

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on  
3 June 2025 at 2.15 pm

**Present**

**Councillors**

A Glover (Chair)  
C Adcock (Vice-Chair), J Cairney,  
S Chenore, G Czapiewski, C Harrower and  
H Tuffin

**Apology**

**Councillor**

N Letch

**Also Present**

**Councillors**

J Lock, S Robinson and D Wulff

**Also Present**

**Officers**

Richard Marsh (Director of Place & Economy), Simon  
Newcombe (Head of Housing & Health), Mike Lowman  
(Operations Manager for Housing), Sophie Richards  
(Customer Manager, Mid Devon Housing), Laura Woon  
(Democratic Services Manager) and Sarah Lees  
(Democratic Services Officer)

**Councillors**

**Online**

J Buczkowski, S J Clist, G Duchesne and L G J Kennedy

**Officers Online**

Dr Stephen Carr (Corporate Performance & Improvement  
Manager), Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property & Climate  
Resilience) Carole Oliphant (Housing Policy Officer) and  
David Parker (Democratic Services & Research and Policy  
Officer)

**1 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR 2025/2026**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr A Glover be elected Chair of the Homes Policy Development  
Group for the municipal year 2025/2026.

**2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR FOR 2025/2026**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr C Adcock be elected Vice Chair of the Homes Policy  
Development Group for the municipal year 2025/2026.

### 3 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr N Letch.

### 4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The following public questions were asked:

#### **Mr Barry Warren**

My observations and questions are prompted by item 12 on your agenda.

The report is prepared by the Head of Housing and Health.

#### Question 1

Is this the report which he told the March 2025 meeting he was going to present to give further reassurance that the Zed Pod developments were value for money and for people to be assured that right homes were being provided at the right cost?

After he had advised of his proposed actions the then Chair of this committee said “Make it as robust as possible to counter the little group of difficult people.”

#### Question 2

Is the report robust as required when there is manipulation of facts or the full truth is not being told?

An example of this is contained in paragraph 1.8 of the report where it states – “It is also worth noting that MDDC has also been instrumental in enabling the delivery of other affordable housing units within the district - for example the 70 new properties at Post Hill.” There are those who know the full story behind this site where a deal was done with the original developers to acquire the land for a 3 Rivers project that did not materialise and the land has been sold by MDDC at a loss of some £1.4 million. If the developers had built the houses as part of the original development some would already have been lived in for the past 3 years.

#### Question 3

Is this an example of due diligence and value for money?

The report gives information of grant funding which has been obtained which is excellent news for the MDDC finances.

#### Question 4

Is it correct for this grant monies to be deducted from a build cost to make costs per square meter of floor space look cheaper than it really was?

In true 'Yes Minister' comedy script the following appears on page 145 of your papers: Space standards – all residential schemes meet the nationally described space standards. As the formal Principal Designer and developer, Zed Pods are responsible for incorporating this into each building design and this is checked by MDDC Development Control at Planning Approval stage to ensure the minimum standards are met. Post-completion, as built measurements have been taken at several schemes to further verify compliance.

#### Question 5

This suggests that as built measurements have not been taken at all schemes. Which ones have not been so measured?

#### **Mr Paul Elstone**

My questions relate to Agenda Item 12.

Modular Home Value for Money Benchmarking Report.

A report which I fully consider is fatally flawed this including with some very basic maths errors plus factual errors that seriously distort results.

I have provided Committee members with a copy of a document plus attachments, and which I hope you have had the opportunity to read. A document I believe once scrutinised fully validates my statement.

#### Question 1

The report represents that the Bristol New Kingsland development as a high cost development this when compared to this Councils ZED POD's modular projects.

The factual information available shows something very different.

The gross square meter cost for the Bristol development is three thousand four hundred and seven pounds (£3,407)

ZED POD - Croft Estate, Sandford, development cost five thousand five hundred and ninety pounds £ 5,590 or 64% higher.

Shapland Place – Tiverton cost £5,103 or 50% higher

St Andrew – Cullompton cost £4,689 or 36% higher

And astoundingly while not mentioned in the report, Fir Close - Willand will cost £8,108 or 136% higher.

These cost fully exposing the accuracy and therefore validity of the Value for Money data you have been presented with

Why are the financial numbers in the report so very different from fact?

#### Question 2

Why does the report say that the Bristol Development is Traditional Build when the evidence says it's built with MMC structures and using robotics?

#### Question 3

Why does the report indicate that the Bristol Development is not as energy efficient than it really is and as the available evidence shows. Even having Passive House design components?

#### Question 4

How reasonably can the Eastleigh former Post Office development be considered as a Value for Money point of reference?

A four (4) story high block, built using a mix of traditional and modules, even with a lift.

Very importantly a development that has two commercial units on the ground floor. This as shown in the document provided to this committee?

#### Question 5

The benchmarking makes use of grant funding in various forms to reduce the apparent ZED POD development cost. Grant funding that in most instances could and should be applied to the external developments used as the reference this to normalise the quoted development cost.

Grants if applied to the Bristol development cost calculations it would further and substantially prove that this Councils ZED POD development schemes are not providing the anything like "Best Value" and by any reasonable measure.

Will this Committee accept that the data they have been provided with in the report is fundamentally (fatally) flawed and therefore defer making any recommendations to Cabinet based on its content, this until fully scrutinised?

The Chair stated that as the questions had not been received in advance, written responses would be provided within 10 working days and attached to the minutes.

## **5 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

No interests were declared under this item.

Members were reminded that interests could be declared at any point during the meeting.

## 6 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2025 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

## 7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair had no announcements to make.

## 8 START TIME OF MEETINGS

It was **AGREED** that the start time for meetings for the remainder of the municipal year continue to be at 2.15pm on Tuesday afternoons.

## 9 INTRODUCTION OF THE CO-OPTED TENANTS TO THE COMMITTEE (00:14:00)

The Chair welcomed and introduced the three new Co-Opted Tenants to their first meeting.

The three tenants were:

- a) Ian Henwood
- b) Marc Jones
- c) Thomas Sixsmith

Each of the Tenants provided a brief introduction to themselves and explained why and how they had become interested in being Co-Opted representatives on the Group.

It was explained that whilst the Co-Opted Tenants would not have any voting rights when it came to recommending policy to the Cabinet it would be extremely useful to the Group to receive their views and perspectives on policies and issues that affected tenants.

## 10 PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD FOR QUARTER 4 2024 - 2025 (00:22:00)

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED**, two slides \* showing performance information in the Mid Devon Housing area both under the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the general Fund (GF).

The dashboards aimed to give an 'at a glance' understanding of how services were performing in terms of performance measures, finance and risk. Any measures that were also part of the Corporate Plan were listed in yellow text.

The indicators were presented with current performance, the annual target and a RAG (red/amber/green) rating to indicate whether or not the Council was on track to meet its target. Overall performance was presented in a pie chart which combined the RAG ratings for both the performance and the finance measures.

## General Fund

- The Outturn relating to the General Fund was showing an under spend due to the late Homelessness Prevention Grant of £241k being received in 2024/25. Without that the service had slightly overspent, hence Red RAG status.

## Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

- MDH Delivery of new Social Housing - Red and New net-zero properties (also at Red) - There had been delays to live projects, as well as difficulties awarding contracts for some projects which had contributed to this. The data only included homes when they were available for occupancy. As such there should be a significant rise at the start of this new financial year as more homes became available for occupation, such as at St George's Court.
- Market delivery of new affordable homes Year To Date (YTD) was showing as Red. This was an annual performance indicator and detailed the gross number of affordable housing units built or created across the district. This represented the overall housing market's creation of affordable homes. The target would be revised alongside the new Local Plan.
- Complaints responded to within Complaints Handling Code timescales was Amber. There was 100% compliance in Q4, Q3, and Q2. The only underperformance was back in Quarter 1, when 3 complaints were not responded to within the code timescales.
- HRA – Outturn was showing as Red. This was for a number of reasons including the Post Hill development; costs of viability studies for developments which had not proceeded; and the costs of converting St. George's court into accessible housing.
- HRA – Tenant Income (Outturn) - This related to the reduction in rent in 2024/25 following the correction of the rent formula.
- HRA – Capital Outturn was showing as Amber. Spend was relatively close to the budget being within 5%. There were some projects under and over spending. The over spends generally related to Right-to-buy buybacks.
- HRA – Capital Slippage % of development projects (current) was showing as Amber. 10 out of 42 projects had slipped – again relatively good and quite common for capital projects. This was offset to a degree with 5 projects accelerated from future years.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Delivery of Social Housing – was this total or YTD? Could figures not reflect if they were year totals or work in progress? It was explained that the figure showing was the outturn figure for last year. It would be misleading to include properties that were acquired or developed but not yet available for letting, when these were fully online the numbers would be included. This was not a linear issue but would be shown in stages.
- Complaint Response Time target 100% - was that reasonable? It was explained that this was a mandatory code from the Housing Ombudsman and had been in place for the last three years for Housing. That Housing therefore had had time to embed procedures to deal with this and therefore aiming for the 100% target was achievable.

- MDH specific tenant engagement events (YTD) was shown as 206 with a target of 100. It was confirmed this was a typo and would be corrected, however the outturn was still above target.
- Two year's worth of data under the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures would be needed before a target could be set in relation to 'MDH Antisocial behaviour cases relative to the size of the landlord'.
- ASB reports were dealt with on a case by case basis. The Council had an ASB policy and toolkit to assist in tackling this issue. It could be time consuming and challenging with many factors to take into account.
- It was confirmed again that eviction was the very last resort with all other avenues having been explored.
- Reference to indices of multiple deprivation could be helpful in analysing and assessing ASB cases but this was a complex area.
- The Ombudsman would always look at the Council's policies in relation to complaints issues or ASB to check that the Council had done what it said it would do in the policy.
- It was confirmed it was not unusual for capital projects to slip.

Note: \* Slides previously circulated.

## 11 **MID DEVON HOUSING COMPLAINTS HANDLING REPORT 2024 - 2025** (01:01:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report and appendices \* from the Head of Housing & Health providing annual information in relation to the handling of complaints by Mid Devon Housing.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- This was necessarily a large report since the Ombudsman required the Council to demonstrate that Members had seen it and to meet the statutory Complaints Handling Code. The report provided a window into what the Council was getting right and what it was getting wrong.
- The report demonstrated that the Council was handling complaints well, in a timely fashion and that the numbers of complaints had dipped slightly. The service proactively encouraged complaints and when received worked hard to identify common themes and areas.
- Most complaints related to repairs as was to be expected given the volume of service requests. Officers held a monthly complaints and performance meetings and sought to capture lesson's learned to improve the service where it could.

Discussion took place regarding:

- It was confirmed that every single complaint was logged, however, if for example a complaint was made that a repair had not been undertaken but that every effort had been made by officers to visit the property at an agreed time but had been refused entry, then that part of the complaint would not be upheld.
- Equality Impact Assessments could be tightened up and more thoroughly considered prior to policies affecting tenants being written rather than being considered at a later stage in the process.

- Lessons Learned - this list did not include common lessons learned such as improving communications, compliance with policy and procedure or staff/contractor relations, the question was asked as to why not? It was confirmed that whilst not listed, these factors were always considered.
- All complaints opened were shown as closed within the report, did this mean none were carried over as it suggested there were no problems? It was explained that some complaints were not an issue for the Council to deal with but were referred to the Ombudsman and in general the Council did not have long term outstanding complaints, all matters having been dealt with wherever possible.

Note: \* Report and appendices previously circulated.

## 12 **VALUE FOR MONEY AND BEST PRACTICE IN MID DEVON HOUSING MODULAR SOCIAL HOUSING DELIVERY (01:31:00)**

The Group had before it a report \* from the Head of Housing & Health providing it with the strategic and policy context supporting the delivery of modular (modern methods of construction, MMC) social housing in the Mid Devon Housing (MDH) Housing Revenue Account (HRA) development programme.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The report dealt with some of the misconceptions regarding modular schemes. The report recognised the variety of different schemes that could be undertaken, not just modular but also more traditional methods of construction. The report provided a clear reference point moving forwards.
- The beginning of the report set out the key strategic position of the Council in terms of the national housing crisis.
- The Corporate Plan stated strong aspirations regarding a housing development programme. The Council had to try and navigate various Government funding schemes which were more orientated towards modern methods of construction and attempts to move towards net zero carbon emission.
- Limiting costs to the Council was a significant factor in determining build methods.
- The Council faced challenges in terms of infrastructure, utilities, economies of scale and the types of sites available for development. There were sometime planning schemes to consider as well as biodiversity, draining and flooding issues, all specific to individual sites.
- No two sites were the same making bench marking very difficult.
- When looking at net costs the Council's schemes were benchmarking well.
- Other factors the Council needed to consider were the speed of construction, the quicker a property was built the quicker it could be rented out as well as the effect of construction on other tenants and neighbours.
- Accommodation needed to be sympathetic to the surrounding area.
- Feedback had been very positive. Modular builds could be a benefit to tenants in terms of lower energy costs.
- This same report would be on the Scrutiny Committee agenda for 9 June 2025.

Consideration was given to:

- Future proofing – and the 60 year Building Regulation rule. It was explained that this regulation was the same for traditional builds as well as modular. It was exactly the same standard.
- Could the components of the Social Value Impact be measured? It was agreed it was very difficult to analyse the benefits to using prisoners for example in the construction process as a means of trying to ensure non-re-offending by providing trade skills.
- Was there a distinction between savings for MDDC and savings for residents?
- MMC were not automatically cheaper, however, at present it was not automatically a cheaper way to build homes. MMC required a constant pipeline, a repetition of product, and thus relied on economies of scale or highly localised manufacturing efficiencies and flexibility in order to generate ever-more efficient returns. Thus, larger scale projects and a consistent pipeline would mean eventual, more significant cost savings, but as it stood today, the industry was not at that scale. The Council had built or intended to build 93 MMC properties. What was the scale required?
- One of the tenants was able to provide first-hand experience of living in a Zed Pod modular home describing it as 'spacious' and 'perfectly sized'. Overheating was an issue and it would be nice if it could be designed to have more windows but on the whole the positives outweighed the negatives and as tenants they would score it 8/10.
- The relationship between the Council and Zed Pod Ltd was on a contract by contract basis. The Council was open to looking at other types of development and contractors if necessary.
- The Council had considered adding modular extensions to existing housing stock particularly when considering adaptations, however, there were challenges with the planning process and the groundworks needed to be right in order to proceed.
- It was confirmed that one of the scheme due to be completed later in the year would provide 10 new modular builds providing wheelchair access. The service tried very hard to marry up particular needs with available and future properties. Meeting local need was a priority.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that:

- a) The report be **NOTED**.
- b) The Cabinet continues to adopt an HRA development programme with a focus on delivering MMC, modular net-zero social housing where possible and viable as part of the Council's future Housing Strategy.

(Proposed by the Chair)

Notes:

- (i) \* Report previously circulated.
- (ii) Cllr G Czapiewski abstained from voting and requested that this be recorded.
- (iii) Cllr S Chenore left the meeting at 16:15pm and was not therefore present during the vote.
- (iv) Cllrs Cairney and Adcock were unable to vote to as they had left the meeting room during the discussion of the item.

### 13 **MID DEVON HOUSING (MDH) SERVICE DELIVERY REPORT FOR Q4 AND OUTTURN FOR 2024-2025 (02:37:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Head of Housing & Health providing a quarterly update to Members on activity undertaken by Mid Devon Housing (MDH) including some relating to enforcement. It also provided some indication of the final outturn expected at the end of the year.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- When a property was left as a void, if necessary, it needed to be brought back up to the Decent Home Standard in order to be re-let and for a number of reasons this sometimes took time.
- Not all tenants could be forced to have non-safety related upgrades.
- It was confirmed that certain checks needed to be made legally, for example, gas safety checks.
- There were all kinds of voids but overall it was important to remember that there was a 97% occupancy rate.

Note: \* Report previously circulated.

### 14 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

The items already listed in the work programme for the next scheduled meeting were **NOTED**. The Group were informed that the Housing Strategy may need to slip until later in the year as the Government were due to issue an important update in relation to housing in the coming months and this would affect the direction of the MDH Strategy.

(The meeting ended at 16.56 pm)

**CHAIR**