

Homes Policy Development Group Chairman's Report 2017-2018

The past year has seen the P.D.G. dealing with many varied subjects at our bi-monthly committee meetings. Apart from our continual updating of Housing Department Policies, I feel we had had a very positive year. More than double the number of empty homes have been brought back into use – very good news as this also brings a positive net financial contribution for the Council

Processes have been streamlined so that it only takes 9 weeks to deal with a Disabled Facility Grant, instead of 17 weeks in the past. One of the other successes of the year has been the piloting of the Wessex Scheme which, with additional funding of £100k from Devon County Council, increased advertising, Drop In sessions and a new contract, has resulted in much reduced processing application time – 100% recovery rate and an improved performance all round.

As a result of the horrific fire in London with the Grenfell Tower, as a committee we needed to be sure that all was secure in our patch and we also made sure that all communal spaces were clear and allowed a quick safe exit.

The situation with regard to the housing of refugees is that currently 2 families are housed in Cullompton and Bradninch. One of the families is struggling with cold isolation and lack of Primary School places. Our officers are in contact with someone in Crediton with regard to housing a family nearby – this may seem probably very little in the whole scheme of things but surely far better than being in their ravaged homeland.

Towards the end of the Municipal Year the PDG held an informal workshop where there was a lengthy discussion of “Right to Buy” and “Devon Home Choice”. Here there was agreement that Band E should stay and a motion to be put to Full Council to lobby Government to remove Right to Buy.

Once again this year has seen a lot of work put in by T.T.G. who are very dedicated to their tasks which as ever is most appreciated.

As with all departments in our Authority the Housing Service find themselves having to do more and more with less income, the Government 1% rent reduction strategy will continue to have a major impact on our financial situation and will mean ongoing challenges to provide the excellent service that our tenants have come to expect from our Repairs Service headed up by Mark Barlow.

In addition I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to all our Repair Staff who on a daily basis are the face of Mid Devon in the eyes of our tenants. It is always a pleasure to see the praise that is recorded for the good work that is done for our tenants.

Next the Housing Officers who have once again this year proved to be invaluable to us. Their dedication has ensured that as an Authority we are ranked amongst the

best in the land. Your efforts in making sure that our rent arrears are at a constantly low level is a credit to this Council as you diligently continue to pursue outstanding rents and seem to have found a very successful formula for rent collection – well done.

We as a Council are continuing in the process of building more affordable homes, to try to help as many people as possible who find themselves in need of local authority housing. We are aware that the scheme at Palmerston Park in Tiverton has continued to suffer some setbacks but I am still confident that we will see these houses being occupied. We are striving to bring forward more affordable homes in our District as I know this has a high priority with both the Cabinet Member for Housing and our Head of Housing. I take this opportunity of thanking them both for their dedication and forward thinking also for their ongoing advice and sound judgement which they bring to our meetings

I would also like to record a heart-felt thanks to all the members of the PDG who have turned up to our meetings and have taken part in our discussions.

In the next couple of years I think our Housing Service will continue to face some very tough challenges brought about by ever changing regulations, including Universal Credit, customer expectations and last but far from least financial restrictions. I am sure however that as in the past you will rally around and produce a service we as Members can be proud of.

Finally I wish to extend special thanks to our Committee Clerk, Sarah Lees for her continued dedication, help and advice, which is always delivered with a smile and in a thoughtful manner – thank you Sarah.

JOHN DAW

Chairman of MDDC Homes Policy Development Group.

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