

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 22 May 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

Apologies

Councillor

Mrs E M Andrews

Also Present

Councillor

R L Stanley

Also Present

Officers

Andrew Pritchard (Director of Operations), Claire Fry (Group Manager for Housing), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security), Michael Parker (Housing Options Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN (CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL IN THE CHAIR)

RESOLVED that Cllr W J Daw be elected Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2018/19.

Cllr W J Daw then took the Chair.

2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Cllr P J Heal be elected Vice Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2018/19.

3 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs E M Andrews.

4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

There were no declarations made under this item.

5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

6 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2018 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

8 PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT FOR 2017-18 (00:03:58)

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 with regard to:

- The figure for the 'number of affordable homes delivered' should have stated 115 and not 92 within the published report.
- Of the 7 properties previously identified as not being able to provide a valid gas safety certificate, 4 of these had now been serviced.
- Homelessness prevention was on target.
- Bad weather had caused some delay in the building of council houses, however, completion of the Tiverton council house projects was due to take place in 2018/19.

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

9 TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY (00:11:03)

The Group had before it a report * from the Group Manager for Housing Services presenting the revised draft Tenant Involvement Strategy.

The Officer outlined the contents of the report with reference to the following:

- The Strategy set out the high level aims for the Council as a social landlord. These were regulated by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH). One of their standards related to Tenant Involvement and Engagement meaning that Registered Providers should involve tenants in the work that they do.
- The new Strategy had been updated significantly to reflect rapid changes in methods of modern communication.
- The Council had a very active Tenants Together Group who considered policy, performance and also challenged officers and elected Members.
- There was a ring fenced pot of money set aside for Tenant Involvement activity such as training. It was also confirmed that tenants could claim expenses when attending training courses as this was seen as a way of fostering involvement.
- Experience had shown that most tenants preferred to communicate by electronic means although it was acknowledged that some preferred the more traditional methods of communication.

- Estate walkabouts with Ward Members were encouraged. Ward Members were also invited to attend eviction panels but some chose not to attend.
- Any tenant was welcome to come to a Tenants Together meeting or indeed join the group.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the revised Tenant Involvement Strategy be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr D R Coren and seconded by Cllr P J Heal)

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

10 **TENANT INVOLVEMENT POLICY (00:29:43)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Group Manager for Housing Services presenting the revised Tenant Involvement Policy. The contents of the report were outlined with reference to the following:

- Whilst closely related to the Strategy the 'Policy' talked about the 'nuts and bolts' of Tenant Involvement.
- A revision to the wording in relation to 'Equality and Diversity' at section 9 was suggested as tenants had indicated they wanted meetings to be as open and as inclusive as possible but with safeguards in place so as to deter offensive remarks. It was **AGREED** that the first paragraph of section 9 of the draft policy be reworded slightly.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the revised Tenant Involvement Policy be approved subject to a revision of paragraph 9 on Equality and Diversity to state the following:

As a registered provider of social housing, the Council has an equality duty and is bound by the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. This means that the Housing Service must ensure that there will be no discrimination or unfair treatment on the grounds of gender (or gender reassignment), race, colour, ethnicity or national origin, faith, sexual orientation, marital/civil partnership status, age, disability, politics or trade union membership. We will not tolerate any discriminatory remarks or actions and will challenge anyone who behaves in that manner. Tenants will be excluded from any further involvement if they continue to behave in an offensive or discriminatory manner.

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

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

11 **COMMUNITY HOUSING FUND GRANT POLICY (00:35:00)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Group Manager for Housing Services presenting the Community Led Housing Fund Grant Policy. In 2016/17 the Council had been allocated £131,359 from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Community Housing Fund. The Council wished to use this ring-

fenced funding to work in partnership with local communities to develop Community Led Housing across the District.

It was proposed that the policy governance would be overseen by the Community Housing Fund Project Group chaired by the Cabinet Member for Housing. The group would comprise of the Cabinet Member for Housing and three other Cabinet Members. It would receive recommendations from the Group Manager for Housing, the Housing Options Manager and the S151 Officer or designated representative from Finance. It would meet on a monthly basis to discuss the progress of community groups and consider applications for funding.

It was explained that money had been allocated by the Government to help almost 150 councils tackle the problem of high levels of second home ownership so that the development of community led housing could be supported. Since there were relatively low levels of second home ownership in Mid Devon the allocation to this area had seemed low in comparison to some of the more affluent local authorities with coastal borders.

It was further confirmed that the sum of money available was solely for Community Led Housing projects. The Council would continue to work with Wessex Community Housing with whom it already had a proven track record arising from a successful Community Land Trust project in Hemyock.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet recommend to Council that:

- a) The Community Led Housing Fund Grant Policy is adopted and endorsed so that it can be used within the Council's District.
- b) That Members support the framework for the allocation of grants as presented within the report.
- c) Should any disagreements occur then the final decision should be delegated to the Director of Operations in conjunction with the Cabinet Member.

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

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

12 **STATE OF THE DISTRICT - HOMELESSNESS WITHIN MID DEVON (00:41:10)**

The Housing Options Manager presented the Group with the Council's Position Statement * on Homelessness within Mid Devon.

Particular reference was made to the following:

- In 2017/18 there had been 450 approaches made to the local authority, compared to 2008/09 when there had been over 700 approaches.
- The new Homelessness Reduction Act was implemented with effect from the beginning of April 2018. It was estimated that the changes being introduced by this legislation would increase the number of applicants presenting as homeless. It was expected that local authorities would be placing more people into temporary accommodation for longer periods.
- The average interview with a person presenting as homeless now took between two and two and a half hours. Prevention work was key, however, if

homelessness had taken place there was a need to try and establish why this was the case. A typical example of this was failure to pay rent.

- There was an increasing lack of affordable private rented accommodation to offer someone threatened with homelessness. Many landlords within Mid Devon were reluctant to take on large families or households where there may be family members who might exhibit challenging behaviours.
- Statistics showed that Mid Devon was roughly in line with the rest of England in terms of the numbers of people being accepted as homeless and in priority need.
- Rough sleeping was on the increase across the country.
- In late 2016 a partnership of four Local Authorities, Teignbridge, Exeter City Council, East Devon District Council and Mid Devon District Council were successful with a bid to the DCLG to become a Homeless Prevention Trailblazer.
- The Council was working very closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau to empower households to take an active part in resolving their own housing difficulties.
- The roll out of Universal Credit had been delayed in Mid Devon until July 2018, however, officers had been working hard to learn good practice from partner groups to understand the likely impacts of this so that the Housing Service was best placed to deal with the implications when they arise.

The report was **NOTED**.

13 **START TIME OF MEETINGS (00:56:45)**

It was **AGREED** to continue to hold meetings of the Group at 2.15pm for the remainder of the municipal year.

14 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (00:57:10)**

It was unlikely that the Tenancy Strategy would be available for the next meeting as Government Regulations had still not been released and these would inform the Council's Strategy.

It was also unlikely that the ASB Policy and Procedure would be available for the next meeting due to resource constraints.

(The meeting ended at 3.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN