

Appendix A

Council House Building Scrutiny Report recommendations progress

February 2022

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 in the high priority bands whose housing requirements are not easily met.	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 aged either 55 years plus or 65 years plus who wish to downsize from larger family sized houses (Harlow Homes Incentive scheme).	March 2022 Ongoing March 2022
3	It is recommended that officers receive regular	1) Allocations will be able to provide regular reports for all Council House	Allocations to provide Regeneration Team with 6 monthly reports on all new council tenancies –	Complete and ongoing

	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	lets. 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.	broken down by size. Allocations Team providing Regeneration with regularly updated spreadsheet outlining all Registered Providers nominations requests received.	Complete
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	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. It will be considered as part of the Housing IT delivery Plan	The earliest date this can be considered is 2022/23.	March 2023
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.	1) Regular Councillor briefings are being set up with key staff to develop wider understanding. 2) The awareness sessions could be linked to the development of the Housing Delivery Plan	Briefing session for key portfolio holders and key senior officers from Housing and Regeneration to be arranged at a future date. Regular updates to Portfolio Holder on process and reasons why schemes succeed or fail.	June 2022
6	In order to ensure a focused approach on house building it is recommended that achievable annual house	1) Annual Targets to be included in the Housing Delivery Plan. 2) Once targets are set, progress can be monitored.	Regular updates on progress made to Senior Management Board. Last update October 2021. Housing pipeline document sets of plan for delivery. Currently under review.	Ongoing

	building targets are set, and progress against these targets should be reported quarterly			
7	In order to ensure a clear strategic vision for the delivery of housing the new Housing Strategy should be finalised and adopted	New Housing Strategy is being finalised that was produced in conjunction with Overview Working Group Subgroup. Key priorities have been consulted on. New Housing Strategy includes a short chapter on Council House Building. The detail will be captured in the Housing Delivery Plan.	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	1) Can be included within the Housing Delivery Plan. 2) Need to understand political appetite,	Liaising with planning team to understand major house builders appetite for social housing, although these are mostly in areas that Housing	

	developers both within Harlow and neighbouring districts	budget implications, value for money and other factors.	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 its success		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
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, 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 further	1) Current contractor contract is for 3 years with possibility of 2 year extension.	Liaising with Procurement team start the process of enrolling 2 or 3 local multi-disciplinary	

	procurement exercises when the current contract with the selected contractor comes to an end has the potential to introduce delays	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.	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	Ongoing
20	It is recommended that the Council undertakes further research into highlighted good practice in order to identify what learning and opportunities could be embedded locally	Initial conversations have taken place with Homes England regarding best practice. Further work to be undertaken.	Homes England Investment partner status granted – to achieve this proof of good practice must be evidenced	On-going and linked to item 13