

# **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at online via Zoom on 16 June 2022**

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

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.30 pm

### **1 Appointment of Chair for the meeting**

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Sarah Chamberlain, the Board were asked to appoint a Chair for the meeting. With agreement of the Board, tenant representative Sue Saunders was appointed Chair for the meeting.

### **2 Public speaking**

Co-opted tenant member of the Board, Steve Beer expressed his shock and sadness on the recent passing of Peter Sullivan and requested that a letter of condolence and appreciation of Peter's work be sent to his wife. Sue Saunders updated the Board that Peter's wife had requested that two rose trees be planted outside their home in his memory. An article would be included in the next Housing Matters magazine recognising Peter's work. The Housing Service Lead informed that Board that she had spoken to Mrs Sullivan and put some wording forward on behalf of the Council and would be attending Peter's funeral on 24 June, along with other EDDC representatives.

Co-opted tenant member Steve Beer also requested that expressing declarations of interest be made easier for tenants. In response to this he was advised that the Council had recently adopted a new code of conduct which all members of the HRB were bound by. Mr Beer was reassured that Legal and Democratic Services were available to provide guidance.

Councillor Dan Ledger, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities gave his thanks to Councillor Megan Armstrong for the fantastic work she had done over the years whilst she was in the role as Portfolio Holder. It was suggested that an article be included in Housing Matters.

### **3 Appointment of Vice Chair**

In the absence of the Chair the Board agreed to appoint a Vice Chair for the current meeting only. It was agreed that Councillor Brenda Taylor be appointed Vice Chair for the meeting.

### **4 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 April 2022 were received and accepted.

### **5 Declarations of interest**

No interests were declared.

### **6 Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency.

7 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no confidential/exempt items.

8 **Welcome to 3 new Housing Review Board members**

The Chair introduced and welcomed three newly co-opted members to the Housing Review Board; independent community representatives Sara Clarke and Rob Robinson, and tenant/leaseholder representative Sue Dawson (who had given her apologies for the meeting).

She also gave the Board the sad news that Peter Sullivan passed away on 27 May. Peter had made an outstanding contribution to the housing service. In terms of the Housing Review Board, Peter was elected on to the district council in May 2011 and served on the Board from 2011-14. Following this Peter was co-opted onto the Housing Review Board as a tenant representative in 2017 and was vice chair of the Board from 2018, until he stood down in January of this year due to ill health. The Board agreed that Peter would be sadly missed.

9 **Housing Review Board forward plan**

The Housing Service Lead 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 herself or the Democratic Services Officer.

During the meeting it was noted that the following items were intended to be brought to the September Board meeting:

- Garage sites suitable for development.
- Review of Resident Involvement Strategy
- Review of downsizing.

It was also noted that in preparing for the Social Housing White Paper the service was undertaking an intensive self-assessment exercise.

A request was made to add the stock condition survey to the forward plan and this was endorsed by the Board.

10 **Integrated Asset Management Contract**

The Housing Service Lead updated the Board on the delivery of the Integrated Asset Management contract, as part of a regular update to the Board as well as a direct response to ongoing concerns raised regarding the delivery of some key functions of the contract. She reported the drive and focus had been on specific areas of concern. As a result the action plan had been revised and was included with the agenda papers for the Board's information. The tenant repairs review group would monitor the action plan going forward. A focus session had been held in which members of the HRB had been invited to for a face to face meeting. Representatives from Ian Williams had also attended the meeting of the Housing Review Board.

The Housing Service Lead drew the Board's attention to the key performance indicators (KPIs) included in the report and the fluctuations. In terms of responsive repairs, since January, six of the nine KPIs were moving in a better direction. The complaint KPIs had improved slightly. An area of concern was reactive repairs - overdue jobs. This was a key area that was driving dissatisfaction with the service.

Voids were another main area to focus on. The void fluctuations showed a worsening performance and work was focussing on this area. The situation with Ian Williams was mainly due to labour shortages which had contributed towards a backlog of work. The voids were also larger and typically requiring more work than originally anticipated in the contract, and a realistic price review was needed, as well as a review of void standards. The void costs were driven by the type of properties and the condition they were returned in. There had also been problems clearing previous debt left on meters which had caused a delay, but officers were in discussions with a third party provider (TSM) debt clearing service to resolve this. The intention was to start a trial of this service from 1 July 2022. It was noted that pre-void inspections were useful in identifying issues that might impact on void times. The Housing Service Lead reported that this was something that had always been done, but the Covid-19 pandemic had prevented this and she was absolutely committed to reviewing the process to ensure that it was put back in place.

The customer satisfaction KPIs were good and also provided helpful feedback data. Officers continued to drive forward the importance of the need for contractors to leave paper surveys in tenants' homes. The areas for improvement were all captured in an updated action plan that accompanied the report.

Overall the Housing Service Lead reported that there were encouraging signs that recent focus and interventions were paying off, but there was still a lot of work to be done to continue to drive improved performance. It was noted that the Housing Service's own staffing issues remained of concern. In light of this the Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities requested that the Property and Asset Manager not report at the next meeting of the Housing Review Board to allow him and his team to focus on delivering the day to day work of the service. This work would be kept under review by the Housing Service Lead, the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment and the Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the Housing Review Board:

1. notes the update on the delivery of the Integrated Asset Management Contract; and
2. recommends to Cabinet that the updated action plan is adopted, as set out in the report, to address ongoing performance concerns that relate to the Integrated Asset Management Contract.

## 11 **Climate change update**

The HRB considered the report of the Senior Technical Officer (Asset Management and Climate Change) which provided information on retro-fit renewable measures and delivery to date, approach and current programmes, successful funding applications and continued delivery and bid planning for the future.

In 2020 EDDC was successful in bidding on a grant funding initiative for the installation of air source heat pump heating systems to 100 properties (this was delivered to 140 properties). The programme was further enhanced with other improvements, listed in the report. The enhanced element of the project was self-funded by EDDC.

In February 2022 EDDC was again successful in being awarded around £600,000 in funding through the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, which was part of a £1.5m commitment for delivery of a retrofit programme for 2022/23. A fabric first approach would be taken to delivery, focussing on external component upgrades and improved insulation measures to 50 properties having the worst energy performance rating.

EDDC were looking at other funding mechanisms and a collaborative approach to securing grant funds. Officers were carefully tracking all opportunities that existed for climate change and tenant home improvement opportunities. The Council's ambition was to be net zero by 2040 and it was recognised that the housing stock was a huge contributor to the carbon footprint. The housing service had excellent links to EDDC's Climate Change Officer and were working really positively with the team. Climate change and carbon reduction improvements would also be delivered through the planned works delivered by Ian Williams.

In response to a question about window replacements it was reported that a programme of works was being compiled and rolled out for window replacements and that the stock condition survey would better inform future programmes on a whole range of improvements/replacements and help with funding bids. The Council was committed to investing in and upgrading all of its stock.

The Housing Review Board endorsed the progress being made by the housing service to deliver on climate change objectives as set out in the EDDC Climate Change Action Plan and the Housing Service Plan 2022-2023.

## 12 **Finance report**

The accountant's report provided the Housing Review Board with current draft financial outturn figures for the housing revenue account and housing capital program for the 2021/22 financial year. The report also considered the implications of any forthcoming regulatory changes.

Producing a Housing Revenue Account had been a statutory requirement for Councils who managed and owned their housing stock for some time, and therefore a key document for the Board to influence.

It was noted that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was in a healthy position. The 2021/22 outturn surplus was £2.192m (£1.226m above final budget). The proposal for the allocation of this outturn surplus was:

- An increase of £1m in the planned maintenance/stock condition survey reserve (increasing it to £4.375m) taken from:
  - The £0.794m underspend within major repairs.
  - The £0.205m underspend in required revenue contribution to capital.
- The residual £1.191m to be placed into the capital development fund for future acquisition/development and climate change aspirations.
- There would be no change to the HRA balance, keeping it at the £3.1m adopted level.

In terms of capital expenditure and associated funding the housing accountant summarised that:

- A total of 11 acquisitions were completed within the year. There had been 12 right to buy sales, reducing the stock level by one property over the year.
- The £1.623m remainder of the additional borrowing taken out in March 2020 had been utilised in part funding the 2021/22 capital expenditure.

- The FRA capital works continued in 2021/22 and were solely funded by the associated earmarked reserve.

The Board noted the year end reserve levels which were contained in the report.

During Board discussion the following points were raised:

- There was an additional £1m in the planned maintenance reserve for the stock condition survey and catch up costs. There was also the option of borrowing for capital works that came out of this.
- £3.6m had been set aside for climate change acquisitions and it was also possible to borrow for this capital development.
- The Housing Task Force were looking at a huge variety of sites, both HRA owned and on the private market, to meet demand and the high priority ambition of the Council to increase its levels of housing stock. The Housing Task Force would be reporting progress to a future meeting of the HRB.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the Housing Review Board note the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital Finance 2021/22 year end outturn report is noted, and the recommend that the reserve recommendations are approved by Cabinet.

### 13 **Tenant satisfaction survey**

The Information and Analysis Officer's report explained that having information on tenant satisfaction was crucial to how the housing service was planned and monitored. Having accurate and up to date information on what tenants thought about the service enabled it to see how it was performing, and more importantly to ensure that informed decisions were made about how the service was shaped and planned for the future.

The last tenant satisfaction survey was carried out in 2020 and it was felt that it was timely to carry out another one. It was hoped to collect satisfaction data for all areas of the housing service and officers would also like to ask some additional questions around the cost of living as it was important to think and plan proactively on how best to support tenants who were affected by the current cost of living crisis. The Information and Analysis Officer also committed to ensuring that tenants have input in the creation of the survey in order to assist in what questions we asked and how they were asked. This will also be valuable in order to help us try and achieve good levels of engagement.

In response to a question about why tenants were leaving properties, the Information and Analysis Officer agreed to pass this information on. It was noted that information was also available on the number of voids in the quarterly housing performance indicator report.

The Board endorsed the housing service carrying out a housing satisfaction survey, within the existing budget of £5,000.

