

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at online via the zoom app on 29 April 2021

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.45 pm

102 Public speaking

There were no matters raised by the public.

103 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 21 January 2021 were confirmed as a true record.

104 Declarations of interest

Declarations of interest.
Cat Summers, Personal, Housing tenant.

Declarations of interest.
Cindy Collier, Personal, Housing tenant.

Declarations of interest.
Councillor Ian Hall, Personal, Mother is a housing tenant and a Homesafeguard customer, and he is a Devon County Councillor, during purdah.

Declarations of interest.
Councillor Sarah Chamberlain, Personal, Employed by Exeter City Council and used the services of Advantage South West in her current employment.

105 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

106 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There was one confidential/exempt item.

107 Housing Review Board forward plan

The Acting Housing Service Lead presented the forward plan and advised members that the forward plan acted as 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. The Acting Housing Service Lead advised the Board that the next meeting would be focusing on the implementation of the new Buildings Safety Act, tenant safety and the Housing White Paper.

RESOLVED: that the forward plan be noted.

108 **Housing Strategy refresh and scoping**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment’s report presented the draft Housing Strategy for Board member consultation. The report sought member feedback on the structure, focus and content of the strategy and sought approval for the proposed timeline to publication. It was in draft form so that the Board could genuinely assist in shaping the final version of this important policy statement.

It was important that the Housing Strategy was underpinned with robust housing needs evidence, it confronted challenges in the housing sector, and it picked up on and articulated the priorities and ambitions of the Council. It needed to be a forward looking document that had regard to past performance and the local housing market operating within national policy and legislation. It was necessarily a high level document and in recent years the statement had been kept short, to the point and linked with other corporate and service specific policy documents.

The overriding vision was ‘a decent home for all residents of East Devon’ and the service’s priorities were to provide homes, improve homes, improve communities and improve services. Officers were seeking to link the strategic approach outlined in the housing strategy to the themes of the forthcoming Council Plan, with the annual housing service plan providing the more detailed actions required to meet the priorities of the strategy. The strategy needed to be ambitious, but realistic and achievable. Outcomes needed to be specific, measureable and time bound.

The report asked a series of questions for Board members to consider before the strategy was redrafted and presented to Cabinet and Council for adoption. It was felt that improvement was needed on feedback to tenants and better use of customer surveys. It was noted that the provision of additional housing stock was built into the housing service plan and included part of the debate on the Council Plan.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment expressed his thanks to the Housing Projects Officer for the work he had done in producing the housing strategy.

RESOLVED: that the draft Housing Strategy is approved for the purposes of final drafting.

109 **Updated housing policies**

The Acting Housing Service Lead’s report informed members of a number of housing policies that had been reviewed by the relevant housing manager to ensure that they continued to reflect current practice and legislation. The policies that had been reviewed were:

- Pets policy.
- Car park management policy.
- Anti-social behaviour policy.
- Succession policy.
- Responsive repairs policy.
- Recharge policy.
- Property and assets compensation policy.

- Decant policy.
- Gas safety policy.
- Improvements to council properties policy.
- Leasehold management policy.
- Asbestos policy and management plan.
- Adaptations policy.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the updated housing policies.

110 **Integrated asset management contract void report**

The Property and Asset Manager explained to the Board that alongside the annual review of the integrated asset management contract with Ian Williams, the Council's specialist consultant, Echelon also carried out a detailed review of voids. The outcome identified operational areas that could be changed to improve the service delivery of the voids and achieve improved value for money.

The report explained that the voids had been re-categorised from three void types to just have two types of voids:

1. V1 which covered the price per void (PPV) void works and up to two component changes with a target completion of a maximum of 14 days.
2. V2 which covered major voids requiring three or more component upgrades and/or exceeding £10k in value – the period for completing such voids would be agreed on an individual basis by both parties.

The revised PPV cost was £2,876.56.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board accept the operational changes in the delivery of the integrated asset management contract.

111 **Ian Williams complaints and compliments**

East Devon District Council was committed to being an organisation that listened to customers and worked closely with its main contractor, Ian Williams, to provide a quick responsive solution. Therefore, both customer feedback and the way that the Property & Asset responded to this feedback, whether negative or positive, were vital indicators of the overall performance of the Ian Williams contract, impacting KPI's.

Property & Asset aimed to maintain a high level of performance and improve the quality of service offered to customers, who felt that they had not received a high standard. This included providing timely responses to complaints whilst continuing to learn and improve.

The Property & Asset team strived to ensure it responded to customer concerns in an open and transparent way within defined timescales that has been agreed with both the service and Ian Williams. The purpose of the Housing and Customer Business Improvement Manager's report was to outline the complaints and compliments that had been received between 1st July 2019 – 31st December 2020, highlighting key themes and trends. The report also explained how Property & Asset, working hand in hand with Ian Williams had performed and included case studies demonstrating how the service had learnt from complaints received. This was the most important aspect of the complaints process.

It was noted that the format and overall presentation of the report was based over a year and a half of the contract. In future these reports would be produced on a quarterly basis

to be presented at the core contract monitoring group meetings, alongside the monthly PDF reviews.

Whilst customer feedback provided a valuable insight into how Ian Williams were and had been performing, complaints and compliments figures did not reflect the full picture. Members were reminded that the report should be understood within the context of the number of customers interacting with our repairs service, averaging all repairs to 4200+ properties.

The priority areas of focus for 2021 would be:

- Increasing the number of compliments recorded. The Housing and Business Customer Improvement Manager would promote the procedure for reporting compliments via social media platforms and website to ensure that tenants were having an opportunity to relay positive feedback.
- Addressing current and upcoming issues, using complaints as direct customer feedback to make immediate service improvements, working alongside Ian Williams CLO, Business Manager and EDDC's Contract Manager.
- Reviewing the way that the Property & Asset team highlight and consider learning from complaints to ensure that each complaint enquiry is fully considered and used to positively grow the service and improve customer relationships.

It was noted that the top three trends of complaints were:

- Lack of communication.
- Cancelled appointments/no shows.
- Repair timescales.

The top three trends of compliments were:

- Operatives work.
- Operatives manners.
- Timescales.

Timescales appearing in both complaints and compliments highlighted the need for consistency with reactive repair timeframes and the need to ensure that larger jobs were dealt with as a project, and the tenant kept informed throughout the whole process.

Complaints were being proactively managed to provide a better service and ensure that tenants were being given the opportunity to be heard.

The Housing Business and Customer Improvement Manager was thanked for her report.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the Ian Williams complaint and compliment report and the actions being taken.

112 **Grounds maintenance additional costs**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment presented the StreetScene Operations Manager's report which requested two grounds maintenance season staff for the 2021 season.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment explained that the budget for grounds maintenance seasonal staff was removed last year as part of the Council's efficiency savings (£71k). This impacted on the delivery of grounds maintenance throughout the district, including the maintenance of housing site (individual grounds maintenance and communal areas). The housing contract equated to 25% of the overall work that StreetScene carried out across the district.

StreetScene had started to undertake a review of the Housing Service contract and rough calculations indicated that it was about £250k below market value. It was acknowledged that additional resource was required to service the housing contract, to provide a service on the current terms, minimising complaints from housing residents, until a full review was completed. If StreetScene were to keep the same service to housing residents and the reduction in service came solely from the general classification areas (public gardens and open spaces) this would create an imbalance of service across the district.

RECOMMENDED: that the Housing Review Board acknowledge that StreetScene are undertaking a larger review of the housing contract and recommend to Cabinet and then on to Council for resolution, the interim funding of two grounds maintenance season staff at a cost of c£30,000 from the Housing Revenue Account to help maintain continuity of service through the coming season.

113 **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 2020/21 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.

The report explained regulatory changes to Right to Buy. The benefits of the changes which took effect in the next financial year were:

- Required spending timeframe to increase from 3 years to 5 years on all current and future receipts.
- Funding cap on receipts to increase from 30% to 40%.
- Reporting time frame changed from quarterly to annually.

A potential issue for East Devon within the reforms was that there would be a phased reduction placed upon the proportion of acquisitions made within the year from the 2022/23 financial year, to ensure that councils were developing rather than acquiring properties. Currently EDDC's supply was 100% acquisition. The limits imposed would be:

- From 2022/23 – maximum 50% of supply to be acquisitions.
- From 2023/24 – maximum 40% of supply to be acquisitions.
- From 2024/25 onwards – maximum of 30% of supply to be acquisitions.

This meant that the Council would be required to focus on development opportunities in the future but that it would not have to return its Right to Buy receipts as had previously been predicted.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities reported that she had ongoing communications with MPs and was still lobbying and looking to improve as much as possible. It was agreed that the price of replacing stock bought cheaply under Right to Buy was very expensive.

It was noted that the Housing Revenue Account was in a healthy position. Rent collection figures remained high which allowed a commitment on expenditure. The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment thanked the rental collection team for

their excellent work and also thanked the HRB Chair and Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities for all their support.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital Finance report.

