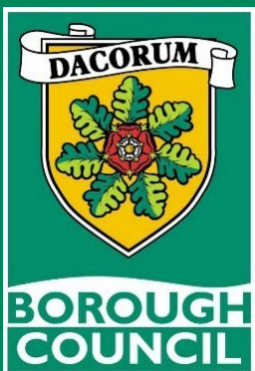




**Resident
approved**



Annual Report for Tenants and Leaseholders 2022-2023

Welcome to our Annual Report for our tenants and leaseholders

We have much to celebrate, but we also wish to acknowledge some of the difficulties faced by ourselves, our partners and residents.

Having joined Dacorum Borough Council as Chief Housing Officer in January, I will have responsibility for making sure that we all work together to provide the best possible housing service, and that we comply with all new legislation such as the Building Safety Act (2022) and the long-awaited Social Housing (Regulation) Bill, which is likely to receive Royal Assent and become law in summer 2023.



Dacorum Borough Council owns just over 10,000 rented properties plus around 1,800 leasehold flats, which totals approximately one in five of all homes in Dacorum. As the Local Housing Authority and largest landlord in the borough, we always strive to align our plans with the Council's corporate priorities:

- A clean, safe and enjoyable environment
- Building strong and vibrant communities
- Ensuring economic growth and prosperity
- Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need
- Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery
- Climate and Ecological Emergency - working to deliver net zero carbon.

The current cost of living crisis is causing financial difficulties for many local families, many of whom have never faced these issues before. I would like all our tenants to know that – whilst a regular and reliable income from rent and other charges is essential in order to deliver our housing services – we will do all we can to support those who are struggling with rising costs.

Our repairs and maintenance contractors continue to work hard to clear the huge backlog of non-emergency repairs that built up during the COVID-19 lockdown, and which continue to impact their service delivery. I would like to thank all our tenants for their patience whilst some repairs continue to take longer to resolve than usual.

Looking to the future, we have begun a 'Housing Transformation and Improvement Project' that will bring improvements and efficiencies to the way that we work. We are also shaping what the procurement process will look like for our next housing repairs and maintenance contract, with a view to going out to tender in the financial year 2024-2025.

With borough elections for all 51 seats taking place on 4 May 2023, we have been working closely with representatives of all local political parties so that we are well-prepared whatever the eventual outcome.

Finally, having only recently joined DBC, I am looking forward to getting out on our estates, meeting residents and seeing for myself where we can improve. I am asking my teams to engage even more with service users and arrange some interesting, useful and fun interactive events.

I do hope that you enjoy reading this report.

Darren

Darren Welsh, Chief Housing Officer

Our Performance 2022/2023

We spent **£11.5 million** on repairs and maintenance to council homes:

- Including bringing **620** empty homes up to our lettable standard.
- Carried out **24,037** repairs to council properties, of which **20,671** were fixed 'right first time'.
- **99.2%** of emergency repairs were completed within four hours
- **57.8%** of tenants satisfied with repairs to their home (by our main contractor, Osborne), which will be a key focus next year for improvement.



We focused on improving estates and communal areas:

- Completed **679** Estate Inspections (100% of target)
- **36** balconies were completely refurbished including all new railings and metal work
- **62** single properties have had a new roof, plus a block of flats at 1 – 10 Reynolds Close



Keeping our tenants safe:

- **100%** of Electrical Compliance Inspections in date
- **100%** of annual asbestos inspections completed
- **100%** of Fire Risk Assessments completed
- **100%** of lift inspections completed
- **100%** of valid Landlord Gas Safety Certificates in place
- **100%** of water hygiene inspections completed

Helping people needing Affordable Housing:

- Provided housing advice to **2,108** households approaching our Homeless Prevention Team
- Handled **2,014** Housing Register applications
- Made more than **600** offers of accommodation

Turning round empty properties is key to housing people quickly and making sure we gain the rental income we need to provide housing services:

- Average **57.8** days to re-let council general needs property
- Average **64.1** days to re-let council sheltered property

Carried out **471** disabled adaptations, helping people live independently in their own homes:

- **196** major adaptations such as level access showers
- **254** minor adaptations such as installing handrails
- **21** adaptations in empty homes
- Let **24** adapted homes



Working with Residents:

- Consulted **2,627** tenants and leaseholders
- Held regular formal meetings to use what our residents tell us to develop and improve services:
 - Tenant & Leaseholder Committee (TLC)
 - Supported Housing Forum
 - Tenant Improvement Grant Panel
 - Private Sector Landlords' Forum
 - Focus groups on repairs & maintenance to help develop our next procurement process



Supporting residents to sustain their tenancies:

- **100%** of cases supported by the Tenancy Sustainment Team resulted in reduced arrears
- Working with the private housing sector:
- Licensed **17** HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation)

Our Achievements 2022/2023

Improving Neighbourhoods

Our residents told us their communal areas and estates were not always in the condition they hoped. Since then, we've begun a regular cycle of neighbourhood inspections. These will make sure that the areas our tenants and leaseholders live in are clean, tidy and generally well-maintained. We will pay particular attention to landscaping, car-park areas, trees, hedges and bin stores, as well as any other communal facilities and lighting. We'll look out for vandalism or fly-tipping, but will also respond quickly to reports from residents and contact the correct Council team to get the problem resolved. These inspections are carried out by our Tenancy Management Officers (TMOs).



Investing in our housing for older people

We upgraded heating systems at two supported housing schemes in Tring, Emma Rothschild Court and Pond Close, introducing communal air source heat pumps and Solar PV panels, which will significantly reduce our carbon footprint and contribute towards our long-term carbon zero ambitions as well as achieving lower costs for residents. Betty Patterson House refurbishments included all flat entrance doors, communal doors and emergency lighting being upgraded to current industry standard. The communal areas were painted and the carpets were replaced meaning the scheme is looking brighter, as well as safer. We've also carried out important fire safety upgrades.

Housing Allocations Policy updated

We consulted with residents to make positive changes to our Housing Allocations Policy. Listening to local people, we always aim to take their views into account when we decide how to make best use of our housing stock, so we have reduced the time needed to gain a 'village connection' and changed the income thresholds to reflect the cost of different-sized homes. We also increased the permitted personal asset threshold, which will allow some homeowners to apply for supported housing to meet their needs.

Tenancy Reviews

Our Tenancy Management Officers have begun a programme of visits to every tenant at least once every three years. It's important that all the information we have about your household is up to date. It also allows us to assess the condition of your home and gives you the chance to ask questions about your home, your tenancy or your neighbourhood. These visits are helping us to make sure that all homes are compliant, protecting against tenancy fraud and identifying tenants who may have support needs or safeguarding issues. Our tenants can use these visits as an opportunity to ask questions or tell us of any concerns. Find out more at www.dacorum.gov.uk/tenancy-review

Improving thermal efficiency to reduce energy costs and tackle the climate emergency

We completed works at 6-9a Sebright Road, which included a new roof, replacing timber façade with fire rated external skin, new communal and tenanted windows. This is a first of its kind in Dacorum, reaching a C rating at EPC. In summer 2022 we started at 10-32 and 32-55 Kimpton Close, 15-91

and 127-179 Cleves Road. We have replaced the roofs and will complete these projects in the next financial year.

We successfully secured, via competitive tender, a substantial government grant from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (wave 1). This is partially funding the decarbonisation of 24 flats at Northend Road. These measures will reduce the heat demand of the property and should in turn reduce tenants' energy bills and make their homes warmer. The homes are expected to achieve a majority grade 'A' SAP rating, the highest rating a home can achieve.

('SAP' stands for 'Standard Assessment Procedure' and is the only official, government-approved system for assessing the energy rating for residential property.)

Update on review of Temporary Accommodation

Our Temporary Accommodation review aims to ensure that we deliver our strategic priorities: providing affordable housing for those most in need. Furthermore, it will aim to improve service delivery and resilience, ensuring that temporary housing meets the same lettable standard and conditions of other property within the borough. We want to ensure that those living in temporary housing feel part of a community and enabled to make positive contributions.

Our Plans for 2023/2024

High Rise Building Safety

We will be developing our approach to launching 'Resident Engagement Strategies' for each of our five blocks that exceed 18 metres in height. The Building Safety Act (2022) requires that we register all these buildings by 1 October 2023. It's essential that residents know how to report any safety concerns. We're planning a series of engagement events and to develop an interactive platform for every block.

Housing Open Day

You told us you wanted more informal ways to engage with us, so we've already started planning a fun and interactive event for tenants, leaseholders and housing applicants. We'll aim to have stalls from our partners, as well as guest speakers. This will be our first large event for many years, so we're hoping to make it a great success. The event will be publicised on social media and council publications.



Tenancy Agreement

We will consult with all our tenants to review our standard Tenancy Agreement, with the aim of producing a simpler, clearer document that meets recent changes to legislation.

New Regulatory Surveys

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) are a new, compulsory requirement for social landlords to gather and submit data around satisfaction and performance to the Regulator of Social Housing. We've appointed a contractor, MEL Research, to carry out these surveys on our behalf, starting in spring 2023. We will use what you tell us to improve services. For more information, please visit www.dacorum.gov.uk/TSM

Our Plans for 2023/2024

New Housing Strategy

We have listened to our partners and residents, and begun to develop a strategy that sets out our plans for affordable housing in Dacorum. We are committed to ensuring that everyone in Dacorum can access warm, safe, secure housing to meet their needs, in an attractive, welcoming community where people from all backgrounds feel at home. Our next five-year Housing Strategy will set out our vision for providing the homes that local families need, at a price they can afford. The strategy will begin the formal approval process towards the end of 2023 with a view to being adopted early in 2024.



Resident Engagement

We plan to broaden opportunities for engagement, building on the invaluable role of our highest level formal group, the Tenant and Leaseholder Committee, to ensure that service users have greater influence in shaping service delivery. In particular, we will review what role residents play at a Governance level, how other residents can feed in to this process, and how this embeds into the culture of the organisation.



New Council Homes

Providing good quality, affordable homes, in particular for those most in need



Coniston Road, Kings Langley

Our Achievements 2022/2023

We built **18** much-needed new council homes:

- 8 self-contained units of move-on accommodation. Each unit features a fitted kitchen, furniture and cooking utensils.
- 10 two-bedroom and three-bedroom homes, including a fully compliant wheelchair house, all for social rent in Kings Langley.

We also achieved planning permission on **88** additional homes and have **199** under construction



Our Plans for 2023/2024

We will continue to plan and deliver our ambitious new-build programme to provide much-needed affordable housing across the borough including:

St Margaret's Way

46 new energy-efficient homes will have air source heat pumps and solar roof panels. Apartments will have private balconies or patio space on the ground floor. The development will also provide parking and retain a central green space.

Eastwick Row

A new apartment block in Adeyfield which will provide 34 new homes with improvements to parking and landscaping.

Randalls Ride

30 new homes made up of 18 one-bedroom apartments and 12 two-bedroom apartments with Juliet balconies, parking and cycle storage in Highfield.

Paradise Depot

This site, off St Albans Road in Hemel Hempstead will be redeveloped to accommodate 56 apartments, with a mix of one and two-bedroom homes, as well as providing a new headquarters and **community hub for local homeless charity DENS.**

Marchmont Fields

The scheme will deliver 32 new homes, including 14 houses and 18 apartments for social rent, and is scheduled for completion in spring 2025.

Randall's Ride

30 flats, with a mix of one and two-bed homes and communal parking.

Paradise Fields

58 flats - a mix of one and two-bed accommodation, communal parking and landscaped garden facilities. Work began on site in the summer 2022 and is progressing on Blocks A and B. The properties are scheduled for completion in 2024.

Former garage sites

We are currently redeveloping several under-used garage sites in Hemel Hempstead and Kings Langley. Work has begun, with completion expected between summer 2023 and autumn 2024. The sites are located at:

- Wilstone, near Tring
- Beechfield, Kings Langley
- Dione Road, Hemel Hempstead
- Housewood End, Hemel Hempstead
- Sempill Road, Hemel Hempstead
- Sleddale, Hemel Hempstead

New Team - Investment and Delivery

In spring 2023, we will launch a brand new 'Investment & Delivery Team', aiming to deliver the Council's aspirations to work in partnership with other providers and maximise use of previously-developed land to build the truly affordable housing that local residents need.



Artist's impression of new homes at Paradise Fields

Compliments and Complaints

When things go wrong

We understand that sometimes things go wrong, so we want to make it as quick and simple as possible for you to raise your concerns with us.

Our residents asked for an improved approach to complaints handling, so we have set up a dedicated team to make sure that complaints are responded to in good time and with a clear and reasonable outcome.

Since October 2022, this team has helped staff throughout the Council respond to complaints effectively, using the outcomes to make sure that we use residents' concerns to improve services. All managers throughout the Council have completed Training sessions on complaint handling to ensure consistency of reply.

During 22/23 the new ways of working were still embedding, so we continued to observe a downward trend for responding to complaints. By Quarter 4, the percentage for Stage 1 complaints responded to on time was 73% and for Stage 2 complaints 68%. This will be an area of continued focus over the next financial year to give assurance that individual complaints are being managed effectively. We will also introduce transactional satisfaction surveys for complaints handling and publish our performance in future annual reports.

During 2022/2023, four complaints investigated were referred to the Ombudsman. Of these, two (50%) were upheld. Further information was recorded by the Ombudsman, which can be viewed at: [Decision results - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#) Similar organisations typically had 59% of complaints upheld.

Starting next year, all complaints performance, outcomes and numbers of cases will be publicised to tenants for awareness and to create an open complaints culture.

We do of course also appreciate it when you let us know that you're pleased with the service you've received. If a member of staff, councillor or one of our contractors has gone the extra mile, please tell us!

You can find out more about giving compliments or making a complaint at www.dacorum.gov.uk/complaints

This Annual Report was produced by Housing & Property Services' Strategy, Quality & Assurance Team. You can contact us by emailing SQATeam@Dacorum.gov.uk or by calling **01442 228966**.

We would like to thank members of the Tenant & Leaseholder Committee for their input.