

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 10 September 2015**

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

The meeting started at 2.30pm and ended at 4.30pm.

Before the meeting began Councillor Pauline Stott, Chairman of the Board welcomed all those present and invited everyone to introduce themselves. She particularly welcomed the two new independent community representatives and the new tenant/leaseholder representative to their first Board meeting.

#### **\*17 Public Speaking**

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

#### **\*18 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 18 June 2015 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

#### **\*19 Declarations of Interest**

Angela Bea: Personal Interest - Housing tenant

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.

Cllr Knight: Personal interest – Family member lives in a Council owned property. He is also a Devon County Council councillor and a member of the Fire Authority

#### **\*20 Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency identified.

#### **\*21 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.

#### **\*22 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.

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

#### **23 Summer budget – rent reduction implications**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health & Environment's report explained the impact of one of the announcements contained in the Summer Budget on the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, as well as the financial implications nationally. Government announced a 1% reduction in rents per annum for four years as part of the budget to assist

towards achieving the savings required on the welfare budget. The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health & Environment reported that he would be objecting to the proposal. The detrimental impact on the HRA Business Plan was outlined in the report. If the proposals are taken forward by Government, the Business Plan needed to be reviewed over the coming months and proposals would be brought forward to bring it back into balance throughout the 30 year period.

The Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities outlined her efforts to lobby against the changes. She had met with two local MPs who were seeking a meeting with the Housing Minister to explain the implications. The Board suggested that the Strategic Lead, Housing, Health and Environment be invited to attend any meeting that was arranged with Government ministers.

The Board agreed that it was important that the differences between a local authority HRA business plan and a typical housing association business plan were understood. They felt that the Government should be lobbied hard and agreed to send a letter from the HRB to the Housing Minister, as well as the Chancellor.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that consideration be given to the implications of the Summer Budget on the Council's Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and initial responses to the proposals be endorsed.
2. that a letter be sent to the Housing Minister and the Chancellor from the Housing Review Board strongly objecting to the rent reduction proposals.
3. that the Strategic Lead, Housing, Health and Environment be invited to attend any meetings arranged with Government ministers.

**24 Gas servicing contract extension**

The Property and Asset Manager's report requested approval to extend the existing gas servicing contract for a further six months until 31 March 2016. Officers and tenants were happy with the performance and service provision of the current contractor. 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 currently in discussion with Mid Devon District Council with the intention of pursuing a joint tender approach to the contract when it comes up for renewal in 2016.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the existing gas-servicing contract be extended until 31 March 2016.

**25 Fire safety update**

The Property and Asset Manager's report updated the Board on how the Council was meeting current fire regulations in tenants' homes and communal areas. This generally focused around the outcomes of the Fire Risk Assessments that were undertaken on all blocks of flats and community centres. The report also proposed a more structured approach for the future to ensure a target timeframe when it was expected works would be completed on sites requiring additional fire protection measures.

It was noted that some garages were being used to store large amounts of paint and possible inflammables and these posed a potential fire hazard. Estate management teams would be made aware of this and members were asked to notify the Strategic Lead, Housing, Health and Environment of any specific examples.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the ongoing progress in relation to fire safety measures and improvement works that were taking place across the housing stock be noted.
2. that a 5 year programme of works in relation to fire safety with an agreed annual budget of £250,000 be approved.
3. that fire stopping works on all void properties (where appropriate) be approved.

**26 Shared house, Exmouth**

The Board received an update report from the Property and Asset Manager on the current position and progress being made for the delivery of a shared house in Exmouth. The Board had previously received a report in June 2013 outlining the proposal and business case to purchase the property. The current completion date for necessary works was the end of December 2015, with tenants being in place in January 2016. Officers explained the licence agreements that would be in place and that allocations would be made through Devon Home Choice. A request was made for extra Right to Buy funding to go forward on this project.

**RECOMMENDED:** that additional Right to Buy receipts be used to fund the project if required.

**RESOLVED:** that the information report be noted.

**\*27 Draft annual report to tenants 2014/15**

Consideration was given to the draft of the annual report to tenants. The Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities commented on the excellent report, which demonstrated how much work was undertaken on tenants' homes and how this money contributed to the local economy. She also congratulated the community development workers for all their excellent work on the estates.

The report would be sent to all tenants with the December copy of Housing Matters magazine, be available on the Council's website from late October and it would also be emailed to all staff and councillors.

**RESOLVED:** that the draft annual report to tenants 2014/15 be noted.

**\*28 Homes and Communities Agency Regulatory Standards**

The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment's report set out the latest advice on regulatory standards issued by the Homes and Communities Agency. This allowed the Board to have an understanding of the regulators' advice on standards expected in social housing, and the approach taken by the Homes and Communities Agency when regulating the sector.

**RESOLVED:** that the contents of the advice on regulating standards in social housing be noted.

**\*29 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 2014/16 at the end of month four (July 2015).

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.

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.

**RESOLVED:** that the variances identified as part of the HRA revenue and capital monitoring process up to month four be noted.

**\*30 Performance digest**

The Housing Review Board noted and discussed the performance indicator report for the first quarter of 2015/16. This also included a report from the SPAR reporting system, which the Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment explained to the Board.

**RESOLVED:** that the performance indicator report for the first quarter of 2015/16 be noted.

**31 Grounds maintenance task and finish forum final report**

The Chairman presented the final report of the grounds maintenance task and finish forum. She thanked all the officers and members involved with the TaFF and gave particular thanks the Housing Land Surveyor.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the grounds maintenance service provided by Streetscene be recognised as good value for money
2. that the amount paid to Streetscene Services from the Housing Revenue Account for grounds maintenance remain unchanged
3. that the Estate Management Service Review Group remit be extended to ensure tenant involvement in the grounds maintenance service
4. that the current system should continue with regards to not charging future freeholders/leaseholders of right to buy properties for a grounds maintenance services.
5. that an update report on garden licences be brought to a future meeting of the Housing Review Board.

**\*32 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).

**33 Extension request, Exmouth**

The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment's report asked the Board to consider issues in relation to the tenants in Pound Lane, Exmouth. Throughout the discussion the importance of receiving a statement of need from a Devon County Council (DCC) Occupation Therapist and a DCC commitment to provide additional funding if required was regarded as critical. DCC were also urged to ensure that a full time care worker would be covered during holiday and sickness absence. Officers agreed to investigate the suggestion that a business was being operated from an adjacent property.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that it be agreed that the household detailed in the report are suitably housed.
2. that, in accordance with our Adaptations Policy, a statement of need be requested and obtained from a Devon County Council Occupational Therapist in order to consider the provision of any alterations that are needed, and a financial contribution if the work required exceeded £30,000,
3. that the offer of sound proofing to the relevant area of the property be endorsed.

**Attendance list**

**Present:**

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

Co-opted tenant members:

Angela Bea  
Mike Berridge  
Joyce Ebborn

Officers:

Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager  
Natalie Brown, Information & Analysis Officer  
Emma Charlton, Housing Projects Officer  
Amy Gilbert, Property and Asset Manager  
John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment  
Marian Hitchcock, PA to Strategic Lead Housing, Health & Environment and Housing  
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs & Strategy Manager  
Paul Lowe, Housing Enabling Officer  
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 Peter Faithfull  
Cllr Eileen Wragg

**Apologies:**

Harry Roberts – tenant  
Pat Rous – tenant (Vice Chairman)  
Cllr Brenda Taylor

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