

**Report to:** Cabinet  
**Date of Meeting:** 5 February 2020  
**Public Document:** Yes  
**Exemption:** None



**Review date for release** None

**Subject:** **Establishing (1) a Housing Company TaFF and (2) a Poverty Working Panel**

**Purpose of report:** To obtain Cabinet's agreement to the setting up of a Housing Company TaFF and Poverty Working Panel following recent motions agreed by Council.

**Recommendation:** **That Cabinet;**

- 1. Agree to establish a Poverty Working Panel on the basis set out in paragraphs 5 & 6 of the report;**
- 2. Agree to establish a Housing Company TaFF on the basis set out in paragraphs 9 & 12 and determine whether to appoint a Chairman, and if so who, or alternatively decide to leave the appointment of a Chairman to the TaFF to decide at its first meeting.**
- 3. Note the resourcing implications that may arise.**

**Reason for recommendation:** To satisfy the wishes of Council in accordance with the motions agreed at the Council meetings of 23<sup>rd</sup> October and 18<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

**Officer:** Henry Gordon Lennox, Monitoring Officer

**Financial implications:** There are no direct financial implications at this stage. The report highlights the growing implication of additional work created by more member groups being formed and the risk that additional staff resources maybe required in the future to meet this demand if it continues to grow.

**Legal implications:** The legal position is detailed in the report.

**Equalities impact:** Low Impact

**Climate change:** Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk

**Links to background information:**

**Link to Council Plan:** Outstanding Council and Council Services, Outstanding Homes and Communities and Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity

## Report in full

1. This report is brought to Cabinet to progress establishing two bodies – a Housing Company TaFF and Poverty Working Panel – in light of motions agreed at Council at the end of last year.
2. The Constitution advises that panels and forums (established by Cabinet or any of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees) will normally consist of seven councillors with a quorum of four. The terms of reference and responsibilities of a panel or forum will be defined when they are set up and it confirms that they will normally sit in public. While membership will be defined, there is nothing to stop any member attending a formally constituted panel or forum meeting to engage and express their views.

### Poverty Working Panel

3. At the Council meeting of 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2019, Cllr Allen's motion on poverty was considered and the following was decided;

#### **RESOLVED;**

*This council is seeking new ways to help those in poverty.*

*We support the proposal of the Overview Committee to consider, within the corporate plan, a recent range of proposals on poverty and the willingness of Cabinet to assess the costs and to set up a working group on poverty.*

*We therefore propose that this council resolves to include within its Corporate Plan the following aspirations:*

1. *That no one in East Devon is destitute without immediate help*
2. *That nobody should be in involuntary poverty for more than two year's duration*

*Council further resolves that all Corporate Plans, strategies and Service Plans shall be subject to "poverty proofing" which means a poverty impact assessment will be made and reported to Overview Committee of the effect of the strategy or service plan on those in poverty.*

4. This decision envisages the setting up of a group of members to address the poverty agenda. Since this resolution, the Overview committee at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> November considered a report in relation to poverty which led to a series of recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet accepted those recommendations at its meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2020 with the addition of a further recommendation relating to lobbying Government on Universal Credit. It is also worth re-iterating that the new Council Plan has poverty as a prominent feature throughout.
5. In light of the above it is considered that the Terms of Reference for the Panel, if agreed, should be;

*To assist Cabinet in the development of an East Devon Poverty Strategy, to monitor progress against the Strategy once adopted and to review the Strategy on an ongoing basis and to make recommendations to amend it as appropriate. Also to consider the progress of the actions in relation to poverty agreed to by Cabinet at its meeting of 8<sup>th</sup> January 2020.*

6. It is recommended that the Panel should be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Homes and Sustainable Communities. In terms of the makeup of the Panel, it is recommended that this should comprise seven councillors, as per the Constitution, and that the Monitoring Officer be given delegated authority in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Homes and Sustainable Communities to agree the membership with Group Leaders to ensure, as far as possible, a cross-party involvement.

### Housing Company TaFF

7. At the Council meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> December 2019, Cllr Ledger's motion on housing was considered and the following was decided;

**RESOLVED;**

*1. That Cabinet establishes a politically balanced Housing Company TAFF comprising the relevant portfolio holders, members of the Strategic Planning Committee and also the Housing Review Board to re-evaluate the business model of East Devon Homes Ltd with a view to ensuring it is better fit for purpose and also integrates effectively with the work of the Housing Review Board.*

*2. That the TAFF will be expected to fully scope options into altering the delivery models of the housing company as they have been ineffective so far. Recommendations will be reported back to Cabinet, Strategic Planning Committee and the Housing Review Board and then to Council.*

8. The requirements of the resolution are more difficult to meet here due to the need to politically balance the TaFF across three committees, one of which is not politically balanced in its own right and another which is only five members strong. The difficulty of having to get committees to nominate members would compound the issue and potentially leave the last committee to consider the matter with the inability to fulfil the requirement.
9. Accordingly, the Monitoring Officer has been in liaison with the Group Leaders and Chairman of the relevant committees to propose a solution and makeup that meets the requirements of the motion. The proposal is for the TaFF to comprise ten members on the following basis;

Independent - 3 seats

Cllr Pook (Asset Management Portfolio Holder)

Cllr Armstrong (Sustainable Homes and Communities Portfolio Holder)

Cllr McCollum (Chair of HRB)

Conservatives – 3 seats

Cllr Hall (HRB)

Cllr Parr (HRB)

Cllr Moulding (SPC)

Independent EDA - 2 seats

Cllr Ledger (HRB)

Cllr Hayward (SPC)

Liberal - 1 seat

Cllr Rylance (SPC)

Green - 1 seat

Cllr Davey (SPC)

10. This therefore results in two members from Cabinet, four from Strategic Planning Committee and four from Housing Review Board on a political balance basis. It also ensures the involvement of the two most relevant Portfolio Holders – Asset Management and Sustainable Homes and Communities – as well as the Chair of HRB.
11. The initial proposal put to the Group Leaders was for Cllr Pook, as the Asset Management Portfolio Holder to chair the Forum. However, the Independent East Devon Alliance have noted that Cllr Ledger, whose motion it was, would relish the opportunity to chair the Forum on the basis his research into this area and knowledge of construction is particularly strong. Cabinet therefore will need to decide whether to nominate a chair, and if so who it will be, or permit the Forum to decide its own chair at their first meeting.

12. In light of the above it is considered that the Terms of Reference for the Forum, if agreed, should be;

*To assist the Council in ensuring East Devon Homes Limited (the Council's housing company) is fit for purpose by; re-evaluating the business model, considering alternative business models, its role in the delivery of housing generally and how it might meet the aspirations of the Council in relation to affordable housing, working with the Housing Review Board and the Housing Revenue Account to explore options for housing delivery.*

#### Resourcing

13. Since May 2019, there have already been a number of additional bodies established – the Governance Review Working Party and Car Parking TaFF – and the work on the Glover Review, following the Strategic Planning Committee meeting, is expected to be initiated soon. If the bodies recommended in this report to be established are, then this will mean there are five additional bodies in operation since May 2019 which require support not just in terms of lead officer input but also in governance support from Democratic Services.
14. At a time when 'careful choices' and 'fit for purpose' are having to be considered, the concern is that establishing more and more of these bodies will impact on the ability of officers to do all that is expected of them and there is also a risk of distraction from other tasks. In that regard the Council needs to continue to prioritise service delivery which may impact on officer availability in terms of supporting the work of these bodies. It is important to note therefore that dependent upon the work to be undertaken that there may be a need to focus on prioritising the corporate work programme and / or for there to be requests to increase the staff compliment to manage delivery.