

## MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 14 November 2017 at 2.15 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

W J Daw (Chairman)  
Mrs E M Andrews, D R Coren, R J Dolley  
and F W Letch

### **Apologies**

#### **Councillors**

Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs G Doe, P J Heal and J D Squire

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillor**

R L Stanley

### **Also Present**

#### **Officers**

Andrew Pritchard (Director of Operations), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security), Claire Fry (Group Manager for Housing), Mark Baglow (Group Manager for Building Services), Roderick Hewson (Principal Accountant), Stephen Bennett (Building Surveyor) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

## 34 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs G Doe, P J Heal and J D Squire.

## 35 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

## 36 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2017 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

## 37 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman reminded the Group that an informal workshop would be held on Wednesday 10 January 2018 to begin to discuss the Right to Buy and Devon Home Choice issues. An information pack had been circulated the previous week with background reading on both subjects.

## 38 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT FOR 2017-2018 (00:02:06)**

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 2017/18 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

Discussion took place regarding:

- 43 empty homes had now been brought back into use against a target of 25 for 2017/18 which was excellent.
- Two properties were subject to possession proceedings by the tenancy service as it had not been possible to acquire a valid gas safety certificate.
- Rent collection rates were very good.
- There had been some staffing issues within the housing department with officers having to cover a number of vacant posts.
- The effects of welfare reform were beginning to show. The numbers of people claiming housing benefit had not really changed but people were receiving less.
- The average number of days to re-let a property was currently below target.
- The Group Manager for Housing was satisfied that there were sufficient measures in place to tackle any staff health and wellbeing issues resulting from often challenging situations with clients.
- When Universal Credit was fully introduced in Mid Devon there would be a need for early intervention work with some tenants to address any issues caused by the delay in receiving their payment.

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

#### 39 **FINANCIAL UPDATE FOR THE SIX MONTHS TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2017 (00:13:14)**

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

The following was highlighted within the report and discussion followed with regard to:

- There was a General Fund Housing variance of £5k
- There was a shortfall of £59k on dwelling rents income but it was explained that this was only a variance of 0.5% on what was expected at this stage in the year.
- There was a £76k underspend in Repairs and Maintenance.
- Agency costs were sometimes incurred as a result of seasonal repairs and maintenance pressures.
- It was clarified that 'RCCO' stood for 'Revenue Contribution to Capital Operations'.

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

#### 40 **DRAFT 2018/19 GENERAL FUND AND CAPITAL BUDGETS (0019:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources considering the options available in order for the Council to set a

balanced budget for 2018/19 and agree a future strategy for further budget reductions for 2019/20 onwards.

Consideration was given to the following:

- Overall there was currently a budget gap on the General Fund of £617k. Of this, approximately £500k was outside of the Council's control as a result of central Government cuts.
- Service managers had identified significant savings over the course of the summer. Without this the budget gap would have been significantly greater.
- There were still a few key issues that had not yet been resolved or were still to be fully evaluated.
- Members were invited to attend one of the budget briefings to be given by the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources in the early part of December.

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

#### 41 **HRA MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (00:23:20)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources and the Director of Operations providing an estimate of the budget required for the operation of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) from 2018/19 – 2021/2022.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- Gross expenditure and income were both predicted to increase by 2021/2022 as was the surplus on the General Fund and the HRA.
- By the end of 2021/2022 it was expected that approximately £2.6m would be contributed to the Housing Maintenance Fund. The forecast was described as being reasonably healthy although there were some unknowns such as the number of Right To Buy sales. It was also stated that a large budget was needed to maintain the housing stock and that caution in relation to these positive figures was needed.

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

#### 42 **DRAFT 2018/19 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET (00:26:35)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources and the Director of Operations considering the options available for the Council to set a balanced budget for 2018/19 and agree a future strategy for further budgetary planning for 2019/20 onwards.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The HRA budget for 2018/19 was currently in a balanced position and had been set to nil.
- A number of assumptions had been made in order to reach this position which included a decrease in rents by 1%, an increase of 10p per week in garage rents and a harmonisation of community alarm charges.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- The poor condition of some of the garages and the fairness of increasing their rental fees.
- A strategic options review of the garages would be undertaken by Christmas 2017. This would lead to consideration of a number of options including demolition where appropriate and alternative provision depending on what the community needed.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that Garage Rents and Community Alarm Charges for 2018/19 be frozen at the current levels for 2017/18.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

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

#### 43 **MDDC ACTIONS POST GRENFELL (00:39:50)**

The Group received a presentation from the Building Surveyor regarding the actions put in place by the Council's housing department following the Grenfell Tower disaster.

The following was highlighted within the presentation:

- As a Landlord, Mid Devon District Council was legally obliged to comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. This required landlords to have Fire Risk Assessments, carried out by a competent person, to all their flats with enclosed communal areas and to implement the recommendations of the Fire Risk Assessments within a reasonable time.
- Mid Devon District Council had the latest Fire Risk Assessments carried out in June 2016; these were due to be renewed in the coming months by the Public Health and Regulatory Service.
- Mid Devon District Council had:
  - Installed fire doors to residents flats
  - Installed Communal fire alarms
  - Installed emergency lighting
  - Installed Fire Action Notices
  - Removed carpets to stairwells
  - Established a testing regime
  - Worked with the Fire Service in Brewin Road
- Regarding Grenfell Tower - it was still too early to give the exact reasons for the fire and its rapid spread through Grenfell Tower, but from the information available the technical experts agreed that the materials attached to the façade of the building created a risk to fire safety. The Fire Service were also impeded by the height of the building and inadequate access externally.
- Following the fire, the Government, via the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), had established the Building Safety Programme, to support Landlords and Residents of high rise buildings to ensure fire safety.

- On the 17 June 2017 DCLG convened a group of technical experts to provide advice on the best immediate steps Government could take to help Local Authorities address the fire safety concerns that tenants living in tower blocks similar to Grenfell Tower would have.
- Actions required of social housing providers were:
  - Identify all their residential tower blocks over 18m tall.
  - Identify those with external Aluminium Composite Cladding (ACM) and submit samples for testing.
  - Ensure that Local Authority Landlord's had robust Fire Risk Assessments of their blocks in place.
  - Confirm that the supply of gas to any system built blocks of flats was adequately protected.
  - Confirm the structural safety of the building, where cladding was replaced.
  - Complete a questionnaire relating to the above and actions taken.
- Mid Devon District Council does have foam cladding attached to the external faces of 258 Cornish Units, which was installed approximately 20 years ago.
- To ensure the security of our tenants Mid Devon District Council engaged the services of a suitably qualified Fire Risk Assessor to carry out an assessment of the external cladding that was applied, to its non-traditional properties.
- Risk to life from fire at the Cornish Units caused by the External Wall Insulation was judged to be **Trivial**.

#### 44 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (00:54:42)

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

- An update regarding the housing of refugees in Mid Devon

(The meeting ended at 3.10 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**