

<p style="text-align: center;">Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee</p> <p style="text-align: center;">15 April 2021</p>	
<p>Report of Karen Swift, Divisional Director, Housing & Regeneration</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Title: Improving health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces – Action Plan Update</p>	

Originating Officer(s)	Una Bedford
Wards affected	All wards

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the progress made in implementing the recommendations from the Housing Open Spaces scrutiny review undertaken by the former Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee between February and May 2019. The report detailing the recommendations of the review with its supporting action plan was approved by the Mayor and Cabinet in November 2019. The emerging pandemic and the subsequent hiatus in the council's scrutiny activity has however, led to the delay in officers reporting back to the Committee.

The Coronavirus Pandemic has also affected the ability of officers and partner organisations to deliver on the majority of the actions which are necessary to implement these recommendations. Throughout this extraordinary time, the focus has been to support our residents given the exceptional circumstances and economic and social uncertainties that they have faced. Consequently, the resources and attention which would have been invested in delivering the recommendations arising from the Housing Open Spaces review have been invested to ensure that residents have whatever additional support that they have needed during this time and in the council and its partners maintaining the provision our existing services throughout the pandemic.

The review focused on the Housing Open Spaces within the borough that are managed by both Private and Local Authority Registered Providers (social landlords), with the objective of exploring ways to '**Improve health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces**'. It considered a range of programmes and projects that the council had been engaging in, which intended to facilitate the transformation of the open spaces in and around the borough's social housing stock. The review considered the council's then current open space strategies and policies. It also examined the council's management and horticulture practices in and around the open spaces, in consideration of community greening and growing priorities and the benefits that these, when combined, can bring to our communities. The report arising from the review acknowledged the good practice within the council, (in its management and maintenance of the borough's open spaces) and recognised the increasing demand for community greening and

growing.

The review highlighted concern that there was a missing repository of housing open space information, and identified that there was issues around accessibility and ensuring a consistency of approach in implementing policy, bio-diversity training for residents and horticulture staff, and the sustainability of community greening and growing projects. The report arising from this review made several practical recommendations for the council and its partners to implement the development of the Housing Open Spaces Action Plan.

This follow up report details the progress made to date against the recommendations within the Action Plan and clarifies the actions officers and partners have been unable progress due to the demands of the pandemic. Further, the Action Plan has been updated to extend the deadlines for completion of these actions, on the premise that the proposed Government road map out of lockdown continues as planned and that the public health threat recedes; without further lockdowns and additional support for residents required from the council and its partners.

Recommendations:

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress made to date in delivering the recommendations from the scrutiny review as set out in the Action Plan emanating from the original report to Cabinet in November 2019.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the progression which has been made since the original scrutiny review and action plan were agreed by the Mayor and Cabinet in November 2019. The Action Plan arose from the findings and recommendations from the Housing Open Spaces Review (to improve health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces) - which was part of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee's work programme for 2019/2020 municipal year, and provides an update on the progress made in implementing recommendations from the scrutiny review.

2. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 2.1 As part of its work programme for 2018/19, the former Housing Scrutiny Sub-committee and the Tower Hamlets Residents Panel carried out a joint scrutiny review of Housing Open Spaces to improve health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces. This review was Chaired by Cllr Dipa Das, Chair of Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee. The Scrutiny Review took the form of three evidence gathering sessions and a fourth session to agree recommendations. All of which took place between February 2019 and May 2019.

- 2.2 In delivering this scrutiny review, members of the scrutiny panel agreed to review good practice and policies in housing open space management. This included identifying opportunities for partnership working, sharing of good practices, promoting an increase in community benefits, accreditations and awards, and increasing access to resources to improve the quality of housing open spaces.
- 2.3 The Panel received evidence from the Council, local and pan-London organisations in setting out good practice in working with housing open spaces to support green communities in the provision of quality open spaces, including those brought forward through new development. This included the identification of benefits to both existing and new communities and habitats as well as through the delivery of several improvement projects through community engagement and participation.
- 2.4 Council officers presented evidence of the council's Watts Grove development where through stakeholder engagement, sites had been identified to be transformed into the provision of new homes and quality open spaces. Sites identified by the Council for housing (to support delivery of 2,000 new Council homes (the Mayoral pledge)) are often inaccessible, susceptible to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), with formal / informal car parking, where green / play space needs enhancement. Through resident engagement, the council's housebuilding programme empowers residents to be active in the design of schemes. This includes enhancing open space / green space sites through intelligent design and planting, and working with ASB prevention officers to design out ASB. The panel acknowledged the council's approach to design and stakeholder engagement, requesting that the council prioritises and encourages under-utilised spaces to be co-designed and transformed, to deliver a balance between competing priorities.
- 2.5 The joint panel agreed that in a borough with a growing population, c.19,000+ people on the housing register, existing open space deficiencies and underutilised open spaces, delivering a balance between competing priorities to achieve quality open spaces is crucial (Recommendation 2b).
- 2.6 This report therefore made five recommendations for the Council and its partners to implement which comprises of a GIS map of open spaces, sampling accessibility of spaces, implementation of policy, delivering a balance between competing priorities, development of a good practice guide to quality open spaces, a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of projects and a community greening and growing development programme for staff and residents:

Policy	
R1	Drawing on intelligence, the Council produces an up to date GIS map of housing open spaces and encourages THHF to sample and assess the accessibility of sites in wards with open space deficiencies - identifying any improvement options.
R2a	<p>The Council to report back to the committee on new developments and their compliance with planning policies (below):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy D.SG3: Health impact assessments • Policy D.DH8: Amenity • Policy S.SH1: Delivering high quality design • Policy D.DH2: Attractive streets, spaces and public realm • Policy S.CF1: Supporting community facilities • Policy D.ES3: Urban greening and biodiversity • Policy D.OWS3: Open space and green grid networks • Policy D.DH6: Tall buildings • Policy D.ES2: Air quality
R2b	The Council to prioritise and encourage underutilised spaces to be co-designed and transformed to deliver a balance between competing priorities.
Management & Service improvements	
R3	<p>The Council to encourage and support THHF to develop a good practice guide to achieve quality open spaces – to deliver health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes. Comprising of priorities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green communities, roofs and balconies and support (incl. grants, tools and revenue funding (where possible)) community growing • Improving access, encouraging usage and multiuse facilities on open spaces • Eco friendly and environmentally grounds maintenance and intelligence-based planting • An online platform (webpage) for community greening, (either via THHF or by each social landlord) – including information, advice and guidance, policies, procedures, duties, health and safety, licenses and map of community growing projects established and new sites identified
Communications, Engagement & Partnership working	
R4	The Tower Hamlets Housing Forum's Community Involvement Network supported by the Council to facilitate the delivery of projects that encourage community greening, growing and quality open spaces that deliver wide benefits.
R5	The THHF Community Involvement Network to widen the scope of its 'food growing and managing a food garden training session' to a broader development programme to cover community greening and growing (available to both residents

	<p>and staff) comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Green flag awards for housing • Intelligence based planting, enhancing biodiversity and green recycling • Benefits of friend's groups • Community greening and growing - policies, procedures, duties, health and safety, and licenses • THHF good practice guide and sharing of good practices
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2.7 Appendix 1 provides an updated action plan detailing the progress made towards implementing these five recommendations.

2.8 Members will note that the actions to meet Recommendation 1 have been progressed in the interim. Actions 2.1 and 2.3 within Recommendation 2 have been met and Action 3.7 (Recommendation 3) has been addressed and completed, the remaining actions arising from the Scrutiny Review have not. This is attributable to the unprecedented pressures and demands placed on service areas and partners with responsibility for the the actions agreed to implement the recommendations. The pandemic and series of lockdown interventions required officers to divert their resources to ensuring the continued support for residents over the course of this last exceptional year.

2.9 Officers therefore request that a further update on the progression of actions to embed the recommendations of the Housing Open Spaces review is carried over to September 2022, to allow the resumption of the council's normal business activity (provided the Government's Road Map out of lockdown comes to fruition and the council returns to a more settled 'business as usual' approach to its day to day activities.

3. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty (as set out in the Equality Act 2010) aims to embed equality considerations into the day to day work of public bodies, so that they tackle discrimination and inequality and contribute to making society fairer.

3.2 The recommendations and actions following on from the Housing Open Spaces review seek to reduce inequalities including health inequalities, foster greater community cohesion, reduce social isolation and support social value, economic and environmental benefits. The subsequent report following the scrutiny review stressed the vital role Local authority's play in enhancing and improving access to open spaces working with partners to implement recommendations on key equality considerations.

4. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The recommendations in scrutiny review are made as part of the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee's role in helping to secure continuous improvement for the Council, as required under its Best Value duty.

- 4.2 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the report or recommendations.
- 4.3 The recommendations of the Scrutiny Review are based on areas of risk and for improvement for the Council and its partners and the actions seek to address these.
- 4.4 There are no direct crime and disorder reduction implications arising from the report or recommendations.

5. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications emanating from this report which provides an update on progress made in implementing the recommendations from the Housing Open Spaces scrutiny review. Any costs associated with implementing the recommendations detailed within the report have been made from existing budget provision.

6. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- <https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?Id=7279>

Appendices

- **Appendix 1:** Update March 2021: SCRUTINY REVIEW ACTION PLAN: Improving health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces

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