

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 10 March 2016

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.30pm and ended at 4.20pm.

64 Public Speaking

Councillor Ian Hall reported that a loan shark awareness estate walkabout had recently taken place in Millwey Rise, Axminster. He urged that loan shark awareness be kept in the spotlight and the Chairman suggested that an article be placed in the Housing Matters magazine.

RECOMMENDED: that an article be placed in Housing Matters to raise awareness of loan sharks.

***65 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 14 January 2016 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***66 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

Sylvia Martin: Personal interest – housing tenant.

Cllr Jim Knight: Personal interest – family member lives in a Council owned property and another family member is a housing association tenant.

Pat Rous: Personal interest - housing tenant.

***67 Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency identified.

***68 Forward plan**

The Strategic Lead, Housing, Health and Environment presented the forward plan and advised Members that the forward plan acted 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 either himself or the Democratic Services Officer.

The Chairman advised the Board that the first meeting of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Task and Finish Forum would take place on 17 June. The Housing and Planning Bill would have been considered by the House of Commons and the impact of the Bill could be better assessed.

The following additions were made during and after the meeting:

- Statement of intention for unused land at Millwey Rise and Foxhill, Axminster.
- Update report on the effectiveness of work carried out to combat damp penetration in Council properties.
- Update report to raise tenants' awareness of ways of preventing condensation in their homes.

RESOLVED: that the forward plan be noted and updated.

69 Rent setting for 2016/17

The Rental Manager's report provided the Housing Review Board with details of the Government's announcement to give a year-long exception for supported accommodation from the 1% rent reduction in the social rented sector, to reduce the threat to the viability of supported living.

The report explained the financial details and implications of how the exception would impact the supported tenants in sheltered housing. The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment outlined to the Board the anticipated income into the Housing Revenue Account using the formula previously used for rent increases if a 0.9% increase was implemented. The Board were reminded that the introduction and increase in support charges would be phased. This allowed for an excellent service to be provided to sheltered housing tenants.

RECOMMENDED: that the increase in rents in respect of supported accommodation be approved as per the Government's announcement.

70 Gas servicing contract

The Property and Asset Manager's report requested approval to extend the existing gas servicing contract for a further six months, until 1 October 2016. Officers and tenants were generally 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 to progress a partnering arrangement with regard to tendering both authorities' gas servicing contracts at the same time.

The results of the tender exercise would be presented at a future Board meeting, ready for commencement of the new contract in October 2016.

Officers had been advised that boiler replacement work should fall under a separate contract agreement and officers had successfully engaged with Fusion 21, a social enterprise company who specialised in large-scale procurement for the public sector. As a local authority the Council could access the existing frameworks that had already been set up and benefit from excellent prices due to the size of the buying power available through Fusion 21.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that an extension until 1 October 2016 to the existing gas servicing contract be approved.
2. that proposals to tender the contract jointly with Mid Devon District Council in line with European procurement regulations be approved.
3. that the use of Fusion 21 and their procurement framework for the boiler upgrade programme be approved.

71 Response to Tenant Scrutiny Panel on tenant participation

The Landlord Services Manager's report responded to recommendations of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) report, which was presented to the Housing Review Board on 5 November 2015, in relation to their review of customer recruitment and involvement. She clarified some points and inaccuracies within the original TSP report. The response set out the recommendations that had already been achieved, those recommendations that were

relatively straightforward and had now been added to the work plan, and those that needed further discussion by the Board so that it could be decided whether or not the recommendation should be acted upon.

It was noted that the TSP worked independently and produced an independent report with an effective scrutiny function. Officers gave advice and support as and when it was requested.

The TSP recommendations that had financial implications and required further Board discussion were:

- Make sure tenant involvement priorities are linked to the organisation's vision and objectives (TSP recommendation 2).
- Make sure the customer involvement budget meets the needs of the collective annual customer involvement work plan (TSP recommendation 2.8).
- Develop a way to measure the value for money created (or not) by customer involvement to show how involvement has influenced and benefitted the business as well as tenants generally. Report on this annually to HRB and tenants in the annual report (TSP recommendation 2.10).
- Make customers central to decision making processes (TSP recommendation 3).
- Support customers to be able to 'challenge' East Devon as effectively as 'critical friends'. Support staff to understand this is about improving services and is not personal (TSP recommendation 3.8).
- Finding out which communication methods customers prefer to use – and use these to communicate with them (TSP recommendation 3.16).
- Employ another full time customer involvement person to support the current role which gets bogged down in administrating to the groups. In this way, one can focus on promoting and developing effective customer involvement, whilst the other can focus on admin (TSP recommendation 3.17).

The Board discussed the recruitment of another tenant participation officer and noted the limited finances available to fund an additional post. The budget for 2016/17 had just been set and did not include money for this. The Strategic Lead, Housing, Health and Environment reported that Housing Service Management Team would be considering a number of requests for additional staff, but there was limited scope for new posts, and there was a need to consider priorities from a service management point of view. A decision on any additional investment in staff would be brought to a future Board meeting.

Tenant representative Angela Bea informed the Board that she had recently attended two training events on tenant participation and communication from Councils to tenants. She believed that local representation should start from the bottom up and representation should be based on area rather than subject matter. The Chairman suggested that Angela write a short report for the next meeting of the Housing Review Board on tenant participation and representation.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the Tenant Scrutiny Panel recommendations that were already being achieved and those that have been incorporated into the resident involvement work plans be noted.
2. that the Housing Project and Information and Analysis Officers be engaged to measure the social and monetary value created by resident involvement, and to show how involvement has influenced and benefitted the business as well as tenants generally.

3. that the OpenHousing management system be used to gather tenant profiling information into the future.
4. that the tenant representative write a short report for inclusion on the next Housing Review Board agenda on tenant participation and representation.

72 Annual report of the Housing Review Board

Members were asked to note the annual report of the Housing Review Board which highlighted the achievements and detailed the work undertaken by the Board over the last year.

The Strategic Lead, Housing, Health and Environment thanked the Democratic Services Officer for her report and commented that it was a good discipline for the Board to annually review the work it had undertaken. Cllr Hull also thanked the Democratic Services Officer for producing such a readable and easy to understand report.

It was noted that the remit of the Board was out of date as some of the tenant groups had changed. This would be updated when changes to the Constitution were made at the annual meeting of the Council on 18 May 2016.

RECOMMENDED: that the remit of the Housing Review Board be updated when the Constitution is updated at the Annual Council meeting.

RESOLVED: that the annual report of the Housing Review Board be noted.

73 New void performance calculation

The Information and Analysis Officer's report outlined the changes made to how the performance indicator 'average re let times' was calculated. This now reflected HouseMark's calculation and was more in line with Systems Thinking, being a more accurate end to end measure ensuring a more comparable and meaningful statistic was being produced. The report compared performance using the old and the new calculation to provide an understanding of the difference the new calculation would have on void performance. Using the new calculation, the re let times increased by approximately five days. The teams involved in the void process were using this as an opportunity to scrutinise their work and establish how re let times might be improved.

RECOMMENDED: that the new void calculation be adopted.

***74 Home Safeguard annual report 2014/15**

The Board received the Home Safeguard annual report which highlighted the key achievements of the service during the year. Home Safeguard was a key part of the housing service for tenants in sheltered housing and had a significant private sector customer base. It provided a 24/7 community alarm based on a telephony system with telecare and telehealth capabilities.

The Board agreed that Home Safeguard was a wonderful service. It had high performance and was highly valued by its customers.

RESOLVED: that the Home Safeguard annual report 2014/15 be noted.

75 Strategy and options for spending Right to Buy receipts

The Housing Development and Enabling Officer's report set out a strategy for spending Right to Buy (RTB) receipts to ensure the Council continued to deliver affordable homes in

the district. Failure to spend receipts on time would result in them being returned to Government with interest.

Since the RTB discount was increased the Council had seen an increase in the numbers of RTB sales. Consequently this had generated a significant amount of RTB receipts. To enable the Council to spend the receipts it must find 70% of the total costs of a project, the remaining 30% would come from RTB receipts. The RTB guidance notes from the Department of Communities and Local Government stated that there were two ways a council could spend the receipts on the provision of affordable housing:

- use the money itself as a direct provider whereby the council finds 70% of the cost of provision, or
- transfer the receipt over to another registered provider, with that other provider putting the remaining 70% funding into the provision.

Options for spending RTB receipts were:

- The Council could decide not to spend the RTB receipts.
- The Council could spend all the RTB receipts on new council homes/land.
- To use Commuted Sums from planning gain in lieu of on-site affordable housing with RTB receipts.
- Create a RTB grant funding pool for registered providers to bid for.
- A hybrid approach.

Officers were working hard to identify funding streams to spend the money on time and at the correct amount in the areas required. The Housing Development and Enabling Officer requested that delegated authority be given to allow for a faster turnaround, reduce bureaucracy and hit deadlines.

The report recommended that in the short term, with a deadline of September 2016 to spend the next tranche of RTB receipts, that the RTB receipts be combined with commuted sum monies and that homes be bought on the open market. This option would not require any HRA funding/subsidy. It was recommended that in the long term, beyond 2017, a hybrid approach be adopted.

The Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities advised the Board that she had asked the Overview Committee to look at an affordable homes policy, in light of the Housing and Planning Bill.

On behalf of the Board, the Chairman thanked the Housing Development and Enabling Officer for his report and the officers for their hard work.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the proposed options for spending Right to Buy receipts to secure additional suitable affordable housing in the district be approved.
2. that delegated authority be given to the Portfolio Holder Sustainable Homes and Communities, Chair of the Housing Review Board and the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment to approve a programme of individual property purchases to meet the short term Right to Buy spending deadline.

***76 Selling off the stock**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment presented to the Board two publications; a policy fact sheet on the disposal of vacant high value social housing, from

the Department for Communities and Local Government; and 'selling off the stock' an interim analysis of the proposals for sales on council houses in high-value areas to finance a new right to buy for housing association tenants, by the Chartered Institute of Housing.

The details had not been made public as to what constituted high value stock, but the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan TaFF would consider this as part of their review. Assumptions would need to be built into the HRA Business Plan. The Strategic Lead, Housing, Health and Environment urged caution regarding any future spending plans until the 'high value' payment formula was published and the implications could be assessed.

The Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities reported that she had been in contact with and was lobbying MPs and members of the House of Lords on many aspects of the Housing and Planning Bill and the Welfare Reform Bill. It was noted the notion of 'Pay to Stay' had been dropped by the Government for the time being.

RESOLVED: that the information papers included in the agenda be noted.

***77 Estate Management Service Review Group report**

The Board was presented with a report from the tenant lead (Pat Rous) of the Estate Management Service Review Group, which highlighted the many ways the group had been involved in a variety of issues. The group was first set up in 2008 and comprised a mix of tenants and staff. Over the last 12 months the group had reviewed its purpose and how it worked and agreed that it needed to change its focus. Some of the areas covered by the review group included animal awareness, noise nuisance and energy. Fire safety was a regular agenda item. Grounds maintenance and garden maintenance were also being considered and there would be closer working with the Repairs Service Review Group. Recruitment of new members continued to be a struggle.

On behalf of the Board, the Chairman thanked Pat for her report, which contained very useful information.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

Attendance list

Present:

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

Co-opted tenant members:

Pat Rous (Vice Chairman)
Angela Bea
Mike Berridge
Joyce Ebborn

Independent community representative:

Christine Drew

Officers:

Bev Anderson, Tenant Participation Assistant
Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager
Natalie Brown, Information & Analysis Officer
Amy Gilbert, Property and Asset Manager
John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment
Darren Hicks, Housing Officer - Estate Management
Paul Lowe, Housing Enabling Officer
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs & Strategy Manager
Jane Reading, Tenant & Communities Section Leader
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
Sylvia Martin - Tenant Scrutiny Panel
Peter Sullivan

Apologies:

Julie Bingham – independent community representative
Harry Roberts - tenant
Cllr Steve Gazzard

Chairman Date.....