

**HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP  
10<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2020**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMY AND REGENERATION**

**COMMUNITY LED HOUSING FUND GRANT POLICY AND PROJECT GROUP**

**Cabinet Members:** Councillor Bob Evans and Councillor Richard Chesterton  
**Responsible Officer:** Claire Fry (Group Manager for Housing) and Tristan Peat,  
(Forward Planning Team Leader)

**Reason for Report:** The Homes PDG set up the Community Housing Fund Project Group in 2018 to consider requests made to the Council for financial support from the Community Housing Fund. There is a need to amend the membership of the Community Housing Fund Project Group to reflect that the Council's housing enabling role has been moved from the Housing Service to the Planning Service.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That Cabinet agrees that Section 11.1 of the Community-Led Housing Fund Guidance and Criteria (Appendix 2), which provides the framework for the allocation of grants, is amended so that the Community Housing Fund Project Group membership includes the:**

**Cabinet Member for Housing, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration, the Group Manager - Housing Services, the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration, and the Housing Enabling and Policy Officer.**

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** The Mid Devon Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 (January 2020) includes three strands. The use of local funds to support community groups and building more affordable and social rented properties in Mid Devon accords with two of these strands "Sustainable and prosperous communities" and "Sustainable participation".

**Financial Implications:** There are no wider financial implications arising from the recommendation of this report, beyond the Community-Led Housing Fund.

**Budget and Policy Framework:** The Council has a Community Led Housing Fund and the policy for managing this has been adopted and endorsed by the Council on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

**Legal Implications:** Grant recipients may be required to repay the grant should their use of the award fail to comply with the conditions set out by the Council.

**Risk Assessment:** Failure to have an efficient and effective process in place for administering the fund could result in adverse publicity for the Council.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** Community-led housing will help to support the needs of vulnerable people, including older people, and reduce inequality by helping to provide the right type of housing solutions to meet the needs of local communities.

**Impact on Climate Change:** There are no implications arising from the report.

**1.0 Introduction**

1.1 In 2016 the Government announced a £60m fund to support community-led housing developments in areas where the impact of second homes is particularly acute. The fund being to enable local community groups deliver affordable housing units of

mixed tenure on sites which are likely to be of little interest to mainstream house-builders and which will thereby contribute to the national effort to boost housing supply.

- 1.2 The Council received a Community-Led Housing Fund grant of £131,359 in 2016/2017. This grant is ring-fenced for the delivery of Community-Led Housing in Mid Devon.
- 1.3 The Homes Policy Development Group considered a report on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018 (see **Appendices 1 and 2**) which sought to establish:
  - a 'Policy' for how the Community-Led Housing Fund grant will be used, and
  - A Project Group that is responsible for the governance of the Policy

The report's recommendations were the subject of decisions taken by the Cabinet at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018 (minute 28) and were adopted by the Council on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

- 1.4 The Policy for the Council's Community Led Housing Fund sets out who is eligible to apply for the funding, what will be funded (i.e. set up costs for a community organisation, undertaking initial feasibility work, and gap funding towards project management costs and construction costs), how applications will be assessed and how funding will be awarded. It includes criteria and grant caps for each funding stage, which requires applicants to demonstrate Value for Money and to seek match funding from other sources to mitigate financial risks. Communities are also subject to providing a service level agreement (SLA) with the Council. It was intended a Community Housing Fund Project Group responsible for the Policy would meet on a monthly basis to discuss the progress of community groups and consider applications for funding.
- 1.5 At October 2020, £108,360 remains in the Community Led Housing Fund. Part of the original grant from Government has been used for the purpose of joint working with Wessex Community Housing to support Community Land Trusts over 4 years, which concludes in 2020/21. It is not known if there will be future grant funding by the Government which will be made available to local authorities to support community led housing schemes.
- 1.6 A funding request has been received from Aster Housing Association on behalf of the Chawleigh Community Trust for £15,000 towards development costs for proposed scheme of 10 social rented houses. This has been considered by the Community Housing Fund Project Group. The requirements of the Policy for the grant funding have been met and an agreement has been reached that the request is accepted.
- 1.7 With the exception of the recommendations set out in this report, it is proposed that the policy for how the Community-Led Housing Fund will be used will continue in its current form, and that any amendment that may be needed to this will be the subject of a further report to the Homes PDG, and approval sought as needed from the Cabinet and/or Council.

## **2.0 Community Housing Fund Project Group**

- 2.1 There is a need to review the composition of the Community Housing Fund Project Group. This follows the Council's housing enabling role being moved from the Housing Service to the Planning Service and is necessary for the continued efficient governance of the Community-Led Housing Fund Grant Policy and the allocation of grant in response to requests received for funding.

2.2 Section 11.1 of the Community-Led Housing Fund Policy (Guidance and Criteria) (see **Appendix 2** to this report) sets out the membership of the Project Group:

- Cabinet Member for Housing
- Three Cabinet Members

And is supported by the following group after receiving recommendations from the

- Group Manager (Housing Services)
- Housing Options Manager
- S151 Officer or designated representative from finance

2.3 It is recommended that the membership of the Project Group is amended to comprise:

- Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration
- Cabinet Member for Housing

And is supported by the following group after receiving recommendations from the

- Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration
- Group Manager for Housing
- Housing Enabling and Policy Officer (post being established)

2.4 The revised membership will include Cabinet representation from both the Housing, and the Planning, Economy and Regeneration services, with an appropriate level of officer support necessary to manage the Council's Community Led Housing Fund in accordance with the policy's guidance and criteria for considering requests for grant support.

2.5 A new post of 'Housing Enabling and Policy Officer' has been agreed. This will take the lead role for housing enabling in Mid Devon, including but not limited to, achieving more affordable housing, supporting community housing groups, liaising with Registered Providers and other external partners, promoting custom and self-build homes, modern methods of construction and facilitating the delivery of sites and pitches for Gypsies and Travellers. The post is currently the subject of a job evaluation and it is intended that recruitment will take place in the autumn this year. The Forward Planning Team Leader is currently acting in a bridging role for housing enabling until the new post has been filled.

2.6 Given there are currently only a handful of community housing groups in Mid Devon it is proposed that the Project Group will, going forward:

- Meet again following a successful recruitment of the Housing Enabling and Policy Officer, and thereafter as necessary in relation to requests for grant funding, and
- Provides a report every 6 months to the Homes Policy Development Group to provide an update on what applications have been received to grant funding, what has been achieved as a result of the grant funding provided, and what funds remain.

### **3.0 Groups Consulted**

3.1 The Community Housing Project Group and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration met on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020 to consider and inform the content of this report.

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**Circulation of the Report:** Councillor Bob Evans, Cabinet Member for Housing Councillor Richard Chesterton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

**Appendix 1** - Community Housing Fund PDG Report 22.05.2018

**Appendix 2** – Community-Led Housing Fund Policy (Guidance and Criteria)

**Homes Policy Development Group Meeting 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018**

<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=138&MId=953&Ver=4>

**Cabinet Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=941&Ver=4>

**Council Meeting 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=156&MId=997&Ver=4>