

Report to: Housing Review Board



Date of Meeting 24 March 2022

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

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Annual report of the Housing Review Board

Report summary:

To review the work of the Housing Review Board during the 2021-22 civic year.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That the Housing Review Board note the work it has undertaken during the 2021-22 civic year.

Reason for recommendation:

To inform the Board and the Council of the work of the Housing Review Board.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; .

Links to background information .

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
 - A greener East Devon
 - A resilient economy
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Report in full

The Board

The remit of the Board covers:

- Advising the Cabinet on the Council's landlord activities and functions affecting tenants and leaseholders;
- Maintaining an active involvement in the on-going review of the options for the future ownership and management of Council owned homes, and to make recommendations;
- Promoting good practice and overseeing service improvements;
- Monitoring performance on core housing management activities and reporting to the Cabinet;
- Preparation of the Housing Revenue Account budget and Business Plan;
- Promoting tenant and leaseholder involvement and implementation of the Resident Involvement Strategy;
- Consulting with the Resident Involvement Strategy Monitoring Group, who liaise with tenant groups and representatives;
- Encouraging good practice in relation to equality and diversity issues, and ensuring that the needs of vulnerable tenants are satisfied;
- Advise on any other matters affecting the Council's landlord duties and responsibilities.

Despite service disruptions experienced due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Board has continued in its role of introducing service improvements and monitoring throughout the year, liaising with the Resident Involvement Strategy Monitoring Group as appropriate.

The Chair of the Housing Review Board was Councillor Sarah Chamberlain. The civic year began with tenant representative Peter Sullivan as Vice Chair. Following his resignation in January 2022 Sue Saunders took over as Vice Chair.

The Board welcomed new board members tenants Stephen Beer and Sue Saunders. It also said a sad goodbye to tenant representative and Vice Chair Peter Sullivan and tenant representative Christine Morrison during the year.

Words from the Chair

I would like to thank all officers / staff and tenants for the continued support and commitment to the council's housing department in what has been a difficult year with the pandemic. Officers and staff have continued to work throughout the pandemic, many committing to working from home yet still continuing with the Council's vision and plan. Some great achievements have been gained within the last year, new contracts being procured, for instance the gas contract. Despite the challenging circumstances we have faced many have adapted well to meetings online which has allowed business to continue as usual. I am aware that this has been a difficult time for everyone especially when it comes to allowing contractors into your homes but with the support and reassurance and strong compliance in place this has still been achieved maintaining legal compliance for the Council.

I am looking forward to the future where we can build on our good grounding and relationships. We have some great opportunities in our forward plan for improving existing council stock and also building new. We have some great resources /staff and tenants on board and together I believe we can build a great future for officers, members and tenants alike in the outstanding area that we all live or work

Some examples from the HRB work programme are summarised below:

1. Draft Housing Service Plan 2022/23

The Service Plan is produced annually and sets out the key achievements over the past year and the forthcoming issues to be faced by the service. A range of service improvements were identified, performance data reported, consultation proposals outlined and budget information provided to the Board. The Plan linked closely with the Housing Strategy and was designed to complement a number of other housing plans and policies as part of how the Council managed its own housing stock, managed homelessness, and the services it delivered in the private sector. The Plan this year reflected some of the service interruptions due to the pandemic. The Plan also considered service challenges and pressures over the next three years, including climate change implications, tenant safety measures, the implications of the Social Housing White Paper, the Building Safety Act and the ambitions to increase the supply of social housing. The over-arching priorities of the Plan were more affordable homes, homelessness and rough sleeping, and Council homes fit for purpose and satisfied tenants.

The Service Plan was presented to tenant groups and the Board's input was welcomed.

2. Draft Housing Revenue Account and Capital Budgets 2022/23

The draft Housing Revenue Account for 2022/23 a key document for the Board to influence. The annual HRA was underpinned and influenced by the 30 year HRA Business Plan. This business plan needed to be refreshed to consider a number of issues which had evolved over the years, including a full stock condition survey to inform future programme costs, the implications of the climate change action plan, the implications of Universal Credit, the end of rent reductions, additional work required on asset management planning and compliance requirements, and reconsideration of the debt level and use of Right to Buy Receipts linked to future development ambitions. However, this had been delayed by other work commitments. The budget was in effect a 'stand still' budget based on existing stock data, whilst the updated stock condition survey data was awaited.

The draft 2022/23 budget continued to invest in and maintain existing properties to a high standard and set aside £880,000 for climate reduction investment. There was a healthy surplus of £0.208million.

3. HRA financial monitoring reports and Right to Buy spending

A summary of the overall financial position on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), HRA Capital Programme and the Business Plan for 2020/21 has been regularly provided at meetings. Careful monitoring throughout the year indicated that the HRA was in a healthy position.

Rent collection rates remained high which allowed a commitment on expenditure, however garage rents continued to underperform.

