

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at online via Zoom on 24 March 2022

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.15 pm

29 Public speaking

Council housing tenant Sue Dawson brought concerns about tenant participation to the Board, which she felt were having a detrimental effect on tenants and the housing service. She referred to the number of senior housing staff that were absent, a lack of tenant input into the housing service and a poor repairs service.

In response the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment replied that Sue's comments in relation to tenant involvement were recognised as an area for improvement across the social housing sector, and that the proposal for a review would be incorporated into the Housing Review Board's forward plan. The Housing Service Lead acknowledged that having a number of housing managers absent was impacting on capacity for service delivery and reassured the Board that everything possible was being done to resolve the situation.

30 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 January 2022 were received and accepted.

31 Declarations of interest

Declarations of interest.

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

Declarations of interest.

Sue Saunders, Personal, housing tenant.

32 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

33 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential/exempt items.

34 Housing Review Board forward plan

The Housing Service Lead presented the forward plan and outlined a number of items to be brought to future meetings. She advised members that the forward plan acted as a reminder of agenda items to come forward on future meetings and reminded members that they could add further issues to the next forward plan by informing either herself or the Democratic Services Officer.

Consideration was given to a proposal form submitted by tenant representative and vice chair Sue Saunders, requesting a review into updating tenant involvement and customer service.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment commented that the proposal for a review of tenant involvement was a timely opportunity as the three year resident involvement strategy adopted by the Board in 2019 was due to be refreshed and he would ensure that the issues raised and a commitment to tenant involvement would be picked up during this review.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged the concerns of tenants around tenant involvement and contact with officers. He gave his undertaking that he would discuss this with officers and members of the Cabinet to try to address these things, but also explained that it was a hard time for officers, with a number of senior staff absent.

During the meeting the forward plan was endorsed by the Board, with the addition of a review of tenant involvement, to take place with an officer team and tenants reviewing the resident involvement strategy.

35 **Integrated Asset Management Contract**

The purpose of the Property and Asset Manager's report was to provide the HRB with an update on the integrated asset management contract (IAMC), delivered by Ian Williams, as part of the regular performance update, but also as a direct response to ongoing concerns raised regarding the delivery of some key functions of the contract. Two Ian Williams representatives, Kate Green – General Manager, and Arron Kelly – Business Manager, were introduced and welcomed to the meeting.

The Property and Asset Manager reported the IAMC had come to the end of its third year. Since its commencement many challenges had been encountered. Officers continued to monitor the external influences that could impact on the delivery of the service:

- Brexit
- Covid
- War in Ukraine

These were included in the risk register, which was reviewed quarterly by the Core Group.

It was reported that the level of demands on the service in relation to reactive repairs and voids were generally as expected with year 3 directly comparable to the year 1 of the contract. Year 2 was somewhat of an anomaly due to the direct impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In general terms the void, planned works and compliance elements of the contract were working well. However, there were concerns with the reactive repairs service and the length of time it was taking to complete routine repairs in some cases. It was noted that void properties were increasingly being left in poorer conditions when vacated, often with debris to clear from the house and garden. Sometimes there were complex issues which led to a delay at the start of the process.

Since the last meeting of the HRB the level of Work in Progress (WIP) and overdue jobs had risen and was above that expected and desired. As a result a direct impact was being seen with an increase of calls from tenants chasing jobs as well as an increase in complaints on the basis that tenants were waiting too long for jobs to be completed. To

fully understand the problems in this area officers had carried out detailed data analysis to identify the reasons and trends for the current high level of WIP and overdue jobs.

Among the issues identified as causes were:

- Incorrect application of operational processes on the part of IW and EDDC, particularly the variation process and extension of time process.
- Jobs were still being incorrectly marked as “work completed” rather than stage completions being applied when follow on works were required.
- Jobs had been completed but not closed down correctly meaning they remained on both the WIP and overdue jobs list.
- The delivery of larger scale and complex repair jobs that extended beyond the contractual 28 day period for completion.
- The sourcing of resource/sub-contract support to deliver some repair jobs which delayed the completion of jobs directly contributing to the WIP and overdue jobs.
- The sourcing of components/materials to carry out specific repairs, this directly contributed to the WIP and overdue jobs.

The levels of WIP and overdue jobs was of particular concern and officers were working closely with Ian Williams to undertake a detailed review of the delivery of reactive repairs to ensure that they met the headline aim/purpose of ‘Right Repair, Right Time, Fixed and Stay Fixed’. The areas that had been the subject of this review included but was not restricted to:

- Diagnosis.
- Appointment.
- Right First Time.
- Stay Fixed.

Initial findings from the review suggested that a number of problems existed that need to be addressed ranging from:

- Too many chasers required in relation to repair orders and in some cases recalls.
- Missed appointments with no communication with the tenant.
- Insufficient time allowed to carry out specific repairs.
- Material availability.
- Resource availability for some key trades.
- Sub-contractor support was not sufficient.
- Sub-contractors not adhering to the contractual protocols and timescales.
- Management of sub-contractors.
- Systems and contract resources not being used correctly to deliver the contractual requirements for repairs.
- Poor communication across all areas.

These issues had been discussed at length between both parties and as result an ‘Action Plan’ had been developed to address the issues. Work was underway to resolve the issues and included:

- Updating existing processes to remove the possible areas of failure.
- Updating the IT processes and automated communication across the interface.
- Staff training with a focus on the diagnosis of a repair and raising the orders correctly with a focus on appointing at the first time of contact.
- Greater use of the ‘Duty Surveyor’ role to improve the diagnosis and ordering of complex repairs.
- Staff training to ensure all the processes were being delivered correctly.
- Focused delivery of the more complex repairs ensuring that realistic deliverable plans were in place for such repairs and importantly such plans were communicated to tenants so they had a full understanding of the work required and the timescales.
- Better communication across the organisations to include record keeping.

- Better communication with tenants to ensure that they were fully aware and understood if their repair could not be carried out for any reason, had to be postponed and where follow on work was required.

The action plan was included with the agenda papers for the Board's information and was being monitored by the Core Group. The Core Group acted as a higher level of governance between EDDC and Ian William to ensure over all delivery of the contract. Both organisations were fully committed to delivering both the IAMC and action plan.

The Property and Asset Manager reported that the issues identified directly impacted on customer satisfaction and complaints. There was huge pressure on officers. Of particular concern was the demand being placed on the Property & Asset Management Team, particularly the Business Development & Customer Improvement Manager in having to intervene to manage issues to prevent needless escalation. The demand for intervention would be closely monitored to ensure it was reduced, and further reviews would be undertaken and measures implemented if necessary. It was noted that there were a number of vacancies (11 highlighted) within the Property and Asset Team, with difficulties around recruitment remaining the key issue.

Customer satisfaction remained a challenge and needed to be improved. The ways in which EDDC and Ian Williams carried out and collated satisfaction were listed in the report.

Officers were fully aware of dissatisfaction amongst tenants mainly around the responsive repairs element of the contract. This has been picked up through:

- Preventable complaints.
- Negative feedback from Members representing tenants.
- Negative feedback from tenants during face to face meetings with officers.
- Negative feedback given by a tenant representative at the HRB.

Analysis of complains was very important. No specific geographical dimension had been detected, however there was a strong dissatisfaction amongst residents around communication.

Concern was expressed over how tenants were contacted. The Open Housing System recorded tenant's disabilities and contact preferences, however it was acknowledged that if the information was not provided by the tenant or on the system this would not be highlighted to staff. The Housing Service Lead reiterated that the Council's telephone lines were always open.

In order to give more evidence of areas of concern and also to give all residents the opportunity to feedback their own experiences, the Information and Analysis Officer had been tasked with undertaking a survey that would give every tenant the opportunity to tell EDDC how they felt. The Information and Analysis Officer was also requesting the assistance of tenants to help formulate the survey and the questions in order to hopefully appeal to all and to encourage the feedback required. This action and area in general also featured highly in the action plan.

Officers had recently attended the first Repair Service Review Group that had taken place since the Covid pandemic and were looking forward to working with the group to engage directly with tenants to understand the issues, and to work with them to drive forward improvement in service delivery of the IAMC as well as the wider Property & Asset service.

Other areas that were being explored were:

- Some general reminders regarding the delivery of the contract by way of specific publications such as Housing Matters.
- Tenant workshops/drop in sessions across the district
- A member workshop for councillors so that they could get a full understanding of the delivery of the service.

The Property and Asset Manager was thanked for his open and honest appraisal of the IAMC everyone present acknowledged that improvements were required from the contract. The Board were urged to look at the action plan and report any perceived gaps, which would be included in the action plan. Ian Williams' representatives again commented that they were fully committed to the long term partnership and contract with EDDC and were absolutely aware of the issues, concerns and need for performance improvement.

The Leader of the Council thanked the Property and Asset Manager for his report and welcomed the positive measures being put in place for the future. He also thanked the tenants for their input. He reassured the Board that internal discussions would take place about the controls over the contract and that he would organise an internal meeting with senior officers and councillors to review this.

A request was made during the meeting for the key performance indicators (KPIs) relating to all aspects of asset management to be circulated to Board members. It was felt that it would be helpful to provide this to the Board in future too.

The Board agreed to note the update on the delivery of the IAMC and supported and endorsed the action plan set out in the report to address ongoing performance concerns that related to the IAMC.

36 **Social Housing White Paper**

The Social Housing Green Paper which was reported to the Board in 2019 had now emerged as a Government White Paper. The White Paper's Charter for Social Housing Residents' aimed to set out a new vision for the way that social housing residents were treated. The Housing Services Manager had been working closely with some of the involved tenants on this paper and a tenant representative presented the report along with the Housing Service Lead.

The seven themes covered what every social housing resident should be able to expect:

- To be safe in your home.
- To know how your landlord is performing.
- To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly.
- To be treated with respect.
- To have your voice heard by your landlord.
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in.
- To be supported to take your first step in ownership.

It was important to get the basics right and engage tenants in a way that worked for them. The intention was to work with tenants to develop a suite of satisfaction measures that they want to see, that they thought would show the health of the service and each of the teams within it. It was a great opportunity to revive tenant involvement and the Board's commitment to listen and support officers and tenants was sought.

The Board noted the report and welcomed examination of the areas identified for further action, which would be taken forward by the housing leadership team.

37 **Annual report of the Housing Review Board**

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment 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 Democratic Services Officer was thanked for producing the report which the Board endorsed and noted.

38 **Housing Task Force - an introduction**

The Housing Task Force Service Lead explained the Housing Task Force which had been convened, following the findings and recommendations of the Housing Task and Finish Forum, to look into concerns, issues and potential solutions to meeting the levels of housing need within the district. EDDC had lost significant numbers of social homes via the Right to Buy scheme.

The team would initially have four officers: Service Lead, 2 Enabling Officers and a Development Surveyor, with other specialist roles being brought in as required. The team was funded for two years, with two clear aims:

- To facilitate a step change in the delivery of new affordable and social housing units across the district.
- To write an evidence based 30-50 year Housing Development Strategy, Pipeline Development Programme and a robust Active Asset Management Strategy.

The team would be exploring a range of options, detailed in the report in order to achieve the aims.

The Housing Review Board noted and endorsed the informative report.

39 **Stock Condition Survey**

The meeting became inquorate at this point and was adjourned.

40 **Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital finance report**

Following adjournment of the meeting, this item would be considered at a future meeting of the Housing Review Board.

41 **HouseMark membership renewal**

Following adjournment of the meeting, this item would be considered at a future meeting of the Housing Review Board.

42 **CIH Professional Standards**

Following adjournment of the meeting, this item would be considered at a future meeting of the Housing Review Board.

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

Following adjournment of the meeting, this item would be considered at a future meeting of the Housing Review Board.

44 **Electrical Safety Policy**

Following adjournment of the meeting, this item would be considered at a future meeting of the Housing Review Board.

45 **Quarterly performance indicator report**

Following adjournment of the meeting, this item would be considered at a future meeting of the Housing Review Board.

46 **Housing Covid 19 performance monitoring**

Following adjournment of the meeting, this item would be considered at a future meeting of the Housing Review Board.

47 **Senior officer decision**

Following adjournment of the meeting, this item was not considered.

Attendance List

Board members present:

Stephen Beer, Tenant
Sue Saunders, Tenant
Councillor Helen Parr
Councillor Sarah Chamberlain (Chair)

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

M Armstrong
P Arnott
D Ledger
E Wragg

Officers in attendance:

Jo Garfoot, Service Lead Housing Task Force
Graham Baker, Senior Technical Officer Asset Management
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead Housing
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Michelle Davidson, Property and Asset Management
Danielle Furzey, Housing Options Manager
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Andi Loosemore, Rental Manager
Rob Ward, Accountant
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Bev Anderson, Tenant Participation Assistant
Kate Green – General Manager, Ian Williams

Arron Kelly – Business Manager, Ian Williams

Board apologies:

Christine Drew, Independent Community Representative

Cat Summers, Tenant

Councillor Ian Hall

Cindy Collier, Tenant

Councillor Brenda Taylor

Chair

Date: