

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 16 June 2016**

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

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

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

Sylvia Martin apologised that no representative of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) had been present at the last HRB meeting and thanked the Landlord Services Manager for all her work on the response to the TSP on tenant participation. It was noted that it was becoming harder to recruit tenants despite advertising widely in the Housing Matters magazine, on the website and via social media.

#### **\*2 Appointment of Vice Chairman**

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting, in particular new Board member Councillor Brenda Taylor. Those present introduced themselves.

Nominations for Vice Chairman were received for co-opted tenant member Pat Rous.

**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 10 March 2016 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

#### **\*4 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: Chairman of the Millwey Rise Community Hall group.

Pat Rous: Personal interest - housing tenant.

#### **\*5 Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency identified.

#### **\*6 Community Development update**

The Chairman agreed for this item to be moved up the agenda to allow the Community Development to present their work to the Board. Presentations were received from the Education Ranger, the Community Development worker and the Community Development Apprentice on their work, including:

- Countryside outreach project;
- work with children's centres;
- SWITCH youth group;
- community festivals;
- fun days;
- SWITCH residential;
- Community Development Workers networking meeting;
- Youth tenant conference;

- Loan shark bite back week;
- community orchards;
- and future activities and goals.

The Board agreed that the community development work was invaluable. It encouraged people to spend more time outdoors in a supported way and reached out to target and early help families. Trust had been built up with families and young people and partner agencies were now sharing knowledge and recognising the value of the team. All activities were free at the point of take up. It was recognised that it was hard to measure the value of the projects but everyone acknowledged the positive impact it had on tenants and their families.

The Chairman and other members all praised and thanked the Community Development team and the Countryside Education Ranger for their hard work on behalf of the community.

**RESOLVED:** that the work carried out by the Community Development team be noted.

**\*7 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 Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities updated the Board on Danby House and Exebank. Contractss had been signed and Devon and Cornwall Housing would be bringing forward a planning application for the site in the next few weeks.

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

**\*8 Update on unused land at Millwey Rise and Foxhill, Axminster**

The Housing Projects Officer gave a brief verbal update on land at Millwey Rise and Foxhill, Axminster. She hoped to bring architect plans to a future Board meeting showing what the site could look like. Community centre aspirations would be built into this brief, as well as a play area, a multi use games area and housing.

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

**\*9 Storm damage and water penetration update**

The Property and Asset Manager's report updated the Board on work that had taken place on over 400 of the Council's properties as a direct result of the severe 2013/14 winter storms. Two update reports had previously been presented to the Board in June 2014 and January 2015. Due to the complexity of works required, work had been organised into 3 phases:

**Phase 1:** immediate stabilization and emergency repair to areas of significant damage and water penetration, to include immediate removal of sodden cavity wall insulation. This stage was almost entirely complete although there were a couple of properties that had been brought to officers' attention later on.

**Phase 2:** Addressing less obvious failures of the external envelope of the building, including re-pointing, brickwork, roof works, door and window replacements. Again, the majority of these works were now complete. There remained a few properties where problems had

been more complex to solve. This phase had highlighted where previous planned programmes of maintenance had not captured all areas of property improvements to the level that the Council would have liked. This information could now be used to plan accordingly for future programmes.

**Phase 3:** The Council were about to embark on this phase that addressed issues left by the removal of cavity wall insulation. It was important to note that the solutions required would differ from property to property and officers were working closely with specialist contractors to assess the options. A significant amount of time had been spent educating tenants with regard to the benefits of, or problems with, cavity wall insulation. Many tenants wanted what had been taken away replaced, but there was the need for the Council to carefully consider its next steps in the best interest of both the tenant and the property. If not, properties could easily end up in the same position as two years ago should there be further extreme weather events. It was stressed that wet insulation was worse than having no insulation.

The approximate cost of the remedial works to date was in the region of £1 million. Claiming on the Council's insurance was a long process and approximately £450,000 compensation had been received so far. A further payout was expected within the next few months. The full costs would never be recovered as each affected property had an excess of £100. It was reported that there was the possibility of grant funding being available, depending on how the Council chose to re-insulate its properties. Members noted that there was a not a 'one size fits all' solution.

Officers had learnt a great deal from the incident and the experience had added knowledge in the following areas:

- the fabric and construction of Council properties;
- running future maintenance programmes to ensure properties were more robustly protected from storm/water damage;
- good and bad practice with regards to insulating properties.

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

## 10 **Condensation awareness update**

The Property and Asset Manager's report updated the Board on on-going issues relating to condensation and mould in Council properties. There had been a noticeable steady rise in tenants complaining about condensation and damp issues, many of which resulted in Maintenance Surveyors carrying out lengthy inspections and investigations. Condensation and damp was often the result of people's lifestyle and a property having:

- inadequate heating;
- inadequate insulation;
- inadequate ventilation;
- possible excessive moisture production.

