

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Exmouth Town Hall, Exmouth on 21 June 2018**

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

The meeting started at 2.30pm and ended at 4.50pm.

#### **\*1 Public speaking**

Councillor Steve Gazzard declared a personal interest as a council tenant. He then raised the issue of the method of payment for tenants to pay their rent. The previous rent book had been replaced by a card, which he reported was causing some tenants problems when paying with the card at the post office. He asked whether the change from rent book to card had ever been consulted with tenants and formally agreed through the committee decision making process.

The Rental Manager explained that the cards had to be implemented quickly as the computer software running the rent books was no longer supported by the IT system, as there was no longer anyone in Strata that could run the interface. It was not possible to put the tenants' rent payment information on the cards as these were produced by an outside company, which raised data protection issues, and the rent amount changed annually.

Officers reported that they were not aware of any problems in terms of tenants paying their rents, as rental income performance remained very high, and would be interested to know of the specific issues experienced by tenants paying rent via the Post Office. The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment apologised that the Board had not been informed of the change and agreed to bring a report to the next Board meeting to explain the rationale and process behind the change.

**RESOLVED:** that a report explaining the rationale and process behind changing some tenants from rent books to cards be brought to the next meeting of the Housing Review Board.

#### **\*2 Appointment of vice-chairman**

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and invited everyone to introduce themselves.

Nominations for Vice Chairman were received for co-opted tenant member Peter Sullivan.

**RESOLVED:** that tenant representative Peter Sullivan be appointed Vice Chairman of the Board for the ensuing year.

#### **\*3 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 8 March 2018 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

#### **\*4 Declarations of Interest**

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

Peter Sullivan: Personal interest – housing tenant.

**\*5 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.

During the meeting the following items were added to the forward plan:

- Explanation of the change from the use of rent books to rent cards.
- Update report on the integrated asset management procurement exercise.
- Further implications from the Grenfell Tower fire enquiry,
- Modular homes in East Devon.

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

**\*6 Tenant Scrutiny Panel report – scrutinising community centres**

Sylvia Martin, tenant representative of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) presented the TSP report reviewing the recommendations of scrutinising community centres. The previous review and report had found that community centres had largely been neglected and looked sad, outdated and unwelcoming. Upon review the TSP found a vast improvement, with evidence of efficient management and good organisation. Upcoming events were well advertised and there was an improvement in the use of the premises.

A continuing problem was with the cleaning of the community centres, particularly after events, as cleaning was done on a timetable which did not necessarily always coincide with bookings. It was hoped that the profile of the community centres could continue to be raised as there was a common misconception that they were only available to council tenants.

In conclusion the report made the following recommendations:

1. Make a 5 year plan for the refurbishment and modernisation of community centres a matter of urgency.
2. Make the financial statement easier to comprehend with more detail on individual centres, including utility usage.
3. Clarify the contractual cleaning responsibilities of StreetScene and their implementation.

The TSP thanked and congratulated all the officers that they had worked with on the project for their contribution and support. On behalf of the Board the Chairman thanked the TSP for their fantastic work.

**RESOLVED:** that the Tenant Scrutiny Panel report and its recommendations be noted.

**\*7 Homelessness in East Devon**

The Board received the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment's report which had been presented to Cabinet in June. The report highlighted the challenges EDDC were facing with rising levels of homelessness and securing temporary accommodation and long term affordable housing for homeless households. This had implications on the Housing Revenue Account and was therefore important for the Board to be aware of.

East Devon had experienced an increase in homelessness consistent with national trends, and an extended set of statutory duties to tackle homelessness. Homelessness had always been a priority for the Council and had been managed through prevention, timely advice

and assistance, early intervention, resulting in relatively low numbers of homeless cases and the minimal use of temporary accommodation.

There had been an increase in homeless approaches, more complex cases and a reduction in available accommodation, resulting in a build-up of homeless cases in temporary accommodation. This did not appear to be a seasonal or short-term variation, and when the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and welfare benefits reductions was factored in, there was a need to plan for a continuation of this trend. A careful review of the Homelessness Strategy was also needed.

It was noted that it was costing more to provide temporary accommodation and the budget had increased significantly. There was a shortfall between the amount the benefits system would pay and the actual cost of providing accommodation. However the Council had a statutory duty to meet any overspend resulting from the implementation of homelessness duties. It was essential that good value for money was achieved and to optimise subsidy claims when securing temporary accommodation. There was a need to ensure a greater supply of temporary accommodation available, to expand the rent deposit and bond scheme to get more people into the private rented sector and try to create more shared houses.

Concern was expressed that other agencies were not providing enough support and that a whole review of help and support was needed. East Devon were frequently being asked to provide not just a property, but one 'with help', with no additional support available to offer to people with a greater complexity of needs. For example, for people coming out of prison and hospital discharges. It was noted that the housing officers met with other agencies when there were particular crisis's with individuals, but other agencies tended to refer to EDDC rather than help with solving the issues. There needed to be an awareness with other partner agencies that EDDC was struggling with its duty. In particular it was felt that housing associations could do more to house homeless applicants.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment's report proposed (and Cabinet had agreed) to the creation of a temporary or homeless accommodation officer post to support households in temporary accommodation and source new temporary accommodation for homeless households.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment was congratulated for his excellent report and the housing service was thanked for all the work they undertook.

**RESOLVED:** that the report on Homelessness in East Devon and the recommendations approved by Cabinet be noted.

**\*8 Housing and safeguarding report to Devon Safeguarding Adults Board**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment presented to the HRB a report he had produced for the Devon Safeguarding Adults Board on housing and safeguarding. He wanted EDDC to be seen as an exemplar in terms of good practice.

It was noted that safeguarding was the core responsibility and business for a housing provider. There was a lot of good practice amongst housing providers, but there was still room for improvement. Safeguarding for adults was a relatively new responsibility for social housing providers and there was still a lot of learning. This also involved good leadership at a senior level, and good training at all levels, including with partners and contractors.

On behalf of the Board the Chairman thanked the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment for his report.

**RESOLVED:** that the report to the Devon Safeguarding Adults Board be noted by the Housing Review Board.

**9 Rental exchange scheme**

The Landlord Services Manager's report updated the Housing Review Board on the effects of the General Data Protection (GDPR) on the Rental Exchange Scheme.

It was reported that under the new GDPR regulations it was unfair to expect tenants to opt out of the scheme and that Experian were unable to offer a suitable opt in scheme.

**RECOMMENDED:** that Cabinet approve that no further (previously agreed) action be taken towards implementation of the Rental Exchange Scheme.

**\*10 Integrated asset management procurement update**

The Board considered the report of the Property and Asset Manager, which updated members on the progress of the integrated asset management procurement process, which was still on track with the timetable.

A three stage procurement process was being used:

- Standard Selection Questionnaire (SQQ)
- Invitation to Submit Initial Tender (ISIT)
- Negotiation stage leading to an Invitation to Submit a Final Tender (ISFT)

A bidders day took place on 28 February 2018, with representatives from seven companies attending. Expressions of interest were received from 21 different companies, with seven bidders submitting their SQQ by the deadline. A successful ISIT bidders day was held on 25 April. Subsequently, one of the incumbent providers announced that they would be withdrawing from the process as they felt the new model did not fit in with their future business plans. The six remaining bidders submitted their ISIT responses by the deadline with the three highest scoring bids moving through to the final stage of evaluation.

The negotiation stage began on 11 June and consisted of an initial one day of negotiations with each bidder. Bidders would then be asked to submit their final tender (ISFT), incorporating any adjustments that had arisen during the negotiation phase. Officers had attended the Tenant Involvement Forum to ensure that tenants were kept informed of progress and thanked those tenants that had been involved to date. Members wanting further information relating to the procurement between HRB meetings were invited to contact the Property and Asset Manager directly with any queries or concerns.