### 14 **Community Development: Food support**

The Board received and noted an update on the vital work being done by the Community Development team to address food poverty across the district.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic the Community Development team had been working with FareShare Southwest to set up a local food hub to support existing food providers and fill gaps. During the pandemic the team mapped what was already in the district and identified gaps and overlaps, before starting something new. The report outlined all the

work undertaken and support provided from June 2020 until August 2021 when EastDevon Food Partnership deliveries finally started. The report gave some case studies and also explained how this food support fitted in with the EDDC Poverty Reduction Strategy, which included:

- Maximising incomes.
- Strengthening families and communities.
- Promoting an inclusive economy.
- Improving health.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment stated that the Community Development team were the unsung heroes in housing. The food support initiative had helped so many people during a really difficult time. Having robust processes to support food poverty in place was great going forward during the cost of living crisis. It was noted that supermarket food donations were becoming harder to source and that the systems were working differently. However due to the links the Community Development team had created meant that the local hubs were doing ok and excess food was still being shared. It was also highlighted that the Community Development team were linking in closely with other areas of housing to ensure a one team approach was delivered. The Housing Service Lead pointed out the two case studies in the report that indicated the additional help that was being accessed by people coming forward for help with food.

#### 15 **Additional post - Data Officer (Property and Asset)**

The Property and Asset Manager's report asked the Board to note the request for an additional post of Housing Data Analyst to provide accurate validated data in relation to the variety of work undertaken by the Property and Asset team to ensure the housing stock remained safe, compliant and that tenants could also feel safe in their homes. Accurate validated data was an important tool in the delivery of property and asset/asset management and would also assist in achieving value for money from contracts. It was noted that at present there was insufficient capacity within the Property and Asset team to take on this role.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the Housing Review Board:

1. recommends to Cabinet the creation of the additional post of Housing Data Analyst to provide accurate validated data in relation to a variety of work undertaken by the Property and Asset team;
2. recommends to Cabinet to recommend to Council the additional budget of £40,000 to provide the post of Housing Data Analyst for the Property and Asset team.

#### 16 **Use of external consultants**

The Property and Asset Manager's report requested that the HRB accept the recommendation to engage specialist/external consultants to support the delivery of key services/projects. The housing Property and Asset team was currently under resourced. The engagement of a specialist would assist in the delivery of key projects and essential services to ensure that the housing stock remained safe, compliant and that the tenants could feel safe in their homes.

The Property and Asset team was currently very short staffed, with 14 vacancies, many of which were technical/surveyor posts. Recruitment remained a real challenge and at

this point the recruitment journey was unknown. Although the preference was to self-deliver the housing services' own projects, this was not possible due to the lack of resource in the team. In light of the ongoing recruitment issues where was a need to explore other options in order to deliver the asset management service. At present there was very little other option than to use external consultants in the delivery of the service.

In order to maintain service and deliver on targets it was proposed to use specialist external consultancy support. It was also likely that external consultant support would be required to delivery programmes of work arising from the stock condition survey. The Housing Service Lead reported that the procurement frameworks already set up were excellent, the turn-around in terms of being able to get on with jobs was very quick, and she had great confidence in these groups. There was a lot of due diligence in relation to the procurement groups and the pricing and awards methods were entirely transparent and widely used by neighbouring authorities.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the Housing Review Board recommends to Cabinet the use of existing budget to employ external consultants to support the Property and Asset Team to deliver planned works as required to ensure our housing stock remains safe, compliant and that our tenants can feel safe in their homes.

#### 17 **Q4 2021-22 Housing performance indicator report**

The Board noted the housing performance indicator report for quarter 4 2021/22 which detailed selected indicators measuring performance across the housing service. It was noted that this included figures for the number of evictions and void properties.

#### **Attendance List**

##### **Board members present:**

Sara Clarke, Independent Community Representative  
Rob Robinson, Independent Community Representative  
Stephen Beer, Tenant  
Sue Saunders, Tenant (Chair for the meeting)  
Councillor Brenda Taylor (Vice Chair for the meeting)

##### **Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)**

M Armstrong  
P Arnott  
P Faithfull  
M Howe  
D Ledger  
M Rixson  
E Wragg

##### **Officers in attendance:**

Sophie Davies, Housing Business and Customer Improvement Manager  
Graham Baker, Property and Asset Manager  
Natalie Brown, Information and Analysis Officer (Housing)  
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead Housing  
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment  
Rebecca Heal, Solicitor  
Paul Lees, Senior Technical Officer (Asset Management & Climate Change)

Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer  
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Manager  
Victoria Robinson, Community Development Officer  
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer  
Rob Ward, Accountant  
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)  
Darren Hicks, Housing Allocations Manager  
Yusef Masih, Interim Housing Services Manager  
Michelle Williams, Housing Service PA  
Kate Green – Ian Williams Ltd  
Arron Kelly – Ian Williams Ltd

**Councillor apologies:**

Sue Dawson, Tenant  
Cat Summers, Tenant  
Councillor Ian Hall  
Councillor Helen Parr  
Cindy Collier, Tenant  
Councillor Geoff Pook  
Councillor Sarah Chamberlain

Chairman .....

Date: .....