

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **DECENT AND AFFORDABLE HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on Tuesday 9 September 2014 at 2.15pm

Present

Councillors: Mrs E M Andrews, W J Daw, P J Heal, R F Radford, Mrs J R Rendle and R Wright

Apology

Councillor: P F Williams

Also Present

Councillor: R L Stanley

Also Present

Officers: N Sanderson (Head of Housing and Property Services), A Jarrett (Head of Finance), C Yandle (Audit Team Leader) and S J Lees (Member Services Officer)

21 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

22 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 July 2014 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

23 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

24 **FINANCIAL UPDATE FOR THE THREE MONTHS TO 30 JUNE 2014 (Recording 1 minute and 49 seconds)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Finance presenting it with a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year. The key highlights within the report were stated as follows:

- The forecast General Fund deficit for the current year was £227k;
- A small underspend of £56k was forecasted on the Housing Revenue Account;
- Figures in relation to the successful collection of rent arrears were extremely good and much better than in previous years;
- General Fund housing figures would improve by £20k due to some funding received from Devon County Council in relation to a Youth Homelessness Prevention Officer post.

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

25 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT FOR THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2014-15 (Recording 4 minutes and 50 seconds)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Head of Communities and Governance providing it with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2014/15 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Collection of rent arrears had exceeded the set target and housing staff were to be congratulated;
- The Head of Housing and Property Services felt that they would be able to achieve an average void time of 17 days by the end of the year; individual 'hard to let' properties had a detrimental effect on the average number of days figure within the report. Bank holidays and the Christmas shutdown days were unfortunately included within the number of days to turn a property round. This could not be avoided since this was prescribed by the national indicator;
- On average there could be between 6 and 8 empty properties at any one time but this could be as high as 11 or 12 depending on circumstances and the time of year;
- The budget took into account the average number of voids per year in terms of the loss of rental income;
- Achieving the targets in relation to the percentage of Decent Council Homes was required to be 100% by the end of the year.

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

26 **REVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT POLICY (Recording 21 minutes and 45 seconds)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Housing Services Manager requesting that it reviewed the Neighbourhood Management Policy in order to ensure that it took into account health and safety concerns. This policy which was originally approved by the PDG in May 2012 was due to be reviewed in March 2016. This date had been brought forward as a result of some complaints made about the way in which the Council responded to issues raised in connection with hanging baskets.

Discussion took place regarding:

- How important it was that the Housing Service had a clearly defined policy in place because this helped both staff and tenants understand their responsibilities;
- Neighbourhood walkabouts did not routinely include checks of back gardens, however, they did include a check of the 'street scene' at the front of the property.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet
that the new draft version of the
Neighbourhood Management Policy
be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr W J Daw and
seconded by Cllr R F Radford)

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

27 **TENANCY HOME CHECKS (Recording 35 minutes and 15 seconds)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a briefing paper * from the Housing Services Manager updating it on Tenancy Home Checks since the policy relating to Tenancy Inspections was approved in July 2012.

It was confirmed that as at the end of July 2014, a total of 343 homes had been visited, or over 11% of those properties in the management of the Housing Service. Staffing issues had impacted upon the ability of the Neighbourhood teams to complete these visits during 2013 and into 2014 but these teams were now fully staffed and each officer had been instructed to undertake 2 visits each week in order to ensure that the target was met and every tenant was visited at least once every 5 years. The comment was made that these visits provided the tenant with an opportunity to talk about any repairs which needed to take place.

In general, houses were extremely well cared for, only a few had been identified as needing intensive housing management.

Note: *Briefing paper previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

28 **DEVON HOME CHOICE WORKING GROUP (Recording 41 minutes and 40 seconds)**

The Working Group had had a number of meetings since the Policy Development Group (PDG) had last met. The Chairman of the working Group provided the PDG with an update on their deliberations. He stated that they had listed the advantages and disadvantages of removing Band E and would bring a formal report with their conclusions and recommendations to the next meeting.

29 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING – 25 NOVEMBER 2014 (Recording 52 minutes and 15 seconds)**

In addition to the items already identified in the work programme for the next meeting a report from the Devon Home Choice Working Group was requested.

(The meeting ended at 3.08pm)

CHAIRMAN