

## MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

### MINUTES of a MEETING of the DECENT AND AFFORDABLE HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 19 July 2016 at 2.15 pm

#### Present

**Councillors** P J Heal (Chairman)  
Mrs E M Andrews, Mrs H Bainbridge,  
D R Coren, W J Daw, Mrs G Doe,  
R J Dolley and J D Squire

#### Apologies

**Councillor(s)** L D Taylor

#### Also Present

**Councillor(s)** R L Stanley

#### Also Present

**Officer(s):** Claire Fry (Housing Services Manager), Roderick Hewson (Principal Accountant), Mark Baglow (Repairs Manager), Philip Langdon (Solicitor), Michael Parker (Housing Options Manager) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

#### 14 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies had been received from Cllr L Taylor.

#### 15 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from the members of the public present.

#### 16 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2016 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

#### 17 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Mrs P Cowie and Mrs S Gregory from Tenants Together, informing the Group that Tenants Together did a lot of work to help the Housing Service and meet monthly. He also welcomed Tanya Wenham, Lead Officer for Private Sector Housing and Hannah Johnson who was on work experience.

The Chairman reminded the Group that there was a Member Briefing later that day regarding Devon Home Choice.

The Chairman informed the Group that there would be a visit to the Old Road Housing Depot prior to the meeting being held on 15 November 2016.

## 18 FIRE RISK IN COMMUNAL AREAS POLICY

The Group had before it a report \* from the Housing Services Manager reviewing the Fire Risk in Communal Areas Policy. The officer outlined the contents of the report explaining that the review of this policy reflected changes in good practice and legislation. It provided a framework for staff which set out how they were to manage fire risk in communal areas. The updated policy set out how the Council would manage fire risks in communal areas within its housing stock. It identified how it would monitor communal areas so that they were kept free from obstructions and hazards to protect the health and safety of all users of its buildings. The policy had been amended to provide more clarity on existing clauses relating to risk assessments, preventative measures, communal inspections and maintenance of communal areas.

The Officer reminded Members that this was a very important policy as fire killed. It was important that rules were laid down in order that everyone knew what was and what wasn't allowed and what could be done to reduce the risk of fire. Following a fire that had occurred at a block of flats in Southwark the Regulator found failings in measures that had been put in place to stop the spread of fire. Tenants did not always appreciate that items left in hallways and communal areas constituted a risk but if fire took hold these items could become dangerous by causing smoke or an obstruction to the Fire Service.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Mobility scooters and the fact that if there was no appropriate storage for them then it may be recommended that the tenant move to more suitable accommodation;
- An ongoing review of spare land near accommodation and whether it could be used for storage;
- How officers dealt with toys that were left lying around at properties and the possibility of producing a poster to try and prevent this;
- Building Repairs Operatives and Estate Caretakers and the role they took in reporting risk.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that the revised Fire Risk in Communal Areas policy be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge, seconded by Cllr Mrs E M Andrews)

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

## 19 MEETING MANAGEMENT

The Chairman indicated that he intended to revise the order of agenda items to 5, 7, 6, 8, 9, 11, 10 in order to make best use of officer time.

## 20 PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE TENANCY AGREEMENT (00:18:38)

The Group had before it a report \* of the Housing Services Manager presenting the proposed changes to the revised Tenancy Agreement following consultation with tenants.

The officer outlined the contents of the report explaining that the Council currently operated nine different tenancy agreements relating to introductory, secure and flexible tenancies. The revised tenancy agreement amalgamated those documents into one. The current version of the introductory and secure tenancy agreement was introduced in 2010. Since then, flexible tenancies (2 and 5 year terms) had been introduced. The review of all the tenancy agreements currently in use had meant that the conditions of tenancy in all the agreements could be amended, as appropriate, bringing them into line with new legislation, regulatory requirements, policy and good practice. The Policy set out the consultation that had been undertaken, which was extensive, and listed outcomes.

The Housing Services Manager further explained that national Housing Policy was evolving. The Housing and Planning Act had become Statute within the previous month and this ended lifetime tenancies. Despite forthcoming changes it had been agreed to go forward with the Tenancy Agreement as there was a clause included which stated that areas within it could be superseded if new legislation was implemented.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The use of Facebook and Twitter for consultation;
- Changes only applying to new and not existing tenants;
- The possibility of changing from 48 week to 52 week rent payments in the future;
- Universal Credit and the impact that this could have on rent payments;
- Persons with Power of Attorney were treated as tenants.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that approval be given for the Council to vary the terms of the tenancy agreement by serving a notice of variation to secure tenants in accordance with sections 102 and 103 of the Housing Act 1985.

(Proposed by Cllr W J Daw and seconded by Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge)

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

## 21 TENANCY INSPECTION POLICY (0:46:51)

The Group had before it a report \* of the Housing Services Manager presenting the revised Tenancy Inspection Policy.

The officer outlined the contents of the report explaining that the review of this policy reflected changes in good practice and legislative changes. It provided a framework

for staff which set out how they could make the best use of the housing stock by carrying out regular tenancy inspections. The policy explained the purpose of carrying out tenancy inspections, the type of information collected during an inspection and the action that would be taken where concerns were raised. Tenants Together had approved the draft Tenancy Inspection Policy at their meeting on 9 June 2016.

The officer further explained that Tenancy Home Checks were important not only to ensure that properties were kept in good order and who was living in them but could be used to engage with tenants, to check for additional needs and to direct tenants to other support agencies.

During June officers had undertaken 59 Tenancy Home Checks. The first three attempts to undertake a Home Check were unannounced but having given 24 hours' notice tenants were obliged to allow access to the property.

Discussion took place regarding the benefits of inspections including 'putting a face to the Council' and the fact that officers generally received a good reception.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Cabinet approve the revised Tenancy Inspection Policy.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs E M Andrews and seconded by Cllr D R Coren)

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

## 22 **VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY - SHELTERED HOMES DECORATION (01:00:39)**

The Group had before it a report \* from the Head of Housing and Property Services advising members of the revised Void Management Policy. The Building Services Manager explained that 654 of the properties owned by the Housing Revenue Account were formally classified as 'Sheltered Accommodation' however this had since been reclassified as 'Accessible Housing'. The change in designation had removed the minimum age criteria for allocation of these properties. It was possible that in the future in order to make the best use of the housing stock these properties could be allocated to persons under the age of 45, in recent months one of these properties was let to a 29 year old.

Previously Sheltered Housing voids had been decorated prior to letting. The average cost to decorate a sheltered property based upon our schedule of rates was around £700. In order to reduce costs and counteract the constraints placed upon the Housing Revenue Account by the current financial climate, it was proposed that the authority no longer decorate sheltered /accessible housing stock, and apply the same principles to decoration as currently used for the generals general needs stock.

The Housing 'Tenants Together' group have been consulted on this policy and their comments taken into consideration.

Discussion took place regarding the criteria for accessible accommodation, which was dependant on need not age and that it was anticipated that around 5% of tenants may not be able to decorate the property themselves but if this was the case the work would be undertaken post-void.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Cabinet adopt the revised Void Management Policy.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge and seconded by Cllr W J Daw)

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

23 **CONVERSION OF COMMON ROOMS IN TO LETTABLE (01:13:00)**

The Group had before it a report \* from the Head of Housing and Property Services presenting the proposed 'change of use' of Common Rooms.

The Building Services Manager outlined the contents of the report explaining that the authority currently had four commons rooms, three of these were within the Westexe area of Tiverton that were only a few hundred metres apart, and one in Cullompton.

The Tenants Together group were asked if they would like to undertake a full review of their use as it was felt that the rooms were underutilised and that better use could be made of these assets.

The recommendations contained within the proposed policy were fully supported by the Tenants Together Scrutiny Group. Their review identified that room usage had strayed from the original intent, that they were underutilised in many cases, and also used by non-tenant organisations

The officer further explained that surveys had identified that three of the four Common Rooms could easily be converted into lettable units, pending 'change of use' permission being granted.

Due to the proximity of the three rooms in the Westexe area of Tiverton it was felt by the scrutiny group that the organisations using these rooms could easily be relocated into one central location freeing up the properties for conversion to lettable units.

The Common Room at Brewin Road Flats had a communal washing/drying room which was available for the tenants to use free of charge. They felt that although this facility was required due to the fact that there was no room in the flats for this sort of appliance, it should not be free and that tenants should be expected to cover the running costs.

The Common Room at Woolcott Way, Cullompton was rarely used and the site was unsuitable for this type of usage due to its location and lack of parking.

The Cabinet Member for Housing thanked the members of Tenants Together for their work on this project.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Cabinet recommends to Council the proposed 'change of use' of our Common Rooms.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs E M Andrews and seconded by Cllr J D Squire)

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

## 24 **WASTE MANAGEMENT AT OLD ROAD (01:12:06)**

At the previous meeting the Group had requested that they receive information on how waste was treated at Old Road. The Building Services Manager explained that a lot of waste was generated whilst undertaking works but that the service also had to deal with waste that was left in void properties and garages by tenants. He confirmed that in cases where tenants had left waste they were recharged for the removal of it.

The Officer explained that waste from sites was either returned to the depot by operatives where it was separated into skips, collected by a specialist from site or taken directly to landfill.

Asbestos was very expensive to dispose of and was also removed by a specialist contractor. Waste that could be recycled was cheaper to dispose of and for this reason there were a number of skips at the depot for separation of items such as metals, plasterboard, rubble and wood.

## 25 **HOUSING SERVICES ALLOCATIONS POLICY (ADDENDUM) (01:26:57)**

The Group had before it a report \* from the Head of Housing and Property Services presenting a revision to the Housing Services Allocation Policy. It was explained that this policy had recently been adopted by the Council but since then it had been pointed out that the Council could no longer advertise properties as “Sheltered Accommodation”. Due to the withdrawal of funding for Supporting People and the subsequent ending of floating sheltered housing support, it was prudent to review the definition of ‘Sheltered Accommodation as used by the Council.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Cabinet adopt the addendum to the Housing Allocations Policy.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs G Doe and seconded by Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge)

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

## 26 **WESSEX PARTNERSHIP (01:36:11)**

The Cabinet Member for Housing stated that the next Wessex Group meeting was being held on 28<sup>th</sup> July. He informed the Group that he had been receiving monthly reports which showed that Exeter was moving forward as a pilot and had been issuing loans but that there had been no loans in Mid Devon. It may be that there would be a need to call a Special Meeting of this Group during August as six months’ notice would need to be given if the decision was made to withdraw.

## 27 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

There were no additional items to add.

(The meeting ended at 4.02 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**