

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 15 June 2023

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 11.15 am and ended at 2.05 pm

1 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak. However a request was made via email from a district councillor for responses to the following:

1. Can an up to date report come before the next HRB on voids clearly setting how many are through the district and why it is taking so long to get them back into circulation.
2. Can a report come to the next HRB dealing with the stock condition survey, setting out where the district contractors are with the review, setting out number of houses that have been surveyed and what the surveyors are actually looking at.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

The Chair welcomed all those present to the meeting. He informed them that co-opted tenant member Sue Saunders had resigned from the Housing Review Board and thanked Sue for her contribution to and time spent on the Board

Nominations for Vice Chair were received for Councillor Sarah Chamberlain.

RESOLVED: that tenant representative Sarah Chamberlain be appointed Vice Chair of the Board for the ensuing year.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 March 2023 were agreed.

4 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.

Councillor Vicky Johns declared that she had family members who were council housing tenants.

5 Matters of urgency

There were none.

6 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There was one confidential/exempt item.

7 Housing Review Board induction

Prior to the start of the Board meeting the Assistant Directors for Housing and the Housing Task Force gave members of the Housing Review Board and other councillors in attendance an introduction to the work of the HRB. They reminded those present of the priorities and remit of the Housing Review Board, and hoped that it would focus the Board on key activities and areas of service that mattered to tenants and service users.

As well as explaining the background and purpose of the Board they also outlined the aims and purpose for housing services, how the service was organised, future challenges and opportunities for housing, and the housing strategy. The three broad priorities fell under the following categories:

- Providing homes.
- Improving homes.
- Improving communities.

The presentation also covered detail around some of the external and internal pressures that the service was facing including changes in regulation, increasing demand in every area, ongoing sickness and wellbeing issues with officers due to pressure and workload and the ongoing challenges around recruitment.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note and use the contents of the report as part of the induction process for new Board members.

8 **Housing Review Board forward plan**

The Assistant Director of Housing presented the forward plan and advised members that the forward plan acted as a reminder of agenda items to come forward to future meetings. 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.

The Chair requested that the following items be added to the forward plan:

- A review of the Housing Review Board and its membership, which would tie in well with the Resident Involvement Strategy review.
- A review of the contract with StreetScene services for estate management.

RESOLVED: that with the addition of two items the forward plan be agreed.

9 **Social Housing White Paper action plan**

The Housing Review Board received a presentation from the Assistant Director Housing, along with a report and action plan in order to provide the Board with an update on the preparations that were being made to ensure compliance with the up and coming Social Housing (Regulation) Bill. The Bill provided the legal basis for many of the measures set out in the 2020 Social Housing White Paper. The intention was to deliver transformational change for social housing residents and fulfil the Government's manifesto pledge to empower residents, provide greater redress, better regulation and improve the quality of social housing.

The Assistant Director Housing's report aimed to summarise the Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper) and consider how EDDC fared against its demands as it currently stood, and set out recommendations on what steps needed to be taken in order to prepare for its full implementation. The Consumer Standard would be given greater focus and status, elevating it to be in line with the Governance and

Finance measures. The proposed new regulations also set out wide-ranging proposals to transform and strengthen the regulatory regime based around new consumer standards and a code of practice with increasing powers of intervention to ensure it held all landlords to account for the services they delivered and drove good services for tenants.

The new transparent approach would bring a fundamental change to social housing regulation. The legislation would set new expectations on the services that landlords needed to provide for their tenants. There were new consumer regulations and standards. There would be reactive inspections every four years considering feedback from tenants, board reports on service performance and evidence from the Housing Ombudsman. There would be new tenant satisfaction measures and the Bill would look at the assurances councillors were getting about the quality of homes, service performance and their engagement with residents. There were stronger powers and harsher penalties on landlords if things went wrong, and a very transparent approach with the publication of conclusions from individual consumer inspections.

The Charter sought to deliver transformational change and respond to the lessons learnt from:

- The Grenfell Tower tragedy.
- The views of residents on the Social Housing Green paper 2018.
- Views on how social housing was regulated, including complaints.
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the importance of people's homes, communities, neighbourhoods and green spaces, social isolation, support for the vulnerable, wellbeing, mental health, crime and anti-social behaviour.
- To address energy efficiency and building safety.

