



Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

21 November 2012

-: Present :-

Councillor Thomas (J) (Chairman)

Councillors Bent, Darling (Vice-Chair), Hytche, Pentney, Pountney and Stockman

(Also in attendance: Councillors Davies, Cowell, Thomas (D) and Tyerman)

34. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barnby and Kingscote.

It was also reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, the membership of the Board had been amended to include Councillor Hytche instead of Councillor Hill.

35. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 30 October 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

36. Urgent Items

The Chairman reported that the Board would consider the draft Corporate Plan which was not included on the agenda as he was of the opinion that it was urgent by reason of special circumstances i.e. the matter having arisen since the agenda was prepared and it was unreasonable to delay a decision until the next meeting.

However, it was noted that the draft was not currently available and therefore the meeting would adjourn at the end of its scheduled business to allow for consideration on 30 November 2012.

37. Allocations Policy and Local Tenancy Strategy

The Executive Lead for Strategic Planning, Housing and Energy and the Strategic Housing Manager presented their report which provided information on a review of how the Council made social housing allocations, managed its waiting lists and made use of tenancies for social housing as a result of new powers available under the Localism Act 2011.

The Localism Act had created a statutory requirement for all local authorities to develop a Tenancy Strategy which must include the high level objectives that registered providers in the area are able to "have regard to" when considering their

own tenancy policies. The Tenancy Strategy should be developed alongside the authority's Allocation Scheme.

In considering the officer recommendations to the Council that:

- (i) the Council continue with the Devon Home Choice partnership agreement and allocations policy and review the future policy approach when the next review of Devon Home Choice is completed; and
- (ii) the Local Tenancy Strategy (appended to the report) be published in January 2013 and local registered housing providers be encouraged to have due regard to Torbay's Local Tenancy Strategy

the Overview and Scrutiny Board made the following points:

- There was a view expressed that the use of Flexible Tenancies should be limited in order to foster better balanced housing estates.
- The impact of housing benefit reforms on social landlord tenants would need to be reviewed in order to understand the level of demand for homes with specific numbers of bedrooms.
- The Council should look to achieve more, within the Tenancy Strategy, than the statutory minimum in relation to the Military Covenant.

38. Council Tax Support Scheme

Having previously considered the impact of welfare reform and the development of the Council Tax Support Scheme, the Board gave its final consideration to the proposed Scheme which was presented alongside the results of the consultation and the final Equalities Impact Assessment.

In response to questioning, the Board heard that the technical discounts which the Council could apply to Council Tax were being actively considered and any changes would be proposed when the Council Tax Base was considered by the Council. It was suggested that this information could be modelled and provided alongside the Council Tax Support Scheme.

It was noted that the Equalities Impact Assessment had highlighted a disproportionate impact on households where a Band D restriction combined with the 75% limitation would apply and that, as a result, it was being recommended that this proposal be delayed for the first year of the Scheme to enable affected customers to consider alternative arrangements.

It was also noted that it was proposed that a Hardship Fund of £80,000 be established but that the details of how the Fund would operate were currently being developed. Similarly a Vulnerability Policy was being developed that this had not been available for consideration alongside the Scheme.

In considering the reports before it and the answers received at its meeting, the Board made the following comments:

Given the potential impact on vulnerable people, as identified in the Equalities Impact Assessment, the Council should look to continue to provide a proactive system of managing the impact of the Council Tax Support Scheme rather than a reactive system. The Overview and Scrutiny Board is concerned that there may not be the capacity within the relevant teams to respond to concerns identified via (amongst other things) the Council's automated systems. To mitigate these fears, the draft Hardship Scheme and Vulnerability Policy should be provided to the Council when it considers the Council Tax Support Scheme.

(Note: During consideration of the item in Minute 38, Councillor Thomas (J) declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Director of Shekinah.)

39. Adjournment

At this juncture the meeting was adjourned until the rising of the Priorities and Resources Review Panel on 30 November 2012.

Chairman