

Report to: Housing Review Board



Date of Meeting 14 March 2024

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## Annual report of the Housing Review Board

### Report summary:

To review the work of the Housing Review Board during the 2023-24 civic year.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### Recommendation:

That Cabinet and Council note the work that the Housing Review Board has undertaken during the 2023-24 civic year.

### Reason for recommendation:

To inform the Board, Cabinet and 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
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

**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 Housing Review 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 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 Monitoring Group as appropriate.

The Chair of the Housing Review Board was Councillor Sarah Chamberlain, with Councillor Helen Parr as Vice Chair.

### **Words from the Chair**

I would like to thank all officers, staff, members and tenants as always for their continued support and hard work within the housing department.

We have had some challenges in different areas in the last year but I truly believe that we are in a much better place now and looking to the future thanks again to the hard work of so many involved.

We have made some great improvements and will continue to do so with the works planned as part of the stock condition survey.

Once again thank you all for your support and hard work.

Some examples from the HRB work programme are summarised below:

#### **1. Draft Housing Service Plan 2024/25**

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 service plan was presented to the appropriate tenant groups in order to ensure awareness and understanding of the content of the plan, and the Board's input was welcomed.

## **2. Draft Housing Revenue Account and Capital Budgets 2024/25**

The draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2024/25 was a key document for the Board to influence. The annual HRA was underpinned and influenced by the 30 year HRA business plan. It was a balanced budget with the £3.1million minimum adopted level predicted to be met and an additional £1.6 million being held in the HRA debt Volatility Fund. The HRA business plan needed to be updated with revised financial modelling once the stock condition survey work was complete, which could mean reallocation of budgets or the use of additional reserves. The budget was in effect a 'stand still' budget based on existing stock data, whilst the updated stock condition survey data was awaited. The budget was seen as an interim solution whilst restructured teams bedded in, which could result in re-organisation of budgets but within the same financial envelope. Other pressures on the HRA were decarbonisation of the housing stock as well as expanding the housing stock. The draft budget presented to the Board in January 2024 assumed an increase in rents of 7.7%.

## **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 2023/24 has been regularly provided at meetings. Producing a HRA was a statutory requirement for Council's who managed and owned their housing stock and was a key document for the Board to influence.

The Board were kept up to date with revenue and capital budgets, which included acquisitions and right to buy sales. At the November meeting the Board noted the HRA reserves, original budgeted surplus and revised budget deficit figures. They were concerned that lost rents due to voids continued to be above the budgeted levels and emphasised the need for improved performance in relation to voids.

Careful monitoring throughout the year indicated that the HRA was in a healthy position.

## **4. Integrated asset management contract**

In June the Board received an overview of the first four years of the integrated asset management contract (IAM). There had been a year-on-year increase in demands on the contract and challenges facing the contract (both internal and external). Management of the contract had been a challenge and the structure of the property and asset team was reviewed. The delivery model needed to be reviewed and adapted to meet service demand and ensure that the contract was delivered in the most efficient and compliant manner possible.

## **5. Performance dashboard and repairs and voids performance**

The Board received key performance indicators and compliance dashboard, and actions were outlined to them that were being taken to improve performance where targets were not being achieved. As a result of the Board's concerns regular reports and presentations outlined the Council's approach to improving performance across its housing repairs contracts and in the management of empty Council homes. This included progress made and actions being taken to further improve performance. By the end of 2023-24 the number of empty homes continued to reduce month on month and void turnaround times were also decreasing.

In January the Board were told that in order to ensure the service was in a position to meet upcoming challenges and invest wisely in the housing stock portfolio some additional measures were being taken to future proof the service. A review of the service had been undertaken to ensure the right people were in the right places. Resources would continue to be reviewed in line with the demands on the service and the contractors would be supported to do the same. There was an upcoming skills review to inform a training plan for the teams for all staff to develop and be further equipped to deal with the challenges of the large contracts. Data from the stock condition survey would inform the Asset Management Strategy and the Investment Plan for the next five years, which would improve the overall decency of the Council's homes and therefore impact the Council's position on responsive repairs.

## **6. Gas and fire safety compliance and policies**

In June 2023 the Board were alerted to non-compliance regarding electrical safety and were presented with a summary on findings and actions in place to address non-compliance. In November 2023 the Board received a report updating them on the increased monitoring of compliance that was taking place and the progress that had been made. There had also been a review of the electrical safety policy, legionella plan and policy and the asbestos management plan and policy for housing, and the Board were asked to agree these amended reviews. The Board then received amended reviews of gas safety policy and fire safety policy for housing in January 2024, to ensure compliance with current legislation and regulations relating to those statutory areas of compliance. The policies and procedures were consulted with through the Resident Involvement Monitoring Group.

## **7. Tenant satisfaction survey**

A tenant satisfaction survey had been undertaken in March 2023, which demonstrated a significant decline across several aspects of the housing service. A communication plan and improvement plan were put together to address how tenant satisfaction could be improved and the Board recommended that a series of focus groups be held with tenants to further inform future improvements.

## **8. Changes to the housing leadership team**

The Board received updates throughout the year on changes to the housing leadership team. Following staffing challenges within the housing service capacity and resilience in the housing leadership team had increased, with more resource for the housing service following the restructuring of the housing leadership team. The new post of Head of Housing Operations had been created, as well as that of an additional Assistant Director. It was hoped that this gave the Board reassurance and confidence that the challenges of the service had been recognised and that a robust management team was in place to address the issues and ensure the housing service was able to function and meet the required level of service delivery for tenants and wider residents.

## **9. Social Housing White Paper and action plan**

The Board were kept up to date on preparations that were being made to ensure compliance with the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill, which provided the legal basis for many of the measures set out in the 2020 Social Housing White Paper. The Board also endorsed an action plan. 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 themes of the Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper) were seen through many HRB agenda items.

## **10. Resident Involvement Strategy**

There had been a redesign of the Resident Involvement Strategy 2024-27 which replaced the previous 2019 strategy. A tenant focussed approach was needed in all aspects of work within the housing service. The Board considered the extensive consultation undertaken, the key points of the new strategy and the legislation governing it and recommended it for public consultation.

## **11. Asset Management Strategy**

The Housing Review Board considered the development of an asset management strategy for EDDC's housing stock. This strategy would ensure the housing service met legislation, regulation and enable forecasting budgeting requirements in maintaining Council homes. The strategy would assist in guiding future strategic property decisions to ensure EDDC managed the housing portfolio efficiently. In January 2024 the detailed results of the stock condition survey were awaited, but the key findings of the programme would enable fully costed five-, ten-, fifteen- and thirty-year plan of works to be included in the asset management strategy. The HRB recommended that a project board be formed to deliver the asset management strategy and also recommended the approval of the appointment of a consultant, if required, to deliver the strategy.

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

- Housing Task Force – the Board received progress updates during the year and approved the creation of a senior surveyor post within the Housing Task Force.
- HouseMark performance report and annual membership renewal – the HRB received a comprehensive report which gave useful insight into cost and performance. They agreed for the subscription to be renewed in 2023/24 and annually there on in.
- Advantage South West subscription – the noted the advantages of Advantage South West and agreed to continue to pay the membership subscription, with this being delegated to the Assistant Director Housing in future years.
- Self-assessment on Consumer Standards – the Council assessed itself against current consumer standards, as encouraged by the Social Housing Regulator, as a way of highlighting any areas of non-compliance. Tenant assessment was also undertaken and the HRB recommended that a joint workshop was undertaken with officers and tenants on receipt of the revised Consumer Standards from the Regulator.
- Chartered Institute of Housing Qualifications – work was being undertaken to understand the current levels of professional qualification in the housing service, in order to achieve the required standards by the Social Housing Regulator, taking into account capacity, budget and timeframes.
- Housing Ombudsman determination – the Board considered the Housing Ombudsman findings of severe maladministration and EDDC's response to the findings. The service would continue to take learning from the case in order to ensure the failures could not be repeated. The HRB endorsed the appointment of an additional complaints officer. It also received reports on housing complaints handling performance.

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### **Financial implications:**

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

### **Legal implications:**

There are no legal implications identified.