

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 7 September 2017

Attendance list at end of document

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

***16 Public speaking**

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited those present to introduce themselves. She informed the Board that a previous tenant representative, Sue Saunders, had been taken into hospital and circulated a card to be signed.

***17 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 15 June 2017 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***18 Declarations of Interest**

Mike Berridge: Personal interest - family member lives in a Council owned property and a housing tenant.

Joyce Ebborn: Personal interest – housing tenant.

Pat Rous: Personal interest - housing tenant.

Cllr Ian Hall: Personal interest – family member lives in a Council owned property and uses Home Safeguard.

***19 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. Members were advised that items that would be coming forward and added to the plan were the Tenant Scrutiny Panel report, a report on the introduction of Universal Credit and a report about joint working in Broadclyst around the community centre.

RESOLVED: that the forward plan be noted and updated.

20 Housing Revenue Account Business Plan update

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment's report presented the updated Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan to the Board. The Business Plan set out the known income and expenditure plans and a series of assumptions projected over the next thirty years.

The Business Plan was originally produced to coincide with the reform of social housing finance and the introduction of self-financing. It had now been updated to include the latest developments and challenges likely to affect the HRA over the next few years. The Business Plan was a key policy document for the landlord element of the housing role.

The Business Plan had matured over eleven years and reflected ambitions and priorities. Producing a Business Plan was a good discipline and guided the annual budgeting process. The HRA was in a healthy position so that the service could afford to keep tenants' homes in good condition and deliver good quality housing management services. However,

it needed to be carefully monitored and managed. It was a dynamic document, with complex spreadsheets underpinning it which could be manipulated to model various financial scenarios.

There had been some key operational considerations, which had recently prompted a review of the business, including the governments rent reduction policy, and work had been undertaken with Capita on some technical/financial pieces of work. The Plan was based on a series of assumptions and predictions about income and expenditure. It was noted that asset information regarding stock condition would benefit from being more up to date, and a stock condition survey would be undertaken and the results built into business planning process. The impact of Universal Credit on rental income was unknown, but from experience elsewhere in the country the introduction was likely to have a negative effect on rent income. A development programme for 25 additional homes every five years was also factored into the Plan.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet note the contents of the draft Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2017-2022 and approve the Plan.

***21 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 2017/18 at the end of month four (July 2017).

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 Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities suggested that the success of the service should be flagged up and included in the monthly performance report going to Cabinet. Good news stories should be better communicated.

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

22 Responsive repairs and works to void properties contract procurement process

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment's report updated the HRB on the progress being made to tender and procure a new responsive repairs and works to voids contract. The Board were invited to agree the appointment of consultants to support the Project Group through the procurement, and the revised terms of reference for the Project Group were presented.

The Project Group had been reconfigured, consisting of officers to oversee the drawing up of the specification and the procurement process. The project was extremely large and complex with an estimated value over a 10-year period of well in excess of £100million. It was an involved procurement process and could be subject to challenge. The EDDC Legal team would be drawing up the contract, but were not able to provide support with procurement, specification and the technical aspects of the work. The Devon County Council procurement team were overseeing the procurement of the contract, but did not

have the capacity to give detailed or intensive assistance. Therefore, it was intended to go out to tender for consultants to support officers through the whole process and specifically with assistance in drawing up the contract specification, tender documents and evaluation, contract award, TUPE, mobilisation and so on.

Tenants would be kept fully informed by regular reports to the Repairs Service Review Group and the Tenant Involvement Forum, as well as specific consultation events as and when required. The HRB would be kept engaged in the process with regular reports.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet note the progress being made on the renewal of the responsive repairs and work to void properties contract;
2. that Cabinet approve the direction of travel and the terms of reference for the project group formed to discuss the procurement;
3. that Cabinet approve the brief for the appointment of procurement consultants.

(Christine Drew, independent community representative, requested that her vote against the proposal be recorded).

23 Fire safety review and policy update

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment reported on an internal review of fire safety following the Grenfell Tower fire in London. Fire safety was a key element of compliance work and a priority for the Council as a landlord. The Housing Review Board were invited to recommend to Cabinet an updated fire safety policy which outlined the Council's approach to fire safety in housing. It was anticipated that new learnings and revisions to fire safety practice would emanate from the Grenfell Tower inquiry, and this would be embraced when it emerged.

It was acknowledged that tenants also had a critical role to play in fire safety. There was a need for good staff awareness of the fire safety policy and tenants needed to be aware of it too. It was noted that hoarders were a significant risk to fire safety. It was also suggested that East Devon become a non-smoking housing provider.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet adopt the fire safety policy and endorse the approach towards fire safety in Council owned housing.
2. that Cabinet approve the inclusion of an article on fire safety in the next Housing Matters magazine.

24 Compliance review

The Senior Technical Officer – Asset Management reported on an internal review of property and asset related compliance. This was a priority area of service delivery for the Council as a responsible landlord with tenant safety at the centre. It was critical that good practices were adopted and basic compliance requirements exceeded wherever possible. The Council employed a dedicated Compliance Surveyor.

Compliance covered a wide range of areas including gas safety, electrical safety, asbestos management, fire safety and legionella. The Council also adhered to the Construction Design & Management Regulations 2015 and Building Regulations. The Council had legal obligations to fulfil, however, it also adopted good practices with solid fuel, passenger lifts, stair lifts and track hoist servicing, clos-o-mat servicing, rainwater harvester servicing, air

source heat pumps, solar PV panel servicing and servicing and maintaining a number of sewage treatment plants and boreholes.

