

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 9 September 2025 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

J Cairney, S Chenore, G Czapiewski,
B Holdman, N Letch, H Tuffin, Henwood,
Jones and Sixsmith

Apologies

Councillors

C Adcock, A Glover and C Harrower

Also Present

Councillor

J Lock

Also Present

Officers

Simon Newcombe (Head of Housing & Health), Paul Deal
(Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Dr
Stephen Carr (Corporate Performance & Improvement
Manager), Mike Lowman (Operations Manager for
Housing) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer)

Councillors

Online

D Wulff and L G J Kennedy and D Wulff

Officer Online

Sophie Richards (Customer Manager)

Also in

Attendance

I Henwood (Co-Opted Tenant), M Jones (Co-Opted
Tenant) and T Sixsmith (Co-Opted Tenant)

**15 ELECTION OF CHAIR (FOR THIS MEETING ONLY) - CHAIR OF COUNCIL
PRESIDING**

As the Chair of the Homes Policy Development Group had sent her apologies for the meeting and the Vice Chair had also sent his apologies, there was a need to elect a replacement Chair for the purposes of this meeting only.

RESOLVED that Cllr J Cairney be elected Chair for the purposes of this meeting only.

(Proposed by Cllr B Holdman and seconded by Cllr S Chenore).

16 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR (FOR THIS MEETING ONLY)

RESOLVED that Cllr B Holdman be elected Vice Chair for the purposes of this meeting only.

(Proposed by Cllr J Cairney and seconded by Cllr S Chenore)

17 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from:

- Cllr C Adcock who was substituted by Cllr B Holdman.
- Cllr A Glover
- Cllr C Harrower

18 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

19 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

No interests were declared under this item.

20 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2025 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

21 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair had the following announcements to make:

- There was a great deal of important business to discuss on the agenda, he encouraged all participants to be succinct when asking their questions and making comments.
- He advised the Co-Opted Tenants not to make comment in relation to the Rents Error item as there would be a clash of interests.
- He drew the Group's attention to the fact that a previous Chair of the Homes Policy Development Group and former Member of Mid Devon District Council, Cllr Ron Dolley, had recently passed away. The condolences of the Group wished to be passed to his family. The Chair stated that he had been a 'delightful man' who always had time for you and he would be sadly missed.

22 PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD Q1 (00:10:00)

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.

A summary of the performance position was presented as follows:

General Fund

- Home Improvement Loans sanctioned was showing as amber. Performance was just below the target position at the end of quarter 1.
- Private Sector Housing Service requests response rate was showing as amber. This was due to an administrative error which had now been rectified. Performance was 100% for Q1, not 90% as stated on the Dashboard.
- Homes PDG Projected Outturn was showing as amber. This was due to higher spend on Community Alarms installations.

Housing Revenue Account

- Mid Devon Housing (MDH) - Delivery of new Social Housing and New MDH net-zero MMC properties were both showing as red. It was stated that there were homes under construction and most were expected to be delivered in Q3 and Q4.
- MDH routine repairs completed on time was showing as amber. This was just behind target, with 1,129 routine repairs completed on time out of 1,213. Q2 performance had improved and was currently ahead of target. This would be seen in the Q2 Dashboard.
- HRA Projected Tenant Income was showing as amber. This was due to a very minor variation, made up on £116k loss of income from voids, which was largely offset by £110k increase in affordable rent income.
- HRA Projected Capital Outturn was showing as red across 18 projects with a budgeted spend in 2025/26 of £23.5m, 9 were underspending to a value of £10.5m due to slippage for a variety of reasons, such as delays in planning, legal or tendering. For current stock maintenance and renovations – there was a net £107k overspend largely due to increased works against modernisation and renewables. This was partially offset by underspends in glazing replacements and reduced responsive maintenance works.
- HRA Capital Slippage percentage of development projects was showing as red. 9 out of 34 projects were slipping. These were largely development projects.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Whether the number of unoccupied and unfurnished empty homes figure was 'reasonable'? This needed more context in future.
- The target of '50' new MDH net zero properties was a challenge but current and ongoing development was moving towards this.

Note: * Slides previously circulated.

23 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (00:17:00)

The Group had before it a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) presenting the updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which covered the period 2026/27 to 2028/29 and which discussed initial options for cost pressures/savings or income related to the services covered by the Policy Development Group.

