

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 23 May 2017 at 2.15 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

Mrs E M Andrews, 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

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillor**

R L Stanley

### **Present**

#### **Officers**

Andrew Pritchard (Director of Operations), Claire Fry (Housing Services Manager), Simon Newcombe (Public Health and Professional Services Manager), Michael Parker (Housing Options Manager), Roderick Hewson (Principal Accountant), Tanya Wenham (Lead Officer Public Sector Housing), Nicky Chandler (Auditor) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

## **1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN (CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL IN THE CHAIR)**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr W J Daw be elected Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2017/18.

Cllr W J Daw then took the Chair.

## **2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr P J Heal be elected Vice Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2017/18.

## **3 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no apologies for absence.

## **4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

## **5 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2017 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

## **6 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

## 7 PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT FOR 2016-17 (00:06:00)

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 2016/17 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- Where performance indicators were below target an officer note had been provided.
- Since the agenda for the meeting had been published the number of outstanding gas safety certificates had reduced to one. This related to an abandoned property and the Council was looking to seek possession.

Discussion took place regarding the rent collected as a proportion of rent owed being over 100%. This was because the housing department collected arrears brought forward as well as some rents in advance.

The team responsible for collecting rent were congratulated by the Group who they described as being a 'shining light' within the organisation.

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

## 8 UPDATE ON EMPTY HOMES (00:09:40)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Public Health and Professional Service Manager providing it with an update on the progress of the empty homes project following the briefing in January 2017.

Key highlights within the report included the following:

- In relation to the Corporate Plan target, more than double the number of predicted empty homes had been brought back into use.
- Income generation going forwards from 2017/18 would become tighter with the New Homes Bonus only being payable once a 0.4% baseline had been reached with the dowry period falling to 5 years. Bringing empty properties back into use therefore takes a positive net financial contribution to the Council's revenue budget in addition to the wider beneficial social, housing and regeneration impacts.
- 13 properties had been identified as needing priority action however contact had been made with all 132 properties that had been empty for 2 years or more.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The fact that overall there were currently 776 properties that had been empty across the district for more than 6 months.
- Whilst there was significant housing need in Crediton, applications had been submitted for development but these would take some years to come to fruition.

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

## 9 **DISABLED FACILITY GRANT (DFG) UPDATE (00:21:40)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Public Health and Professional Services Manager providing an update on the current position with the disabled facilities grant (DFG) programme.

It was explained that during the summer of 2016 the existing processes with regard to the administration of the DFG programme were fully reviewed in order to identify areas where there was scope for streamlining and updating. The Group were referred to section 2 within the report which listed the areas which had been subsequently streamlined. It was further explained that previously it had taken 17 weeks to process a DFG, this was now down to 9 weeks.

In 2016/17 the total government allocation for Mid Devon through the 'Better Care Fund' for disabled facilities grants was £561,385. In common with all Devon district authorities it was agreed that 10% of the allocation would be retained by the County Council for redistribution to those areas where there was additional demand. This meant that Mid Devon received an allocation of £505,246. The private sector housing team had spent and committed a total of £551,580 and therefore was able to apply for the 10% that had been retained and this had been successfully invoiced.

A brief discussion took place regarding the introduction of a form for the client to complete to agree the works needed and identify the method of getting quotes.

The Group wished to congratulate the private sector housing team for streamlining these processes so quickly and efficiently and for their understanding in dealing with clients in this area.

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

(ii) Cllr P J Heal declared a personal interest as his daughter was in receipt of a Disabled Facilities Grant.

## 10 **HOUSING ENABLING - SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (S106 - HOUSING NEED ALLOCATION - EXCEPTION SITES)**

The Group had before it a report \* from the Director of Operations regarding a Housing Enabling Supplementary Planning Document. The policy had last been adopted in June 2012, since then the policy had required some updating following the legal legislation regarding Armed Forces personnel.

The Housing Options Manager outlined the contents of the report and explained that affordable housing would be allocated to eligible people based on their level of housing need and local connection in accordance with the Meeting Housing Needs section 6 in the Supplementary Planning Document: Meeting Housing Needs. This annexe was revised whenever necessary to take account of changes made by the Council's Housing service to the eligibility criteria.

**RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that the new local need / qualification criteria in annexe 1 to the Meeting Housing Needs Supplementary Planning Document be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr P J Heal and seconded by Cllr D R Coren)

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

#### 11 **UPDATE ON THE HOUSING OF SYRIAN REFUGEES (00:34:35)**

The Housing Options Manager provided the Group with a verbal update regarding the housing of Syrian Refugees within Mid Devon. This included the following:

- 4 properties had been identified within the district.
- The first of these was in Washfield, however, it was explained that Mid Devon District Council had agreed with Devon County Council that an agreement would not be entered into with the Home Office unless a family could be identified that would be suited to a very rural location.
- The second one was a three bedroomed house in Cullompton.
- The third and fourth properties were in Bradninch.
- The Council was looking to the end of July for the arrival of the first family.
- A fifth property in Crediton would not be progressed until the other families had been settled.
- Due to the amount of time it was taking officers to progress these arrangements there had been some affect upon the frontline service offered by the housing options team.
- It was confirmed that there was only 4 years remaining in relation to this Government scheme.

The Group requested that they receive an update at their next meeting.

#### 12 **START TIME OF MEETINGS (00:40:00)**

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

#### 13 **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 next agenda:

- Civil Penalties Policy
- Fire safety in communal area's

The Tenancy Policy was unlikely to be brought before the Group until the Government had released the associated regulations.

(The meeting ended at 3.00 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**