

93. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

There were no urgent matters.

94. TARKA HOUSING

The Housing Manager presented the report. She advised that this was one of the bi-annual cycle of reports provided to update the Committee since the transfer of stock in December 2007.

The Housing Manager drew the Committee's attention to the 'Stock Transfer Agreement' document she had brought to the meeting to illustrate the large quantity of information passed to Tarka Housing at the time of transfer. She advised that the key aspects of the agreement within the first five year's undertakings had now been completed. The majority of promises had been achieved with the exception of those which had variations agreed.

The Housing Manager stated that the relationship with Tarka Housing was now moving into a new phase whereby the two organisations, Tarka Housing and TDC, will work together in partnership and look at the risks involved with this. She advised that parts of the Transfer Agreement will continue for the next 20 years and there will continue to be legal obligations.

The Committee were informed that four Members from TDC were on the Tarka Board. In addition the Council has a 'golden share' with a voting right equivalent to 33% of the votes to be cast at an AGM or EGM. This voting right would be exercised by the Head of Paid Service (as Torridge is a Fourth Option Council, Members could not be delegated to exercise this vote).

The Housing Manager advised that the purpose of the presentation by Tarka Homes at this meeting, was to look beyond the transfer of stock, to the partnership that will be in place for the future.

The Housing Manager and Mr Barnard gave a joint presentation.

It was stated that one of the first challenges being faced, was managing the consequences of the Welfare Reform. This was expected to have a significant impact on Tarka Housing and how tenants paid their rents. The rent payment system had changed and future payments were to be made by the individual tenant.

A general discussion followed on the 'bedroom tax' and scarcity of one-bedroom flats and also the threshold age limit and when the new reforms would not apply. It was mentioned that those of pensionable age are protected and will not be affected by the 'bedroom tax'.

The Committee were informed that Tarka Housing were organising an event to enable tenants to meet to discuss their housing requirements. At the event it would be possible to make arrangements to swap properties to match needs.

Mr Barnard advised the Committee that Tarka Housing had been re-branded 'Westward' and this was to avoid duplication and also a cost saving move. He further advised that the company had been re-structured. He stated that Tarka Housing were looking to help tenants reduce energy costs and water bills. He added that they were the first Housing Association to pilot a scheme with South West Water Authority to identify residents who were in 'water debt' and to help them reduce their bills.

The Corporate Services Manager asked if Tarka Housing took payments in their offices. It was replied that there was no facility to take payments in the offices, but that payment can

be made at any Post Office or Shop under the Paypoint Shop scheme or by one of their other payment methods. Mr Barnard advised that they encourage payment to be made through direct debits.

There was further general discussion regarding:

- Northgate, Hartland – Councillor Redwood asked for information regarding the proposed development. He advised that Councillor Dart had received calls about this and Councillors would like a 'heads-up' regarding similar situations. Mr Barnard apologised and stated in future Tarka Housing would endeavour to keep Members informed of similar situations in their Wards.
- Mr Barnard advised that 20% of the Westward programme was being invested in the Torridge area.
- Mr Barnard stated that Westward were committed to their work with TDC.

The Chair thanked Mr Barnard for his very interesting and well explained presentation.

She asked Mr Barnard to reply to the written questions which had been sent to him prior to the meeting. Mr Barnard replied to each question:

- The communication issue was being addressed and he showed the Committee a new leaflet which was being sent to all tenants which detailed how they could become involved.
- All tenants will receive an invitation to attend an AGM at the Durrant House Hotel on 16 July at 7pm.
- The Housing Manager advised that Tarka Housing do not run the Tenants Panel as this is run by the tenants themselves. Mr Barnard added that the Tenants Panel would carry on if the tenants continued to want it.
- Mr Barnard advised that a Youth Engagement Strategy had been adopted by the Board a year ago. They were working with the local job centre and had employed two people on work experience.
- The Housing Manager suggested that the Neighbourhood Strategy was brought back to the next Overview & Scrutiny (External) Committee meeting that Tarka Housing attend.
- The Tarka Housing Handyman service had not been established due to lack of financial viability.
- The Mount at Appledore still had ongoing issues. Mr Barnard advised that the contractors had been dismissed. Further work was planned at the site.
- Mr Barnard confirmed that the number of grass cuts was being maintained at the previous level.
- Bull Hill car park had been problematic and a variety of charges had been in place. Mr Barnard advised that Tarka Housing were trying to identify who owned which spaces and to rectify the inconsistencies. They were looking to resolve the problems with Bull Hill car park.

Mr Rayner asked if Tarka Housing were engaging with Safer North Devon Partnership regarding anti-social behaviour. Mr Barnard replied that he would need to check this with his Officer and report back.

Councillor Redwood stated that there was a lack of one-bed units in Hartland and asked if consideration could be given to making this a priority. Mr Barnard replied that he would feed back this information.

Councillor Redwood expressed concern that Tarka Housing had taken only twelve houses

to look at the energy efficiency and fuel poverty. Mr Barnard advised that a further twelve houses were going to be surveyed, giving a total of 24 houses. These would be at scattered locations to give a broad picture of areas of fuel poverty.

The Chair thanked Tarka Housing for answering the questions.

Mr Barnard and Ms Patt left the meeting at 11.30am.

Mr Rayner commented that having viewed the Tarka Housing leaflet he noted a difference between 'involvement' and 'communication'. He suggested there was a need for more proactive 'communication'. The Housing Manager suggested that the next time Tarka Housing address the Overview & Scrutiny (External) Committee they are asked to outline their Communication Strategy and to differentiate it from 'involvement'.

The Chair asked the Committee if there were any proposals following the presentation.

Councillor Redwood recommended that if Tarka Housing have any issues in a Ward, that they notify the Ward Member for the area.

Councillor Fulford proposed an amendment - that all Housing Associations are required to notify the Ward Member of any social housing issues in their Ward.

A discussion followed on the proposal to send a letter to Tarka Housing and other Housing Associations. The letter to ask them to contact the Torridge Ward Member with any issue that affects their Ward. It was suggested that the letter could only be applied to Tarka Housing and not Housing Associations generally.

There was further discussion regarding who at TDC, the Housing Association should notify regarding the social housing issues. There was concern that they would not know which Member was responsible for which area. The Housing Manager proposed enclosing a detailed list of Wards and Members with the letter.

It was proposed by Councillor Redwood, seconded by Councillor Langmead and

Resolved:

That the Housing Manager will send a letter to Housing Associations asking, that if there are major issues or projects in a Ward, then they contact and inform the Torridge Ward Member. That a list of Wards and Members be enclosed with the letter.

Vote: (For - Unanimous)

Councillor Lausen left the meeting at 11.55am.

95. SOCIAL HOUSING – The Role of 'Designated Persons' in Complaints Handling

The Housing Manager stated that this Social Housing Report had been to the Community & Resources Committee who had resolved to ask the Overview & Scrutiny (External) Committee to take an oversight of the new 'Designated Persons' role.

The Committee were informed that as from the 1 April 2013 the Localism Act 2011 created a new role for Councillor, that of 'designated person', to assist in dealing with social housing tenants' complaints.

The Housing Manager advised that the preliminary to appointing a Designated Person is receipt of a complaint. She further advised that the Complaints File is in the Members

Room (an orange ring-binder).

The Committee were informed that a Designated Person would help resolve the complaint in one of two ways; either resolving the complaint themselves or referring the complaint straight to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman may or may not take on the case.

It was discussed that a group of four Members should be formed to develop expertise and set up procedures to act in the role of 'Designated Persons'. The group to meet with the Corporate Services Manager and also the Housing Manager to formalise procedures. It was noted that O&S (External) would have the capacity to scrutinise this and that they would receive regular updates regarding the number of complaints and the number of resolved complaints.

The Chair clarified that Volunteers were required to fill the four positions. The Housing Manager added that any Member of TDC could Volunteer.

The Corporate Services Manager suggested that this be added to the agenda for the next O&S (External) Committee meeting and Volunteers were elected to post in that meeting. He added that details would also be put in the Members Bulletin.

The Housing Manager reported that there had already been one complaint dealt with by Councillor Lausen who had volunteered to act as Designated Person in that instance. Councillor Lausen gave an overview of the case. It was agreed that the Volunteers should be Non-Tarka Board Members. Councillor Lausen agreed to answer questions and provide information about his recent experience as a Designated Person to any Members who may be interested in volunteering.

The Housing Manager advised that the Designated Person has no role other than to mediate and would not be able to award compensation. A compensation claim would either have to go to the Ombudsman or through the legal process. She further advised that although it was proposed that there be four Volunteers, the actual number may be more or less.

It was proposed, seconded and –

Resolved:

That 'Social Housing – The Role of the 'Designated Person' in Complaints Handling' be added to the next Overview & Scrutiny (External) Committee agenda and that Volunteers be elected to act as Designated Persons.

Vote: (For – Unanimous)

The Housing Manager left the meeting at 12 noon.

96. ANNUAL REPORT

The Corporate Services Manager presented the draft report. He advised that an initial inspection of the report highlighted the wide range of issues which had been covered by the Overview & Scrutiny (External) Committee over the past year.

Councillor Leather commented that there were a significant number of presentations but questioned the amount of scrutiny. The Chair replied that she believed this was a valid point but that the scrutiny occurs at the end of each presentation. She advised that scoping meetings had started to be held, to prepare questions as part of the scrutiny aspect. It was added that a scoping meeting had been held prior to the Tarka Housing

presentation.

Mr Rayner asked if it would be possible to add as an agenda item to the next meeting – to look at widening the scrutiny by the Overview & Scrutiny (External) Committee. The Corporate Services Manager advised that this would be added to the Forward Plan.

It was proposed by Councillor Eastman, seconded by Councillor Fulford and –

Resolved:

That the Vice-Chair meet with the Corporate Services Manager to make alterations to the Annual Report to include additional scrutiny details.

Vote: (For – Unanimous)

97. FORWARD PLAN

The following additions were made to the Forward Plan:

- To develop a work plan
- To look at the role of the Committee and any changes or improvements that can be made to include increasing the amount of scrutiny.
- Mr Rayner to report back from a Training Day at Health Watch Devon

98. HEALTH AND WELLBEING (Standing Item)

Mr Rayner informed the Committee that a new Health Watch Devon organisation had come into existence from 1st April and is a consumer champion in Devon. Mr Rayner advised that he had applied to attend a training day on 30th May to become an Ambassador. He suggested that, should he attend the training day, he would report back to the next Overview & Scrutiny (External) Committee. It was noted that this had been added to the Forward Plan.

The Joint Head of Strategic Development & Planning joined the meeting.

99. ATLANTIC ARRAY (Standing Item)

The Joint Head of Strategic Development & Planning advised the Committee that it was now close to the time when a decision was needed on the Atlantic Array. She reported that the Planning Department had received a 'Draft Development Consent Order' and it was expected that the Application would be received by the Planning Inspectorate in June. Once the Application was received there would be 28 days to complete validation and then 28 days to put in a formal 'statement of case'.

She further advised that TDC would have 28 days to complete the formal procedure and decide how they wish to put their position. It was stated that they were awaiting a decision by the Solicitor regarding details of which Committee's the application would go before. It was expected that these would be Community & Resources and Full Council.

The Joint Head of Strategic Development & Planning advised that there were three areas of work with this:

1. TDC view of the Atlantic array
2. Local Impact Report
3. Formal view on whether the consultation exercise undertaken by RWE was sufficient for purpose.

There was a general discussion regarding the planning considerations and the need to produce evidence if planning applications were refused. It was reported that RWE had been resolving each issue as it arose in connection with the Atlantic Array.

Councillor Brenton asked if TDC would be employing a specialist to provide legal advice in connection with the Atlantic Array Application. The Joint Head of Strategic Development & Planning replied that if TDC were at a stage where this was needed then a specialist would be employed.

Councillor Redwood left the meeting at 12.30pm.

The Joint Head of Strategic Development & Planning reported that she had discussed with Leaders whether TDC and NDC should work jointly on this. It has been decided that due to differing views, this would not happen except in the case of examination which may be done jointly.

It was agreed that it was important for Full Council to have the opportunity to express opinions regarding the Atlantic Array and be able to vote For or Against.

There was further discussion regarding the AONB 'Rochdale Envelope' which fixes the key parameters and also discussion concerning the navigational channels. The Joint Head of Strategic Development & Planning advised that details of the Rochdale Envelope were known but not the number of turbines.

The Chair thanked The Joint Head of Strategic Development & Planning for the update on the Atlantic Array.

DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting to be held on 26 June 2013 commencing at 10 am.

The meeting commenced at 10 am and closed at 1 pm.

Date

Chair