

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Exmouth Town Hall, Exmouth on 20 September 2018

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.30pm and ended at 4.45pm.

***17 Public speaking**

There were no questions raised by members of the public

***18 Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 21 June 2018 were confirmed and signed as a true record. The Chairman announced that with regret tenant member Sue Saunders had resigned from the Board due to ill health. It was noted that this meant there was now another vacancy on the Board for a tenant/leaseholder representative.

***19 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.

***20 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.

RESOLVED: that the forward plan be noted.

***21 Community Development update**

The Housing Review Board received a presentation informing them of the activities and projects that Community Development Workers had undertaken. It also promoted further work that was to be undertaken to deliver all four Council priorities. The presentation included:

- SWITCH – the youth work sessions, fun days and festivals and Easter residentials.
- Community work – supporting community groups such as The Ottery Station, Open Arms.
- Running Honiton Dragons' Den.
- Early Help involvement – supporting families identified as needing additional support under early help and safeguard criteria.
- Right Track Program.
- South West Youth Games.
- Youth tenant conference
- Littleham Hub – mapping services and using an Asset Based Community Development approach to guide our next steps in supporting the people of Littleham.
- IT support for Universal Credit.
- Sidmouth family adventure days
- Enabling community-led community development - working with strategic and community-based partners to support the health and wellbeing networks emerging in many East Devon towns, and linking them up with social prescribing initiatives.

It was noted that the events were inclusive and that no one was discriminated against. Many opportunities were for the whole community, not just housing tenants. Referrals were received from social services and the police as well as self referrals for some of the schemes. The team helped to make families 'better families'.

The Board thanked the Community Development Workers for their presentation and congratulated them on their successful work. A request was made for the presentation to be appended to the minutes of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. that the Housing Review Board note the work of the Community Development team,
2. that the community development presentation be appended to the minutes of the meeting.

22 Installation of defibrillators across East Devon

The Chairman agreed for this item to be brought forward on the agenda as tenant Mike Passant had attended the meeting to discuss the installation and use of defibrillators.

The Landlord Services Manager's report brought to the Board's attention an exciting opportunity to help prolong lives in East Devon by installing defibrillators in community centres across the district.

The report proposed 12 suitable locations across the district:

- Ratcliffe House, Palmer House, Morgan Court, Albion Court, Bidmead community centres in Exmouth
- Park Close community centre in Woodbury
- Churchill Court community centre in Lympstone
- Broadview community centre in Broadclyst
- Trumps Court and Lymebourne community centres in Sidmouth
- Millwey community centre in Axminster
- Dunning Court community centre in Honiton

The defibrillators would be placed on the outside of the buildings so that they were continuously accessible to the whole community. The cost for 12 such units would be approximately £14,000 - £16,000, and it was proposed that this would come from the Housing Revenue Account. Mobile support officers could make the necessary monthly checks of the equipment. It was pointed out that there was a need to replace the pads when units had been used.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve that lifesaving defibrillators be installed and maintained at Housing community centres across the district.

23 Housing Green Paper – A new deal for social housing

The Board received the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment's report which summarised the detail of the Housing Green Paper and outlined suggestions that could form the basis of EDDC's response. The Housing Green Paper had been published in mid-August as a consultation on a number of changes being considered for social housing. Consultation would run until 6 November 2018. Much of the publication focused on regulation, tenant empowerment, complaints the stigma associated with social housing, safe and decent housing and expanding the supply of social housing and supporting home ownership.

The five core themes of the Green Paper were:

- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities.
- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership.
- Effective resolution of complaints.
- Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator.
- Ensuring homes are safe and decent.

Whilst it was recognised that there were some positives it was felt that the Green Paper was a missed opportunity to comprehensively address some of the big housing issues facing the country, and as such was regarded as underwhelming as a social policy document. The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment, in consultation with the Chairman of the Board and the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities would produce a reasoned response to the consultation and circulate a copy of the response to members.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet consider the contents of the social housing Green Paper, and agree the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment’s response on the key issues being proposed for the social housing sector.

24 Consultation on the use of receipts from Right to Buy sales

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment presented to the HRB a report summarising the detail of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government consultation on the use of receipts from Right to Buy sales. The report also presented the proposed response from EDDC’s Housing service, strongly advocating greater control over the use of Right to Buy receipts for local authorities. Consultation would close on 8 October 2018.

The message conveyed through the proposed response was that decisions over how Right to Buy receipts were used should be the responsibility of local housing authorities rather than central government, with decisions on spending approved through existing committee structures. Right to Buy receipts should be spent on replenishing council housing stock. The response also suggested that the level of discount available to purchasers should be determined locally to reflect the unique housing market and demands.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the response to the consultation on the use of Right to Buy receipts contained in appendix 1 to the report.

***25 Award of the integrated asset management procurement contract**

The Board considered the report of the Property and Asset Manager, which updated members on progress made on the procurement of the Integrated Asset Management Contract, and sought agreement of the recommendations contained within the September 2018 Cabinet report. The report outlined the progress that had been made since June 2018 and sought approval to appoint a contractor to provide the services specified in the contract and procurement documentations, subject to a satisfactory outcome to the Leaseholder Consultation period (which was due to end on 24 September 2018).

Cabinet approval had already been sought to appoint Bidder A, who the Property and Asset Manager named as Ian Williams during the meeting, to deliver the new service subject to no negative and significant feedback from leaseholders. Statutory Standstill Letters (Alcatel) were issued to the unsuccessful bidders on the 6 September 2018. The standstill period was for ten days and so it was now possible to enter into contract with the preferred bidder,

subject to the results of the leaseholder consultation. Once the contract was awarded a mobilisation period for the new contractor would start.. The performance of the incumbent contractors would need to be managed during this period to ensure that tenants continued to receive a high quality service and seamless transition. It was important that tenants were involved in the exit strategy and mobilisation process and communication would be critical. It was noted that tenants would like to invite Ian Williams to the tenants' conference.

A draft contract had been available to bidders throughout the procurement and inevitably there would be a period of final drafting and both parties agreeing final terms and conditions. The next report to the Board would detail the mobilisation process that would be undertaken over the coming months in the run up to the start of the new contract. The procurement team in their current form would be disbanded and a new mobilisation team would be established with the various skills and expertise that would be required to ensure everyone was appropriately prepared and ready to enter into new contracting arrangements.

The Property and Asset Manager outlined some information about Ian Williams and encouraged members to look at their website for more information. It was noted that Ian Williams had expressed a desire to meet the Board at a future meeting as well as link with other tenant forums.

RESOLVED:

1. that the Board note the Cabinet decision for the approval of Bidder A (Ian Williams) to deliver and operate the services specified in the contract and tender documents. This would be subject to a satisfactory outcome of a statutory leaseholder consultation process.
2. that the Board note the Cabinet decision to give delegated authority to the Strategic Lead (Housing, Health and Environment) and the Strategic Lead (Legal, Licensing and Democratic Services) to negotiate and complete the contract.

***26 Revision to the tenancy agreement**

The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager advised the Board that in consultation with the Chairman the decision had been taken to remove the draft tenancy agreement from the agenda.

Officers had consulted widely on the agreement over the last six months to ensure that the new agreement complied with current legislation and EDDC's Housing Policies. However, to ensure that the new agreement was as legally "watertight" as possible, Andrew Lane, barrister at Cornerstone Chambers had been asked to review the document before submitting it to HRB for consideration.

Whilst this would add a delay to the planned timetable for the implementation of the new tenancy agreement, it was felt that it was prudent to take this extra time to ensure that the tenancy agreement was legally robust. Once advice had been received from Mr Lane officers would look to submit the final draft to the November meeting of the Housing Review Board, with a view to beginning statutory consultation with tenants on 13 December 2018.

RESOLVED: that for the reasons outlined during the meeting, consideration of the revised tenancy agreement be deferred to a future Housing Review Board meeting.

27 Lift replacement at Poplar Mount, Axminster

The Property and Asset Manager's report asked the Board to consider the urgent replacement of lifts to ensure tenants' homes were accessible at all times. The three current lifts at Poplar Mount, Axminster, a sheltered housing scheme, were over 50 years old. They were much smaller in size than the average lift, which was a regular complaint from tenants who lived in the three blocks of flats. The lifts were becoming increasingly difficult to keep running due to the type and age of parts and the maintenance contractors had warned that on breakdown of certain parts it would be unlikely that the appropriate replacement parts could be sourced to repair the lifts. Currently if the lifts were not available then the occupants of 6-8 flats would need to be rehoused immediately.

There were three options for the lifts outlined in the report:

1. Leave the lifts running as they were currently and wait for complete breakdown.
2. Close the lifts down now, preventing the risk of the lifts failing.
3. Replace all three lifts to fully comply with current building regulations. Replacement in the current format was not an option. The two options to replace the lifts were:
 - a) Construct new lifts within the footprint of the existing blocks. This would require re-modelling of individual flats to accommodate the new lift shafts and access to the lifts.
 - b) Construct external lift shafts at the rear of the existing block. This would impact three flats in each block.

Significant building works would be required for both options a and b, in addition to the cost of the replacement lifts. It was recommended to the Board that delegated authority be given to the Senior Technical Officer for Asset Management and Compliance to specify the most suitable option for lift replacement in accordance with an in depth feasibility study of the site, cost implications, as well as the opportunity for tenant consultation to achieve an outcome favoured by the majority of tenants.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the urgent replacement of three lifts at Poplar Mount, Axminster, with delegated responsibility given to the Senior Technical Officer for Asset Management and Compliance to determine the most effective and suitable scheme for replacement.

28 Roof replacement, various sites

The Senior Technical Officer – Asset Management and Compliance' report proposed additional expenditure to complete roof replacement works to a number of Council properties, as outlined in the report. Over the past few years numerous problems had been experienced with the roofs, leading to increased expenditure in maintaining the roofs on a reactive basis. The original roof coverings had not been replaced and repairs had been carried out over a number of years with increasing regularity, so much so that it was considered that economically re-roofing was the best solution. The re-roofing work would be managed and carried out as a single project, overseen by one of the Programmed Works Officers.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the request for additional funding from the HRA (£334, 492.06) for the re-roofing programme.

***29 Compliance monitoring**

The Board considered the report of the Property and Asset Manager which raised awareness of compliance matters that related to management of the Council's housing stock.

The Board were shown a brief video which demonstrated a recent piece of work that involved commissioning an external specialist to inspect the installation of fire doors within the Council's housing stock. The video would also be published as part of Fire Door Safety awareness week, 24 – 30 September. During the week awareness would be raised through staff training initiatives, social media platforms as well as tenant awareness such as an article in the next Housing Matters magazine.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the progress that was being made with all aspects of health and safety compliance in relation to the management of Council housing stock.

30 Legionella policy

The Property and Asset Manager's report informed members of the Council's responsibilities in relation to legionella management within its housing stock.

Legionella bacteria were found naturally in water sources and could multiply in domestic water systems given the right conditions of temperature and nutrients. Inhalation or ingestion of legionella bacteria can cause a potentially fatal form of pneumonia called Legionnaires disease, as well as other less serious illnesses. As a landlord the Council had a duty of care to ensure that residents and visitors can live in their homes and use the facilities safely. This extended to ensuring that residents and visitors were safe from risks associated with legionella bacteria and other contaminants. The management of legionella came under a range of legal and guidance documents.

Legionella management was an area of compliance that the Council must ensure it was managing robustly with the support of an appropriate management policy. It was necessary to demonstrate compliance with the relevant legislation through the creation of a specific policy that sets out how it will manage and control the risks associated with legionella within the housing stock, staff offices and community buildings. The Housing Legionella Policy was presented to the Board in January 2017 and it had since been revised.

Members of the Board were asked to approve the revised policy, which would be reviewed on a three year basis or sooner if there was a change in legislation.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the revised legionella policy.

31 House of multiple occupation purchase, Exmouth

The report of the Housing Enabling and Allocations Manager set out a proposal to purchase a suitable property to use as a house of multiple occupation (HMO).

The demand for using emergency accommodation such as bed & breakfast had increased significantly over the last few years as homelessness levels have risen immensely both nationally and regionally. Furthermore, the additional responsibilities placed upon local authorities through the Homelessness Reduction Act have also added greatly to the overall use of emergency accommodation. Local authorities now need to accommodate people from homeless situations for a significantly longer period than previously. These factors have dramatically raised the levels of expenditure that the Council spends on emergency accommodation. The actual cost of emergency accommodation was much higher than forecasted.

