

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 18 June 2015**

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

The meeting started at 2.30pm and ended at 4.45pm.

Before the meeting began Councillor Pauline Stott, Chairman of the Board welcomed all those present and invited everyone to introduce themselves. The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment gave an introduction and overview of the role of the Housing Review Board. This included:

- Background to the Board and its role
- Reference to the Homes and Communities Plan
- Ring fenced Housing Revenue Account (HRA), with an £18m annual turnover
- Annual report to tenants
- Housing service and its four teams:
  - Landlord services
  - Housing needs and strategy
  - Property and asset management
  - Private sector housing
- Self financing reform – freedoms and flexibilities
- 30 year HRA business plan
- Future challenges and opportunities for housing

#### **\*1 Public Speaking**

Councillor Douglas Hull requested that the Board be provided with a breakdown of housing owned by the Council, into size, type and location, across the district and that this be taken into consideration when building new houses. This information was circulated at the meeting. It was noted that further information could be found in the annual report to tenants, which was available on the Council's website.

The Chairman suggested that a trip be arranged for HRB members to visit some of the Council's housing across the district, including some newly acquired property and housing in more remote locations.

Councillor Douglas Hull went on to request information on the void times of two bedroom bungalows and the implications of bedroom tax on letting these. The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment advised that void times were reported monthly to Cabinet via capability charts, but this item could be added to the HRB forward plan.

Tenant member John Powley questioned the timing of the HRB meetings. He felt that the change of start time had not been adequately debated by Board members. The Chairman and The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment explained the reasons behind the change of time, which originated from a tenants request, and advised that the trial could be reviewed at the end of the Council year.

Councillor Megan Armstrong asked how much information was recorded during the Devon Homes Choice bidding process. The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager advised that it was difficult to assess the number of times an individual had to bid or wait for a property due to changes in their housing need and circumstances. The Housing Needs & Strategy Manager welcomed all members to talk to the housing managers if they wanted more information on the services and invited them to consider work-shadowing staff.

**\*2 Appointment of Vice Chairman**

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

**RESOLVED** that tenant representative Pat Rous be appointed Vice Chairman of the Board for the ensuing year.

**\*3 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 19 March 2015 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment reported that the two independent community representative positions on the Board were currently vacant. Rob Finch had served the maximum two terms on the Board as set out in the Constitution. The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment had written to Rob on behalf of the Board and thanked him for his valued contribution and support. The other independent community representative, Julie Adkin had also resigned due to time constraints.

Julie Bingham from Devon and Cornwall Housing Association had been invited to attend the meeting to observe how the Board operated. The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment advised that he had also received an expression of interest from a former councillor and Board member. Douglas Hull requested that an interview panel be set up to appoint the independent community representatives.

**RESOLVED** that an interview panel consisting of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Councillor Douglas Hull and tenant Mike Berridge be set up to interview applicants to the two vacant independent community representative positions on the Board. Any appointments would need to be reported to Council for approval.

**\*4 Declarations of Interest**

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

Joyce Ebborn: Personal Interest - Housing tenant

Cllr Ian Hall: Personal Interest – Family member lives in a Council owned property and uses Home Safeguard

Cllr Douglas Hull: Personal interest – Family member lives in a Council owned property.

John Powley: Personal Interest - Housing tenant

Pat Rous: Personal Interest - Housing tenant

**\*5 Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency identified.

**\*6 Exclusion of the Public**

**RESOLVED:**

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

**\*7 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 further issues to the next forward plan by informing him or the Democratic Services Officer.

During the meeting the following items were added to the forward plan:

- Void times
- Age restriction issues (particularly in relation to sheltered housing)

**RESOLVED:** that the forward plan be noted and updated.

**8 Revisions to the introductory, secure and flexible tenancy agreements**

The Housing Projects Officer's report explained that the secure tenancy agreement had not been revised since 2007 and required updating to meet current good practice and legislation. It was proposed that one tenancy document was produced which incorporated the introductory, secure and flexible tenancy agreements. This would ensure that all the documents carried the same rights and obligations (where appropriate) and that where the tenancy conditions varied due to the type of tenancy being used, these would be clearly highlighted throughout the combined document. The Housing Projects Officer outlined the consultation process and how tenants would be formally notified. It was planned that the new tenancy agreement would come into effect from 1 January 2016.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the revised amalgamated tenancy agreement be agreed
2. that the Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment and Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities be given delegated authority to act on the outcome of feedback from the consultation process.

**9 Tenancy anti-fraud policy and tenancy anti-fraud strategy**

The Housing Projects Officer presented to the Board a draft tenancy anti-fraud policy and a draft tenancy anti-fraud strategy. This followed recommendations from the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) internal auditors that the Council should clarify its position and policy with a documented approach that defined how the Council would prevent and address tenancy fraud.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the tenancy anti-fraud policy and the tenancy anti-fraud strategy be approved.

**10 Safeguarding vulnerable adults**

Adult safeguarding was the process of protecting adults from neglect or abuse. The Care Act 2014 amended and strengthened this as a statutory duty for local authorities and along with statutory guidance set out clear expectations. The Property and Asset Manager's report updated members on the requirements set out under the Council's corporate Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy and refreshed the policy in response to recent changes in legislation and learning. The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment reminded the Board that safeguarding adults was not exclusively housing's domain, but the service tended to take the lead on this. There was mandatory annual training for all housing staff. Training would also be arranged for Councillors later in the year as part of their welcome/induction and refresher process.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the changes set out in annex 1 – safeguarding vulnerable adults policy be approved.

**\*11 Tenant inspectors**

The Property and Asset Manager's report outlined a proposal to carry out a pilot scheme (6 months – starting in July 2015) involving tenant inspectors working alongside the Housing Property and Asset Management team. Tenant inspectors represented an excellent way of tenants and front line officers working together to ensure agreed standards were maintained. Mid Devon District Council had been running a successful tenant inspector programme for a number of years.

The report focused on tenant inspectors being involved in the void management of properties within the responsibility of the repairs and maintenance team. Tenant inspectors work would not replace any part of the current technical inspections carried out by Maintenance Surveyors, but would act as an additional resource. There would be no requirement for tenant inspectors to attend every void property.

Details of the scheme, including recruitment, training and monitoring were outlined in the report. The pilot project would be reviewed after six months and the outcome of the review would be presented to the Housing Review Board in order to seek approval for Tenant Inspectors to be a new addition to the Tenant Involvement Strategy. The review would also form the basis of whether tenant inspectors could play a useful role in other parts of the Housing Service.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the proposal of a pilot scheme commencing in July 2015 to introduce tenant inspectors to the Housing Service be agreed.

**\*12 Housing Service complaints April 2014 - March 2015 review**

The Landlord Services Manager's report provided information on formal and other complaints received in relation to the Housing Service for the period April 2014 - March 2015. Complaints were taken seriously and carefully monitored. They were used for learning wherever possible. Although there had been an increase in complaints, it still fell below the HouseMark benchmark. The main messages and lessons learnt from formal complaints were noted in the report and included communication and staff attitude.

**RESOLVED:** that the number and type of complaints received during 2014/15 be noted, along with the learning points arising that would be used to improve the Housing Service.

**\*13 Membership of Advantage South West – procurement consortium**

The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment informed the Board of the purpose of the membership to the Advantage South West consortium and highlighted savings achieved during 2014/15. As well as savings opportunities through the procurement consortium, Advantage South West also provided the benefit of additional areas of expertise.

**RESOLVED:** that savings achieved during 2014/15 be noted and the continued membership of the consortium during 2015/16 be supported.

**\*14 HRA outturn report 2014/15**

During 2014/15 monthly budgeting reports had informed members of the anticipated year end position. The Housing Accountant's report contained the final position for the year-end and compared this outturn position against the budgets set for 2014/15.

35 Rights to Buy sales had been completed during 2014/15. The timetable for expenditure of Right to Buy receipts to be incurred was included in the report and it was noted that spending on the provision of new social housing was ahead of schedule.

Following a question regarding the Council's vulnerability to Right to Buy sales, the Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment advised that the HRB business plan would be tested in terms of sensitivity to Right to Buy sales. The financial model could be manipulated in terms of its sensitivity to many different factors, such as inflation rates.

**RESOLVED:**

1. that the HRA outturn position for 2014/15 be agreed.
2. that the transfer of £0.500m into the HRA Business Plan Volatility Reserve be agreed.

**\*15 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 item in private session (Part B).

**16 Proposed purchase of properties at Mudbank Lane, Exmouth**

The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment's report sought Board support for the proposed purchase of 13 affordable rented dwellings upon completion of the development at Mudbank Lane, Exmouth from Devon and Cornwall Housing. The proposed purchase was subject to contract, including price negotiations and securing full planning permission.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that it be agreed that the proposed affordable rent dwellings were a desirable addition to the Council's housing stock.
2. that the proposed purchase be supported and delegated authority be given to the Portfolio Holder for Homes and Communities along with the Strategic Lead for Housing, Health and Environment to negotiate an appropriate level of offer to secure the dwellings.
3. that funding from the Housing Revenue Account, Commuted Sum monies and maximising the use of Right to Buy receipts be used to fund the proposed purchase.

**Attendance list**

**Present:**

Cllr Pauline Stott (Chairman)  
Megan Armstrong  
Ian Hall  
Cllr Douglas Hull

Co-opted tenant members:

Mike Berridge  
Joyce Ebborn  
John Powley  
Pat Rous

**Officers:**

John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment  
Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager  
Emma Charlton, Housing Projects Officer  
Marian Hitchcock, PA to Strategic Lead Housing, Health & Environment and Housing  
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs & Strategy Manager  
Giles Salter, Solicitor  
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer  
Melissa Wall, Housing Projects Officer  
Mandy White, Accountant

**Also present:**

Cllr Jill Elson, Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities  
Cllr David Barratt  
Cllr Tom Wright

Julie Bingham Devon and Cornwall Housing Association

**Apologies:**

Harry Roberts – tenant  
Cllr Jim Knight  
Cllr Paul Diviani – Leader of the Council

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