

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton, EX14 1EJ on 31 July 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.10 am and ended at 3.00 pm

51 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2025 were agreed.

52 Declarations of interest

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.

69. Build and Buy Plan: Acquisitions and preliminary site-specific proposals.

Councillor Steve Gazzard, Affects Non-registerable Interest, some of the development sites were within his ward and the adjacent ward.

53 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

Councillor Dan Ledger, Portfolio Holder Sustainable Homes and Communities informed those present that following a 12-week inspection with the Regulator for Social Housing, the Council had received a C2 judgement. He explained the judgement grading and that the C2 judgement acknowledged several key areas of strength and the good experience that was being delivered to tenants. The feedback identified some work was needed to improve and enhance in some areas, but this was already planned for, with action plans in place for the coming year. Only 21 local authorities had been awarded the C2 so far, and only 3 awarded C1.

The housing team had shown dedication, commitment and drive to make significant changes across all teams to improve service delivery and the customer experience. The Portfolio Holder thanked the housing team and the wider teams at East Devon District Council as well as members of the Housing Review Board for their support, and positive approach to achieving such a great outcome.

54 Matters of urgency

There were none.

55 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There was one confidential/exempt item.

56 **Housing Review Board forward plan**

The Assistant Director – Housing Regulated Services 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 time frames 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.

Following on from his motion to Council in July, 'Communication Workers Union – design and positioning of letterboxes', Councillor Faithfull requested that the housing service actively support the work of the Communication Workers Union in relation to the design and positioning of letterboxes in relation to new and replacement doors on Council properties. He also asked for consideration to be given to the time that trade buttons to flats turned off. The Assistant Director – Housing (Regulatory Services) agreed to discuss this further with the housing teams.

Following on from a recent successful training session, members of the Housing Review Board requested that additional training sessions be arranged, particularly in relation to housing finances and the Housing Revenue Account.

57 **Housing staffing update**

The Assistant Director – Housing (Regulated Services)'s report provided the Board with key staffing updates on the housing service.

The Corporate Lead for Housing Property and Assets was in post and recruitment was moving forward with recruitment in other critical roles within the Property and Assets teams. Recruitment was live and ongoing and included:

- Compliance Manager
- Repairs Service Manager
- Senior Surveyor
- Heating Compliance Surveyor
- Maintenance and Planned Works Surveyors

These roles would bring further resource and resilience into the housing property and assets team and would ensure manageable scope and areas of responsibilities. They would support the Council in effective oversight and management of risk and health and safety and would increase the services' ability to respond quicker to requests for surveyor visits and inspections.

It was noted that the interim Repairs Service Manager had left EDDC in June and the Assistant Director – Housing (Regulatory Services) acknowledged his work and thanked him for his time and commitment to EDDC. There were currently no agency staff being employed by the housing service.

Additional resource was also being brought in to support with housing-related complaints, with a full time Housing Performance Lead post beginning on 4 August 2025. In response to a question, it was reported that all complaints were initially administered by the corporate complaints team, but were then reviewed and investigated by the relevant teams across the Council

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

58 **Finance report**

The Housing Review Board considered the report of the HRA Accountant, which set out the revenue budget and capital outturn positions at the end of the financial year 2024/25 and provided a summary of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) financial position for quarter 1 2025/26. The HRA was a ring-fenced account for providing Council housing and associated services.

The revised Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget approved by Council (July 2024) agreed the use of the HRA Balance up to £1.750m in year, with the acceptance this would take the HRA Balance below its minimum adopted level of £2.1m to £1.350m, to be replenished in future years. Expenditure was being maintained within this parameter with ongoing analysis on future spending plans and projections to gain assurance on this position to financial year end. The year end outturn on the Housing Revenue Account was per the final agreed adjusted budget, resulting in a deficit of £1.336m, reducing the HRA Balance to £1.764m.

The review of the year to date figures up to the end of quarter 1 for the Housing Revenue Account showed that it was trending materially in line with the budget profile up to that point in the financial year. Therefore, there were no material revenue items or concerns to bring to the attention of members. As was normal at that point in the financial year, housing capital spend was low, as the procurement of contracts and assessment of required major works got underway.

The team were congratulated on the 2024/25 outturn position, regaining control and on achieving a budgeted that was better than that re-budgeted for.

The accountant advised the Board that he would arrange a training session for members on HRA finances in due course. A request was made for the finance report to be shown on the monitors in the Council Chamber in future.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet considers and notes the outturn position for 2024/25 including the implications and proposals relating to the balances and reserves held by the Council.
2. that Cabinet notes the year-to-date Housing Revenue Account position for quarter 1 2025/26.

59 **Review of Anti Social Behaviour Policy**

The Housing Review Board were asked to approve the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, which had recently been reviewed. The management of anti-social behaviour (ASB) was covered under legislation and the Housing Act, as well as being a moral duty of the housing service to support tenants with their right to the peaceful enjoyment of their homes. It was important to have a policy which outlined how reports of ASB were managed, how tenants were supported to resolve disputes and how the council worked in partnership across the district to not only support its tenants, but also the wider community.

It was noted that the proposed policy had been out to consultation, which included three ASB focus groups, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and a common place survey.

Once approved, a communications plan would be drafted and implemented to ensure the policy, and a key summary of it, was clearly communicated to tenants - balancing both the need to make tenants aware of their responsibilities, alongside what they could expect from the council as their landlord and clarity around definitions of anti-social behaviour.

A request was made for ward members to be informed at the initial stages when an ASB complaint was received. The Director for Housing and Health explained that she was conscious of the officer time and resource that this would involve, but that she would discuss it with the relevant teams. The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities reminded councillors of their strategic role and that officers' role was operational. Councillors would be informed if the ASB complaint was escalated. It was noted that EDDC had a community safety team who dealt with non-EDDC housing ASB claims.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the updated Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

60 **Review of Electrical Safety Policy**

The Corporate Lead for Housing Property and Assets' report outlined the updates and changes made to the Housing Directorate's Electrical Safety Policy. The changes were in response to changes in legislation and ensured a full and robust policy was in place. The main body of the policy was approved by the Housing Review Board in 2023 and was due for a full review in September 2026.

A request was made to clarify in the policy the portable appliance testing of electrical items, whether this related to tenants' own electrical items or those supplied by EDDC. The Director of Housing and Health advised that this would be added to and clarified in the Electrical Safety Policy.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the updates and amendments to the Electrical Safety Policy for Housing, including the clarification of portable appliance testing.

61 **Review of Housing Repairs Policy & Awaab's Law**

The Corporate Lead for Property and Assets' report presented a proposed Repair Policy that would replace the existing April 2021 Repairs Policy and the existing Damp and Mould Policy. The current policy was out of date and the introduction of Awaab's law from 27 October 2025 would require a high risk-based approach to repair, which defined timescales for responding to and completing the highest risk repairs. Compliance with the new law would require a fundamental change in the approach to how repairs were managed and the performance tracked, and would have a significant impact. The proposed policy aligned with the new requirements from Awaab's law and other related legislation.

It was noted that there were significant risks associated with the policy that would be managed as best as possible. The cost of the policy requirements was a risk and was dependant on the capital programme. Many of the issues and problems were historic and reflected the age of the Council's properties. In response to a question about disposals it was reported that a key factor was that the Council could not leave a tenant in an unfit property, however it was obligated to do works on a secure tenancy if the tenant did not want to move.

Members welcomed the policy and congratulated officers for their prompt response to the Awaab's Law requirements. They agreed that it was important to set realistic expectations and timings and communicate these to tenants. It was requested that garden maintenance be included in the policy.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet approve the proposed Repairs Policy.
2. that Cabinet note that some final amendments may be made following further feedback from tenant scrutiny and stakeholders. The policy would be brought back to the Housing Review Board should any material changes be required.

62 Review of Radon Policy

The Compliance Surveyor's report presented a proposed Radon Policy for Housing to meet East Devon District Council's regulatory compliance and health and safety obligations. The proposed policy aligned with the Housing Act 2004 and other related legislation, ensuring legal compliance and that the Council's tenants would be provided with a healthy and safe home to live in as well as a safe environment for employees and contractors to work in.

The Corporate Lead for Housing Property and Assets explained to the Board that tenants were at the centre of the policy and confirmed that radon testing had been budgeted for.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet approve the proposed Radon Policy.
2. that Cabinet note that some final amendments may be made following further feedback from tenant scrutiny and stakeholders (with a commitment to bring the policy back to the Housing Review Board should any material amendments be required).

63 Quarterly performance report - Quarter 1 Tenancy Services

The Housing Review Board were presented with key performance indicators (KPIs) for quarter 1 of 2025/26 for tenancy services. The Tenancy Services Manager (Regulated Services) gave a presentation which summarised performance actions being taken to improve performance in rentals, estate management and sheltered housing functions within tenancy services.

Some of the areas highlighted were:

- 98.93% rental income collected.
- Rent arrears of 1.34% (high performance and within top quartile).
- Reduction in number of ASB cases reported (although there were 43 open ASB cases).
- Estate inspections and tenancy visits.
- Communities team:
 - 8 Community Hubs per week.
 - 1603 attended in quarter 1.
 - Garden competition.
 - Resident Connect Festival.
 - Community Initiative Fun.

The Tenancy Services Manager and teams were thanked for all their hard work and excellent progress with performance. All of the KPIs were going in the right direction, with exceptional performance in some areas. It was hoped that tenants were seeing improvements on the ground. It was suggested that a positive communications piece be published on this.

Quarterly performance report - Quarter 1 Property & Assets

The Housing Review Board were presented with key performance indicators (KPIs) for quarter 1 of 2025/26 for property and assets. The Corporate Lead for Property and Assets gave a presentation which summarised performance actions being taken to improve performance in repairs, compliance and planned works functions within property and assets.

Quarter 1 performance headlines were:

- Progress was being made in filling the existing vacancies and right sizing the team for the current and future needs.
- Repairs: Calls and jobs were trending down and percentage of repairs completed within the target timescales was increasing (this was expected to increase with the introduction of the new repairs policy). Reporting alignment between systems was improving.
- There was a significant maintenance survey backlog due to resources constraints. This was leading to additional complaints, disrepair and Ombudsman cases. A new process for tracking and prioritising survey requests had been established.
- Average days to relet a property had stabilised due to void resources focusing on disrepair and extending the life of assets where possible.
- Outstanding compliance remedial works was decreasing, and new contracts were required to complete all the remedial works.
- The requirement for planned works was increasing as the service moved to a 'Whole Property' approach to the delivery of planned works. This would reduce repair costs and minimise disruption for customers. The resource constraints were reflective in the statistics.

The Corporate Lead for Property and Assets also gave some examples of void life extension works, successful planned works, and a case study which established a model for how planned works would be delivered, particularly with regards to tenant engagement.

The Director for Housing and Health thanked the officers for all their hard work. Performance was moving in the right direction and it had been an incredible journey over the last 12 months. She commended all the managers and staff teams working tirelessly to turn performance around. She also commented on the incredible performance in relation to the outturn budget and how the budget was being managed and attributed this to the hard work and judgement of housing teams and finance colleagues. The regulatory judgement of C2 position was fantastic and this was reflected in the tenant satisfaction measure (TSM) improvements.

The Director for Housing and Health went on to thank the Housing Review Board as a committee for all its support. It had scrutinised well, challenged where it was needed and asked officers to take on certain pieces of work and asked them to demonstrate ambition. The HRB had been a great critical friend.

Stock condition survey report

The Assistant Director of Programmes, Investment and Development's report presented the findings of the comprehensive stock condition survey undertaken by Currie & Brown on behalf of East Devon District Council (EDDC).

The programme surveyed 3,554 residential properties (86%) and assessed an additional 588 properties on a desktop basis. In total, 4,522 assets were surveyed, including community centres and garages. The purpose of the survey was to support strategic asset management, guide future investment planning, ensure continued compliance with the Decent Homes Standard and identify any health and safety risks under the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The key outcomes were contained in the report and noted by the Board:

- Decent Homes compliance.
- Damp issues
- Housing, Health and Safety Rating System.
- Community centres.
- Sewerage treatment plants.
- 30-year investment forecast.

The stock condition survey results demonstrated that East Devon District Council's housing stock was largely compliant and fundamentally sound, but required priority investment in some areas as well as long-term strategic investment. This investment, which would be set out in a 30 year Business Plan. It would need to be targeted and sustained to avoid asset degradation and future compliance failures which would impact tenant wellbeing, service delivery and long-term sustainability. The results of the stock condition survey would be used to inform the Asset Management Strategy.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet note the results of the stock condition survey.

