

## **Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 6 November 2014**

### **Attendance list at end of document**

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 7.30pm

#### **\*41 Public Speaking**

Victor Kemp read a statement to the Board stating that GPs should make a recommendation of support for housing allocations applicants. Dennis Boobier, Housing Needs & Strategy Manager responded on behalf of the Board and stated that the Exeter Health and Wellbeing panel did not have a GP member but did have social workers, health practitioners and occupational therapists. They review health needs with property needs; it was about the impact of the property on health ground issues not the actual health of the person themselves. In most cases common sense prevailed; bias could arise if a medical person was on the panel as health would be their priority over the property. He did not think that setting up a Task & Finish Forum was necessary. Comments from the Board were that they did have a representative on the Health and Wellbeing panel and it was recommended retaining the status quo. It was suggested the Panel ought to look at long-term needs of people needing assessment and to respond to these in the future.

Cllr Elson, Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities reminded the Board of the lack of two bedroom properties for live-in carers and large hospital equipment required by the patient - often meaning they was no room for anyone else to use or even get into the bedroom. She agreed the situation needed looking into long-term. The Housing Needs & Strategy Manager stated that the Devon Home Choice Board were reviewing the health and wellbeing criteria in the Devon Home Choice Policy. He would give an update at a future meeting.

#### **\*42 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 4 September 2014 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

#### **\*43 Declarations**

Mike Berridge

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

Douglas Hull

Personal Interest - Sister lives in Council owned property.

Rob Finch

Prejudicial interest - Agenda items 17 & 18 works for Devon & Cornwall Housing

Joyce Ebborn

Personal Interest - Housing tenant

John Powley

Personal Interest - Housing tenant

Pat Rous

Personal Interest - Housing tenant

#### **\*44 Exclusion of the Public**

##### **RESOLVED:**

To agree any items to be dealt with after the public (including press) have been excluded. There were two items that officers recommended should be dealt with in Part B.

**\*45 Housing Review Board forward plan**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment 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.

**\*46 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 six (September 2014).

Regular monitoring was intended to highlight 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. There are currently no areas of concern.

A large proportion of the Capital spend would be on the new IT software system. The Right to Buy fund had been bolstered by the sales of 15 Right to Buy properties and 1 garage so far this year.

Current monitoring indicated that:

- The Housing Revenue Account Balance would be maintained at or above the adopted level and currently shows a surplus of £4.7m
- The position on the HRA Business Plan remained healthy.

**RESOLVED:**

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

**47 Review of Asbestos Procedures**

Dennis Boobier, Housing Needs & Strategy Manager highlighted key points from his report. In March 2011 Members agreed the Council's revised Asbestos Policy and Procedures. This document had been revised further to reflect good practice and was presented to Members for approval. The information held about asbestos in the Council's housing stock was being updated through the asbestos 'management' surveys carried out on each void property. The survey results of each void property could be shared with similar properties of the same size, build type and build date in the same street/location.

Members of the Board had previously agreed to undertake a Demolition and Refurbishment Survey in place of the Management Survey, where necessary and additional funds had been approved for this purpose. Outcomes identified were that annual reviews of properties where asbestos materials was known to exist were not being carried out; of the 3000 properties on the housing database, 75% have some form of asbestos material. This is a requirement of Health and Safety legislation and action must be taken to ensure that this was carried out. Members were asked to approve the appointment of 1 x FTE new member of staff to undertake this work.

**RECOMMENDED:**

Members agreed approval for an additional FTE post to undertake the annual review of council properties where asbestos materials were known to exist in accordance with current legislation.

**\*48 Handy Person Scheme**

The Board was asked to consider the principle of introducing a Handy Person Scheme for day-to-day repairs and minor works that are the tenant's responsibility. It was proposed that the Board set up a time limited Task and Finish Forum (TAFF) to develop the scope and key criteria for a Handy Person Scheme. The Board agreed to this TAFF made up of the following members:

Cllr Stott, Cllr Drew, Cllr Bond, Joyce Ebborn, John Powley, Pat Rous and 1 support officer from the housing team.

Discussions included the following:

- Service to be more than just a repair scheme – responsive repairs normally undertaken by a contractor. Operatives would be the 'eyes and ears' of the housing service as would report back other repair issues.
- How other schemes are run; with some of these being free of charge to the tenant.
- TaFF could consider how best to provide the service, such as if the handy person was a dedicated employee, or a contractor but managed by the housing service.
- Exmouth Town Hall has a similar scheme that does light jobs for free – the Housing Needs & Strategy Manager would look into how this scheme operates.

**RESOLVED:**

that a Task and Finish Forum be set up to develop the concept of a Handy Person Scheme and to propose a local scheme approved by the HRB.

**49 Tenant Inspectors**

The Board was asked to consider whether or not to introduce tenant inspectors for day-to-day repair maintenance service to help manage the quality of workmanship by the Council's contractors, and to better understand tenant satisfaction with the service.

Discussions included the following:

- Initial inspections would be to look at void properties, including improvements to kitchens and bathrooms and compliance with the void standard.
- Not every repair would be inspected as it would be too time consuming.
- If a tenant was dissatisfied with any work the inspector would be called in.
- Experience from the Mid Devon scheme would be reviewed and taken into account.

**RECOMMENDED:**

that the introduction of tenant inspectors for the Council's repair service be recommended for approval in principal.

**\*50 Older Persons Targeted Support**

Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager gave an update to the Board on the position regarding the impact of the termination of Devon County Council (DCC) Supporting people contract and options for the future of the Council's support service for sheltered housing residents. The service was in the process of conducting tenant consultations with over 400 people having already attended a roadshow session. Initial results showed that 109 tenants preferred option 1 (charging all customers) and 211 tenants preferred option 2 (an enhanced management service plus the opportunity to buy more support hours). The Landlord Services Manager thanked Cllr Peter Sullivan who came to the Sidmouth consultation and helped with initial questions raised at the start about issues affecting local government in general. Some of the comments already received during the consultation were shared with the Board.

A full report will be presented to the Board in January and would be looking for the recommendation to start from 1 April 2015.

Pat Rous thanked Sue and her team for the help and support in this matter as well as thanking Cllr Jill Elson for providing information to the press.

**RESOLVED:**

that the contents of the report be noted.

**\*51 Home Safeguard activity report**

Amy Gilbert, Support Services Manager gave an update on the work of the Home Safeguard team due to changes to the service. It had been a challenging year especially the implementation of the new Operator working rota that changed staff times of work; this had led to some staff leaving. The new team was now in place and working well with a day team and a night team, set up to meet customer demand. Devon County Council cuts would affect Home Safeguard but the team was ready for these challenges.

There had been good marketing feedback on the new logo and publications with lots of talks with community groups. There is already an increase in business for installations and October was a record month with the highest number of installations for quite some time.

The Home Safeguard team had passed another Telecare Services Association (TSA) accreditation for the fourth year in a row and was now accredited to 2016; subject to a further successful annual inspection in 2015. The TSA accreditation provided a 'health check' in all areas of the service with particular focus on speed of response and customer satisfaction.

John Golding, Strategic Lead – Housing Health and Environment thanked Amy Gilbert, Sue Bewes, and Sue Hodges for the new rota and the continuous 24/7 service provided. They ensured the service is always covered, sometimes at very short notice and sometimes covering shifts themselves. The Chairman asked that the team be nominated for a 'bouquet' in the next Team Brief on behalf of the Housing Review Board. Cllr Jill Elson congratulated the whole Home Safeguard and Housing teams. The Chairman gave her support for this growing scheme and said it was a great comfort to many people knowing someone was there.

Discussions included the following:

- Concerns over County Council cuts to support services and hope that officers could cover these challenges.

The Support Services Manager intended to seek further corporate contracts to see if these could generate extra income.

John Golding reported that next year's budget was a challenge and was being prepared. He intended for the draft budget to be cost neutral for the Home Safeguard team. This process would be presented at the next meeting. Any revised charges should be kept affordable, and with a flow of new people accessing this is a strong demonstration of need for the service.

**RESOLVED:**

that the changes in the Home Safeguard work plan as set out in the report be approved.

**\*52 Right to Move consultation**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment presented a report from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) who were consulting on proposals to give social housing tenants a right to move to take up a job offer or to live closer to employment or training. He advised that the Government may impose targets. Cllr Jill Elson stated that as a council this was already the practice but recognised the shortfall of suitable affordable rented properties would make the process difficult. If changes are made to national guidance on allocations, this will be reflected in our Devon Home Choice scheme.

**RESOLVED:**

that the proposals in the consultation paper on Right to Move be noted.

**\*53 Tenants Leading Change**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment updated the Board on the DCLG Tenants Leading Change initiative, promoting tenant involvement and its benefits to the delivery of improved services. He added that the Council had good examples of this, including tenant scrutiny and mystery shoppers. John Golding thanked Pat Rous for being on all interviews for HRA staffing and quoted this as another example of good practice.

**RESOLVED:**

that the report on Tenants Leading Change be noted.

**\*54 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).

**55 Danby House/Exebank – DCC updated proposals**

Members were asked to view correspondence between DCC and the Council regarding proposals over the future of these two DCC owned properties. The Board was asked to support an 'in principle' offer to purchase subject to contract, surveys, further investigations etc.

**RECOMMENDED:**

that the opportunity to acquire the site be progressed.

**\*56 Submission of Offers – Manstone Depot, Sidmouth**

As part of the office relocation project the Council had appointed Savills to market Manstone Depot and the Knowle. The Manstone Depot site was considered to be of a suitable size and location consistent with the Council's ambitions for own build and therefore an offer subject to contract has been submitted.

**RESOLVED:**

that the offer submitted for the purchase of Manstone Depot, Sidmouth be noted.

**Attendance list**

**Present:**

Cllr Pauline Stott (Chairman)  
Cllr Susie Bond  
Cllr Christine Drew  
Cllr Douglas Hull

Co-opted tenant members:

Mike Berridge (Vice Chairman)  
Pat Rous  
Joyce Ebborn  
John Powley

Co opted independent community representatives:

Rob Finch,

Also present:

Cllr Jill Elson, Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities

Tenant Scrutiny Panel

Jose Ireland  
Eric Howard

Officers

John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment  
Dennis Boobier, Housing Needs & Strategy Manager  
Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager  
Jane Reading, Tenant & Communities Section Leader  
Amy Gilbert, Support Services Manager  
Giles Salter, Solicitor  
Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer  
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

**Apologies:**  
Julie Adkin  
Harry Roberts  
Cllr Steph Jones

Chairman ..... Date.....