

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall, Exmouth on 22 November 2018

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.30 pm and ended at 4.45 pm

1 Public speaking

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

2 Chairman's welcome

The Chairman welcomed tenant Pat Gore to the meeting. Pat had attended interviews, along with another tenant, Cat Summers, on 14 November, for the two vacant tenant/leaseholder representative posts on the Board. Subject to Board approval, both tenants would be formally co-opted by Full Council on 12 December 2018 and become members of the Housing Review Board.

RECOMMENDED: that Pat Gore and Cat Summers be co-opted on the Housing Review Board as tenant/leaseholder representative members.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 20 September 2018 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

4 Declarations of interest

Pat Gore: Personal interest - housing tenant.

Peter Sullivan: Personal interest – housing tenant.

Alek Williams: Personal interest – housing tenant.

5 Housing Review Board 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:

- Draft housing service plan.
- Draft Housing Revenue Account budget.
- Update on the integrated asset management contract and the work taking place on mobilising the contract.
- Update on the impact of Universal Credit.

RESOLVED: that the forward plan be noted and updated.

6 Revision to tenancy agreement

The Housing Project Officer's report updated members on progress made in the development of a revised tenancy agreement. The report contained the final draft of the revised tenancy agreement, along with an explanation of the changes made and sought approval of the revised tenancy agreement. With this approval, it was planned to enter a seven week statutory consultation with tenants from 12 December 2018.

The report also recommended that the Strategic Lead for Housing, Health and Environment, and the Portfolio holder be given the authority to make any minor amendments to the tenancy agreement following the statutory consultation.

In September 2017, a project group, consisting of housing service managers and officers and legal representation, with Mobile Support Officer consultation, was set up to revise the tenancy agreement to ensure that it reflected changes in policy and legislation implemented since the previous revision of the agreement in 2015. The HRB were notified of this in September 2017. Tenants were also updated on progress through the Tenant Involvement Forum and suggested amendments were received through the Tenant Readers Panel.

Running concurrently with the tenancy agreement revision, housing teams had been reviewing and updating their housing policies, making sure that the revised tenancy agreement would be consistent with them. Following the updating of policies, the project group members were given a last chance to suggest amendments to the tenancy agreement.

Following approval of the revised tenancy agreement a preliminary notice letter would be sent to all tenants, along with a document detailing the changes that had been made to the tenancy agreement. The statutory consultation would run for six weeks from 12 December 2018 until 31 January 2019.

Any further amendments arising from the consultation period would be incorporated into the tenancy agreement before the final agreement is presented to HRB on 28 March 2019 for approval. This would then go to Cabinet and Full Council for ratification. The formal Notice of Variation and tenancy agreement would then be sent to all tenants on 25 April 2019. The new tenancy agreement would then come into effect from 10 June 2019, six weeks after the Notice of Variation was issued.

During the meeting the Vice Chairman raised a number of issues queried by the Tenant Involvement Forum (TIF). The Solicitor reminded the Board that the draft tenancy agreement had been considered by a barrister, but suggested that officers go through the concerns raised by the TIF and amend the wording of the clauses where necessary.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet approve the revised tenancy agreement, and
2. that Cabinet agree the next steps and timescales detailed in section 2 of the report,
3. that delegated authority be given to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities and the Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment to make minor amendments to the tenancy agreement following the consultation process.

The Senior Technical Officer's (Asset Management and Compliance) report updated the Board on the current position in relation to fire safety in blocks of flats, and set out a proposed way forward.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 set out requirements in relation to general fire safety precautions that landlords must adhere to. The basis of the legislation was centred on the completion of Fire Risk Assessments (FRA). By adopting a fire risk assessment approach, there was the need to look at how to prevent fire from occurring in the first place, by removing or reducing hazards and risks (ignition sources) and then looking at the precautions to ensure that people were adequately protected, if a fire were still to occur. FRAs were updated every two years. Any urgent recommendations were implemented urgently. Non-urgent recommendations were packaged up and tendered. FRAs were confined to communal areas and means of escape in accordance with the guidance. FRAs were in place for all of the properties that required one.

Throughout the period in which fire safety work had been carried out EDDC had established a very close working relationship with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. They had provided an expert level of guidance and support throughout and were extremely satisfied with the manner in which EDDC had approached and were addressing fire safety, so much so that EDDC were held up as a flagship for other housing providers to aspire to.

The emphasis on fire safety had resulted in a detailed review of the fire safety policy, which was carried out in 2017. The policy:

- gives clarity in the main statutory regulations/legislation that applied and needed to be followed,
- defined the roles and responsibilities within housing, particularly in relation to upgrading/maintaining the buildings and managing the buildings.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment explained that there was a number of options in terms of spend, depending on the degree of urgency given to the fire safety works. The works highlighted in the report were essential and future FRAs would be done on a similar basis to that already done. The housing accountant advised that in the budget fire safety works could be prioritised over the new housing development fund, but this would mean that it was not possible to provide so many new properties. The three options for the delivery of outstanding fire safety works outlined in the report were:

1. Provide the complete budget to carry out all the work in the next financial year, approximately £3million.
2. Carry out the work over two financial years, approximately £1.5million per annum.
3. Carry out the work over three financial years, approximately £1million per annum.

It was noted that considerable resource would be required from the Property and Asset team to deliver the required work to prepare documentation to procure the work, whichever option was selected. It was therefore proposed to extend the employment of the Fixed Term Programmed Works Officer (Fire) beyond the initial twelve months.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet note the progress made in relation to fire safety in blocks of flats and agree the priority of future works to address property issues related to fire,
2. that members be aware of the significant budget required to bring all blocks of flats up to a fully compliant fire safety standard.
3. that Cabinet approve the extension of the employment of the additional Programme Works Officer (Fire Safety) for a further 12 months.

8 **Renewal of Advantage South West subscription**

The Housing Review Board noted the report of the Senior Technical Officer (Asset Management and Compliance) which set out the benefits of membership of Advantage South West and recommended continuing membership to the organisation.

Advantage SW was a limited liability partnership owned by Live West, North Devon Homes, Ocean Housing Group and Yarlinton Housing Group. The organisation was created in 2004, and its purpose was to improve homes and lives through collaboration and innovation. The three parts to Advantage SW were:

- New build properties; Advantage SW owned the rights to a number of house type designs. In 2017-18 they finalised a new range of designs to meet the current size aspirations of its members.
- The Procurement Consortium, started in 2008 and improved value for money for its members in the products used in new build, planned and responsive maintenance. The procurement consortium had saved its members over £36m in cashable savings and RPI avoidance.
- EnergySW; the resident energy brand provided in partnership with OVO Energy that was launched in November 2015.

During 2017-18 the procurement consortium had 12 members who between them owned over 100,000 properties. Each member paid an annual subscription that was calculated dependent on its size. EDDC's subscription for 2017-18 was £13,708, excluding VAT. Since 2010 EDDC had saved £740,981 and a further £521,303 of RPI avoidance through its membership of Advantage SW.

Advantage South West had established and were delivering a programme of accredited Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions on topics relevant to members' staff. EDDC staff were in the process of enrolling onto various CPD courses. Membership of Advantage SW also brought benefits in terms of access to the formal network of members that provides valuable advice and guidance, as well as the specific procurement expertise that Advantage SW itself had.

The report stated that membership of Advantage SW continued to be beneficial for East Devon District Council and that membership of the group should continue for 2019/20 at a cost of approximately £15,000 excluding VAT. Through the efforts of all involved, Advantage SW delivered:

- sharing of information and good practice
- access to procurement knowledge and technology
- value for money
- good products
- an increasing range of multi-supplier frameworks
- opportunities for resident involvement
- methods to reduce fuel poverty

The Board agreed that the housing service received excellent value from the subscription to Advantage South West.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve continuing to pay the annual subscription to maintain the membership to Advantage South West.

9 **Housing Revenue Account update to October 2018**

The Housing Accountant's report provided the Board with the current position to October 2018 and details of the year end forecast of the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2018/19. The HRA showed the main areas of anticipated income and expenditure on landlord activities for the year ahead. Producing a HRA business plan 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 notable items of budget variance were:

- Lower than expected employee costs as recruitment progressed.
- Increased forecasted expenditure on compliance related items such as works resulting from fire risk assessments.
- Higher than budgeted prices for the Air Source Heat Pump programme.

The report also provided the position of the HRA capital programme for both affordable housing and other capital items outside of the HRA. The business plan included a programme of expenditure to replace properties lost through Right to Buy sales and ensure that Right to Buy receipts were invested and not returned to central government. It was noted that if Right to Buy sales declined this would have an impact on capital expenditure in future years.

The housing accountant asked the Board for a steer about the length of time the money for Fire Risk Assessments and fire safety works should be spread (1 to 3 years). It was suggested that all remaining property purchases (excluding the current house of multiple occupation) be put on hold for the remainder of the year. The accountant agreed to bring budget setting scenarios back to the next Board meeting. It was also suggested that the Garage Task and Finish Forum be revisited.

RESOLVED:

1. that the Board note the Housing Revenue Account update to August 2018 report.
2. that the housing accountant present various budget setting scenarios to the next meeting of the Housing Review Board.

10 **Housing research study update: Your wellbeing your home**

The report of the Information and Analysis Officer provided the Board with an update on the first stage of a joint three year project with the University of Birmingham and LiveWest, exploring the relationship between housing and wellbeing and landlord satisfaction. The results would support service improvement.

The Chairman welcomed Laura Rychlewski, from LiveWest to the meeting. The Information and Analysis Officer presented the research findings so far, which centred around what mattered about a home, and why. It was noted that in comparison to the previous year's STAR satisfaction survey the figures had decreased slightly. The 'your wellbeing your home' research put the tenant at the heart, rather than EDDC as the landlord. The research considered:

- financial wellbeing – over 65 year olds and women and households with children were the most likely to struggle financially.
- health and wellbeing – mental health was a high concern.
- wellbeing and experience of home – there were general themes for what the role as landlord should be.

- top problems reported – those on the housing register, LiveWest tenants and EDDC tenants.
- reasons for wanting to move or stay in current home – the most important reason reported was a desire for long-term security in the home. Other important reasons given were quality of life, affordability and suitability.

The research demonstrated that respondents in social housing had better wellbeing than those on the housing register. Having a good home mattered for overall life satisfaction. It showed that social housing was not the cause of lower quality of life, but there was a need to understand the importance of the right home for the right person. The importance of emotional and physical security for a positive wellbeing that came with having a stable home was what mattered.

The Information and Analysis Officer reported that more data would come forward over the course of the three year longitudinal study. The research so far demonstrated how important the housing service was to the people of East Devon and how it should become more holistic about delivering housing services. It was important to educate all people that it was the home that mattered, not the tenure, as there was still a stigma attached to social housing.

On behalf of the Board the Chairman thanked the Information and Analysis Officer for her powerful and interesting presentation.

RESOLVED: that the Board note the first year's results of the 'your wellbeing your home' study.

11 **Home Safeguard system upgrade**

The Board considered a report that would be presented to Cabinet on 28 November seeking approval for the expenditure necessary to upgrade the Home Safeguard call handling system, as outlined in the business case attached to the report. The upgrade was a necessity for the continuation of the Home Safeguard Service, which in addition to the alarm for private, sheltered and corporate customers, provided the out of hours service for EDDC and Teignbridge District Council, plus lone working services for both authorities.

Councillor Brenda Taylor thanked Home Safeguard for the excellent service it provided.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the business case for the upgrade of the Home Safeguard call handling system.

12 **Dates of the next meetings**

The Board noted the dates of the HRB meetings for the forthcoming civic year:
Thursday 24 January 2019 – 2:30pm, Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall
Thursday 28 March 2019 – 2:30pm, Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall

Attendance List

Board members present:

Councillor Pauline Stott (Chairman)
Peter Sullivan, Tenants (Vice-Chairman)

Christine Drew, Independent Community Representative
Alek Williams, Tenant
Councillor Megan Armstrong
Councillor Helen Parr
Councillor Brenda Taylor

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

J Elson
S Gazzard

Officers in attendance:

Graham Baker, Senior Technical Officer Asset Management
Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead Housing
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Henry Gordon Lennox, Strategic Lead Governance and Licensing
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs and Strategy Manager
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Natalie Brown, Information and Analysis Officer (Housing)
Rob Ward, Accountant
Michelle Davidson, Property and Asset Management
Tim Laurence-Othen, Housing Projects Officer
Giles Salter, Solicitor

Councillor apologies:

Mike Berridge, Tenants
Julie Bingham, Independent Community Representative
Pat Gore, Tenant
Cat Summers, Tenant
Councillor John O'Leary

Chairman

Date: