

## MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

### MINUTES of a MEETING of the DECENT AND AFFORDABLE HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 24 May 2016 at 2.15 pm

#### Present

**Councillors** P J Heal, Mrs E M Andrews, Mrs H Bainbridge, W J Daw, Mrs G Doe, R J Dolley and J D Squire

#### Apologies

**Councillors** D R Coren and L D Taylor

#### Also Present

**Councillor** R L Stanley

#### Present

**Officers** Nick Sanderson (Head of Housing and Property Services), Andrew Cawdron (Finance Manager), Helen Carty (Housing Policy Officer), Angela Barrett (Accountant), Nicky Chandler (Auditor) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

#### 1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR 2016/17 (CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL IN THE CHAIR)

**RESOLVED** that Cllr P J Heal be elected Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2016/17.

Cllr P J Heal then took the Chair.

#### 2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN FOR 2016/17

**RESOLVED** that Cllr W J Daw be elected Vice Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2016/17.

#### 3 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillors D R Coren and L Taylor.

#### 4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

#### 5 MINUTES (00:03:15)

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2016 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

#### 6 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00:03:40)

The Chairman stated that he looked forward to welcoming Cllr D R Coren to the Group at the next meeting. Cllr Mrs E A Andrews also requested, through the Chairman, that a personal vote of thanks be recorded to Sandra Hunt who had

recently retired as Community Support and Initiatives Team Leader. The Group also wished for their thanks to be forwarded on to her.

## 7 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK OUTTURN REPORT FOR 2015/16 (00:04:21)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Head of Communities and Governance providing it with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2015/16 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

It was explained that the report was based on performance data from the final quarter of 2015/16 and was also based on the old corporate priorities. Future reports would be based on the new corporate priorities. It was noted that the number of 'empty homes being brought back into use' and the number of 'affordable homes delivered' were below target. However, whilst targets in relation to these were set locally, the number of 'affordable homes delivered' were not entirely within the district council's control. It was also noted how pleasing it was to see targets in relation to repairs being maintained and where they weren't credible reasons had been provided in the management notes.

The Group wished to pass on their congratulations to the housing service for their continuing achievements against performance indicators.

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

## 8 **REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN 2015/16 (00:08:06)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Head of Finance, which had previously been presented to the Cabinet on 12 May 2016. This presented the revenue and capital outturn figures for the financial year 2015/16.

Key highlights within the report were summarised as follows:

- £36k better recovery on the Deposit and Rent Scheme (DARS) and as a result there had been a reduction in the level of provision required.
- The use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to fund housing benefit claimants in the DARS scheme had also reduced by £18k. The total General Fund Housing Services Expenditure was therefore showing an under spend of £86k.
- The Housing Service had managed to reduce some of their repair costs whilst maintaining 100% at the 'decent homes' standard.
- The Group were reminded that the Council still had a significant Housing Revenue Account loan to repay through the Public Works Liability Board of over £40m.
- There had been some staff savings.
- Less had been spent on alarms than had been expected despite the numbers of requests for alarms increasing.
- Solar panel income had been greater than expected and had contributed a further £46k.
- Throughout 2015/16 high priority had been given to improving the housing stock as well as new housing developments.

- Ear marked reserves had increased from £6.7m to £9.7m but the sustainability of the Housing Revenue Account depended upon future rents.

In conclusion whilst there was an overall surplus of £916k for the year, the Group needed to bear in mind that housing rents had been frozen with decreases for another four years. A significant PWLB loan needed to be repaid and it was not clear what plans central government had for local housing authorities in the future, therefore caution needed to be exercised.

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

## 9 TENANCY CHANGES POLICY (00:21:00)

The Group had before it a report \* from the Housing Services Manager reviewing the Tenancy Changes Policy (previously known as the Succession & Assignment Policy).

It was explained that the policy had been updated and set out how the Council would deal effectively with tenancy changes such as, successions, assignments in accordance with a Court Order, mutual exchange or assignment to a person qualified to succeed to a tenancy or a joint to sole tenancy request. The title of the policy had been renamed from Succession and Assignment Policy to Tenancy Changes Policy to better reflect what was included in it. The policy contained a new section which stated that tenants may seek written consent to change their tenancy to either a sole or joint tenancy or vice versa. Any requests made would be at the discretion of the housing service. The policy also introduced a section relating to the retraction of notice to terminate a tenancy. This clarified what would happen when a tenant served a notice on the council to end their tenancy and then changed their mind.

Discussion followed with regard to:

- The fact that if a tenant wished to retract a notice to vacate and then changed their mind, the existing tenancy agreement would still need to be terminated and a new one created.
- The need for a cooling off period, however, the housing service were governed by housing legislation. Despite this it was confirmed that they did listen to people's personal circumstances and had a certain amount of discretion.
- The need for the Council to make the best use of its stock.
- Having a policy ensured fairness to all tenants who would all be treated in a similar way.
- If there was a joint tenancy the need to check that both parties were happy to terminate the tenancy would depend on the type of tenancy involved, for example, a flexible tenancy required that both parties needed to give notice.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that the revised Tenancy Changes Policy be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs J Doe and seconded by Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge)

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

- (ii) Cllr Mrs E M Andrews requested that her abstention from voting be recorded.

**10 BAND E - VERBAL UPDATE (00:43:08)**

The Head of Housing and Property Services provided the Group with a verbal update regarding Band E. This included the following:

- Mid Devon District Council had allocated 72% of properties in Bands B and C in general needs properties. 37% in Bands B and C had been allocated to sheltered housing. 299 properties across all bands had been allocated in the last financial year.
- Currently there was 1812 people on the Devon Home Choice waiting list which was a 15 % reduction on the previous year, 895 of these were in Band E.
- Regular reviews were conducted and this process was now automated, saving officer time to the value of 8 days per year.
- People were regularly reminded that if they did not bid on anything they may be removed from the system.
- The Devon Home Choice team actively encouraged people to bid.
- There would be a letter drop to all those on the waiting list advising them about the key changes to the Allocations Policy.
- The Council had been working with Devon Homes Choice on the 'Terms and Conditions' of the Devon Home Choice scheme.

Discussion followed with regard to the fact that anybody registered with Devon Home Choice could look at properties outside of the district but within the Devon boundary. Should people want to look outside of the county they would need to register with the equivalent homes provider in that area.

**11 WESSEX - VERBAL UPDATE (00:54:12)**

The Cabinet Member for Housing provided the Group with an update regarding the Wessex partnership. He reminded Members that the council had given notice to withdraw from the partnership at the end of last year but that it was waiting to make the final decision until the results of a pilot scheme in Exeter were known. Until that time the Council had ceased trading with Wessex.

Discussion followed with regard to:

- The need for negotiation regarding the return of any outstanding monies.
- Advice was being sought from the Legal Department regarding a number of issues in this regard.
- An update would be provided to the Group at the next meeting.

Information relating to a change of name to the company in question would be relayed to the Group via the Committee Clerk.

**12 START TIME OF MEETINGS (01:01:42)**

It was **AGREED** that the Group continue to meet on Tuesday's at 2.15pm.

### 13 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:02:15)

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

- A report from 'Tenants Together' regarding the use of common rooms.
- A presentation from the Building Services Manager regarding how the housing service dealt with waste.
- Future plans for social housing

It was also suggested that a visit by the Group to Old Road take place before a future meeting to see how the repairs service worked.

(The meeting ended at 3.23 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**