
DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

23 FEBRUARY 2022

Present -

MEMBERS:

Riddick (Mayor), Adeleke, Allen, Anderson, Arslan, Banks, Barrett, Beauchamp, Bhinder, Birnie (Deputy Mayor), Cloughton, Dhyani, Douris, Elliot, England, Foster, Freedman, Griffiths, Guest, Harden, Hearn, Hobson, Hollinghurst, Imarni, Johnson, Link, Suqlain Mahmood, Sobaan Mahmood, Peter, Ransley, Rogers, Silwal, Stevens, Sutton, Symington, Taylor, Timmis, Tindall, Williams, Wilkie and Wyatt-Lowe (41)

OFFICERS:

The Chief Executive, Strategic Director (Place), Chief Finance Officer, Group Manager (Legal and Democratic Services), C O'Neil (Corporate Support Team Leader) and T Angel (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm.

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2022 were agreed by the members present and then signed by the Mayor.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor England advised he was a member of Herts Valley Hospital which was mentioned in one of his written questions.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS

4.1 By the Mayor

The Mayor welcomed new Councillor Anne Foster and Councillor Simy Dhyani.

4.2 By the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive confirmed the results of the by elections on Thursday 3rd February were as follows:

Berkhamsted West Ward: Anne Foster, Liberal Democrats

Berkhamsted Town Council West Ward: Anne Foster, Liberal Democrats

Boxmoor Ward: Simy Dhyani, Liberal Democrats

4.3 By Group Leaders

Councillor Williams gave apologies on behalf of Councillors Bassadone and Chapman.

Councillor Tindall gave apologies on behalf of Councillors Barry-Mears, McDowell, Pringle and Townsend.

4.4 Council Leader and Members of the Cabinet

Councillor Williams, Leader of the Council

The Leader had a couple of announcements:

Yesterday I circulated the response from the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable on the letter on violence against women and girls. I felt it was a comprehensive response and I hope members had had the chance to read it.

WH Smith in Hemel Hempstead town centre is closing. This houses the Post Office which makes the closure more disappointing. Contact is being made with the Chairman of the Post Office to seek provision of another facility in the town centre of Hemel Hempstead. The current facility closes on 31st May 2022.

Happy to take questions.

Questions

Councillor Tindall asked, in light of the Prime Ministers recent statement regarding living with Covid, what are we doing to protect our staff and visitors at the Forum.

The Leader responded that all government guidance was being followed and the advice of the Director of Public Health in Hertfordshire had been exemplary in his guidance which has often changed. We must continue to be cautious and responsible. The safety of staff, visitors and members continues to be paramount.

Councillor Symington queried why the DBC Code of Conduct differed from the LGA model. The Leader advised that without seeing both documents side by side he couldn't advise of the variants, however there is no requirement to copy the code exactly. The Standards Committee agreed our interpretation of Declarations of Interest and it works.

Councillor Symington raised concern that we weren't adopting best practice. The Leader said it was a very detailed question and couldn't tell the differences without seeing the pages Councillor Symington was referring to. He didn't feel the need to review the

document every year unless there were legislative changes we needed to adopt. He felt our model was as good and sufficient for DBC.

Mayor Riddick confirmed that practices had taken place for many years were still being followed and there was no need to review these now just to match the model code of conduct.

Councillor Anderson, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Infrastructure

Councillor Anderson presented a report on Planning and Infrastructure:

The member briefing on the technical reports to the Local Plan is happening shortly. This will include a general update on the Local Plan.

There has been an increase in developers approaching ward members. Can I ask that members don't be rude but equally don't be too helpful. We need members to liaise with council officers.

Please continue to have patience with staffing levels. The Council is actively trying to recruit.

Hemel Gardens Community Project – the Local Journeys survey on transport options is currently out with details on the website. Please participate and spread the publicity of the survey.

Hemel Place – the next board meeting is due shortly. The 12 street art owls are out until 19th April and have been popular with children and families.

The South West Herts joint strategic plan for 2038-2050 is taking shape and will be agreed in the next month with the Regulation 18 consultation taking place in June.

The filming industry assistance data has been collected and the database is now available to the filming industry.

There have been 114 applications under the last round of ARG COVID grants. We need more people to apply.

I will be looking at increasing fibre broadband across the borough. Hoping to arrange a briefing for members for more information.

Questions

Councillor Allen asked, further to the written response of his question from the last meeting, can the Portfolio Holder advise of the Council's response to the Network Rail Tender for a development partner as they state they received a warm pre-application response from the local Council. The Portfolio Holder advised that pre-application discussions were confidential but he will look into this and see what can be shared.

Action.

Councillor Tindall followed on from Councillor Allen's question and asked if would be possible to hold a briefing with the relevant ward councillors and those adjacent. The Portfolio Holder agreed.

Councillor Symington referred to the South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan and queried what impact this had with the Dacorum Borough Council Local Plan being on hold until 2023. The Portfolio Holder advised there wasn't any impact because the South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan is for 2038-2050 and was still in early stages. He confirmed it was fine to proceed.

Councillor Hollinghurst suggested the number of homes was crucial and asked how we could plan for future development without having that information to hand. The Portfolio Holder felt they would have to agree to disagree on that point. He said it was so important to plan as much as we could, we work closely with our third parties to plan the infrastructure and even if some of it does seem like a backwards process that is how the system works.

Councillor Foster expressed frustration about the consultation on the Local Plan, the delays and the documents that had been missed from the Plan. The Portfolio Holder felt that the members question had breached confidentiality and therefore couldn't respond on those points.

Councillor Elliot, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources

Councillor Elliot presented a report on Finance and Resources:

FINANCE AND RESOURCES

Financial Services

The Finance service has been extremely busy during January and February following the release of the final local government finance settlement.

This has required a further assessment and review of the draft 22/23 budget proposals, followed by the final budget scrutiny and the production and presentation of the proposed 22/23 budget on this evening's agenda.

The finance service is also working closely with our external Commercial experts to develop the basis of the Council's future commercial strategy and commercial business case appraisals.

