

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES of a MEETING of the DECENT AND AFFORDABLE HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on Tuesday 15 July 2014 at 2.15pm**

#### **Present**

**Councillors:** Mrs E M Andrews, W J Daw, P J Heal, Mrs J R Rendle and K D Wilson (substituting for Cllr R Wright)

#### **Also Present**

**Councillor:** R L Stanley

#### **Also Present**

**Officers:** N Sanderson (Head of Housing and Property Services), C Fry (Housing Services Manager) and S J Lees (Member Services Officer)

### **13 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

### **14 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 May 2014 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

### **15 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

### **16 REVIEW OF CASH INCENTIVE SCHEME (Recording 1 minute and 40 seconds)**

The Group had before it a report\* from the Housing Services Manager requesting that the current scheme be reviewed. She explained that recent welfare reform had encouraged a lot of people to think about moving and downsizing. The rationale behind the proposed change was that, by reducing the amount payable in each downsizing case the budget could be used to help more people. People who were downsizing may be doing so because they are experiencing difficulties paying the rent. Moving can be very expensive and the amount paid could assist them with removal costs. By making smaller payments, the Council could assist more people. Previously larger payments had been made which meant that the budget had been spent before the end of the twelve month period it covered.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The need to let tenants know that this budget was available once the incentive scheme had been approved and that it could be applied for retrospectively for any moves that had taken place since 1 April 2014;
- The need for the Housing Revenue Account to have a fixed budget each year, it would not be sound financial management to have an 'open ended' budget in this area;

- The budget of £30k for 2014/15 had already been approved by full Council. The Group would be notified of any exceptional cases that may occur once the budget for 2014/15 had been spent.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that the amount payable in each downsizing case be reduced to a maximum of £500 to those giving up one bedroom and £1000 for those who are giving up two or more bedrooms.

(Proposed by Cllr W J Daw and seconded by Cllr Mrs J R Rendle)

- Notes:
- (i) \*Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes;
  - (ii) Cllr Mrs E Andrews requested that her abstention from voting be recorded.

## 17 **HOUSING BUSINESS PLAN (Recording 30 minutes)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, the Business Plans for the following areas and discussion took place under each heading:

### Homelessness, Allocations & Lettings, Tenancy Services

In the short term the key area of work was Digital Transformation and trying to get tenants to make more use of electronic communications. This would make collecting rent cheaper and would also free up staff time enabling them to be out visiting tenants and properties. Staff would also be encouraged to use digital technology whilst out and about.

Members requested that plain English be used when providing information to them in the future regarding Digital transformation.

### Building Services

- Staffing resource in this area needed to be flexible in order to meet shifting demands;
- A number of contracts needed to be put out to tender.

### Care Services

Every effort would be made to find alternative employment within the authority for those staff affected by the termination of the Supported Housing Service.

Note: \*Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

## 18 **CARE SERVICES (Recording 54 minutes and 8 seconds)**

The Head of Housing and Property Services provided an update in relation to the Supported Housing Service that would be terminating on 31 March 2015:

- Staff had visited and spoken to all the tenants that would be affected by the removal of this service and would be visited again in December 2014;

- Tenants had been advised that the Lifeline Alarm Service would incur a charge as from 1 April 2015;
- Mid Devon District Council was ahead in terms of conducting need assessments compared to other providers;
- Staff were committed to providing the best help and support available to tenants during the transitional period;
- Tenants were upset but had accepted that the removal of the service had not been a Mid Devon District Council decision.

The comment was made that Members preferred to have written reports in advance of a meeting so that they could consider the relevant issues and any questions they wanted to ask. The Head of Housing and Property Services stated that this particular Group did usually receive a lot of written policies and reports but that on rare occasions this was not always possible.

**19 INTERIM REPORT FROM THE DEVON HOME CHOICE PROJECT GROUP (Recording 1 hour and 53 seconds)**

The Chairman of the Working Group informed the Group that they had had two meetings thus far. One to scope out the project and one to meet with Rupert Warren, the Devon Home Choice Co-ordinator who had put forward his point of view. In addition to this they had also received information regarding the rationale behind Torbay Council and Teignbridge District Council's decisions to remove Band E. As a result of this the Group had come up with a list of questions which would be sent to those Councils seeking further clarification. These questions would be circulated to the Policy Development Group as a whole in advance of this to see if members not in the working group wanted to add something to the list.

The Head of Housing and Property Services explained that Exeter City Council would shortly be taking a report to their Cabinet looking at the same issue.

**20 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING – 16 SEPTEMBER 2014 (Recording 1 hour, 6 minutes and 30 seconds)**

There were no additional items identified for the next meeting other than those already identified in the work programme.

(The meeting ended at 3.23pm)

**CHAIRMAN**