

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 9 November 2021 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

R J Dolley (Chairman)
J Bartlett, J Cairney, S J Clist, D R Coren,
S Pugh and R F Radford

Apologies

Councillors

Mrs E M Andrews and C J Eginton

Also Present

Councillors

Mrs C P Daw and R Evans

Also Present

Officers

Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Richard Marsh (Director of Place), Simon Newcombe (Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing), Paul Deal (Corporate Manager for Finance), Claire Fry (Housing Services Operations Manager), J P McLachlan (Principal Accountant), Michael Parker (Housing Options Manager), Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

31 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs Eileen Andrews and Cllr C Eginton.

32 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

33 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

No interests were declared under this item.

34 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

35 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00:05:00)

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

36 UPDATE ON THE AFGHANISTAN RELOCATION SCHEME (00:06:00)

The following verbal update was provided by the Housing Options Manager in relation to the Afghanistan Relocation Scheme:

- Initially there had been quite a few landlords come forward offering their properties for occupation but some had not been appropriate due to location. However, three in Crediton had been deemed to be suitable according to the criteria.
- Two of these had already been signed up and the third was in the process of being secured.
- The properties were in the process of being furnished.
- Devon County Council were in the same position in terms of the relevant criteria and the process.
- No date for 'moving in' had yet been set but all three Mid Devon landlords were on board.
- The Council was working with SeaMoor Lettings, a property management service, to progress this work.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The Council previously working with SeaMoor Lettings to house Syrian Refugees. The relationship had proved successful, as prior to this, officers had been pulled away from other Homelessness work.
- The scheme was fully funded by Devon County Council and there were no financial repercussions for Mid Devon District Council.
- The District Council worked with the County Council in that information was exchanged regarding the size and location of the properties offered by landlords so that under occupation or overcrowding was avoided.

37 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN, GENERAL FUND (GF), HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME (00:10:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive presenting the update Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which covered the period 2022/23 to 2026/27 and the options available in order for the Council to set a balanced budget.

The following headlines from the Chancellors budget were reported:

- There would be a 3.8% increase in departmental spending but there were be competing demands on this.
- Current Referendum Limits would be retained at 2% or £5.
- A number of changes to Business Rate Reliefs were highlighted but due to current legislation the Council was unable to benefit from them as it was prevented from claiming relief on its own property.
- The Chancellors budget covered three years but there was no indication as to whether the settlement for local Government covered three years or one year.
- Public sector pay would no longer be frozen.
- There would be £1.8m made available for the housing supply nationally.
- £639m would be made available for rough sleeping nationally, this represented an 85% increase on 2020 levels of funding.
- Universal Credit – the tapered amount would be reduced and the amount people could earn before Universal Credit is reduced would be increased.

With regards to the housing area, the following was highlighted within the report:

- The General Fund had a shortfall of just under £1m which would increase over the next 5 years.
- There would be a significant investment in the HRA estate over the next 5 years. It was envisaged that approximately 500 units could be created which would mean a significant amount of borrowing in the initial stages.
- The figures presented in the report were only estimates at this stage, significant work would be needed to refine these.

Consideration was given to:

- HRA projects should be dealt with as a matter of priority so that affordable rental properties were brought forward.
- Concerns regarding short term lending against cash reserves in terms of risk. However, it was confirmed that the Council would not enter into any agreement unless it was 100% confident on the return.
- Local authorities could now apply rent increases that were based on the CPI plus 1%. This meant that the Council could apply a 4.1% increase but the current prudent assumption was a lower amount of 3%. This final percentage was yet to be decided.
- Rent deficits were way below what had been expected as a result of the pandemic. The Housing team were credited for working hard with tenants in terms of offering advice and support.
- The draft budget forecast included an assumption relating to an increase in interest rates.
- The Capital Programme set out how the Council was proposing to bring forward social housing schemes in the coming years. It was hoped Homes England would be able to provide some grant funding to facilitate this but the details were not yet known.

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

38 HOUSING SERVICE DELIVERY REPORT (00:40:00)

The Group had before it a briefing paper * from the Operations Manager for Housing Services providing an update to Members on enforcement and other activities undertaken by officers in the Housing Service.

The Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing explained that a significant restructure of the Housing Service had been undertaken and a new combined Mid Devon Housing Service, with a new logo, had been created. This would put the tenants at the heart of the service.

An experienced temporary member of staff working in a Neighbourhood Officer role was thanked, by the Group, for the work she had recently undertaken to help Members and residents in the Westex Ward, Tiverton.

It was **RESOLVED** that the contents of the report be noted and that the Group receive future quarterly service delivery reports covering the combined activities of both housing and building services under a single Mid Devon Housing report.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

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

39 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (00:52:00)

In addition to the items already identified within the work programme for the next meeting, the following would also be provided:

- An update in relation to the 2 modular schemes on the St Andrews and Shapland estates.
- An update on the Housing Strategy

(The meeting ended at 3.11 pm)

CHAIRMAN