It was noted that additional support had been required from procurement consultants, echelon, and that therefore the procurement costs had increased, but this additional investment was worthwhile and vital to ensure the most suitable partner to work with over the next 10 years was selected.

**RESOLVED:** that progress made by officers in relation to the procurement of the new integrated asset management contract be noted by the Housing Review Board.

**11 Void property – 4 Camperdown Terrace, Exmouth**

The Housing Enabling and Allocations Manager's report sought a decision on how to deal with the void process of a council property when taking into consideration possible Exmouth regeneration aspirations.

4 Camperdown Terrace was a three bedroom detached house standing in large grounds. The property was in a poor condition and required almost complete refurbishment, since becoming vacant at the end of October 2017. The property/grounds had always been considered as having the potential to unlock further redevelopment of that part of Exmouth, including demolition and building of affordable homes. Since the property had become vacant officers had been looking into various options: treat as a standard void and rent to a family, to convert into a shared house for single people, or demolish and develop for council housing.

The options outlined in the report for the property were:

**Option 1** – Make secure and leave the property empty.

**Option 2** - Demolish and leave the site redundant for years whilst waiting for any possible regeneration works to commence. This was likely to cost circa £26,000 plus vat. Plus additional costs to fence off the site.

**Option 3** – The housing department / housing company to develop the site independently of any future plans to regenerate this area, this could be to the serious detriment of any future regeneration redevelopment opportunities in this area.

**Option 4** – To convert into a shared house for three single people. Conversion costs around £1,200 - £1,800 m<sup>2</sup>. Estimated area of 90m<sup>2</sup> at an average figure of £1,500 m<sup>2</sup> = approx. £135,000.

**Option 5** - To commit approximately £40,000 and rent it to families under a licence or flexible tenancy agreement. This may only be for five years, but maybe longer. If the potential arose to redevelop the site in conjunction with any regeneration proposal this could then be fully considered without the implications of a standard tenancy being in place. Weekly rent £90.07 = £4,683 per annum over five years = £23,418 less costs for void periods, rent loss and management and maintenance costs. Bed and Breakfast / temporary accommodation costs for a three bedroom property is on average £250 per week, £12,000 per annum with a potential saving to the council over five years of around £52,000.

**RECOMMENDED:** that Cabinet agree to the progression of option 5 – to agree an appropriate level of funding from the HRA to complete necessary works to make the void property habitable, whilst taking into consideration the potential regeneration plans for Exmouth.

**12 Financial monitoring report – HRA draft accounts 2017/18**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment presented the Housing Accountant's report which provided the Board with an extract from the draft statement of accounts for 2017/18 for items relating to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA showed the main areas of anticipated income and expenditure on landlord activities for the year. Producing a HRA had been a statutory requirement for Councils who manage and own their own stock for some time, and therefore a key document for the Board to influence.

The 2017/18 budget was set to achieve a surplus of £0.522m. The final position gave a surplus for the year of £0.801m. This leads to an increase in the HRA balance of £0.662m. The adopted range for the HRA balance was £2.1m to £3.1, which leaves the HRA £0.801m above the adopted range and it was recommended to members that this sum be transferred to the Future Housing Development Fund.

The main variants in the outturn position were set out in the report and noted.

**RECOMMENDED:** that Cabinet agree the recommendation within the narrative report from the Strategic Lead Finance to add the £0.8m in year surplus to the New Housing Development Fund.

**RESOLVED:** that the extract report from the 2017/18 Statement of Accounts relating to the Housing Revenue Account be noted.

**\*13 Modular homes in social housing**

The Board had previously expressed an interest in learning more about the potential for using modular homes as part of the Council's response to housing need. The Property and Asset Manager presented her report, which raised awareness of this alternative form of housing supply. Modular housing was factory-produced housing, which was fabricated off site, then completed once put into position.

The advantages of modular construction were:

- speed of building
- cost
- efficient use of space
- construction quality

However, there were many issues to be taken into account when considering modular housing for the social housing sector, with much to be learnt from studying the experiences of other providers.

The Chairman commented that it was interesting to know the approaches that other housing providers in the country took with regard to modular homes. There were small parcels of land available in the district and acquisition opportunities available to consider. It was suggested that modular homes be added to the list of housing considerations, particularly in view of the need for urgent accommodation in the district. It was noted that the Overview Committee had also been investigating the provision of modular homes.

**RESOLVED:** that the modular homes be added to the forward plan and a provider of modular housing be invited to a future meeting of the Housing Review Board.

**\*14 Dame Judith Hackitt's final report**

Dame Judith Hackitt's final report on her review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety, following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, was brought to the Board's attention. It acted as a reminder to EDDC as a housing authority and responsible landlord of its responsibility for fire safety in its buildings.

The Compliance Surveyor outlined a number of fire safety actions being taken by EDDC to keep tenants safe. She advised that all tenants and leaseholders would be written to and offered guidance. It was suggested that the fire safety checks to be undertaken by a specialist consultant be video recorded and shown to the Board in a future meeting

The Hackitt review showed that in too many cases people who should be accountable for fire safety had failed in their duties. In future, the Government would ensure that those responsible for a building must demonstrate that they have taken decisive action to reduce building safety risks and would be held to account.

**RESOLVED:** that Dame Judith Hackitt's final report be noted by the Board.

**15 Request for exemption to contract standing orders – extension to Homemaker contract**

The Board considered the Rental Manager's report, which asked them to recommend to Cabinet the approval for Landlord Services to request an exemption to contract standing orders so that the Homemaker support contract, which came to an end in March 2018, could be extended. This would allow the time needed to prepare for a tender of the service in a years' time. This would mean that residents would not be put at risk by having nothing in place in the meantime. The exemption would give transparency to the decision and involve members in the decision making.

Homemaker was a non-profit organisation who had been providing support services to EDDC's Housing department since 2010. The primary purpose of Homemaker was to prevent homelessness and promote independence. They offered specialist advice and support to individuals and families who may be at risk of losing their home. They also offered support to people who may be moving into new accommodation and living independently for the first time.

**RECOMMENDED:** that Cabinet extend the Homemaker contract, which ended in 2018.

**\*16 Dates of the forthcoming Housing Review Board meetings**

The Board noted the dates of the HRB meetings for the forthcoming civic year:  
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

The Chairman suggested that a tour of some of the housing estates, community centres, garages and parking issues across the district be arranged for the Housing Review Board, preferably in September 2018.

**RESOLVED:** that a housing tour be arranged for members of the Housing Review Board.

**Attendance list**

**Present:**

Cllr Pauline Stott (Chairman)  
Cllr Megan Armstrong  
Cllr John O'Leary  
Cllr Helen Parr  
Cllr Brenda Taylor

**Co-opted tenant members:**

Mike Berridge  
Peter Sullivan

**Officers:**

Michelle Davidson, Compliance Surveyor  
Danielle Furzey, Housing Options Manager  
Amy Gilbert, Property and Asset Manager  
John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment  
Andi Loosemoore, Rental Manager  
Paul Lowe, Housing Enabling and Allocations Manager  
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer  
Debbie Wills, Rental Officer

**Also present:**

Cllr Jill Elson, Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities  
Cllr Brian Bailey  
Cllr Alan Dent  
Sylvia Martin, tenant  
Alek Williams, tenant

**Apologies:**

Cllr Tom Wright  
Cllr David Barratt  
Sue Saunders, tenant representative  
Heather Salter, tenant  
Julie Bingham, independent community representative  
Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager

Giles Salter, Solicitor  
Rob Ward, Housing Accountant

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