

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton, EX14 1EJ on 22 January 2026

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.00 pm

85 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2025 were agreed.

86 Apologies

In the absence of the Chair who had given her apologies, the Vice Chair Simon Smith was in the Chair and it was agreed that Councillor Chris Burhop would act as Vice Chair for the meeting.

87 Declarations of interest

3. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Aurora Bailey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, She was a Council housing tenant..

88 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

89 Matters of urgency

There were none.

90 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential/exempt items.

91 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 Board noted that 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 the Assistant Director or the Democratic Services Officer.

RESOLVED:

To note the Housing Review Board forward plan.

92 **Draft Housing Revenue Account Revenue and Capital Budget report 2026-27**

The Finance Manager's report presented to the Board the draft revenue and capital budgets for 2026/27 relating to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Recommendations from the meeting would be presented back to Cabinet on 4 February 2026 to finalise the 2026/27 budget proposals to recommend to Council.

The HRA recorded expenditure and income on running the Council's housing stock and related services and facilities which were provided primarily for the benefit of the Council's own tenants. The HRA was a ring-fenced account within the General Fund, with strict legal and accounting rules to maintain separation from the General Fund. The HRA must always remain in surplus, and this needed to be considered when setting each year's budget and future planning. The Finance Manager's report explained what was considered as capital and revenue and that the Council was allowed to borrow to fund capital expenditure, but not revenue without specifically required central government permission.

The key revenue budget areas and general spending categories set by the Chartered Institute for Public Financial Accountability (CIPFA), and a brief summary of what was included in each was set out in the report:

- Income.
- Repairs and maintenance.
- Supervision and management.
- Other expenditure/special services.
- Capital charges.

The HRA was currently considered to be stable but continued to face, significant financial pressure in the medium to longer term. These pressures were being seen in other stock holding local authorities and arose from a range of factors including:

- A high stock investment requirement.
- Increased consumer and regulatory standards including new legal duties relating to damp and mould.
- General inflation.
- Net zero expectations.
- Disrepair claims.
- Complaint resolution.
- High void and decant costs.

In recognition of this the Council had developed a strategic plan to address the immediate pressures and ensure a long-term sustainable business model was in place to ensure it could provide safe, warm and regulatory compliant homes.

A financial sustainability / efficiency plan was in place to address and respond to the short-term financial pressures facing the HRA. This plan set out a range of measures to increase income and deliver savings over the next 5 years and included recommendations from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA), who undertook a health check of the HRA in 2024/25.

Savills, a market leading property consultancy, had also undertaken a business plan and options review. This led to the development of a 30-year Business Plan Financial Model which underpinned immediate and longer-term budget setting decisions. This model

underpinned budget setting for 2026/27 and would form the basis of a formally published 30-year Business Plan in 2026.

An Asset Management Strategy was also under development and would outline investment priorities over the medium term. This would reflect the findings of the stock condition survey completed in 2025 and would outline how the Council would effectively manage its assets ensuring investment was targeted and efficient.

Overall HRA income was expected to be £140k above the Business Plan target. The majority of the increase arose from a planned increase in service charge income. Total HRA costs were budgeted to be around £518k below the Business Plan target. The majority of saving in the current year derived from a reduction in repairs expenditure from improved contract management. The overall 2026/27 budget achieved a net positive position of + £658k above the Business Plan target.

The proposed capital budget priorities for 2026/27 had been influenced and informed by the stock condition survey and Business Plan review and included:

- Addressing category 1 and 2 hazards.
- Tackling damp and mould.
- Continuing to ensure regulatory compliance.
- Increasing the number of Decent Homes.
- Reduced responsive repairs through planned investment programmes.
- Addressing major repair works.
- Reducing void turnover times.
- Development and acquisition of new affordable homes.

The proposed capital programme amounted to a significant investment in the Council's housing stock. The investment would result in a substantial level of additional borrowing and an increase in the overall HRA debt burden. The servicing of the debt would be met from within the HRA revenue budget and therefore create further pressure on revenue in future years. The additional interest expense burden would be offset by efficiencies, savings, income generation and strategic asset disposals.

The Director – Finance informed the Board that the budget for 2026/27 presented a good picture, but there continued to be future pressures and investment requirements of the housing stock doing forward. It was noted that the information contained in the report was compared to the 2025/26 budget, not the actual current position of the 2025/26 budget. The Director – Finance reported that internal monitoring indicated that the budget was on target, with a capital underspend currently. This would need to be monitored in terms of delivery of the capital programme.

The HRA business plan would be presented to the next meeting of the Housing Review Board and a workshop session would be run for members in advance. The 30 year business plan would come alongside the asset management strategy.

RECOMMENDED: that the draft revenue and capital estimates are approved by the Housing Review Board and recommended to Cabinet to finalise the 2026/27 budget proposals.

'How we manage pre-court action and evictions in rentals'

The Housing Review Board received a presentation from the Rental Manager on how the rental team managed rent and service charge collections. The aim was to balance the collection of rent with the sustainment of tenancies, whilst ensuring the service was:

- Accountable.
- Fair.
- Efficient.
- Effective.
- Empathetic throughout the processes.

The rental team did not wait until the customer was already in debt before they started taking action. There were a number of recovery stages which were outlined to the Board and the Rental Manager also explained the process and steps involved in taking legal action. The possible legal outcomes were suspended possession order, adjournment on terms, outright possession order, possession forthwith or in 7/14 days, or the legal action is thrown out.

The Rental Manager gave the Board a case study of a recent customer saved from eviction through joint working with Rental and Options. Since 1 April 2025, working with Homemaker had prevented four homeless cases and saved customers £135,872.12 in debt. The rental team had made financial gains for customers of £15,050.29.

In summary, the Rental Manager explained that early intervention was used to try to sustain tenancies and avoid legal action. A well-defined rent recovery process helped maintain fairness and consistency across customer interactions. Balancing compliance with compassion supported customers facing financial challenges. Eviction was only used after persistent non-payment, and after multiple interventions to try to resolve the arrears had failed. Every customer was treated as an individual, with individual circumstances.

The Rental Manager was thanked by the Board for her presentation which set out how caring the Council's processes were. There was a robust system in place with the aim of having as few evictions as possible. In response to a question, she reported that there had been no evictions over the last year for rent purposes. There had been a few evictions over the last few months related to anti-social behaviour issues, persistent non-payers and property left empty.

On behalf of the Board, the Vice Chair in the Chair thanked the Rentals Manager and stated that the Council had a holistic resilience approach, with a lot of due diligence and several layers of protection for tenants.

94 **Income Management Policy**

The Rental Manager's report updated the Housing Review Board on how the Council's rental team dealt with the collection of rent and service charges. It outlined how customers in financial difficulties were supported, with both internal finance resilience team referrals and external sources of support which were free for customers to use. There were no legislative or material changes, but the previous policy was out of date, and the wording, grammar and formatting had been updated in consultation with the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel in June 2025.

The aim of the policy was to create a rent payment culture, thereby ensuring that rent and charges were collected quickly and effectively, whilst also offering help and support to tenants/licensees if needed or requested in matters relating to financial inclusion and the ability to manage their money.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the proposed updated income management policy.

95 **Possession of council homes and garages policy**

The Rental Manager's report updated the Housing Review Board on how the Council's rental team dealt with the possession of council houses and garages. It established guidelines for the recovery of any Council property created by a breach of tenancy/licence, whilst supporting customers in matters relating to financial/social inclusion. There were no legislative or material changes, but the previous policy was out of date, and the wording, grammar and formatting had been updated in consultation with the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel in June 2025.

The policy outlined the Council's rental team's approach to the possession of Council dwellings and garages, after a breach of tenancy through non-payment of rent/service charges. The aim of the policy was to create a rent payment culture, thereby ensuring that rent and charges were collected quickly and effectively, whilst also offering help and support to tenants/licensees if needed or requested in matters relating to financial inclusion and the ability to manage their money effectively. It was emphasised that eviction was only used as a last resort.

It was noted that garages were not supposed to be used for storing anything other than a vehicle, which included mobility aids. The Assistant Director – Regulated Services reported that there were a number of work streams going into the review of garages, which would form part of the Asset Management Strategy and the Build and Buy scheme.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the proposed updated possession of council homes and garages policy.

96 **Mutual exchange policy**

The Housing Solutions Manager's report presented the mutual exchange policy. This had been reviewed and updated to incorporate relevant changes in practice, outlining EDDC's approach to managing mutual exchange requests. EDDC was keen to promote mutual exchanges as a way of encouraging and promoting tenant mobility. Residents had been consulted through the Resident and Leaseholder Panel, with no changes to the policy content required.

In response to a question the Housing Solutions Manager reported that been 31 mutual exchanges in 2023/24, 56 in 2024/25 and 40 so far in 2025/26. Tenants could request to mutual exchange or be downsized. There were financial incentives for downsizing, as previously agreed by the Housing Review Board.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the updated mutual exchange policy.

97 **Tenancy services - performance report 2025-26 quarter 3**

The Housing Review Board were presented with key performance indicators (KPIs) for quarter 3 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.

100.19% of rent was collected in quarter 3, above the target of 98%. The rental collection figure was over 100% as rent was also collected for former tenancies, therefore counting towards income for that period. The rentals team demonstrated high performance with low tenant rent arrears and were within the top 25% of landlords nationally and the Tenancy Services Manager congratulated the Rental Manager and her team.

It was noted that there was a significant decrease in the number of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) cases reported in quarter 3 compared to previous quarters. There were no evictions for quarter 3 of 2025/26, although there were court proceedings in progress due to rent arrears and ASB which could lead to evictions in the coming months. 42.36% of estate inspections had been completed in the first half of the six month cycle.

Tenancy visits were a joint objective for the Estate Management and Sheltered Housing teams. The purpose of visits was to not only offer support to tenants, but also to identify any tenancy management issues, wellbeing/safeguarding concerns and issues of disrepair. The estates team were on target to complete visits to general needs tenants. The estate management team were nearing full staff capacity and it was anticipated that the number of tenancy visits to general purpose properties would increase as a result. The target for sheltered housing tenants to be visited every year was 100%. So far 60.42% visits had been undertaken in 2025/26. Sheltered housing managers would be taking a more proactive approach to ensure that Mobile Support Officers were undertaking their tenancy visits. It was noted that initial findings indicated that visits had been taking place, but not recorded on the systems. Improvements were required in new tenant visits to be completed within 10 weeks of the tenancy start date. There were 18 new tenant visits outstanding across general needs and sheltered housing. Managers would be regularly monitoring team and individual performance to drive improvements in this area. The Tenancy Services Manager outlined other areas of improvement that was anticipated through the successful recruitment of outstanding posts in the estate management team.

The Tenancy Services Manager informed the Board that the Communities Team had provided seven Community Festive Hubs across the district, giving 210 hot Christmas meals to tenants. Activities included balloon modelling and Christmas crafts, decorating community spaces and carol singing. Colleagues from Devon Communities Together also attended the festive hubs to provide advice on staying warm and safe during the colder months and supported residents with practical guidance at a crucial time. In addition, mobile support officers arranged a carol service, lunch and festive quiz for 30 residents at Palmer House.

In response to a question, it was reported that tenant scrutiny/consultation fed into strategy and policy processes.

RESOLVED: that the housing performance report – tenancy services quarter 3 (2025/2026) is noted.

Housing complaints - performance report 2025-26 quarter 3

The Housing Performance Lead's report provided the Board with details on housing related complaints performance, and details of the ongoing complaints improvement action plan. The Board noted that there had been a continued trend of improvement in response times throughout the year. 74 % of stage one complaints were processed

within target timescales during quarter 3, with 92% of stage two complaints responded to within target timescales. The approach to complaint handling was continuously being reviewed, with processes and communication channels streamlined to ensure that tenants were receiving the best service possible. The slight decline in stage two complaints received was an initial indication of successful focus on resolving complaints in full at stage one of the complaints process.

It was noted that data was not included in the figures until a complaint was closed, therefore overdue and ongoing cases were not included in the data set. A review of how data was calculated would be undertaken to provide a more accurate picture moving forward.

The Housing Performance Lead's report highlighted two complex cases which had been resolved during the quarter. It was noted that support continued to be received from the Housing Complaints Panel and a mechanism was being developed to record compliments received.

The Director – Housing and Health congratulated the Housing Performance Lead and her team who had worked incredibly hard. Some cases had been extremely challenging and a reduction in complaints coming through was now being seen. This was a result of the whole collective of teams of people working very hard and proactively. It was agreed that communication with tenants was key.

RESOLVED: that the Housing Review Board note the content of the report outlining the quarter 3 performance for housing-related complaints.

99 **Property and Assets - performance report 2025-26 quarter 3**

The Housing Review Board were presented with the performance headlines for property and assets in quarter three 2025/26:

- There was continuous improvement in tenant satisfaction with time taken to complete repairs – 68% in quarter three.
- 61% of tenants felt their home was well maintained, up from 55% in the same period last year.
- The number of repairs calls received were on a continuous downward trend, with missed calls at almost zero. The introductory recorded message was longer, which meant that the length of time taken to answer calls had increased.
- The average number of days to relet a home was 58 at the end of quarter two, but this rose to 141 days in quarter three due to three long term voids being let in the period.
- Compliance was in a strong position. There had been a delay in one asbestos management survey, and the outstanding electrical checks were due to no access.

It was noted that anything over two months was classed as a long term void and that there were currently 34 properties in this category. However, this only equated to 0.8% of the entire housing stock. The Assistant Director – Tenancy Services explained how long-term voids were managed and the finances and budget involved. Some previously neglected properties required significant levels of investment and therefore disposal would be considered.

The Board were given case studies of a fire damaged property, a major adaptation, and refurbishment at Trumps Court.

Questions were raised about the process for requesting an adaptation, the number of major adaptations undertaken and keeping district councillors up to date with plans for

properties. It was suggested that the councillor enquiry form was the most appropriate way for a councillor to enquiry about and respond to constituent enquiries in relation to vacant properties.

Positive feedback was given by a tenant Board member on a recent successful repair and the Director – Housing & Health replied that the service should be more forthcoming with the compliments it received.

RESOLVED: that the housing performance report – property and assets, quarter 3 (2025/2026) is noted.

Attendance List

Board members present:

Sid Forde, Tenant
Wang Tian, Independent Community Representative
Rosemary Dale, Tenant
Councillor Christopher Burhop (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Melanie Martin
Councillor Simon Smith (Chair)
Sara Clarke, Independent Community Representative
Rob Robinson, Tenants
Councillor Tim Dumper
Councillor Helen Parr
Councillor Roy Collins

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

A Bailey
B Bailey
D Ledger
S Westerman
J Heath
P Arnott

Officers in attendance:

Simon Davey, Director of Finance
Darren Hicks, Tenancy Services Manager (Regulated Services)
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew King, Assistant Director for Housing (Regulated Services)
Andi Loosemore, Rental Manager
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Service Manager
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Catrin Stark, Director of Housing and Health
John Symes, Finance Manager
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Tanya Traylen, Housing Performance Lead

Apologies:

Rachel Browne, Tenant
Councillor Sarah Chamberlain
Councillor Mike Goodman

Councillor Steve Gazzard (non committee member)
Councillor Ian Barlow (non committee member)
Tracy Hendren, Chief Executive

Chair

Date: