

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton, EX14 1EJ on 24 April 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.05 pm

39 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2025 were agreed.

40 Declarations of interest

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Aurora Bailey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Tenant of East Devon District Council.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Brian Bailey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Tenant of East Devon District Council.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Sarah Chamberlain, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Employed by Exeter City Council in the housing department.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Steve Gazzard, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Tenant of East Devon District Council.

Declarations of interest.

Rachel Browne, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Tenant of East Devon District Council.

Declarations of interest.

Rob Robinson, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Tenant of East Devon District Council.

Declarations of interest.

Rosemary Dale, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Tenant of East Devon District Council.

41 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

42 Matters of urgency

There were none.

43 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were none.

44 Housing Review Board forward plan

The Director – Housing and Health presented the forward plan and advised members that the forward plan acted as a reminder of agenda items to come forward to future meetings. The forward plan had been derived from previous meetings and requests, as well as the housing service plan. Service managers were currently reviewing realistic timeframes against each topic. 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 Director – Housing and Health advised the Board that the report on the Housing Asset Management Strategy had been delayed due to the pre-election period. A report on the 30-year business plan and the asset management strategy would be brought to the next meeting of the Housing Review Board. The temporary accommodation procurement and allocation policy would also be brought to the next HRB meeting.

In response to a question about Local Government Reorganisation the Director of Housing and Health replied that at present it was unknown what the new structure would look like. There were currently three stock holding authorities within Devon. Residents would be communicated with when there was greater clarity.

45 **Housing staffing update**

The Assistant Director – Housing (Regulated Services)'s report provided the Board with key staffing updates on the housing service. An up-to-date structure chart for key roles and service management across the housing service was included with the agenda papers and explained by the Assistant Director – Housing (Regulated Services).

The Assistant Director – Housing (Regulated Services) introduced the newly recruited Corporate Lead for Housing Property and Assets and welcomed him to the meeting. With the appointment made, officers were now beginning the process of recruiting permanently to other posts within the property and assets teams to help bring further stability and permanence to the teams and service area.

It was noted that there were currently 12 vacancies across the Housing Service that fell within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Some of the roles were out for active recruitment, some were occupied by interim staff whilst work was undertaken to review the role or permanently recruit, and others were under consideration for removal from the structure to support with savings and efficiencies.

In response to a question about total staff numbers within the HRA the Assistant Director – Housing (Regulated Services) explained that it was difficult to provide an exact figure but estimated it to be around 90. There were over 140 staff within the housing directorate, including statutory services. The system would allow for a breakdown of staff numbers, but this interpretation of data required some time. A request was made for staff names to be included alongside the structure chart job roles but the Director of Housing and Health explained that individual names were removed from the public domain so that teams/mailboxes were used rather than individual contacts, and to negate any risk to staff.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the contents of the housing service staffing update report.

46 **Housing performance report - quarter 4**

The Housing Review Board were presented with key performance indicators (KPIs) for quarter four of 2024/25. It was noted that at the time of writing the report not all year end activities had closed and therefore some of the data was partial or subject to change once the year end activities were completed. The end of year complaints data would be reported in July. The Assistant Director Housing (Regulatory Services) gave a presentation which summarised the performance and actions being taken to improve performance, and gave some examples of successful planned works, adaptations and accessible homes.

The service was in a strong position and had demonstrated incredible movement from the previous years' performance.

- Void loss was just 0.1% above target.
- The median number of days taken to relet a home had more than halved.
- Contractors had completed over 14,500 reactive repairs in Council homes.
- A priority focus for 2025/26 would be the improvement in completing jobs within target timescales.
- Rentals continued to achieve sector leading outcomes, despite the economic climate and cost of living crisis facing residents.
- Income collection was excellent, with arrears at just 1.36%.
- Rental support had helped tenants access food bank vouchers, electricity vouchers, white goods and discretionary housing payments.
- 25 cases were referred through the partnership with Homemaker Southwest, resulting in £95,502.97 of financial help for tenants and 2 evictions prevented.
- Major refurbishments projects had been undertaken.
- 478 adaptations to tenants' homes were completed in 2024/25.
- Improvements in all but one tenant satisfaction category.
- Complaint handling required improvement but additional resource had been brought in to support the complaints team and an incredible shift in performance was already being seen.

During his presentation the Assistant Director Housing (Regulatory Services) highlighted the Involved Devon Event which took place in March and focussed on 2 main topics selected by tenants; anti-social behaviour and the cost of living crisis. Involved Devon was a networking group of professionals working in tenant engagement for social landlords, sharing best practice, ideas and resources, and delivering training and events. The learning from the event would help inform the work that involved tenants carried out in their roles on the tenant scrutiny and participation groups.

During discussion the following points were raised:

- Reusing outgoing tenants carpets/flooring where possible.
- Discrepancy of data with contractors' data. Both sets of teams were working closely together to resolve this.
- Concern that tenants may not know subcontractors were working for EDDC if they did not display branding. All contractors had ID and tenants should be aware of a visit as an appointment would have been made.
- Since the introduction of the member enquiry form there had been a reduction in the number of complaints being received directly by officers. Complaint numbers were being monitored.
- Compliance was at almost 100% across the board. There was just one property with an outstanding electrical check.

The Assistant Director Housing (Regulatory Services) thanked all the housing service teams for the incredible journey over the past year. Members present also thanked staff for all the service improvements, despite having less finances. A request was made for

scrutiny of performance two years ago in order to reflect back and learn lessons. The Assistant Director Housing (Regulatory Services) replied that he thought that the improvement in performance despite having less staff and spending less could be attributed to a number of processes including reorganising functions, teams coming together and working really hard, and a change of staffing. There was a new set of operational controls which allowed the budget to be managed well.

On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked the Assistant Director Housing (Regulatory Services) for his presentation and congratulated all those involved with the housing service.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note performance at the end of quarter 4, 2024/25.

47 **Resident involvement strategy - progress on objectives**

The Community Team Manager's report provided the Board with an assessment of progress made against the strategic priorities identified in the Resident Involvement Strategy (RIS) since it was adopted by Cabinet in January 2024. The strategy was produced after extensive consultation with staff, stakeholders, involved tenants and non-involved tenants and included focus groups, interviews and online surveys. There were currently 72 involved tenants and at least nine different ways, including Resident Involvement panels and groups to help residents' voices be heard.

Some of the key messages from the consultation were:

- A more diverse of residents needed to be involved.
- A need to increase the variety of ways for residents to get involved.
- The focus of formal resident involvement groups needed to improve.
- Performance information and reports needed to be presented to residents in a clear and concise format.
- Training needs for involved residents should be identified and met.
- More attractive incentives should be offered to involved residents.

The Resident Involvement Strategy 2023 -2027 outlined 5 main objectives, linked to 28 aims. The strategy set out an ambitious programme of work to be delivered over three years. The five objectives were:

1. To understand more about the people who live in our homes.
2. To improve the value of our tenant engagement.
3. To increase the diversity of our involved tenants.
4. To improve our communication and consultation with tenants.
5. To value our involved tenants, volunteers, and communities.

Significant areas of progress against these 5 objectives were outlined in the report. One of the ways improvement was measured was via the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM), which were used by the Regulator for Social Housing to measure tenant satisfaction. Improvements were being seen in some TSMs.

It was noted that Councillors weren't directly involved in the RIS but were urged to contact the Communities Team if they wanted to become involved. Members of the HRB requested more on-line pre-meetings/training opportunities.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the contents of the report and progress made against the strategic priorities and objectives outlined in the Resident Involvement Strategy.

48 **Housing policy review - Succession policy**

The Housing Review Board were asked to approve the updated housing succession policy. The policy had been reviewed and updated and a new section had been added to the housing succession policy to incorporate guidance on tenancy assignments to add clarity to this area. This was felt necessary due to the number of assignments the housing allocations team had processed. It was noted that over the past two years the housing allocations team processed an average of 41 succession requests per year and 21 assignments.

In response to a question the Housing Solutions Manager confirmed that claims for the right of succession were always dealt with sensitively and that if necessary an extension beyond the 28 days of death could be granted.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the updated Housing Succession Policy.

49 **Website redesign - housing pages**

The Housing Projects Officer's report set out ongoing plans to review and improve the housing section of the EDDC website to better meet the needs of council tenants and residents of East Devon. The housing section of the EDDC website would be redesigned to improve accessibility for tenants and streamline the pages to make navigating the site easier and quicker for tenants and residents. The 'existing council tenants' section would be prioritised initially.

A project team had been set up to develop and deliver the improvement plan and officers intended to work with tenants and staff throughout the project. HRB members were also invited to participate in this and were encouraged to become involved.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the report.

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

The Chair 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 report gave an overview of the achievements of the Board and celebrated the progress that had been made. The Chair thanked all those involved with housing and the Housing Review Board for their outstanding work and dedication, and huge efforts in improving the service.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet and Council note the work that the Housing Review Board has undertaken during the 2024-25 civic year.

Attendance List

Board members present:

Councillor Aurora Bailey

Councillor Sarah Chamberlain (Chair)

Councillor Melanie Martin
Councillor Simon Smith (Vice-Chair)
Sara Clarke, Independent Community Representative
Rob Robinson, Tenants
Councillor Tim Dumper
Rachel Browne, Tenant
Rosemary Dale, Tenant

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

B Bailey
I Barlow
R Collins
S Gazzard
D Ledger
S Westerman

Officers in attendance:

Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Darren Hicks, Interim Tenancy Services Manager (Regulated Services)
Andrew King, Assistant Director for Housing (Regulated Services)
Andi Loosemore, Rental Manager
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Service Manager
Liam Reading, Assistant Director - Housing Programmes, Investment and Development
Catrin Stark, Director of Housing and Health
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Nathan Muggeridge, Corporate Lead for Housing Property and Assets

Councillor apologies:

Councillor Christopher Burhop
Councillor Jenny Brown

Chairm

Date: