

MINUTES of a meeting of the POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 12 MARCH 2014

Present: Councillor J G Coxon (Chairman)

Councillors N Clarke, J Cotterill, D Everitt, J Geary, V Richichi, A C Saffell, S Sheahan, N Smith and M Specht

In Attendance: Councillors R D Bayliss, R Johnson and T Neilson

Officers: Mr S Bambrick, Mr R Bowmer, Mrs C Hammond, Mr C Lambert, Ms C Proudfoot, Mr J Richardson, Mrs M Scott, Mr M Tuff, Ms S Williams-Lee and Mr R York

**23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**24. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

**25. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no questions received.

**26. ADMISSION OF ADDITIONAL ITEM**

RESOLVED THAT:

By reason of special circumstance in that an additional item of business needs to be considered before the next meeting of the Policy Development Group, the item entitled "Call-In of Cabinet Decision of 4 March 2014 Entitled 'Additional Costs of The Decent Homes Programme 2014/15'" be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4)(B) of the Local Government Act 1972.

**27. MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2014.

It was moved by Councillor M Specht, seconded by Councillor J Cotterill and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2014 be approved and signed as a correct record.

**28. RETURNING HOUSES TO HOMES UPDATE**

The Head of Community Services presented the report to Members. He highlighted that the annual returns of long term empty homes since 2010 had fallen each year, that the District figures were consistent with the other Districts in Leicestershire and confirmed that they had recruited to the three month Empty Homes Officer post in February.

Councillor N Smith asked that if a property that was owned by a private owner and it was the only property that they owned, was it correct that the Council would not be able to take

Chairman's initials

action against the owner, as there was a property in Ravenstone that had been empty for many years and he had been advised in the past that this was the case.

The Street Action Team Manager responded by advising the Committee that this was not the case and would be happy to discuss the individual case further with Councillor N Smith.

Members suggested that Officers contacted Melton Borough Council to seek advice on how they had managed to get their long term empty homes down to such a low percentage.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

**29. DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS – OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SCHEME AND THE AWARDS MADE IN 2013/14**

The Head of Finance presented the report to Members.

In response to a question from Councillor N Clarke, the Head of Finance advised Members that the Council's policy was in line with other Councils. He also explained when calculating the amount of Discretionary Housing Payment for a claimant, both the income and expenditure was taken into account and the two could cancel each other out.

It was moved by Councillor N Smith, seconded by Councillor M Specht and

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

**30. ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT**

The Head of Community Services presented the report to Members. He thanked Members of the Committee who had attended the Task and Finish Group.

He brought to Members' attention the amended recommendations that had been circulated to them at the start of the meeting.

Following a query from Councillor S Sheahan, Officers agreed to reconsider the remit and future of the Task and Finish Group, and provide Members with an update at the next meeting.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) Policy Development Group have considered the Draft Community Covenant and endorse the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.
- b) That the Draft Community Covenant be passed to the Leader and Chief Executive to exercise their delegated authority to sign the Covenant on behalf of the Authority.

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**31. CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION OF 4 MARCH 2014 ENTITLED 'ADDITIONAL COSTS OF THE DECENT HOMES PROGRAMME 2014/15'**

The Head of Housing presented the report to Members. He highlighted to Members the four grounds for calling-in the decision and that the report took each ground in turn and provided information to address them.

Councillor S Sheahan advised the Committee that the call-in request had arisen following a routine briefing and he had concerns over the magnitude of money that was required. He requested a breakdown of how much of the additional £1.6 million was required for each of the four elements stated in the report.

The Head of Housing informed Members that £810k was required for roofing work, £226k was required for asbestos removal, £405k was required to offer a level access shower in suitable properties in lieu of a standard bathroom and £210k was required to cover other inflationary pressures.

Councillor S Sheahan asked if it was the aim of the Head of Housing to complete the work within the budget and if the overspend could have been avoided.

The Head of Housing advised Members that it was his objective to complete all work within budget, however Officers could not predict any additional works that may be required once the original work had begun. He stated that the additional money that was required was not an overspend, it was required as additional costs following surveys that had been completed in December, however in the future Officers would ensure that the surveys would be carried out in the earlier quarters so that any additional costs could be incorporated. He advised Members that on this occasion the additional costs could not have been avoided.

Councillor S Sheahan went on to ask if the additional costs that had been raised had come from just one contractor or both, and if the Council would use the Term Partnering Contract in the future.

The Head of Housing responded by advising Members that the contractors worked in different areas and it would depend on the age of the property and previous materials used as to the costs that each contractor would incur, however should contractors come to Officers with an increase in costs they must provide reasons and justify the increase. He went on to advise Members that he would recommend the use of the Term Partnering Contract again in the right circumstances, but would let experience decide if it was the right option for the work that was needed.

Councillor D Everitt asked that if the contractor found additional work, was the Council able to verify this itself and once the work had been completed was it signed off with the tenant, as to being completed to an acceptable standard.

The Head of Housing advised that Officers from the Council did go out to verify the additional work and that Council Officers, tenants and contractors would sign the work off together.

Councillor N Clarke raised concerns over the use of the Right to Buy money as this would affect the One to One Policy.

The Head of Housing advised Members that despite selling more properties, the decrease in value had not led to the income reaching a level to trigger the policy.

Councillors A C Saffell and J Geary expressed concerns at the lateness of the report and felt that they had not received enough time to take in the information provided.

Councillor J Geary stated that he was finding it difficult to understand the amount of money that was required, as he felt that Council should know the amount of asbestos within properties and the roofing materials should not be a significant part of the costs. He expressed doubts as to how the costs were procured.

The Head of Housing responded that it was difficult to know where the asbestos was in properties as it may have been built in behind objects in the past and with carrying out pre-inspections, Officers were locating more and completing the register that was required for contractors to view, and with regard to roofing materials, it was not until the purlins were removed that it was becoming apparent that the roof structures did not meet the standards. He advised that this could not be predicted by just looking into the roof space.

Councillor S Sheahan stated that he would be happy to receive a future report regarding the additional non-decent homes, but queried if the Council could secure additional external funding.

The Head of Housing advised that funding was only available for Authorities with more than 10% of homes requiring work by April 2015 and that he did not envisage the Council having more than 10% at that time.

Councillor N Smith stated that he had replaced many roofs over the years and informed the Committee that until you stripped the roof off you could not know what additional work may be required to ensure the safety of the structure.

Councillor N Clarke stated that he supported the Decent Homes Programme as a lot of the work had been carried out within his Ward and thanked Officers for all the hard work that had been put into the programme.

It was moved by Councillor M Specht, seconded by Councillor J Cotterill and

RESOLVED THAT:

No further action be taken.

## **32. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

RESOLVED THAT:

The following items be included on the work plan for a future meeting:-

- a) Risk Management Strategy
- b) Asset Management Strategy and Corporate Capital Strategy

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.40 pm

Chairman's initials