

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 DECEMBER 2007 AT 12.30PM

Present:	Terry Anderson	David Payce
	Alison Baxter	Viv Phelps
	Stephen Collier	Rod Simons
	Bob Halpin	Joan Smith
	Lin Kaczanow	Tony Bodgin (ECC)
	(observer East area)	Steve Deakin (ECC)
	Alison Moore	Steve Warran (ECC)
		Jenny Berry (ECC)

1. Apologies

Moira Barker, Gina Goodfellow, George Hood, Gemma Lissaman, Ann Parchot, Marion Watkins

2. Accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2007

The minutes were accepted with the addition of apologies from Viv Phelps and under item 4, Feedback from the Committee included: ... Focus Group for people with physical **add and mental health** disabilities.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

Point 3, item 4. Terry still to email website address re. digital upgrades, for inclusion in Insight.

Point 4. TB mentioned that another Tenant Liaison Officer would be doing work next year to involve young people.

Any Other Business. Reminder of TPAS Chairing skills training on 30 & 31 January in Exeter. Bob Halpin requested booking for both days and Alison Baxter and Alison Moore for 31 January. Other training will be planned following on from Jenny Vernon's initial training. Evening training sessions are possible.

4. Reporting Housing Performance to all tenants/leaseholders

It was agreed that content and presentation of Housing Performance information should be considered by the Editorial Board and their findings to be reported back to the January TALC meeting for further discussion and decision.

5. Performance Review Committee Report

There was no report from the Performance Review Committee.

6. Feedback from mock inspection

The inspection feedback reported that many of our tenants and leaseholders were happy with the services provided by the Council. This was particularly pleasing as many of the tenants and leaseholders who took part in the focus groups were not usually involved in giving feedback to the Council or part of any formal tenant participation structure. The inspection report contains over 400 recommendations for improvement and these are being sorted into Service areas. The recommendations will be checked to assess whether they appear correct and then prioritised for action to help towards maximising our performance prior to a possible future Audit Commission Housing Inspection. Wider issues covering a range of the recommendations will be considered next year with residents (including TALC) being involved from the early stages. Plans will be drawn up early in 2008 showing the order of priority and the person responsible for reporting back on each issue under review. Resources will be identified and people employed in the areas needing improvement. It is intended (subject to approval from the Scrutiny Committee and Executive) to re-introduce the Housing Operations Manager's post that reports directly to the Head of Housing. The post will manage services to tenants and leaseholders and drive through the changes required as a result of the housing inspection. The postholder will support section heads and give a valuable overview to the service. A similar post still exists on the strategic housing side of the unit. Tenants will be involved in the recruitment process. Tenant training will be important in achieving valuable involvement in the changes planned.

7. Budget/rent increase for 2008/2009

Exeter City Council annually receives approximately £14 million in housing rents of which £3.5 million last year was paid back to the Government under the national subsidy regime. This money is then redistributed to other Councils and ALMOs who cannot fund their decent homes programme. Next year the amount we will have to pay will increase to approximately £4.3 million. The Government has also been paying a rent restriction 'top-up' fee that will amount to £220,000 in 2008/2009. This will no longer be paid. As a result these changes will amount to a budget reduction of about £1 million for 2008/2009. Nevertheless the Housing Capital Programme will go ahead for 2008/2009, but will need to be re-considered for 2009/2010 and future years. The reduction in budget will also limit the amount of improvements that can be made following the mock inspection. ECC's Leader and Housing Portfolio Holder have written to the Government pointing out that priorities set as a result of tenant consultation have been badly affected. It is hoped some changes will be made to the calculation by the time the final Subsidy Determination is released in January. Value for money is now more critical as everything we do needs to be scrutinised and examined. There will be a Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and Asset Management Strategy review requiring TALC input during 2008/09. This will determine the true impact of the budget cut and help us prioritise future programmes. ECC Housing is currently debt free and holds about £2.9 million in reserves, but most of this should be retained for possible emergencies.

Rents in 2008/2009 will increase by 5.7%. An increase of 8.25% would be required to reach the Government's predicted target rent but the Subsidy Determination caps the rent at a level that takes account of general inflation plus a small increase to help us increase our rents over time up to the target rent. Full convergence is not expected until 2016/17.

Leaseholder service charges are not affected as these are based on actual costs per block of flats. ECC intends, over the next 18 months, to develop a service charge breakdown for tenants living in blocks of flats so that tenants and leaseholders will then be able to choose higher levels of service if they are willing to pay for them. This information needs to be incorporated into the Tenancy Agreement so that if tenants are in receipt of Housing Benefit these charges would be covered by the Benefit.

8. Team Building Training (Jenny Vernon)

9. Any other relevant business