

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Tuesday 8 February 2022 at 7.30 pm
Council Chamber - Civic Centre

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions
2. Declarations of Interest
To receive Councillors' declarations of interest (if any) in relation to any matters on the agenda.
3. Minutes (Pages 2 - 6)
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2021.
4. Matters arising
5. Written questions from members of the public
To receive any questions from members of the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.
6. Written questions from Councillors
To receive any questions from Councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.
7. Responses of the Cabinet to Reports of the Scrutiny Committee
To consider responses (if any) of the Cabinet to reports and recommendations from the Committee.
8. Delivery of Council House Building Programme (Pages 7 - 16)
9. Policing and Community Safety Annual Review - Agreement of Questions (to follow)
10. Work Plan (Pages 17 - 18)
To review the Committee's work plan for the current year.
11. References from Other Committees
12. Matters of Urgent Business
Such other business which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be received as a matter of urgency by reason of special circumstances to be specified in the minutes.

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON**

7 December 2021

7.30 - 8.45 pm

PRESENT

Committee Members

Councillor Tony Edwards (Chair)
Councillor David Carter (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Tony Durcan
Councillor Eugenie Harvey

Also Present

Councillor Simon Carter

Officers

Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration
Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support
Adam Rees, Senior Governance Support Officer

28. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Shona Johnson and Nicky Purse.

29. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor David Carter declared a non-pecuniary interest as a site rep for Harlow Allotment Association.

30. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

31. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

32. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

None.

33. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

None.

34. **RESPONSES OF THE CABINET TO REPORTS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

35. **DELIVERY OF COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME - UPDATE**

The Chair said that this item had been withdrawn from the agenda as the Portfolio Holder responsible had been changed. A report would now be considered at the February meeting.

It was agreed that Councillors Simon Carter and Dan Swords would be invited to the meeting.

36. **ALLOTMENTS - INITIAL REPORT**

The Committee considered an initial report on allotments. The Committee agreed to add the following terms of reference to the review:

- i) To understand the different types of people who use allotments;
- ii) To look at examples of best practice;
- iii) To identify how allotments can be linked into the Council's corporate priorities in the emerging Corporate Strategy;
- iv) To understand how younger people can be encouraged to use allotments; and
- v) To identify potential grant funding opportunities

RESOLVED that:

A A Councillor Task and Finish group comprising Councillors David Carter and Tony Durcan, supported by officers from appropriate Council services and HTS (P&E), be established to review existing allotment provision.

B The terms of reference, set in paragraph 6 of the report, as amended above, be agreed.

37. **REVIEW OF TURNOUT IN LOCAL ELECTIONS - FINAL REPORT**

The Committee received a report of turnout in local elections. It was agreed that a copy of the postal vote form would be included in the next edition of Harlow Times.

RESOLVED that:

A The Returning Officer be requested to develop an action plan to deal with issues identified by the survey that are within the control of the Council on:

- i) Specific issues raised about polling stations; and
- ii) Communications on voting options and absent voting.

B A copy of the postal vote form would be included in the next edition of Harlow Times.

38. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee received a report summarising its work plan.

RESOLVED that the work plan be noted as appended to the minutes.

39. **REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

None.

40. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE

Scrutiny Committee Work Plan 2021/22

Work	Tuesday 13 July 2021	Tuesday 14 September 2021	Tuesday 7 December 2021	Tuesday 8 February 2022	Tuesday 15 March 2022
Policing and Community Safety Annual Review				Agreement of questions	Q&A with Police
Delivery of Council House Building Programme				Update	
Housing and Accommodation Requirements for Adults with a Moderate /Severe Learning Disability	Final report				
Allotments	Review Submission Form		Report		Final Report
Domestic Abuse in Harlow (to be included in Police Annual Review)	Review Submission Form				
Support for Victims of Domestic Abuse and Sexual Harassment	Review Submission Form			Report	
Turnout in Local Elections	Review Submission Form	Report	Final Report		
Antisocial Behaviour (to be dealt with through pre-scrutiny of Community Safety Strategy)	Review Submission Form	Q&A with Portfolio Holder			
Online Gambling	Review Submission				

	Form				
Call In Sub Committee Procedures	Report				

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 8 FEBRUARY 2022

TITLE: DELIVERY OF COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME – UPDATE

LEAD OFFICER: ANDREW BRAMIDGE, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC GROWTH AND REGENERATION (01279) 446410

CONTRIBUTING OFFICERS: ALISON FOX, REGENERATION PROJECTS MANAGER (01279) 446407

ANDREW START, HOUSING REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER (01279) 446456

RECOMMENDED that Committee:

- A Notes the progress made on delivering the recommendations of the Scrutiny Report on Council Housebuilding.

BACKGROUND

1. In March 2021 the Scrutiny Committee recommended to Cabinet that the recommendations set out in the Delivery of Council House Building programme scrutiny report presented by appointed consultants be adopted.
2. There are a total of 20 recommendations contained within the report covering both strategic and operational aspects.
3. Since the adoption of the report, the Regeneration, Housing and Planning teams have worked together on progressing the recommendations to help support the successful delivery of a Council Housebuilding programme.
4. Appendix A highlights the progress made on each of the recommendations.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

5. The recommendations covered a wide range of areas of work which included measures aimed at improving the understanding of the supply and demand for Council Housing in order to influence what is built as part of the Council House building programme, ensuring adequate staff are employed and that existing staff have access to project management training.
6. Work has continued on the development of new Housing Strategy which is due to be considered by the Councils' Policy Development Working Group and

Cabinet early in 2022. The Housing Strategy covers a number of priorities that includes “Creating a suitable supply of new housing to meet local housing needs” under which the objective of “Develop a Council Housebuilding Programme” is included.

7. In addition to the Housing Strategy a further, more detailed document called the Council Housebuilding Delivery Plan is being developed. This is a framework that outlines the processes and decision making points linked to Council Housebuilding. It is not a public document as it includes details that are commercially sensitive. It covers details on the processes to be undertaken to develop the pipeline of future Council Housebuilding including undertaking feasibility studies on sites and how sites are prioritised, deciding on what is due to be built on each site, assumptions linked to financial modelling and how schemes are to be funded as well as outlining practical aspects of the housebuilding process including the use of professional services and contractors.
8. The Council House building Delivery Plan document will be a live document that will be updated as new practices are adopted and others are reviewed and refreshed.
9. The Council Housebuilding Delivery Plan includes a planned five year pipeline of Council Houses to be delivered as outlined below:

Year	Target number of new Council Homes built
2021/22	18 units
2022/23	60 units
2023/24	100 units
2024/25	120 units
2025/26	120 units

10. The five year pipeline has been established after reviewing the feasibility and priority of each site, exploring funding opportunities and considering practical issues such as lead-in times for each scheme. To ensure a continuous pipeline of schemes work on schemes across the whole programme is undertaken in parallel to each other.
11. Currently, there are two Council housebuilding schemes progressing on site that are due to be completed by April 2022. These are 16 houses at Bushey Croft and 2 houses at 4 The Hill. A £460,000 grant from Homes England has been awarded for the Bushey Croft development which is being developed by Borrás Construction. The two units at 4 The Hill are being developed by HTS Group Ltd.
12. It is recommended that Committee notes the progress that has been made on successfully delivering against the recommendations of the scrutiny report and as a result clear targets of Council Housebuilding have been set which will be delivered against.

IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Growth and Regeneration

As contained in the report.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance

None specific.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Housing

As contained within the report.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Communities and Environment

As set out in the report.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance and Corporate Services

As contained in the report.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services

Appendices

Appendix A – progress report

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.

Appendix A

Council House Building Scrutiny Report recommendations progress

November 2021

Background: A report was presented to scrutiny committee in March 2021 outlining the Council’s House Building Programme. It made 20 recommendations. This table summarises feedback and progress made on those recommendations.

Report Recomm’n number	Scrutiny Report Recommendation	Comments on recommendations	Latest Progress update	Target date
1	It is recommended that the Council gives consideration as to whether it still wishes to enable households with no housing need to join the Housing Register. It is suggested that the Council may wish to review the allocations policy	The Allocations Policy was last reviewed and updated in 2018. It lasts 5 years and is due to be reviewed / updated in 2023/24. The possibility of removing Band 4 (lowest priority) will be included as part of the consultation process for the review	6/8/21 – This will be included in review of Allocations Policy due in 2023/24.	March 2024
2	It is recommended that the Council uses data from the Housing Register to inform its development plan.	1) Regeneration Team are developing a Housing Delivery Plan that will outline the processes and key decision making points in Council House Building process. 2) Agreed that reviewing the requirements of the households in the highest priority bands will be useful. Also useful to consider whether there are groups of people	6/8/21 –Housing Delivery Plan document structure has been developed and work has begun on drafting key aspects of document. Allocations to provide Regeneration Team with 6 monthly reports on Band 1 and 2 property entitlement. Report will be broken down into age brackets. To review those on Housing Register	March 2022 On-going March 2022

		in the high priority bands whose housing requirements are not easily met.	aged either 55 years plus or 65 years plus who wish to downsize from larger family sized houses (Harlow Homes Incentive scheme).	
3	It is recommended that officers receive regular reports that break down total annual lets by bedroom size for all annual lets. This would enable demand to be compared with supply, providing more accurate intelligence on housing need in Harlow	<p>1) Allocations will be able to provide regular reports for all Council House lets.</p> <p>2) Unable to provide same report on Registered Providers units as this is a different system. However, summary of all Registered Providers nominations is now kept and is being supplied to Regeneration Team.</p>	<p>Allocations to provide Regeneration Team with 6 monthly reports on all new council tenancies – broken down by size.</p> <p>Allocations Team providing Regeneration with regularly updated spreadsheet outlining all Registered Providers nominations requests received.</p>	<p>Complete and on-going</p> <p>Complete</p>
4	It is recommended that moving to an online Housing Register application form would enable staff resource to be more effectively focused on other activities to meet housing need, and ensure that applications are automatically reviewed and that the Register provides an accurate understanding of current housing need	<p>1) Agreed that it would be desirable to have an online housing register application form, as this would enable clear efficiencies in the long term however, there are resource and cost implications that needs to be resolved.</p> <p>It will be considered as part of the Housing IT delivery Plan</p>	The earliest date this can be considered is 2022/23.	June 2022

5	It is recommended that an awareness session is held with Elected Members and Senior Managers to ensure that the house building process is better understood and that expectations can be managed and are achievable.	<p>1) Regular Councillor briefings are being set up with key staff to develop wider understanding.</p> <p>2) The awareness sessions could be linked to the development of the Housing Delivery Plan</p>	<p>Briefing session for key portfolio holders and key senior officers from Housing and Regeneration to be arranged at a future date.</p> <p>Regular updates to Portfolio Holder on process and reasons why schemes succeed or fail.</p>	March 2022
6	In order to ensure a focused approach on house building it is recommended that achievable annual house building targets are set, and progress against these targets should be reported quarterly	<p>1) Annual Targets to be included in the Housing Delivery Plan.</p> <p>2) Once targets are set, progress can be monitored.</p>	Regular updates on progress made to Senior Management Board. Last update October 2021. Housing pipeline document sets of plan for delivery. Currently under review.	On-going
7	In order to ensure a clear strategic vision for the delivery of housing the new Housing Strategy should be finalised and adopted	<p>New Housing Strategy is being finalised that was produced in conjunction with Overview Working Group Subgroup. Key priorities have been consulted on.</p> <p>New Housing Strategy includes a short chapter on Council House Building. The detail will be captured in the Housing Delivery Plan.</p>	Work continues on finalising the Housing Strategy and at the same time the Housing Delivery Plan is also being developed. Must align to corporate strategy and so timing to be considered and strategy to be reviewed after adoption of corporate strategy	March 2022

8	Develop a defined process for identifying and agreeing sites with a minimum number of agreed outcomes	1) The process for agreeing which sites to be included in the Council Housebuilding pipeline along with the expected units to be delivered from each site is being included in the Housing Delivery Plan. The process includes undertaking desktop review to establish position in Local Plan, feasibility reviews etc. for each site.	As part of the Housing Delivery Plan work details of the decision making process for prioritisation of pipeline of potential sites is being developed. A checklist for potential schemes in being reviewed and passed to the monthly development team for comment before submission	March 2022
9	Have a clear decision making process for awkward sites with a high build cost	1) As part of the Housing Delivery Plan a process is being developed that clarifies the process for dealing with awkward / high cost sites.	As part of the Housing Delivery Plan work details on decision making process for such sites are being developed including understanding of the options of what can be done with land which could include: -Exploring regeneration non-housing options -Selling land on open market; -developing serviced plots to sell for self-build to meet Council's Self-build requirements .	March 2022
10	Explore the opportunity of acquiring both land and property from major site developers both within Harlow and neighbouring districts	1) Can be included within the Housing Delivery Plan. 2) Need to understand political appetite, budget implications, value for money and other factors.	Liaising with planning team to understand major house builders appetite for social housing, although these are mostly in areas that Housing doesn't currently have any stock, so possible management issue moving forward	
11	The importance of appointing and retaining the right person to lead the housebuilding programme is critical to		Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager has been in post leading the Council House Building Programme for the past 18 months. Training of other staff on-going to aid succession planning.	Complete

	its success.			
12	Focus on staff retention through the appraisal process	Do not consider that staff retention is a problem; however this will be considered during Personal Performance Plan process.	Appropriate feedback through Personal Performance Plan process made July 2021	Complete
13	Undertake a benchmarking exercise to understand if an increase in staffing resources would be likely to lead to an increase in developments	Not yet started	Additional staff resource required. Recruitment of additional staff member completed Nov 21 – benchmarking to be included as part of work plan	June 2022
14	Ensure that project management expertise is embedded within the team responsible for housebuilding either through existing resources or via a project management officer	Underway	Project management training has been identified via Personal Performance Plan process and training underway. Project management training undertaken by relevant team members.	Complete but keep under review
15	Establish an Officers Project Group to meet regularly with representation from Housing, Planning, and Finance and chaired by Regeneration, with the involvement of contracting partners where appropriate.	1) For the past 18 months there have been regular Officer Project Group meetings focused on developing joint understanding of the Council Housebuilding programme.	Meetings taking place on a regular basis	Complete
16	It will be important to recognise that any	1) Current contractor contract is for 3 years with possibility of 2 year	Liaising with Procurement team start the process of enrolling 2 or 3 local	March 2022

	further procurement exercises when the current contract with the selected contractor comes to an end has the potential to introduce delays	extension. Recommending that procurement process for additional professional fee contracts is commenced asap in order to be ready for April '22 when 3 years potential extension to take place which will give us potential options of alternative consultants and prevent slippages in procurement process.	multi-disciplinary companies that we can use on a rota system.	
17	Hold a meeting with planning, regeneration and housing to identify opportunities to overcome some of the delays within the current process	1) Process / reduction in delays is being reviewed as part of the development of the Housing Delivery Plan 2) Quarterly meeting between planning, Regeneration and Housing are underway.	Regular meetings taking place	Complete
18	Ensure that meetings with planning take place at the pre-application stage.	1) Pre-application stage meetings to be incorporated into process as part of Housing Delivery Plan 2) Meetings arranged on ad-hoc basis as schemes get to pre-application stage 3) Request that planners notify whole team of schemes brought to pre-planning application stage to ensure greater awareness.	These arrangements are in place.	Complete
19	Work with HTS to develop, plan and deliver future housing and regeneration schemes through a structured process	To progress – work in hand	Work with HTS ongoing. Trial site underway at The Hill. Future pipeline being worked up so that HTS can forward programme resources	On-going
20	It is recommended that the Council undertakes	Initial conversations have taken place with Homes England	Homes England Investment partner status granted – to achieve this proof of	On-going and linked

	further research into highlighted good practice in order to identify what learning and opportunities could be embedded locally	regarding best practice. Further work to be undertaken.	good practice must be evidenced	to item 13
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Scrutiny Committee Work Plan 2021/22

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Antisocial Behaviour (to be dealt with through pre-scrutiny of Community Safety Strategy)	Review Submission Form	Q&A with Portfolio Holder			
Online Gambling	Review Submission				

	Form				
Call In Sub Committee Procedures	Report				