

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 5 June 2014

Present:

Councillors:

Pauline Stott (Chairman)
Susie Bond
Christine Drew
Douglas Hull
Jim Knight

Co-opted tenant members:

Mike Berridge
John Powley
Pat Rous

Co-opted independent community representative:
Rob Finch

Officers:

Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager
Dennis Boobier, Housing Needs and Strategy Manager
Amy Gilbert, Support Services Manager
John Golding, Head of Housing
Paul Lowe, Housing Development and Enabling Officer
Peter Richards, Rental Manager
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Mandy White, Housing Accountant
Stephanie Lewis, Assistant Democratic Services Officer

Also present:

Councillors:

Jill Elson - Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities
Stephanie Jones – Deputy Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities
Steve Gazzard

Apologies

Councillors:

Paul Diviani
Phil Twiss

Co-opted independent community representative:
Julie Adkin

Tenants:

Eric Howard, Tenant Scrutiny Panel

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 8.00pm.

***1 Public question time**

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

***2 Appointment of Vice Chairman**

Nominations for Vice Chairman had been received for co-opted tenant members Pat Rous and Mike Berridge.

Cllr Drew explained that Pat Rous would bring a lot of experience to the role having served on the Housing Review Board for several years.

Cllr Knight indicated that Mike Berridge had served well on other tenant groups and would be able to gain experience by having the opportunity to serve as Vice Chairman.

RESOLVED that tenant representative Mike Berridge be appointed Vice Chairman of the Board for the ensuing year.

***3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Review Board held on 6 March 2014, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

The Chairman advised the Board that tenant representative Victor Kemp had served the maximum two four year terms, as set out in the constitution. The Board was now looking to recruit two new tenant members to the Board and had received several applications. The Chairman read out the following statements from Victor:

“I thank members for putting up with me for 8 years and I hope the Board will continue effectively for the tenants’ interests foremost in partnership with the Council. I will miss you all.”

In turn the Chairman spoke in appreciation of Victor’s contribution and dedication to the Board.

RESOLVED that the Chairman sends a letter to Victor Kemp thanking him for all his hard work and valuable contributions over the past 8 years as a member of the Housing Review Board.

***4 Declarations of interest**

Board Member	Minute number	Type of interest	Nature of interest
Mike Berridge		Personal	Family member lives in a Council owned property.
Rob Finch	22	Disclosable Pecuniary	Employed by the Housing Association (remained in chamber for debate but abstained from vote)

***4 Declarations of interest (Cont'd)**

Douglas Hull		Personal	Sister lives in a Council owned property.
Jim Knight		Personal	Daughter lives in a Council owned property. He was also a Devon County Council Councillor.
	9	Personal	Member of the Fire Authority
Pat Rous		Personal	Housing tenant
John Powley		Personal	Sheltered housing tenant; daughter in law lives in a council property; part of Reading Panel committee and a member of the Repairs and Maintenance Committee.

***5 Exclusion of the public**

RESOLVED: that the classification given to the documents to be submitted to the Board be confirmed; there was one item which officers recommended should be dealt with in Part B.

***6 Housing Review Board forward plan**

The Head of Housing presented the forward plan and advised Members that reports would be presented on the work around updating tenant profiling and the tenant satisfaction survey known as STAR.

RESOLVED: that the forward plan be noted.

7 Fire Regulations, Fire Risk Assessments and Blocks of Flats

The Board considered the report from the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager which set out the current position relating to the Council meeting Fire Regulations in Council owned blocks of flats. The report also detailed the Fire and Rescue Service enforcement action in respect of Dray Court, Exmouth. A recent inspection had resulted in the Fire Officer issuing the Council with an "Enforcement Notice" (The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005) giving the Council 6 months to bring all aspects of Fire Safety up to standard.

The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager explained to the Board that they were working closely with residents at Dray Court to ensure the building met fire safety regulations. A zero tolerance approach had been taken to remove all personal belongings from the communal areas and staircases intended as a means of escape. This was a key part of the fire safety measures that must be imposed in all blocks of flats for the safety of residents.

The Board noted that in most cases tenants had responded well to the Council's request to stop storing personal items and combustible materials in communal areas, including wheelchairs, mobility scooters and walking aids.

7 **Fire Regulations, Fire Risk Assessments and Blocks of Flats (Cont'd)**

The Housing Team was working with the Planning Department to find the best location for the provision of a buggy store with charging facilities at Dray Court, Exmouth. This facility would be considered at other sites as necessary. However, the buggy store may take 3-4 months to provide and the team was currently looking at the cost implications of this facility.

The Board discussed issues which could arise for tenants in flats should they have to keep their mobility scooters outside their property. Residents were often worried about leaving their scooters outside and the implications of accessing their scooter if stored further away from their flat. Other issues raised by Members included the cost implications of implementing storage facilities at all blocks of flats and if a charge could be made to tenants. The Chairman highlighted to the Board that the Council was under no obligation to provide these facilities as it was similar to residents owning a car. A tenant member advised that he owned a mobility scooter and was given an allocated space in a covered area with recharging facilities; however he did not contribute toward electricity costs. He advised that this should be reconsidered by the council and a charge made to tenants to help cover the cost.

The Head of Housing stressed to the Board that he was concerned that the Fire Service had served an enforcement notice on the Council as landlord to Dray Court, and that the Council would be liable should any harm come to tenants as a result of fire safety issues. He advised that the Housing Department had tried a 'managed' approach to ensure stair cases and communal areas were kept clear; however they had now been forced to take a 'zero tolerance' approach in order to ensure the safety of all residents. The Fire Safety Officer had visited Dray Court to explain this to residents and the Chief Executive had also sent a letter to the Dray Court Residents Association outlining the reasons why the Council had taken this approach.

RESOLVED: that the Board note the report from the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager regarding Fire Regulations, Fire Risk Assessments and Blocks of Flats

RECOMMENDED: that approval be given to additional funding being found (from the Housing Revenue Account), for essential fire protection work.

8 **Inclement weather and damp/water penetration to our tenant's homes**

The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager's report provided the Board with an update on the work carried out to Council homes after the bad weather experienced over the winter period.

The Council was aware of over 300+ properties and garages that needed work completed on them because of damp/water penetration which had in many cases damaged internal walls and cavity wall insulation.

8 Inclement weather and damp/water penetration to our tenant's homes (Cont'd)

Most tenants were being very helpful, co-operative and patient. It was important for Members and tenants to be aware of the potential cost to the Council of around £1m in dealing with the impact of the prolonged wet weather and finding permanent solutions to the problem at each property.

The Board was informed that the current cost of undertaking essential repairs/making good, the provision of dehumidifiers, reimbursement of electricity and removal of cavity wall insulation was being funded from the day to day repairs budget. The estimated cost of the work was £980,000, with an identified average cost per property of £5,000. An insurance claim had been made to recover some of the cost of the work. Members were asked to consider how they would wish the damp penetration work to be funded. Options included:

- a. Acknowledge the overspend on Responsive Repairs budget for the time being;
- b. Reduce the programmed works budget and transfer part or all of the funding required, or
- c. Approve additional funding from HRA reserves.

RESOLVED: that the report on Inclement Weather and water/damp penetration to our tenant's homes be noted

RECOMMENDED: that additional funding for unforeseen work to repair damaged Council homes be approved and an overspend on the Responsive Repairs budget be acknowledged.

9 Decoration Scheme for vulnerable elderly and disabled tenants

The Board considered a report presented by the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager which detailed a new proposal to introduce a decoration scheme for qualifying vulnerable elderly and disabled tenants. The criteria proposed for being included in the decoration scheme would be similar to the criteria currently in place for the Individual Garden Maintenance Scheme.

