



Improving Dacorum -
Our Plans & Performance
2003 – 2004

DACORUM PERFORMANCE PLAN 2003/4

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Setting the Scene

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In this section we set out the characteristics that make Dacorum the borough that it is. This includes information about the environment, the community and the Council.

Environment

Dacorum is a Borough in the west of Hertfordshire, which includes part of the M1 and M25 corridor, and is traversed by the West Coast Mainline railway and Grand Union Canal. The main towns are Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring and the Borough includes a number of villages from Long Marston in the west to Flaunden in the south-east. Over a third (40%) of the Borough's 210.20 square kilometres has been designated as part of the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty, while the majority of the remainder has landscape quality and potential.

Because of its proximity to London and the main transportation links, the area is under considerable pressure for development for both commercial premises and housing. There are significant levels of traffic congestion at peak times.

With 40% of the Borough designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty and 52% Green Belt, balancing environmental quality with the growth needs of the area is increasingly difficult and a major priority for the Council.

The Community

The Borough has a population of 137,799 (Census 2001) and is increasing, with 19.5% aged 60 and over and 25.6% aged under 19. There are 57,612 (2003 figure) dwellings, of which around 20 % (11,291) are owned by the Council. The 2001 census indicated that people from black and ethnic minority communities constitute 4.6% of the population.

The "New Town" effect in Hemel Hempstead has not yet fully disappeared. The physical development of Hemel Hempstead clearly shows the original concept of the new town. The population profile also varies ward by ward: those new town neighbourhoods that were developed most recently have a lower than Borough average age profile, with more young families and higher birth rates. The generation, which originally moved to the new town as young adults, is now at retirement age, and in some wards there are higher than average numbers of 55-70 year olds.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation, which the then Department of Local Government, Transport and the Regions devised based on a range of economic and social statistical measures, ranks Dacorum at 312 from a total of 354 English Council areas, which means that 42 authorities are more affluent. Of the 27 wards in the Borough, 3 are among the 50% of most deprived wards in England. The Borough is therefore relatively affluent, with very high levels of car-ownership and high house prices, with several wards among the most prosperous in the country. Even in the most affluent wards however, there are pockets of deprivation, and access to housing is an issue for many in the local population, particularly those on low incomes and key workers.

About 61% of the population work in the Borough - mostly in the services sector, especially finance, banking, education and health. There are a higher number of small and medium sized firms, with 87% of businesses employing less than ten employees. There are also major employers such as Kodak, Atlas Copco and Dixons, which have based their

headquarters in the Borough. At 1.7% claimant count, unemployment is low compared to a national average of about 2.7% (April 2003).

The health of Hertfordshire residents is generally good, and the incidence of most life-threatening diseases in Dacorum is lower than the national average. However there are areas of concern: high numbers of pregnancies to women under 18, high accident rates among under 5's and males under 25. Although life expectancy and morbidity are better than average, provision of health care is a continuing concern to the community. The availability of teaching hospital facilities in London has been detrimental to the funding and development of health services in Hertfordshire for many years, something that the community cares deeply about. The Council responds to this concern by making representations to health bodies formally and informally, and by working with partners in the health sector.

The Council

Dacorum, in its present form, was created in 1974 following a review of local government in England & Wales. Five smaller Council areas, those of the Borough of Hemel Hempstead, the Urban Districts of Berkhamsted and Tring, and the Rural Districts of Hemel Hempstead and of Berkhamsted were merged with small parts of the Rural Districts of Watford and of St. Albans.

Until 1999 the Council had changed little in both its political and officer structures. The introduction of the Government's modernisation agenda in 1999 saw a significant change in the emphasis on local authorities management and delivery of services. At this time a new Chief Executive Officer was appointed along with a new and strategic corporate management team. An IDeA review was requested, the outcome of which led the Council into a new era of service provision and management.

In 2001 a new political structure was introduced following consultation with the community. This introduced a structure it was intended would provide a transparency to Council decision making and responsibility. Further information on these changes and how Council services have changed can be found in this later document.

If you would like to know more, please telephone Bronwen Watson on 01442 228742, or email: bronwen.watson@dacorum.gov.uk.

Leaders' Introduction

Welcome, to the Best Value Performance Plan for Dacorum Borough Council 2003/04.

It explains how our services are performing, where we are improving and how we plan to make our services even better and more efficient. There is also information on how we are meeting the targets we set for our services and what we hope to achieve this year.

We are now in year four of our "Best Value" programme which is reviewing the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of all Council Services. You can see the programme for the years ahead on page 86 of this document.

2003/04 will be a time of significant change for the Council. We will be modernising the way we do business with our customers, particularly through better use of information and communications technology to smooth delivery and access to services.

Like all councils we need to make our money stretch further and we will continue to look for cheaper and more efficient ways of delivering our services. This may include introducing a Sports Trust to run the sports centres and investigating alternative ways of providing our Housing Services.

Delivering services which make a real difference to the quality of life in the district and which match local needs and priorities is very important to us.

To help achieve this we have developed a Community Plan in partnership with residents and with others working in the public, private and voluntary sectors which sets out what we want Dacorum to look like in 2010. A partnership of key organisations has been established to deliver improvements in areas including community safety, transport, employment, the environment, health, affordable housing, leisure and lifelong learning.

Two new Area Working schemes being trialled from April will take working with our communities a stage further. The pilot schemes covering Woodhall Farm and Grovehill in Hemel Hempstead and the villages of Flamstead, Markyate and Great Gaddesden will look at how we can involve residents more in shaping services to meet the particular needs and priorities of those communities.

This year will see the start of another exciting project which will benefit the whole district. Work will start in June on the Riverside which will bring shops, housing and hotel facilities as well as creating more than 500 new full and part-time jobs on this council owned site in the centre of Hemel Hempstead.

I hope you will find this document useful and informative. You can find a copy of the full Performance Plan on our web-site www.dacorum.gov.uk from June 30th. If you would prefer a paper copy please call [Bronwen Watson on 01442 228742](tel:01442228742), or email bronwen.watson@dacorum.gov.uk.

For reports on how the Performance Plan and the Community Plan are progressing, see future issues of Dacorum Digest which is available on our web-site and delivered to homes in the Borough.



Andrew Williams
(Conservative)
Leader of the Council



Denise Rance
Leader of the Liberal
Democrat Group



Keith White
Leader of the
Labour Group

Our Main Purpose

We aim to improve the quality of life for everyone who lives or works in the Borough, and to make it a place where people, communities and businesses can flourish.

Our Standards

Dacorum Borough Council provides a wide range of services to residents, businesses and visitors. Some of these services are delivered by the Council's employees, some in partnership with external organisations and others by businesses carrying out work under contract to the Council.

Each service has its own priorities and standards. But in addition the Council has set some standards which apply to all services.

At Dacorum Borough Council we aim to:

- Provide you with the services you need where possible;
- Be fair and even-handed to everyone;
- Tell you when and where our services, including emergency services, are available;
- Always be helpful and courteous and wear a badge which will tell you who we are;
- Respond quickly and efficiently to your enquiries;
- Value the feedback you give us including complaints;
- Continuously improve our services;
- Encourage and support businesses and other organisations to improve their services to you.

The Council also has Customer First standards, which are designed to make it easier for you to get in touch with us. For example we aim to answer all telephone calls within 12 seconds. We aim to answer correspondence needing response within 5 working days, even if we cannot provide a full reply in that time. We monitor our complaints procedure to make it easier for you to tell us if you are dissatisfied with our service. We try to use Plain English in letters and other written items.

Our Methods

We will achieve our aims by:

Involving our community:

We will seek to involve all the communities in Dacorum in planning, designing and monitoring services we provide, respecting the differences and diversity that exist, and enabling everyone who wishes to contribute to local matters;

Setting targets:

We will set ourselves ambitious targets for achieving what our communities tell us they want. We will do this by setting clear objectives, monitoring performance and using the

results to review our policies and our working arrangements. We will also improve our performance against national targets set by the Government.

Working in partnership:

The Council will safeguard and promote the interests of the residents of the Borough through joint working with all relevant partners, for example; other local authorities, central Government and statutory agencies, non-elected bodies, industry and the voluntary sector.

Working together:

We will work together towards even more efficiency, effectiveness and quality in all services. We will treat customers well, uphold the Council's values and let the public know what we are doing.

Valuing and developing employees:

We will support our employees in delivering services by helping them reach their full potential through training and development and by providing a good working environment.

Generating funds:

We will seek external sources of funding through partnership working where possible to maximise the resources available for the Borough's residents.

Supporting National Initiatives:

National Government and agencies control some of what we do. We will work within this framework to provide local services.

Continuous Improvement:

We will continuously try to improve the quality of all the services we provide. We will ensure that resources are used wisely by continuously reviewing what is provided and how it is provided. We will do this by following the Government's Best Value process.

Corporate Governance:

This is the system by which local authorities direct and control their functions and relate to their communities. We will develop a local code in 2005 which will demonstrate the Council's:

- Accountability
- integrity
- effectiveness
- openness and inclusivity

We will ensure that our policies and procedures reflect best practice.

If you would like to know more about these statements please contact Hilary Mitchell, Head of Corporate Policy on 01442 228344, or email hilary.mitchell @dacorum.gov.uk