

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 17 July 2018 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

W J Daw (Chairman)
Mrs H Bainbridge, D R Coren, Mrs G Doe, R J Dolley,
P J Heal, F W Letch and J D Squire

Also Present

Councillors

C J Eginton and R L Stanley

Present

Officers

Andrew Pritchard (Director of Operations), Claire Fry (Group Manager for Housing), Joanne Nacey (Group Manager for Finance), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security), Mark Baglow (Group Manager for Building Services) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

15 **Apologies and Substitute Members**

There were no apologies for absence.

16 **Public Question Time**

There were no members of the public present.

17 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2018 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

18 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman informed the Group that there would be a short informal meeting after the close of this meeting and he hoped as many of the Group could remain as possible.

19 **Performance and Risk (00:01:38)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Operations providing members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2018/19 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

It was explained that this was the first report for the current municipal year.

Consideration was given to:

- Whether the target in relation to ‘the average number of days to re-let’ was unrealistic at 14 days and whether this should be set at a higher number. It was explained that this was a challenging target but challenges had driven the business forward and if 14 days was not achievable the target could be reviewed in future.
- The review of the Homelessness Strategy in ‘early’ 2018. The question was asked as to whether this work had been completed yet since we were now half way through the year. The Group Manager for Housing explained that new legislation in this area had been introduced in April 2018 and that this had resulted in a large volume of work to enable to Council to be in a position to manage its duties. A review was on the ‘to do list’ and would be forthcoming as soon as possible.

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

20 **Revenue and Capital Outturn Report for 2017/18 (00:08:30)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (151) presenting the revenue and capital outturn figures for the financial year 2017/18.

The Group Manager for Financial Services briefly outlined the contents of the report stating that there had been an overall underspend on the General Fund in 2017/18 of £159k and for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) the underspend had been £255k. Approval had been given to carry forward some of the capital budget. The underspend on the HRA meant that money could be transferred across to support the 30 year modernisation plan.

Discussion took place regarding:

- A variance of £377k under Property Services. This was a complicated area with lots of ins and outs throughout the year. It was requested that a full breakdown be provided to the Group as to how what made up this amount.
- The variance of £48k under Grounds Maintenance and why this was. It was explained that the relevant factors in relation to this included having to replace equipment that had been stolen and costs incurred by the relocation to Carlu Close. The Group were reassured that 24hr security surveillance was now in situ and that equipment was kept in locked containers.
- Variances in relation to the Tiverton Town Hall and the Crediton Office Building. It was requested that a full breakdown showing the makeup of these figures be provided to the Group.
- The effect that a proposed new superstore may have on the centre of Tiverton.

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

21 **Policy principles (00:18:57)**

The Director of Operations introduced the item seeking an open discussion regarding the bringing of policies to the Group going forwards. It was explained that there

needed to be a more consistent message across all of the housing policies with any ambiguities removed. There was a difference between the 'what', 'where' and 'how'. Pure policy needed to be separated from operational elements. Some policies had, over the course of time, morphed into procedural notes.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- The fact that the Group was a 'Policy Development Group' and the Members of it did want to continue to see some of the 'how' as they were the people that were answerable to the electorate if something went wrong.
- It was suggested that 'the policy' could set out the left and right arc of the principle under consideration. It could set the tone without the need for the mechanics to be as detailed.
- The example was provided of the relationship between the landlord and the tenant needing to be one of mutual trust and respect. As the 'landlord' the council had an obligation to ensure all gas appliances were safe, however, sometimes tenants refused to let officers have access. A revised policy would set out what would then happen in terms of legal intervention and the recovery of costs so that the landlord and tenant were clear from the outset of their responsibilities and what would happen if there was an issue of non-compliance. In this way a recharge policy needed to be consistent with a gas policy so that they were providing the same message to the tenant. Currently there was some ambiguity across particular policies and this was fair neither to the tenant nor the landlord.
- The need for Members to attend eviction panels when it relates to a situation in their ward.

In summary, it was explained that two policies would be brought to the Group in September regarding gas safety and recharges. These would set out what would happen if there was a situation of non-compliance. These revised policies would provide better clarity and would be more consistent. They would be written in a set template and set style that would be consistent with any other policies coming forward in the future.

22 **Identification of items for the next meeting (00:41:55)**

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

- Verbal update regarding 'hot topics in housing' (this to become a regular feature going forwards)

(The meeting ended at 3.57 pm)

CHAIRMAN