The new Charter for social housing set out what every social housing resident should be able to expect from their landlord in seven chapters:

1. To be safe in your home.
2. To know how your landlord is performing.
3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly.
4. To be treated with respect.
5. To have your voice heard by your landlord.
6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in.
7. To be supported to take your first to home ownership.

The Assistant Director Housing explained that EDDC's action plan provided details of where it did and didn't meet the proposed Charter requirements and any further actions it needed to address these areas. It also set out where Charter requirements were yet to be determined/developed by the Regulator and notification was awaited. It was noted that the themes of the Charter could be seen throughout many of the agenda items for the meeting and emphasised the importance of the role of the Housing Review Board.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note and agree the report, action plan and content of the presentation.

10 **Results of tenant satisfaction survey**

The Information and Analysis Officer's report explained that the results of the March 2023 tenant satisfaction survey saw a significant decline in satisfaction across several aspects of the housing service. The housing leadership team had considered the findings in detail and a communication plan (worked in conjunction with the corporate communications team) and an improvement plan was being put together to address how tenant satisfaction could be improved. The results gave additional evidence to support

the measures being put in place to improve particular areas of the service, such as the complaints process and aspects of the repairs service.

This report also highlighted how performance in some of the key areas was translating into lower levels of tenant satisfaction. An important step to improving the services for tenants and hopefully improving tenant satisfaction was to ensure that the housing service was getting the basics right across the service. The survey was carried out by a third party company called 'Service Insights', which enabled the survey to be sent by email and SMS to general needs tenants (sheltered housing tenants received a postal survey). A lesson learnt from this was to ensure transparency on all aspects of data protection, and to ensure all tenants were aware of the survey in advance.

The Board were made aware that there was a requirement for all registered providers of social housing to run a tenant satisfaction survey annually from 2023/24, with a statutory duty to submit these measures to the Social Housing Regulator. The recent survey provided a 'baseline' to ensure the Council was meeting the requirements for the future. As part of the survey questions, tenants were asked if they would be willing to share further information and a proportion of tenants agreed. These tenants would be further engaged with to help gain more insight into tenant's experiences.

The Information and Analysis's presentation (and report) covered and explained the following satisfaction measures, as well as actions being taken to address the findings:

- Overall satisfaction.
- Satisfaction with repairs.
- Communication.
- Complaints.
- Anti-Social Behaviour handling.
- Cost of living and tenant wellbeing.

The next steps were to track tenant satisfaction much more closely and to monitor this as EDDC went through service changes. Officers acknowledged that there was a link between what tenants were saying they were unhappy with and where there were known service challenges/failures. It was important to be aware of the national context and change. The housing sector was working in a much tougher operating environment than ever before, nationally under increasing pressure in a number of areas. The trend across most other registered providers was showing a decline in tenant satisfaction across all service measures.

Those present expressed concern with the results of the tenant satisfaction survey. The Assistant Director Housing reported that the Housing Leadership Team were reflecting on the results of the survey and using them to feed into a wider improvement plan, with a report being brought to the September meeting of the HRB. The survey highlighted the need to improve the visibility of the service, accessibility for tenants and to build back up the relationship with tenants. The survey linked in directly with the current consultation to renew the resident involvement strategy. The survey also highlighted and provided further evidence that supported tenant dissatisfaction with the current repairs service. There was a review of the current staffing structure underway to ensure there were the right people in the right roles across the housing service as well as sufficient capacity.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet approve the facilitation of a series of focus groups to be held with tenants who have offered to provide further insight and information on their experiences with the

housing services. Officers would then review and use these findings to further inform future improvements.

2. that Cabinet approve the further surveying of tenants over the coming months in order to monitor satisfaction levels more closely and more frequently and as a way of assessing whether levels of satisfaction were improving.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the baseline tenant satisfaction measure survey report.

11 **HouseMark performance report**

The Information and Analysis Officer's report explained that HouseMark was a data analysis service which gathered performance and cost information from 350 social housing providers across the UK, providing them with the data and insights needed to make evidence based decisions to drive efficient performance and business improvement. Being able to bench mark the housing service across its peers was a very difficult exercise to do alone, but it could play a hugely important role in evaluating the service. The reports and online interactive analytical tools that HouseMark provided helped officers 'dive deep' into the data and compare EDDC's housing service with others.

HouseMark had provided a comprehensive report, giving a useful insight into cost and performance. Understanding costs alongside performance was an important part of knowing how the service was doing, as well as considering this with up to date performance and recent tenant satisfaction results.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board considered, commented on and noted the HouseMark 2021/22 Benchmarking report.

12 **Consumer Standards - self assessment**

The Interim Housing Services Manager reminded the Board that at its last meeting on 16 March the HRB received a report on the Self-Assessment against the Consumer Standards. The HRB agreed the self-assessment and action plan and requested that further consultation should be carried out with tenants and reported back to the Board. This was due to tenants at the previous meeting expressing concern that they had not had sufficient time to consider the content of the self-referral. An extraordinary meeting of the Resident Involvement Management Group (RIMG) took place on 31 March 2021, with 13 tenants taking part in the consultation. Out of 126 assessment requirements the tenants agreed with 74 areas and disagreed with 52 areas. It was reported that the feedback was the view of tenants and officers were not involved in the self-assessment. Officers pointed out that this was useful, direct feedback from tenants and could be considered as part of the preparation work in this area.

It was noted that the tenant self-assessment was undertaken by tenants only without any officer input. It was their view on the requirement and how they felt EDDC were meeting the requirement. The EDDC self-assessment had been carried out by officers using the evidence and working knowledge of how the requirements were being met. It also included actions where it was felt the minimum standard was being met, but further work could be undertaken to strengthen the service and implement best practice.

The original HRB report proposed that when the revised Consumer Standards were received from the regulator, a self-assessment be carried out with both officers and tenants present so that there was a greater understanding of the requirement, the evidence that could be provided in meeting the standard and a joint assessment of whether EDDC met it.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve that a joint workshop is undertaken with officers and tenants on receipt of the revised Consumer Standards from the regulator.

13 **Performance dashboard**

The Housing Review Board received a report and presentation from the Interim Housing Services Manager on the key performance indicator (KPI) dashboard and compliance dashboard at quarter 4 and year end. The presentation also outlined actions being taken to improve performance where targets were not being achieved.

KPIs in the presentation included:

- Rent arrears of current tenants as a % of annual rent debit.
- % of self-contained dwellings vacant and not available to rent.
- Average days to relet a social housing dwelling.
- % of rent lost through properties becoming vacant.
- % of routine repairs completed within target.
- % of emergency repairs completed within target.
- % of repairs outstanding and overdue.
- % satisfaction with day to day repairs.
- % of complaints responded to and closed within 20 days.
- % of calls answered within 1 minute.
- Average number of working days per person lost through sickness.

During 2023/24 the KPIs would continue to be cleansed and the data improved. PIs needed to be collected in line with the methodologies and best practice, ensuring it was accurate. New indicators of tenancy visits, tenant satisfaction measures and community development would be introduced. Improvements were planned for how complaints were reported, which would include complaints upheld, partially and not upheld, and learning from complaints. When setting targets for 2023/24, staff and residents would be consulted with to ensure that appropriate targets were set and that services for residents would continue to be enhanced. In addition to this, team targets would be developed and monitored to measure and track performance of teams.

Concern was expressed over staff sickness levels which the Assistant Director Housing agreed were high and an area of concern. Members also raised concerns over call centre response times and the Board were reassured that there were plans in place to improve this.

The eight key areas monitored in the compliance dashboard were:

- Asbestos.
- Electrical systems.
- Fire risk assessment.
- Fire protection systems.
- Gas safety.
- Lifting equipment.
- Smoke and carbon monoxide alarm regulations 2022.
- Water management.

The Interim Housing Services Manager outlined recent concerns in relation to electrical safety. This was being investigated and further information on this would be presented to the Board. Members questioned some of the narrative given and confirmation was received that asbestos surveys were now up to date.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board receive and note the performance report at year end and for quarter 4.

14 **Finance report**

The accountant's report provided the Housing Review Board with current draft financial outturn figures for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and housing capital program for the 2022/23 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.

It was noted that the 2022/23 outturn deficit for the year was £1.264m, £158,000 below the budgeted surplus of £1.422m. The Housing Accountant's report gave a summary by cost driver:

- Employment costs of an additional £0.36m resulting from the 2022/23 pay award.
- Lost income of £0.43m due to void properties.
- Supplies, services and other costs of an additional £0.15m due in part to disrepair claims and legal fees.
- Interest, income and charges of £0.21m from improved returns on investments.
- Expenditure on premises of an additional £0.69m.

The report proposed to cover the in-year deficit of £1.264m from earmarked reserves, leaving the HRA balance at the adopted level of £3.1m through:

- A contribution of £1.12m to be taken from the planned maintenance reserve covering the premises overspend of £0.69m and the void loss of £0.43m. This would in effect reverse the surplus contribution made to this reserve in 2021/22 due to underspends.
- The residual net £0.144m to be taken from the Capital Development Fund.

In terms of capital expenditure and associated funding the housing accountant summarised that:

- A total of 3 acquisitions were completed within the year as opposed to 33 right to buy sales, reducing the stock significantly.
- The £1.816m capital expenditure on Green Homes was funded partially by a central government grant of £0.612m with the majority of the residual funded by non-ring-fenced right to buy capital receipts
- The total revenue contribution to capital made from the HRA was £0.757m rather than a budgeted figure of £0.88m.

The Board noted the year end reserve levels and the 2022/23 right to buy position which were contained in the report.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet note the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital Finance 2022/23 year end outturn report, and approve the reserve recommendations.

15 **Chartered Institute of Housing Qualifications**

The Assistant Housing Director outlined the reasons that were driving the need to professionalise the housing service and the broader context for this. The report presented to the Board explained what was being done to understand the current levels of professional qualification and the options available to increase the level of professionally qualified managers in the EDDC housing service, taking account of capacity and budget and the requirements of the Social Housing Regulator.

An audit was currently being carried out of all housing employees to understand their qualifications and at what level. Many officers had already undertaken Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) learning. The CIH training was based around seven key characteristics or behaviours:

1. Integrity.
2. Inclusive.
3. Ethical.
4. Knowledgeable.
5. Skilled.
6. Advocate.
7. Leadership.

In many ways these were already aligned to the EDDC behaviours framework and it was therefore anticipated that they could be blended with the existing expectation for behaviour. The report suggested that the CIH professional standards were embedded into the culture and performance of the housing service to ensure they were current and alive. The report went on to outline a number of ways to increase knowledge and learning, as well as the budgetary implications. It was important to ensure a balance between work and any studies required.

It was expected that it would be a requirement for housing sector managers to be qualified, although it was not exactly clear what those levels were. This would make recruitment more challenging. A picture was being built of what the current position was, taking into account capacity, budget and timeframes, in order to achieve the required standards that were set by the regulator.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the approach set out in the report and support the drive towards ensuring officers had or worked towards achieving a relevant professional housing qualification, which would improve the ability to deliver a service that met the needs of the tenants and the standards required by the Social Housing Regulator in a sustainable and timely way.

16 **Subscription for Advantage South West**

The Property and Asset Manager's report asked members of the Housing Review Board to note the benefits of membership of Advantage South West (ASW) and to support the continuing membership of the organisation. The advantages of ASW included:

- Maintaining properties to a good standard whilst achieving value of money.
- Assisting in achieving continuity of components and services across the Property and Asset service.
- Assisting in the ongoing training and upskilling of staff through regular product review workshops and continuing professional development events.
- Providing a platform for networking with other authorities and housing providers across the South West.

The Chair suggested that in future the annual ASW subscription be delegated to the Assistant Director for Housing, rather than being brought to the HRB for decision.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet approve to continue paying the annual subscription to maintain the membership to Advantage South West.
2. that Cabinet approve that in future the decision to continue paying the annual subscription for Advantage South West membership be delegated to the Assistant Director Housing.

17 **Integrated asset management contract context and performance**

The Property and Asset Manager's report gave the Board an overview of the first four years of the integrated asset management (IAM) contract, particularly highlighting the growth and performance of the contract over that period. There had been a year on year increase in demands on the contract, and challenges facing the contract.

External factors that had impacted the contract and explained in the report were:

- Covid-19 pandemic.
- Brexit.
- Cost of living crisis/inflation.
- Disrepair cases.
- Damp and mould cases.

Internal factors that had impacted the contract and explained in the report were:

- Staffing.
- Stock investment.
- Processes.
- Resident expectations.
- Partnership ethos.

There had been a consistent year on year growth in responsive repairs and void works, as well as an increase in exclusion jobs and rise in damp and mould cases. The increased work load and factors such as inflation had attributed to the financial growth on the contract.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) contained in the report demonstrated numerous fluctuations in performance across all areas of the contract, with some KPIs showing a slight improvement and other showing a slight dip in performance. It was noted that a detailed review of the price per void was currently underway.

The Property and Asset Manager reported that the management of the contract remained a challenge. A high level review of the structure of the Property and Asset team in terms of resources and job roles was underway. Ian Williams had also had changes in their structure and were facing similar recruitment challenges.

Explanations of many other issues were contained the Property and Asset Manager's report including:

- Reactive repairs.
- Voids.
- Planned works.
- Handyperson service.
- Social value.
- Compliance and cyclical servicing.
- Customer satisfaction and compliments.

- Complaints.

There was a need to review and adapt the delivery model to meet service demand and ensure that the contract was delivered in the most efficient compliant manner possible. There was an ongoing improvement action plan which was a live tool to ensure that those areas highlighted/recorded would be monitored to ensure standards were maintained and improved upon. In addition to the action plan EDDC continued to benefit from the support of Echelon, the specialist consultant engaged to procure the IAM contract, carrying out in depth reviews of certain areas of the contract, specifically:

- Voids.
- Reactive repairs.
- Processes within the Open Housing System for the management of the IAM contract including the interface with Ian Williams.

In response to questions from members, the Property and Asset Manager advised that it was expected that a proportion of the backlog of current void works would be cleared by mid-July 2023. He explained that the repairs part of the voids process was just one phase and that properties also sat at different stages of the void process. He was uncertain why the number of repair jobs had increased so much but attributed some of this to the recent publicity surrounding damp and mould cases. Repairs identified as category one in the stock condition survey were being reported as urgent, other repairs would be assessed and dealt with accordingly.

The Assistant Director Housing reminded the Board that many things had changed since the contract was first tendered and that things were very different to five years ago. It was important to consider this going forward and whether the current contract was fit for purpose given where it was now.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board notes the explanation and context that demonstrates how and why we have had to adapt from the original intentions in the contract to provide a fit for purpose repairs and void service tailored to the requirements of the Council's residents, and to note the performance in quarter 4 2022-23.

18 **Tenant Scrutiny Committee - Review of MSOs**

The report of the Interim Housing Services Manager set out the findings and recommendations made by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) following their investigations into the roles of mobile support officers (MSOs) in September 2019 (delayed in being brought to the HRB due to the Covid-19 pandemic). The report sought to find ways to address the differing expectations of the service provided by the MSOs amongst sheltered housing tenants, the MSOs themselves and the wider housing service. The report made recommendations aimed at clarifying the boundaries of the responsibilities of MSOs. Changes had been made to the MSO team since the TSP report was completed, with most of the recommendations already having been undertaken. However, it was important to acknowledge and recognise the work of the TSP and ensure the learning was fully implemented.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note and endorse the recommendations highlighted within the report.

19 **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).

20 **Interim Housing Operations Manager**

The Director of Housing, Health and Environment's report followed on from the agreement at the last meeting of the Housing Review Board to create a new position of Operations Manager within the Housing Service. Having regard to current operational pressures and work demands it was being proposed that this position was filled on an interim basis by a recruitment agency appointment. The costs exceeded those originally budgeted due to the nature of the interim agency arrangement. The longer term intention was to recruitment permanently into the position.

Although the Board expressed some concerns about the additional costs they recognised the importance of filling the position and therefore regarded it as a necessary spend.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve that the recently created Housing Operations Manager position be filled on an interim basis using the individual put forward by a recruitment agency with the additional costs to be financed through the Housing Revenue Account.

Attendance List

Board members present:

Sara Clarke, Independent Community Representative
Rob Robinson, Independent Community Representative
Councillor Sarah Chamberlain
Councillor Peter Faithfull
Councillor Dan Ledger (Chair)
Councillor Tony McCollum
Councillor Helen Parr

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

B Bailey
I Barlow
P Fernley
V Johns
G Jung
M Martin
M Rixson

Officers in attendance:

Graham Baker, Property and Asset Manager
Natalie Brown, Information and Analysis Officer (Housing)
Jo Garfoot, Assistant Director Housing Task Force
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Assistant Director Housing
Yusef Masih, Interim Housing Services Manager
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Manager
Giles Salter, Solicitor

Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance & Licensing (Monitoring Officer)
Jacqueline Stokes, Administrator/Paralegal
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor apologies:

Sue Dawson, Tenant
Cindy Collier, Tenant

Chair

Date: