

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 14 March 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.30 am

51 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2024 were agreed.

52 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest under the Code of Conduct. Councillor Sarah Chamberlain declared that she was employed by Exeter City Council in the housing department.

53 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

54 Matters of urgency

There were none.

55 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were none.

56 Housing Review Board forward plan

The Tenancy Services Manager presented the forward plan and explained the revised format of the plan and the reasoning behind these changes in that it aligned with the Overview and Scrutiny Committees' forward plan format. Members were advised that the forward plan acted as a reminder of agenda items due to come forward to future meetings. The forward plan had been derived from previous meetings and requests, as well as the housing service plan. Service managers we currently reviewing realistic timeframes against each topic and dates for the future items would be populated once dates for 2024/25 Housing Review Board meetings had been agreed. Members were reminded that they could add further reports and topics for discussion to the next forward plan by either informing herself or the Democratic Services Officer.

Concern was expressed that there were a large number of items on the forward plan but only four Housing Review Board meetings scheduled for the year. The Director for Housing, Health and Environment reassured those present that additional Board meetings could be called if required. It was noted that a stock condition survey report would be brought to the next meeting of the Housing Review Board.

57 Function of the Housing Review Board

The Board considered the report of the Assistant Director for Housing (Tenancy Services) which had come forward following a direct request for the function of the HRB to be reviewed and refreshed. The report aligned with the recent scrutiny review carried out by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CGS), which was presented to a joint meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, Overview Committee and Housing Review Board on 15 February 2024. An action plan would be produced by the Democratic Services Manager by 30 April 2024 based on findings of the CGS review. Members of the HRB would receive further details on this.

The Assistant Director Housing's report set out a proposed change to the frequency of HRB meetings (from five to four per year), which would need to be made formally within the Council's Constitution. This change to the frequency of meetings would allow for better alignment with quarterly performance information. The day-to-day performance of the functions within the Housing Revenue Account were a key consideration for the Housing Review Board in terms of how they set out and derived with work plans moving forward. To ensure that this could be achieved the Board therefore needed to receive this information in a timely manner at the end of each quarter. Board members were reminded that an extraordinary meeting could be proposed at any other time throughout the year as and when required.

RECOMMENDED: that Council agree that the Housing Review Board terms of reference be amended so that the number of meetings is decreased from five to four per year (or more frequently as required).

58 **Finance report**

The accountant's report provided the Housing Review Board with a summary of the housing revenue account and housing capital program overall financial position for 2023/24 at the end of month 10 (31 January 2024). 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.

The Board noted the impact on the originally agreed budgeted surplus (£0.268m) of subsequently approved spend that was not originally included in the set budget, resulting in a revised budgeted deficit of £0.656m. Income was increased on rents by 7% and all other service charges by 3% in 2023/24. Lost rent due to voids continued to be above the budgeted levels and was likely to add an additional £0.433million to the in-year deficit as the catch-up work to reduce void levels continued. In addition to this, due to the higher levels of major works that were being addressed from the stock condition surveys, the expenditure on decants during the year had been higher than expected. This further increased the revised budget deficit to £1.374m.

The stock condition had also significantly increased the demand on the integrated asset management contract with void levels and their associated expenditure, as well as larger jobs outside the Price Per Property framework requiring significant contributions from reserves. This resulted in a final revised forecast deficit of £4.851m, to be funded by reserves/underspends in previous years. Despite the forecast deficit the Finance Manager reassured the Board that the HRA was fully financed from earmarked reserves and balances and that some of the higher than predicted spending this year was catching up on expenditure following a lack of spending in previous years.

The accountant's report explained that the completion of the stock condition survey and the creation of an asset management strategy would directly feed into the housing revenue account business plan and officers were working on a stock options appraisal position report that would consider longer term investment decisions.

The Board noted that during the year to date there had been nine right to buy sales (with another completion imminent) and three property acquisitions. These acquisitions were funded 60% from the Capital Development Fund 40% from right to buy receipts.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet acknowledge the variances identified as part of the housing revenue account and housing capital finance up to month 10 2023/24.

59 **Key performance indicators and compliance, quarter 3 2023/24**

The Housing Review Board were presented with the key performance indicator (KPI) dashboard and the compliance dashboard for quarter 3. The Tenancy Services Manager and the Responsive Repairs and Voids Service Manager introduced themselves and gave a presentation which summarised the performance and actions being taken to improve performance where targets were not being achieved.

Performance targets were set annually, but this year the framework began part way through the year so targets were not set for all the indicators. Figures were benchmarked against last financial years' performance and HouseMark was used to benchmark performance and set targets for the KPIs against performance of other social housing landlords.

Performance in rent arrears continued to be good and quarter three remained within target and top quartile. This was being achieved through a proactive approach to rent collection, ensuring early intervention when accounts fell into arrears and using all the appropriate tools available to stop situations worsening.

The number of voids continued to reduce month on month. Void turn-around times were also starting to show improvement, with a clear downward trend across the reporting months. There were 130 void dwellings at the end of quarter three (December 2023) compared to 168 in July 2023. Work was still required to reduce average relet times, however it was noted that a lot of long term voids were being let, which had an impact on the performance data. The Responsive Repairs and Voids Service Manager outlined to the Board actions that were being taken to ensure void property performance including the active involvement of tenants in the process, weekly contractor meetings and recruiting to a Void Manager post.

The Responsive Repairs and Voids Service Manager reported that repair jobs (both routine and emergency jobs) completed within target were improving. There were combined measures across the two main contractors reflecting service improvements being made within the contractors' operations and timely data being provided to EDDC by the contractors. Actions being taken to ensure repairs performance were outlined to the Board.

The Tenancy Services Manager highlighted to the Board the ongoing work to improve performance in relation to complaint handling. A new performance team had been established, with a Housing Performance Lead. The process for complaints was being reviewed against the new Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and a key

focus of the new Housing Performance Lead would be taking learning from complaints and ensuring this shaped future service delivery.

The Board noted the compliance dashboard which covered eight key areas of regulation and legislation requirements:

1. Asbestos
2. Electrical systems
3. Fire risk assessment
4. Fire protection systems
5. Gas safety
6. Lifting equipment
7. Smoke & Carbon monoxide alarms
8. Water management

There were a large number of green areas showing in the report and the Tenancy Services Manager explained the areas in red and the work being done in relation to these areas. It was also noted that the Planned Works and Compliance Service Manager post had been recruited in to.

Following the presentation a number of issues were raised by those present and the officers advised that they would and report on these and discuss individual issues outside of the meeting. Better ways of reporting housing issues to ward councillors were being explored. The Director for Housing, Health and Environment reassured the HRB that the housing team had gone through a lot of change in the last six months, but the service now had the right people in the right post and she was confident that things would improve going forward.

The Portfolio Holder, Sustainable Homes and Communities agreed that performance was moving in the right direction and positive improvements were being made. The amount of work going on was commendable, with 75% of KPIs being in the green. In response to a question it was noted the average re-let time (a property being ready to being occupied) was 23 days (down from 35). In response to another question about the use of garages the Housing Strategy, Enabling and Project Manager reported that a housing delivery and investment plan was being developed to consider all housing assets.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board receives and notes performance at quarter three, 2023/24.

60 **Annual report of the Housing Review Board 2023/24**

The Chair presented the annual report of the Housing Review Board which summarised and highlighted the diverse range of issues covered by the Board over the year. The report gave an overview of the achievements of the Board and celebrated the progress that had been made. The Chair thanked all those involved with housing and the Housing Review Board for their huge efforts in improving the service.

It was noted that tenant satisfaction measures were undertaken annually. Officers were also currently working on tenant satisfaction transactional surveys, using advances in technology to receive live and direct feedback. Tenants were reassured that many communications options would be available. A data analyst had been appointed in the housing performance team and was regularly calling tenants.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet and Council note the work that the Housing Review Board has undertaken during the 2023-24 civic year.

Attendance List

Board members present:

Sara Clarke, Independent Community Representative
Rob Robinson, Independent Community Representative
Councillor Sarah Chamberlain (Chair)
Councillor Peter Faithfull
Councillor Tony McCollum
Councillor Helen Parr (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Christopher Burhop

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

B Bailey
I Barlow
C Brown
J Brown
R Collins
D Ledger
S Smith

Officers in attendance:

Tracy Hendren, Director of Housing, Health and Environment
Andrew King, Tenancy Services Manager
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Service Manager
Liam Reading, Housing Strategy, Enabling and Projects Service Manager
Giles Salter, Solicitor
John Symes, Finance Manager
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Susie Williams, Responsive Repairs and Voids Service Manager

Apologies:

Sue Dawson, Tenants
Councillor Paul Arnott (non-committee member)
Councillor Paul Hayward (non-committee member)

Chair

Date: