

## MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 16 January 2018 at 2.15 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

W J Daw (Chairman)  
D R Coren, R J Dolley, F W Letch and  
J D Squire

### **Apologies**

#### **Councillor(s)**

Mrs E M Andrews, Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs G Doe and  
P J Heal

### **Also Present**

#### **Officer(s):**

Andrew Pritchard (Director of Operations), Claire Fry (Group Manager for Housing), Roderick Hewson (Principal Accountant), Simon Newcombe (Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services), Michael Parker (Housing Options Manager), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security) and Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager)

## 45 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllrs: Mrs E M Andrews, Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs G Doe and P J Heal.

## 46 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00-01-33)**

Mr Conyngham speaking as Convenor of the Welcoming Refugees in Crediton Group and referring to Item 12 (Update on the housing of refugees in Mid Devon) on the agenda stated that at the meeting of the committee on 17 January 2017, it was agreed to house up to 5 refugee Syrian families for the duration of the resettlement scheme but also to review it after the first family was settled. We are glad that 2 families have so far been resettled in Mid Devon. We in Crediton are actively seeking private sector accommodation which we believe is a very suitable place for one or two families. Given that the scheme only has another 3 years to run, will the Group recommit to the scheme now and agree to support more families being resettled, in Crediton or elsewhere in the District if and when appropriate accommodation is found?

The Chairman indicated that a response would be given when the matter was discussed.

## 47 **MINUTES (00-03-15)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2017 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

#### 48 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00-03-20)**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

#### 49 **MEETING MANAGEMENT**

The Chairman indicated that he intended to take Item 12 (Update on the housing of refugees in Mid Devon) as the next item of business. This was **AGREED**.

#### 50 **UPDATE ON THE HOUSING OF REFUGEES IN MID DEVON (00-03-43)**

The Housing Options Manager referring to the question posed in public question time stated that there were 2 refugee families housed in Mid Devon, in Cullompton and Bradninch. The offer of a house in Washfield had been refused because of its rural location. There had also been a need to refuse another house in Uffculme because of the lack of primary school places in the area. He stated that officer time on the scheme was being recharged to Devon County Council. One family was struggling with the cold weather and officers were monitoring the situation. Not many private landlords were coming forward as the authority could only pay the local housing allowance. The officer would continue to correspond with Mr Conyngham with regard to moving the scheme forward in Crediton.

#### 51 **PRESENTATION FROM HOUSEMARK ON THE COUNCIL'S BENCHMARKING RESULTS (00-09-25)**

The Group received a presentation from HouseMark updating it on the Council's current position with regard to its benchmarking results for 2016/17:

Mr Lomax Relationship Account Manager for HouseMark provided the meeting with information on the Cost and Performance Benchmarking Report for 2017; he explained that the organisation collated information from different housing organisations and made comparisons with other similar rural local authorities. He identified the "bespoke group" used for comparison purposes with similar stock sizes.

He outlined the following issues that were part of the benchmarking process and where the authority stood within the group on each issue:

- Overheads as percentage of adjusted turnover
- Total cost per property – housing management
- Total tenant arrears as % rent due (excluding voids)
- Average re-let time in days (standards re-lets)
- Rent loss due to voids
- Tenancy turnover rate
- Vacant dwellings split
- Total cost per property : responsive repairs and void works
- Average number of responsive repairs per property and cost per property
- Average number of calendar days to complete repairs
- Percentage of repairs completed at the first visit
- Appointments kept as a percentage of appointments made
- Total cost per property: major works and cyclical maintenance

- Percentage of dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate
- Satisfaction with repairs.

Members acknowledged that performance was good and asked that congratulations be passed to officers. The Chairman thanked Mr Lomax for his attendance.

## 52 PERFORMANCE AND RISK 2017/18 (00-41-12)

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report \* from the Director of Operations providing it 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.

The Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security stated that the previous item had been very interesting, collating all the performance statistics from the previous year. The performance figures before Members today were the current performance figures to date. She identified the Corporate Plan aims with regard to housing growth and informed the meeting of the process and timings for the review of the Local Plan. She highlighted the concerns with regard to the introduction of Universal Credit.

Note: \* Report previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

## 53 FINANCIAL MONITORING (00-44-07)

The Principal Accountant provided an update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year. He indicated that there had not been any material changes since his last report and that the budget gap remained at £181k. Most of the Council's functions were performing well.

The Housing Revenue Account had a forecasted underspend of £130k; this was due to underspends on repairs, staffing costs and housing management.

## 54 BUDGET UPDATE (GENERAL FUND) - 2018/19 (00-47-09)

The Group had before it and **NOTED** an \*update on the budget from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources setting out the revised draft budget changes identified.

The Principal Accountant outlined the contents of the report stating that following initial meetings of the Cabinet and the Policy Development Groups, the Finance team and service managers had been revisiting a range of budgets to deliver more savings or increase income levels. Members discussed the following table which showed the main budget variances affecting the 2018/19 budget:

<b>Variances</b>	<b>Amount £k</b>
<b>18/19 Budget Shortfall (Cabinet Report 26/10/17)</b>	<b>617</b>
Further Cost Pressures identified	570
Additional savings identified	(231)
<b>18/19 Revised Budget Shortfall</b>	<b>956</b>

2% Staff Pay award offer (1% previously built in)	116
Business Rate 100% Pilot bid accepted (1 year only)	(230)
Business Rate Growth (Solar & Benefit of Devon Pool)	(150)
Funding from sinking funds & reserves (ICT & Leisure)	(215)
Other additional savings identified	(174)
<b>18/19 Revised Budget Shortfall</b>	<b>303</b>
No reduction in Rural Services Delivery Grant	(86)
3% increase in C/Tax (2.6% previously built in)	(22)
<b>Draft budget gap for 2018/19</b>	<b>195</b>

He highlighted the provisional formula grant ward for 2018/19 which amounted to £2.7m and the fact that the Council had also been given the freedom to raise its council tax by an additional 0.4%.

Consideration was given to the use of sinking funds and any percentage increase in Council Tax.

Note: \*Update previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

#### 55 **DRAFT 2018/19 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET (00-52-09)**

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

The Principal Accountant outlined the contents of the report highlighting the key issues for consideration that of : Right to Buy Property Sales, the 1% rent decrease, other income, the work of the DLO and the amount transferred into the Housing Maintenance Fund

Consideration was given to:

- The number of vehicles purchased in 2017/18 and those proposed to be purchased in 2018/19
- The need for sinking funds to feed into renewals

Note: \*Report previously circulated, copy attached to minutes

#### 56 **DEVON WIDE HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY (00-56-33)**

The Group had before it a \* report of the Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services presenting a revised Housing Assistance Policy under Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 for consideration.

The officer outlined the contents of the report stating that in 2015 the Government had introduced the Better Care Fund (BCF) in an attempt to bring health and social care together in an integrated way. The fund was a combination of Government funding from the Department of Health and the Department of Communities and Local Government and included the grant allocation for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). The 2017-19 Integration and Better Care Fund Policy document listed the conditions that must be addressed by the BCF and in particular this included working together on a jointly agreed plan.

A task and finish group was set up in late 2016 involving representatives from neighbouring authorities which included Devon County Council, their remit was to produce a common policy that could be adopted across the whole of Devon. The policy provided for flexibility and discretion for the Councils to provide appropriate assistance to meet 4 objectives:

**Objective 1** - Assist disabled residents to remain in their own homes through supporting the provision of adaptations (so far as this is necessary, appropriate and reasonably practicable) to prevent admissions to care and to assist with delayed transfers where possible.

**Objective 2** – Safeguard the health and well-being of vulnerable residents by removing unnecessary hazards to health and safety in the home to reduce avoidable emergency admissions

**Objective 3** – Provide adaptations that are suitable for the future by ensuring the scheme of works is dementia aware.

**Objective 4** – Assist vulnerable people to afford to heat their homes through appropriate energy efficiency and heating measures.

The officer continued by outlining the summary of assistance that was also available, that of the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant, the Accessible Homes Grant, the Home Improvement Loan Scheme and the ECO Flex Top Up Scheme.

Consideration was given to the schemes available

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that:

- (1) The revised Housing Assistance Policy attached in Annex 1 be approved.
- (2) The ECO Flex Statement of Intent (SOI) attached in Annex 4, associated with the revised Housing Assistance Policy be approved.  
(Proposed by Cllr F W Letch and seconded by Cllr D R Coren)
- (3) Delegated authority be given to the Director of Operations in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Housing to suspend some or all non-mandatory parts of the revised Housing Assistance Policy attached in Annex 1 if adequate funding is not available.

- (4) Delegated authority be given to the Director of Operations in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Housing to determine continued participation in the Wessex Home Improvement Loans Scheme.

(Proposed by Cllr D R Coren and seconded by Cllr R J Dolley)

**Note:** \*Report previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

57 **THE HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE - ACTIVATION OF THE SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY PROTOCOL (SWEP) AND EXTENDED WINTER PROVISION PROTOCOL (1-15-36)**

The Group had before it a \* report of the Group Manager for Housing presenting a revised protocol in case of severe weather.

She outlined the contents of the report stating that the Council was a member of the Devon and Cornwall Housing Options Partnership (DCHOP). Members of the partnership worked together with the aim of preventing rough sleeping at any time of the year. The winter months presented greatest risks to the health of rough sleepers. They also offered increased opportunities to engage with hard-to-reach groups and those rough sleepers who may not wish to consider any other sort of lifestyle. This was due to the fact that they may be more likely to accept support at this time of the year.

Consideration was given to the number of homeless and engaging with those who did not wish to be helped.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that: the Housing Service continues to work in partnership to deliver the Housing Options Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and Extended Winter Provision Protocol.

(Proposed by Cllr D Coren and seconded by Cllr R J Dolley)

**Note:** \*Report previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

58 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

In addition to those items already identified within the agenda, an update on homelessness would be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

(The meeting ended at 3.40 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**