

**CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**(HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING)**

8 October 2020

**Present:**

Councillor Matthew Vizard (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, M, Foggin, Mrs Henson, Mitchell, K, Sparkes, Wardle and Warwick

**Apologies:**

Councillors Martin and Oliver

**Also present:**

Director City Development, Housing & Supporting People, Democratic Services Officer (HB) and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

**In attendance:**

Councillor Ruth Williams

Councillor Laura Wright

Councillor Diana Moore

- Portfolio Holder for Supporting People
- Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Services

**22 Apologies**

These were received from Councillors Martin and Oliver.

**23 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 16 July 2020 were taken as read, approved as correct, for signing by the Chair at the earliest possible convenience.

**24 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

**25 Questions from the Public under Standing Order 19**

No questions from members of the public were received.

**26 Presentation on Covid-19 Recovery by Portfolio Holders and Questions from Members and Answers**

The Chair invited the two Portfolio Holders to present their respective briefing notes.

Questions from Members submitted in advance of the meeting with the answers given at the meeting together with the supplementary questions and answers made at the meeting are set out below for each Portfolio.

Portfolio Holder for Supporting People - Councillor Williams - in presenting her briefing note highlighted the following:-

- expressed her thanks to Councillor Morse, the previous Portfolio Holder, for her dedication and hard work in this role;
- a recent virtual anti-social behaviour conference hosted by the City Council attended by local and regional leaders and partners including the Bishop of Exeter, the Chief Constable of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Councillor Hart, Leader of Devon County Council, Ben Bradshaw MP as well as representatives from city's in Portugal and the United States. The City Council would be progressing many of the initiatives discussed; and
- her attendance at the Exeter Community Safety Partnership, chaired by the local police commander.

### **Questions from Members of the Committee.**

- 1 **Councillor Wardle** - *Can the Portfolio Holder update us on the new test and trace Support payments?*

From 28 September 2020, Government has changed the legislation so that certain people will have to self-isolate due to the current Covid-19 crisis. A package of legislative measures has been introduced both to ensure that those who are required to self-isolate, do so and, that those on a low income, receive a payment to assist their finances and to encourage compliance with the legislation. The Council is administering both the Standard Scheme and the Discretionary Scheme for Exeter. Both schemes are currently due to run until 31 January 2021.

The Standard Scheme has been determined by criteria set down by Government and is primarily aimed at all applicants who are working or self-employed; are unable to work from home and will therefore have a reduction in income and are in receipt of certain qualifying benefits (Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, Income-related Employment & Support Allowance; Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance; Income Support; Housing Benefit or Pension Credit). Government has confirmed that it will reimburse the Council for all payments correctly made under the Standard Scheme.

The Discretionary Scheme is intended for any individual who meets all of the required criteria for the Standard Scheme except that they are not currently in receipt of a qualifying benefit. The reason for this could be, for example, that a claim for a benefit has not yet been made or is being appealed, or that the individual, whilst normally resident in the UK, is unable to gain access to public funds. The Council will be receiving £29,277.09 for the four months that the Discretionary Scheme is intended to last and the Government has confirmed that no additional monies will be given to the Council. This funding equates to only 58 awards. Given that the funding for the Discretionary Scheme is limited, Government has stated that it will be up to each Council to determine additional criteria that have to be met if a payment is to be made. The additional criteria has been developed with other authorities within the County and is designed to focus on those applicants who are not in receipt of a qualifying benefit, are on a low income, have relatively low capital, have had

their income reduced and are therefore facing financial hardship due to self-isolation.

Policies for both the Standard Scheme and the Discretionary Scheme have been submitted for approval and was now live and available on [www.exeter.gov.uk/testandtrace](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/testandtrace).

The support will take the form of a single payment of £500. An individual may make an application more than once but only if the individual is told to self-isolate multiple times and they meet the eligibility criteria for each individual application, and the periods of self-isolation do not overlap. Individuals in the same household can each make an application to receive a Test and Trace Support Payment, if they each meet the criteria in full.

Applicants must have been instructed by the NHS Test and Trace to stay at home and self-isolate either because they have tested positive for Covid-19, or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive. All applicants will be required to provide the 8-digit unique ID number which has been provided to them by NHS Test and Trace.

Individuals meeting the eligibility criteria who have been instructed to self-isolate on or after 28 September are entitled to a payment, and Government requested that local authorities have an application process in place by 12 October. Officers, along with Strata, have designed one on-line application form to cater for both schemes, which is currently being tested with a planned go live of 12 October. On-line and telephone applications will be accepted. Eligible applications can be backdated to 28 September. In order to capture those backdated claims, [www.exeter.gov.uk/testandtrace](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/testandtrace) has been live since 28 September offering information and the capability to register an interest in claiming. Exeter has received 15 registrations of interest so far and those residents will be emailed a link to the application form once it is live. Applications will be dealt with by benefit staff as there is a need to check benefit eligibility through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)'s Searchlight system which has restricted access. The benefit staff allocated to this task are working closely with their Customer Support colleagues dealing with the Exeter Wellbeing Support Hub so that support can be provided if other vulnerability issues are identified.

The Portfolio Holder thanked all staff who had worked to implement the scheme in a short time period.

Supplementary questions and answers.

*Will those self-employed individuals previously excluded from the support system be left outside the circle of entitlement again?*

*Will the Council be reimbursed for the scheme and by how much?*

The summary of the scheme, circulated to all Members, details the information in response to the questions, including the figures sought.

- 2a **Councillor Foggin** – *As you are providing accommodation for rough sleeping what plans are there to remove tents and other items from, in and around the High Street?*

2b **Councillor M. Mitchell** - *Rough Sleepers. In recent weeks there appears to have been an increase in the number of individuals and groups rough sleeping in and around the city centre. What actions are the council taking to ensure that these individuals are supported and helped as winter approaches?*

(Combined response to 2a & 2b)

The Council co-ordinates responses to city centre (including the High Street) encampments via contact and assessment by the outreach team working closely with the Council's rough sleeper co-ordinator and housing advice team. Rapid assessment for emergency accommodation, or reconnection to home area, is undertaken with a view to provide a service offer as soon as possible. A number of services are simultaneously informed including Civil Enforcement, city centre police and Environmental Health (if anti-social behaviour is being committed). If a service offer is not available (e.g. if there is no legal duty and no discretionary option) or is declined, and if not already initiated then enforcement action is taken serving notice and removal of tents where necessary. Not all encampment dwellers are homeless and in such cases notifications are made to their housing providers to support interventions to ensure a swift return indoors.

The Council continues to provide accommodation for many rough sleepers through discretionary accommodation placements into temporary accommodation stock as well as bed and breakfast spaces purchased from hotels willing to accommodate rough sleepers (many hotels will not). The Great Western Hotel (GWH) has the majority of occupants with recent rough sleeping experience and all arising vacancies at the hotel are prioritised to rough sleepers nominated by the outreach team. In anticipation of the award of capital funds through the government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) the plan is to resettle all current occupants of the hotel into move-on housing as and when it vacancies and new spaces come online. The first spaces are expected at the repurposed 11-bed hostel at 62 Howell Road. A further 10 bed units are to be delivered by local partner Bournemouth Church Housing Association (BCHA) under the first successful part of the NSAP capital bid. This will increase vacancies for rough sleepers to move into the hotel as interim accommodation whilst awaiting purchase and opening of up to 25 further NSAP-funded beds to be available as soon as possible before 3 March 2021.

In the meantime, the Council is specifically supporting BCHA in maximising moving on of residents in Gabriel House and its move-on Morwenna Court in order to free up further spaces for people to move on from the GWH. Work is also underway exploring opportunities to lease Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) properties through third party investors and property agents in order to increase temporary accommodation capacity.

The Council is also leading a review and overhaul of the supported housing pathway in order to recalibrate and concentrate the availability of housing related support in some of the services and ensure clearer processes and targets around move-on and throughput in the system. This is being done through a number of measures:

- reviewing of rents in key accommodation
- reviewing the priorities of the floating support service (commissioned by County) to upstream their work
- revised move-on panel and pathway including social housing referrals

- increasing financial incentives and support to private landlords.

There remains a key issue regarding the loss of emergency overnight bed spaces as a result of covid impact. With the continuing restrictions permitting no shared bed spaces capacity for rough sleepers' bed space numbers are still severely reduced. The Junction night shelter is currently accommodating a maximum of six people (20 beds down on its 26 capacity). A works assessment to build in private rooms on the ground floor has to date proved cost-prohibitive. Gabriel House is seven beds down due to single occupancy of the bunks and no night chair facility and two further spaces are suspended at Esther Community. The young persons' Night Stop scheme has also been in abeyance since March as have other hosted beds through Countywide provider Young Devon. This issue has been raised with Public Health and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Council is awaiting guidance documents understood to be a set of principles for re-instating some bed spaces with increased risk management measures where possible. It is also understood that there may be an opportunity for local housing authorities to apply to MHCLG for emergency winter funds to support added capacity for bed spaces in areas of high unmet need. It is understood that the remaining £13million of the £105million NSAP revenue fund has been reserved for such purposes.

Supplementary question and answer.

*Will steps be taken to prevent rough sleeping outside the Guildhall?*

The Portfolio Holder advised that rough sleeping had been one of the issues discussed at the Exeter Community Safety Partnership on 7 October 2020 and was very much on the radar. Accordingly, this and other locations in the city were constantly monitored.

The Portfolio Holder also advised that Members would be provided with contact numbers to report rough sleeping. Details below:-

Contact information for reporting a suspected rough sleeper:

- Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm - Assertive Outreach Team 01392 284287 [exeter-outreach@julianhouse.org.uk](mailto:exeter-outreach@julianhouse.org.uk)
- Weekends - Streetlink - <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/>

Contact information for reporting suspected criminal behaviour / ASB on the street.

- Devon and Cornwall Police Call 101 or 999 (in an emergency) [101@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk](mailto:101@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk)

- 3 **Councillor M. Mitchell** - *Recovery Plans. Could the Portfolio Holder provide more detail regarding the use of the allocated government grant of £440K from the Next Steps Accommodation Programme and elaborate on the availability of other 'temporary placements'?*

The £440,779 award is broken down as follows:

- £315,420 – Accommodation costs (GWH)
- £49,980 – Security (at GWH)
- £13,325 – Cleaning (including needle sweeps) and Repairs (at GWH)

- £38,000 – Support (two x workers at six months)
- £15,362 – Food and clothing support
- £8,712 – Laundry support

Other temporary placements are outlined in response to Q2a/2b. The Council's 130 units of procured temporary accommodation (95 units plus a further 35 move-on units) are consistently full with voids being re-let within 24-48 hours. In addition to the 33 rooms at the GWH the Council currently has a further 15 persons in spot purchase hotel accommodation as at 06.10.20.

Supplementary questions and answers.

*It is understood that this is a retrospective payment for services already provided and, if so, is there funding available to take this programme through to the end of the financial year?*

The funding provided was not retrospective as such. When the Government requested Councils to bring rough sleepers into accommodation there was a certain amount of funding allocated but additional funding was provided, on the agreement of the Portfolio Holder, from in-year savings from within the service. The funding now provided will enable the continuation of the service until the end of the financial year.

*Can the funding made available be used to lease small or medium sized hotels for accommodating rough sleepers for a five year period?*

Because of the piecemeal nature of funding it is difficult to plan long term. The funding provided by Government was specifically for bringing the homeless indoors to cover accommodation itself and including the other elements listed.

- 4 **Councillor M. Mitchell** – *Winter Emergency provision. In the current crisis many tenants in all sectors are experiencing financial hardship not of their own making. What actions can the Council take to ensure that if the number of eviction orders rise due to non-payment of private rentals, tenants and their families are able to remain in their homes to provide the social and other stability they need at this time?*

The Council's homelessness prevention service is working alongside welfare and benefits staff to ensure read-across of tenants approaching the service for housing advice especially where rent arrears (or the risk of) are involved. A homelessness prevention advice update is being drafted in order to circulate on social media and via the website to provide early advice and contact information for households at potential risk. Financial support utilising discretionary funds (e.g. hardship) to provide rent contributions are already in place for some households. Housing advice staff also negotiate with payments plans with some private landlords especially as more workable alternatives to the extended and more convoluted evictions process. Other measures regarding rent arrears and payment plans are in place with Council tenants as per Q3 below.

#### **Questions from other Council Members.**

- 1 **Question from Councillor J. Moore read by the Chair** - *What level of delays before receiving their first payment are new applicants for Universal Credit typically experiencing in Exeter*

Our DWP Partnership Manager has confirmed that they do not have any first payment delays. All Universal Credit claims are processed and paid on time in the first month, unless they do not verify their information, or contact the Job Centre Plus (JCP) to verify their claim. Around 97% are paid on time.

- 2 **Councillor D. Moore** - *Benefits and Welfare: Since April how many new benefit and welfare claimants are there in Exeter, how many are predicted to the end of the year, and does the Council have the capacity to process the current and expected workload to ensure no delays to claimants?*

The table below gives caseload figures for Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Support (CTS).

Month	Council Tax Support	Housing Benefit
March 2020	7371	6119
April 2020	7910	6049
July 2020	7976	5917
October 2020	7813	5742
Change (Mar to Oct)	+442	-377
% change (Mar to Oct)	+6.0%	-6.2%

CTS cases continue to trend slowly down. HB caseload has been reducing at a fairly consistent rate since the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) and hasn't been hugely impacted by COVID-19. Some of the reduction in HB will be due to existing claimants starting new jobs and claiming UC instead of Working Tax Credit (WTC), not just customers losing their jobs and claiming UC instead of Jobseekers Allowance.

If the current trend continues, CTS caseload is expected to reduce by a further 200 by April 2021. However, realistically, there is likely to be a second wave of financial impact and job losses leading to an increase in claims. If this is half the size of the first wave it would mean an additional 300 claims, but it is impossible to predict at this point.

Officers anticipate being able to manage a second wave of claims as they did in the spring without undue impact on processing times, and if necessary, staff can be diverted from less urgent work, and delays in making decisions on CTS claims can be offset by flexibility on the recovery side.

- 3 **Councillor D. Moore** - *Payments and Collection: Will the Council be implementing or give consideration to its own voluntary extended ban on evictions of council tenants who have fallen behind on rents due to the impact of COVID pandemic?*

Whilst there are no plans to extend the eviction ban once it expires Members can be assured that there are a number of checks and balances in place to ensure tenants are given every opportunity to resolve any debt issues with

the Council as its landlord. As is often the case the officers have to determine who cannot pay and those that will not pay. Evictions are only ever an action of last resort for any breaches of tenancies including non-payment of rent. As a landlord we must always balance the needs to support our tenants as much as is practical against the need to generate the income to provide the services to all tenants.

Supplementary question and answer.

*What action has been taken to assist those who are unable to pay council housing rent as a result of the pandemic?*

Council staff continue to support those in financial difficulty on the same basis as before the pandemic. The financial position of those in difficulty is discussed in detail including assessment of their income and expenditure and, as the Council is often not the only organisation owed money, steps are taken to prioritise debt re-payment including referrals to other agencies. It is important to keep track of debt even if this involves small repayments being made. A continuing income stream to the Council is necessary to support other housing services.

- 4 **Councillor D. Moore - Rough Sleeping.** *What specialist support is the Council providing for those rough sleepers who have been evicted or abandoned emergency accommodation?*

The Council's policy towards rough sleepers recently evicted or abandoning emergency accommodation is one of continued contact and ongoing assessment of housing and health need. Outreach provide welfare checks and support for the individual to learn from the issues that led to the accommodation loss. Health needs are monitored by the Clock Tower surgery staff in the main alongside outreach staff and where relevant an individual may also have a housing navigator worker advocating for them to access alternative services felt to be needed in order to support the issue underlying the eviction (e.g. mental health, substance treatment, social care etc.). The housing navigator plays an important role in following the client to establish a relationship.

The Council supports specialist support engagement on the street via RSI-funded interventions through a specialist drug and alcohol outreach worker plus nurse and GP outreach sessions. The Council also led the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) - bid for a mental health navigator to work with rough sleepers and Housing Needs is also engaged with a revision plan for the Devon Partnership Trust (DPT)'s mental health community offer to complex and vulnerable individuals including rough sleepers. Rough sleepers (including those recently evicted) are also being supported to access covid testing where needed through combined planning and interventions between the usual services plus public health support.

Supplementary questions and answers.

*What specialist support is available to those rough sleepers with complex issues?*

Specialist support is through the mental health navigator as part of the RSI bid. City Council officers initiated the bid in conjunction with other partners



including the setting up of Colab. There have been successes and it is hoped that further progress can be made in this challenging area.

*How many of the 22 individuals who have abandoned the accommodation provided are within the 28 identified as rough sleepers?*

The Council seeks to find alternative accommodation for those who leave the Great Western Hotel for whatever reason. Some of these are likely to be rough sleeping but it is difficult to identify the precise figure. The Portfolio Holder referred to two success of re-housing individuals by referral of one to a Devon District Authority in Devon and the other to an authority in another county.

Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Services – Councillor Wright – thanked the Director and all housing staff for their outstanding commitment to tenants and, in presenting her briefing note, highlighted the following:-

- the difficulty in undertaking emergency and essential repairs during the lockdown, although there had been a reduction in requests for non-essential repairs during this period; and
- the positive feedback received from tenants supported by Council Officers during the lockdown

#### **Questions from Committee Members.**

- 1 **Councillor M. Mitchell – Fire.** *Can the Portfolio Holder in the light of the concerns within the private sectors of the implication of External Wall Fire Review Form (EWS1) certification for the safety of tenants and home owners state whether local authority housing in Exeter has or will be inspected to the same standard as that required by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors?*

#### **Background**

The government recognised that following Grenfell and subsequent MHCLG guidance to landlords it became more challenging for some households to obtain mortgages for high-rise residential properties. It therefore supported of industry efforts to apply consistency in how such properties are valued. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) developed a procedure designed to secure a proportionate valuation judgement to buildings over 18 metres or lower if there were specific concerns; e.g. cladding systems contain combustible materials without fire stopping, wooden balconies, etc.

In short, a) is the building over 18 metres or b) if it is less, would the exterior construction allow fire to spread? The EWS1 form is used by a surveyor making an assessment to record their findings. It must be remembered that the EWS1 form is not a fire risk assessment but provides information for the valuer/lender when deciding whether to provide a mortgage. It is not a legal requirement although of course we take great note of all ministry guidance, have risk assessed all our blocks of flats and are planning detailed compartmentation assessments for all our blocks of flats over the next 4-5 years. The form itself says: *“This form is intended for recording in a consistent manner what assessment has been carried out for the external wall construction of residential apartment buildings where the highest floor is 18m or more above ground level or where specific concerns exist. It should not be used for other purposes”.*

There was an article in the Guardian newspaper about this last month. They identified a capacity issue – “there are only 300 or so experts certified to carry out these inspections and they have been prioritising taller buildings, and those where there is known to be cladding” (none of our blocks have cladding). Further, they found that it could take until 2026 to complete EWS1s just on the 18m+ high-rise blocks and those with cladding. The article also quoted the MHCLG as saying “We do not support a blanket approach to EWS1 forms on buildings, and where owners are able to demonstrate their buildings are safe using other equivalent evidence, we would encourage lenders to accept that. We are investigating further actions we can take to support the industry, including looking at ways to address capacity issues.”

The background information above is provided to help explain our status.

Our status

- We have one block above 18 metres which is Rennes House. It does not have cladding and there are no external features which would facilitate fire spread.
- All our other blocks are less than 18 metres and none have cladding or features which would facilitate fire spread
- We do have some blocks with vertical tiles held on by wood battens, these are very common however fire spread would be slow, easily reached by the fire service and quick to extinguish
- Our ‘clear and safe’ policy ensures communal areas are as free from combustible materials as possible – we also ask for combustibles to be removed from balconies (e.g. barbeques)
- Our fire risk assessments now look at surface features
- We make our fire risk assessments available to our leaseholders and third parties on request
- We will be carrying out compartmentation checks of all blocks and have already begun to involve procurement, identify frameworks, etc. One specification is that they make a recommendation if they believe an EWS1 would be beneficial (a double-check for us)

In summary, there are no specific concerns currently that warrant the instigation of an EWS1 form by us, the freeholder. We are nevertheless expecting a continuation of demands for EWS1s. If the lender accepts our stance that none are needed then we normally hear no more. Alternatively, if the lender will not accept our position then the leaseholder is free to engage a suitably qualified consultant to carry out an EWS1 survey and we will take note of its findings but it is not the same as a formal fire risk assessment undertaken by ourselves and for our purposes. Its purpose is to assist the valuation.

A South West Housing Association has adopted a similar approach and attempted to engage with RICS but their request have been ignored.

Comment by the questioner.

*This issue is being faced by all local authorities who, although able to authorise inspections, the same is not possible for tenants, including those seeking to proceed with Right To Buy.*

**Questions from other Council Members.**

- 1 **Councillor D. Moore** - *After the national ban on evictions ends at the end of this month, will the Council be implementing or give consideration to its own voluntary extended ban on evictions of Council tenants who have fallen behind on rents due to the impact of COVID pandemic?*

Answer provided in response to the question from the Non-Committee Member in Question 3 above.

The Portfolio Holder stated that every scenario was examined to help those in difficulty including benefit support and other forms of financial assistance, The Director advised that monthly arrears were monitored to check trends over time.

Supplementary question and answer.

*What is the period of time during which individuals will not be pursued for failure to pay rent?*

The ban on evictions ends at the end of October.

- 2 **Councillor D. Moore** – *How will meaningful tenant participation be enabled as part of the recovery process and how can the Council support the formation and operation of tenants' associations?*

We are very keen to improve our resident involvement service and to meaningfully involve residents in our work.

After much discussion with residents we have reviewed and re-written our Resident Involvement Strategy which is currently out for consultation. We would encourage anyone who has an interest in this area to comment on the new Strategy which they can via a link on our website or Facebook page.

Full details of our plans are recorded in the Strategy itself.

Once the consultation period has ended on 21<sup>st</sup> October and the Strategy has been approved by the Executive, we will be able to start on our action plan which will include:

1. A new resident involvement structure that allows residents to choose how they want to get involved and to what extent;
2. Regular resident events such as fetes, open days, gardening projects etc.;
3. Some new thriving local residents' groups;
4. Residents undertaking their own projects to improve services and their local environment;
5. Regular tenant training to increase capacity;
6. Improved two way communication, especially via internet, smartphone and social media; and
7. Involvement from all parts of the community (particularly those who have been unrepresented in the past) to create a truly diverse group of involved residents.

Specifically on the subject of forming residents' associations we will:

1. Find out what appetite there is for such groups among residents;

2. Set up initial meetings with any involved residents to discuss the aims and objectives of any association;
3. Help establish the constitution, together with a code of conduct;
4. Help decide on the number and regularity of meetings;
5. Help to elect key officers;
6. Help with booking rooms; providing refreshments; paying reasonable expenses; providing stationery and suchlike; giving help and advice on running such meetings;
7. Provide reasonable grants for any work they wish to undertake; and
8. Provide any reasonable capacity building training.

The key, of course, to all this is to work with local residents and help them to achieve what they want to achieve. Once local associations are established, there will also be two places on the Council Housing Advisory Board for the Chair and Deputy of the overall associations to represent tenants and leaseholders.

Supplementary questions and answers.

*What can the Council do to help increase connections with tenants and support tenant activity many of whom played an important role in helping neighbours during the lockdown as many residents felt isolated? Can tenant participation be encouraged through other areas of Council activity such as Home Call as part of the stock condition work and other work streams so that as many residents as possible have the opportunity to engage?*

The purpose of the consultation on resident participation is to hear how resident and neighbourhood associations wish to become involved with the Council and the use of Home Call would be an appropriate means of promoting this process. The Council tenants' magazine "Insight" encourages tenants to participate as well as advising them of services within and outside the Council. Housing officers on routine visits also encourage tenants to participate in the consultation on the resident involvement strategy. Similarly, Customer Service staff, on receiving phone calls from Council tenants encourage them to complete the survey.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Council possessed 4,976 council houses.

Supplementary question in addition to those on the agenda and answer.

*What is the current number of voids and are they on schedule to be ready to be re-occupied?*

There are 23 major voids with five weeks being the average period a property is left void at the present time as a result of the Covid-19 crises as it had not been possible to clear properties, deliver rubbish to the tip etc. during lockdown and there was also a legal restriction on moving households. Advantage was taken to use some of the voids to house the homeless as part of the "Everyone In" Government initiative. It is hoped that the backlog will be addressed within two to three months.

The Chair, Portfolio Holders and Committee Members asked that their thanks be passed on to staff for their commitment, hard work and significant efforts during the current crisis.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.04 pm

Chair

DRAFT