

Liz Nicolls

She spent years working at the heart of government with politicians from all sides but these days PCH Board member Liz Nicolls has different priorities.

Liz recently moved to the South West after years working as a civil servant in the capital – but our region is one she is very familiar with.

Her family originally came from the Plymouth area and she's been coming here for visits all her life.

After taking redundancy in 2016, she and her husband moved to Shaugh Prior, where they run a 'small-scale' B&B during the summer months.

She feels like her experiences in Whitehall have given her a good grounding for her work with PCH.

After graduating in politics and economics from university, Liz got her first job at the Greater London Council (GLC) before moving to the Civil Service in 1990.

She said: "I'd always wanted to work at the heart of politics. When I first applied to the Civil Service, I didn't get the job but I reapplied after I'd been at the GLC for some years."

She started off in the Department of Environment which at the time covered housing, local government and planning.

She has fond memories of her time there. She said: "John Prescott was quite memorable. I used to do a lot of work with him on controversial planning cases. If there was anything big like plans for a new town or a new Ikea which attracted a lot of opposition, it would get called in to the Secretary of State and I would often have to go to court."

She also worked at 10 Downing Street during John Major's premiership.

She added: "The first time you go through the gates at Downing Street you've got all these tourists looking at you – you can feel their eyes on your back. I've also been in the House of Lords and Commons to offer support during debates. It's really good fun."

In 2009, Liz did some work on an affordable housing programme, where her interest in housing was really ignited. She became so passionate about it, she arranged to do a secondment at London and Quadrant Housing Association for a year and ran a project where she got to know how tenants really lived.

She says it taught her a lot about stereotypes and stigma around social housing.

Liz went back to the Civil Service but when the opportunity for redundancy came up, she took it.

She joined the Board of a housing association in the South East called Saxon Weald, which was similar to PCH in that it had gone through a stock transfer.

When she and her husband eventually moved to Devon, she saw the PCH Board member role advertised and thought she'd give it a go.

Liz said: "Working at Saxon Weald gave me a lot of valuable experience. I'm really pleased I've been able to use my skills and knowledge learned over the years in previous roles for PCH.

"With PCH now developing homes in Plymouth's travel to work area, we're showing we're not just about maintaining standards for existing tenants, we're also securing homes for the future, for people who may not live in the city, but may work here. It shows PCH is a big part of the city's economy."

Liz sits on our Audit and Risk and Customer Focus Committee and is also a volunteer for the Shekinah Mission, where she helps homeless and vulnerable people with job searches, money and debt advice and housing issues.

She also enjoys socialising with friends and family in the city and enjoying all it has to offer, travel, walking her dog and learning new languages.