

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 20 July 2021 at 2.15 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

R J Dolley (Chairman)  
G Barnell, D R Coren, C J Eginton, S Pugh and R F Radford

### **Apologies**

#### **Councillors**

J Bartlett, J Cairney and S J Clist (although Cllr Cairney attended part of the meeting via Zoom)

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillors**

R Evans and B G J Warren

### **Present**

#### **Officers:**

Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Jill May (Director of Business Improvement and Operations), Simon Newcombe (Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing), Catherine Yandle (Operations Manager for Performance, Governance and Health & Safety), Tristan Peat (Forward Planning Team Leader), Mike Lowman (Building Services Operations Manager), Arron Beecham (Forward Planning Officer), Clare Robathan (Policy and Research Officer), Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

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

**RESOLVED** that Cllr R J Dolley be elected the Chairman of the Homes Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2021/2022.

## **2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr D R Coren be elected Vice Chairman of the Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2021/2022.

## **3 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from:

- Cllr J Bartlett
- Cllr J Cairney
- Cllr S J Clist who was substituted by Cllr G Barnell

## **4 PROTOCOL FOR HYBRID MEETINGS**

The protocol for hybrid meetings was noted.

## 5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present and no questions had been submitted in advance.

## 6 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

No interests were declared under this item.

## 7 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

## 8 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- There was a site visit to St Georges Court later that day at 5pm and all Members were welcome to attend.
- He reminded the Group that they were a 'Policy' Development Group and that that should be their focus going forwards. There would be less reports coming forwards for noting only, for example, Performance and Risk and Financial Monitoring since these were reported to the Scrutiny Committee, the Audit Committee and Cabinet on a regular basis. Members were welcome to attend those meetings and if an issue fell under the umbrella of Housing which was of concern it could be brought to the Policy Development Group meeting.

## 9 START TIME OF MEETINGS (00:10:00)

It was **AGREED** to continue to hold meetings at 2.15pm on Tuesday afternoons.

## 10 MEETING MANAGEMENT (00:12:00)

The Chairman informed the Group that he would be taking item 17, 14 and 15 (in that order) as the next items of business. The reason for this being that he felt that the work programming item would inform debate surrounding the rest of the items on the agenda.

## 11 WORK PROGRAMMING SESSION (00:13:00)

The Scrutiny Policy and Research Officer provided the Group with a summary of the discussions that had taken place at a recent informal Programming Panel meeting and reminded the Group, by way of presentation, the issues which fell under the umbrella of the 'Homes' area within the Constitution and the Corporate Plan.

Reference was made to the selection criteria used by the Scrutiny Committee to determine whether or not an issue should be discussed, this included, benefits to the community, what the 'value added' benefits would be, what the impact of the issue was or could be and the associated risks. Possible options for future agendas included, single item agendas, working groups to investigate specific issues and inviting external speakers with expertise on particular housing issues.

The Group identified two areas that they would like to focus on in their work programme for the coming year:

- Social Housing / Affordable Homes
- Private Sector Housing and bringing empty homes back into use

Note: \* Work programming slides previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

## 12 PERFORMANCE AND RISK OUTTURN FOR 2021/2021 (00:18:00)

The group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Chief Executive providing Members with the outturn on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2020/21.

The Group's attention was drawn to appendix 6, the Risk Register and also the fact that there was an error at section 3.1 in the report which stated that one 'Right To Buy' property had been brought back into use when in fact it had been two.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- A request to see dry recycling figures segregated out as a separate item in the performance indicators for recycling. However it was explained that there was a need to be consistent with the rest of Devon in reporting these statistics but discussions on the best way to report this were ongoing.
- How quickly housing performance indicators could be reported in the future given the formulation of the new Housing Strategy.
- It was intended to provide an annual update to the Group on progress with aspirations within the new Housing Strategy.
- The necessity to explore all available opportunities to acquire land for house building.

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

## 13 REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN FOR 2020/2021 (00:37:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Deputy Chief Executive presenting the Revenue and Capital outturn figures for the financial year 2020/2021.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The previous financial year had been the most challenging the Council had ever had to face but it had still managed to finish with a £65k overspend on the General Fund and a small underspend on the Housing Revenue Account.
- A small amount had been transferred to Reserves.
- The collection of rents had not been nearly bad as expected.
- The Revenues and Benefits teams had been heavily involved in the paying out of Government funding.
- The Council had received Government funding in relation to the Income Reduction Scheme and the Decarbonisation Fund
- There had been some slippage on the Capital programme due to the pandemic.

- Treasury Management had performed well.

A brief discussion took place regarding how well the Council had performed financially given the extreme circumstances due to Covid.

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

#### 14 **AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS POLICY (00:45:00)**

The Group had before it a report \* from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing providing Members with an opportunity to review the proposed update to the Aids & Adaptations Policy.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Who provided the Occupational Therapy service referred to within the report, how available was it and how was it delivered? It was explained that the Council had contact with both Devon County Council and the NHS. It was confirmed that there had been pressure on this service during the pandemic. The onus was on the Council to respond to an individual's 'Statement of Need' once this had been obtained by partner agencies. A monthly meeting was held with Devon County Council and it had recently been agreed to commence the start time for completing the 'aids and adaptation' needs of clients from the moment the client contacted DCC rather than when the District Council received a 'Statement of Need'. It was confirmed that the Building Service had conducted more work in this area in the previous quarter than they ever had before.
- The importance of providing adaptations to outdoor areas, such as boundary walls, as well as indoor adaptations so as to ensure the safety of residents using those areas.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that the revised Aids & Adaptations Policy be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr C Eginton and seconded by Cllr R F Radford)

#### Reason for decision

The reason for the recommendation is to allow for formal adoption of the updated policy. The policy is key to ensuring that tenants with disabilities are supported to have access to facilities as set out by the medical and related professional opinion, in accordance with individual need and ability in order to continue living in their home.

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

#### 15 **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING FEES AND CHARGES 2021/2022 / REVISED CIVIL PENALTY POLICY AND DELEGATED POWERS (00:55:00)**

The Group had before it a report \* from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing providing the Members with the revised fees and charges for statutory and discretionary Private Sector Housing functions within the Community Team, Public Health and Regulatory Services.

Discussion took place regarding:

- How effective enforcement was within this area? It was explained that there was a proactive enforcement approach within the team, with officers being trained in enforcing criminal legislation and documenting evidence. All available powers were used and cases referred to the court where necessary.
- There was a proactive programme in place to ensure property checks for Houses of Multiple Occupation.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that:

1. The revised fees as set out in Annex 1 be approved.
2. The updated Policy on the Use of Financial Penalties for Housing Act Offences as set out in Annex 2 be approved.
3. The Corporate Manager for Public Health and Regulation and Housing be given delegated authority to authorise relevant officers to enforce The Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020.
4. That changes to the way Works in Default charges are constructed are agreed.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

#### Reason for the decision

Recharging for officer time in relation to enforcement activities, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing and recovering costs associated with non-statutory services means that we are encouraging compliance within the private rented sector, providing suitable for homes for our residents and ensuring HMOs do not have an adverse impact on communities.

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

#### 16 **HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION DRAFT (01:10:00)**

The Group had before it a report \* from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing providing Members with an opportunity to review the proposed consultation draft of the revised corporate Housing Strategy.

The contents of the report were outlined with the following being highlighted:

- It wasn't a legal requirement to have a Housing Strategy in place but it was a really important document. Homes were a basic necessity and a fundamental requirement for everybody. Local authorities had a broad role to play in supporting and regulating the housing sector, this forward looking document provided a framework to enable this to happen. It involved key facets such as public health and the opportunity to attract and retain a skilled work force within Mid Devon.
- The proposed Strategy very much linked with other key council policies such as the Local Plan.
- The following '**HOME**' priorities were proposed within the Strategy document:

- **Housing** - increase delivery of quality designed, well-built homes across the housing market to meet identified needs
- **Optimise** - fit for purpose healthy, sustainable, adaptable homes optimised for high energy efficiency and low carbon impact
- **Making the most** - making the most of our existing homes across the private and public sector in all forms of tenure
- **Engage** - engaging and working with others including partner organisations to deliver our aims
- A key thread within the document was the Council's commitment to climate change and the reduction of carbon.
- The Group's attention was drawn to Objectives 5 and 6 annexed to the report which highlighted the aim of seeking to retain a viable Council Housing stock baseline through full use of available Right to Buy receipts and growing the number of Council houses further through other mechanisms

Discussion took place regarding:

- The proposed strategy represented a step change in approach and a joined up approach with the Planning department and the Local Plan. The Group congratulated the officers in drawing up what was referred to as an 'excellent piece of work'.
- Concerns regarding a perceived lack of ambition regarding the numbers of new Council houses proposed to be built.
- Figures quoted within the report represented a baseline or a minimum in terms of aspiration. Numbers of houses had had to be included in terms of what was realistically deliverable and achievable. The Strategy had to start somewhere.
- The need to explore all available avenues to building to new homes including the recently advertised modular homes.
- The time table at section 3.2 within the report was confirmed as correct.

The Group **NOTED** the proposed timeline and stages for adoption of the Housing Strategy.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that the draft Housing Strategy 2021 – 2025, attached at annex 1, be approved for external and public consultation.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Reason for the decision

The reason for the decision is to ensure the Council can progress to the next key consultation stage leading to the adoption of the Strategy and have approval with regards to the overall adoption process.

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

**17 UPDATE ON TECKAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) informing Members of the intended timetable of activities / reports that will be produced to consider the applicability of a Teckal delivery model to assist in the delivery of the Council's accelerated HRA housing programme.

The content of the report was outlined and it was explained that an all Member briefing would be scheduled for late August or early September. This would be to discuss with Members the basics of Teckal, the associated advantages and disadvantages and whether there were any other mechanisms available to achieve the same aims. Any final decision as to the way forward would need full Council approval. It was also confirmed that there were strong links with the proposed Housing Strategy.

Consideration was given to the following:

- The delay with current housing projects.
- The need to explore the best and most affordable opportunities.
- The proposal was to take an options paper to Cabinet in September and then to full Council for a decision in the autumn which would be likely to coincide with the new Housing Strategy.
- Proposals for the Post Hill development and Teckal were not currently connected.
- Much work was going on behind the scenes regarding the Post Hill development and planning permission was being sought as were design specifications. This was a multi million pound project which needed careful preparation. It was envisaged that the Council would commence development within the current financial year.

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

#### 18 HOUSING SERVICE UPDATE

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Operations Manager for Housing providing an update on enforcement and other activity undertaken by officers in the Housing Service.

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

#### 19 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

In addition to the items already within the work programme for the next meeting, the following was also requested to be on the agenda:

- An update on affordable housing projects
- A specific update on the Post Hill project

(The meeting ended at 4.20 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**