

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of Poverty Working Panel held at Online via the Zoom app on 24 February 2025**

#### **Attendance list at end of document**

The meeting started at 10.01 am and ended at 11.00 am

#### **17 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 November 2024**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 November 2024 were noted as a true and accurate record.

#### **18 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **19 Public speaking**

One member of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

Mr Jack Rowland commented that the draft Housing Strategy was a fantastic document and very ambitious. He observed from the Strategy that in October 2023, a total of 312 homes had been empty for more than 6 months. He asked if more recent data were available and whether data from previous years could be included, for comparison. He went on to suggest that the objectives set out within the Strategy should be revised to ensure they were SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound). Finally, he asked whether the Housing Investment and Delivery Plan would incorporate the possibility of using Public Works Loans to build council houses on Council owned land.

The Housing Projects Officer thanked Mr Rowland for his comments and responded that more recent statistics on empty homes would be provided for the final Strategy document, along with previous years' data. He agreed with Mr Rowland's point concerning SMART objectives and confirmed that an action plan setting out how progress would be measured, along with timescales, would sit underneath the Strategy document. He added that he would liaise with colleagues to obtain an answer regarding development on council-owned land, and provide a response outside of the meeting.

#### **20 VCSE Anti-Poverty Event - verbal update**

The Chair provided a verbal update on the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Anti-Poverty event which had taken place at the Council's offices earlier in the month. The event had been well attended and very well received, and the Chair congratulated officers on their good work.

Discussion included the following points:

- The event had facilitated networking but also provided a valuable opportunity for interaction with statutory teams.
- Officers had taken away a lot of learning and would be providing some feedback to attendees imminently. Many action points would be reflected in the new Poverty Strategy and others would be addressed more immediately.

21 **Celebrating and contributing to the work of Open Door Exmouth: Environmental Health's support in response to the cost of living crisis - verbal update by Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer**

The Public Health Project Officer introduced this item, outlining how COMF (Contain Outbreak Management Fund) covid-recovery funding had contributed to Open Door Exmouth's activities during 2024. The grant had enabled Open Door too:

- Extend Community Café opening on Saturdays throughout 2024
- Furnish the Community Café
- Support Parent Hub running costs for 2024
- Support Community Craft Room running costs for 2024.

A report had been received from Open Door noting outcomes, reflecting on issues arising and offering very positive and welcome feedback.

22 **Planning beyond Planning - presentation by Naomi Harnett, Corporate Lead - Major Projects and Programmes**

The Corporate Lead – Major Projects and Programmes delivered a presentation which illustrated how the Major Projects and Programmes team use their connections across the authority and with stakeholders to address poverty within the district and the wider area.

Discussion included the following points:

- The anti-poverty agenda is interwoven into the work of the Major Projects and Programmes team as part of its commitment to equality in the district, and with consideration for how a project is going to live after the authority's involvement in it is over.
- The Corporate Lead – Major Projects and Programmes regular engages with the Planning team to ensure there is an understanding of the wider anti-poverty objectives that the Major Projects and Programmes team are looking to achieve.
- The district has a high level of micro-enterprises with fewer than nine employees, and such businesses can be more vulnerable than larger businesses to financial shocks. However, the impact on the district's economy in the event of the demise of a smaller business is lesser than if a major business fails, therefore micro-enterprises can make the economy more resilient.

23 **Draft Housing Strategy**

The Housing Projects Officer delivered a presentation which provided an overview of the draft Housing Strategy 2025-2030, its key objectives, and next steps.

Discussion included the following points:

- Currently the highest need in the district's rental sector is for 1 and 2 bed homes.
- Affordable housing is considered 80% of market rent value, and social rent is 60% of market rent value. Some properties are let at the Local Housing Allowance Rate, this being the amount which the government contributes towards the cost of rent through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.
- Advice for tenants regarding prevention of damp and mould is published in the Housing Matters magazine and on the council's website.
- The Homeless team work with private landlords regarding rent deposits and some behavioural issues, and loans and grants are available to landlords to improve property standards.

**Attendance List**

**Councillors present:**

P Arnott  
C Brown  
J Heath  
D Ledger (Chair)  
M Martin  
M Rixson  
S Smith

**Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)**

R Collins  
P Faithfull  
E Rylance

**Officers in attendance:**

Naomi Harnett, Corporate Lead (Interim) – Major Projects & Programmes  
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer  
Libby Jarrett, Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits, Corporate Customer Access, Fraud & Compliance  
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer  
Tim Laurence-Othen, Housing Projects Officer  
Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer

**Councillor apologies:**

B Collins  
M Goodman

Chair: .....

Date: .....