Regulatory Right to Buy changes were explained to the Board, these meant that the Council were required to focus on development opportunities in the future but would not have to return its Right to Buy receipts as had previously been predicted.

4. Housing strategy refresh and scoping

The housing strategy needed to be a forward looking document that had regard to past performance and the local housing market operating within national policy and legislation. The Board's feedback was sought on the structure, focus and content of the strategy. 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 improves services. The strategic approach outlined in the housing strategy were linked to the themes of the Council Plan. Following consultation the 2020-24 strategy was brought back to the Board for its approval.

5. Stock condition survey

The Board acknowledged the benefits and risks associated with undertaking an internal and external stock condition survey on 100% of the EDDC housing portfolio. The completion of a full stock condition survey was an economic and strategic imperative for the Council as without one it was at 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. It would provide the information necessary to enable effective forecast and budgeting for the financial implications of managing repair and maintenance obligations. A full stock condition survey was also required in order to comply with the new Building Safety Act. Following the initial stock condition survey, a five year rolling programme would be delivered, which would require a dedicated stock condition surveyor. The Board noted and approved the additional resource requirements to deliver the full stock condition survey.

6. Integrated asset management contract updates/Ian Williams complaints and compliments

The Board noted progress with the contract and reviewed the partnership with Ian Williams Ltd throughout the year. All elements of the contract were focussed on to continually seek improvements with both the day to day management and performance of the contract. Operations during 2021/22 had not been business as usual due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of Brexit. A complaint management programme had been developed and the Board noted key themes and trends for complaints and compliments. Steps were being taken to improve on gaining customer satisfaction and learning from complaints received. Customer feedback and the way that the Property and Asset team responded to the feedback were vital indicators of the overall performance of the Ian Williams contract, impacting KPIs. Complaints were actively managed to provide a better service and ensure that tenants were being given the opportunity to be heard.

7. Expanding the compliance and cyclical servicing arm of the Property and Asset team

The Board considered and approved a request for an increase in budget for additional posts in the housing Property and Asset team for the delivery of compliance and cyclical services work streams to ensure that the housing stock remained safe, compliant and that tenants could feel safe in their homes. An additional delivery strand was provided within the Property and Asset team to focus on compliance and cyclical servicing (the existing ones were reactive repairs and voids, planned works, climate change and stock condition survey, and call centre customer improvement and relationship management).

8. Housing Management System software upgrade

The Board were kept informed of the options the Council's housing service had investigated for upgrading and modernising its Housing Management IT System in order to ensure its systems remained fit for purpose and able to meet the flexible and agile working needs of the service in the years ahead, and to enable and support the Council's obligations under the Social Housing White Paper 2021 and the Building Safety Bill 2021. The Board considered the proposed upgrade route, the implementation, method and anticipated timescales, the high level benefits and risks, other

options considered, and the costs of the proposal. The proposed upgrade would provide the housing service with a good and effective value for money system, allowing improved flexible and mobile working environments. The tenant portal would also provide tenants with another form of engagement and access to the service.

9. Mental Health Strategy for Housing 2021-2025

A five year mental health strategy for housing had been developed over the past two years, designed to deal with the increasing demand upon housing services which were mental health related. A specialist worker, experienced in the field of mental health was recruited to carry out a small caseload and act as liaison between housing and mental health teams, as well as providing a source of assistance and guidance for staff across all housing teams.

10. Advantage South West

The Board recommended that the Council should continue paying the annual subscription to maintain the membership and continue the benefits of procurement, significant financial savings, a platform for networking and the opportunity to work with other housing providers. Membership of ASW allowed the Council to maintain properties to a good standard whilst achieving value for money.

11. Building Safety Act presentation

The Board received a detailed presentation from the Property and Asset Manager and the Compliance and Cyclical Servicing Manager on the Building Safety Act and the impact on housing. The key points of the Building Safety Act for the future were a stricter regime on building and refurbishment of buildings, golden thread of information needed at all stages of the buildings, fire door inspections, stricter regime on fire safety inspections, and ensuring resident engagement.

12. Other issues reviewed by the Board during the year have included:

- Complaints handling – the Property and Asset complaint policy applied to all staff members, contractors and sub-contractors employed by or acting on behalf of EDDC. The aim was to proactively manage complaints in order to provide a better service.
- Social Housing White Paper – the contents of this were likely to be translated into legislation and would signal a significant change to the governance of social housing.
- Integrated asset management contract void report – independent cost review of voids by consultants Echlon.
- Grounds maintenance additional costs – two grounds maintenance season staff.
- Procurement of the gas servicing/services contract – procurement options and the suggestion that Advantage South West framework be utilised to procure the gas servicing contract were considered.
- Housemark annual performance report.
- Performance management reports – measuring performance across the housing service.
- Covid-19 performance monitoring report – monitoring different areas of the housing service since March 2020.
- Updated housing policies:
 - income management including debt collection policy/strategy
 - 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

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications.