

Report to: Housing Review Board



Date of Meeting 16 March 2023

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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 2022-23 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 2022-23 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

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.

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, with tenant representative Sue Saunders as Vice Chair. The civic year began with online consultative meetings, with the Board finally resuming face to face meetings in January 2023.

The Board welcomed three new board members, independent community representatives Sara Clarke and Rob Robinson and tenant/leaseholder representative Sue Dawson. They said goodbye to independent community representative Christine Drew and also received the sad news that former tenant representative and Vice Chair of the Board Peter Sullivan had passed away.

Words from the Chair

I would like to thank all officers, staff, members and tenants as always for their continued support and commitment to the Council's housing department which is so important and key in so many ways. Over the last year we have continued to adapt to the new normal way of working, be it from home or in fact now in some circumstances face to face, or going forward, hybrid.

The housing department has had to make some difficult decisions this year with rent increases in these already difficult times, but the housing department have also made some great inroads into some new projects, including starting the huge task of the stock condition survey for the Council's housing stock. Once completed this will make a huge difference to our tenants and our stock properties, highlighting any repairs or defects that need addressing. We also have the new damp and mould policy which has been actioned and being implemented. Also the development team headed by Jo Garfoot with some great opportunities going forward.

I would like to thank everyone who has been involved over the last year and am confident in the future.

Some examples from the HRB work programme are summarised below:

1. Draft Housing Service Plan 2023/24

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 also considered service challenges and pressures over the next three years, including climate change implications, the implications of the Social Housing White Paper, the Building Safety Act and the ambitions to increase the supply of social housing with the role of the newly formed Housing Task Force team. The over-arching priorities of the plan were more affordable homes, homelessness and rough sleeping, and Council homes fit for purpose and satisfied tenants. This year's service plan had also been produced alongside a comprehensive workforce development plan document to compliment it and ensure that the correct resources and staffing requirements were considered and in place to ensure plan delivery is realistic.

The service plan was presented to tenant groups and the Board's input was welcomed.

2. Draft Housing Revenue Account and Capital Budgets 2023/24

The draft Housing Revenue Account for 2023/24 was 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 updated with revised financial modelling once the stock condition survey work was complete. 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 budget assumed an increase in rents of 7% in order to meet rising costs. There were measures in place to protect low income council tenants.

The draft 2023/24 budget continued to invest in and maintain existing properties to a high standard with a comprehensive planned programme of expenditure, adaptations and routine repairs. All planned expenditure was met from available income. Reserves were kept at adopted levels. There was a healthy surplus of £0.268million.

3. HRA financial monitoring reports

A summary of the overall financial position on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), HRA Capital Programme and the Business Plan for 2022/23 has been regularly provided at meetings. Careful monitoring throughout the year indicated that the HRA was in a healthy position.

The Board were kept up to date with acquisitions and right to buy sales.

At its October meeting the Board discussed the social housing rent cap consultation, which had been produced by the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, as part of measures to protect tenants from further impacts of the cost of living crisis. Under the current policy, rent was increased in line with the consumer price index (CPI) plus 1% which would currently mean a potential increase of 11% from April 2023 onwards. The consultation suggested a rent cap of either 3%, 5% or 7% was imposed and the Government were asking for views from the sector. The Board were reminded that although the increase and implications on tenant affordability to meet this increase were a key consideration, the cost of maintaining the housing stock would be increasing with inflation and by not keeping pace with increase income levels would necessarily result in a reduction in available resources to meet current plans to maintain and improve stock.

The draft budget presented to the Board in January 2023 assumed a rent increase of 7%.

4. Stock condition survey

The Board were regularly updated on the delivery of the stock condition survey which was taking place both internally and externally across 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 on 20% of the stock per annum would be delivered, which would require a dedicated stock condition surveyor. The mobilisation period had been completed and the stock condition survey commenced in September 2022

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

The Board received regular progress updates on the integrated asset management contract with Ian Williams Ltd throughout the year. This was 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. The issues identified had directly impacted on customer satisfaction and complaints.

The purpose underpinning the contract was right repair, right time, fix and stay fixed. EDDC developed an action plan with Ian Williams to improve the repairs and maintenance service to a level that client, contractor and customers were expecting from the contract. This action plan was reported to and reviewed by the Board. It was being rigorously implemented and had resulted in service improvements. Key Performance Indicators were also used to monitor performance. Voids remained a concern throughout the year, with many factors contributing to the issue, such as labour shortages, type of property, an increase in void turnover, condition the properties were being returned in and the problem of clearing previous debt left on meters.

6. Tenant satisfaction survey

The Board endorsed the housing service carrying out a housing satisfaction survey. Having accurate and up to date information on what tenants thought about the service enabled it to see how it was performing, and more importantly to ensure that informed decisions were made about how the service was shaped and planned for the future. Tenant satisfaction measures were proposed in the Social Housing White Paper and published by the Regulator for Social Housing. There was strict guidance on how the tenant survey was carried out.

7. Resident involvement strategy

The Board received a joint report from an officer and tenant on the process to review the resident involvement strategy to ensure that the Council maintained a fit for purpose approach to engaging its tenants in the management and maintenance of their homes.

8. Emergency winter housing plan

The Council's plans to respond to the cost of living crisis and its commitment to support vulnerable tenants throughout the winter period were considered by the Board. The report proposed the adoption of a series of short-term measures to be implemented during the winter and the creation

of a Housing Winter Pressures Hardship Fund to help combat the worst impacts on vulnerable households.

9. Complaints

Throughout the year tenant members raised their concerns over the complaints policy. Officers explained the corporate complaints procedure in detail and outlined the options available to complainants. The Board also considered a report concerning self-assessment of the complaints procedure against the Housing Ombudsman's code. It was noted that changes to the Housing Ombudsman scheme which took effect in October 2022 included the removal of the 'democratic filter', which the Housing Ombudsman considered would make it easier for residents to access their service. The Board also received the results of a broader review of how the housing service responded to complaints and service issues. In January 2023 the Board considered a report which set out learning and improvements identified from the complaints the housing service had received during the year. This report made recommendations in the handling and processing of complaints by the housing service in line with the EDDC corporate complaints procedure, the Housing Ombudsman code and the consumer standards, which the Board approved.

10. Review of downsizing grant

The Board recommended that the Council should trial suggested financial payments for tenants who were downsizing. Encouraging tenants to downsize would lead to an increase in the number of larger family homes available and would also help tenants who were struggling in larger properties. It was acknowledged that there were factors over and above financial incentives and that the key area was additional support for some tenants downsizing. It was agreed that the council would give consideration towards helping tenants, when help was needed, with some of the tasks which came with the process of moving homes.

11. Damp and mould policy

The prevalence of damp and mould in social housing, as well as failings to address these had become national headlines in the press over the winter months and the Government/Regulator had asked every housing provider to answer some probing questions that sought to establish their current position. The issues surrounding damp and mould highlighted the need to have a specific policy and process in place for the management of damp and mould. The Board recognised the serious health impacts that damp and mould could have on the occupants and the need to take meaningful action as a social housing landlord that aimed to provide a decent home for tenants. The Board endorsed the policy, which had been written to ensure that wherever possible tenants were not adversely affected by the causes of damp and mould. There would be proactive action to manage and eradicate cases of damp and mould and would avoid a culture of attributing the problem to tenant lifestyle.

12. Performance management

Throughout the year the Board received reports measuring performance across the housing service. In January 2023 the Board were asked to consider a newly developed tabular summary, which would help to ensure that it had better assurance around performance of the housing service, which would support it to scrutinise, challenge and be accountable for the performance of the housing. The Board were asked what performance information it wanted to see presented to future meetings and also different format options for how this information was presented. 56 key performance indicators (KPIs) and 25 compliance performance indicators were chosen to monitor and reflect the different areas of housing. These showed at a glance areas for improvement and

where focus was needed, in addition to where the service was doing well. Officers could access a live dashboard to see detailed information on any performance measure.

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

- 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.
- Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) professional standards - these were based on seven characteristics and linked closely with the Social Housing White paper. The standards were being cascaded through the EDDC housing service.
- Housing Task Force – convened to look into concerns, issues and potential solutions to meet the levels of housing need within the district. The Board received reports on progress to date, options and future plans for the delivery of affordable social housing across the district.
- Climate change update – the Board received information on retro-fit renewable measures and delivery to date, approach and current programmes, successful funding applications and continued delivery and bid planning for the future.
- Procurement of the gas servicing/services contract – the Board were updated on the procurement, award and mobilisation of the gas servicing contract.
- Additional post – Data Officer (Property & Asset) – the Board recommended an additional post of Housing Data Analyst to provide accurate validated data in relation to the variety of work undertaken by the Property and Asset team to ensure the housing stock remained safe, compliant and that tenants could also feel safe in their homes.
- Housemark membership renewal – the Board approved the Housemark membership renewal and acknowledged the need to benchmark as well as share information and best practice.
- Community Development: food support – the Board received an update on the vital work being done by the Community Development team to address food poverty across the district.
- Use of external consultants – the Board recommended approval of the use of external consultants to support the delivery of key projects and essential services to ensure that the housing stock remained safe, compliant and that tenants could feel safe in their homes.
- Electrical safety policy – to ensure compliance with current legislation and regulations. This included community centres, communal areas and district offices.

Financial implications:

The financial considerations are included within the body of the report.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications