

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 19 November 2024 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

S Robinson (Chair)
C Adcock (Vice-Chair), J Cairney,
C Connor, B Holdman, F W Letch, N Letch,
and H Tuffin

Apology

Councillor

A Glover

Also Present

Councillor

S J Clist

Also Present

Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Simon Newcombe (Head of Housing & Health), Tanya Wenham (Operations Manager for Public Health and Housing Options), Mike Lowman (Building Services Operations Manager), Dr Stephen Carr (Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager), Sam Barnett (Housing Initiatives Officer), Sarah Thomas (Housing Options Manager), Carole Oliphant (Housing Policy Officer), Laura Woon (Democratic Services Manager) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer)

Councillors

Online

J Buczkowski, G Czapiewski and J Lock

Officer Online

Richard Marsh

Also in

Attendance

Matt Dodd and David Hancock (Exeter University)

36 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr A Glover who was substituted by Cllr B Holdman.

37 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

38 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

No interests were declared under this item.

39 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2024 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

40 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair had the following announcements to make:

- a) She welcomed Matt Dodd and David Hancock from Exeter University to the meeting. They were attending in relation to the Devon Housing Commission Report item.
- b) Mid Devon Housing had received a number of awards since the last meeting and she congratulated all those involved on this remarkable achievement.
- c) The March 2025 meeting already had a long list of agenda items programmed for it. In order to redistribute the workload so that it could be better managed, she proposed that a Special Meeting take place on 28th January 2025 to consider any items that could be brought forward. The Head of Housing and Health confirmed that several items could be brought forward. The Group **AGREED** therefore to holding a Special Meeting of the Homes Policy Development Group on 28th January 2025.
- d) She offered her congratulations to the Public Health and Housing Options Team for all the work they were doing in relation to Homelessness.

41 **DEVON HOUSING COMMISSION REPORT**

The Group received a presentation from Matt Dodd and David Hancock at Exeter University regarding the Devon Housing Commission Report.

This contained the following information:

- A huge data gathering exercise had been undertaken at the commencement of the project through site visits, seminars, online calls for evidence and working with local and central government agencies.
- Some key headlines included the fact that Devon was 'older' than the rest of England and was getting 'older' faster.
- Devon's homes were some of the most under-occupied in the country, they were also some of the poorest quality.
- There were fewer affordable homes in Devon than the rest of England and the number of bids per home on Devon Home Choice had doubled since 2019/20.

Some of the key recommendations in the report included the following:

For the Government

- A renewed and increased Affordable Homes Programme.
- Local Authority Housing Fund providing renewed and increased flexibility on temporary accommodation.

- Support for the Renter Reform Bill.
- Funding for Rural Housing Enablers.
- Support for being more robust on planning.

For Local Authorities

- Ensure Housing Enabling is at the heart of Local Authorities.
- Act on holiday lets/second homes.
- Ensuring the right type of homes were built – using the local plan process.
- Temporary accommodation – acquisition and remodelling.

For Other Bodies

- Homes England – work closely with Devon and develop rural and coastal housing strategies.
- Housing Associations – communicate on disposals strategies.
- Regulator of Social Housing – develop a charter on disposals.
- Promote and encourage construction skills and retrofit/green skills.
- Landowners and housing authorities working together.

Next steps

- Report focused on benefits of devolution.
- Working together between districts and between districts and county.
- Facilitation of that relationship.
- Strategic pipeline that Homes England want to develop.
- Devon wide housing strategy to support the delivery of housing ambitions.

Discussion took place regarding:

- A lot of this could be solved purely by freeing up bedrooms.
- 45% of Mid Devon's stock was under occupied.
- There needed to be a sufficient turnover of stock.
- Decanting people to other parts of the country would not be practical or appropriate. Flexibility was needed and it was about providing appropriate stock within the local area.
- There was a tension between developers providing houses at market price for people coming in from outside the area and local need.
- Considered design of new housing developments was vital.
- There was much work to do in terms of gathering data on downsizing.
- Government recommendations were aimed at stopping the actions of some less than scrupulous landlords.
- More needed to be done to encourage developers to 'build to rent' and the 'Renters Reform Bill' would be key in this process.
- Many landlords were leaving the rental sector and placing their properties on the market.
- The Local Planning Authority could be more prescriptive about what it would like to see, however, it was a difficult balancing act with what was happening with the open market.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:

The Devon Housing Commission report and recommendations are taken into account in the review of the MDDC Housing Strategy due in 2025.

(Proposed by the Chair)

Reason for the decision

As set out in the report.

Note: Cllr C Connor declared a personal interest in that she was a landlord outside of the district. Cllr B Holdman also declared a personal interest in that he was a private sector tenant.

42 **PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD QUARTER 2**

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED**, two slides * showing performance information in the housing area both under the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.

Since the Dashboard was last presented to this meeting, work had been ongoing to create a glossary. This contained all the measures used as part of the Dashboards and provided a definition for each. The definitions aimed to provide a fuller understanding of what was being measured and how. This was available on the Council's website.

Regarding the measures showing as red and amber it was explained that:

- Private Sector Housing service requests response rate was at amber. This was only just behind target, with just 2 cases falling outside the 5 working days target in Q2.
- Projected Outturn was also at amber - a small overspend of £13,000 currently predicted.
- Delivery of new Social Housing - the red status here was a little misleading, with 44 homes delivered against a target of 50 with several schemes about to come on line.
- New net-zero properties (red) - Shapland Place, Tiverton was now complete, but this would show in Quarter 3 data. Crofts Lapford would be complete ahead of schedule by Christmas so would also show in Q3. Several other schemes had now commenced, so overall, delivery was strong. Housing delivery could be more accurately assessed at the year end rather than on a quarterly basis due to the nature of delivery.
- Mid Devon Housing (MDH) - Complaints responded to within Complaints Handling Code timescales (amber) - 100% had met the target timescales in Quarter 2. The average performance across the financial year was therefore increasing.
- MDH Housing stock occupancy rate (amber): There had been a full and detailed report on Voids to the Scrutiny meeting on the 28 October. A number

of long term development voids were awaiting demolition and this was contributing to the lower occupancy rate.

- HRA – Projected Capital Outturn (amber): This underspend reflected both the revised timing of the projects and the revised programme of works themselves, with the deliverable budget amended as necessary.
- HRA – Capital Slippage % of development projects (amber): As the previous indicator – the programme had been revised with some projects slipping, some being accelerated and some no longer being taken forward.

Note: * Slides previously circulated.

43 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - GENERAL FUND (GF)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) presenting the options to update the 2025/2026 budget for consideration / approval.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The report provided a ‘refresh’ of the service areas falling under the umbrella of this Policy Development Group and showed the movement to date in the process of trying to set the budget for 2025/2026 and beyond.
- Costs in relation to Private Sector Housing and Temporary Accommodation were highlighted.
- A report going to Cabinet in December would present the very latest position ahead of Council needing to agree a budget in February 2025.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

44 **HOUSING INITIATIVES PLAN UPDATE**

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Operations Manager for Public Health and Housing regarding the Housing Initiatives Plan.

The contents of the report were summarised and consideration was given to:

- The Group were heartened by the amount of help and support that was offered to people in housing need.
- Congratulations needed to be extended to the Housing Options Team who were working hard to house people wherever possible.
- Council Tax information was helpful in identifying properties that were not occupied. Going forwards there would be a focus on work in this area.
- The team did link in with other local authorities in monitoring the movements of rough sleepers to check as much as possible that they were okay.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

45 **MID DEVON HOUSING (MDH) TENANT COMPENSATION POLICY UPDATE**

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of Housing and Health presenting the revised Mid Devon Housing (MDH) Tenant Compensation Policy.

A summary of the report was briefly provided and discussion took place regarding:

- What would happen if there was a serious problem with a door entry phone?
- The Regulator advised that up to £50 could be paid as a 'good will' gesture under the right circumstances to avoid all parties having to go through a lengthy complaints procedure.

RECOMMENDED to that Cabinet that:

The Updated MDH Tenant Compensation Policy and Equality Impact Assessment contained in Annexes A and B respectively be adopted.

(Proposed by Cllr F Letch MBE and seconded by Cllr B Holdman)

Reason for the decision

As set out in the report

Note: * Report previously circulated.

46 **MID DEVON HOUSING (MDH) SERVICE STANDARDS UPDATE**

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Housing and Health regarding the updated MDH Service Standards 2024-2029 as attached in Annexe A.

It was explained that this was a single document pulling together a range of standards across housing policies. It would allow for all the standards to be seen in one place. It was important that Members had sight of this. It provided a clear reference point setting out the expectations on both the landlord and the tenant.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

47 **REVIEW OF MID DEVON HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Group received a report from the Head of Housing and Health regarding a review of the Mid Devon Housing Asset Management Strategy.

The review had been necessary in order to comply with the Consumer Standards and regulations as set out by the Regulator for Social Housing. The environmental impact had been considered as part of developing the strategy. This included specific objectives regarding EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) standards and new net-zero homes within the HRA stock.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:

The Updated MDH Asset Management Strategy in Annexe A be adopted.

(Proposed by Cllr F Letch MBE and seconded by Cllr B Holdman)

Reason for the decision

As set out in the report.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

48 **VARIATION TO THE STANDARD TENANCY AGREEMENT PROJECT PLAN**

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a verbal update from the Customer Engagement Coordinator regarding the Variation to the Standard Tenancy Agreement Project Plan.

The Tenancy Agreement document was having to be completely rewritten as a result of the new regulatory regime. The revised document was still in the phase of getting legal sign off but it was hoped the draft document could be brought before the Group at their March 2025 meeting with a view to the new Tenancy Agreement going live in late summer 2025.

Consideration was given to:

- The fact that MDH no longer issued Flexible Tenancies.
- Consultation with tenants would play a large part in finalising the new Tenancy Agreement.

49 **APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED TENANT MEMBERS**

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of Housing and Health providing some context around a proposal to recruit three suitable independent tenant members to the PDG. The purpose was to enable a more formalised mechanism for an established tenant voice and greater tenant scrutiny during the development of MDH policies and the consideration of housing service performance given the inherent impact matters have on the Council's residents.

The relevant details regarding the proposal were discussed and consideration was given to:

- The views of the local housing officers needed to be factored into part of the procedure for selecting prospective candidates.
- Whether the needs of tenants in towns and rural areas were the same or different?
- MDH needed a much stronger tenant 'voice' going forwards. It was important to reflect the independent views of tenants on policy matters.
- The aim was to have representative voices from the tenant community that were reflective of all ages, genders, backgrounds and family connections. It would also be important for representatives to have an ability to see issues from all angles not just their own.
- It was recognised that appointments may be difficult to manage and that it may take some time to get the right balance.
- Housing officers would be managing the appointments.
- Representatives would need to be adults who had signed a Tenancy Agreement with MDH, however, it was hoped that they would be able to bring the views and concerns of their wider families, including the younger generation.

- The Chair hoped that it might be possible to consider Care Leavers as potential candidates for the Co-Opted member role going forwards.

RECOMMENDED to Full Council that:

- a) The appointment of three Co-Opted Tenant Members to sit on the Homes Policy Development Group until April 2027 be approved;
- b) Delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing and Health in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Housing Assets and Property for the appointment of each Co-Opted Tenant Member.
- c) Delegated authority be given to the Director of Legal, People & Governance (Monitoring Officer) to make the necessary amendments to the constitution, including the amendment to the scheme of Members Allowances to include a special responsibility allowance for this position(s).

(Proposed by the Chair)

Reason for the decision

As set out in the report.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

50 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

The items already listed in the work programme for the next scheduled meeting in March 2025 were **NOTED**. However, as discussed earlier in the meeting, a proposal to hold a Special Meeting on 28th January 2025 had been **AGREED** so that the long list of items could be more evenly split and the workload upon the Group better managed across two meetings rather than one.

It was also **NOTED** that a report from the Downsizing Working Group would need to be presented to one of these meetings and added to the work programme.

(The meeting ended at 4.40 pm)

CHAIRMAN