

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON**

12 September 2023

7.30 - 9.01 pm

PRESENT

Committee Members

Councillor Tony Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Alastair Gunn (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Colleen Morrison
Councillor Kay Morrison

Also Present

Councillor Dan Swords, Leader of the Council
Councillor David Carter, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing

Officers

Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services
Hannah Marriott, Governance Support Officer

77. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors James Griggs and Matthew Saggars.

78. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

79. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2023 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

80. **MATTERS ARISING**

Councillor Tony Edwards noted that at the previous meeting Councillor Dan Swords agreed to provide the committee with a copy of the implementation plan on the five priorities and a link to the monthly performance date for key performance indicators. Councillor Dan Swords agreed again to circulate this information.

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

None.

82. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

None.

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

None.

84. **ROOFING AND MAJOR REPAIRS TO COUNCIL HOUSES - FINAL REPORT**

The Committee received two reports on roofing and major repairs to council houses; one from Harlow Council and one from HTS.

Councillor Tony Edwards noted that there were no Housing or HTS officers present at the meeting and requested it be noted that this was unsatisfactory. Councillors Dan Swords, Leader of the Council, and David Carter, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing, were present to answer questions on the report.

Councillor Tony Edwards advised the Committee that the Task and Finish Group had met twice. It was noted that there had been some progress towards the completion of jobs and progress achieved towards the agreement of joint working strategies for Harlow Council and HTS.

Councillor Dan Swords advised the Committee that all 56 roofing jobs which had been outstanding since before Christmas 2022 had now been completed. Councillor Dan Swords also confirmed that 28 full roofing jobs had been referred this year and that all were in process of being completed. Councillor Dan Swords confirmed that more money had been allocated in this year's budget for full roof replacements.

With regard to the backlog of 5,800 jobs, Councillor Dan Swords confirmed that £3.4 million had been allocated to deal with the backlog. It was noted that over 1,000 jobs had been cleared from the backlog with HTS operatives completing around 3.6 jobs per day. Councillor Dan Swords confirmed that this meant that the backlog level was at its lowest level since pre-covid. Councillor Dan Swords also confirmed that HTS was prioritising backlog jobs for vulnerable residents first where needed.

Councillor Dan Swords confirmed that Harlow Council and HTS were in the process of re-ordering the schedule of works to aim for a maximum timeframe of 30 days for repairs to be completed. The Committee noted that the maximum timeframe used to be nine months, however, this had been reduced to 60 days as an interim measure.

Councillor Dan Swords noted that HTS have had to use a supply chain of sub-contractors to reduce the backlog. Once the backlog is cleared, HTS in-house workforce would have the capacity to deal with all repairs.

Councillor Dan Swords also confirmed that Harlow Council had appointed a contractor to complete a 100 per cent internal and external stock condition survey. The contractor will start on 1 October 2023 and it would take around three years to complete.

The Committee was advised that there had been a full review into the major works process for council properties. Councillor Dan Swords confirmed that the new process would be brought to Cabinet in November 2023 for approval.

Councillor Dan Swords confirmed that data was available on the achievement on completion of jobs within 30 days for “work in progress” repairs and that this could be provided to the Committee.

The Committee noted that the cost per job ratio had now been worked out. Councillor Dan Swords confirmed that the Council would be agreeing a new contract with HTS which would be based on cost and performance. This contract should be agreed by early 2024.

Councillor Dan Swords confirmed that the target will be for HTS to have a 30 day rolling programme of around 2,400 jobs.

Councillor Tony Edwards suggested that a Tenants Repair Charter be introduced to provide tenants with appropriate information when they are having a repair completed on their property. Councillor Dan Swords confirmed that lots of work was being completed on improving the service and clarity of communication which tenants receive. Councillor Dan Swords noted that a charter could be considered when the schedule of works is completed.

The Committee expressed its disappointment that the information presented verbally by the Cabinet members did not correspond with the information provided within the report. It also requested that future reports be combined into one joint report from both Harlow Council and HTS.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- A** Noted improvements to the business process, following the reviews of both the major works and roofing referral processes.
- B** Noted the completion of the 2022/23 Housing Capital Roofing Programme and clearance of the backlog of roofing projects.
- C** Noted the increased allocation within the HRA Business plan 23/34 for capital roofing work £2.3m and a further £3.4m allocated to HTS to reduce the backlog of responsive repairs, which includes roofing repairs.

D Requested that a further report be brought back to Committee in December 2023.

85. **SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

The Committee received a report on recommendations for Cabinet following its review into support for victims of domestic abuse and sexual harassment.

The Committee agreed to remove the wording “on-street harassment” from recommendation A.

RESOLVED that the Committee recommends to Cabinet that:

A The Council seeking to take proactive steps to tackle the ‘hot spots’ the Police identified, and consideration be given to putting these locations in the public domain;

B Developing additional ‘softer’ measures to chart progress in tackling domestic violence (i.e., in addition to conviction rates); and

C Formalising agreements between relevant local authorities in supporting those who have escaped domestic violence to return to their home authority, where this is considered appropriate.

86. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee received a report summarising its work plan for 2023/24.

It was agreed that a report on roofing and major repairs to council houses would be brought back to Committee in December 2023.

The Committee agreed to re-consider the New Princess Alexandra Hospital review submission form in October 2023.

The Committee also agreed to consider a report on the councillor enquiry system in March 2024. The Committee agreed to set up a sub-group for this review.

RESOLVED that the work plan be noted.

87. **REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

None.

88. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE