

Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 19 March 2015

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 7.44pm.

***74 Public Speaking**

There was no public speaking.

***75 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 15 January 2015 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***76 Declarations of Interest**

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

Joyce Ebborn: Personal Interest - Housing tenant

John Powley: Personal Interest - Housing tenant

Harry Roberts: Personal Interest - Housing tenant

Pat Rous: Personal Interest - Housing tenant

Cllr Susie Bond: Personal Interest - Mother uses Home Safeguard

Cllr Jim Knight: Personal Interest – Daughter lives in a Council owned property. He is a Devon County Council Councillor so did not take part in the debate on agenda item 17.

***77 Matters of urgency**

To review the proposals from the Handy Person Scheme Task and Finish Forum. The notes of the meetings were approved and agreement for a trial Handy Person Scheme to begin this summer.

***78 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.

***79 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. Members were reminded that they could add future issues to the next forward plan by informing him or the Democratic Services Officer. The Chairman asked if the 55 years old age limit for sheltered housing tenants could be reviewed. This would be reviewed after the end of March 2015 when the Supporting People funding was withdrawn Devon County Council. It was questioned why formal complaints were not on the agenda as this was the last Board meeting of the civic year. It was explained that this would usually be on the first Board agenda in the year civic year as it would give new members a feel for what issues are raised by tenants and enable an assessment of all 2014/15 complaints.

The Vice Chairman regretfully informed the Board of the passing away of Mrs Helen Moore, who chaired various designated tenant groups/committees. A letter of condolence would be sent to her husband on behalf of the Housing Review Board.

RESOLVED: that the forward plan be noted.

***80 Support Services**

The Landlord Services Manager updated the Board on the final preparations for the changes to Support Services from 6 April 2015 and highlighted the efforts to explain the process and support tenants were given through the changes. This was one of a series of reports over the last 12 months. There had been little reaction so far to the press release and related articles in the local newspapers. A handful of tenants had stated that they intended to write to the press themselves objecting to new changes. A designated telephone line was being manned during working hours with responses recorded.

A series of 12 drop-in sessions across the district started on 3 March 2015. Approximately 250 tenants took the opportunity to come to discuss the new charges and any general queries on the new service would be answered. Staff from the Support and Rental teams were present to 'log on' to the network and answer tenant questions.

The message was that there would be no opportunity to opt out of the service. The sheltered homes come with the support service and alarm as standard, and a charge for each of these was made to the customer/tenant. If a tenant wished to move out of sheltered housing the team would refer them to the Housing Needs service – so far 5 tenants had been referred. The team had received good feedback on the consultation process and the consideration given to tenants needs. The consultation had now ended. Cllr Knight thanked the Housing team for the way they had dealt with this difficult situation.

John Golding acknowledged that his staff had worked hard to implement the Board's decision to charge all tenants for support services. He stated that it was not easy charging tenants, but felt reassured the charges were reasonable and fair; they were in common with the rest of the sector. Tenants only had to pay one third of the cost in the first year as this was being subsidised by the Housing Revenue Account, and measures had been put in place to protect the most vulnerable tenants.

RESOLVED: that the arrangements towards the implementation of new charges for support services be agreed.

***81 Care Act briefing**

The Landlord Services Manager updated the Board on the new Care Act and its implications for the council and its tenants; there was a strong preventative theme throughout. The Care Act 2014, which would come into force from April 2015, was regarded as the most significant reform of care and support in over 60 years. It reformed and streamlined the legislation on access to, administration of, and responsibilities for care services. It put people and their carers in control of their care and support. It would introduce new responsibilities for local authorities and for the first time put a limit on the amount anyone would have to pay towards the costs of their care.

The Act created a single modern law that made it clear what kind of care people should expect. It had introduced a minimum eligibility threshold across the country which made it clear when local authorities have to provide support to people. Councils cannot reduce their thresholds below this minimum level. The concept of wellbeing was central to the Act and councils would have a duty to consider the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of the individual needing care. There was also a new duty on local authorities to provide

preventative services to maintain people's health. The system had to be built around each person – what they need, how they can best be cared for, and what they want.

Personal budgets had been introduced giving people the power to spend money on tailored care that suits their individual needs as part of their support plan. A cap had been put on the amount people have to spend on care, regardless of their savings and assets. The cap was £72,000 and once reached the state would pay those costs. The government had also increased the means testing level, meaning that people with modest wealth would be eligible for state help towards the cap. Under the Act, councils had to offer information and advice to help everyone understand what support they would need to help them better plan for the future. Also councils had to offer a deferred payment scheme, meaning no one should have to sell their home during their lifetime in order to pay for residential care.

There were new requirements to give carers support that put them on the same footing as the people they care for. All carers will be entitled to an assessment, and had a legal right to receive support for their needs. The main duties fall to local authorities at the county council level (in our case Devon County Council (DCC)) but EDDC had to support and work with DCC to help bring in these changes. There may well be opportunities for EDDC to deliver services around well being and prevention.

RESOLVED: that consideration of the impact of the Care Act 2014 on housing services be noted.

***82 Financial Monitoring report**

The Board was presented with a report giving 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 ten (January 2015). It was highlighted that the £70k for Devon & Cornwall Housing be deleted from the Capital Programme as this should not be in the HRA for a development in Exmouth.

33 Rights to Buy properties had been sold over the last year, this was evenly distributed across the district. The question was raised to whether the council was building social houses at the same rate as the selling through Right to Buy. In 2015 the council and partners would exceed 300 new affordable homes. The council needed to sell off approximately four homes in order to build one house. Sheltered housing was protected from Right to Buy.

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

Current monitoring indicates that:

- The Housing Revenue Account Balance would be maintained at or above the adopted level.
- 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 ten be acknowledged.

83 Regulatory Framework changes

The Strategic Lead, Housing, Health and Environment presented highlighted changes being made to the Regulatory Framework being introduced by the Homes and Communities

Agency, following consultation with stakeholders. These changes would not really affect the council but it needed to comply with and keep track of elements such as value for money and gas servicing. The Regulatory Framework was the guidance issued to Registered Providers and forms the basis of the Homes and Communities Agency regulation of standards in the social housing sector. In April 2014 the social housing regulator published a discussion document to seek the views of stakeholders on the principles for amending the Regulatory Framework to ensure the protection of social housing assets. Following consideration of responses received, a statutory consultation was published on proposed changes to the framework. Stakeholders were invited to give their views to the Regulator.

Proposals included:

Changes to the governance and financial viability standard

- Focus on risk management and mitigation, including the requirement for providers to have undertaken robust stress-testing of the business plan and to have a comprehensive register of their assets and liabilities.
- Ensuring appropriate skills to manage risks and to certify annual compliance with the standards.
- Where providers' businesses were ultimately controlled by a non-registered organisation, the regulator would be seeking additional assurances about the security of the social housing assets.

Code of practice

- Proposal to introduce an associated code of practice that would amplify and expand on the standard to help providers understand the concerns of the regulator.

Disposals regime

- Changing consents regime to protect the public value in social housing assets as they move between the not for profit and for profit sectors.

RECOMMENDED: To note the changes to the Homes and Communities Agency Regulatory Framework and to request that officers assess the implications and report back to the Housing Review Board once detailed guidance was published.

***84 HouseMark Benchmarking survey results**

The Information & Analysis Officer presented the results of HouseMark's cost and performance benchmarking exercise using the last year's financial data. The report compared the council with its peers in a number of key areas of housing management service delivery. The data related primarily to 2013/14 although the report also showed the council's costs and performance in 2012/13 as a comparison. The Information & Analysis Officer stated the council was doing well compared with its peers but must now take steps to go up another level to continue this success.

The results of the high 'staff sickness absence' was questioned, John Golding told the Board that the council had an older workforce as well as some serious long-term illnesses. EDDC's health and wellbeing at work policy had been developed to promote and encourage health and well being at work so that employees were Happy, Healthy and Here. The breakdown on individual days and short-term sickness was low, and SMT were regularly reviewing these figures across all council services.

The 'average cost of a responsive repair' was high as the council prefers to replace rather than 'patch and mend' as this was more cost effective in the long-term. There was a high cost implication due to the storm damage from the severe weather last winter. It was

suggested that members view a few void properties to see exactly what repairs were necessary and what officers were faced with when they dealt with an empty property. John Golding would put this on the next forward plan.

RESOLVED: that the HouseMark's 2013/14 Benchmarking report be agreed.

***85 Performance Insight action plan**

The Information & Analysis Officer reported that key to delivering an excellent performing Housing Service was strong performance management and listening to the views of its tenants. This was a 'living' document and would be continually added to by all teams in order to focus on areas of concern. Results from HouseMark's benchmarking exercise and the latest STAR survey (2014) results had been used to develop a Performance Insight Action Plan for 2015/16. This summarised intended activities and outcomes over the next 12 months to ensure continued improvement to delivered services. This work would complement the actions in the Housing Service Plan, and other strategies and policies directed towards improved tenant involvement and housing performance.

Honiton was being chosen as an area to work in as the survey revealed there to be a lower tenant satisfaction rate. This demonstrated the council taking the concerns of these tenants seriously and using the information to good effect.

It was suggested that a 6 month survey be undertaken with sheltered housing tenants to gain feedback on the new support charges.

RESOLVED: that the 2015/16 Performance Insight Action Plan be agreed.

***86 Evaluating the achievements of the Board**

The Chairman highlighted the achievements of the Housing Review Board over the last 12 months. These included:

- **Centenary Fields Programme** - the Board nominated a piece of recreational space to be dedicated as a Centenary Field to commemorate World War 1.
- **Standardised Tenants and Residents (STAR) Survey Results** – this survey showed overall satisfaction scores were positive and EDDC housing service was performing well.
- **Men's Shed** - a project based around the increased and worrying social isolation amongst men in our society.
- **Handy Person Scheme & TaFF** - a scheme for day to day repairs and minor works that were tenants' responsibility to be carried out by contractors.
- **Tenant Repair Inspectors** - tenant inspectors to oversee the day to day repair maintenance service to help manage the quality of workmanship by contractors.
- **Older persons targeted support and Home Safeguard** - 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.
- **Tenants Leading Change** - promoting tenant involvement and its benefits to the delivery of improved services.

Other issues reviewed by the Board during the year had included:

- Right to Buy update
- Right to Move consultation
- Rent Restructuring Scheme
- Annual report to tenants 2013/14

- Estate Management review
- Devon Home Choice – policy changes and update
- Decoration scheme for vulnerable elderly and disabled tenants
- Gas safety checks
- Fire risk assessments
- Dampness eradication programme
- Targeted families support project progress report and updates
- Affordable homes programme 2015-18
- Performance indicator reports

John Golding thanked the Board for all their work, stating that officers and tenants valued the work of the Housing Review Board.

RESOLVED: that the yearly achievements of the Board be noted.

***87 OPENHousing Software System**

The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment gave an update on the progress to date of Capita's OPENHousing System implementation project. The migration of existing data from various systems onto a single housing management system was a significant project for the Housing Service, designed to lead to improved service delivery for tenants.

There was good support from Strata and the March data load test was successful. John Golding asked that Claire Barnes, Systems Administrator gave the Board a demonstration of the system in the near future.

RESOLVED: that the update to consider progress towards a comprehensive housing management software system report proposals be agreed.

***88 Performance Digest – 2014/15**

The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment highlighted the report to the Board referring to key performance figures that included:

- Affordable Housing Completions
- Anti-social behaviour
- Complaints
- Customer Satisfaction
- EDDC Stock
- Homelessness
- Home Safeguard
- Lettings
- Number of Households on the East Devon Housing Waiting List
- Private Sector Housing
- Rental
- Repairs

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

***89 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).

***90 Update on the Proposed Purchase of land at Mudbank Lane, Exmouth**

The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment provided an update on the progress made with the proposed purchase of land at Mudbank Lane, Exmouth from Devon County Council as part of a joint venture with Devon and Cornwall Housing.

RESOLVED: to approve the progress made on site acquisition since last reported to the Housing Review Board on the 6 November 2014.

91 Affordable Housing – Potential Property Acquisition or Land disposal in Honiton

The Housing Development and Enabling Officer's report outlined a proposal to purchase a new property using Housing Revenue Account funding and Right to Buy receipts, and to dispose of a small area of Housing Land.

RECOMMENDED: it is agreed that:

- a. this type of accommodation (two bedroom house in Honiton) would be a beneficial addition to the current council property portfolio.
- b. funding from the Housing Revenue Account and Right to Buy receipts be used to purchase the proposed property.
- c. in the event the property purchase is unsuccessful, consideration may be given to the disposal of an identified area of Housing land for a best price consideration.
- d. in either case the Strategic Lead for Housing, Health and Environment is given delegated authority to negotiate the best outcome for the Council.

Attendance list

Present:

Cllr Pauline Stott (Chairman)
Cllr Susie Bond
Cllr Jim Knight
Cllr Douglas Hull

Co-opted tenant members:

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

Officers:

John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment
Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager
Mandy White, Accountant
Natalie Brown, Information & Analysis Officer
Claire Barnes, Housing System Administrator
Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer

Apologies:

Cllr Christine Drew

Cllr Jill Elson, Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities

Cllr Steph Jones

Rob Finch

Giles Salter

Julie Adkin

Chairman

Date.....