66

Housing Revenue Account Business Plan update report

The Assistant Director – Programmes, Investment and Development's report provided the Housing Review Board with an update on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and associated strategic documents that underpinned the effective management and investment in East Devon District Council's housing stock to ensure the housing service remained financially viable, sustainable and responsive to tenants' needs. The HRA Business Plan would provide the overall financial framework for the HRA.

The HRA continued to face significant financial pressure in the immediate and longer term. These pressures arose from a range of factors including an historic underinvestment, increased consumer and regulatory standards, general inflation, restricted rent increases, net zero expectations, disrepair claims, complaint resolution, high void and decant costs and other issues. The situation was not unique to East Devon with similar cost pressures being seen amongst other housing providers and stock holding local authorities.

The 2023/24 HRA budget outturn and capital spend far exceeded the planned budget, necessitating the contribution of all HRA earmarked revenue reserves and required £2.5m additional borrowing. The HRA adopted balance reserve was also reduced. A revised budget for 2024/25 was approved by Council in July 2024. Improved budget management, monitoring and controls meant the 2024/25 budget outturn was within budget at year end. This represented a significant improvement on the previous year and reflected significant improvements in financial planning and management of the HRA.

The previous HRA Business Plan had expired and needed updating to reflect current circumstances and the future investment needs of the stock. The purpose of a Business

Plan was to ensure long term financial sustainability over a 30-year period and ensure sufficient resources were available for the management, maintenance, repair and improvement of the stock. Business Plans should also consider maintaining stock levels through acquisitions, development and estate regeneration. The HRA Business Plan looked at development and stock regeneration, as well as considering land and assets that were underutilised. The key element was how this was balanced with investment in existing stock. The conclusion was that any development would need to pay for itself.

In order to support the required level of borrowing for stock maintenance and investment the HRA needed to reduce the revenue expenditure by 15% (£2.6m) in order to retain debt within a manageable capacity. Whilst achievable, the scale of reduction was significant and highly challenging. It was therefore essential that an Efficiency Plan was established to achieve a long-term sustainable position. An ongoing internal review had identified a number of opportunities for improved efficiency and cost reductions. Any savings or efficiencies would be based on the key principle of finding alternative approaches to service delivery to ensure the quality of tenant services were maintained or improved. Other elements of the Efficiency Plan included income maximisation and effective asset management to boost income and tackle poor asset performance.

The report outlined that a formal Business Plan would be published later in the current financial year with formal adoption to align with the 2026/27 budget. The plan would set the financial framework for budget setting and capital investment over the medium term. The Asset Management Strategy would be completed and presented prior to the start of the 2026/27 financial year.

It was noted that a stock transfer was not a viable option at this point in time so had been discounted as an option.

There were a number of assumptions in the Business Plan, which was a long term forecast. There were a number of variables and it was important to review the Business Plan on an annual basis. Assuming the efficiencies and reductions outlined in the report were delivered, modelling suggested a sustainable position was achievable within the overall plan period.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet note the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan position and required efficiency savings.

67 **Build & Buy - A housing investment and delivery plan for East Devon**

The Assistant Director for Programmes, Investment and Development's report provided an overview and introduction to Build and Buy, a housing investment and delivery plan for East Devon. The report was in response to a growing housing need and feedback from the Housing Strategy consultation to increase the supply of affordable homes for residents in East Devon and contribute to the wider housing and community objectives, including estate regeneration.

The purpose of the Build and Buy Plan was to maximise the use of the Council's assets, address housing need and support the Council's strategic objective of having a supported and engaged community that had the right homes in the right places with the appropriate infrastructure. The Plan aimed to deliver an aspirational target of 500 homes over the next five years, with an equal split between homes built on Council owned land and homes acquired through partnerships with private developers. This mixed delivery

approach was intended to accelerate housing supply, make efficient use of public assets, and ensure the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) had a range of housing stock to meet local needs. It was noted that the intention was that the majority of homes would be social rented rather than affordable rented. All would be funded through the HRA. A local authority development company was not being proposed.

Key considerations contained in the report were:

- Site development and feasibility.
- Construction type, procurement and delivery models.
- Housing mix and design standards.
- Community and stakeholder engagement.
- Risk assessment.
- Funding implications:
 - Capital investment.
 - Funding sources.
 - Revenue implications.
 - Governance.
- Communications and engagement strategy.
- Regular Portfolio Holder updates.
- Housing Review Board – routine reporting to provide oversight on delivery, risks and track performance against the plan proposals.
- Decision making and delegated authority.

Build and Buy – A Housing Investment and Delivery Plan for East Devon was a bold, ambitious and proactive response to the district's housing challenges. The Board noted that the development process could be lengthy and complex with the potential for lengthy delays, particularly at the planning and pre planning stage. Multiple external factors such as inflation, particularly on build costs and labour, could adversely affect development viability and necessitate a deviation from the plan target. As such, the hugely ambitious target of 500 homes over 5 years should be seen as an aspirational target.

The next steps included:

- Finalising site feasibility prioritisation and engagement plans.
- Establishing delivery partnerships and a pipeline of acquisitions.
- Regular progress reporting to Members, in addition to regular review to monitor delivery, risks, and financial performance.
- Seeking formal approval of the HRA Business Plan which would provide the strategic financial investment framework for financing the plan.

Concern was expressed over the resources that could be required to deliver such an ambitious plan. It was acknowledged that not all of the resource was currently available in-house and this would be built into the plan. It was currently a conceptual piece of work, with broad figures in principle. There would be precise costings and sustainability credentials on site specific schemes, which would be brought to the Board and considered on an individual basis.

The Board were pleased to see ambitions for the future and officers were thanked for presenting the build and buy plan.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet recommend that Council endorse the Build and Buy Plan.
2. that Cabinet note that the financing of the Build and Buy Plan was subject to approval of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and the 2026/27 budget setting process in due course.

68 **Exclusion of the 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 these items in private session (Part B).

69 **Build and Buy Plan: Acquisitions and preliminary site-specific proposals**

The Assistant Director for Programmes, Investment and Development and Development Surveyor's report set out the preliminary site-specific proposals to deliver circa 228 new affordable homes on six sites as part of the Build and Buy Plan, to maximise the use of the Council's Housing Revenue Account assets and deliver new affordable homes for the residents of East Devon. The report also recommended that work commence on establishing a programme of potential affordable housing acquisitions in line with the plan to deliver 500 new affordable homes over five years.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet:

1. note the proposed development sites; with further design feasibility and stakeholder engagement and consultation plans to be prepared.
2. approve that work to establish a pipeline of affordable housing acquisitions is commenced in line with the vision set out in the Build and Buy Plan.
3. approve that any capital and revenue expenditure above existing approved budgets be subject to the approval of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and budget setting process in 2026/27.
4. grant delegated authority to the Director of Housing and Health in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities to progress the RIBA stage 3 on sites 1-4 Honiton and RIBA stage 3 on sites 5 and 6 in Exmouth.

Attendance List

Board members present:

Wang Tian, Independent Community Representative
 Rosemary Dale, Tenant
 Rachel Browne, Tenant
 Councillor Christopher Burhop
 Councillor Sarah Chamberlain (Chair)
 Councillor Melanie Martin
 Councillor Simon Smith (Vice-Chair)
 Rob Robinson, Tenants
 Councillor Tim Dumper
 Councillor Helen Parr

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

J Heath
 S Jackson
 P Arnott
 I Barlow
 R Collins
 P Faithfull
 S Gazzard

M Goodman
P Hayward
N Hookway
G Jung
D Ledger
S Westerman

Officers in attendance:

Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Darren Hicks, Tenancy Services Manager (Regulated Services)
Tom Butcher, Development Surveyor
Will Dommett, District Ecologist
Tracy Hendren, Chief Executive
Andrew King, Assistant Director for Housing (Regulated Services)
Nathan Muggeridge, Corporate Lead for Housing Property and Assets
Liam Reading, Assistant Director - Housing Programmes, Investment and Development
Catrin Stark, Director of Housing and Health
John Taylor, Property and Asset Manager
Emma Congerton, Assistant Director Statutory Housing
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Service Manager
Rob Ward, Accountant

Councillor apologies:

Councillor Aurora Bailey
Sara Clarke, Independent Community Representative
Councillor Kim Bloxham

Chair

Date: