

Title: Work Programme
Lead Officer: Darren Knight – Deputy Chief Executive
Portfolio Holder: Not applicable
Public report
Wards of the District directly affected: Not applicable

Summary

This report provides a proposed method of working for the Housing Scrutiny Committee and seeks confirmation of approach for officers to produce a work programme for the Committee to consider at its next meeting.

Recommendations

- (1) That the Committee notes its remit as set out at Appendix 1 to the report; and
 - (2) The Committee endorses the approach to its work as set out in the report and asks officers to bring forward a programme of work on this basis.
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1. Reasons for the recommendations

- 1.1 The five main roles of scrutiny in local government are: holding to account; performance management; policy review; policy development; and external scrutiny.
- 1.2 The Committee needs to be mindful of the role of scrutiny in local Government and that the Committee was created by Council in, October 2024, in response to the concerns identified by the Council in respect of compliance with the requirements of the Social Housing Regulator. The terms of remit were set broadly to enable the Committee maximum oversight of the Housing Function and to demonstrate to the regulator the Council's response to improving its service standards for its housing tenants.
- 1.3 An objective for the Committee is to regularly receive and scrutinise a broad area of work, including updates on the agreed Consumer Standards action plan and provide assurance about the delivery of this. It is envisaged that the Committee would be reviewing policies and strategies before they are considered by Cabinet (similarly to the asbestos, water testing, and fire safety reports submitted to the Asset Compliance Committee). This will provide more time for officers to consider and reflect and update these ahead of Cabinet considering the final report.
- 1.4 The Committee may have concerns that it will not have the opportunity to look at all Cabinet reports relating to Housing prior to Cabinet. However, the

Constitution identifies that scrutiny will consider issues that have due significance with reference to the following criteria:

- The number of residents impacted and the significance of the impact.
- The amount of money involved.
- It relates to a strategic priority of the Council or a key project.

- 1.5 In addition to the above, the Constitution also says Scrutiny committees should only consider items where there is a tangible reason to do so. This should broadly fit into one of the following criteria:
- a) Where there are concerns about the basis for a recommendation. For example, the data that had led to the recommendation is deficient, or new data or information require had been provided too late for a written question and answer to be circulated before the meeting, or if members were aware of contradictory evidence.
 - b) There is an alternative policy, development or direction which needs to be explored.
- 1.6 Therefore, with the approach outlined at 1.4, it is envisaged that the key reports which fall within these criteria will be seen at an earlier stage of development, ahead of being submitted to Cabinet. Reports which fall outside the remit at 1.5 and 1.6 should follow previously agreed policies or strategies that the Committee will have provided assurance on.
- 1.7 Neither of the above prevents the Committee from reviewing the impact of Cabinet decisions after they have been implemented, to ensure that they have had the expected outcomes and are benefiting the Council and its tenants.
- 1.8 An area of concern for Councillors is having sufficient time for in depth scrutiny of finance, specifically within Housing. Therefore, it is important the Committee allows sufficient time to understand the HRA budget, how it is funded, how it works, and also provide assurance around its operation.
- 1.9 The budget work, in paragraph 1.5 does not detract from the work of the Budget Review Group, which will still review the HRA Budget prior to consideration by Cabinet. The Chairman of this Committee is appointed to the Budget Review Group. The Budget Review Group is represented along with the Audit & Standards Committee and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.10 It is also important for this Committee to understand the HRA Business Plan and how this operates for the Council. This will help the Committee with fundamental understanding of service delivery of the housing function to Council tenants.
- 1.11 At the training provided by HQN, Committee Members were challenged to reflect on the work programme and consider the following questions:
- Are you getting compliance (and data) right?
 - Are you delivering an effective repairs and improvement service?
 - How has the Council responded to satisfaction feedback?
 - How is the council learning from and acting on complaints?
 - How well does the Council maintain estates?
 - Do tenants take pride in where they live?

- How well does the Council (as a landlord) tackle anti-social behavior and hate crime?
- Does the Council “let well” & sustain tenancies?

1.12 It is recommended to Committee that they agree a theme for each meeting and list questions they want to look at and report on, based around one or two of the areas listed above. Some of these areas are covered in the Action Plan but the approach above allows the Committee to look at an area in more depth and provide greater assurance on the work being undertaken.