

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 8 September 2016**

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

The meeting started at 2.30pm and ended at 4.05pm.

#### **\*21 Public Speaking**

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

#### **\*22 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 16 June 2016 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

#### **\*23 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.

Pat Rous: Personal interest - housing tenant.

#### **\*24 Matters of urgency**

##### **Tenant recruitment**

The Chairman welcomed Victor Kemp to the meeting. Following a recruitment process Victor had applied for the vacant tenant/leaseholder representative position on the Board and would be formally co-opted on to the HRB by Council in October 2016, as the only remaining applicant. The Chairman suggested that the “Getting Involved” tenant leaflet be taken to and distributed at the forthcoming tenants’ conference to encourage more tenants to come forward and express an interest in serving on the Board when vacancies arose. It was noted that a review of the tenant and independent community representative recruitment and selection processes would be added to the forward plan.

#### **\*25 Exclusion of the public**

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.

**RESOLVED:** that there are two confidential items that officers recommended should be dealt with after the public (including press) have been excluded.

#### **\*26 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 advised the Board that Exe Bank and Danby House in Exmouth had now been sold to Devon and Cornwall Housing. Open market housing would be provided at the front of the site, with 13 shared ownership and social rent properties proposed at the back. A planning application was currently being considered and it was hoped that permission would be granted and work on the site would start soon.

**RESOLVED:**

1. that a review of the tenant and independent community representative recruitment and selection process be added to the forward plan.
2. that the forward plan be noted.

**\*27 Annual report to tenants**

The Housing Projects Officer's report asked the Board to comment on and approve the draft of the annual report to tenants. It was noted that the draft was currently in word text format but would be graphically designed once the wording had been finalised. The report would be sent out to all tenants with the December copy of Housing Matters magazine. It would be available on the Council's website from late October and would be emailed to all staff and councillors.

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

**\*28 Review of housing service complaints April 2015 – March 2016**

The Housing Landlord Services Manager's report provided the Board with information on formal complaints received in relation to the housing service for the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016. Formal and informal complaints were monitored carefully in order to learn from them and use them to improve services wherever possible.

Between April 2015 and March 2016 40 formal housing complaints were received. One complaint went straight to stage 2 (to be considered by the Monitoring Officer). 12 of the remaining 39 went straight from stage 1 (to be considered by the Strategic Lead) to stage 2. There was an increase in the number of new stage 1 complaints received and the time taken to issue a full response to all stage 1 complaints. There had been a slight increase in the number of complaints about staff and customer service, but predominantly the complaints were concerning repairs and maintenance, usually concerning damp or mould. The response time for investigating and replying to complaint at stage 1 was on average 21.5 calendar days. Formal housing complaints were now benchmarked through the HouseMark benchmarking club, and this demonstrated that EDDC took longer to deal with formal housing complaints than other social housing providers.

The main messages and learning points revealed by complaints received in 2015/16 were outlined in the report and noted by the Board. Complaints were monitored, recurring themes identified and mistakes learnt from. The Strategic Lead, Housing, Health and Environment advised the Board that he had discussed the report with the housing management team to ensure that staff learnt from the points identified in the analysis.

**RESOLVED:** that the number and type of complaints received during 2015/16, and the learning points arising that would be used to improve the Housing Service, be noted.

**29 Sewage treatment plants**

The Property and Asset Manager's report updated the Board on the current position regarding the sewage treatment plants (STPs) that serve council properties and sought approval on the proposed updating of some plants and the proposed changes to the way in which both tenants and private users linked to the STPs were recharged for the service.

The Housing Service currently owned and managed 15 STPs across the district. These served a total of 55 properties, 22 of which were council properties. The others were ex-council properties sold under Right to Buy

WCI Sewage Treatment Ltd recently undertook a survey of all the Council STPs, giving a very good idea of the current condition of each one and highlighted where there were some potential issues. 12 STPs should not need replacing for at least 10 years, many longer. Three of the STPs were identified as needing urgent attention within the next year:

- The STP at Brookside, Broadhembury required either immediate remedial work which would cost around £4,000 or full replacement costing about £21,000. The report suggested that remedial work is tried to see if it would prolong the life of the plant for a few more years.
- The STP at Porch Cottages, Smallridge requires replacement, costing in the region of £27,000.
- The STP serving 5 & 6 Peek Mead requires replacement, estimated to cost around £9,000.

The likely remedial work/replacement costs which would need to be met in the next few months would be in the region of £40,000. Quotations for the work were currently being obtained.

Officers were looking at the possibility that some or all of the STPs could be adopted by South West Water (SWW), however, this would involve significant cost. The report asked the Board to consider whether they would like officers to investigate further with SWW as to whether they would consider adopting any of the plants, understanding that this would involve further expenditure. It was noted that this was a core area of business for SWW and not necessarily a risk EDDC needed to be managing. There were significant risks from a compliance perspective in terms of day to day management of the STPs. The majority of STPs in the region were managed by SWW, who were industry experts. It was felt that once an STP was only serving private houses steps should be taken to pass the ownership and maintenance of this plant to the private properties.

The Property and Asset Manager's report also proposed that a full review of costs involved in managing the STPs be undertaken to ensure that tenants and private users were paying equal costs for the provision of sewage treatment. These costs should include an element for management and administration. The report also suggested that where it could be shown that tenants had paid considerably more for their sewage than private owners linked to the same STP, some form of compensation should be offered to the current tenants.

#### **RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the necessary expenditure on the three sewage treatment plants needing urgent maintenance/replacement in the coming year be agreed.
2. that officers investigate the possibility of passing some/all of the sites over to south West Water, acknowledging that this may involve potentially significant costs to bring the plants up to standard.
3. that the charges made to both tenants and private owners as outlined in the report be reviewed and compensation be paid to tenants if this is felt appropriate.

### **30 Lift replacements**

The report of the Property and Asset Manager requested permission for the replacement of two passenger lifts at Albion Court, Exmouth and Morgan Court, Exmouth.

The lift at Morgan Court was installed in 1973 and although a new control panel and new signalisation was installed in 2002, the lift was now in major need of replacement. The number of reported failures in recent years had risen to an unacceptable level and visually the lift was showing obvious signs of wear and tear. Complete replacement of the lift would cost in the region of £85,000 - £90,000. For an extra £5,000 the current lift could be

increased in terms of size so instead of an eight-person capacity, the lift could be extended to thirteen-person capacity.

The lift at Albion Court had not experienced the same frequency of breakdowns as Morgan Court, however, a recent survey had outlined a similar situation with regards to the risk of failure at the site. There were obvious signs of corrosion on the lift doors at Albion Court, partly due to the outside location and exposure to the weather. Complete replacement of the lift would cost in the region of £80,000 - £85,000.

The report proposed using funding from the HRA capital budget for major improvements to existing properties. There was not a current lift replacement programme and it was recommended that the other six lift sites be considered for replacement within the next few years, and that this should form an element of the investment required to council housing stock in the refreshed business plan. There were also a number of properties that did not currently have a lift, where it could be shown that there was a need for one.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the Housing Revenue Account capital expenditure be used for the replacement of the lifts at Albion Court and Morgan Court in Exmouth, with the lift size being increased where possible.

### **31 Use of Right to Buy receipts update**

The Housing Enabling and Allocations Officer's report provided an update on property currently being acquired using Right to Buy receipts and commuted sums. It also set out a proposal for future spending.

A number of properties that were considered suitable to add to the Council's housing stock were listed in the report. Members noted properties already purchased and those currently being purchased, which the Housing Enabling and Allocations Officer updated at the meeting. 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. There was a further £104,500 in receipts to spend by 30 December 2016, which was likely to amount to two additional properties.

Officers were also working on other options to spend the Right to Buy receipts beyond January 2017, which was the 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 Housing Revenue Account and Public Works Loan Board.

Positive responses had been received from Registered Providers. However, officers were concerned that the restrictive requirement set out in the agreement with Secretary of State for spending the receipts may prevent the Registered Providers from being able to use the Right to Buy money. There was a real danger that next financial year the Council would be paying money back to the Government, with interest.

The Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities advised the Board that she would be lobbying the new Housing Minister on a number of issues, including relief on stamp duty and many of the proposals that would have a huge impact on the HRA. The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment had already written to the two local MPs highlighting issues raised in the CIH (Chartered Institute of Housing) and CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) report "Investing in council housing – the

impact on HRA business plans” and lobbying for support of the recommendations contained in that report.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. 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.
2. that delegated authority be given to the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities, and Chair of the Housing Review Board to approve further purchases to meet the Right to Buy December 2016 spending deadline and extending into next quarter using either Housing Revenue Account funding or a loan from the Public Works Loan Board as match funding.

**\*32 HRA financial monitoring report 2016/17**

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 2016/17 at the end of month four (July 2016).

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.

Attention was drawn to the challenges that faced the Council regarding how much money must be spent on providing new social housing (only 30% of which could be funded by retained Right to Buy receipts) and the dates by which that expenditure must be incurred.

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

**\*33 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 3 November 2016

Thursday 12 January 2017

Thursday 9 March 2017

**\*34 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).

**35 Award of gas service and maintenance contract**

The Property and Asset Manager's report advised members on the results of the re-tendering of the gas service and maintenance works to gas appliances in council homes, and confirmed the award of the contract. The contract had been awarded to the contractor with the highest combined score quality/price score with 50% of the total score based on quality and 50% price.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the new four year gas service and maintenance contract is award to Liberty Group Ltd.

**36 Disposal of two council houses and land with planning permission for a two bedroom house at Normandy Close, Exmouth**

The Housing Enabling and Allocation Manager's report sought support to change a previous decision made by the Housing Review Board on 6 March 2014 that proposed to appoint suitable contractor(s) to construct an additional house, demolish and rebuild and refurbish no's. 24 & 26 Normandy Close. Instead it was now recommended on financial viability grounds that Council dispose of 24 & 26 Normandy Close along with planning permission for an additional dwelling that adjoined the properties.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the request to change a previous decision that enables officers to proceed to dispose of 24 & 26 Normandy Close, with planning permission to construct an additional dwelling on the open market be approved

**Attendance list**

**Present:**

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

Co-opted tenant members:

Pat Rous (Vice Chairman)  
Mike Berridge  
Joyce Ebborn

Independent community representatives:

Christine Drew

Officers:

Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager  
Mark Dale, Senior Technical Officer  
John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment  
Marian Hitchcock, PA to Strategic Lead Housing, Health & Environment and Housing  
Paul Lowe, Housing Enabling & Allocations Manager  
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs & Strategy Manager  
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer  
Mandy White, Accountant

**Also present:**

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

Victor Kemp – Tenant  
Josie Ireland – Tenant Scrutiny Panel

**Apologies:**

Angela Bea, tenant  
Julie Bingham , independent community representative  
Cllr Steve Gazzard  
Amy Gilbert, Property and Asset Manager  
Giles Salter, Solicitor  
Sylvia Martin, Tenant Scrutiny Panel

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