



## CABINET

Tuesday, 07 December 2021

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Review of Housing Development</b>
<b>Report by</b>	Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee – Councillor Stuart Bird
<b>Supporting Officer</b>	Sarah Davis Democratic Services Officer <a href="mailto:Sarah.davis@eastsoffolk.gov.uk">Sarah.davis@eastsoffolk.gov.uk</a>

Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN
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Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is <b>NOT</b> in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	Not applicable.
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All Wards

### Purpose and high-level overview

#### **Purpose of Report:**

This report provides a summary of the Scrutiny Committee's findings following an in-depth review which took place at its meeting on 16 September 2021.

The review was an update of the overall progress of the Housing Development Strategy with particular focus on the ambition to build 50 Council houses per annum and the implications of the staff resources available to achieve that target.

The Cabinet Member's report, when published on the Council's website, included an appendix detailing written questions submitted by the Committee's Members in advance and the responses that Officers, in agreement with the Cabinet Member, had subsequently provided.

The minutes from the 16 September 2021 meeting form an appendix to this report.

**Options:**

The Scrutiny Committee having considered the contents of the report, the responses to its questions and the matters raised in debate, discussed the merits of recommending to Cabinet that the target be increased from 50 to 100 new builds per annum.

Given, however, that it was not possible at this stage to determine what the implications this recommendation would have on staffing and budgets, it was felt more appropriate to recommend to Cabinet that a Business Case be drawn up to identify and quantify the implications first.

**Recommendation:**

That Cabinet be asked to support this Committee's recommendation for Officers to draw up a Business Case, within 3 months of the Cabinet decision, on the resources required in order to increase the existing target of delivering 50 new build Council houses per annum to 100 new build Council houses per annum.

**When Cabinet receives this report, it is asked that, where it is proposed that a recommendation be accepted, Cabinet provides a clear commitment on its delivery and to what timescales. Similarly, where it is proposed that a recommendation is not accepted, Cabinet provides its detailed and substantive reasons for refusal.**

## Corporate Impact Assessment

**Governance:**

This report has been prepared on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee. The Council is required by statute to discharge certain overview and scrutiny functions. These functions are an essential component of local democracy. Scrutiny Committees can contribute to the development of Council policies and can also hold the Cabinet to account for its decisions.

**ESC policies and strategies that directly apply to the proposal:**

East Suffolk Strategic Plan 2020-24  
East Suffolk Housing Strategy 2017-23  
East Suffolk Council Housing Development Strategy 2020-24  
East Suffolk Council HRA Business Plan 2018-2048

**Environmental:**

**East Suffolk Council Housing Development Strategy 2020-24:** The Strategy identifies "Environmental Sustainability" as an essential element in the creation of homes and communities in which people want to live and work. It notes that lowering the whole-life carbon footprint of properties will help tenants save money and deliver lasting environmental, social and economic benefits. A number of innovative design solutions across several projects recognise the benefit of fabric first principles and the value of carbon neutral design.

In drawing up a Business Case, the potential environmental impact of increasing the number of Council houses built per annum would be identified.

**Equalities and Diversity:**

The supply of new build properties from the development programme must deliver the housing needs of residents in the district with the right homes, regarding mix and tenure, in the right locations.

**Financial:**

As of 31 March 2022, the HRA's Council Housing debt will be just over £60m and this needs to be repaid in full by 2041-42. As of 31 March 2021, the HRA had 4459 properties with a market value of £585.7m demonstrating that a £60m debt position was relatively low and could be increased if required.

The HRA has approximately £21m in income per annum, with fixed expenditure of £16m. Leaving £5m per annum to contribute to debt repayments and invest in the HRA Capital Programme. The HRA Capital Programme approved at Full Council on 27 January 2021 included £7.725m for redevelopment projects and £42.121m for new build development from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

To achieve a target to build more Council houses would require more funding, however, it was clear from the evidence provided to the Scrutiny Committee that the HRA could borrow additional funding if it wished.

**Human Resources:**

Over the last 18 months, the Housing Development Team has been expanded to help assess development opportunities, creating a development pipeline and enabling the year-on-year projected completions to increase. In addition, further specialisms in areas such as development contracting, construction law and commercial procurement were required, as well as external legal and procurement advice on particularly complex projects requiring construction sector expertise.

A Business Case would be able to identify additional staff/roles that would be required if the target to build Council houses was increased.

**ICT:**

The recent purchase of ARGUS developer software will help the Team to manage complex, multi-staged development projects with confidence.

Formally recording information and using software will help the Council to take a more commercial view and bring transparency to risks, helping to progress the building of additional new homes.

**Legal:**

Discussions are currently being held with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services concerning future specialised construction and development legal support for the HRA.

Increasing the target for new builds was likely to increase the need for this support but the costs might be mitigated by economies of scale. The Business Case would help identify the support needed and the associated costs.

**Risk:**

All projects within the Housing Development Programme have a project specific risk assessment carried out at the commencement of the project to identify potential risks to the delivery of the project and provide mitigation recommendations. The most common risks were not being able to successfully deliver the project brief within budget and on time, however, other risks included changes in the housing market, skills shortages or economic and political changes impacting the construction sector directly such as the availability of raw materials and imported goods. Risks have a potential to impact on multiple projects within the Programme.

Increasing the target for new builds was likely to increase the risk, however, it was felt that perhaps economies of scale and the right procurement process might mitigate some of this risk, both of which can be identified as part of the Business Case process.

<b>External Consultees:</b>	Not applicable.
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## Strategic Plan Priorities

Select the priorities of the <a href="#">Strategic Plan</a> which are supported by this proposal: <i>(Select only one primary and as many secondary as appropriate)</i>		Primary priority	Secondary priorities
<b>T01</b>	<b>Growing our Economy</b>		
P01	Build the right environment for East Suffolk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P02	Attract and stimulate inward investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P03	Maximise and grow the unique selling points of East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P04	Business partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P05	Support and deliver infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>T02</b>	<b>Enabling our Communities</b>		
P06	Community Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P07	Taking positive action on what matters most	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P08	Maximising health, well-being and safety in our District	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P09	Community Pride	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>T03</b>	<b>Maintaining Financial Sustainability</b>		
P10	Organisational design and streamlining services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P11	Making best use of and investing in our assets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P12	Being commercially astute	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P13	Optimising our financial investments and grant opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P14	Review service delivery with partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>T04</b>	<b>Delivering Digital Transformation</b>		
P15	Digital by default	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P16	Lean and efficient streamlined services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P17	Effective use of data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P18	Skills and training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P19	District-wide digital infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>T05</b>	<b>Caring for our Environment</b>		
P20	Lead by example	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P21	Minimise waste, reuse materials, increase recycling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P22	Renewable energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P23	Protection, education and influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>XXX</b>	<b>Governance</b>		
XXX	How ESC governs itself as an authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>How does this proposal support the priorities selected?</b>			
<p>The Council's Housing Development Programme's primary objective is to meet housing need by providing high quality sustainable housing at affordable rents or sale values and to develop appropriate housing solutions in all areas of East Suffolk which are effective and cost efficient.</p> <p>Increasing the target of new builds will provide even more high quality sustainable housing solutions for East Suffolk residents.</p>			

## Background and Justification for Recommendation

<b>1</b>	<b>Background facts</b>	
1.1	<p>The Committee considered the Cabinet Member's report on the Housing Development Programme at its meeting on 24 September 2020 and recommended to Cabinet "That the Scrutiny Committee welcomed and encouraged the Housing portfolio's ambition to build 50 Council houses per annum. The Committee, mindful of the limited resources available, recommended to Cabinet that it explore the potential for modular construction, carbon neutral where possible, on appropriate sites at the earliest and most realistic opportunity".</p> <p>An update was requested in one year to review the overall programme and, if necessary, the implications of staffing resources on the attainment of the ambition.</p> <p>That update was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 16 September 2021.</p>	
1.2	<p>The Cabinet Member's update report provided details of the latest position with regards to new stock being added to the HRA portfolio.</p>	

	The written questions submitted in advance of the meeting, together with the written responses, form an appendix to the formal report which went to the Committee.
1.3	<p>The following aspects of this topic were raised and discussed with the Cabinet Member and Officers at the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the targets for East Suffolk under the Government's Affordable Homes Programme</li> <li>• Right to Buy and the impact on stock numbers</li> <li>• housing waiting lists and the need to review the Gateway to Home Choice Scheme</li> <li>• the current staffing levels in the Housing Development Team</li> <li>• the budget available to build and the implications of borrowing more money</li> <li>• the cost of purchasing land and the need to ensure value for money whilst providing new affordable housing in the places that residents need it</li> <li>• the lack of and price of building materials</li> <li>• the challenges of building environmentally sustainable housing.</li> </ul>

## 2 Current position

2.1	The current position with regards to the Council's progress on its Housing Development Programme are detailed in the Cabinet Member's report with additional information provided at the Scrutiny Committee meeting. It is not, therefore, proposed to restate that position here, in this report, and for the sake of efficiency readers are referred to the Cabinet Member's report and minutes of the meeting for this information.
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## 3 How to address current situation

3.1	The Scrutiny Committee noted that the current target had not always been met due to various factors, however, it was also clear from the evidence that there is a demand for more affordable housing for East Suffolk residents.
3.2	Although the Committee were of a mind to recommend that the target for new build Council houses be increased to provide more affordable housing, they recognised that building Council houses had budgetary and resource implications. Members also noted the challenges of building new Council houses, some of which were ongoing such as the impact of Right to Buy and the size of the Housing Development Team, whilst others were potentially short term issues such as the cost of materials and shortage in skilled labour.

3.3	A suggestion was made by the Strategic Director that rather than recommending the target be increased, it would be more beneficial to recommend to Cabinet that a Business Case be drawn up to identify and quantify the impact and cost of increasing the target from 50 to 100 new build Council houses per annum. This would enable Cabinet to assess the cost benefit ratio for providing the additional Council housing balanced against the costs required for other competing demands on the HRA budget such as making the existing stock more sustainable.
3.4	The Committee, in forming its recommendation, wished to offer a constructive friend's view of the current situation. In conducting the review, it was, as always, the Committee's intention to challenge in a positive way that might also add value and assistance rather than criticism.

#### 4 Reason for recommendation

4.1	Having considered all the information provided and having heard the views of the Cabinet Member and key Officers, the Scrutiny Committee wished to make constructive suggestions to help bring long term empty properties back into use.
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## Annexes

### Annexes:

<b>Annex A</b>	Confirmed minutes of the Scrutiny Committee – 16 September 2021
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### Background reference papers:

Date	Type	Available From
	None, save the minutes of the meeting held in September 2020 and the published report for the meeting in September 2021	<a href="http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk">www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk</a>