

Report of: Housing Scrutiny Committee

To: Executive Board

Date: 5th November 2007

Item No:

Title of Report : Recommendations on Affordable Housing Development



Summary and Recommendations



Purpose of report: To present to Executive Board, recommendations made by the Housing Scrutiny Committee on affordable housing development.



Decision: No



Portfolio Holder: Councillor Patrick Murray, Improving Housing Portfolio Holder

Scrutiny Responsibility: Housing Scrutiny Committee



Ward(s) affected: All



Report Approved by: Councillor Ed Turner, HSC Chair, Dave Higgins, Finance and Asset Management and Jeremy King, Legal Services



Policy Framework:



Recommendation(s): The Executive Board is asked to respond to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations:



1. If it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations outlined.



2. If it agrees when will the recommendations be implemented and who will take the lead?



3. If it disagrees why?



4. If more information is required from other officers when that will be considered?

1. Minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Committee – 11th October 2007

45. AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Community Housing Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated now appended) which updated the Committee on the Affordable Housing Development Programme 2005-09.

Graham Stratford said that the programme was progressing however there was not a great deal in the pipe line for future developments at present, mostly due to the availability and cost of land.

In response to questions Graham Stratford said with regard to the former Oxford United Manor Ground in Headington, a way forward had been proposed for this site and that a Housing Association was interested in developing it. He also accepted that in general there was concern on the balance of developments that had too many flats and not enough family homes. Councillor Sanders said that in some cases outline planning permission was granted, but by the time that the full application was to be determined the plans for the development had been significantly altered.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To note the report;*
- (b) To recommend the Executive Board that Officers inform the Leader of the Council, Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Committee and the Chair of the Environment Scrutiny Committee if planning applications are recommended for approval by officers but they fall short of affordable housing requirements set out in the Council's Affordable Housing SPD.*

46. AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY REVIEW FOLLOW UP

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report (previously circulated now appended) which updated the Committee on the implementation of the recommendations from the Affordable Housing Development Scrutiny Review which was completed earlier this year (2007).

Andrew Davies introduced the report.

Councillor Sinclair said that she was very disappointed to hear from Officer that cuts/savings were being required which could impact on service provision. She also endorsed the recommendation that Ward Councillors were informed in a timely manner of housing developments in their wards, but also that the various Business Units talked to each other as well as talking to Councillors.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To recommend to the Executive Board:
 - (1) That an external review should be sought to confirm whether S106 contributions could be used to fund affordable housing on sites where social housing previously stood, an issue which the Housing Quality Network had recommended was clarified;**

(2) That the importance of affordable housing development is not lost in the Council re-structure. The Housing Scrutiny Committee has concerns that the number of sites coming forward for development is falling, and that the Head of Community Housing is able to spend less time on this important area of work than he has previously. Executive Board should take the necessary steps to address this.

- (b) *To request the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to submit a further update report in 6 months, detailing the types of units that will be provided in the programme.*

2. Introduction

- 2.1 At each Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting an overview of the affordable housing developments underway in the city, and those in the pipeline, is presented to members. At their 11th October meeting, HSC also received an update on the implementation of the Affordable Housing Development scrutiny review recommendations. The Committee made recommendations on both reports. These have been combined for Executive Board to consider in one report because they refer to the same issue.

3. Sites coming forward for development

- 3.1 The Housing Scrutiny Committee is concerned that the number of sites coming forward for housing development is falling. Members explored the possible options for this. A shortage of land is likely to be contributing to the drop off in developments. Members also felt that the Affordable Housing SPD may also be a factor, as developers “land bank” rather than develop at this time, to see if there are any changes in planning regulations. Specifically, affordable housing requirements are reduced on sites of 10 or more dwellings or bigger than 0.25ha.
- 3.2 The Committee discussed the importance of securing the affordable housing that is in short supply in Oxford, family accommodation. Securing the right mix of affordable units was regarded as crucial, so that the city doesn't have an oversupply of smaller properties.
- 3.3 Housing Scrutiny Committee want to see how this issue progresses, but in the meantime have recommended that officers provide the Leader of the Council and the chairs of Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee with details of the planning applications that are recommended for approval by officers but fall short of affordable housing requirements as set out in the Council's Affordable Housing SPD. This is so members are aware of how this policy is affecting affordable housing development in the city.

4. Use of S106 funding

- 4.1 One of the recommendations made during by the Housing Scrutiny Committee during the affordable housing development scrutiny review was that the Council should confirm whether S106 contributions could

be used to fund affordable housing on sites where social housing previously stood. Housing Quality Network, who originally reviewed the Council's internal affordable housing development function also recommended that this be clarified.

- 4.2 Housing Scrutiny Committee is concerned that it is over 2 years since HQN carried out their original review and this issue has still not been resolved. Therefore, the Scrutiny Committee asks again that an external view be sought on this.

5. The importance of affordable housing development

- 5.1 The Scrutiny Committee is concerned that the Head of Community Housing is able to devote less time to working on affordable housing development than he would like. HQN recommended that a person be appointed to be the strategic lead on affordable housing development. This recommendation wasn't implemented, as the function moved business units, with the Head of Community Housing taking up this role. The Housing Scrutiny Committee were satisfied with this arrangement providing he was given adequate time (i.e. more than 50% of his work time) to work on affordable housing development.

- 5.2 In the light of falling numbers of developments coming forward and the merging of Community Housing and Community Development in the Council restructure, the Housing Scrutiny Committee asks that Executive Board doesn't lose sight of the importance of affordable housing development. The Committee is concerned that the service head will have more areas of work to focus on and as a result will be able to devote less time to affordable housing development.

6. Comments from the Portfolio Holder (Councillor Patrick Murray)

- 6.1 The only comment I have to make is on the issue of the restructure and the Community Housing manager's role. Delivery of affordable housing remains a priority in the new structure and the potential addition of other functions allows a better focus on regeneration as well.

7. Comments from the Strategic Director (Michael Lawrence)

- 7.1 None received.

Name and contact details of author:

Andrew Davies, Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of the Housing Scrutiny Committee
Tel – 01865 252433
Email – adavies@oxford.gov.uk

Background papers:

