

# Councillor sets the record straight

Following our [article](#) written by Local Democracy Reporter David Bol, we have been contacted by Independent councillor Gavin Barrie, and asked to set the record straight.

The article published over the weekend centres on the former Housing Convener's actions and words in relation to ending the use of B&Bs in the capital.

David Bol made a Freedom of Information request to the council to establish that Cllr Barrie did sign off on the release, which the councillor freely admits.

This matter came to light at the end of last year in a previous [article](#) written by the Local Democracy Reporter. Cllr Barrie questioned the accuracy of the article in respect of the time by which the council was due to end the use of B&Bs.

The Edinburgh Reporter has now met with Cllr Barrie to clarify the timeline and what was agreed.

## Housing Committee meeting

Following a meeting of the Housing Committee in January 2018, the council's media team prepared a press release which Councillor Barrie signed off. He says now that the release was inaccurate, and has apologised for the error in the release which went out to the press.

The housing committee agreed at their January 2018 meeting to consider ending the use of B&Bs as temporary accommodation for

those with homelessness issues – and called for a **report** by June 2018.

## **Press release**

The press release stated that the practice **would end** by June 2018. This was not correct – and even now some families are still accommodated in this way. But the quote attributed to Cllr Barrie did reflect what was agreed at the meeting, which is a matter of public record.

Cllr Barrie said : “The strategy was to be **reported** at the June meeting. At the November meeting the terms of reference and work programme for the Homelessness Task Force clearly states that in January they will report on their fact finding, and in June they would bring forward strategies as to how they will deal with what they have found and which they want to address.

“Every single councillor would want to get everyone out of B&B accommodation, but given the reality and the enormity of the problem, the shortage of social housing it is fantasy to suggest that we could solve this in a matter of months. I certainly would not have deliberately made a pledge to cure that problem by June.

“I freely admit that the headline of the press release containing quotes from three different councillors was wrong.

“When Mr Bol contacted me on 14 February regarding his FOI on this matter, I clearly stated to him that the Press Release was incorrect and yet in his articles over last weekend he repeats the allegation that I personally had made this commitment and goes further with a claim that the minute of the meeting supports this.”

**It has now been made clear to us from the papers that Councillor Barrie did not make a promise to end using B&Bs by June 2018**

The minutes of the November 2017 meeting show this decision :

*To note the Task Force would provide an update report to the Housing and Economy Committee in January 2018 with a clear set of achievable outcomes.*

The report brought to the January 2018 meeting clearly shows what was intended, even though the press release later contained an error in dates. (Read the full report below).

The report at 7.9 states :

The task force agreed to develop a strategy to achieve the following outcomes, prior to reporting back to Committee on 7 June 2018.

- No families to be accommodated in bed and breakfast.

Housing and Economy Committee

- No 16/17 year olds or care leavers to be accommodated in bed and breakfast.

- Reduce the number of people in bed and breakfast accommodation.

- Reduce the lengths of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation.

- Reduce the number of people sleeping rough.

- Increase the stock of temporary accommodation, specifically flats,

supported accommodation and new forms of temporary accommodation.

- Continued reduction in homelessness presentations.

- Implement the “Housing First” approach.

But the minutes of the January 2018 meeting show the recorded version of events and make it clear that a report was due by 7 June 2018 and not an end to the use of B&Bs :

## **2. Homelessness Task Force – Update**

The Homelessness Task Force had been established to address

some of the challenges homelessness services were facing.

Details were provided on the work undertaken thus far and the targets the Task Force had set. A further report presenting proposals developed by the Task Force would be presented to the Committee in June 2018.

## **Decision**

1. 1) To agree the measures of success outlined in section four of the report by the Acting Head of Safer & Stronger Communities;
2. 2) To agree the creation of a sub group, to include operational staff from relevant service areas to develop Task Force proposals; and
3. 3) To note that the Task Force would report back with progress and final recommendations, to the Housing and Economy Committee, on 7 June 2018.



Cllr Gavin Barrie

Cllr Barrie resigned from the SNP party in March that year, and from his position as Housing Convener, so he was unable to see the committee's strategy through. He has represented his Inverleith Ward as an Independent councillor since then, but

is not a member of any committees.

The Edinburgh Reporter apologises to Cllr Barrie for the upset this has caused him, but we are glad to set the record straight.



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