

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the DECENT AND AFFORDABLE HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 22 March 2016 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

P J Heal (Chairman)
Mrs E M Andrews, Mrs H Bainbridge,
W J Daw, R Evans, J D Squire and
L D Taylor

Apology

Councillor

Mrs G Doe

Also Present

Councillors

C J Eginton and R L Stanley

Also Present

Officers

Nick Sanderson (Head of Housing and Property Services),
Roderick Hewson (Principal Accountant), Catherine Yandle
(Internal Audit Team Leader), Nicky Chandler (Auditor) and
Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

78 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs G Doe.

79 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

80 MINUTES

The Minutes of the special meeting held on 25 February 2016 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

81 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

82 FINANCIAL UPDATE FOR THE NINE MONTHS ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2015 (00:01:43)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Finance presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

The Principal Accountant outlined the contents of the report making reference to three major positive variances within the General Fund. This included:

- £38k better recovery on the Deposit and Recovery Scheme (DARS).
- £20k lower costs than budgeted due to using the councils own stock instead of B&B's and case numbers having been below average.
- £20k use of Discretionary Housing Payments from central government to fund DARS scheme.

Regarding the Housing Revenue Account the most significant savings were in relation to:

- Repairs and Maintenance as the painting contract would complete a portion of the work in 2016/17 and so £140k would not be spent in the current financial year.
- Where operatives were spending significantly more of their time on major upgrades instead of day to day repairs and so the costs could be charged elsewhere.
- There had also been salary savings where vacancies had not been filled.

A brief discussion took place regarding the enforcement costs in relation to Harlequin Valet and whether or not these could be recovered. It was explained that there was a charge on the property and subject to it being sold there was every possibility of having the costs returned.

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

83 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK FOR THE THIRD QUARTER OF 2015-2016 (00:08:31)**

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 2015/16 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The Internal Audit Team Leader outlined the contents of the report stating, as an update to section 2.3 of the report, that there were now no outstanding gas safety certificates.

Discussion took place regarding:

- A staircase in St Andrew Street not meeting current building regulations due to conservation requirements however when the property was originally built it had.
- What constituted a 'non decent council home' – it was explained that, in the main, this related to additional loft insulation and it was confirmed that the upgrades would be carried out by the end of the financial year.
- The target in relation to affordable homes being linked to the Corporate Plan and the objective of achieving 300 affordable new homes over the next four years.

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

84 HOUSING SERVICES ALLOCATIONS POLICY (00:15:12)

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of Housing and Property Services presenting the draft Housing Services Allocations Policy. Social housing was a valuable resource and the Council needed to ensure that those homes in the District which became available for letting were allocated appropriately in order to make best use of the stock. The revised Allocations Policy set out the Council's approach to the use of preference labels on adverts for available properties.

The Head of Housing and Property Services outlined the contents of the report highlighting the changes within the policy that had taken place since the last review. This included offering some of the older person's accommodation to those over the age of 45 and also incorporating some of the recommendations made by the Band E Working Party designed to reduce the number of cases in Band E.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Looking at individual cases sympathetically in relation to family size and age limit criteria.
- The necessity to make the best use of the Council's housing stock.
- Factors relating to the allocation of properties.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the revised Allocations Policy be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge and seconded by Cllr R Evans)

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

85 WELFARE REFORM (00:32:30)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a briefing paper from the Housing Services Manager outlining the effects of continuing welfare reform.

The Head of Housing and Property Services explained that the paper set out how the Council was planning to deal with the effects of welfare reform. One of these effects would be the reduction of rental income by between £4m and £5m over the next 5 years obviously having a significant impact upon the Housing Revenue Account. The Council would need to look at its long term planning in the housing area as well as a need to look at its asset management.

The paper also highlighted the good work of the Local Welfare Assistance and Money Advice Schemes which were being managed by the Council's Housing Benefits Service.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- The numbers of people on Universal Credit would increase in the coming years.
- Courses of action to reduce the impacts of the effects of the 1% reduction in rent.
- It was not clear at this early stage whether Devolution would allow the Council some leeway in terms of what it could and couldn't do in relation to housing.

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

86 CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16 (00:43:30)

The Committee had before it a draft annual report * by the Chairman on the work of the Policy Development Group during 2015/16. There being no suggested amendments to the report it was **AGREED** that it would be included with the Council Summons for the meeting on 27 April 2016.

87 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (00:44:09)

In addition to the items already listed in the work programme, the following items were requested to be on the agenda for the next meeting:

- Update on Band E
- Update on the situation regarding Wessex Home Improvement Loans

(The meeting ended at 3.03 pm)

CHAIRMAN