

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 28 September 2022 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

R J Dolley (Chairman)
G Barnell, J Bartlett, J Cairney, S J Clist, D R Coren,
P J Heal, S Pugh and R F Radford

Also Present

Councillors

L J Cruwys, R M Deed and S J Penny

Present

Officers

Jill May (Director of Business Improvement and Operations), Simon Newcombe (Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing), Mike Lowman (Building Services Operations Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

27 Apologies and Substitute Members

There were no apologies for absence.

28 Public Question Time

There were no questions from members of the public.

29 Declaration of Interests under the Code of Conduct

No interests were declared under this item.

30 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2022 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

31 Chairman's Announcements (00:05:00)

The Chairman informed the Group that the recommendation they had made at their last meeting regarding the purchase of houses for multiple occupation had been considered thoroughly by the Cabinet. However, the Cabinet had decided to purchase two houses rather than one. Despite this, the deliberations of the Homes Policy Development Group had been much appreciated and welcomed.

32 Mid Devon Housing Service Delivery Report (00:12:00)

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing providing an update to Members on enforcement

and other activity undertaken by Mid Devon Housing. This included the following information:

- The report provided a summary of results in relation to key performance indicators, including voids and debt recovery.
- The Government had mandated that new Tenant satisfactory measures be reported upon and this applied to anybody providing social housing. This would be a focus for the Regulator in the future.
- There was a challenge for the Council at the current time in terms of staff recruitment and retention. This was being experienced across the sector.

Consideration was given to:

- The effectiveness of the Devon Home Choice (DHC) Allocations system. It was explained under the new regulatory regime that any provider having over a 1,000 properties to rent out will be required to have an open, fair and transparent allocation system which DHC already provides. There had to be a level playing field providing vital assurance that all was fair. There could be issues with bandings which could be looked at on an individual basis. Have a regional approach was also supported by the larger Housing Associations who joined DHC on this basis which ultimately provides more choice for tenants.
- Despite the pressures within the service the Group were reassured that issues were prioritised in terms of health & safety, repairs and maintenance.
- The complexity of multiple debt issues experienced by tenants given the current cost of living crisis and the effect of having to deal with this on the Neighbourhood officers. It was explained that officers were trained and worked with third parties such as CAB, CHAT and DWP, however, there were pressures.
- Possession numbers increasing. Every effort was made to engage with Tenants before things escalated but sometimes this was not possible and there was no option but to refer matters to the court. This was always used as a last resort.
- Assessing numbers of staff within the specialist team was always under review, however, there were financial implications to consider in terms of additional recruitment and training costs.

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

33 **Briefing on the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill and changes to Social Housing Regulatory Regime (00:55:00)**

To Group received, and **NOTED** a report * from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing providing an update to Members of the PDG on the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill which will reform the regulation of social housing; and which will set out the terms of approved schemes for the investigation of housing-related complaints. This paper also provided some information on the subsequent report of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee report, published on 20 July 2022 alongside an informal presentation by the Social Housing Regulator in August 2022.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The report provided a summary of the changes to the Social Housing Regulatory regime. It would be much more proactive in terms of striving for tenant engagement and satisfaction going forwards and would also provide more guidance to housing providers.
- The changes had been driven out of the Grenfell Tower disaster.
- Tenants needed to be listened to.
- Early proactive engagement with the Regulator had already been undertaken and would continue to ensure all staff, tenants and Members were consulted on a way forward.

The Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing was thanked for his explanation of the new Bill, his hard work and his proactiveness in working with the Regulator at an early stage.

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

34 Homes for Ukraine Scheme - update (01:14:00)

The Group received a presentation from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing which provided summarised information in relation to the following:

- Role / focus of Local Authorities on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (HfU)
- HfU scheme funding
- Funding arrangement in place with Devon County Council
- HfU scheme roll-out
- Local Mid Devon delivery team
- Latest Mid Devon position
- Requirements & challenges
- Current position – wraparound support
- Housing and other risks
- Next steps: re-settlement work
- Team Devon Approach
- Short and long-term solutions
- Support examples

Consideration was given to:

- The Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing was congratulated for his thorough and comprehensive update on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the amount of work that he and his team were undertaking.
- The family scheme was proving to be the most challenging but much was being done to provide support and signpost to other helpful agencies.
- Concerns that the crisis in Ukraine was far from over and may well get worse.
- The complexities in having to support individuals and families experiencing trauma.
- Was the scheme sustainable? What support was being given by central Government? It was confirmed that the Government were continuing to look at

the scheme very closely, however, due to recent national events, such as the election of a new Prime Minister, the energy crisis and the economy, the scheme appears to have been put on the backfoot somewhat. Team Devon were expressing their frustrations at a high level.

- Mid Devon Tenants were able to take in Ukrainian guests but would need fully assessing first and permission from Mid Devon as the landlord.

35 Identification of items for the next meeting (02:00:00)

In addition to the items already listed in the work programme for the next meeting the Group requested that they receive an update in relation to the following at a future meeting:

- Consideration of the current Mid Devon Housing Development Plan and the Housing Needs Assessment jointly and the possibility of setting up a working group to assess the issues further.

(The meeting ended at 4.25 pm)

CHAIRMAN