

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 4 September 2014

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 7.45pm.

***21 Public Speaking**

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

***22 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 5 June 2014 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***23 Declarations**

Mike Berridge

Personal Interest - Family member lives in a Council owned property.

Douglas Hull

Personal Interest - Sister lives in Council owned property.

Jim Knight

Personal Interest - Daughter lives in Council owned property. He is also a Devon County Council Councillor and a Member of the Fire Authority

Pat Rous

Personal Interest - Housing tenant

***24 Exclusion of the Public**

RESOLVED:

That the classification given to the documents to be submitted to the Board be confirmed; there were two items that officers recommended should be dealt with in Part B.

***25 Housing Review Board forward plan**

The Head of Housing presented the forward plan and advised Members that the forward plan would help act as a reminder of agenda items to come forward to future meetings.

RESOLVED:

that the forward plan be noted.

26 Housing Revenue Account business plan update

The Board considered the report setting out the updated Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan. The Business Plan sets out the Council's known income and expenditure plans and included a series of assumptions projected over the next thirty years.

The Business Plan was originally produced to coincide with the reform of social housing finance and the introduction of self-financing. It had now been updated to include the latest developments and financial challenges likely to affect the HRA over the next few years.

RECOMMENDED:

that the contents of the draft Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2014 be noted and recommended for approval.

***27 Financial Monitoring report**

The Board was presented with a summary of the overall financial position on the Housing Revenue Account, HRA Capital Programme and the Business Plan for 2014/15 at the end of month four (July 2014).

Regular monitoring highlighted any areas of concern or unforeseen expenditure in the HRA and associated capital programme, enabling corrective action to be taken as required. Any variances would be reflected in the Business Plan.

Current monitoring indicated that:

- The Housing Revenue Account Balance would be maintained at or above the adopted level.
- The position on the HRA Business Plan remained healthy.

Discussions included the following:

- Funding for improvements in the Housing Revenue Account was referred to in the HRA Business Plan Operating Account.
- Figures were based on projected Right to Buy sales which had increased in recent months.

RESOLVED:

That the variances identified as part of the HRA revenue and capital monitoring process up to month four be acknowledged.

28 Rent Restructuring Scheme

The Board received a report from the Rental Manager, which set out the Government's policy on rents for social housing and the rents for social tenants with high incomes from April 2015 onwards. This guidance replaced the "Guide to Social Rent Reforms", published by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions in 2001, and "A Guide to Social Rent Reform in the Local Authority Sector", issued in February 2003; and any other guidance on rents issued in relation to those documents.

The Government's aims for this new rent policy were to:

- Ensure that rents for social housing remain affordable in the long term.
- Protect social tenants from excessive increase in rents.
- Ensure rents take account of local conditions.
- Provide long-term certainty and stability to social tenants, social landlords and their funders, in order to:
 - Enable tenants to understand their future housing costs better;
 - Enable landlords to plan for future investment better;
 - Encourage landlords to invest in new affordable housing, helping more people in need;

- Support landlords to drive value for money; and
- Give investors confidence in social housing.
- Give landlords significant income to invest in the maintenance and improvement of existing homes, the provision of new affordable homes, and in providing good services to their tenants.
- Control public expenditure – principally, housing benefit costs.
- Support landlords to charge a fairer rent to those social tenant households with high incomes.

Discussions included the following:

- Joint income would only include spouse or partner and not include adult children living in the property.
- Income would be assessed on an annual basis and obtained by written communication.
- Expenditure would not be taken into account.
- Previous year's income would determine how much rent tenants would pay.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) that the Government's guidance on rents for social housing and social tenants with high incomes be adopted from April 2015 onwards;
- 2) that, in addition to the guidance on rents, the proposals for increasing social rents for tenants with high incomes be adopted;
- 3) that a framework for the introduction of service charges be created where new or extended services are provided to some tenants.

***29 Draft Annual Report to Tenants**

The Board was informed that this year a shorter, more concise, summary report would be produced. This would be available on the council's website in October and sent out to all tenants in December with the Housing Matters magazine. The Board was invited to comment on the draft text of the report and suggest any amendments.

RESOLVED:

1. that the draft of the Annual Report to tenants 2013/2014 be noted;
2. that the Board's suggested changes be incorporated into the report before being published.

***30 Tenant Profile report**

The Board was presented with a report on key and interim statistical information on tenants using data gathered from a variety of different sources. This information was a valuable source of insight into the demographic profile of EDDC's tenants. It would be used to support the work of the service and help it to be more tailored and personalised.

The new housing software system would have the facility to store all sorts of different data against the individual, such as attitude and behavioural data. This will give the service a much better opportunity to produce a more comprehensive tenant profile.

The new housing system would provide the opportunity to 'fill in the gaps' by collecting appropriate personal information about tenants online (through the tenant portal on the new

housing system) and during face to face and telephone conversations with tenants, for example, when a tenant gets in touch to report a repair. This approach to gathering data would help replace the current method, which was heavily reliant on paper surveys.

RESOLVED:

that a comprehensive tenant profiling exercise be not progressed until the new housing system has been implemented.

31 Targeted Families Programme

The Head of Housing gave an update on the Troubled Families Initiative, which in Devon had been labelled Targeted Family Support programme. The project was designed to turn around the lives of dysfunctional families and was an important feature of the DCC work programme with partners, and this Council's own Public Health Plan that prioritises this work. The Council had engaged with 145 families in East Devon through key worker attachment and our local Programme Coordinator.

RESOLVED:

that the progress on the Targeted Families initiative be noted.

RECOMMENDED:

that the Council's commitment to the Targeted Families programme be reaffirmed.

32 Countryside Outreach Programme

The Head of Housing informed the Board that the Countryside Service was looking to expand their Education Ranger services by appointing an additional part time officer. The Council had an opportunity to commission part of the service for the benefit of EDDC's tenants. This complimented the Council's community development and health and wellbeing aspirations for tenants and their families, as well as its sustainable communities' interest.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Board's 'in principle' indication of support to part-fund a Countryside Outreach programme be noted.

***33 Older people's targeted support**

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. At its last meeting, the Board had been advised that Devon County Council had given notice that the Older Persons Targeted Support Agreement would end this financial year and would not be extended for 2015/16. The Board noted that this would result in lost income and a need to find alternative ways to fund the agreed housing support scheme.

The report set out consultations and progress since the Board's last meeting. Further costed details of the options outlined to the Board at its June meeting were set out in the report. These took into account tenants' ability to pay and Government issued guidance on inflationary levels for service charges. The report included the risks associated with charging all customers for the Home Safeguard alarm service; the preferred option of the small focus group of tenants was to provide targeted support.

The next steps were for Officers:

- to consult with tenants currently in receipt of the support service and involve them in the process whilst there is more than one option available;
- to continue the work with Devon County Council to have as many of the supported tenants as require it assessed for a social care package;
- to continue work alongside consultants Support Solutions to scope out the exact shape of the enhanced housing management service, and assess any necessary changes to job descriptions;
- to bring a report back to the Board's November meeting on developments made and to seek guidance and direction.

RESOLVED:

1. that the developments outlined in the report be noted;
2. that Officers commence consultation with tenants of the Council's sheltered schemes across the district on the selected options.

***34 Right to Buy (RTB) update**

The Housing Landlord Services Manager updated the Board on the latest Government changes to the RTB criteria. It was anticipated that these changes would increase the number of sales and further deplete the housing stock of East Devon Homes. At its March meeting, the Board was advised that there had been a significant increase in RTB sales over the past year. It was now anticipated that the new arrangements, as set out in the report, would generate interest in the scheme still further. Further loss of social housing stock would have serious implications for the Council's ability to meet housing needs within the district and could serve to undermine the Council's self-financing arrangements.

RESOLVED:

that the report on the Right to Buy update be noted.

35 Decoration of General Needs void properties

The Board considered a report of the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager which considered whether or not to redecorate all general needs void properties in line with the Council's current practice in sheltered housing void properties.

RECOMMENDED:

that no change be made to the existing practice of decorating void General Needs properties where it is considered necessary.

***36 Quarterly Performance Indicator report**

The Head of Housing presented the Board with the Quarterly Performance Indicator report for quarter 4 of 2013/14.

RESOLVED:

that the Quarterly Performance Indicator report for quarter 4 2013/14, be noted.

***37 New approaches to allocations publication**

The Home Connections publication – New Approaches to Allocations - had been included on the agenda for the Board's information. The document sets out current best practice, opportunities for review, challenges and emerging issues.

RESOLVED:

that the new approaches to allocations publication be noted.

***38 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).

39 Mountain Close, Exmouth

The Housing Development and Enabling Officer's report outlined a proposal to purchase a property using Housing Revenue Account funding and Right to Buy receipts. The property was a former council flat situated in Exmouth and would, if supported, provide much needed additional Council owned accommodation.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that it be 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.

40 Barnards Hill Lane, Seaton

Members considered the report of the Housing Development and Enabling Officer setting out the business case for the acquisition of nine additional affordable homes direct from a developer. This approach was consistent with the Council's Homes and Communities Plan and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. The Board discussed increasing the purchase price from that set out in the report.

RECOMMENDED:

that the Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities and the Head of Housing be authorised to acquire 9 new affordable homes at Barnards Hill Lane, Seaton on terms and conditions to be agreed and at the increased purchase price (£20,000 above the figure contained in the confidential report) proposed by the Board.

Attendance list

Present:

Pauline Stott (Chairman)
Susie Bond
Christine Drew
Douglas Hull

Jim Knight

Co-opted tenant members:

Mike Berridge (Vice Chairman)

Pat Rous

Co opted independent community representatives:

Julie Adkins

John Golding, Head of Housing

Peter Richards, Rental Manager

Melissa Wall, Housing Projects Officer

Emma Charlton, Housing Projects Officer

Giles Salter, Solicitor

Mandy White, Housing Accountant

Wendy Harris, Democratic Services

Jill Elson

Steve Gazzard

Phil Twiss

Apologies:

Cllr Diviani

Cllr Stephanie Jones

John Powley

Rob Finch

Chairman

Date.....