Commercial Assets and Property Development

Estates Team

The Estates Team have continued to work with Public Health England, the NHS, Herts County Council and other partners on the assessment and delivery of vaccine delivery sites, pop up testing/vaccination sites, and booster jab locations. The work in this area is expected to reduce significantly going forward, the experience of this joint working and the relationships created should assist the council going forward. The focus moving

forward will be to make the best use of our operational assets as part of the wider Covid recovery plan.

Commercial Property Team

The performance of the commercial assets has remained strong, and income levels exceed budgeted expectations by circa 15%, and occupancy remains above 95%. This is a good indicator of how the local small independent businesses have progressed over the course of the pandemic. The Government's Moratorium on debt collection is due to come to an end in March 2022 and it is unknown at this point in time what impact that will have upon the local business community and void levels.

Going forward the customer/business response to Covid Recovery will be key to income performance. The Government's business rates relief support will continue in 2022 for the leisure and hospitality sectors.

Revenues and Benefits service

The Revenues service has been hard at work implementing several new government Covid Support policies for 21/22 and 22/23. These include; the implementation of the Omicron and Hospitality relief scheme 21/22, providing circa £800k of business rates relief to local businesses, the planning for the Council Tax based £150 Energy Rebate for 22/23, and the delivery of the final Covid Additional Relief Fund scheduled for March.

The revenues service have also supported the Economic development team to roll out the next phase of the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), with this phase focusing on supporting those businesses that won't receive the Omicron Relief grant but are involved in the hospitality and leisure supply chain sectors.

This team continues to play an important role in providing financial support to local residents and numbers of test and trace support applications increased exponentially during December and January to levels not seen before.

The Revenues service is working with the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities and software partners to ensure the issuing of the 2022/23 business Rates bills are on time and include the new reliefs for 2022/23.

Questions

Councillor Beauchamp questioned the expected payment date for those businesses that were eligible for the Hospitality and Leisure Grant. The Portfolio Holder confirmed the hospitality and leisure relief grants started the week commencing 7th February and is now nearing its conclusion. To date payments to 99 businesses have been made, totaling over £400,000 and the majority of the remaining payments will be paid next week.

Councillor England asked if the Portfolio Holder was concerned about inflation, and questioned if he would consider writing to The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, to ask if some of the Test and Trace monies could be clawed back. The Portfolio Holder said he would not consider writing to the Chancellor with regards to inflation given other priorities he has to consider.

Councillor Hollinghurst expressed disappointment about the current Government. The Mayor said such comments were not appropriate for the Chamber.

Councillor Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Councillor Griffiths presented a report on Housing:

TENANT & LEASEHOLDER SERVICES

- Two new income support officers recruited to provide support and advice for tenants that are experiencing difficulties with budgeting and paying their rent
- Rent collected to end of January achieved 99.4% and is an improvement on this time last year, which is positive in the current economic climate.
- Tenancy Management team are making good progress with the tenancy review visits and are identifying the need for some support or other intervention in 25% of visits

STRATEGIC HOUSING

- Senior Officer decision approved to vary arrangements for Afghan LES resettlement Scheme and to incorporate Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme households
- Third Afghan LES household matched and tenancy commenced for DBC property, fourth household expected to take up occupation of Registered Provider tenancy week commencing 28/2/2022
- Evaluation of Year 4 Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) and in liaison with Dept. Levelling Up Housing & Communities preparation for final submission for RSI Year 5 grant funding application, which currently enables delivery of Housing First/Street Outreach to deliver focused prevention initiatives.

PROPERTY & PLACE

- Gas servicing achieved 100% at the end of January
- Electrical testing programme continues with just over 98.4% of properties tested and the remaining properties are with the tenancy team, some at enforcement stage, as these have been hard to access
- Stock condition survey is underway and now gaining access to a greater number of properties after an initially slow start, due to the emergence of the Omicron variant.
- The Council has been awarded £300K of Social Housing decarbonisation grant funding to carry out energy efficiency upgrades 4 blocks of flats.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Martindale	Defects period completed and properties handed over to Property & Place
Magenta Court	Defects period completed and properties handed over to Property & Place
St Margaret’s Way	Planning Approval achieved 16 th Dec. Tender documents have been issued to select a Principal Contractor. Cabinet Report prepared to appropriate general fund land.

Mountbatten View	Appointment of Principal Contractor approved. Mobilising a start on site.
Bingham Mews	Final defects inspections carried out January 2022. Minor snagging works to be undertaken.
Eastwick Row	Start on site 21 st February 2022 after a delay linked to obtaining approval from Herts CC flood authority
Coniston Road	On site progressing well. Completion due April 2022 Site visit for Leader, PH of Housing and local Councillors booked for 4 th March
Wilstone	Appointment of Principal Contractor approved. Mobilising a start on site. Site demolished.
Bulbourne	Approval to purchase land approved at Sept Cabinet. Project ready to submit for Planning subject to Tring Town Council to agreeing Heads of Terms to sell the site to DBC.
Marchmont	Stage 2 design progressing. Resident consultation event held along with additional meeting with local Councillors. Planning application to be submitted early March.
Cherry Bounce	Stage 2 design completed. Preparing resident consultation event.
Paradise Depot	Planning application submitted. Tender documentation issued to demolish existing buildings.
Garage Sites	Demolition completed. Preparing contract documents and mobilising a start on site.
Randall's Ride	Mobilising a start on site. Site due to be demolished March 2022. Homes England funding request formally submitted.
Stoneycroft & Varney Rd	Stage 2 design commenced.
Aragon Close RSAP	Planning approval achieved 2 nd Dec. Contractor instructed. Mobilising start on site. CCTV instructed. Notice to quits served on Garages.

Questions

Councillor Adeleke asked what plans were in place to help tenants that were likely to get into rent arrears due to rising living costs. The Portfolio Holder explained we had an experienced and caring team in the rents department and as long as residents talk to us we can assist them. She said there was always a potential for residents to get into arrears so they will continue what they have been doing for years and taking action.

Councillor Ransley said as a member of Tring Town Council they have not caused delays in the Bulbourne project. She said there had been delays with Legal, Government agencies, paperwork and decisions have changed but the Town Council had not caused the delays. The Portfolio Holder replied perhaps they could have a conversation outside of the meeting.

Councillor Freedman queried if we were legally able to stagger rent and service charge increases throughout the year rather than one firm increase in order to assist our

residents. The Portfolio Holder advised it hadn't been looked at but she would need to investigate the legal ramifications. **Action.**

Councillor Williams, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Contracted Services

Councillor Williams presented a report on Corporate and Contracted Services:

Thank you to the Elections Team for the work on the by-elections on 3rd February.

The Berkhamsted sports centre project is progressing. We have now moved to public consultation stage and we've already had over 400 responses.

Despite some slight delays the work at Highbarns is expected to complete at the end of the month.

Happy to take questions.

Questions

Councillor England noted there had been a report of a health and safety incident at the Everyone Active Sports Centre in St Albans, the same operator we have in Dacorum, and asked the Portfolio Holder for an update. The Portfolio Holder wasn't aware of the incident but as it wasn't in the borough it didn't warrant any intervention. Councillor England asked for reassurance that such incidents wouldn't be able to happen in Dacorum. The Portfolio Holder explained the operator had an exemplary safety record and if there was any incidents they would be investigated.

Councillor Freedman asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed that the Berkhamsted sports centre consultation falls short of encouraging and meaningful answers, and also seemed more resident focused. He asked if the Portfolio Holder would consider ad-hoc responses from businesses. The Portfolio Holder suggested the purpose of a consultation for a sports centre used by residents should be primarily aimed at residents. He said businesses could make contributions to the consultation if they wished to and he felt it was sufficient enough for anyone to make comments.

Councillor Symington said a few meetings ago she asked a question in relation to electric vehicle charging points and the Portfolio Holder had advised he was waiting for a response from UKPN. She asked if there was an update. The Portfolio Holder explained they had been in conversation with one operator and it had turned out not to be as it seemed so they had broadened that conversation out to a range of providers to look at options for all our car parks. He advised those conversations were ongoing and hoped a report would be produced to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee in the next cycle.

Councillor Barrett, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services

Councillor Barrett presented a report on Environmental Services:

Continuing to maintain services despite Covid restrictions. 15 members of staff off either with Covid or self-isolating at beginning of February. All but 2 back to work.

Christmas backlog all cleared by 11th January.

Refresher training being undertaken to all frontline staff (170). Difficult this year due to social distancing restrictions.

Plans underway for work on Splash Park opening in May. New contract awarded for maintenance.

HCC Agency agreement (tree and Grounds maintenance) expired and working on new contract.

In 2019/2020 our recycling percentage was 52.8% - putting us 63rd in the league tables. In 2020/2021 our recycling rate has risen to 54.5% - putting us 40th in the league tables. So our percentage has gone up 1.7% and we have gone up 23 positions.

56 new street champions registered in January. Total of 576 registered and 316 with equipment.

654 residents came to the Council with their Christmas trees. With additional help from Scouts and Hospice of St Francis, a total of 6400 trees were chipped after Christmas.

Questions

Councillor England thanked the Trees and Woodlands Team for all their hard work in the cleanup of the recent storm. He then asked what was being done about the missing 200+ street champions who hadn't collected their equipment. Cllr Barrett confirmed that emails were sent monthly to those who hadn't collected equipment but as it was a voluntary scheme we can only encourage people to join. Councillor England advised he was happy to engage directly with those in his ward who haven't collected equipment if that would help. Councillor Barrett replied he would need to confirm if personal data can be released to Councillor England for this. **Action.**

Councillor Symington referred to the commitment with Hertfordshire County Council for a cleaner Hertfordshire and queried if there was a formal agreement, and if so, how is it defined, is there specific KPIs. She used street cleaning and litter picking as examples. Councillor Barrett advised he wasn't sure of a formal agreement and would need to come back to her on the KPI data. **Action.**

Councillor Birnie asked if the re-negotiations had taken place on the Tree Management arrangements. The Portfolio Holder advised that negotiations were in progress and there was a meeting programmed for next week on that topic.

Councillor Birnie said he was hopeful that those negotiations would lead to a more reasonable fee for the work we do. He sought assurance that was our aim. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that was the aspiration.

Councillor Banks, Portfolio Holder for Community and Regulatory Services

Councillor Banks presented a report on Community and Regulatory services:

ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION

Covid-19

Case numbers peaked and then slightly reduced settling at high numbers of infections throughout January in Dacorum. This is due to the Omicron variant which became the dominant variant in December throughout the UK. The Team are now focusing its attentions on Self Isolation, Workplace Outbreaks and working with Community Partnerships Teams to support the vaccination programme.

Public Space Protection Order and Littering Enforcement Pilot Contract

The PSPO (Dog control and Town Centre restrictions) /Littering Pilot Contract went live on the 1st November.

The pilot is a 12 month zero cost to the council pilot, to provide us with information on the best way to enforce littering and PSPO's in future in Dacorum. This approach is one taken by numerous other Local Authorities to support enforcement teams with enforcement of PSPO's and littering offences.

In January 446 tickets were issued (two were cancelled), 344 of these were for littering offences. The remaining were for breach of the Borough wide Dog Control PSPO or the Hemel Town Centre PSPO.

Members will be further updated on the progress of the pilot, as and when data is available from the service as part of the updates to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (SPAEC).

Officers have been working with District Partners to ensure that all wards in the borough are visited frequently, at least monthly for areas of low littering and PSPO complaints.

Fly-Tipping Prosecution

Mr Ramzan pleaded guilty on 19th Jan to two counts of fly tipping in July 21. Evidence was collated on the Covert Cameras. The court sentenced the Defendant to a fine of £1,221, ordered the Defendant to pay a victim surcharge of £122 and the Council's full costs of £1,664.71. Total of £3,007.71. This was publicised in both Hemel and Luton Press to act as a deterrent to others.

COMMUNITY

The Adventure Playgrounds re-opened for half term on 14th February. Although they have been closed for the general sessions over winter we still received over £9000 of income from hire of the 3g pitches, youth clubs and private hire. The Adventure Playgrounds and DBC Comms team have been promoting 'Relax and vax' sessions run in Hemel Hempstead and across Herts to help 12 to 18-year-olds who are nervous about having the vaccine. These sessions have specially trained vaccinators to help young people overcome worries like a fear of needles or other concerns to help reduce tension and support them through the process.