The scheme would offer tenants the opportunity to have two rooms decorated every three years at a nominal charge of £50 per year. The Board agreed that this was less than the current market value offered by contractors. Members discussed the qualifying age limit and agreed that the scheme should be offered to tenants over the age of 70 years, as set out in the report.

RECOMMENDED: that the introduction of a decoration scheme for qualifying vulnerable elderly tenants over 70 years of age and disabled tenants be agreed as set out in the report.

10 **Robert Heath Heating - Contract Extension**

The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager presented the report and requested approval to extend the existing gas servicing contract by one year, from 1 October 2014 to 30 September 2015. Officers and tenants were generally happy with the performance and service provision of Robert Heath Heating – the current contractor.

The Board noted that the current contract term was from 1 October 2010 for a four year period with the option to extend by up to two years on an annual basis. Officers were in discussion with Mid Devon District Council to try and pursue another joint tender approach to this contract when it is due for renewal in 2015.

RECOMMENDED: that a one year extension to the existing gas servicing contract to 30 September 2015 be approved.

11 **Property and Asset Team – Staffing**

The Board considered a report presented by the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager which outlined proposals to increase the staffing of the Property and Asset team to enable programmed works, flood/damp penetration work and Fire Risk Assessment work to be undertaken during the financial year.

The inclement weather experienced this winter and the work required as a result of the Fire Risk Assessments has impacted on the ability of the team to deliver the annual improvement programmes of work including kitchen and door replacements. To enable the identified and budgeted programmes of work to be completed this financial year an additional Building Surveyor post was required.

RECOMMENDED: that a new Building Surveyor post be approved in the Property and Asset team at an annual cost of £32,000.

12 **Estate Management Review**

The Landlord Services Manager presented a report which outlined the valuable work that the Estate Management team had undertaken. The Board was updated with the many different functions the team now had responsibility for. The report proposed that the temporary officer post be made permanent.

The Board noted the valuable work the Estate Management Officers do to be more proactive in managing the increased demand on their time and the serious issues which affected tenants' lives and safety including anti-social behaviour, communal areas, tenancy fraud and nuisance behaviour.

RECOMMENDED: to note the work of the Estate Management Team and approve the recruitment of an additional Estate Management Officer at a cost of £25,500 (scale 5 plus 25% on costs) and to increase the annual Estate Management budget by £10,000.

13 **Supporting People Contract Position**

The Board received a report from the Landlord Services Manager which detailed recent developments with regard to the future of Older Persons Targeted Support in Devon, and outlined options for the future of the Council’s support service for sheltered housing residents. The Board noted that as a result of the Devon County Council (DCC) consultation on the future of Targeted Support for older persons, from 14 April 2014 DCC had served notice that they will not be re-extending the Targeted Support contracts with sheltered housing providers for 2015/16.

The Landlord Services Manager explained the options available to the Board, as set out in full in the report, which included the following:

1. Discontinuance of the Council’s Support Service.
2. Charge all customers (but with transitional arrangements for those already in receipt of the support service as at 31 March 2015).
3. Accessing funding for sheltered housing management through the Housing Benefit system.
4. Introducing a flat rate charge for the alarm service.
5. Help@Home - delivering low level service to sheltered tenants as standard, charging all customers in non sheltered homes.
6. Accessing funding for short term enabling or ‘home from hospital’ support through the Health Service.

The Board thoroughly discussed all of the options available and the points raised during the debate included:

- The need to provide a service to residents to enable them to feel safe knowing they have the option to call for assistance when needed.
- Residents are able to use personal budgets in order to help fund this service.
- Low level service was defined by the amount of time spent with an individual and not the type of care given. This equated to 20 minutes per week.
- The possibility that the Council may have to increase charges in order to provide a viable service to residents.

RESOLVED: that Officers email all District Councillors to inform them of the changes taking place to older persons targeted support,

RECOMMENDED: that Officers provide further charging details for option 2 and that the Board recommend to move forward with options 3,4 and 5 together.

14 **Devonwide occupancy restrictions – Section 157 policy**

The Solicitor presented a report to the Board which updated Members on the Council’s Section157 policy and advised about recent concerns relating to ward members using their discretion in supporting or rejecting applications for consent to

14 **Devonwide occupancy restrictions – Section 157 policy (Cont'd)**

purchase properties which have an occupancy restriction. This applied specifically to rural areas.

The Solicitor explained the two options available to members, as laid out in the report, to either maintain the current status quo or for members to recommend that a new delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing so that a consistent approach can be kept on issuing consents.

The Board discussed concerns including:

- properties which had been sold to individuals who had not lived in the area for the required amount of time or did not have family in area.
- there was no definition of a key worker within the policy.
- a number of Councillors had questioned the current system as ward members had the potential to be pressurised into decisions.
- the Head of Housing would not consult ward members on applications but would look to see if the applicant met the set criteria.

RECOMMENDED: that the Council maintain the existing policy and allow ward members to support or reject applications in their wards for a consent certificate to purchase a property where the factual matters relate to the circumstances set out in the current policy.

*15 **Housing Revenue Account Outturn Statement 2013/14**

The Board noted that during 2013/14 the monthly budget monitoring reports had informed members of the anticipated year end position. This report contained the final position for the year end and compared this outturn position against the budgets set for 2013/14.

The Board was advised that the HRA balance at the beginning of 2013/14 was £2.970m with the recommended adopted level being £2.148m. With the surplus in 2013/14 of £1.939m this had raised the 2013/14 year end balance to £4.909m; £2.761m above the minimum level.

A minor update was reported in that the contribution to capital was financed through capital receipts. A Debt Repayment Volatility Reserve was created in 2012/13 to provide a cushion for repaying the self financing loans should adverse fluctuations in spending and/or rent income occur. The balance in the reserve was currently £1.710m. It was suggested that a further £1.19m be transferred into this Reserve from the HRA giving a total sum of £2.9m.

The Board thanked the Housing Accountant for doing an excellent job in preparing the accounts for the year.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Revenue Account outturn position for 2013/14 be agreed .

16 **Centenary Fields Programme**

The Head of Housing presented the report to the Board which invited the Council to nominate a piece of recreational space to be dedicated as a Centenary Field to commemorate World War 1. The Board noted that the piece of land put forward was adjacent to Rodney Close, Exmouth. It had previously been agreed for development, but it now had Village Green status which effectively prevented any development on the site.

Members of the Board agreed that this was a worthwhile cause and discussed the maintenance of the land. The Board was advised that it would remain Council owned land and that the district council would be responsible for cutting the grass. It was agreed that this should not come out of the Housing Revenue Account, as had been proposed by the Grounds and Maintenance TaFF.

RECOMMENDED: that the Housing recreation land adjacent to Rodney Close, Exmouth, be approved as a centenary field.

*17 **Annual Report of the Housing Review Board**

Members were asked to note the annual report of the Housing Review Board which had been agreed at Annual Council and which detailed the work undertaken over the last year.

RESOLVED: That the annual report of the Housing Review Board be noted.

*18 **Home Truths National Housing Federation Publication**

Members of the Board noted the Home Truths National Housing Federation publication as presented by the Head of Housing.

RESOLVED: that the Home Truths National Housing Federation publication be noted.

*19 **Exclusion of the public**

RESOLVED: that under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting as exempt and private information (as set out against each Part B agenda item), is likely to be disclosed and on balance the public interest is in discussing the items in private session (Part B).

20 **Affordable Housing – Proposed Acquisition of a Property in Exmouth**

The Housing Development and Enabling Officer's report sought permission to purchase a property using Housing Revenue Account funding and Right to Buy receipts. The property was a former council house situated in Exmouth and would provide much needed additional Council owned accommodation.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- 1 that it is agreed that this type of accommodation would be a beneficial addition to the current Council property portfolio.
 - 2 that funding from the Housing Revenue Account and Right to Buy receipts be used to purchase the proposed property.

Chairman

Date