

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 26 July 2022 at 2.15 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

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

### **Apologies**

#### **Councillor**

P J Heal

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillors**

Mrs C P Daw, R M Deed, R Evans and B G J Warren

### **Also Present**

#### **Officers**

Jill May (Director of Business Improvement and Operations), Matthew Page (Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste), Dean Emery (Corporate Manager for Revenues, Benefits and Recovery), Claire Fry (Housing Services Operations Manager), Mike Lowman (Building Services Operations Manager), Tanya Wenham (Operations Manager for Public Health and Housing Options), Arron Beecham (Principal Housing Enabling & Forward Planning Officer), Tristan Peat (Forward Planning Team Leader), Michael Parker (Housing Options Manager), Siann Sandy (Housing Policy Officer), Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer) and Jessica Watts (Member Services Apprentice)

## **15 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr P Heal.

It was noted that Cllr G Barnell attended the meeting via Zoom and therefore did not take part in any voting.

## **16 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No questions were received from members of the public.

## **17 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

No interests were declared under this item.

## **18 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 May 2022 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

## 19 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

## 20 PERFORMANCE AND RISK OUTTURN REPORT FOR 2021/2022 (00:05:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Interim Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager providing Members with an annual review of the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan, service objectives and targets for 2021/2022.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Junction 27 and why it was still being referred to as the 'Eden Project'? Government funding had been provided towards the site. There had never been any question of a Compulsory Purchase Order. A new planning application was being prepared.
- Officers should be congratulated for the exceptionally good rates of Business Rate collection.
- The Performance report was missing targets in relation to social and affordable rented housing. These had links to the Housing Strategy and needed to be reflected.

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

## 21 TENANCY STANDARD POLICY FRAMEWORK (00:20:00)

The Group had before it a report \* from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing. It was explained that all the policies falling under the umbrella of the Framework had been brought before the PDG previously and had been approved by the Cabinet. The Telecare Policy was a General Fund Policy and so was not included here.

Consideration was given as to whether there was a separate fund available in relation to the Decant Policy so that tenants did not incur any additional expense. It was confirmed that there was a budget set aside within the HRA.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that:

The updated policies within the overarching Tenancy Standard Policy Framework as set out in Annex 1 be adopted.

(Proposed by Cllr S Clist and seconded by Cllr J Cairney)

Reason for the decision:

MDH is a social landlord and is registered with the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH), meaning that it is a Registered Provider (RP). The RSH sets consumer standards and the Tenancy Standard is one of these. The role of the regulator is to intervene where failure to meet the standards has caused, or could have caused, harm to tenants. Agreed housing policy provides a framework for decision making which ensures that customer-facing teams deliver consistency in the discharge of

duties to support good housing management. This ensures that both properties and tenancies are managed effectively and reduces reputational risk.

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

## 22 HOUSING STRATEGY 2021-25 PROGRESS UPDATE (00:25:00)

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing providing an update on the Housing Strategy 2021-25.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The Strategy had now been approved and it had been agreed that regular updates would be supplied to the PDG.
- There would be an all Member Briefing on the Mid Devon Housing Development Plan in early September. A working group with multidisciplinary leads had been established to bring the plan forwards.
- 90% of the objectives within the Strategy were on track.
- A full update report would be brought to the November meeting of the PDG.

Discussion followed with regard to:

- Disappointment that the St. Andrews estate development, despite being given planning approval, had not progressed. Shapland Place also remained derelict. Conversations had been had with Homes England regarding funding previously and a lot of work had taken place to try to progress this but it appeared that no progress had been made. The following questions were asked in relation to this and answers provided:

a) Question: Why had there been no progress on the two applications?

Answer: All the units were being built in a factory elsewhere and were 50% complete. Delivery was expected by December 2022.

b) Question: Why had there been no additional planning applications in the last 4 month period despite funding being available?

Answer: More information would be provided at the all Member briefing on the Mid Devon Housing Development programme in early September.

c) Question: What progress had been made with Homes England?

Answer: The previous contact with Homes England had left, however, a new submission for funding would take place by the end of the week. The Council would need to wait 3 or 4 weeks for the result.

- Whether the target in relation to 'The supply of new market homes in Mid Devon' should be adjusted since current results were not on track to meet this? It was explained that the target of 393 homes had been derived from the adopted Local Plan and included all new homes across the district, not just the

local authority. Investigations were being undertaken so as to establish the reason for this which might include factors such as shortage of labour, materials, Community Land Trusts and self builds. Benchmarking exercises were being undertaken to help understand the situation further. It was confirmed a considerable number of builds were in the pipeline.

- The need for this report to be cross referenced with the performance report since information in relation to affordable housing and social rented housing didn't quite match up. An explanation from the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing needed to be given to the PDG.
- The report was also missing information on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the housing of refugees.
- The importance of the Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA). Members had received a presentation on this but the report did not provide any detail on what was planned. It was explained that the LHNA was almost complete and would inform the Mid Devon Housing Strategy. It would be a valuable document providing an evidenced set of data and it would provide an opportunity for Members to discuss how it affected future policy.
- The need for more Gypsy and Traveller sites.

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

## 23 HOMES FOR UKRAINE SCHEME UPDATE (01:11:00)

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a verbal update on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme from the Operations Manager for Public Health and Housing Options. This included the following update:

### Numbers and re-matching

- Numbers of hosts/properties matched to Ukrainian guests continues to rise – weekly DCC updates via national portal
- 97 hosts/properties matched to 195 guests as of 25 July – Not all have arrived yet.
- Guests have arrived at 66 properties so we have 155 guests hosted in Mid Devon at present.
- 96 of 97 properties inspected. The team have been working very hard to achieve this on top of the normal day job.
- Re-matching demand is relatively low (host/guest arrangements ending early) and single figures but we are starting to see an increase due to the rural location of some hosts. People want to be closer to employment, services and schools and on a bus route so they don't have to rely on the host to drive them or find the money for a car.
- All unmatched hosts registered locally have been contacted as potential expressions of interest for re-matching but responses have been low. Those that have responded are being reviewed in terms of the location of the property and the type of accommodation. Those in the most sustainable

locations are being inspected first and we are trying to avoid the need for further rematches.

#### Commissioned support locally – external and internal

- Welcome visits and support/case management is in full swing via commissioned voluntary support - as previously reported CHAT are working with the Devon Ukraine Assoc. The number of guests needing a visit means we have expanded the contract to include additional resource for initial visits and follow-up visits
- Specialist CAB support is in place for benefits claims especially Universal Credit and housing law
- Reviewing additional, money management (Money Maze) support and training via the charity Navigate
- Pressure on internal teams has meant inspections and scheme administration has been impacting on other statutory service delivery – now utilising HfU scheme funding to recruit temporary business admin and technical housing posts

#### Finance

- Funding for Q1 of the scheme has been received from DCC under agreed financial arrangement based on numbers and payments out. Further Q2-Q4 returns and payments in due course
  - 60% of £10.5k per refugee (DCC 25%, 15% contingency for all) which includes £200 subsistence payment per head
  - 100% of monthly £350 host 'thank you' payments
  - Q1 payment of £640K banked
  - Committed spend to date inc. some Q2 expenditure and existing staff time is around one-third of funding received so far @ £235k

#### Team Devon

- The Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing continues to lead and provide support into Team Devon level work (DCC and all Districts):
  - Fortnightly meetings to review delivery/risks and ensure consistent Devon approach – link back into MDDC delivery team
  - Reviewing a Devon-wide exit strategy around pending housing/accommodation pressures once hosting ends – joint solutions (work in progress)
  - Bus travel for HfU negotiated with all major and some local operators across County – packs on 10 day rider return tickets per person, ideally for use for essential visits e.g. DWP/interviews but flexible
  - Negotiated strong offer with Petroc for summer holidays and longer-term programme inc. Tiverton campus. Activities include:

- Summer programme (get to know - family cookery, arts and crafts, physical activity, trips to local attractions)
- 1:1 support from Adult Success Coaches
- ESOL (English language) support ranging from basic English for beginners to more advanced
- Employment and subject specific English language
- Online resources
- Identifying qualifications and professional certification – how to gain equivalency in UK
- Careers fair plus self-employment & entrepreneurship taster sessions
- Supervised age-appropriate play, sports, forest school and outdoor learning sessions
- Prep for school
- Advice and triage for longer-term needs
- Access to other funding streams and support
- Participant travel costs
- The Petroc offer and the various informal network events will help support transition to sustainable residency (employment, language, skills, accommodation, schools etc) and help during summer holiday period – likely to be testing for some host/guest relationships
- Continue to engage with DLUHC, LGA and DCN on scheme roll-out, pressures and risks and updated national guidance etc

Consideration was given to:

- Any support and help that elected Members could provide especially through Petroc.
- What next? Currently there was no end in sight to the war, therefore there was a need to begin to plan for the housing needs of a significant number of refugees on a potentially long term basis. Team Devon needed to treat this as a priority.
- How hard the Mid Devon team had worked and continue to work to support this scheme whilst still doing the 'day job'.
- The importance of employment for the refugees.

It was **AGREED** an all Member briefing was needed on this subject as soon as possible.

Note: Cllr G Barnell declared a personal interest in that he was himself a matched 'host'. He also provided some training to Ukrainian refugees.

## 24 **HOUSING INITIATIVES PROJECT - PURCHASE OF HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO'S) FOR TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION (01:43:00)**

The Group had before it a report \* from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing seeking agreement to purchase either one or two houses in multiple occupation, currently in the private rented sector, for use as temporary accommodation and for rough sleepers.

It was agreed that discussion with regard to the report should take place in private session and it was therefore:

**RESOLVED** that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and Part 5 - Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Returning to open session it was:

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that:

- a) Option 2 – to purchase one property – Scheme 1 - be approved as the preferred option in terms of size, location and ongoing maintenance.
- b) That full funding is utilised from Earmarked reserves (EMRs) as set out in Section 3.3 of the report.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Reason for the decision:

The project and its outcomes are supported by the current Housing Strategy 2021-25. In particular the aim of the project is to reduce the current spend on B&B as temporary accommodation and to provide accommodation with support for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. The project will be supported utilising external grant funding and earmarked reserves.

Notes:

- (i) \* Report previously circulated; copy attached to the minutes.
- (ii) Cllr S Clist declared a pecuniary interest as he owned a rented property and had business dealings with the agent who had valued the properties in question. He therefore left the meeting for the duration of the discussion and did not take part in the vote.
- (iii) Councillors R J Dolley, S Pugh and R F Radford declared personal interests in that they also owned property that was rented out, either currently or in the past.

## 25 **COUNCIL TAX SECOND HOMES AND LONG TERM EMPTY BRIEFING PAPER (02:45:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a briefing paper \* from the Corporate Manager for Revenues, Benefits and Recovery providing information in relation to Council Tax and Second Homes and Long Term Empty Homes.



An updated paper had been provided and this would be attached to the minutes.

Consideration was given to:

- Whether Air B&B's would be included as part of this.
- The number of holiday lets and the threshold for Business Rate relief meaning a potential loss of income to the Council.
- The difficulties involving in 'policing' this area.
- The current efforts being made to collate and track the data.

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

## 26 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (02:58:00)

In addition to the items already listed in the work programme for the next meeting the Group requested that it receive an update in relation to:

- The Home Share Scheme

(The meeting ended at 5.15 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**