114 **Complaints handling**

The Property & Asset service was committed to providing a high-quality repair, maintenance and void service. Both positive and negative feedback was welcomed and each was viewed as an opportunity to learn and improve the quality of service, provided by both East Devon District Council and by its contractors. The Property & Asset team recognised that being a reactive service working on and within people's homes there would always be occasions when things went wrong or residents were unhappy about aspects of the service. The Property & Asset complaint policy and report applied to all staff members, contractors and sub-contractors employed by or acting on behalf of East Devon District Council, carrying out work or instructing work to Council properties.

Each and every complaint and compliment was discussed in detail with the relevant teams in Property and Asset on a monthly basis. In addition to this complaints and compliments were reported and action lessons learnt in the following contractual meetings:

- Weekly discussions between both management teams in the Council and contractors.
- Operational group with Ian Williams (monthly).
- Core group, senior members meeting (monthly).

Information about complaints was provided to senior managers across the Council. An annual report was created at the end of each calendar year summarising complaints and compliments received throughout the year. The aim was to proactively manage complaints in order to provide a better service.

It was noted that the most commonly reported complaints were:

- Mould and damp within the property.
- Lack of communication from the contractors when follow up works were required.
- Heating issues within the property.

The Housing Business and Customer Improvement Manager was thanked for her report and the Board thanked the teams for their continued effort.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board recognise the process, policy and plan in the management of all feedback whether negative or positive in regards to the service provided within the Property and Asset service

115 **HouseMark annual performance report**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment presented a summary HouseMark report which provided key cost and performance comparisons for the organisation. The data related to the financial year 2019-20, but had been supplemented by bespoke HouseMark forecasts built using in-year data and public data sources. The Council's bespoke peer group, chosen by itself, was detailed in the appendix.

As well as annual cost and performance benchmarking, HouseMark also provided a range of other data services, including monthly COVID-19 impact monitoring and a bespoke budget forecasting tool for the organisation.

RESOLVED: that the performance report be noted by the Housing Review Board and the areas for further investigation identified in the report be examined by the Housing Leadership Group.

116 **Covid 19 performance**

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

RESOLVED: that the housing covid-19 performance monitoring be noted by the Housing Review Board.

117 **Annual report of the achievements of the Housing Review Board**

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.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet note the annual report and achievements of the Housing Review Board.

118 **Renewal of Advantage South West subscription**

Housing Review Board members were asked to note the benefits of membership of Advantage South West (ASW) and to support the continuing membership of the organisation. Membership of ASW allowed the council to maintain properties to a good standard whilst achieving value for money. It assisted in achieving continuity of components and services across the housing service. It also assisted in the ongoing training and upskilling of staff through regular product review workshops and continuing professional development events. Another advantage of belonging to ASW was that it provided a platform for networking with other authorities and housing providers across the south west. It was noted that the renewal of ASW subscription had been budgeted for.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the continued payment of the annual subscription fee to maintain the membership of Advantage South West.

119 **Stock condition survey**

The Acting Housing Service Lead's report outlined reasons, benefits and risks associated with undertaking the proposed full Stock Condition Survey (SCS) on the EDDC housing portfolio. The completion of a full SCS was a strategic imperative for the council. The data received as a result of this complex and in-depth piece of work will enable the housing service to:

- Produce an evidenced based 30 year active Asset Management Strategy & delivery programme;

- Produce a comprehensive 50 year Estate Regeneration Strategy & delivery programme;
- Produce accurate planned and cyclical works programmes;
- Produce an accurate Housing Revenue Account Business Plan update and models;
- Achieve a significant reduction in the responsive repairs load;
- Secure improvements to the quality and futureproofing of the Council's housing stock;
- Make efficiencies by maximising the ability to flex economies of scale;
- Fully understand the wider financial and delivery implications of the Council's drive toward a carbon neutral housing stock;
- Better fulfil the obligations incumbent upon EDDC as social landlords;
- Ensure compliance with all statutory and legislative implications, including those of the new Building Safety Act and the resultant inspection regime;
- Have full and meaningful 'conversations' with tenants and communities enabling the Council to move forward together with EDDC's Sustainable Communities aspirations.

Without a SCS EDDC was at considerable risk of struggling to fulfil the full remit of its duty as social landlord and also to achieve its ambitions to provide a carbon neutral housing stock across the district by 2040. Also, without the data from a SCS the Council would fail to comply with the requirements of the new Building Safety Act. The Council did not currently have the information to enable it to effectively forecast and budget for the financial implications of managing its repair and maintenance obligations. The output from the SCS would be detailed information on each property in the housing service portfolio including components, age, condition, life expectancy, energy efficiency etc. The housing portfolio also included community centres, a bore hole, sewage treatment works, shops and blocks of flats. A full database would be completed. EDDC's membership of the South West Procurement Portal had enabled it to greatly reduce the time and cost implications of securing an appropriately qualified and experienced provider. Use of the Portal also offered the comfort that due diligence and value for money benchmarking had been undertaken on its behalf.

The Acting Housing Service Lead explained the release of Central Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) in 2022. In order to be able to submit a strong bid for funding to support the 'Green Homes' works programme, there needed to be a complete understanding of the housing portfolio including current EPC data on all individual homes. These data requirements were included within the specification of the SCS.

The resource required by EDDC to deliver the SCS, which would be included as part of the project team was:

- A project lead.
- A Senior Officer to oversee the day to day management of the project.
- A dedicated Officer to review/audit the Stock Condition data.
- Administration assistants to perform a tenant liaison role/address access issues and to upload data information onto the Council's systems.
- Dedicated IT support within Housing Systems.

These would need to be new posts as there was not sufficient capacity within the Property and Asset or Housing Systems teams.

EDDC had approximately 4200 properties and had never before undertaken an internal and external 100% stock condition survey. The last SCS was carried out in 2011 on

approximately 15% of the stock (around 700 homes) and had used an element of cloning/assumptions. This information had been added to by staff visiting tenants' homes. The Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment reassured members that all necessary up to date compliance data was held by the Council.

Following the initial SCS, which would be undertaken within 12 months with specialists, it was recommended that a 5-year rolling SCS programme be delivered to ensure that data was regularly updated. This five year rolling programme would require a dedicated resource in the form of a Stock Condition Surveyor as there was not sufficient resource in the existing Property and Asset team. It was noted that the costs of the SCS would fall to the Housing Revenue Account, and therefore borne by Housing, rather than from the Council's General Fund.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the report and discuss the Housing Stock Condition Survey recommendation further in Part B along with the costs associated with undertaking the proposed stock condition survey on the EDDC housing portfolio.

120 **Exclusion of press and public**

RESOLVED: that under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting as exempt information, of the description set out in the agenda is likely to be disclosed and on balance the public interest is in discussing this item in private session (Part B).

121 **Stock condition survey report**

The Acting Housing Service Lead's report outlined the costs associated with undertaking the proposed full stock condition survey outlined in the Part A report. The completion of a full stock condition survey was a strategic and economic imperative for both the Housing Service and the wider Council. Without a stock condition survey EDDC was at considerable risk of struggling to fulfil the full remit of its duty as a social landlord and also to achieve its ambitions to provide a carbon neutral housing stock across the district by 2040. Without the data from a stock condition survey the council would also fail to comply with requirements of the new Building Safety Act. A full stock condition survey would provide the information to enable the council to effectively forecast and budget for the financial implications of managing its repair and maintenance obligations.

It was noted that the current budget allocation was significantly short of the fund required for the work, because a sample survey methodology was proposed when the budget was proposed. However there were sufficient Housing Revenue Account reserves to cover the more expensive 100% survey of all council homes and associated assets.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet recommends to Council that sufficient budget (as detailed in the Part B report) be set aside to complete the full stock condition survey as described in this report. Additionally that budget be set aside to support the recruitment of a

dedicated Project Management Team to oversee this complex and pivotal work as outlined in the Part A report.

2. that delegated authority be given to the Housing Service Lead in consultation with the Strategic Lead Governance and Licensing, Housing Review Board Chair and Portfolio Holder for Homes and Communities to finalise the contract documents and commence the work in accordance with the Council's constitution.

Attendance List

Board members present:

Councillor Tony McCollum (Chair)
Cat Summers, Tenant
Councillor Ian Hall
Cindy Collier, Tenant
Councillor Brenda Taylor
Councillor Sarah Chamberlain

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

M Armstrong
P Arnott
S Gazzard
D Ledger
J Rowland

Officers in attendance:

Graham Baker, Senior Technical Officer Asset Management
Sue Bewes, Housing Services Manager
Michelle Davidson, Property and Asset Management
Sophie Davies, Housing Business and Customer Improvement Manager
Jo Garfoot, Acting Housing Service Lead
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Rebecca Heal, Solicitor
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Manager
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Rob Ward, Accountant

Councillor apologies:

Peter Sullivan, Tenant
Christine Drew, Independent Community Representative
Christine Morrison, Tenant

Chairman

Date: