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## MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 13 June 2023 at 2.15 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

C Adcock (Chairman)  
J Cairney, M Farrell, A Glover, F W Letch, N Letch and  
S Robinson

### **Apologies**

#### **Councillors**

E Buczkowski and C Connor

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillors**

D Broom, J Buczkowski, G Duchesne, B Holdman, J Lock  
and D Wulff

### **Present**

#### **Officers**

Simon Newcombe (Corporate Manager for Public Health,  
Regulation and Housing), Paul Deal (Corporate Manager  
for Finance), David Parker (Member Services & Policy  
Research Officer) and Sarah Lees (Member Services  
Officer)

## 1 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr C Adcock be elected Chairman of the Homes Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2023/2024.

## 2 **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

Due to the fact that 2 Members of the Policy Development Group had sent apologies for the meeting and 2 were absent it was **AGREED** to defer the election of Vice Chairman until the next meeting.

## 3 **START TIME OF MEETINGS**

Due to the fact that two Members had sent apologies to the meeting, two were absent and that moving the start time to the evening may affect some Members attending Parish Council meetings later in the day, it was **AGREED** to defer a decision on the start time of future meetings until the following Policy Development Group meeting in August.

## 4 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from:

- Cllr E Buczkowski who was substituted by Cllr S Robinson.
- Cllr C Connor who was substituted by Cllr Matt Farrell.

## 5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Paul Elstone asked the following questions in relation to the Leisure VAT refund, it was asked:

What the exact reason was for the Leisure VAT Refund, being repaid; who was refunding, to the Council, the Leisure VAT Refund; what period does the Leisure VAT Refund cover and had the Council actually received the Leisure VAT Refund.

In addition, Paul Elstone asked questions in relation to Zed Pod modular housing units, it was asked:

If the Council would provide a detailed breakdown of the £500,000 additional spend required for the Shapland Place and St Andrews Estate Modular Units referred to in the report.

If an explanation could be provided as to why these modular developments were taking so very long to complete and whether these completion dates were reliable given that not even the groundworks at St Andrews had been started.

If the Council could explain why these Zed Pod modules were seen as good value, when they cost considerably more than a conventional built home, needed more maintenance, had a shorter life expectancy and took longer to build?

If this Committee would fully investigate whether the revised module designs, at Shapland Place, met the Governments Minimum Floor Space Standards and the Building Regulation Overheating risk mitigation requirements.

It was confirmed by the officers in attendance that a written response would be provided and attached to the minutes of the meeting.

## 6 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Cllr A Glover declared a personal interest in that she lived in and rented a Council property.

## 7 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2023 were **AGREED** as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

## 8 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00:05:00)

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

## 9 REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN REPORT (00:20:00)

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 2022/2023 for both the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The contents of the report were outlined and a high level summary provided as follows:

- The outturn position on the General Fund showed a small overspend of £190k. This represented a good achievement given the current economic circumstances. The Housing Revenue Account showed a small underspend of £312k.
- Notable variances included a higher than expected staff pay award and higher levels of staff sickness than expected,
- The cost of living crisis had had a significant impact across the Council's finances.
- Reserves were still in a healthy position and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was in a strong position to support future investment in the Council's housing stock.
- The increasing cost of Homelessness provision was being offset by Government grants.
- The HRA variances related to staff vacancies, interests through investments, depreciation being higher than expected and the increase of material costs to maintain the housing stock.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The impact of staff vacancies would could lead to an increased risk of a drop in productivity. The biggest challenge at the moment was in recruiting people to the trades. The hope was to recruit locally wherever possible and ensuring the Council took on apprentices to grow its own workforce.
- A request to show plus's and minus's in separate columns in future.
- The new waste depot and the timescales involved in having it operational.
- The Right to Buy Scheme which was a legal requirement. The Council received a proportion of each sale which was used to invest back into the house building programme. That proportion had increased recently on a temporary basis under new flexibilities recently announced by Government
- The revised Voids Management policy which now used a new measure related to turn around time. When a property became a void it often provided an opportunity to deal with damage caused by the previous tenant, modernise a property or hold it for redevelopment. The new overarching target within the policy that 97% of the Council's stock was occupied at any one time was highlight.
- A request to see data which showed how long a property had been void for. The next item on service delivery and future performance reporting (including voids) was highlighted
- Zed Pod buildings as with all other residential new-build property had to comply with building regulations. These specific building were also highly insulated beyond minimum requirements so retained warmth in the winter whilst being cool in the summer.
- The complexities involved in trying to show how many Tenants, who were in rent arrears, were still waiting to receive benefit claims before paying their rent.

It was requested that the Group receive background information in relation to Voids Management at the next meeting.

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

## 10 MID DEVON HOUSING SERVICE DELIVERY REPORT (00:50:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing providing a quarterly update to Members on enforcement and other activity undertaken by Mid Devon Housing and provides a summary of the final Q4 and outturn for 2022/2023.

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

- Mid Devon Housing was entering into a new a consumer led regulatory regime with 22 key performance indicators relating to tenant satisfaction and which needed to be reported on. These measures included a combination of hard information and perception surveys.
- Only a small proportion of tenancies reached the formal eviction phase. Ward Members were invited to attend eviction panels and could act as an advocate for a tenant should they wish.

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

## 11 MID DEVON HOUSING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY UPDATE (01:04:00)

The Group had before it a report \* from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing. Under the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) requires all registered providers to publish a policy setting out, how in consultation with their tenants, they will maintain and improve the neighbourhood's associated with their homes. Registered suppliers are required to publish a policy on how they work with relevant partners to prevent and tackle Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).

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

- This was a refreshed policy which set out how MDH worked with partners.
- Representatives from this Policy Development Group had joined with the Community PDG working group on ASB in 2022, and the housing team had worked hard with this group together with consulting tenants and key partners in updating the policy.
- There were challenging issues around, drug trafficking, county lines and the targeting of vulnerable individuals.
- There had been revised guidance from the Housing Ombudsman and a new Tenant Satisfaction Measure for TSM defining what ASB is and how it should be measure taken account in the updated report. An example being how a neighbourhood boundary dispute is no longer classified as ASB.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- The Housing officers and previous working group were thanked for the work they had undertaken to produce such a detailed and important piece of work.
- Currently there were enough powers and tools to enable officers to deal with anti-social behaviour on Council housing estates but this ability relied heavily on being able to liaise closely with other agencies such as the Police.

- There would always be some anti-social behaviour and it was important to remember that there were complex issues involved.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that the updated Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, Statement, Procedures and Equality Impact Assessment contained in Annexes A,B,C & D respectively be adopted.

(Proposed by Cllr F Letch and seconded by Cllr S Robinson)

Reason for the decision

The Council is required, under Section 12 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, to prepare a policy and procedure on ASB and to publish the following documents:

- Statement of policy on ASB;
- Statement of procedure on ASB;
- Summary statement of current policy and procedures on ASB

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

12 **MID DEVON HOUSING COMPLAINTS HANDLING ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023**  
(00:01:17)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing presenting the Mid Devon Housing Complaints Handling Annual Report for 2022-2023.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- A whole new approach to the handling of complaints came about as a result of the Grenfell disaster. The Corporate Manager welcomed the greater transparency now needed which necessitated a lot of detailed reporting under the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code setting out how the Council needed to fulfil key criteria and comply with key tenant satisfaction measures.
- It was difficult to compare current complaint data with previous data as the whole regime had changed.
- Currently the Council upheld about a third of its complaints with only a very small number of those being referred to the Ombudsman. Lessons to be learnt were properly captured and acted upon under the Code as set out in the relevant Annex.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- The increased administrative burden upon staff and the effect upon their morale.
- There was some correlation between the numbers of repairs and complaints.
- The aggressive practices of some claims companies in relation to disrepair claims arising from complaints
- All the regulatory changes placing greater burden on private landlords and potentially having a negative impact on the availability of private sector housing leading to social housing pressures

- The neighbourhood walkabouts with Ward Members were greatly appreciated and offered a good opportunity to get to know the area. They also provided an opportunity to identify problems sooner than might otherwise have been the case.

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

### 13 **PRESENTATION ON THE HOMES FOR UKRAINE SCHEME (01:42:00)**

The Group received an update, by way of presentation, on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. This included the following information:

- Background to the scheme
- Scheme details
- Local Authority Statutory Role
- Short / medium / long term requirements
- Wraparound support
- Specific MDDC support and initiatives
- Using the voluntary sector
- The number involved both overall and current
- The Local Authority Housing Fund
- Homelessness Prevention Grant
- Managing local risks
- The future and looking ahead.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The team were to be congratulated for providing this support on top of all their other work.
- Operating the scheme had enabled the Council to pilot some initiatives which looking ahead may work more broadly.
- The willingness of the UK people to open their doors was key to the success of the scheme.
- The support needed and given to the refugee community generally.
- If people were given the opportunity to work there were benefits not only to them but also the local and wider communities.

### 14 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (02:35:00)**

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

- Background information in relation to Void Management
- A work programme for the Group for 23/24

(The meeting ended at 4.46 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**