

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall, Exmouth EX8 1AW on 20 June 2019

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.30 pm and ended at 5.15 pm

1 Public speaking

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

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 of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 28 March 2019 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

4 Declarations of interest

Councillor Ian Hall: Personal interest – mother was a housing tenant and used Home Safeguard. Chairman of the Millway Rise Action Group.

Councillor Dan Ledger: Personal interest – employed by a third party contractor for the current repairs and maintenance service.

Peter Sullivan: Personal interest – housing tenant.

Cat Summers: Personal interest – housing tenant.

5 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency raised at the meeting.

6 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential or exempt items.

7 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.

The following items were added to the forward plan:

- Report on community development work.
- Resident involvement strategy.
- Position statement on the new integrated asset management contract and an update on the departure of the incumbent contractors.
- Housing's contribution to the climate change agenda, to include sustainability.

RESOLVED: that the forward plan be noted and updated.

8 **Housing Review Board induction**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment's report provided an introduction to the work of the Housing Review Board. It was intended for new members of the Board, and also a reminder for existing members. The report was a reminder of Housing Service priorities and the remit of the HRB. It would help the Board focus on key activities and the areas of service that mattered to tenants and service users. Members noted that the housing service ran a whole range of discretionary as well as statutory services.

The purpose of the Housing Review Board was to oversee and steer the Council's housing landlord activities. The report outlined the remit of the HRB and the aim and purpose for housing services, as well as future challenges and opportunities for housing, how the housing service was organised and gave a summary of the Housing Strategy, the overarching aim of this 'a decent home for all'. Tenants were involved in the decision making process and underpinned the work of the Board. It was noted that delivering new affordable housing was a challenge, with approximately 300 new homes per year required.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board use the contents of the report as part of their induction process.

9 **Housing Review Board 2018/19 annual report**

Members were asked to note the annual report of the Housing Review Board which highlighted the achievements and detailed the breadth of work undertaken by the Board over the last year. The Democratic Services Officer was thanked for producing the report.

RESOLVED: that the annual report be noted by the Housing Review Board.

10 **Integrated asset management contract update**

The Board received a detailed presentation from the Acting Housing Service Lead on the integrated asset management contract. The presentation covered the entire process and set out the key milestones that had been achieved since the project began in 2015. They also received a report summarising the final stage of the process on the mobilisation of the new contract. It was confirmed that final preparations were complete, with a 'go live' date of the 1 July 2019.

It was noted that Ian Williams Ltd was a very reputable contractor who were proud of their work in the community and with vulnerable people. It was a condition of the contract that all staff were DBS checked.

The Acting Housing Service Lead was thanked for her report.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the progress made in the mobilisation of the new contract with confirmation that the new contracting arrangements would begin on 1 July 2019.

11 **Housing Revenue Account Year End 2018/19 Year End position**

The Housing Accountant's report provided the HRB with an extract from the draft statement of accounts for 2018/19 for items relating to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA was the ring-fenced account for providing council housing and associated services and showed the main areas of anticipated income and expenditure on landlord activities for the year. Producing a HRA had been a statutory duty for Councils who owned and managed their stock for some time, and therefore a key document for the Board to influence.

The Board received a presentation from the Housing Accountant by way of an introduction to the HRA, which explained what the HRA was and the code principles to guide its effective management. He explained the differences between capital and revenue, as well as a simplistic balance sheet. He explained how the right to buy procedure worked.

It was noted that the current year surplus was £1.1 million. The income from tenants was £18.3 million. Expenditure was broken down into financing, management and overheads, maintenance and other expenditure, and improvements/contribution to additions.

The financial responsibilities of the HRB included:

- Approving the strategic direction of the HRA
 - 40 year Business Plan
 - Stock replenishment programme
 - Indebtedness
- Monitoring financial performance
 - Budgeting process
 - Benchmarking
 - Ensuring 'value for money'
- Adherence to the code principles

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet agree the recommendation within the narrative report from the Strategic Lead Finance to add the in-year surpluses to the earmarked reserve for fire related building works.

RESOLVED: that the extract from the 2018/19 statement of accounts relating to the Housing Revenue Account be noted.

12 **Tenancy agreement changes**

The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager's report summarised the process of updating the tenancy agreement and confirmed that the revised agreement came into effect on 17 June 2019.

It was noted that the tenancy agreement was a contract between the council and tenants. It was unique and bespoke to East Devon, although best practice research had been undertaken when updating the agreement.

RESOLVED: that the tenancy agreement update report be noted by the Housing Review Board.

13 **Tenancy policy update**

The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager presented the Housing Review Board with the EDDC tenancy policy, which had been updated to reflect changes made to the tenancy agreement.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the updated tenancy policy.

14 **Social housing regulator consumer standards**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment explained that the Regulator of Social Housing had recently written to all Registered Providers reminding them of their obligations under the Home Standard for ensuring that tenant's homes were safe. It was one of the Council's priorities as a landlord and it was important to always remain vigilant and ensure that it was fully compliant with the various requirements for tenants' safety. Since the Grenfell fire tenant safety was under greater scrutiny.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet agree to a self-assessment audit against the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer standards applicable to local authority social landlords.

15 **Homes legislation**

The newly appointed Property and Asset Manager introduced himself to the Board. He explained that the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 had come into force on 20 March 2019 and his report outlined the operation and extent of the new legislation. EDDC owned and managed in excess of 4200 properties which remained compliant and to a high standard. The legislation was designed to provide those tenants of 'slum landlords' greater access to the courts for a quicker remedy whilst protecting their tenancy from possible subsequent vindictive eviction.

Officers were confident that EDDC complied with the Act, maintaining its stock to a high standard and annually investing in planned maintenance and cyclical compliance works. There were also numerous checks and balances in place to ensure that EDDC remained compliant.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve that the Housing Service ensures that the properties in the Council's portfolio comply with the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018.

16 **Housing complaints**

The Landlord Services Manager's report provided the Housing Review Board with information on formal complaints received in relation to the Housing Service for the period April 2018 to March 2019. Formal complaints were monitored carefully to learn from them and use them to improve services wherever possible.

The Housing Service dealt with formal complaints through the corporate complaints two stage process:

- Stage 1 – complaints would be considered by the Strategic Lead.
- Stage 2 – complaints would be considered by the Deputy Chief Executive/Monitoring Officer.

Between April 2018 and March 2019 37 formal housing complaints were received. 15 of these went from stage 1 to stage 2. There was an increase in the number of new stage 1 complaints and the time taken to issue a full response to all stage 1 complaints. The main messages revealed by the complaints were noted in the Landlord Services Manager's report.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve that:

1. the housing leadership team re-iterate the importance of outstanding customer care, considering additional training and awareness of opportunities where appropriate.
2. the Property and Asset Manager reviews processes to ensure the repairs team are always providing timely responses to issues reported to them.
3. the Landlord Services Manager reviews processes to ensure appropriate communication and response from officers is given when dealing with complaints regarding antisocial behaviour and noise.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the contents of the report.

17 **Designated persons leaflet**

The designated persons leaflet, which explained what tenants could do if they remained unhappy with the way a complaint had been handled, was noted by the Board.

18 **Construction, design and management regulations**

The Board received a report due to go to Cabinet in July, for the adoption of a Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 Policy. It had been referred to the Board for information as much of the content of the policy applied to work of the housing service.

19 **Future rent policy and rent standard**

The Rental Manager's report explained the new rent standard and its implications to EDDC. Rents had decreased by 1% since 2016 except for a small number of exceptions where rents had remained static. This had meant a reduction in the amount of rent the council could collect over the past four years and therefore a reduction in the amount of services which could be funded from the rent collected. The council had the ability to increase rents from April 2020 to maximise income for the Housing Revenue Account.

It was noted that almost £19 million was collected in rents in 2018/19. EDDC was in the top quartile for rent collection, with over 99% of rents consistently collected for the past 11 years.

It was important to be mindful of the impact a rental increase on tenants. The rental team had strategies in place to help tenants who were struggling financially and these were outlined in the report.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the changes to how rents would be increased from 2020.

20 **Quarterly performance indicator report**

The Board was presented with the Housing Service performance indicator report for quarter 4 2018/19, with details of selected indicators measuring performance across the Housing Service.

The Board noted that the number of rights to buy had increased. The Rental Manager was thanked for maintaining high rental income performance. There were some issues to be addressed with housing complaints.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the performance of the Housing Service.

21 **Countryside outreach project**

The Board received an update on the countryside outreach project. From 2015 the HRB had funded one and a half days per week for an Education Ranger from the Countryside team to work in areas of the district with high levels of council housing. The aims of the project were to encourage more people to use their local green space and to provide a supported 'way in' for families and young people to spend more time outdoors.

The Board agreed that it was a very worthwhile investment and were shown a BBC Spotlight clip of the 'dragons den' which had been run in Honiton.

Attendance List

Board members present:

Councillor Tony McCollum (Chairman)
Peter Sullivan, Tenant (Vice-Chairman)
Christine Drew, Independent Community Representative
Cat Summers, Tenant
Councillor Ian Hall
Councillor Dan Ledger
Councillor Helen Parr

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

M Chapman
M Armstrong
P Faithfull
A Moulding

Officers in attendance:

John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager
Natalie Brown, Information and Analysis Officer (Housing)
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead Housing
Andi Loosemoore, Rental Manager
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs and Strategy Manager

John Taylor, Property and Asset Manager
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Rob Ward, Accountant

Board member apologies:

Mike Berridge, Tenant
Pat Gore, Tenant
Alek Williams, Tenant
Councillor Kim Bloxham

Chairman

Date: