

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the DECENT AND AFFORDABLE HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 26 January 2016 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors: P J Heal (Chairman)
Mrs E M Andrews, Mrs H Bainbridge,
W J Daw, Mrs G Doe, R J Dolley, R Evans,
J D Squire and L D Taylor

Also Present

Councillor: R L Stanley

Also Present

Officers: Nick Sanderson (Head of Housing and Property Services),
Claire Fry (Housing Services Manager), Roderick Hewson
(Principal Accountant), Michael Parker (Housing Options
Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

60 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence.

61 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

62 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2015 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

63 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded the Group that there would be a Special Meeting on Thursday 25 February 2016 at 2.15pm to discuss the Wessex Partnership.

64 HRA BUDGET 2016/17 (00:02:20)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Finance and Head of Housing and Property Services providing an estimate of the budget required for the operation of the Housing Account (HRA) in 2016/17. Most of the specifics were now known and the remaining uncertainty was the ongoing effect that welfare reform would have.

The Principal Accountant outlined the contents of the report stating that there had been little change since the last report however there had been some movement in the repairs and maintenance area in that operatives were spending more time on non

day to day repair work meaning that costs could be charged to the capital programme rather than the Housing Revenue Account. Other changes were in relation to recharges and capital charges being finalised. However, these were not material overall.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Community alarm charges; there had been a reasonable take up and promotion of the 24 hours a day, 365 days a year scheme, was having a positive effect;
- The balance involved in trying to set reasonable charges for garage rents whilst trying to retain customers;
- Responsive repairs and the possibility of offering this service to private tenants. The adaptations team, in particular were well thought of by tenants in terms of the standard of their work and a more commercial approach may be needed going forwards.

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

65 **HOUSING STRATEGY 2015-2020 (00:22:00)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Housing Services Manager informing it about the results of the recent consultation on the draft Housing Strategy.

The contents of the report were outlined and it was explained that it was an overarching strategy that made reference to lots of other Council housing policies. The Strategy listed the Council's priorities, for example, preventing homelessness and set the scene locally against the context of national legislation.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet approves the revised housing strategy once the changes set out in the report have been implemented.

(Proposed by Councillor Mrs H Bainbridge and seconded by Councillor R J Dolley)

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

66 **PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE TENANCY AGREEMENT (00:26:45)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Housing Services Manager seeking agreement to the proposed changes to the draft Tenancy Agreement prior to consultation with tenants.

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

- National housing policy had moved on since the last review and the Council had to comply with this;
- Since the last review there had been the introduction of Flexible Tenancies; currently there were 9 different types, this document consolidated them.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The Government's initiative entitled 'Pay to Stay' which was currently progressing through the House of Lords and would mean that those earning more would pay more rent. It was likely that this would result in an increased administrative burden to the housing service;
- The proposed move to charging rent over a 52 week period rather than 48. It was explained that no decision had been taken in relation to this matter yet but that a paper would be brought to the Group in due course. Administratively this would be easier and would fall in line with Government changes to the way benefits would be paid. However, there was some concern amongst the Group regarding the proposed change and they welcomed further discussion at a later stage;
- The consultation process and whether tenants would be contacted individually; it was confirmed that they would.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet approve consultation with Council tenants in accordance with sections 102 and 103 of the Housing Act 1985 on the proposed changes to the draft Tenancy Agreement.

(Proposed by Councillor Mrs H Bainbridge and seconded by Councillor R Evans)

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

67 **CAR PARK MANAGEMENT POLICY (00:45:02)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Housing Services Manager reviewing the Car Park Management Policy.

It was explained that the policy had last been reviewed in June 2011 and some slight revision had been needed, mainly in relation to providing clarity in certain areas.

Discussion took place regarding how rigorously the Council enforced the proper use of its car parks. It was explained that certain incidents had involved a great deal of discussion between tenants and Council officers about what was reasonable behaviour and the policy now provided clearer guidelines to both parties.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet approves the revised car Park Management Policy.

(Proposed by Councillor J D Squire and seconded by Councillor Mrs H Bainbridge)

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

68 **GARAGE MANAGEMENT POLICY (00:49:46)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Housing Services Manager reviewing the Garage Management Policy.

It was explained that the Council was not obliged to provide garages to tenants but it was good estate management to do so if space allowed. The report provided clarification around the issue of succession meaning that if somebody died a family member could succeed the tenancy. It was further explained that because of the need for a 16 year old to provide a guarantor if they had wanted to rent a garage and

the administrative burden this presented the age limit had been raised to 18. Also if garage keys were lost these would be charged for.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The new policy allowing for the demolition of garages should they be in a poor state and the health and safety of tenants and the public was an issue;
- Garages were also available for private rent which was why there was a two tier pricing system.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet approves the revised housing strategy once the changes set out in the report have been implemented.

(Proposed by Councillor R Evans and seconded by Councillor Mrs H Bainbridge)

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

69 **RECHARGE POLICY (00:57:53)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Housing Services Manager reviewing the Recharge Policy. It was explained that this was a key policy for the Council which dealt with issues such as damage and items left by previous tenants which needed removal.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet approves the revised Recharge Policy.

(Proposed by Councillor R Evans and seconded by Councillor Mrs H Bainbridge)

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

70 **UPDATE ON THE DEVON HOME CHOICE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS (01:02:40)**

The Group received a verbal update from the Housing Options Manager regarding the recommendations of the Devon Home Choice Working Group which had been approved by the Cabinet. This included the following:

- Following correspondence 400 applicants had recently been removed from the system as a result of a change in circumstance or having moved address; the next stage would be to look at the remaining 550;
- Bands A to D would also be looked at;
- A new Allocations Policy would be drafted to include a clause which said that if applicants did not bid for a property for 12 months they would be removed from the system;
- Currently, as of January 2016, there were 1909 applicants on the waiting list across all Bands.

It was requested that the Group be emailed a link to the current Devon Home Choice quarterly monitoring report.

71 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:08:15)

In addition to the items already listed within the work programme for the next ordinary meeting the following was also identified for the next agenda:

- Chairman's Annual Report for 2015/2016

The Head of Housing and Property Services also asked the Group to consider whether there were any topics they would like brought to a future meeting. It was important to keep the Group updated on current housing issues and changes to housing legislation, therefore a regular item in the form of a short briefing may be appropriate. It was **AGREED** that the Group give this some thought and report back to the clerk before the next meeting

(The meeting ended at 3.27 pm)

CHAIRMAN