Questions

Councillor Adeleke advised that the Police website reports an increase in crime. He asked how closely the Council worked with the Police to keep crime under control and keep the Borough safe. The Portfolio Holder advised that during the lockdowns we actually saw a reduction in crime in all categories but now we are at the same level as 2019, prior to the pandemic. She advised the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) team worked closely with the Police and other relevant authorities to keep the Borough safe. An annual report is being prepared for 21/22 and will be shared with members and the public to highlight the work at the CSP. The date of that public meeting is yet to be set but will be publicized soon.

Councillor Guest referred to the refurbishment and reopening of the Northridge Way basketball courts. She asked how Hemel Storm, the local basketball team, will be involved in the reopening. The Portfolio Holder advised that the Coach of Hemel Storm was the one that first highlighted the state of the basketball courts and here we are now. She said they would be involved in any launch event or ribbon cutting once it has been scheduled in after the final markings have been finalised.

Councillor Wilkie thanked the team for their hard work with self-isolation visits. She then asked for the performance indicators for reducing litter versus fines, how do we know they're working? The Portfolio Holder advised the whole idea of the pilot is to establish if the enforcement work is successful. Clean, Safe and Green have reported an improvement with litter and dog-fouling which is a good indication that the pilot is having a positive effect.

Councillor England asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed the reports of enforcement fine fraud and elderly individuals being bullied by district enforcement officers were worrying. The Portfolio Holder advised there had been 3 reported scam incidents out of the 2000+ fixed penalty notices issued and these incidents have been dealt with by the Police. Those cases were alarming and any further incidents should be reported to the Police. She explained there had been approximately 50 complaints of bullying by enforcement officers. The body-cam footage has been reviewed and not one of those complaints have been upheld. She had no doubt that the officers were qualified and were doing a professional job to keep the Borough clean and tidy.

5. MOTION

The following Motion was proposed by Councillor Timmis and seconded by Councillor Tindall:

I move that Dacorum Borough Council strongly opposes Luton Airport's further planned expansion, from 18 million passengers per annum to 32 million passengers per annum by 2040, with the resulting negative impacts of increased noise, emissions and surface transport. This disproportionately impacts the Watling Ward villages in Dacorum, and more widely our Borough and much of Hertfordshire. Given National Climate Change goals, air travel awareness, and noise and environmental pollution levels, it cannot be justified. This cannot go unchallenged and so Dacorum Borough Council will therefore commit to oppose the expansion of the airport at every opportunity.

A recorded vote was held:

For: 37 (Adeleke, Allen, Anderson, Banks, Barrett, Beauchamp, Bhinder, Birnie, Cloughton, Dhyani, Douris, Elliot, England, Freedman, Griffiths, Guest, Harden, Hearn, Hobson, Hollinghurst, Johnson, Link, Sobaan Mahmood, Suqlain Mahmood, Peter, Ransley, Riddick (Mayor), Rogers, Silwal, Stevens, Sutton, Taylor, Timmis, Tindall, Williams, Wilkie and Wyatt Lowe)

Against: 1 (Arslan)

Abstain: 1 (Foster)

Therefore the Motion was carried.

6. QUESTIONS

Question for Councillor Andrew Williams from Councillor Sally Symington:

At the last meeting of the Full Council, you agreed to write follow up letters to the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable of Hertfordshire Police as no response had been received to the following questions agreed by the Council on 17 November 2021 to the following:

- a. To ask what steps they are taking to review safeguarding and vetting procedures and misconduct processes in Hertfordshire Police in light of what has been learnt during the sentencing of a serving metropolitan police officer on 30 September 2021.
- b. To ask whether they will review the wider workforce culture in relation to violence against women and girls.
- c. Urging Hertfordshire Police formally to record Misogyny as a hate crime.

The dual issues of Violence Against Women and Girls manifested in the press by the high profile cases relating amongst other things to the late convicted sex offender, Jeffery Epstein, and his cohort; and the recent conviction of a Hertfordshire police officer for corruption and making indecent images of children and charges against another serving officer for raping a child under 13 highlight the ongoing importance of this issue.

Q1. Could the Leader confirm the date the follow up letter was sent and the response received from the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable?

Q2. Does the Leader think it is appropriate that it took two letters for the Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner to respond to such an important issue?

Responses from Councillor Williams:

Response to Q1. The original letter was sent by post, the follow up was sent by email on 10th February and the response was sent on 16th February.

Response to Q2. I agree it was a long time to receive a response as the initial letter was sent in December and it would have been better to receive a response sooner.

Question for Councillor Andrew Williams from Councillor Adrian England:

At a public meeting of Health in Dacorum on 8th December 2021, an apparent commitment was made verbally by West Herts Hospital Trust, to conduct a comparative costing of a Greenfield hospital site. This exchange was recorded on the MS Teams recording but has not appeared in the subsequent Minutes. There appears to be some question of interpretation as to whether or not this offer was hypothetical or actual.

At a subsequent meeting of several Dacorum-based hospital campaign groups with the Health and Social Care Secretary of State, together with and arranged by Hemel Hempstead's MP, campaigners had sought to rely on this witnessed commitment and indeed to refer to it in the meeting with the SoS. This was not possible, due to it being missing from the Minutes and the MS Teams recording not being readily-available.

In view of the critical importance to Dacorum residents of this issue, does the Leader of the Council agree that it is regrettable that this MS Teams recording of a public meeting was not simply published on YouTube and/or the Dacorum Borough Council website, for full transparency?

What is the Council-agreed policy and procedure for the making and storing of MS Teams and video recordings? How long are meeting recordings retained, for which meetings, and can the Leader confirm these are all now available publicly, either published at the time or in response to an FOI request?

Having equipped the Forum Council Chamber and Committee rooms with robot-cameras, will the Council now adopt a practice of pre-promoting public participation in public Full Council and scrutiny (OSC) meetings, including via joining MS Teams meetings, streaming video recordings of meetings live (subject to a short delay up to a minute) and through the clipping of entire meeting items as separate segments for digestible watch-back?

