

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 16 MARCH 2021

TITLE: DELIVERY OF COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME – FINAL REPORT

LEAD OFFICERS: SIMON HILL, HEAD OF GOVERNANCE
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JANE GREER, HEAD OF COMMUNITY
WELLBEING (01279) 446406

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** Cabinet adopts the recommendations set out in the consultant's report (attached as Appendix A to this report).

BACKGROUND

1. At its meeting on 1 September 2020 the Committee agreed to conduct a review on the delivery of the Council's house building programme. It was agreed that a consultant would be procured to carry out the review, with three members of the Committee helping to oversee the review. It was subsequently agreed that the three Councillors would be Councillors Simon Carter, Bob Davis and Tony Edwards.
2. On 25 November 2020, these Councillors met with the consultant to discuss the scope of the review and timescales for completion. It was agreed that the final report would come to the Committee meeting on 16 March 2021.
3. The group also agreed a list of witnesses which the consultant would interview prior to the next meeting on 16 December. Officers then helped to schedule a number of meetings with the agreed witnesses
4. At the December meeting, the group discussed some of the initial findings following desktop research and interviews with the witnesses.
5. A final meeting took place on 27 January which discussed a draft version of the report attached as Appendix 1. This meeting evaluated some of the findings and recommendations. This included making suggestions on how the report could strengthen its recommendations surrounding the Council's relationship with HTS Group Ltd.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

6. There are a total of 20 recommendations contained within the consultant's report and these encompass both strategic and operational recommendations, varying from holding an awareness session with Councillors, to finalising and adopting the Housing Strategy.
7. Within the topic submission form for this review there were three measures of success, which were:
 - a) Identification of volume of new social housing against plan and the reasons for any non-achievement.
 - b) Timescale and deadlines to deliver a new house building strategy, the capital funding arrangements for house building projects.
 - c) Development of a plan to understand what is needed to build housing that meets the needs of age and mobility.
8. The review was carried out to address these measures for success. The Committee is invited to consider the recommendations in light of the identified measures of success, and the wider benefits it could bring in helping the Council achieve its priority of 'More and Better Housing'.
9. It is recommended that the recommendations contained within the consultant's report are adopted as means of helping the Council to deliver its house building programme, including through HTS (Housing and Regeneration) Ltd, enabling the Council to house more people on its Housing Needs Register.

IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)

The Council is in the process of producing a new Supplementary Planning Document on affordable housing. In this it is made clear that an important objective for the Council is to increase the amount of Council Housing in the town. Delivery of the recommendations set out in this report will help the Council to achieve this objective.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning

Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)

The report sets out the details of the financial provisions already made within the Councils MTFs for the delivery of its housebuilding programme. Should further resources be required to support delivery in line with the recommendations made by the report then these will need to be considered as part of the Councils normal budget cycle.

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

Housing

The identification of, and the acquiring land opportunities will be a key imperative together with the necessary associated links being made between the Housing Strategy, and Local lettings plans. The requirement for continuation of effective cross cutting meeting structures and joint working practices being adopted will demonstrate improvements.

Author: Andrew Murray, Head of Housing

Community Wellbeing (Includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)

The implementation of the recommendations contained within the report will further support and ensure cross cutting working. This will assist on the timely and efficient delivery of new council homes.

Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing

Governance (Includes HR)

The adoption of the recommendations requires adherence to both Standing Orders and reference to HTS Group subsidiary delegated authority to mitigate risk of successful public law challenge.

Author: Simon Hill, Head of Governance

Appendices

Appendix A – Consultant’s report on Council House Building Programme

Background Papers

Delivery of Council House Building Review Submission Form –

<https://modern.gov.harlow.gov.uk/documents/s16379/Delivery%20of%20Council%20House%20Building%20Programme.pdf>

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.