Adeleke)
Alan Johnson	(Cllr Johnson)

**Officers**

Natasha N Beresford	Group Manager Strategic Housing
Paul Hunt	Housing Needs Team Leader
Layna Warden	Group Manager Communities
C Foster	Community Partnerships and Wellbeing Officer
A Care	Community Partnerships Team Leader
Sarah Turner	PA to the Corporate Directors (Minutes)

**HC/051/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Cllr Durrant, Cllr Oguchi and James Deane.

**HC/052/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **HC/053/21 MINUTES AND ACTIONS**

There were no comments on the previous minutes from 1 September 2021 and they were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

## **HC/054/21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no items of public participation.

## **HC/055/21 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

There were no referrals.

## **HC/056/21 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

N Beresford introduced the revised housing policy. N Beresford explained there had been a number of engagement sessions and noted that there is a legal requirement to review the policy every three years or upon legislative change. This review had been prompted by the three-year cycle and there had been no legislative change.

N Beresford stated that four minor amendments had been made. Firstly, the allocation of sheltered housing was to be altered so that applicants of any financial means could be considered for sheltered housing rather than those falling under a capital threshold of £250,000.

Secondly, the local connection to villages will be lowered from ten years to five years, allowing those with a connection to a village of five years or more to apply on that basis for social housing in the village.

The third amendment concerns income threshold for new applicants. It was noted that previously new applicants must have an income of no more than £60,000 across all accommodation types. The proposed amendment was to introduce a tiered approach to the income threshold across property types, with a threshold of £40,000 for one-bedroom properties, £50,000 for two-bedroom properties and £60,000 for properties with three or more bedrooms.

The final amendment will see an increase to the age up to which mixed sex siblings can share a bedroom, from five years to ten years.

Cllr Pringle queried whether the combination of amendments three and four would put large and particularly blended families at a disadvantage, as they are often in need of more space, and may have an income exceeding £60,000. N Beresford explained that the threshold was more generous than some other Local Authorities in Hertfordshire and that affordability data had been closely looked at. N Beresford was confident that those with an income of over £60,000 would be able to afford other means of housing, but that there is flexibility in the policy so exceptions can be made to the rule.

Cllr Pringle questioned the disruption for children having to share bedrooms if their sibling has special educational needs such as autism or ADHD which often led to poor sleeping patterns. Cllr Pringle asked whether the impact of this on other siblings had been taken into account. N Beresford agreed that this is something that is seen more regularly and assured Cllr Pringle that the team works with a multidisciplinary team to ensure that families are adequately supported and that additional bedrooms are authorised on appropriate grounds.

Cllr Pringle asked whether adjustments to sleeping arrangements due to positive Covid-19 cases had been taken into account, if siblings who shared bedrooms needed to self-isolate. N Beresford said that it had not been possible to take that into account when devising the policy, but that families are engaged with to ensure they are making the correct decisions to keep themselves safe in relation to Covid-19 or other health and safety issues.

Cllr Pringle asked whether there were allowances made for parents with shared custody orders as bedrooms would need to be allocated to both parents. N Beresford clarified that when there is a shared custody order granted by the Court, it is considered and a child can be included in two households.

Cllr Bassadone asked what was being done to encourage people living in large houses to vacate them if bedrooms were not being used. N Beresford stated that there is an incentive scheme to encourage this but that not many tenants had taken this up. N Beresford said that although this is a significant issue, there is a higher demand for smaller properties currently. N Beresford advised that the need for adapted houses is also currently very significant and there are hopes that registered providers and the development team will be able to address this.

Cllr Hollinghurst asked what part an applicant has to play in making a bid for accommodation and what constitutes making a bid. N Beresford explained that it is a choice-based letting system, that an applicant with an identified housing need can be put on the register and then bid for as many suitable houses as they like. N Beresford advised that the team works closely with vulnerable applicants who need more assistance in making bids. N Beresford explained that if an applicant bids for a property, is successful and then rejects it, this will have repercussions for the applicant. N Beresford confirmed that the website for bidding can be accessed in a variety of ways including from DBC's main website and can be accessed from all mobile devices.

Cllr Hollinghurst queried whether those in tied accommodation were also considered. N Beresford advised that should they get notice of their employment and/or accommodation coming to an end, they will get support from the Homelessness Prevention Team and be put on the housing register if they are eligible.

Cllr Barry questioned the changes to income threshold, stating that an income of £60,000 would not enable somebody to buy a property. Cllr Barry also asked whether Children's Services had been involved in the decision to amend the age up to which mixed sex siblings can share a bedroom.

N Beresford responded that social housing is a diminishing resource and must be managed carefully, and the ability to afford private sector accommodation is considered. N Beresford said that the DBC threshold compares favourably to others in the area and that it is informed by data from the DWP and offered reassurance that the policy has flexibility and the ability to be amended following reviews if necessary. N Beresford advised that the team worked closely with social services and that all stakeholders were involved in the development of the new policy and that Social Services are closely consulted regarding families in need of extra support.

Cllr Barry asked if N Beresford knew the national living wage in Dacorum, and N Beresford responded that she did not and would seek to provide it.

**Action: N. Beresford**

Cllr Mahmood said that he felt £70,000 was a more appropriate threshold level for large houses. N Beresford explained that a robust financial assessment is undertaken and that the threshold has been changed to a tiered approach to allow for the people most in need and those who cannot access housing in another way to be served by the housing policy.

Cllr Mahmood stated he had compared DBC to other areas and felt that DBC had the biggest housing stock and also the biggest waiting list. Cllr Mahmood queried whether policy differences between boroughs accounted for this. N Beresford confirmed that the demand is very high in Dacorum, but that 4,000 from 6,000 applicants on the register have never placed a bid for properties. N Beresford highlighted that changes to the policy would mean some of these applicants would no longer be on the register.

Cllr Mahmood stated that he still disagreed with the £60,000 threshold and felt £70,000 to be more appropriate. N Beresford said that these households may not be able to afford to purchase a property but they could rent one privately or join other schemes such as a shared ownership scheme. When asked by Cllr Mahmood when people are removed from the register, N Beresford replied that they will be removed if they bid for a property but reject it, if they have certain antisocial behaviour orders, orders related to domestic abuse or rent arrears.

Cllr Mahmood believed that a procedure to cover exceptional circumstances should be included within the policy. N Beresford said that it is important to give exceptional circumstances consideration on an individual basis, and that if patterns emerge which means the exception is becoming the norm, the policy is reviewed.

Cllr Harden sought clarification on page 25 of the policy, in particular regarding the myth that those with the highest priority get housed. N Beresford advised that was solely due to village connection cases where an applicant with a village connection would supersede someone without.

Cllr Johnson asked if those who are to be removed from the housing register will receive advice. N Beresford stated that it will be a long and detailed piece of work and that all applicants will be asked to review their application and subsequently assessed against the revised policy. If they are no longer eligible, they will be

removed from the list. The changes will be managed in alignment of other demands on the council so as not to put a strain on resources.

Cllr Johnson asked about location being a stumbling block with supported housing. N Beresford said that the capital threshold for supported housing will not be the sole resolution to making sure this accommodation is occupied. P Hunt added that unoccupied supported housing will be offered to those aged 55 and then 50, but that removing the capital threshold as well as the stipulation to not currently have housing should mean more over 60s are eligible for this accommodation, improving their quality of life.

Cllr Adeleke stated that he would like thanks to be conveyed to the Tenants and Leaseholders Committee for their hard work that went into creating the new policy. The Chairman confirmed that the gratitude would be passed on and explained the role of the TLC in the creation of the policy.

The Chairman queried the tiered approach to antisocial behaviour and asked what a demoted tenancy is. N Beresford explained that the tiered approach was devised in consultation with the Antisocial Behaviour teams and the Community Safety teams and deemed fair and appropriate in dealing with a spectrum of antisocial behaviour. L Warden explained that a demoted tenancy means a tenant reverts back to an introductory tenancy from a secure tenancy for a year to prove that they can manage that tenancy successfully. L Warden highlighted that it was a way to more effectively support vulnerable people.

The Chairman queried the difficulties surrounding those with severe mental health issues being moved into properties where neighbours know that the council are aware of those issues. N Beresford confirmed that mental health is one of the biggest challenges faced by the housing service and that often these people are the ones that the policy is most focused on helping into social housing. N Beresford confirmed that there is relatively little supported housing and the threshold criteria is high. N Beresford said that dealing with this is done on a multidisciplinary basis, bringing adult services, mental health services and housing together in a wraparound package of support.

The Chairman queried the fairness of the village connection link favouring those with a higher priority need. N Beresford advised that it was important to the housing officers to help those with higher need, but that historical arrangements regarding village connections had to be honoured.

Cllr Pringle asked whether due to the increase in the need to support residents with mental health needs, should the team receive enhanced training or should a designated job role be created in the team to deal with this. N Beresford said that there was a belief that other statutory services should remain responsible for this, but that there is training being provided.

Cllr Pringle asked if the staff needed more support to deal with difficult situations. N Beresford listed the ways in which staff are supported including the EAP service, clinical supervision and additional counselling if required.

Cllr Harden asked if the housing team have any jurisdiction over housing associations and how they deal with vulnerable people. N Beresford explained that they do not have any jurisdiction but that they work closely with registered providers especially when there have been complaints regarding antisocial behaviour. N Beresford also advised that the only area where they retain power under the Housing Act 2004 is where they believe a provider is not taking appropriate regulatory action.

Cllr Hollinghurst asked if there is any power to ensure that policies of registered social landlords are aligned with policies of the authority. N Beresford said that we do not have any authority but we do work closely with them and when we make an offer, the registered social landlord will undertake further checks.

## **HC/057/21      PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORTS ACTION PLAN**

L Warden introduced the delivery commitments and objectives and a plan had been developed to improve sports infrastructure, tackling inactivity and improving governance and partnership working. C Foster went on to highlight recent statistics:

- The action plan has engaged 4,751 Dacorum residents since April 2021, double 2020's figures
- The Wake Up and Dance initiative engaged 816 participants over 6 weeks
- The wellness festival engaged 400 participants over a week
- There is a total of £88,250 in investments brought to the Borough this year including £22,000 from sponsorship from a local electricity company for the basketball courts and £24,000 from Public Health towards the healthy hub project.

C Foster advised that the opening of the new netball and tennis courts was delayed due to Covid but since its opening, 315 residents have used the netball courts and 659 regularly participate in tennis. The facility had been transformed by £65,000 to provide the tennis courts, netball courts, seating areas, equipment storage and bins.

C Foster confirmed she had created The Dacorum Planning and Sports Working Group alongside Mark Gaynor to ensure all organisations are working towards the active Dacorum strategy and that this model had been used as best practice by other local authorities.

C Foster stated that to tackle physical inactivity, there had been virtual events such as a virtual Your Town Dacorum run, a Walk Dacorum virtual event and a wellness festival. These had had good participation levels and raised £1,400 for the Daisy Cave Foundation. C Foster stated that a return to physical events was being planned, starting with a 5K fun run.

Cllr Adeleke wanted to commend C Foster's progress as a one-man-band. Cllr Adeleke asked how many more projects are planned and if funding will increase. C

Foster replied that the plan is a working document so some items will be removed and some will return once completed. C Foster advised that her priority is increasing engagement. C Foster highlighted that funding for next year is uncertain as it comes from several different places but that there is work being done with partners to bring more funding into the borough.

Cllr Adeleke asked how much of the £346,000 budget had come from Dacorum and C Foster responded that £20,000 was from DBC finance and the rest was from external parties.

Cllr Hollinghurst stated that he felt the plan was very focused on Hemel Hempstead and asked why park runs are no longer able to happen at Tring Park now it is managed by the Woodland Trust, and that Tring is in need of a replacement skate park. L Warden responded that they are aware of the changes at Tring Park and have been in discussion with the Woodland Trust as an intermediary but no progress had yet been made. A Care stated that work is going on regarding the Tring skate park and that she is unsure of the current status of the work, and will provide the Councillor with an update.

**Action: A Care**

Cllr Hollinghurst queried why Tring Park had been handed to the Woodland Trust on a 400-year lease and that as it is publicly owned the control of it should not be entirely in the Woodland Trust's hands. L Warden mentioned that she believed the lease to be on a 100-year basis and that the lease gives the Trust the authority to make decisions.

Cllr Harden sought clarification on the inclusion of Nordic walking and this was explained to him by C Foster and A Care. Cllr Harden also enquired as to what can be done to encourage vulnerable people who live alone to be outdoors more for health reasons.

A Care responded that the arts and culture team had run a forest therapy initiative which was very successful and it was hoped that they would receive funding to run it more widely. Cultural walks and trails were also planned to encourage people to get out and about to help with mental health.

Cllr Mahmood praised the report and sought clarification on what had been meant by community engagement. C Foster said that it meant participation in events. Cllr Mahmood asked whether there were plans to implement an e-scooter scheme. A Care stated that this was being looked into as a project but it would require funding. A Care stated that there had been some government pilots and they were waiting to hear the results of those. Cllr Mahmood raised concerns about e-scooters clashing with pedestrians. A Care stated that this was part of the feedback and it would be looked at in detail.

Cllr Ransley asked if the 30 sports organisations in the network in Tring were being engaged. C Foster stated that they were part of the Dacorum Sports Network and they contribute on a regular basis.

Cllr Hollinghurst queried if the council's focus was on active exercise, do e-scooters burn as many calories as cycling or walking? C Foster responded that research shows that the use of e-scooters is linked with an increase in physical exercise and more time spent outdoors, increasing an active lifestyle.

**HC/058/21 GARAGES PROJECT PRESENTATION**

The Chairman stated that this would not be covered due to James Deane's absence following a family emergency and canvassed an opinion on whether an interim TEAMS meeting would be feasible to cover this. This was answered positively. The Chairman stated she would look for a time and date and revert by email.

**Action: Cllr Imarni**

**HC/059/21 WORK PROGRAMME**

There were no additions to the Work Programme.

**HC/060/21 ACTION POINTS**

The Chairman requested Cllr Pringle to send images to Matt Rawdon (ph).

**Action: Cllr Pringle**

There being no further business, The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.35pm.