

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held online via zoom on 7 April 2022

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.55 am

48 Public speaking

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

49 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 March 2022 were received and accepted.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment updated the Board on a meeting which had been held with Ian Williams directors to discuss the performance issues in relation to the integrated asset management contract, following the last meeting of the HRB. It was an honest and challenging discussion around performance concerns, and a letter summarising the concerns was sent immediately following the meeting. Officers sought clarification for confirmation of improvements and for Ian Williams to improve and develop the action plan. Ian Williams acknowledged the need to improve performance in the areas highlighted and were committed to doing so working in partnership with the Council. A meeting had been arranged between the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment, Chair of the HRB and Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities for later in April.

The Chair advised the Board that independent community representative Christine Drew had stood down from the Board, but that following recent interviews two new independent community representatives had been appointed. The Chair looked forward to Sara Clarke and Rob Robinson joining the Board for their first meeting in June 2022.

50 Declarations of interest

Declarations of interest.

Cat Summers, Personal, council housing tenant.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Ian Hall, Personal, his mother was a council house tenant and Home Safeguard user. He was a Devon County Councillor for the Axminster division.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Sarah Chamberlain, Personal, employee of Exeter City Council within the housing service.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Steve Gazzard, Personal, council housing tenant.

Declarations of interest.

Sue Saunders, Personal, council housing tenant.

51 **Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency.

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

There were no confidential/exempt items.

53 **Stock condition survey**

The Property and Asset Manager's report updated the Board on the current position with the delivery of the stock condition survey. Without an up to date stock condition survey EDDC were at considerable risk of struggling to fulfil the full remit of its duty as a social landlord and also achieve its ambition to provide carbon neutral housing stock across the district by 2040. It would also fail to comply with the requirements of the new Building Safety Act. A full stock condition survey would also enable effective forecasting and budgeting for the financial implications of managing the repair and maintenance obligations.

It was noted that with the appointment of Currie and Brown complete and contracts agreed, the mobilisation period (3 months) had commenced at the start of March 2022. The mobilisation and delivery programme were outlined in the report, with a target period of 18 months (with an additional 3 month contingency period) for completion. The target period was very much dependant on access into properties to allow the surveys to be carried out. On completion of the stock condition survey a five year rolling programme would be implemented to survey 20% of the stock per annum.

During discussion the following points were raised:

- The stock condition survey would cover 100% of the housing property portfolio, including garages and community centres, with a team of 6-8 surveyors.
- Asbestos management surveys had been carried out on most properties, but access continued to be an issue, with around 300 no access properties for asbestos surveys.
- Tenants were not informed as a matter of course on the results of the asbestos surveys (so as not to scare them), but that information was available and in future it was hoped that this would be accessible through the tenant portal. This approach was entirely consistent with the approach other social landlords.
- Garages would be included in the stock condition survey, with any areas of concern being reported as they arose. Access to garages remained an issue, as well as what could be stored in them. The tenancy agreements stated that nothing that was likely to cause fire could be kept in council garages, but there was no obligation to keep a car in the garage.
- The communications plan for the stock condition survey was being finalised. Communications to tenants would be absolutely crucial, especially in terms of what was happening, why and what would happen as a result of the stock condition surveys. Communications would take place in many different formats.
- Specific resource was being allocated to assist in access and ownership issues.
- The surveys would be carried out on an area by area basis, with 800 properties being surveyed over five separate areas. This was likely to start in mid June/July 2022.
- Test surveys would be carried out first as part of the mobilisation programme.
- The surveys would include paths and trees, and anything included in the Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme surveys.
- Repairs would be carefully assessed and included on a traffic light system for an urgency rating and a programme of works would be established as items/issues were identified.
- Once information had been gained on the condition of the stock and the repairs required, costings would be calculated. There were various financial reserves to fund some of

these works and borrowing was available for capital works. Grants were also available for retrofit green energy works. There would be some difficult financial decisions over the next few years but the priority was to ensure that homes were fit for purpose.

- Planned works were included in the Ian Williams contract but there was a concern about the capacity to deliver an increased programme of catch up repairs and improvements, and a very real possibility that the procurement route would be needed for larger planned works.

The Board noted the update on the position with the award and mobilisation of the stock condition survey contract. Regular update reports would be brought to future meetings of the Housing Review Board.

54 **Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital 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 surplus forecast for the year was significantly higher than budgeted for. It was likely that there would be carry forwards for underspends, particularly in the planned maintenance and major repairs areas. The report proposed that any surplus within the HRA above the adopted range of £3.1 million would be placed in the HRA Capital Development fund reserve. This fund would be utilised in future years for New Homes and Capital works to reduce the carbon footprint of the HRA.

Within the 2021/22 financial year there had been 10 right to buy sales totalling a capital receipt to the Council of £1.025 million. The breakdown of the funds was outlined in the report and as well as the affordable housing expenditure and the impact this had on the right to buy replacement funding and requirements. The capital programme and the fire assessment capital works were also noted by the Board.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet recommend the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital Finance report for approval.

55 **HouseMark membership renewal**

HouseMark was a data analysis service which gathered performance and cost information from 350 social housing providers across the UK providing them with the data and insights needed to make evidence based decisions to drive efficient and performance business management. The Board were asked to consider the membership renewal for 2022/23 to continue to use HouseMark as a tool to monitor and evaluate the housing service. The ability to benchmark against peers played a hugely important role in evaluating the service and enabled the housing service to improve service delivery for tenants.

The Board agreed that it was vital to benchmark, as well as sharing information and best practice, and the Information and Analysis Officer was thanked for her report.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet recommend that membership to HouseMark be renewed at this year's annual cost of £7,830 + VAT.

56 **CIH professional standards**

The Housing Service Lead's report drew the Board's attention to the recently refreshed Chartered Institute of Housing's (CIH) refresh of professional standards. The CIH professional standards built on seven characteristics developed, tested and refined to enable and encourage the sector to think about professional development needs and how all involved could contribute to the professionalism of the organisation and the wider sector. These linked closely with the Social Housing White Paper. The standards were being publicised and cascaded through the EDDC housing service to raise its own professional standards and an awareness of why this was so important. A number of officers were currently engaged with CIH vocational training at all levels and the Housing Service Lead was working with EDDC's HR department and linking these standards with recruitment.

The Board endorsed and promoted the compliance of the CIH's professional standards.

57 **Procurement of gas servicing/services contract**

The Property and Asset Manager's report updated the Board on the current position with the procurement, award and mobilisation of the gas servicing contract to enable seamless delivery of the service following expiry of the existing/implementation of the new contract. Since the last meeting of the HRB the procurement phase of the renewal of the gas servicing/services contract had been completed, with the current incumbent Liberty Group emerging as the successful bidder.

The previous contract with Liberty Group expired on 31 March 2022, with mobilisation of the new contract taking place during January, February and March 2022. For the duration of the contract to date the Liberty Group had provided a good level of service and achieved 100% compliance at all times, apart from in exceptional circumstances such as the Covid 19 pandemic.

Under delegated powers the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment and the Housing Service Lead were able to sign off as accepted/approved the relevant stages of the procurement process to facilitate the appointment of Liberty Group to deliver the 3 Star Gas Servicing Contract. The award was for an initial duration of four years with the option to extend by a further 6 (2+2+2). The contract went live on 1 April 2022, delivering 3 star industry standard 'MOT style' gas servicing.

The Board noted the update on the current position with the procurement award and mobilisation of the gas servicing/services contract.

58 **Electrical safety policy**

The Compliance and Cyclical Servicing Manager's report asked the Board to consider and agree the implementation of an electrical safety policy for housing to ensure compliance with current legislation and regulations relating to electrical safety. It also provided reassurance that measures were in place to ensure compliance with those regulations and legislation, and to identify, manage and/or mitigate risks associated with electrical installations and electrical portable appliances. The policy set out EDDC's

approach to managing electrical safety within properties owned and/or managed by EDDC, including community centres, communal areas and district offices.

The policy had been reviewed by a number of involved tenants, with their valuable feedback being incorporated in the policy.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet recommends to Council that the electrical safety policy for housing is adopted.

59 **Quarterly performance indicator report**

The Board noted the housing performance indicator report for quarter 3 2021/22 which detailed selected indicators measuring performance across the housing service.

It was noted that in relation to anti-social behaviour figures, the condition of the property and noise issues were high. It was also noted that properties being left in a poor condition was being seen increasingly with voids. In response to a question about whether tenants were required to remove floor coverings when vacating a property, the Property and Asset Manager advised that each property was assessed on its merits, but that floor coverings were generally removed (by the contractors) from voids as the quality or infection risk was not usually known. It also gave the opportunity to assess the quality and safety of the floor beneath. This cautious approach had previously been taken, but this would be considered going forward as there could be opportunities to reuse good quality fittings in the future.

In relation to a query raised about noise complaints from flats the Housing Service Lead advised that a lot of work had been done on sound proofing flats, and that carpets helped. Noise issues were dealt with on an individual basis, with officers trying hard to resolve disputes. All situations of anti-social behaviour were dealt with sensitively on a very individual basis, with support being offered where required. It was noted that the condition of a property from the outside was often a warning indicator to what was going on inside the property.

60 **Housing Covid 19 performance monitoring**

A housing covid-19 performance monitoring dashboard was presented to the Board for information as an example of the information that was monitored on a fortnightly basis. This performance monitoring began at the start of the covid-19 pandemic.

Members commented that the information was hard to understand and the Housing Service Lead explained that this information was used internally as a way of monitoring certain performance indicators. It had been usefully included on the HRB agenda papers during the Covid-19 pandemic, but this was no longer required. The Board noted the fantastic efforts of all the EDDC housing staff during the pandemic and acknowledged that it was hard for employees going forward with sickness, absence and work load.

61 **Senior officer decision**

The Board were asked to note the senior officer urgent decision which was made in February 2022, which was a request for retrospective authority to bid and to proceed with the memorandum of understanding required for the release of successful bid funding as part of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. This was required to access Government funding administered by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial

Strategy that would be used to improve the insulation of tenant's homes and provide alternative heating and hot water systems that support the Council's programme of decarbonising its housing stock and delivering its Climate Change Strategy ambitions.

Government funding of £612,000 was successfully procured through the scheme, with the team working very hard behind the scenes. Properties (approximately 50) were currently being allocated, with those having the lowest EPCs being selected. The Housing Service Lead commented that great progress had been made, but that the numbers were still low and there was a huge task ahead in terms of retrofitting council properties.

Attendance List

Board members present:

Stephen Beer, Tenants
Sue Saunders, Tenants (Vice-Chair)
Cat Summers, Tenant
Councillor Ian Hall
Councillor Helen Parr
Councillor Brenda Taylor
Councillor Sarah Chamberlain (Chair)

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

M Armstrong
P Arnott
S Gazzard
J Kemp
D Ledger
J Loudoun
T McCollum
M Rixson
E Rylance
E Wragg

Officers in attendance:

Bev Anderson, Tenant Participation Assistant
Graham Baker, Property and Asset Manager
Natalie Brown, Information and Analysis Officer (Housing)
Michelle Davidson, Compliance and Cyclical Servicing Manager
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead Housing
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Andi Loosemore, Rental Manager
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Manager
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Rob Ward, Accountant
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor apologies:

Cindy Collier, Tenant

Chair

Date: