

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 12 September 2017 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors Mrs H Bainbridge, D R Coren, W J Daw, Mrs G Doe, R J Dolley, P J Heal, F W Letch and J D Squire

Apology

Councillor Mrs E M Andrews

Also Present

Councillor C J Eginton

Also Present Officers

Andrew Pritchard (Director of Operations), Mark Baglow (Building Services Manager), Claire Fry (Housing Services Manager), Simon Newcombe (Public Health and Professional Services Manager), Catherine Yandle (Internal Audit Team Leader), Roderick Hewson (Principal Accountant), Rosie Williams (Building Services Office Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

25 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs E M Andrews.

26 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

27 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2017 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

28 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- He reminded the Group that an informal workshop would follow this meeting.
- There would be a Landlord Networking event on 8th November at Muddifords Court Country House to which all Group members were welcome.

29 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT FOR 2017-18 (00:03:40)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Operations providing it with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2017/18 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The report highlighted those housing areas with targets that were most closely linked to the aims of the Corporate Plan. It was noted that 23 empty homes had been brought back into use against an annual target of 25 which was excellent. A further update was provided informing the Group that the target of 25 had already been exceeded since the report had been written which was further good news. The number of 'Affordable Homes Delivered' was 26 for the first quarter of 2017/18, the first time that target had been exceeded for over 2 years. However 'Rent Arrears as a Proportion of Annual Rent Debit' was 1.30%, against a target of 1%. The impact of welfare reform was likely to make this situation worse.

Discussion took place regarding the risk associated with evictions and the possibility of those tenants being evicted becoming violent towards officers. It was explained that the Housing Department was doing all it could to ensure the well-being and safety of its officers. There was a framework of supervision in place. Officers were able to meet with their managers on a regular basis, there was also peer support and counselling was available if needed. As a department they were experiencing more challenging behaviour but the Housing Services Manager stated that she was satisfied that there were sufficient mitigating actions in place.

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

30 **FINANCIAL MONITORING (00:09:15)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

The key highlights within the report were as follows:

- Overall the situation regarding the Housing Revenue Account was very positive, however, there was a variance against budget of £5k in the area of General Fund Housing, this could easily improve by the end of the financial year.
- Currently there was a £40k shortfall on dwelling rent income but again it was stated that this could improve by the financial year end.
- £120k surplus had been generated by adaptations work.

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

31 **TENANT COMPENSATION POLICY (00:12:44)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Director of Operations advising Members of the revised Tenant Compensation Policy.

The policy had been due for review and only minor changes were proposed which included the following:

- The proposed policy had been altered to reflect the information in the new Tenancy Agreement and the format of the MDDC website.
- It included further information to clarify the position on compensation claims for external areas including sheds, outhouses and garages.

- It also clarified the position on items damaged during planned demolition works.
- It was designed to be in line with the Rechargeable Repairs Policy, in order that there was fairness in terms of what the Council expected from its tenants and what tenants expected from the Council.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the revised Tenant Compensation Policy be approved.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

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

32 **WESSEX SCHEME**

The Public Health and Professional Services Manager provided the Group with an update on the Wessex Scheme which included information that had been received only that morning.

The following background information was provided:

- Originally the scheme had been designed to assist people to stay in their own homes but who were unable to raise sufficient finance to carry out necessary improvements. The Council had invested a large sum of money in the Wessex Scheme and was part of a wider consortia of Devon authorities.
- In the past large numbers of people had been lost through the process and the scheme had been performing badly. It had been decided to run a pilot for 6 months to see if performance could be improved. This had included extending the range of works that could qualify for a loan rather than those just specified as a specific hazard. It also introduced a new, quicker application process.

The results of the pilot were summarised as follows:

- In the previous financial year just 2 loans had been issued to the value of £17k, however, in the year to date this figure was now approaching £80k (split between £56k drawn down and the remainder committed).
- In 2015 it had taken 29 weeks to complete a loan application as a result of necessary checks and survey's etc. Wessex had been losing 80% of their customers through this process. Since the pilot had streamlined the scheme new targets had been set with a target date for the completion of an application being reduced to 8 weeks. The decline rate had now reduced from 80% to 40%.
- The situation was much improved with the average time taken to process a loan falling to 10 weeks and 70% of applications being completed within the required 8 weeks. This represented a significant improvement.
- Of those that had declined the uptake of a loan in the last 6 months this had been largely due to them finding an alternative to a loan, such as family members providing financial assistance or support from their bank.
- There had been a recovery rate of 100% in terms of those people who had taken up a loan.
- 40% of referrals were coming from external organisations such as AGE UK.
- It was a difficult target audience without a common demographic.

- Discussions were currently underway with Wessex regarding a new marketing plan for the coming year and there was a new online application process.
- There was a lot of competition within the market from pay day loans which often provide fast access to loans, typically at significant higher interest rates however.
- A further review would take place later in the year.
- It was stated that credit should go to Wessex for identifying the problems and for improving performance through the pilot working closely with the Council's Private Sector Housing Team.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Very low bad debt rates.
- The maximum loan available was capped at £15k, however, if an application was received for just over this £, it would be considered as there was some discretion within the lending policy.
- The interest rate for a Wessex Loan was currently 4%.
- The results of the pilot were very encouraging.

33 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

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

- Allocation of funds for community led housing
- Rechargeable Repairs
- Draft Housing Revenue Account and General Fund budget for 2018/19
- Post Grenfell considerations regarding the Council's housing stock

(The meeting ended at 2.52 pm)

CHAIRMAN