To ensure that the Council's housing service was compliant it regularly reviewed compliance. The OpenHousing computer system held information on the housing stock and when certain components were due to be serviced. Each month servicing extracts were sent to contractors to ensure they carried out the servicing in line with legislation or best practice, once the service has been completed data was then uploaded to show that the service had been carried out. Each month a report was produced by OpenHousing giving an overview of compliance. These reports were important as they would highlight if the Council was not compliant, and action could be promptly taken to rectify this.

To ensure the housing service remained compliant it was important that tenants were aware of the Council's legal duties as a landlord. Regular articles in the Housing Matters Magazine would create more awareness around compliance and why it was important to allow contractors in to their homes to carry out servicing. The report also proposed that awareness sessions were held within the community where tenants could come along to a coffee morning and talk to staff about health & safety.

It was noted that gas safety checks were undertaken on a 10-month cycle. Contractors were only gaining access to 75% of properties on their first attempt. The profile and importance of this needed to be raised amongst tenants. It was suggested that an article on this should also be included in the Housing Matters magazine.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet agree the recommendations outlined in the compliance review.

25 Sewage treatment works progress

The Board considered the report of the Engineering Projects Manager, which updated the HRB on the current position regarding the sewage treatment plants (STPs) that served Council properties, and sought approval on proceeding with steps to transfer properties onto the public sewerage system.

The EDDC Housing Service currently owned and managed 15 sewage treatment plants across the district. These served 55 properties, only 22 of which were council properties. The others were ex-council properties sold under the Right to Buy. The current 15 STPs were of varying types ranging from simple septic tanks to more complex processes. Engineers had found a way to transfer 10 of these, the details of which were contained in the report.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet approve that applications for First Time Sewerage should be submitted at up to 10 locations, and
2. that Cabinet approve that applications for sewer requisitions should be submitted at 3 locations at a cost of £2,500 per location,
3. that Cabinet approve further consideration being given to options for transfer of sites which are not eligible for the above.

26 Tenancy succession policy

The Housing Needs and Enabling Manager's report presented to the Board the new tenancy succession policy. The rules on succession were given in the tenancy agreement

but it was good practice to also have a succession policy in place to ensure that all cases of succession were treated fairly, consistently and in accordance with current legislation.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet approve the tenancy succession policy,
2. that Cabinet approve the inclusion of an article raising tenants' awareness of the succession policy in the Housing Matters magazine.

***27 Revision of tenancy agreement**

The Board were made aware of planned revisions to the tenancy agreement. The current tenancy agreement required updating to bring it into line with current practice and legislation. The consultation process was lengthy if significant changes were being made. The Board would be kept informed of progress.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note that the tenancy agreement was in the process of being revised.

28 Annual report to tenants

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment presented the draft of the annual report to tenants for 2016/17. The draft was in word text format and would be graphically designed once the wording had been finalised. The Board felt that every District Councillor should receive a copy of the annual report.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the content of the annual report to tenants, subject to the information being graphically designed for reproduction in the December Housing Matters magazine.

***29 Performance digest – quarter 1 monitoring report**

The Board was presented with the Housing Service performance indicator report for quarter 1 2017/18, with details of selected indicators measuring performance across the Housing Service.

The Board discussed various issues including rough sleepers, anti-social behaviour, the St Andrews Road shared house and welcome packs for tenants. The fantastic work of the SWITCH team was noted. A request was made for ward members to be informed of new tenants moving into their area.

RESOLVED: that the performance of the Housing Service be noted by the Board.

***30 Housing Review Board selection panel**

The Board noted that following the resignation of Angela Bea, there was a vacant tenant representative position on the Board, with two tenants expressing interest in joining the Board. Some of the previous members of the selection panel were no longer Board members so the Board were asked to select three new members.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board selection panel consist of Councillor Megan Armstrong, tenant Mike Berridge and independent community representative Christine Drew, and the Chairman Councillor Pauline Stott. Councillor Ian Hall would substitute where necessary.

***31 Dates of the forthcoming Housing Review Board meetings**

It was noted that the district council would shortly be having a presence at Exmouth Town Hall, with housing officers located there. It was suggested that the 2018 HRB meetings be held in the Town Hall, Exmouth.

The Board noted the dates of the HRB meetings for the forthcoming civic year:
Thursday 2 November 2017 – 2:30pm, Council Chamber, Knowle, Sidmouth
Thursday 11 January 2018 – 2:30pm, Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall
Thursday 8 March 2018 – 2:30pm, Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall

Attendance list

Present:

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

Co-opted tenant members:

Pat Rous (Vice Chairman)
Mike Berridge
Joyce Ebborn

Independent community representatives:

Julie Bingham
Christine Drew

Officers:

Graham Baker, Senior Technical Officer – Asset Management
Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager
Amy Gilbert, Property and Asset Manager
John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment
Andi Loosemoore, Rental Manager
Mike Purcell, Interim Property and Asset Manager
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Rob Ward, Housing Accountant

Also present:

Cllr Jill Elson, Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities
Cllr Simon Grundy
Josie Ireland, tenant
Peter Sullivan, tenant

Apologies:

Cllr Steve Gazzard
Victor Kemp, tenant
Danielle Furzey, Housing Options Manager
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs and Strategy Manager
Giles Salter, Solicitor

Chairman Date.....