

Report to: Housing Review Board



Date of Meeting 24 April 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Annual report of the Housing Review Board

Report summary:

To review the work of the Housing Review Board during the 2024-25 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 2024-25 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

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Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; .

Links to background information .

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
 - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☐ Financially secure and improving quality of services
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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 Simon Smith as Vice Chair. The Board welcomed two new tenant representatives onto the Board, Rosie Dale and Rachel Browne, as well as two new councillors, Councillor Jenny Brown and Councillor Aurora Bailey.

The terms of reference of the Board were amended to better align with the membership of the other scrutiny committees; membership now comprised of seven councillors, five co-opted tenants and two independent community representatives. The frequency of Board meetings was also amended from five to four per year to better align with quarterly performance information.

Words from the Chair

I wish to thank everyone in the HRB staff and members for their continued support over the last 12 months. Whilst we have had challenges we have also come a long way in our achievement, here's to another great year ahead.

Some examples from the HRB work programme are summarised below:

1. Staffing updates

The Board received regular updates on senior housing personnel. A review of the service had been undertaken to ensure the right people were in the right roles. Resources had been reviewed in line with the demands on the service to ensure that the service was adequately staffed. The number of staff across the teams had remained similar, with changes of staffing

being at higher level. Through the year there had been a reduction in staffing costs due to a number of agency staff becoming permanent.

During the year a new Director for Housing and two new Assistant Housing Directors were appointed. A housing staff structure chart outlining the key strategic roles was produced and circulated to members in January 2025.

2. Tenant recruitment to the Housing Review Board

In August the HRB considered and approved an updated tenant representative job description and application form. Officers carried out a programme of recruitment efforts, resulting in the appointment of two new tenant representatives onto the Board in 2024.

3. Housing Revenue Account financial monitoring reports

Throughout the year the Board received finance reports. The accountant's report provided the Housing Review Board with current draft financial figures for the housing revenue account (HRA) and housing capital programme for the 2024/25 financial year. Producing a HRA was a statutory function for Councils who managed and owned their housing stock and was therefore a key document for the Board to influence.

An outturn deficit for 2023/24 was reported to the Board in August 2024. It was proposed that this deficit be covered from earmarked reserves and borrowing. This position of significant increase in spend with a reduction in income had previously been highlighted to members and was of concern. Many of the issues facing EDDC's HRA were reflective of national issues and pressures.

During 2024 there was a HRA financial review, revised budget and sustainability plan put into place and monitored by the Board.

Increased flexibilities for 2024/25 and 2025/26 on Right to Buy receipts were announced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 30 July 2024. Funding all Right to Buy acquisitions with 100% capital receipts would enable the Council to utilise this limited window of opportunity and also provide the funding required to immediately address areas of risk without impacting the previously agreed and budgeted borrowing needs.

In January 2025 the Board received the 2025/26 draft revenue and capital budgets relating to the HRA as well as outturn forecasting versus budget of the current financial year to the end of December 2024. During the 2024/25 financial year there were numerous significant budget movements within the HRA, which in effect had transferred significant sums from revenue to capital. This was the result of the underlying works included in the revised budget being scrutinised in detail within the regular collaborative financial management framework that had been established. The 2025/26 budget approved by the Board was now a balanced budget, however the HRA continued to face significant financial pressure in the immediate and longer term.

4. Draft Housing Revenue Account and Capital Budgets 2025/26

The draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2025/26 was a key document for the Board to influence. The annual HRA was underpinned and influenced by the HRA business plan, which needed to be updated with revised financial modelling once the housing condition survey work was finalised.

The draft 2025/26 budget was seen as an interim solution whilst restructured teams bedded in which could also result in the re-organisation of budgets but within the same financial envelope. All planned expenditure would be met from available income. The HRB were aware that it may be necessary to undertake a reallocation of budgets or the use of additional reserves to meet

priorities in the financial year to reflect the findings of the housing stock condition survey but at present it was considered there were sufficient resources available. The budget had been prepared to maintain council homes to a high standard, with significant sums maintained for major repairs and day to repairs. All proposed capital expenditure would be funded from the HRA. The Housing Review Board would be updated on any reallocations.

The draft budget presented to the Board in January 2025 assumed an increase in rents of 7.7%.

5. Performance dashboard and repairs and voids performance

The Board received key performance indicators and compliance dashboard at each meeting, and actions that were being taken to improve performance where targets were not being achieved were outlined. The performance reports encapsulated complaints data as well as tenant satisfaction measures. 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 2024-25 the number of empty homes continued to reduce month on month and void turnaround times were also decreasing. Tenants were being surveyed quarterly rather than annually and seven of the twelve tenant satisfaction measures (TSM) had increased. Compliance was high. Income collection was excellent. Good progress was also made on reducing complaints, mainly due to staffing changes and implementing dedicated resources. Officers recognised the need to continuously improve in complaints handling and meet the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

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. Complaints

In August 2024 the Board received the Housing Ombudsman self-assessment and complaints policy and procedure, which had been updated to ensure compliance with the updated code produced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Compliance with complaint response times remained a challenge for the housing service, but this was being kept under review, with a focus on driving improvement.

7. Housing allocations policy

In August 2024 the Housing Review Board were provided with and asked to approve an updated housing allocations policy. The policy had been amended to reflect relevant changes originating from legislation, the Consumer Standard, recommendations from an Ombudsman case and a previous HRB report focussing on downsizing. Also included was confirmation of criteria for allocating sheltered accommodation.

8. Acquisitions and disposal policy

In November 2024 the Housing Review Board were asked to approve the adoption of a Strategic Acquisitions and Disposals Policy for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) property portfolio. The introduction of the policy would enable the efficient and effective management of the Council's housing stock and other assets. The policy would form part of a comprehensive asset management strategy for the HRA and was being introduced to provide a framework for any acquisitions or disposals that might be required in advance of the adoption

of an asset management strategy, to assist in the effective management of the Council's housing stock. The strategic acquisitions and disposals policy aimed to align with the broader housing strategy and Council's priorities of addressing the housing needs of residents whilst ensuring sustainable financial management of the HRA.

9. Electrical compliance audit

Following an internal (SWAP) electrical compliance audit on housing electrical safety, the Housing Review Board requested that the nine actions referred to in the audit report be provided to them and that they receive a progress report on implantation of the SWAP recommendations to be completed by 1 April 2025.

Financial implications:

All financial implications are contained within the body of the report.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to the report.