In many of the cases investigated, the problems could be significantly improved or solved when tenants changed the way they lived in their properties. Every opportunity was taken to raise awareness of such issues via a variety of methods, including articles in Housing Matters magazine, stalls at tenant events and leaflets.

Currently, the ventilation of tumble driers was an area that fell under tenants' responsibility. This often caused significant issues within Council properties and the report sought the ability to install appropriate ventilation in order to protect the property as officers saw

necessary. For a minimal cost this would save significant officer time and safeguard the fabric of the properties concerned.

It was the Council's responsibility to ensure its properties had heating systems that were adequate, affordable and fit for purpose. However, many tenants were classified as being in fuel poverty and officers supported these tenants in a variety of ways. Front line staff were trained to recognise the signs of fuel poverty and act accordingly.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the contents of the report be noted in relation to condensation, thermal efficiency and fuel poverty and how the Council was addressing those issues.
2. that where it is deemed appropriate, the installation of ventilation for tumble driers in certain properties be approved.

**\*11 Handy person scheme review**

The report of the Property and Asset Manager outlined to the Board the outcomes of the first six months of the handy person service trial scheme (October 2015 - March 2016). Following a recommendation from a Task and Finish Forum the Board agreed to an initial six month trial of a handy person scheme for tenants of EDDC. The trial scheme was open to all tenants in sheltered accommodation, all tenants over the age of 70 or with a disability, and all tenants on the Individual Garden Maintenance scheme. The service had two parts:

1. to provide a free handy person service for specific tenants.
2. to carry out EDDC small scale repairs, under the approximate value of £100.

One aim of the trial was to find out if by passing small jobs to the handy people, EDDC would save on overall costs and be able to fund the handy person service through these savings.

The report concluded that the scheme had been very popular with the tenants that used the service. It provided benefits other than purely financial. Overall take up had not been as high as anticipated. Take up was reasonable with sheltered tenants, but had not been very high with general needs tenants and more work promoting the scheme would be required. When the scheme was proposed it was anticipated that the savings made by passing the small EDDC jobs to the handy persons would cover the majority of the costs of running the handy person service for tenants. The figures in the report demonstrated that this had not proved to be the case. If the number of small jobs passed to the handy persons could be increased, and the selection refined to be the most cost effective jobs, such as doors, fencing and kitchen units, locks, light bulbs and toilet repairs then more of the handy person scheme could be paid for by the savings achieved.

**RESOLVED:** that the outcomes of the six month trial of the handy person service be noted.

**12 Handy person scheme future options**

The Property and Asset Manager's report asked the Board to consider whether or not the Housing Service continued to offer a handy person service in the future. It also outlined ways the service could work to ensure best value for money and best service for current and future customers.

The two options given were:

1. discontinue the handy person scheme at the end of the pilot trial.
2. continue with the handy person service with one of the following scenarios:
  - a. continue with running the service as it is currently.

- b. continue to run the service with the contractors and consider introducing charges for some or all tenants.
- c. employ a handy person in-house.
- d. employ an in-house handy person and introduce charges for some or all tenants.
- e. employ an in-house handy person, introduce charges for some or all tenants and also extend the service out to private customers and take on work for Home Safeguard.

The report suggested that if the Board decided to continue with the service after August 2016 that delegated powers be given to the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities and the Property and Asset Manager to decide on the best way forward for the service. The aim would be to reduce the costs within a five year timescale, with regular reporting to the Board.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the handy person service be continued, with delegated powers given to the Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment, the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities and the Property and Asset Manager to decide on the best way forward with the service along the lines of the various scenarios outlined in the report.

### **13 Gas servicing contract 2016-2020**

The Property and Asset Manager's report updated members on progress towards tendering a new gas maintenance, safety and heating systems contract to commence on 1 October 2016 and to run for a period of four years, with the option of a further extension for up to a two year term. It contained the timetable for the retender of the contract and a breakdown of the contract evaluation criteria. The report also requested authorisation for the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment and the Property and Asset Manager to award the contract to the successful tender bid following the tender bid exercise that had commenced (May – July 2016). EDDC were working jointly with Mid Devon District Council to procure the contract.

**RECOMMENDED:** that authority be given to the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment and the Property and Asset Manager in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities, to award the contact to the winning tender as determined through the joint procurement exercise currently underway with Mid Devon District Council.

### **\*14 Use of Right to Buy receipts**

The Housing Development and Enabling Officer's report provided an update on property currently being acquired using Right to Buy receipts and Commuted Sums. A number of properties that were considered suitable to add to the Council's housing stock were listed in the report. Based on the figures in the report the Council remained on target to meet deadlines to spend the Right to Buy receipts by 30 September 2016 and 30 December 2016. Officers were also working on other options to spend the Right to Buy receipts beyond January 2017, which was the likely time the Commuted Sums that were currently match funding the property acquisitions would have run out. Options included working with Registered Providers to bid for the Right to Buy monies and possibly borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board.

**RESOLVED:** that the update report on the use of Right to Buy receipts and Commuted Sums to secure suitable property to add to the Council's affordable housing stock be noted.

**15 HRA Outturn report 2015/16**

Members were asked to note the final position for the year end and the Housing Accountant's report compared this outturn against the budgets set for 2015/16. During the year monthly budget monitoring reports had informed members of the anticipated year end position. It was noted that the surplus this year was greater than the budgeted surplus by approximately £1 million and the report suggested that this sum was transferred into the HRA Business Plan Volatility Reserve from the HRA, giving it a total sum of £4.4 million.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the HRA outturn position for 2015/16 be agreed.
2. that £1 million be transferred into the HRA Business Plan Volatility Reserve.

**\*16 Housing senior management structure**

The Strategic Lead – Housing Health and Environment's report considered the interim senior management structure in the housing service and confirmed a more permanent structure suitable for delivery of services to the Council's tenants and customers in the private rented sector.

Following the retirement of the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager, recruitment to the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager post produced two excellent internal candidates who performed better than the external competition. The Housing Needs & Strategy Manager position was filled on a permanent basis and the Property & Asset Manager filled on an interim basis for one year. The interim period expired in May, which prompted a review and the need to confirm a structure going forward. A permanent appointment was made to the position of Property and Asset Manager and the Board congratulated the postholder on this.

The current senior management structure in Housing was shown in the report. This had worked well over the past 12 months with individuals demonstrating a great passion, energy and commitment to their work. There was a good mix of experience and creativity, fresh ideas, whilst recently being able to reward aspiring younger talent, and having an eye to future succession planning. This structure was operated some time ago prior to colleagues acting up and taking on additional duties.

The Strategic Lead – Housing Health and Environment reported that he anticipated a further retirement in the next two years and proposed to review the structure again when that event occurred.

**RESOLVED:** that the implementation of the housing senior management structure as set out in the report be noted.

**\*17 Housing and Planning Act 2016**

The Strategic Lead – Housing Health and Environment reported that the Housing and Planning Act 2016 would create radical changes to how the Council operated as a social landlord. Regard of the Act would be needed when revising and refreshing the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. It was noted that Overview Committee had been requested to consider the Act.

**RESOLVED:** that the Housing and Planning Act 2016 be noted.

- \*18 Reduction in social housing rents and income management CIH charter for housing**  
The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment presented to the Board two publications; a briefing note on the reduction in social housing rents, from the Chartered Institute of Housing; and ‘income management: CIH charter for housing, by the Chartered Institute of Housing. This set out six commitments to work to and offered a good working guide to good practice.

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

- \*19 Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Task and Finish Forum**  
The Board was presented with the scoping document for the forthcoming Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Task and Finish Forum (TaFF). The first meeting would be held at 10am on Friday 17 June. Following changes to the membership of the Housing Review Board, the Chairman invited other members of the Board to join the TaFF

**RESOLVED:** that the membership of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Task and Finish Forum be confirmed as Councillors Megan Armstrong, Ian Hall and Pauline Stott, tenant representatives Angela Bea, Mike Berridge, Joyce Ebborn and Pat Rous, and independent community representative Christine Drew.

- \*20 Dates of future Housing Review Board meetings**  
The Board noted the dates of forthcoming HRB meetings. These would start at 2:30pm and would be held in the Council Chamber, Knowle, Sidmouth. The dates were as follows:  
Thursday 8 September 2016  
Thursday 3 November 2016  
Thursday 12 January 2017  
Thursday 9 March 2017

**Attendance list**

**Present:**

Cllr Pauline Stott (Chairman)  
Cllr Megan Armstrong  
Cllr Ian Hall  
Cllr Brenda Taylor

Co-opted tenant members:

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

Independent community representatives:

Julie Bingham  
Christine Drew

Officers:

Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager  
Mark Dale, Senior Technical Officer  
Penny Evans, Education Ranger  
Amy Gilbert, Property and Asset Manager  
John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment

Penny Hartnell, Community Development Apprentice  
Victoria Robinson, Community Development Worker  
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 Peter Faithfull  
Cllr Douglas Hull  
Sylvia Martin - Tenant Scrutiny Panel  
Peter Sullivan - Tenant

**Apologies:**

Cllr Jim Knight

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