Response from Councillor Williams:

With regard the meeting of Health in Dacorum on 8th December, a query against the minutes was lodged, in response the Chair of the meeting listened to the recording and reviewed it against the minutes produced; it is the view of the Chair that the minutes are an accurate representation of the discussion. The meeting was recorded on MS Teams and this allowed the Chair to confirm the accuracy of the minutes.

The Council has invested significantly to upgrade its facilities to enable us to move to support fully virtual and hybrid meetings and decision making and subsequently look at how we could best support the Council and its Members in returning to meetings taking place in person as the emergency legislation changed around virtual decision making.

Our priority throughout this has been to ensure the safety of officers and elected Members in attending these meetings and carrying out their statutory duties; resource has rightly been focused on ensuring all practical measures are in place to facilitate this. We are now reaching a position where we can move from a reactive to a proactive approach and understandably officers require time to assess what has worked well, what requires improvement and ensure the infrastructure and technology we have in place is able to deliver.

The Council will continue to develop policies, practices and procedures that support the streaming of meetings to enable this to be rolled out more widely and officers will consult members as these policies are developed. In the meantime, we continue to allow public participation in person, as well as making meetings available remotely to view either by way of MS Teams or live streaming. We continue to produce minutes as an accurate record of discussion and decisions. Members are also able to access any MS Teams recordings by viewing the chat box of the said meeting where the recording should be available for them to view.

Recordings are currently retained for 3 months but this is being reviewed and will be included in the policies mentioned above.

Question for Councillor Griffiths from Councillor Garrick Stevens:

It is known there are a number of refugees from Afghanistan and their families being cared for in the Borough.

While it is welcome that accommodation costs will continue to be met pending their long-term resettlement, the Government has made an announcement that it will cease to provide toiletries and similar for such refugees.

Has the Council considered, under the circumstances, what measures might be undertaken so that toiletries and such like can continue to be made available?

Response from Councillor Griffiths:

Hertfordshire currently has 3 'bridging' hotels being used as temporary accommodation for a number of families from Afghanistan while they await long term resettlement. Hertfordshire County Council are providing wraparound support, working with DBC and the East of England LGA and the voluntary and community sector to help residents access vital health, education and employability support for locations in Dacorum.

Initially the Home Office provided funding to each of the hotels to purchase items such as toiletries for residents whilst staying at the hotels. The Home Office recently removed this facility and hotel residents were notified that they would need to purchase these items themselves. This change was discussed by the Strategic Migration Steering Group and where needed families will continue to be supplied toiletries and other essential items from volunteers and donations coordinated by Hertfordshire County Council. All residents in the hotels are supported to claim Universal Credit whilst they are seeking work and housing costs, meals and bus passes continue to be provided by HCC and partners.

Dacorum Borough Council have committed to find accommodation for 4 families from Afghanistan to ensure those who assisted the army and face risk to life would be able to apply for resettlement. Support for these families is being provided by the Refugee Council to ensure they receive access to health, wellbeing, education and employment services. Additionally Community and Voluntary groups and organisations continue to provide them, as well as other residents in need, support to ensure they are not in financial hardship and are able to participate in their local communities. This support does not detract from our work in supporting homelessness in our borough, or those on the existing housing register.

Question for Councillor Graham Barratt from Councillor Adrian England:

Earlier this month members received a list of trees that Dacorum will have planted over the winter 2021-22 period.

Dacorum organise tree planting in accordance with a list that we maintain of potential borough-wide planting sites. Sites that have been listed 'tree-free' the longest are considered first in our deliberations each year. Tree replacement prior to that 2019 was ad hoc and based on visual amenity and Officer opinion.

Dacorum have 249 planting sites still listed without a date of tree removal, so those are being addressed as a priority each time we organise planting. We are planting about 70 – 90 Street or housing trees per year, with an overall total of over 900+ trees on our potential planting list.

I have residents who have been asking since 2018 for felled trees in Hardy and Springfield Roads to be replaced. All of us can probably say the same. As I was advised, I relayed at the time that immediate replacement was not immediately possible – but it is now 2022!

This means that it is taking seven years to replace some lost trees, in streets and residential amenity areas.

Q1. How many street or housing trees were planted during each of the last seven years, since 2015?

Q2. How many each year were substantial sapling specimens and how many were whips?

Q3. What is the survival rate for successful establishment of street and housing trees, in each of those years?

Q4. By how much does he expect the 249 site removal and replanting deficit to have been improved by next year?

Responses from Councillor Barrett

Response to Q1:

All below are 'standard' sized trees

2014/15	46
2015/16	44
2016/17	32
2017/18	67
2018/19	68
2019/20	70
2020/21	173 / 1125 whips
2021/22	96 / 900 whips / 17 fruit trees / 400+ hedging plants

Response to Q2: Detailed in response to Q1.

Response to Q3: We don't monitor survival rates specifically.

Response to Q4: We don't have a specific target. We are planting trees at a much greater pace than we ever have and will continue to do so.

Question for Councillor Andrew Williams from Councillor Sally Symington

The Audit report identified that Procurement Standing Orders valued at £6.9m were set aside (waived) 40 times during 2020/21. The failure to obtain competitive quotes in some instances for procurement awards in excess of £25,000 was also identified.

The report additionally highlighted that there is no formal oversight in place by way of reporting such incidences to Committee or Cabinet.

Could the portfolio holder identify the actions being undertaken to ensure compliance with the Council's own Procurement Standing Orders? And confirm that oversight will be introduced to ensure transparency, accountability and fairness in the procurement process?

Response from Councillor Williams:

The commissioning and procurement standing orders provide advice and guidance for officers and members who are responsible for taking any steps that may lead to a contract being entered into. These standing orders will always apply unless a suspension is approved. An exemption to comply with the standing orders may only be made by the Cabinet or a Portfolio Holder responsible for the service affected by the contract. The suspension of special circumstances justifying the exception must be recorded in the full cabinet minutes or the portfolio decision so there is accountability for the decisions. In response to the audit report the recommendation is the following processes will be introduced from April 2022 to ensure that formal oversight of when the PSO's are set aside and non-compliant activities are currently presented to the finance and resources overview and scrutiny committee every quarter. The council has also subsequently set up a commercial board, part of their remit is to review all procurement over £75,000 which matches the financial threshold for seeking a tender.

Question for Councillor Alan Anderson from Councillor Sally Symington

There have been a number of complaints about the mud on the road along Shootersway, in particular outside the Old Orchard site. This is causing tension and confusion regarding the work of the contractor on the neighbouring site at the rear of Hanburys.

Could the Portfolio Holder confirm there is a Construction Management Plan in place with the contractor at Old Orchard and what enforcement can take place in the event of breaches?

Response from Councillor Anderson:

Following the receipt of further information from the applicants the Council has now recommended the formal discharge of the outstanding planning condition relating to the

Construction Management Plan associated with the development of the Old Orchard at the LA4 site. A decision should be issued later today.

Both developers have been contacted regarding their responsibilities to undertake wheel washing of vehicles prior to them entering the highway from the development site.

Officers will inspect the site to check whether this is being undertaken.

The DBC case officer has also been forwarded an email exchange between the developers at the Old Orchard and a Licensing Enforcement Officer within the Highway Network Management team at the County Council. So the County Council are monitoring from an enforcement prospective in relation to the requirements under the Highways Act 1980 (as amended).

7. BUSINESS FROM THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING

Councillor Symington asked for the action points from the previous meeting to be circulated and added to future agendas. The Mayor confirmed that request was recorded and would be actioned.

8. CABINET REFERRALS

Resolved:

That the following be approved:

15 February 2022

Item 8.1 CA/07/22 SENIOR OFFICER PAY POLICY

Decision

- (1) That Cabinet recommends to Council that it adopts the Pay Policy for 2022/23 as set out in appendix 1 to the cabinet report.
- (2) That Cabinet recommends to Council that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive in conjunction with the Council's Monitoring Officer to approve any amendments to the Pay Policy throughout the financial year 2022/2023, which may be required as a result of legislative changes.

Item 8.2 CA/10/22 CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

Decision

- (1) Approves the outline plan for phase two implementation and recommends to Council the drawdown from reserves of £150,000 to complete the phase 2 work.
- (2) Approves the principle of a new Head of Transformation post to lead the on-going transformational change programme, including the Customer Strategy, and recommends to Council the drawdown from reserves of £180,000 to fund the post.

Item 8.3 CA/11/22 TREASURY MANAGEMENT- MID YEAR REVIEW

Decision

That Council accepts this report on mid-year treasury management performance and prudential indicators for 2021/22

Item 8.4 CA/12/22 BUDGET REPORT

Councillor Elliot made the following introduction on the proposed budget:

“When I addressed you 12 months ago to recommend my last budget to the Council, the Pandemic was still in full flow. My heart goes out to all those that have suffered or lost loved ones to the pandemic, which I know includes many people within Dacorum, including staff and Members. Twelve months on it would appear that we are in a much improved position in regards to Covid and are hopeful we can continue on the path of full economic recovery.

The destruction wrought by Covid has not been limited to health. The steps taken nationwide to combat the virus have brought challenges of their own, and many local businesses and local families have suffered financial hardship as swathes of the economy have been locked down for months at a time.

Within this challenging environment, Dacorum Borough Council has played a key role in the Covid response, extending help and support to our businesses and communities at a time they needed it most. I am particularly proud that in continuing to provide our day-to-day services, the Council has been a visible beacon of stability amid so much uncertainty. I have no doubt that this consistency and reliability has been reassuring for many residents across Dacorum, but in particular for the most vulnerable within our community.

Support for Business

Since March last year the Council has administrated a large volume of separate grant schemes on behalf of Central Government and local discretionary schemes. The need to make payments to struggling businesses as quickly as possible has meant that schemes that would ordinarily be designed over a number of months or years, have instead been rolled out within a matter of weeks.

It is a tribute to Council staff, particularly those within the Revenues & Benefits Team and the Economic Development Team that they have stayed on top of constantly evolving Government guidance and paid out **£16.5m** of grants to over **2,000 local businesses**.

In addition to this, the Council has worked closely with its commercial tenants throughout the last year to ensure it does all it can to support them through the pandemic, and into the recovery phase.

The Council will continue to work closely with its public and private sector partners over the coming months to ensure we do as much as possible to help the local economic recovery through the post pandemic times.

Budget context

Over the last 10 years, this council has successfully risen to the challenge of saving over **£7.5m** whilst simultaneously protecting and improving the services we provide to our residents. This budget outlines plans to save a further **£300k, through new income streams** in 2022/23.

The medium-term future of local authority finance will remain uncertain until the outcome of Government's Local Government Finance Review, which will determine how funding will be allocated to local authorities in the medium term beyond 2022/23.

That is why this council has proposed a budget for 2022 with a strong focus on sustainability, and continuing to deliver its corporate priorities into the medium-term. We have already made significant strides towards balancing the budget in future years, having identified initiatives of over **£300k** to address MTFs savings targets beyond 2023.

Continuing to invest in the Borough

Despite the extent of the financial challenges we are facing, this council's history of prudent financial management means that we are in a position to propose a highly ambitious capital investment programme ... in excess of **£315m** over the next 5 years ... to further enhance the services we provide to our residents, and the environment in which they live.

Some of the areas identified for capital investment include:

- **£88m** investment in our existing housing stock, which continues to provide high quality homes for tens of thousands of people across our borough
- **£157m** investment in our ambitious and successful housing new-build programme ... helping more people to live affordably in an area which has some of the highest house prices in the country
- **£50m** investment in various ventures which combine social benefit with financial return, including significant investment in a new sports centre in Berkhamsted and investment in neighbourhood facilities.

- **£2.5m** Investment in supporting the local community sector to develop their community services.
- **£6.6m** continued investment in the Council's vehicle fleet, driving the desire for greener vehicles to support the delivery of our frontline services.

Council Tax

As part of the budget for 2022/23, the Council is proposing to increase Council Tax by **£5** for a Band D property, which equates to less than **10 pence per week**.

Central government is likely to consider each council's ability to raise tax when deciding how much funding it will provide in the future ... in simple terms, Government is likely to reduce future funding by an amount that it **expects** the council to raise through increasing its council tax.

Proposing this increase in line with government expectation means that we have done all we can to protect Dacorum's overall funding position for future years.

Housing

In line with Government guidance the council is proposing to increase housing rents by CPI plus 1%. The average rent for a council property next year will be £111.23 per week, which following the 4-year period of statutory rent reductions means that average rent in Dacorum remains **lower than it was in 2015**.

Despite this recent period of enforced rent reductions, the Council has continued to make housing delivery one of its key priorities, and the Council recently completed its 338th **new home**. In addition the council Magenta Court Development won the Best Small Social Housing Development at the National Building excellence awards.

This trend will continue ... the Council's approved plans are to **deliver a further 408 homes** across the borough over the next 4 years.

We are also investing in the infrastructure that will enable us to deliver our housing obligations to the most vulnerable in our community in the best way possible.

The council has achieved a match funding grant from Homes England to deliver 8 new purpose built follow on accommodation units to provide additional support for the homeless or those at risk of homelessness, due to be open in the spring 2022.

In Conclusion

Unquestionably, the Council faces significant financial challenges in the years ahead as we play our role in the Covid Recovery Phase.

However, this Council can enter this period feeling confident that with the commitment of its Members and staff we will continue to deliver for our residents.”

Councillor Williams seconded the budget proposal and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Tindall proposed an amendment to the budget and this was seconded by Councillor England. The amendment was as follows:

To use the Negative RSG Contribution of £900,000 as follows –

- a. To set up a specific reserve to be available to kick-start initiatives for carbon reduction in Council domestic properties - £450,000.
- b. To set up a specific reserve for the purchase of electric vehicles in and for the Council and facilitate development of propulsion - £450,000.

Councillor Tindall felt our response to climate change had to speed up otherwise we would get to 2030-2040 in serious trouble along with the rest of the country. It is therefore essential that the officers who are doing sterling work have the ability to call upon funds should new initiatives or plans be developed during the course of the year. It is for that reason that he suggests the amended proposal.

Councillor Wilkie and Freedman spoke in support of the amendment.

Councillor Birnie and Adeleke spoke against the amendment.

Councillor England made the following statement in support of the amendment:

“I thank the officers for their work to prepare the Dacorum Budget.

This is a crucial year for making progress if we are to meet our targets in relation to 2030.

So this is a purposeful, constructive and costed budget amendment which looks at an amount of money which the Council is receiving as a one-off and puts upon it a focus, not just for the machine of the Council, but as a signal to residents, of where we need to focus transformation.

REDUCE, RE-USE and RECYCLE

I thank the Cabinet for adopting the proposal to support regeneration in the north-west of the borough. Two remaining proposals were in relation to a Specific Reserve to kick-start initiatives for carbon reduction in Council domestic properties. £500k and creating a specific reserve to progress the purchase of Electric vehicles in and by the Council and the means of propulsion £400k.

So as a Council we can put this money into the general reserves and forget about it, or we can make visible a local mechanism for addressing two looming problems which are set to cost our residents money in the next several years, especially those who are reliant upon social housing.

We put our money where our mouth is.

In both cases the transformative effects are long-lasting, even though they only have this investment as a one-off. People will be encouraged to reduce their consumption!

I would like to explain the thinking with the LD amendment, in respect of these two urgent items.

These are areas where Dacorum needs to raise its ambition; the climate emergency is the biggest factor facing us and it is costing residents money, meanwhile DBC has an opportunity to gain maximum value from a sum which, with inflation at 7.8%, will become devalued quickly if left in reserves!

1. Set up a Specific Reserve to kick-start initiatives for **carbon reduction** in Council domestic properties. £500k
2. Set up a Specific Reserve to progress the purchase of **Electric vehicles** in and by the Council and the means of propulsion. £400k.

The current DBC plan for insulation, scrutinised at SPAE OSC, does not get us to 100% by 2030 – that is why this reserve, grants like the one announced and probably others, are necessary – literally to fill a carbon-wasting gap.

We know that Dacorum is currently committed only to insulating properly 90% of its large social housing stock, so this money surely HAS to have as a priority advancing that ambition to 100% by 2030, and of course ANYTHING we can do in 2022/23 is worth far more than action delayed until the latter half of this decade.

I have already tonight mentioned the grant for insulation in Northend; nonetheless more is needed and the sooner the better.

If this Council is serious about the Climate emergency, the taking of opportunities and the creating of this targeted reserve would confirm it.

We also know that it is vital to involve and support our residents in preserving – indeed improving their quality of life, and reducing their rising heating bills.

By creating this fund we can also harness the efforts of 150,000 residents to work hand-in-hand with the local council, to tackle climate change. Much preferable to quietly putting money in the reserves. This is, after all, an “emergency”.

We know that EVs are here and the EVCP grid is not. Many other towns and districts are using EVs to respond to the emergency, and at the same time improve air quality and noise levels for residents.

Part of that is transitioning the fleet; the reason used for not taking this opportunity. The Cabinet say they have a “fleet reserve” and if need be they could vire across reserves to support that fleet reserve for the purchase of electric vehicles.

The Leader states he “had already discussed at length with the Chief Executive about how important his view was that they move towards a different method of powering the commercial fleet vehicles, at this stage electric was being considered by the organisation.”

This is about more than buying EVs.

This fund would enable Dacorum to call some of the shots with regard to appropriate type and location of suitable EVCPs, rather than being beholden to poor levels of customer service from infrastructure providers who find themselves in a buyers' market.

The scope of this fund allows us to strike a balance which takes opportunities to improve the EVCP network quickly, and offers the option to invest in EVs for use by the council directly, thus taking a lead and showing that Dacorum is not lagging behind its residents growing adoption on EV.

A recent report in The Guardian based on a study by "Climate Emergency UK" evaluated Dacorum as having done 45% of what it could have done, in terms of establishing its scale of ambition.

Somerset West and Taunton was the only council to score above 90% and was one of only 21 to get top marks for its plans to improve biodiversity and combat the ecological emergency.

It has developed a [climate-positive planning policy](#) and is building zero-carbon council houses, as well as retrofitting existing housing stock.

It has ensured that addressing both emergencies are strategic priorities for planning policies and design guides for new development, declared its area a fracking-free zone, pledged to manage council services, buildings and land in a biodiversity-friendly manner, and embed ecological initiatives alongside climate action in all work areas.

The council's entire pool car fleet will be electric by the end of 2022.

Next year's report will assess to what extent local authorities are on track to reach net zero emissions.

Clearly there is ample scope for more here in Dacorum and this amendment helpfully shows a way forward for Dacorum.

I hope all Councillors who burnish their "Green credentials" will support this amendment on a cross party basis?"

A recorded vote was held on the alternate budget:

For: 15 (Allen, Claughton, Dhyani, England, Foster, Freedman, Hobson, Hollinghurst, Link, Ransley, Stevens, Symington, Taylor, Tindall and Wilkie)

Against: 17 (Anderson, Banks, Barrett, Beauchamp, Birnie, Douris, Elliot, Griffiths, Guest, Harden, Hearn, Johnson, Riddick (Mayor), Rogers, Timmis, Williams and Wyatt-Lowe)

Abstain: 0

Absent for vote: 4 (Adeleke, Arslan, Peter and Silwal)

Therefore the amendment failed.

A recorded vote was then held on the preliminary budget:

For: 20 (Anderson, Arslan, Banks, Barrett, Beauchamp, Birnie, Douris, Elliot, Griffiths, Guest, Harden, Hearn, Johnson, Peter, Riddick (Mayor), Rogers, Silwal, Timmis, Williams and Wyatt-Lowe).

Against: 1 (Hollinghurst)

Abstain: 14 (Allen, Cloughton, Dhyani, England, Foster, Freedman, Hobson, Link, Ransley, Stevens, Symington, Taylor, Tindall and Wilkie)

Absent for vote: 1 (Adeleke)

Therefore it was resolved that the following be approved;

Decision

General Fund Revenue Estimate

a) set a Dacorum Borough Council General Fund Council Tax requirement of £12.836m, and a provisional amount of £13.851m for the combined Borough Council and Parish Councils' requirement for 2022/23;

b) approve a Band D Council Tax increase of £5 (2.4%) for Dacorum Borough Council;

c) approve the base estimates for 2022/23, as shown in Appendix A1, and the indicative budget forecasts for 2022/23 – 2025/26, as shown in Appendix A2;

d) approve the forecast balances of Revenue Reserves as shown in Appendix J, and approve section 11 of this report as the updated Reserves Strategy;

e) approve increases in Fees and Charges for 2022/23 as set out in Appendices C3, D3, and E3;

f) approve and adopt the Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/23, attached at Appendix K;

g) approve and adopt the Capital Strategy for 2022/23, attached at Appendix L;

h) note that this budget paper, if approved by Council, will form part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Capital Programme

i) approve the Capital Programme for 2022/23 to 2026/27, as detailed in Appendix I;

j) approve the financing proposals in Appendix I subject to an annual review of the financing options by the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, during the preparation of the Statement of Accounts.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

k) set dwelling rents according to the new MHCLG Rent Standard, which provides for a rent increase of CPI+1% (4.1% in total). The average dwelling rents is proposed to be £111.23 in 2022/23 (based on 52 weeks);

l) approve the HRA estimate for 2022/23 as shown in Appendix F.

Employer Terms and Conditions

m) note that the hourly rate of all Council employees continues to exceed the rate proposed by the rates of the Living Wage Foundation, for 2022/23 (to be reviewed annually thereafter).

Statement by Chief Finance Officer

n) approve the statement by the Chief Finance Officer regarding the robustness of the budget estimates and level of reserves as set out in Appendix M.

In addition, Dacorum Borough Council is to set aside £135k towards the Wendover Canal Trust restoration project. This is made up of a £25k initial payment to the trust and £110k that will be set aside to fund the final £110k once all other funding requirements have been achieved.

Item 8.5 CA/13/22 Q3 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Decision

Approval of the revised capital programme to move £5.78m slippage identified at Quarter 3 into financial year 2022/23 as detailed in Appendix C of the cabinet report.

Item 8.6 CA/14/22 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT

Decision

That Council approves the annexed Code of Conduct for Councillors.

Item 8.7 CA/15/22 COMMITTEE TIMETABLE

Decision

That Council approves the Meeting Timetable for 2022/23 as set out in Appendix A to the cabinet report.

9. COUNCIL TAX DECLARATION 22/23

As the billing authority for the borough of Dacorum, the Council is required to set the Council Tax annually. The purpose of this report is to set the Council Tax for 2022/23 in accordance with statutory requirements.

A recorded vote was held:

For: 32 (Adeleke, Allen, Anderson, Banks, Barrett, Beauchamp, Birnie, Claughton, Dhyani, Douris, Elliot, England, Foster, Freedman, Griffiths, Guest, Harden, Hearn, Hobson, Johnson, Link, Peter, Riddick (Mayor), Rogers, Silwal, Stevens, Symington, Taylor, Timmis, Tindall, Wilkie, Williams and Wyatt-Lowe)

Against: 0

Abstain: 1 (Hollinghurst)

Therefore the Council Tax Declaration for 2022/23 was agreed.

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REFERRALS

There were no overview and scrutiny committee referrals.

11. REFERRAL FROM THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Council agreed that Dacorum opt into the national auditor arrangement scheme, overseen by the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA), for procurement of External Audit appointments for financial years 2023/24 to 2027/28.

12. CHANGES TO THE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The following changes to committee membership were agreed:

- Remove Councillor Allen from the Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Add Councillor Dhyani to the Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Remove Councillor McDowell from the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Add Councillor Foster to the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

13. CHANGES TO COMMITTEE DATES

There were no changes to committee dates.

14. CALL IN AND URGENCY PROCEDURE

The Council noted the following urgent Portfolio Holder Decision:

PH/001/22 - Additional Resilience Grant (ARG) Policy update

The meeting ended at 10.31 pm.