The Head of Finance, Property and Climate Resilience stated that the report needed to be considered in two distinct halves, firstly the General Fund and secondly the Housing Revenue Account.

The report was a little different to that provided in previous years. This was due to the raft of changes expected from 2026/27 and the longer term restrictions placed upon the Council by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The report didn't give a forecast shortfall to be addressed. Instead it highlighted the unprecedented level of uncertainty faced by all councils in respect of funding from 2026/27 onwards and estimated a range that the shortfall could fall within.

The Chancellor's Autumn Budget would not be available until the end of November 2025. This would have a knock on effect of delaying the detail at individual local authority level. The uncertainty regarding future funding could not be overstated.

General Fund Budget Options

Over the summer officers had identified a range of budget options to address the budget shortfall, using the Red, Amber and Green (RAG) assessment, which were being presented to the relevant Policy Development Groups for discussion, with the recommendation to support the Green and Amber options.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Options

This was largely based on assumptions, including the level of Pay Award, the price of utilities, contractor / materials pricing and income projections. These would be kept under review and would be updated and brought back to the November PDG as more information became available. As shown in Appendix 5, the forecast indicated a funding shortfall of £541k in 2026/27 rising to £1,796k over the 3-year forecast. Therefore savings ideas and proposals were required.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The need to estimate the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) due to such uncertainty.

- It was sensible to be prudent and 'over cautious' when assessing the future budget due to the unprecedented circumstances.
- The proposal to increase the budget in relation to Climate Change needed to be considered given the forecast financial position and the implication it might have in terms of finding further savings in order to be able to afford it.
- The expected increase in income due to the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and that this would offset the loss of the Devon County Council Share Savings.
- The question marks shown in the report against the Collection Fund which were due to so many unknowns at this stage of the budget setting process.
- The Homes for Ukraine Scheme would neither be reduced or expanded, the Council would continue to seek to do what was required of it by Government.
- The robust approach being taken as regards vacancy approvals by senior management.
- Temporary accommodation costs.
- Whether the figures took account of the delay of 6 weeks in the payment of Universal Credit.
- 'Rent Convergence' was explained as a process of gradually aligning social rent levels across the country to ensure fairness and consistency. This process aimed to have people pay similar rents for similar properties while remaining below market rates. The effects of the increase of £1 per week and £2 per week were discussed. 'Rent Convergence' was currently out for consultation by the government with the outcome determining the level of the weekly increase allowed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:

- a. The updated MTFP position for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account covering the years 2026/27 to 2028/29 be **NOTED**.
- b. The budget proposals as set out in Appendices 2, 3 and 6 be approved.

(Proposed by the Chair)

Reason for the decision

By undertaking regular reviews of the MTFP the Council can ensure that its Corporate Plan priorities are affordable. The implications of the budget gap were set out within the paper. Many areas require greater clarity, particularly around national funding and possible changes to Government Policy. Therefore a number of key assumptions underpinned the reported position, which would be refined as greater clarity was received through the budget setting process.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

24 MID DEVON HOUSING MOBILITY SCOOTER POLICY REPORT (01:01:00)

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of Housing & Health setting out a proposed new policy in relation to mobility scooters in flats.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- Clear fire safety guidance had been received by both the Government and Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue and as a housing provider the Council needed to adhere to this.
- The issue had come to light as a result of a visit from the Fire Service to the St George's Court development in Tiverton which had two lifts and the potential for mobility scooters to travel up and down the lifts visiting various flats was therefore increased. Whilst these were 'game changing' leisure devices for many people with impaired mobility it needed to be recognised that these were bulky items that had the potential to block access and exit points in an emergency. With further risks due to potential fires.
- The range and quality of mobility scooters varied greatly.
- Following the approval of the policy, tenants would be able to make informed choices about which properties they would prefer to live in.

Consideration was given to the following:

- The Council would not be installing charging points at the moment since mobility scooters were classed as leisure vehicles and were not covered as part of the Council's Aids and Adaptations Policy.
- All tenants had been made aware of the proposed policy and the legal requirements upon the Council.
- Support e.g. with PAT (Portable Appliance) Testing could be provided for tenants affected through the handyman service.
- The Housing Service was currently looking at the overall mobility needs for its tenants across the whole district.
- There were currently 270 MDH flats above ground floor, officers were not aware of any scooters currently being carried upstairs in those properties. It was estimated that approximately 10 properties might be affected.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that it recommends to full Council:

The adoption of the new Mobility Scooter in Flats Policy and the Equality Impact Assessment contained in Annexes A and B respectively.

(Proposed by Cllr N Letch and seconded by Cllr G Czapiewski)

Reason for the decision

As a registered provider of social housing, the Council must comply with the regulatory standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing. In particular, that it complied with all relevant safety legislation including the mitigation and management of fire risks and meet the wider requirements of the statutory Safety and Quality Standard (consumer standard).

This policy had been developed in close consideration with the latest the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) safety guidance for mobility scooters, noting both their benefits and associated fire risks.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

25 **VARIATION OF TENANCY AGREEMENT (01:20:00)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of Housing & Health setting out the steps needed to meet the legal requirements for varying the terms and conditions of tenancy for existing tenants.

The contents of the report were outlined with particular reference to the following:

- This document set out the rights and responsibilities of tenants.
- 3000 consultation packs had been sent out regarding the Variation to the Tenancy Agreement (TA).
- All references to Flexible Tenancies had been removed and a new clause added for CCTV.
- More detail had been added regarding Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and keeping people safe.
- Multiple ways for tenants to respond to the consultation had been offered. The consultation had ended on 30 June 2025.
- 214 responses had been received which equated to approximately 7%.
- The majority of the responses had said that the new TA was clear and sensible. There were some concerns regarding the use of communal spaces.
- The aim was to issue the new Tenancy Agreement by the end of October 2025 following approval.
- This was a vital step towards modernising the housing service.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Whether or not powers around ASB would be strengthened as a result of this new document. It was confirmed that they would be re-emphasised.
- A response rate of 7% was typical following a consultation.
- It was felt that for many 'not responding' was probably a sign that they were 'happy'.

RECOMMENDED to that Cabinet that:

- a) The Tenancy Agreement is approved subject to any responses from new tenants signed up after the preliminary consultation ended.
- b) Delegated authority be given to Head of Housing and Health (in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Assets and Property Services) to review the consultation responses from the new tenants and authorise such changes to the new tenancy agreement as he considers necessary in the light of any late consultation responses.
- c) Delegated authority be given to Head of Housing and Health (in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Assets and Property Services) to draft and serve the notice of variation to existing secure/introductory tenants under section 103 of the Housing Act 1985 to vary the terms and condition of their tenancies so that they are on the terms and conditions of the new tenancy agreement.

(Proposed by the Chair)

Reason for the decision

As a registered provider (RP) of social housing, the Council was obliged to comply with the requirements of the Housing Act 1985. The specific requirements within the Act with regard to the legal requirements for introducing a new Tenancy Agreement were set out within the report.

The Council's legal team had been closely engaged through this process with regard to the updated Tenancy Agreement itself and the notice/adoption process to ensure legal compliance.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

26 **MID DEVON HOUSING RENT ERROR UPDATE (01:42:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) and the Head of Housing & Health providing an update on the corrective measures completed and next steps in order to rectify an identified historic rent setting error.

The contents of the report were outlined with particular reference to the following:

- A brief summary of the historic background to the report.
- There had been progress since the issue was last reported to the Group. A significant amount of chasing had been undertaken with affected tenants but not everybody wanted to engage with the Council where refunds have been offered.
- All and non-benefit Housing Benefit claims for live tenancies had now been processed.
- The Council was reliant on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to assist with various tenant calculations and this was proving extremely complicated. At the moment there was a large cohort where the claims could of Universal Credit claimants where the refunds could not be processed due to individual complications and these tenants were being encouraged to engage directly with the DWP.
- The Council was not the only housing provider in this situation.
- The work of the Rent Recovery Team had ensured that the Council was ahead of the game where it could be.

Consideration was given to:

- Concern that Universal Credit claimants were being kept in the loop. It was confirmed that all affected tenants had been written to.
- The Council had no legal right to know what benefits a tenant received.
- The Council had not received any complaints so far from tenants, they understood that the Council was waiting for the DWP.
- It was confirmed that the resources to support this work would continue until the process was complete.
- Advice was being provided to other local authorities who were experiencing the same issues.
- The team were confident nobody had been unjustly evicted as a result of this issue.

Note: * Report previously considered.

27 **MID DEVON HOUSING SERVICE DELIVERY REPORT FOR Q1 2025-2026 (02:00:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Housing & Health containing performance information as measured in line with the guidance relating to the Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM's).

The Chair stated that due to the time and the length of the meeting, unless the Group had anything urgent they wanted to ask, he requested that any questions in relation to this item be held over to the next meeting.

The Group did not have any urgent issues they wished to raise under this item at the current time.

The Head of Housing & Health briefly explained that the service was performing well, quarter 1 data was strong and was expected to improve in the coming quarters. Annual repairs had taken a dip but all safety measures were where they should be.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

28 **NATIONAL HOUSING UPDATE BRIEFING (02:05:00)**

The Group received a presentation providing a summary of national changes in the social housing sector within the context of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) 'five-step plan for renewal' (July 2025). This plan was focussed on increasing the supply of social housing and continuing change in the safety and quality of homes.

The presentation included the following information:

- Nationally there was not enough social and affordable housing (MHCLG July 2025).
- Locally, the Devon Housing Commission report (2024) had identified the same issues across the county.
- Mid Devon's Housing Strategy aimed to build / acquire more MDH social housing properties, grow development pipeline, invest in the current stock, acquire temporary accommodation properties and support 100% of Homelessness presentation.
- The Government would provide a boost to affordable homes funding through the new Social and Affordable Homes Programme (SAHP)
- Sector financial capacity:
 - **10-year rent cap settlement** – would allow for annual increases of CPI (Consumer Prices Index) + 1% from April 2026.
 - **Rent convergence** – bringing rent for historic tenancies up to national Formula Rent and aligning social rent levels over time. There was currently a consultation on £1 or £2 per week.
 - Currently more than half MDH tenants had long-standing rents that sat below Formula Rent that could only be lifted when the tenancy changed.

- **Continued provision of low-interest loans** to support housing development. This was still borrowing that had to be sustainable within the wider Housing Revenue Account.
- There were a number of regulatory changes including:
 - **Updated Decent Homes Standard (DHS)** consultation.
 - **Implementation of Awaab's Law** from October 2025. There were stringent timelines for investigating and resolving damp & mould and emergency hazards. MDH were putting processes and resources in place to meet this.
 - **Mandatory full (inspection) electrical safety checks** every five years from November 2025. MDH had already begun significant advance work towards this.
 - Proposals to implement **minimum EPC Band C energy standard** within social rental sector by 2030. Again, MDH had undertaken significant advance work towards this.
 - **Mandatory Competence and Conduct Standard.** This would come into force in October 2026 setting out minimum qualification standards for specific housing staff/roles.
- There was a raft of additional Right to Buy changes.
- There would be a greater tenant focus in terms of the 'Resident Experience Innovation Fund', allocation policies and tenants access to information. This increased focus would mandate specific requirements on housing providers.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The Housing Service faced a lot of challenges and the team as whole were praised for working hard and being so proactive.
- The Government had said that damp & mould was an issue that needed to be solely dealt with by individual local authorities. There would be no additional funding to support this work. However, this Council had a robust system in place to tackle this difficult issue.
- The 'Rent Convergence' issue and the difference to a tenant of being charged either £1 or £2 extra per week. These were not big sums and after 10 years this proposal would allow the Council to be back up to the Formula Rent level providing fairness and consistency across properties.
- Regarding the competency issue and the future need to ensure all officers were trained and qualified where necessary, it was confirmed that the compliance rate for MDH was currently at 56%, however there is a period transition and the Council have several years to be fully compliant.
- It was hoped that a new Tenancy Manager would be starting in a few weeks time.

29 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (02:33:00)

The items already listed in the work programme for the next scheduled meeting were **NOTED**.

It was requested that the following be added to the agenda for the next meeting:

- Grass cutting for sheltered housing units.

It was also **NOTED** that the Housing Strategy would need to slip until early 2026 as the Government were currently undertaking a number of initiatives which would have an impact on the MDH Strategy therefore it would be sensible to delay bringing it before Members until then.

(The meeting ended at 4.51 pm)

CHAIR