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MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 21 March 2023 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

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

Apologies

Councillors

J Bartlett and P J Heal

Present

Officers

Jill May (Director of Business Improvement and Operations), Simon Newcombe (Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing), Sue Hanwell (Operations Manager for Housing) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

58 **Apologies and Substitute Members**

Apologies were received from:

- Cllr J Bartlett
- Cllr P J Heal

It was also noted that Cllr Barnell was no longer a member of the Group as he had become a Cabinet Member since the last meeting.

59 **Public Question Time**

No members of the public had registered to ask a question.

60 **Declaration of Interests under the Code of Conduct**

No interests were declared under this item.

61 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2023 were **AGREED** as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

62 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

He thanked his fellow Policy Development Group Members for their kind words regarding his Chairmanship.

He commented that he was somewhat 'sad' that it had not been possible to create more housing during the past 4 years but hoped that some of these ambitions could be progressed under the new administration.

63 **The use of Flexible Tenancies (00:07:00)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing.

The officer outlined the contents of the report and highlighted the following:

- There were challenges using the Flexible Tenancy scheme as it currently existed and officers were keen to undertake further research to determine the best way forwards. The arguments for and against the use of Flexible Tenancies, as set out in the report, were reiterated. An analysis needed to be undertaken as to whether the current scheme should continue in its current format, or whether a more blended approach would be helpful or whether to phase the scheme out completely and replace it with something more workable. More research was needed.
- A number of legislative changes had taken place over the past 10 years however the Council would continue to offer 1-year introductory tenancies and long-term secure tenancies if flexible tenure was removed.
- Many other registered providers were reviewing Flexible Tenancies such as other stock holding local authorities and a change of approach was seen to be developing across the sector.

Discussion took place regarding:

- A tenant's income, savings and household budget being taken into account in relation to any decision about whether or not to renew a flexible tenancy.
- The number of private letting facilities available.
- Concerns regarding the workload in trying to manage lots of different tenants with different tenancy arrangements and durations.
- Tenants were involved at the heart of decision making and the Tenant Involvement resource had been strengthened.
- The critical stage was the first year where a lot could be understood about the ability of a new tenant to sustain a tenancy.
- There was no automatic transfer of tenancy should a tenant pass away.

The Group **AGREED** for the development of a project plan setting out proposals to consult tenants and other stakeholders on the continued use of flexible tenancies by Mid Devon Housing for discussion and agreement at a future meeting of the Homes Policy Development Group.

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

64 **Mid Devon Housing Service Delivery Report (00:30:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing providing the regular, quarterly update to Members on enforcement and other activity undertaken by Mid Devon Housing.

The officer outlined the contents of the report with particular reference to the following:

- Areas of improvement were referenced such as gas safety checks and fire risk assessments.
- The new regulatory regime was outlined and the tenant satisfaction measures explained.
- Future reporting on service delivery would be in a revised format and centred around the new regulations with a draft format coming forward at a future policy development group meeting for member consideration.

Consideration was given to:

- The cost of living crisis and the effect of this on tenants.
- Early engagement with tenants was key should rent arrears become an issue, circumstances were looked at as holistically as possible.

It was **AGREED** that the thanks of the Group be taken back to the Rent Recovery team who were working so hard and compassionately to engage with tenants at an early stage concerning outstanding rent arrears.

It was also **NOTED** that Mid Devon Housing had recently been nominated for the 'Resolve ASB 2022-2023 Team of the Year' award.

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

65 **Chairman's Annual Report for 2022 - 2023 (00:41:00)**

The Group had before it and **AGREED** the Chairman's Annual Report for 2022 – 2023.

There being no comments this would now go forward to full Council for approval at its next meeting.

66 **Identification of items for the next meeting (00:45:00)**

Members **NOTED** the items listed in the work programme for the next meeting. In addition it was also requested that, following the election, the new membership of the Homes Policy Development Group receive an update on the current and planned housing programme and that the Group be brought fully up to speed.

(The meeting ended at 3.01 pm)

CHAIRMAN

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