



Council Briefing Note 17th July 2024

CORPORATE & COMMERCIAL PORTFOLIO – COUNCILLOR MICHELA CAPOZZI

Financial Services

Significant service achievements since the last Council meeting:

- The production and publication of the year-end financial statements have been concluded by the finance team, with Dacorum one of only 40% of councils that achieved this statutory requirement.
- Financial performance of the Council's revenue and capital funds remained positive up to year end, with a surplus positive position reported at year end.
- The HRA remained in a short deficit for the 2023/24 financial year and the future pressures remain under careful monitoring.

Strategic or significant operational matters which the service would like Full Council to be aware of:

- The annual Fees and Charges review process has been started earlier than in previous years, with the aim of delivering revised Fees and charges proposals for 2025/26 in October 2024.
- Work is underway for the MTFs update in October 2024, and planning for delivery of a balanced budget for 25-26. There are a series of work programmes underway to develop proposals for meeting the ongoing MTFs savings requirement of £3.9m. The work underway includes reviews of commercial income streams and fees and charges, efficiency reviews, a strategic review of the Council's assets, as well as budget and service planning.

Revenues and Benefits service

Significant service achievements since the last Council meeting:

- The 2024/25 Council Tax billing process has been undertaken following February Council approval of council tax levels.
- The annual business rates billing for 2024/25 has been undertaken with businesses receiving their bills.

Strategic or significant operational matters which the service would like Full Council to be aware of:

- Citizen access online has been rolled out successfully, which allows us to support residents more effectively by providing digital access to certain services.

Legal and Democratic Services

Significant service achievements since the last Council meeting:

PCC election 2 May 2024

The Police & Crime Commissioner election was successfully carried out.

84 polling stations were open and fully equipped on polling day and just over 400 staff roles were appointed. All polling station staff were required to carry out new online training and this was well received. A new process for appointing staff and booking of polling stations also enabled a quick and efficient process to be followed. This was the first election these processes were used and overall were very successful.

In addition, new processes at the count were rolled out which resulted in a smooth verification & count over the 3rd and 4th of May 2024. Overall, the PCC election saw a 20.66% turnout.

Bovingdon Neighbourhood Planning Referendum

The Bovingdon NPR was held on the 13th of June. This involved 2 polling stations for an electorate of 3613. There were no issues on polling day and an efficient count was carried out after the close of poll. Overall, this referendum saw a 20.43% turnout.

Strategic or significant operational matters which the service would like Full Council to be aware of:

Parliamentary Election 4 July 2024

Since the announcement of the Parliamentary election, all polling stations have been booked and to date around 430 staff roles have been appointed. All poll cards have been issued and the first run of postal votes have been sent out.

The Elections Team are working cross boundary with St Albans District Council as they will be running the Harpenden & Berkhamsted Constituency, and are also working with Three Rivers District Council, as they will run the South West Herts Constituency.

A major aspect of a Parliamentary election is the increase in Registering to Vote applications, Postal Vote applications and Overseas applications. All can now be applied for online and the Elections Team have seen a significant increase in these sorts of applications and can be processing per day around 250 registrations, 100 postal & proxy vote applications, 20 overseas applications and around 10-15 Voter Authority Certificate applications. The Proxy vote application and Voter Authority Certificate application deadline was the 26th of June.

Electoral Review

Phase 1 of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) electoral review for Dacorum is now complete. The Council submitted a recommendation to agree 53 councillors but the Commission have issued a 'minded to' decision notice which states that their view is that 51

councillors remains an appropriate number of councillors for Dacorum. The Commission considered the Council's evidence that the Council is functioning well and making decisions effectively within its existing governance framework. The Commission's final decision will not be made until the Spring of 2025.

Phase 2 of the review is now underway, which is where the Council reviews warding patterns. The submission date for consultation responses was previously 15th July but this has now been delayed until 9th September due to the General Election. Officers continue to work with members of the Electoral Review Committee to develop their consultation responses.

Commercial Development

Significant service achievements since the last Council meeting:

- Electric Vehicle Charge Points (EVCPs) continue to be installed in certain Council car parks across the Borough. Over the next few weeks and months, more EVCPs will be installed and operational, which will support the Council's commitment to improving availability of charge points and addressing climate change.

Strategic or significant operational matters which the service would like Full Council to be aware of:

- New Parking Proposals – Preparations for the commencement of statutory public consultation relating to new tariff proposals were completed by the beginning of July. The consultation start date was postponed due to the announcement of the General Elections, but arrangements were made to place adverts in the local press to align with the publication and start of the statutory consultation on 10 July 2024.
- Work is underway to prepare for the Procurement Act going live in October 24, which will bring changes to requirements for public procurement, and will require an update to the Council's Contract Standing Orders. Training on new requirements will be rolled out nearer the time for Council officers, and information will be available to Members on the requirements of the new Act.

Commercial and General Fund Property Services

- Despite a challenging environment our Commercial portfolio is circa 96.55% occupied. Income levels are slightly below target due to service charge invoices still to be raised. Once the invoices are raised, it is anticipated income will be on target. Income is profiled for reporting purposes on a monthly basis, against which we record income received. The income target for Month 2 (May) is £2,291,124 reported as May is the most recent closed month at the time of this update.
- July 2024 update - There are 150 commercial buildings and sites that DBC own and Property Services manage and report on for compliance under 6 main headings: Fire; Asbestos; Legionella; Gas, Electricity & Passenger Lifts. All areas are performing well.
- **Bennetts Gate Window Renewal & Concrete Repairs.** The works were completed in June bringing thermal and structural improvements but also a much needed facelift. Included were window replacements, concrete remedial repairs, decorations to the shop frontages covered walkway, ceiling, concrete pillars and the curved wall to the centre block.

- **Rossgate Window Works, Phase 2.** The existing curtain walling panels to the front elevation of the precinct are almost 40 years old and at the end of their useful life. The Council is receiving an increasing number of complaints from the tenants that the windows are ill-fitting, draughty and in some cases dangerous. Phase 1 was completed in 2023 replacing the windows to the rear. Following Officer & Commercial Board approval, Cardo have been appointed to undertake the works. A planning application has been submitted which is expected to take approximately 10 weeks. Once consent has been obtained, the works can commence which is currently forecast towards the end of the summer.
- **Victoria Hall Ceiling.** The Building Services team have arranged for a repair to a small roof leak together with some additional timber support work to the ceiling. A capital bid for extensive ceiling improvement works has been submitted as part of the annual Service Planning exercise.
- **56/58 High Street.** Freehold Disposal. In line with previous instructions, Brasier Freeth have been appointed to market the property for sale. Marketing particulars are being prepared with a view to disposal at soon as practical.