

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Exmouth Town Hall on 8 March 2018

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.30pm and ended at 4.25pm.

***50 Public speaking**

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. She gave particular thanks to all the officers for their assistance over the recent period of snow and also thanked the tenants who went out of their way to help each other.

Councillor Megan Armstrong queried the timing of the publication of the HRB agendas. She requested that the agendas be produced earlier so that the Tenant Involvement Forum had longer to consider the papers. The Democratic Services Officer and Solicitor explained that agendas were produced and published online in accordance with statutory guidelines. Both tenants and HRB members could view the documents at the same time, as soon as the agenda was publicly available. It would be impractical to produce the agendas any earlier due to pressures on officers' time.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment brought to the Board's attention a colourful pamphlet providing an update on the countryside outreach project. From 2015 the Board had funded one and a half days per week, for an Education Ranger from the Countryside team to work in all areas of the district with high levels of council housing. The Chairman requested that one of these leaflets be provided to all district councillors.

***51 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 11 January 2018 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

Tenant Peter Sullivan raised minute 41, rental exchange scheme. He explained some concerns of the Tenant Involvement Forum (TIFF) over data protection issues. They felt that the scheme should be an 'opt in' one, rather than an 'opt out'. It was noted that the decision to join to scheme had already been made by the Board and approved by Cabinet and Council. It was Experian's scheme and the Council had no control over how it was operated, but the basis of the scheme was trying to overcome the unfairness social housing tenants often experienced trying to access credit.

***52 Declarations of Interest**

Pat Rous: Personal interest - housing tenant.

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

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

Peter Sullivan: Personal interest – housing tenant.

***53 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, made a request for extra care housing to be added to the forward plan. Extra care housing facilities was included in the Housing Strategy and should be included on the forward plan. A report would be produced on what had been provided so far and the Council's current position.

The Chairman also requested that a report on modular house building be added to the forward plan for a future meeting.

RESOLVED: that the forward plan be updated and noted.

***54 Homelessness Reduction Act**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment's report provided the Board with a summary of the main features of the new legislation. The new Act, which would become live in April 2018, set out significant changes to tackling homelessness and required local authorities to completely review current systems and introduce a culture change in homeless prevention and reduction.

The report set out an overview and provided a high level summary of the homelessness legislation and the duties, powers and obligations on housing authorities and others towards people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Act signaled a significant change to the national approach to preventing homelessness and required local authorities and their partners to adapt existing protocols to ensure that they implemented the new system in accordance with the guidance and code of practice.

Preparing for the implementation was taking a considerable and sustained effort from the Housing Options team. The changes would require a dramatic shift in homelessness operations. The limited supply and difficulty in accessing temporary and permanent accommodation in the district would be a big challenge for the Council, particularly the lack of supported housing for people who found it difficult to live independently in the community. The aim would be to deliver a service that prevented homelessness wherever possible and secured suitable housing for those homeless households who required the Council's assistance.

It was noted that staff training was critical to the effective implementation of the new scheme and a range of training opportunities had been provided to staff to help smooth the transition from the current familiar system to the new approach. A new member of staff had been recruited and it was hoped to recruit another. It was noted that EDDC jointly funded a young persons worker with social services (DCC) through Young Devon to help prevent homelessness in young people.

A big change was the requirement on the council to intervene earlier. The requirement had moved from 28 days to 56 days as well as a requirement to produce a personal housing plan for each person approaching the council as homeless. The legislation required decisions to be made at a number of key points during the applicant's journey. The council had a prevention duty, a relief duty and a housing duty.

It was noted that the Homelessness Reduction Act fell outside of the remit of the Housing Review Board, but a report had been requested at the last meeting. The Chairman asked for an update report to be brought to a future Board meeting. The Strategic Lead –

Housing, Health and Environment advised that a report on homelessness would be taken to Cabinet during the summer and that this could also be presented to the HRB.

Councillor Ian Hall raised a specific case of homelessness in Axminster and thanked the officers for their support. He hoped that investigations would take place into the root causes of homelessness in general. Another request was made for information on the number of homeless people the council had helped over the past 12 months. Members were advised that this featured in the quarterly performance digests on the Board's agenda.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note and understand the main requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

55 Review of housing policies

The Board was presented with 16 housing policies, requiring its approval. It was important to have an up to date suite of policies covering the approach to areas of housing policy where there was room for discretion and interpretation. The Council's position as a landlord was set out in the various policies and would need to be monitored for compliance, variations and application. The policies had all been considered by the Strategic Management Team. Each policy had a responsible officer and a review date. They would need to be kept under review and updated when changes occurred that could impact on the stance adopted. Staff and tenants would need to be made aware of all the policies once they were adopted.

The following policies were presented for the approval of the Housing Review Board:

- Allocations Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Car Park Management Policy
- Decant Policy
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- Garage Management Policy
- Gas Safety Policy
- Improvements to Council Properties Policy
- Income Management Policy
- Leasehold Management Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Recharging Policy
- Repossessions Policy
- Responsive Repairs Policy
- Succession Policy
- Void Management Policy

Various issues were discussed during consideration of the policies and officers answered questions that were raised.

New and existing tenants would be informed of the new policies and policy updates, and these would be placed on the website.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the housing policies.

56 Credit union consideration

The Rental Manager's report asked for the Board's approval for the Council to recommend the City of Plymouth Credit Union to housing tenants as a replacement for Plough and Share, since it stopped trading.

The City of Plymouth Credit Union was officially registered in 1997 and was a member of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme. It was an ethical, not for profit, member-owned financial organisation dedicated to the economic development of the community of Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. It provided financial services to all of its members, including those who had been excluded from traditional financial services.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve advising tenants of the City of Plymouth Credit Union if asked for a replacement service for Plough and Share.

***57 Financial monitoring report 2017/18 – Month 10 January 2018**

The Board was presented with a summary of the overall financial position on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), HRA Capital Programme and the Business Plan for 2017/18 at the end of month ten (January 2018), with forecasts to the end of the year.

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 in line with the budgeted levels within the 30 year business plan. The current budget and year end forecast figures were noted. The cost of financing was also predicted to be on budget including the payoff of the £1.3m 2018 tranche of the Public Works Loans Board loan.

It was noted that asbestos surveys and works were forecast to be over budget by approximately £200,000 as a result of the continued survey programme and resultant management projects. The impact upon the HRA had been mitigated by delaying the energy efficiency program and non-critical fire safety works to the next financial year. Change of tenancy works on void was also forecast to be overspent by over £500,000 as the service continued to use the opportunity a void brought to carry out extensive works that the older stock required without it inconveniencing tenants.

Progress on the purchase of new housing stock was good, with 26 properties purchased and one due to complete.

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

***58 Responsive repairs and works to void properties procurement process**

The Property and Asset Manager's report updated the Board on progress being made to renew the contract for day to day repairs and void work to council housing stock. The contract would be procured through the route of competitive dialogue with negotiation. The OJEU (Official Journal of the European Community) notice was published on 19 February. Potential bidders were able to see clearly all of the requirements as well as the process they would be expected to go through to bid for the contract. This should help the fully determine if they were likely to want to bid for the contract and should eliminate any bidders that may realise later down the line that they no longer wished to proceed. To date 21

expressions of interest had been received. A bidders event was held on 28 February 2018 and 12 organisations attended. This gave potential bidders the opportunity to come and learn more about East Devon as an authority.

Tenant involvement in the procurement process was also outlined in the report. The website had been updated and an article would be included in the next edition of the Housing Matters magazine to ensure that all tenants were up to date with progress. Members were invited to contact the Property and Asset Manager directly with any queries or concerns.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the progress on renewing the responsive repairs and works to void properties contract.

***59 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 Chairman announced that tenant member and Vice Chairman Pat Rous was retiring from the Housing Review Board. On behalf of the Board the Chairman thanked Pat Rous for her work and dedication over the years. Pat thanked the Board and in particular thanked the tenants and officers for all their support.

***60 Date of the next Housing Review Board meeting**

The Board noted the provisional dates of the HRB meetings for the forthcoming year:
Thursday 21 June 2018 – 2:30pm, Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall.
Thursday 20 September 2018 – 2:30pm, Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall.
Thursday 22 November 2018 – 2:30pm, Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall.
Thursday 24 January 2019 – 2:30pm, Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall.
Thursday 28 March 2019 – 2:30pm, Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall.

Attendance list

Present:

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

Co-opted tenant members:

Pat Rous (Vice Chairman)
Sue Saunders
Peter Sullivan

Independent community representative:
Christine Drew

Officers:

Graham Baker, Senior Technical Officer, Asset Management
Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager
Charles Derry, Tenant and Communities Section Leader

Amy Gilbert, Property and Asset Manager
John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment
Tim Laurence-Othen, Housing Projects Officer
Andi Loosemoore, Rental Manager
Paul Lowe, Housing Enabling and Allocations Manager
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs and Strategy Manager
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Rob Ward, Housing Accountant

Also present:

Cllr David Barratt
Cllr Jill Elson, Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities
Cllr Steve Gazzard
Cllr Simon Grundy

Alek Williams, tenant

Apologies:

Mike Berridge, tenant representative
Julie Bingham, independent community representative

Cllr Ian Thomas – Portfolio Holder - Finance

Chairman Date.....