By securing a suitable property to use as an HMO it would save on B&B costs and was expected to generate savings for the Council. It also provided reliable and quickly accessible accommodation for those in greatest need without the disruption of moving between establishments on a regular basis, as well as saving Housing Officer time in trying to attempt to find suitable bed and breakfast establishments that had vacancies and would accept that client group. It was envisaged that an HMO would be available to single individuals, and in some cases couples who were considered to be in housing need.

Tenants would be expected to abide by the terms contained within the licence agreement, which would be adapted from the existing licence that exists for the shared house in St Andrews Road, Exmouth, taking into account the change of purpose (short term emergency accommodation to meet our obligations under homelessness legislation). It was likely that some tenants would remain in the HMO for a number of months whilst others may only stay for a few days / weeks whilst being assessed by the Housing Options Team. The overarching aim was to help the licensee's to move to more permanent accommodation.

The Board agreed that this type of accommodation would be a beneficial addition to the Council's property portfolio. It would help to reduce the need for private temporary accommodation and housing those in greatest housing need. It was important that the Housing Service ensured that adequate provision was put in place to effectively manage the HMO and support licensees when necessary. If the current property being considered was no longer available, a suitable alternative property should be sought.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities requested greater support from social services and Devon Partnership Trust (DPT). EDDC had a duty to house people, many of which had mental health issues, and Devon County Council and DPT had a duty to continue support these people.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve:

1. that this type of accommodation would be a beneficial addition to the Council's property portfolio, in doing so helping to reduce the need to source and pay for emergency accommodation within the private sector.
2. that the Housing Service ensures that adequate provision is put in place to effectively manage the house of multiple occupation and support tenants, as necessary.
3. that a budget be agreed of up to £500,000 from the Housing Revenue Account to include funding from Right to Buy receipts.

***32 Adaptations to council properties**

The Property and Asset Manager's report updated the Housing Review Board on the increasing need and demand from tenants in relation to adaptations within Council properties. It was important to deliver a consistent approach to adaptations, as set out in the revised Landlord Disabled Adaptation Policy (approved by the Board in January 2017). Application of this policy presented problems, particularly when considering adaptations to a property that was being under-occupied.

There had been a 41% increase in requests for adaptations to properties from 2016/17 to 2017/18. The requests were a combination of minor and major adaptations. The solutions were not always straight forward and in many cases officers would carry out a number of site visits with tenants/contractors to ensure there was clarity and understanding of what was trying to be achieved.

To ensure a cost effective process, adaptations were now tendered as part of larger contracts. This significantly reduced the cost of the adaptations, but also meant that in some cases tenants had to wait longer for them to take place. The contracts were managed robustly, with regular inspections to ensure the standard of work met expectations.

The Landlord Disabled Adaptation Policy was due for review in January 2019 and HRB members would receive an updated policy for approval at that meeting. As part of consultation with tenants a satisfaction form was being created for tenants to complete once adaptations works were complete in their homes. This would provide valuable feedback.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the progress being made in relation to ensuring the Landlord Disabled Adaptation Policy was being applied consistently and that tenants were being supported to live independently in their homes.

33 Draft of the Annual Report to Tenants 2017/18

The draft of the annual report to tenants for 2017/18 was presented to the Board. The draft was in word text format and would be graphically designed once the wording had been finalised. The Board felt that every District Councillor should receive a copy of the annual report.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet approve the content of the annual report to tenants, subject to the information being graphically designed for reproduction in the December Housing Matters magazine.
2. that every district councillor receive a copy of the annual report to tenants 2017/18 in their pigeon holes.

***34 Rent payment cards**

The Landlord Services Manager's report explained to the Board the reasons why rent payment cards were issued to tenants in April 2018. In November 2017 Strata informed the Housing Service that they could no longer support the voucher book payment process. A decision was required quickly in order to achieve the statutory deadlines required as part of the year-end rental procedures. Consent was gained from the Strategic Lead, but there was not time to get a new system in place if approval was sought from the Board and consultation undertaken, as would be used the usual practice. The Landlord Services Manager apologised for not consulting with tenants or bringing the change to the Housing Review Board.

It was reported that no complaints had been received directly from tenants using the new rent payment cards. The cards were also cheaper and quicker to produce than the old rent payment books.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the explanation given in respect to rent payment cards issued in April 2018, contained in the report.

***35 Housing Revenue Account update, to August 2018**

The Housing Accountant's report provided the Board with the current position to August 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 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 report also provided the position of the HRA capital programme for both affordable housing and other capital items outside of the HRA. It was noted that if Right to Buy sales declined this would have an impact on capital expenditure in future years.

RESOLVED: that the Board note the Housing Revenue Account update to August 2018 report.

***36 Void performance**

The report of the Property and Asset Manager and the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager highlighted the improvements required in relation to the speed of turning void properties around for re-occupation. This was a priority and the report identified plans for improvement.

Over recent years there had been a worsening of performance in void turnaround times, with the need to review this activity in order to consider service improvements. There was a continual rise in the number of void properties each year, as well as properties left in a poor condition. Often specialist cleaning contractors were commissioned in order to ensure properties were suitable for contractors to work in. This could result in larger scale works to bring properties up to the required standard for re-let.

The process for re-letting properties involved cross team communications. Core responsibilities for co-ordinating the void period was with the Allocations team. There was significant input from the Maintenance Surveyors who were responsible for contractor management with regards to the tailored property specification produced, as well as any issues that arose during refurbishment.

In line with compliance management there was more emphasis on works that needed to be undertaken as part of the property being re-let. For example, intrusive fire stopping works that the team had taken the opportunity to upgrade as part of any flats that became vacant. This had led to complex, intrusive works in some instances, but was an opportunity that had been taken to improve compliance across stock as part of fire safety works. Such works could lead to extended re-let times and in such cases the surveyors work closely with contractors to reduce the delays wherever possible.

The Property and Asset Manager and the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager were actively involved in overseeing the void review, recognising the need to ensure processes and procedures were working effectively.

Key performance indicators would be embedded from the start of the new integrated asset management contract in terms of void turnaround times. This would be underpinned by a Systems Thinking approach to reducing waste in the system and ensuring tenants were at the centre of the process. Tenant Inspectors would be empowered to continue their inspection visits in order to provide officers with reassurance that from a tenant's perspective the high standards tenants have come to expect were still being met.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the plans being made to improve the current void turnaround times with a view to this leading to an improved performance in this area.

***37 Quarterly monitoring report – quarter 4**

The Board was presented with the Housing Service performance indicator report for quarter 1 2018/19, with details of selected indicators measuring performance across the Housing Service.

The Board noted that the number of people coming into EDDC offices for housing/homeless advice was over 1500. Many of these people were not polite, or even abusive to staff and the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities stressed the need to do the best to support staff at all times.

RESOLVED: that the performance of the Housing Service be noted by the Board.

***38 Housing Review Board coach trip**

The Chairman advised that a tour of some of the Council's housing estates, community centres, garages and parking issues across the district would be arranged for the Housing Review Board, on 29 October 2018. Board members were asked to contact the PA to the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment if there were any particular areas they would like to visit.

***39 Dates of the forthcoming Housing Review Board meetings**

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

Co-opted tenant members:

Mike Berridge
Peter Sullivan

Co-opted independent community representatives:

Julie Bingham
Christine Drew

Officers:

Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager
Steve Billingsley, Programmed Works Officer
Amy Gilbert, Property and Asset Manager
Mark Gerry, Community Development Worker
John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment
Tim Laurence-Othen, Housing Projects Officer
Paul Lowe, Housing Enabling and Allocations Manager
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs and Strategy Manager
Denise Rendell, Housing Projects Officer

Victoria Robinson, Community Development Worker
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Alex Slattery, Senior Technical Officer – day to day repairs
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Rob Ward, Housing Accountant

Also present:

Cllr Jill Elson, Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities
Cllr Douglas Hull
Cllr Eileen Wragg
Mike Passant, tenant

Apologies:

Cllr John O’Leary
Cllr Helen Parr
Alek Williams, tenant

Chairman Date.....