

PFH Housing and Community Involvement
Cllr Rob Hannaford – reporting to Scrutiny COMMUNITY
06 November 2012

Build communities where everyone has a home

- **Continue to offer a professional and flexible approach to developers seeking to build new homes in the City and to negotiate the provision of affordable housing that meets the identified housing needs of local residents.**

Council Tax records identify over 850 new homes delivered in the year to 1 October 2012. Senior Members in quarterly meetings with major house-builders.

A number of key developers and house builders are now members of the Growth Board.

Changes in affordable housing policy reflects feedback from development industry.

City Development is being redesigned using systems thinking to “delivering good development”. This is focused on working with the private sector to deliver houses.

A number of strategic sites at Newcourt, Monkerton and Hill Barton are making good progress and early starts on site are evident with Persimmon Homes on the Lower RNSD site. Draft SPD prepared, considered by PMWG. Agreed for public consultation by Executive on 18 September 2012. 6 week consultation underway. Government announcement 6 September 2012 on renegotiations of S106’s unlikely to have significant impact.

- **Provide new affordable homes across the city and in the urban extensions at Newcourt , Monkerton and Alphington.**

Exeter is currently delivering significantly more affordable housing than the South West average. Affordable housing will be delivered in line with the requirements set out in the Affordable Housing SPD in the urban extensions to the east and south west of the City ensuring that the mix of affordable housing meets the identified housing need and contributes to the creation of a sustainable community.

Four current applications at Monkerton reported to Planning Committee in October. Three current applications at Newcourt reported to Planning Committee in October. Two applications determined and a further two recently received. Alphington brief due to follow publication of SW Exeter masterplan. Dates for Workshops with residents now proposed to Alphington Forum.

There remain outstanding a number of funding issues associated with the highway infrastructure around Junction 29. These are being explored by officers to find a solution.

- **Seek to deliver at least 5% of all new affordable housing stock to meet the Council’s wheelchair design standards and we shall produce a wheelchair housing strategy for the city.**

Five wheelchair design standard homes completed since 1 April 2012. A further two homes are in the pipeline for delivery later this year. The percentage of wheelchair standard homes is proposed to be increased to 10% under new proposed revisions to the Affordable Housing SPD.

Introduced a fast track scheme to deliver stair lifts and level access showers with minimal delays. Working with other Devon LAs to introduce a Devon wide scheme.

The procurement is being handled by Plymouth CC who will shortly be going out to tender in order to develop a select list of builders.

9 fully wheelchair accessible homes at the RNSD site will be brought into Council's stock on completion.

- **Continue to assist in the facilitation and development of 150 Extra-Care homes across the City.**

St Loyes Extra-Care scheme (50 homes) is awaiting formal tender through Devon County and Wiltshire Council Framework Agreement.

Use a range of measures to solve housing problems

- **Accessing funding and land for more social, shared ownership, affordable and shared equity housing after massive government cuts to grant funding and the abolition of the SWRDA and regional spatial strategy.**

Ongoing meetings with Cooperative Housing UK, financial modelling details awaited to ascertain delivery model.

Initial discussions have commenced with HearthUK.

Meetings have taken place with pension funds to establish willingness to fund new housing. Clarification has been sought on whether the City Council can enter into lease with pension funds to provide new housing.

- **Review and monitor the pressures on the Council's existing housing stock and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) from the new discounted Right To Buy proposals.**

The new Right to Buy proposals have generated new enquires but to date no homes have been bought with the enhanced discount

- **Ensure that we make best and prudent use of any funding that becomes available through the new HRA, to maintain existing stock and build new units.**

Self-financing is proving very valuable for the Council, allowing intelligent investment decisions to be made. Issues with planned kitchen and bathroom replacements have already been addressed by doubling the funding available for the next three years. A new policy approach has been taken which refurbishes and retains the remaining 21 Laings homes at Buddle Lane within the Council's stock. 16 new build affordable homes on the RNSD site and at Dean Clarke House have been added to the Council's stock at a total cost of £212,546. A strategic approach to new build and stock improvement is being developed and will be in place for 2014 once we know whether private finance is available for our own build sites.

- **Maintain and enhance our existing good work through the Tenants and Leaseholders Committee, Exeter Homes Partnership and Performance Review Committee.**

As a result of work undertaken by the TALC, improvements have been made to the tenants and leaseholders newsletter making the content more relevant to the audience. Changes have also been made to the Older Persons Housing Forum. The new Independent Living Forum will work with the Warden Service and Neighborhood Management Team to understand the needs and expectations of these tenants and review how we deliver landlord services to them. High levels of satisfaction from our tenants are being maintained.

- **Manage additional pressures and work loads from the cuts and changes to housing benefit, government imposed reductions in Council tax benefits, and the Coalition's back to work agenda.**

A multi-disciplinary team has been established to assess and review the impact of changes in national welfare policy and interventions to mitigate risk have been identified.

- **Work with the Environmental Health staff to monitor and drive up standards in private sector properties, especially for vulnerable groups and young people.**

Achieved through the ongoing HMO licensing regime and inspection of smaller HMOs. Joint working with Housing is also taking place to ensure high standards in properties procured for Extralet/PSL properties.

- **Look at establishing a scoring system for private sector properties to encourage landlords to improve their stock using energy saving grants etc.**

The University of Exeter has launched an accreditation scheme for student landlords; accreditation schemes give the basis for differential standards (e.g. bronze, silver, gold) and landlords can then aspire to achieve a higher standard. However, with the very low level of take up to date, ECC is working with the University to promote the scheme.

- **Make further representations and support the private members bill to give greater rights and protection to park home owners.**

Representations made and the Mobile Homes Bill is currently going through its second reading in Parliament. If enacted the Bill will strengthen the licensing regime for mobile home sites.

- **Make the best use of the new funding streams from the revised planning systems for both housing and community initiatives.**

The New Homes Bonus is one of the key incentives to communities and councils to welcome new housing. Part of the Bonus is available as a Local Infrastructure Fund and 50% of the funding will be ring-fenced for major infrastructure works to meet city wide priorities such as the provision of a new swimming pool and affordable housing.

- **We will also commit to Exeter being a city where no-one needs to sleep out on the streets for a second night.**

Since the project started in June 12, 26 individuals have been helped to avoid a second night out.

- **Ensure that a hotline number is available on behalf of all Devon districts and ensure appropriate provision is made to cope with extreme cold weather periods**

The hotline has been running since April 2012 and has received over 100 calls for Devon and Cornwall. We are prepared to provide cold weather provision services from St Petrocks and Gabriel House as has worked well in the previous 2 years. However we are confident that given the success of the No Second Night Out project we will be accommodating less individuals in emergency provision.

- **Continue to grow the Private Sector Leasing and EXtralet schemes to provide a wider pool of affordable accommodation in conjunction with the private sector**

Since 1 April 2012, five new Extralet and PSL homes have been secured. There are a further 32 homes in the pipeline and it is hoped that delivery will be increased once the proposed new procurement procedures have been adopted and implemented.

Standards in private sector properties are being monitored and increased through the ongoing HMO licensing regime and inspection of smaller HMOs. Joint working between Environmental Health and Housing is taking place to ensure high standards in properties procured for Extralet/PSL properties.

- **Maintain our Council properties well and continue to meet the Decent Homes Standard or similar standards**

Some major investments have been delivered. The kitchen and bathroom replacement budget will deliver an additional 926 kitchens and 448 bathrooms over the next 3 years and the communal heating system at Grandisson Court has been replaced. We are also in the process of reviewing our 30 year Housing Business Plan to ensure that we take sound investment decisions taking into account changes in the self financing regulation, increased Right to Buy discounts and the option of further Council Own Build projects. The systems review of how we maintain our assets has begun which will drive efficiencies and improve customer outcomes.

- **Provide up to £400,000 in renovation grants to those most in need to make private sector homes fit for habitation**

Wessex Home loans available to enable low income households to deal with disrepair in their homes. Although funding is available, take up is low currently with seven loans amounting to £60,000 being processed in the quarter. Wessex Home Loans has developed a Devon wide marketing strategy to increase take-up which was launched in October.

- **We will build upon recent work to cut down the time it takes to install Disabled Facility Grant adaptations in private dwellings by use of approved builders lists and modular pricing of standard works.**

Have now launched a fast track scheme to deliver stair lifts and level access showers with minimal delays. Working with other Devon local authorities to introduce a Devon wide scheme, the procurement of which is being handled by Plymouth City Council who will shortly be going out to tender in order to develop a select list of builders.

- **We will work to strengthen to Protocol all the Devon Councils have with Registered Providers (Housing Associations) through which they undertake to contribute to the cost of disabled adaptations to their homes.**

The Protocol has been adopted by some RPs, but there is a lack of consistency, some having agreed to forgo DFGs, others agreeing to pay a percentage or fixed amount towards adaptations funded through DFGs. A new governance structure to oversee sign up to the protocol has recently been agreed.

- **We will continue to work in partnership with Wessex Home Improvement Loans to develop innovative loan products, and improve marketing in order to encourage greater take up. We will also seek to expand the work of Wessex to include debt advice to clients in need.**

Wessex Home Loans available to enable low income households to maintain their homes. Monies are available but take up is low with 7 loans amounting to £60K being processed in the first 3 months of the financial year. Wessex Home Loans have developed a Devon wide marketing strategy.

A marketing plan is in place but has been delayed.

Provide homes for rent that people can afford

- **Ensure that we continue to take a lead role on the issue of homeless in Exeter and neighbouring areas, and when needed advocate for more funding, resources, and understanding of the often complex issues that are affecting people.**

The housing options service has recently been peer reviewed and is considered to be the best performing in Devon. Exeter is also the lead authority for DCLG projects for Devon and Cornwall and continues to promote good practice nationally with 2 officers speaking at the annual Chartered Institute of Housing, Homelessness and Lettings Conference.

We are also leading on the implementation of a community hub model (which involves a partnership of statutory agencies tackling homelessness e.g. Mental health, probation etc). to target the spend of former Supporting People funding on behalf of the County Council, which will result in a much more effective use of this reduced fund.

- **Facilitate the reuse of privately owned empty homes and properties ensuring they are fit for habitation**

Since 1 April 2012, seven long term empty homes have been brought back into use. 85 long term empty homes are currently under investigation and 120 initial visits to potential empty homes have been programmed to be completed by October 2012. In addition, we will be taking a much more proactive and robust approach to this issue to ensure that existing empty properties can be brought back into use as homes, and reduce the problems and concerns that disused houses often bring to local neighbourhoods.

- **Build on our existing good work with the private sector to expand our portfolio of private properties which we manage on behalf of private landlords and use to proactively prevent homelessness.**

In addition to the 5 houses of multiple occupation we have taken on to manage (which amounts to 24 rooms) we have taken on 10 family homes in the last 6 months to manage and use to prevent homelessness. We are also developing good links with letting agents in the city to improve relations and their confidence in offering houses to those people with low incomes.

- **Following the enactment of the Localism Act there will be considerably more flexibility offered to Local Authorities to decide how we allocate affordable housing in Exeter.**

The current systems review into 'help me solve my housing problem' has identified a number of areas where the Devon Home Choice scheme does not help us to meet housing need. For example someone who is in a 'temporary accommodation' property suitable for their needs and owed a homeless currently has a higher priority on Devon home choice than someone who is lacking one bedroom, this is due to previous government policy which is being relaxed under the Localism Act. The Devon Home Choice policy is due to be reviewed, in May 2013, and this will give us the opportunity to make the changes driven by the systems review and to make sure any allocations system is helping us best achieve our purpose of helping people to solve their housing problem.

The Localism Act will also enable us to discharge our homelessness duty to the private rented sector and we are extremely keen to take up this opportunity and to break the automatic link between homelessness and an allocation of social housing.

- **A group of senior officers and members are looking at how we can use increased flexibilities to adapt the allocations policy to ensure our social housing always goes to those most in need with a strong local connection to Exeter.**

This group has influenced the allocations policy as outlined above and has gone on to consider revisions to our Tenancy Policy to drive optimum use of our social housing. Revisions have also been made to our succession and assignment policy to ensure a balance between optimum use and a sensitive approach to tenants who have suffered a family bereavement.

Retain current system of setting Council rent

- **Set Council rents in line with the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan**

Social rent policy has continued following the move to HRA self-financing. The aim is to achieve rent convergence with housing associations by 2015-16, in accordance with the Government's social rent reform.

Provide 35% of all new build development as social housing

- **Where viable, make 35% of all new homes built across the City affordable**

Draft SPD prepared, considered by PMWG. Agreed for public consultation by Executive on 18 September 2012. 6 week consultation underway. Government announcement 6 September 2012 on renegotiations of S106's unlikely to have significant impact.

- **Provide advice and a range of affordable housing options designed to help local people solve their housing needs**

We continue to provide access to the innovative EXtraLet scheme and have recently procured 5 houses of multiple occupation under the scheme to help prevent the homelessness of single people who don't necessarily meet statutory thresholds.

We continue to provide specialist debt and mortgage advice and this broader remit is further enhanced by the changes being made to frontline services as part of the systems review titled 'Help me with my Housing Problem'.

Introduce a co-operative and mutual model of home ownership where people are given stability and equity while retaining housing stocks

- **We are working with the CDS Co-operative to introduce a cooperative and mutual model of home ownership, where people are given stability and equity while retaining housing stocks. This is an imaginative solution to meeting a need, and we are keen to support what would be one of the first scheme of its kind in the country**

We are working closely with the Welsh Assembly to share good practice and awaiting financial modelling details to ascertain delivery model.

Install solar panels on Council houses

- **Identify and maximise opportunities to increase the Council's own housing stock to high energy sustainability standards. Install 249 solar panels this year.**

284 PV panels installed to Council tenants homes.

- **We will continue to work in partnership with E.on to deliver energy efficiency grants and loans to ensure a smooth transition into the Green Deal and Energy Commitment Obligation (ECO).**

Continuing to work in association with E.on to install solar PV onto Council properties up until Dec 2012

Empower residents to have a greater say

- **Build upon the new community grants system that has been recently set up and ensure new homes bonus funding empowers community groups.**

Local area grants and city grants promoted for use by groups across the city. Major grants provide £654,399 to Arts, Community Associations and Voluntary sector groups in the city in 2012/13. £360,800 available through the New Homes Bonus Local Infrastructure fund to support localised community infrastructure to address deficiencies in existing facilities and to meet additional needs due to increasing population.

- **Ensure through the Council's community strategy that we continue to support and encourage with other partner organisations social inclusion, tolerance and diversity in Exeter, and also work to tackle poverty.**

Priory Community First resident panel established. Year one funding spent on priorities. Year two priorities also identified with residents now taking a lead on taking the programme forward. Connecting Communities initiative developed in Beacon Heath. Residents working to identify priorities. Support offer to resident groups to address issues in their communities regarding new developments and Localism agenda. Connecting Communities initiative progressed in Beacon Heath. Partnership developed in Newcourt with residents and partner agencies. Community Association established with bid made to NHB LIF for funding for new community centre.

- **Working to develop the new scrutiny role for our existing TALC committee in line with new government legislation.**

A Performance Improvement Panel has been developed to provide an enhanced scrutiny role across the housing service. The panel will provide a tenant and leaseholder perspective to the decision making process by reviewing performance and making recommendations for service improvement. The panel will start this work in April 2013.

- **We will further develop the Residential Park Forum in order to support those many Exeter householders who have additional housing challenges to deal with as park home residents.**

The forum, under the chair of a Member, has Terms of Reference have been agreed. And will meet three times per year to provide support to residents and will keep them informed of relevant issues relating to their sites

Community Engagement

- **Work to support more joined up cost effective work between the city and county Councils through the new Exeter Board on community and housing issues , where there is overlap, such as supporting people funding , community facilities etc.**
- **Work within the localism agenda in terms of community consultations and neighbourhood plans.**
- **Continue to support existing joint work with community groups, the voluntary sector, charities, community associations and faith groups across the city.**

1. National and Regional Recognition

- The Council has been leading the work for the District Councils' Network Localism work stream, which has included contributing to a national event to share best practice.
- We are an active member of a regional group that developed a 'Localism In Action' pack. This has opened opportunities for the council to be highlighted as an example of best practice and involved/represented in regional events and training on the localism agenda.
- Regional Community Rights event - we have been working with the organisers, Urban Forum, Locality and Exeter CVS to identify speakers for a community rights and neighbourhood planning event in Exeter on 5 December.

2. New Homes Bonus Local Infrastructure Fund (HNB LIF)

- £360,800 available through the New Homes Bonus Local Infrastructure fund to support localised community infrastructure to address deficiencies in existing facilities and to meet additional needs due to increasing population.
- Promotion of NHB LIF and information community organisations across the city.
- Capacity building support for community groups – this has included support for Newcourt Community Association in preparation for their application for NHB funds, also Exeter Football in the Community project for a future round. Ongoing support for Alphington for proposals to develop village hall.

3. Community Grants

- Local area grants and city grants promoted for use by groups across the city. Major grants provide £654,399 to Arts, Community Associations and Voluntary sector groups in the city in 2012/13.
- City and Ward grants: £2,000 available for each ward. To date fourteen out of eighteen wards have considerably more than a £1,000 still available. The grant will be heavily promoted to community groups/schools over the next few weeks, but any help in doing this would be appreciated. The city grants funding had £20,000. Seventeen groups have been supported. £820 remaining.
- Some good recent examples of Councillors using their delegated community ward funding have included a community composting scheme, partnership work with local place teams on graffiti removal , new play equipment for local nursery and primary school children , and regenerating a neglected area into a new community garden.
- In support of the Council's commitment to equality and diversity Exeter's next Pride Festival (Saturday 23rd March 2013) the Council's city-wide grants panel has provided a grant of £1,000 with other funding secured or being secured from the NHS, Police,

Devon and Somerset Fire Authority, unions, city businesses, and commercial sponsors

4. Neighbourhood Planning

- Work with planning colleagues to provide information on neighbourhood planning for community groups.
- Support for Exeter St. James Forum in the development of their neighbourhood plan.
- Information for : Topsham, Digby, Alphington, Countess Wear. The latter have successfully applied for lottery funding to employ a researcher for 12 months to consult with residents and prepare a baseline to be able to deliver a community or neighbourhood plan in the future.

5. Support for Community Capacity Building in New Developments

- **Newcourt** – 3,500 new homes projected for this area. Community Involvement Officer has co-ordinated a partnership group to address development issues for the area. It includes members, developers, social landlords (DCH/Tor Homes), police, city council officers – parks and open spaces, estates & planning, DCC officers (roads adoption & transport issues & education) and residents. A community association has been established after an initial meeting (23 Jan 2012) where 75 residents attended. Newcourt Community Association (NCA) has established a committee with six sub-groups that are working on a range of issues including the new community centre. The building sub group has recently submitted an application to the NHB LIF to enable NCA to employ a p/t centre coordinator/development worker and to furnish the new community centre.
- **Alphington** – work starting on a series of workshops with Alphington Forum to enable residents to contribute to a development brief for new housing development in the area (500 properties) First workshop 11.10.12
- **Whipton Hill Barton** – preliminary meetings have started with councillors and residents with a view to establishing a new residents association. Primary purpose to have a constituted group to address issues related to new housing development in the area.
- Similar role expected for other new bigger developments e.g. Monkerton where 2,500 new homes are expected.

6. Community Centres

- A review process has been established to identify maintenance and capacity building support for a number of centres owned by the Council and managed by community groups. To date, this has included Wonford CLC and Exwick Community Centre. Estates are working with the centres to address outstanding maintenance issues, and to identify where additional support can be given.
- Wonford - organising a review to identify any spare capacity of community facilities in the area and opportunities for joint working to meet community needs.
- Part of a longer-term piece of work to review the maintenance issues for all Council-owned community centres, and to develop a framework to encourage community centres to develop their services to build stronger links with their local community and neighbourhood.

7. Community development: (Enable me to have my say and be heard)

- **Beacon Heath - Connecting Communities C2** - Priorities identified by local residents after a listening event held in May : transport, anti-social behaviour,

activities for young people, communication . Residents are now starting to take a lead in identifying some quick wins and ways to take these issues forward.

- **Priory – Community First** - Priory will receive £33,910 over four years as part of a Community First government funded programme that will run until March 2015. The first year's funds (£5,624) were successfully spent on three different community initiatives. This included a Community Action Week in Wonford, and a separate week in Countess Wear. Over 50 residents – (young people and adults who contributed over 500 hours) were engaged in working together with officers from the council, local councillors, PCSO's and volunteers to do litter picks, use speed cameras, clear gardens and cut down hedges and overgrown bushes on walkways, also to paint the Home zone area. Even though the weather was very mixed, around 30 people turned out every day to contribute their time, energy and skills to the project. Feedback since has been that residents felt really proud of what could be achieved by people working together, that the work has helped to transform the area and they want to see the good work continue. A panel of residents are working together to take this work forward for the area with support from Exeter CVS and ECC.

8. Communities Living Sustainably – Community Energy Fit

- e.on and National Energy Action (NEA) are piloting the Community Energy Fit project in Exeter, in partnership with the Exeter and Heart of Devon Employment and Skills Board. Dawn Rivers chairs the Community Energy Fit Steering group. The “Community Energy Fit” programme will offer up to 160 unemployed local people the opportunity to increase their knowledge and employability skills by participating in a range of training options, which lead to either a certificate or a nationally recognised City & Guilds qualification. Approximately 40 trainees can also opt to progress to the next stage of the programme and become volunteer “Community Energy Champions”. Volunteers will be supported to deliver an individual community engagement activity plan, passing on their knowledge to others and helping local residents to reduce their fuel bills and access hardship funds. The programme will run between March and December 2012.

9. Address Crime And Anti-Social Behaviour Across The City

- ASBAT meetings. Multi Agency ASB Tasking meetings are held monthly to deal with the most difficult cases in Exeter. 40 Cases have been referred in the last 12 months with 31 having been resolved.
- Troubled Families Project ongoing. Initial multi agency meeting held on 17 Sept 12. Operational management; Project co-ordinator will report to ASBAT, with input also to SHIP.
- Two places funded by Community Safety Partnership for trainers to attend Teen Relationship Toolkit Training to work with teenagers to break patterns of domestic violence and sexual violence.
- Night Time Economy Forum running the H2O project in partnership with five pubs and clubs to reduce problems related to excessive alcohol consumption in licensed establishments in the city centre.
- £7,000 grant from Baroness Newloves Alcohol fund secured for a voluntary taxi marshall project which would provide SIA licensed staffing at bust taxi ranks in the city centre on a Friday and Saturday night.

Cllr Rob Hannaford

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November 2012