

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee – 3rd December 2015

Public Questions

Question from Mr Webb to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning & Regulatory Control

Question 1

“This year saw the first council houses being built since the last one in 1989. There are more affordable houses being built in Shoebury on council land. The council knows it needs to increase the borough stock of affordable housing as there is a waiting list of 2,000 residents wanting a home. What sites have been chosen to build more affordable houses on and how many affordable house will be built on them and when will these be completed by?”

Answer

Phase 1 of the HRA Land Project was borne out of a review of all council owned land which sought to establish what sites had development potential for housing. This first phase is based in Shoeburyness and consists of 18 units and is anticipated that construction will start on site early next year. Two further indicative phases (Phases 2 & 3) were outlined within the original Cabinet Report (dated 1st July 2014) and work has been undertaken to assess the viability of these sites. This work is still at the initial feasibility stage. Two further phases have also been outlined which would form a total housing development programme of 5 phases which could form 60+ housing units in the coming years. There could be further brownfield regeneration opportunities on a similar basis to the Queensway regeneration project and the Council is looking at a number of options, following the publication of the Housing Bill, through which it will be delivering more affordable homes for local people.

[At the meeting it was clarified that the waiting list is 1,400 residents, not as stated in the question].

Question from Mr Webb to the Leader of the Council

Question 2

“What policy encourages and shows how the council is open, honest, and transparent and allows the residents of Southend that the council is adhering and showing this?”

Answer

The Council has a series of policies and practices which ensure the Council is open, honest and transparent. Some of the most relevant, which are available on the Council's website include:

- The Council's Publication Scheme, which follows the Information Commissioners Office model, and outlines a wide range of information that is frequently requested, such as in relation to decision making processes, complaints, recruitment policies and pay and reward policies;
- 'What we spend and how we spend it', recording all expenditure over £500;

- 'Open Data – The Local Government Transparency Code', which outlines how the Council adheres to the Code across a range of issues;
- Publication of the Council's Monthly Performance Report which reports on progress against 28 performance indicators and provides monthly budget management statements by Portfolio holder.
- Codes of conduct for Councillors and staff, setting out expectations of how they should behave and adhere to the Nolan 'principles of public life'.

In addition, Council members and officers regularly undertake meetings with residents and partners to outline current Council activity and provide context and to respond to questions. For example, the Leader of the Council is undertaking a series of meetings with community partners and residents groups (23 so far this year alone) and the Leader and Chief Executive regularly attend local business forums.

There is a host of other information relating to the Council which is published on a regular basis, including to Cabinet, Scrutiny Committees, Audit and other committees. An overview of how the Council ensures it is open, honest and transparent is set out in the Council's Annual Governance Statement, which is reviewed each year by Audit Committee and included in the Council's Statement of Accounts'.