

## **Annual report of the Housing Review Board 2019/20**

Following the district council elections there was a change of membership of the Board, including a new Chairman and Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities. Councillor Tony McCollum was appointed Chairman of the Housing Review Board. Tenant member Peter Sullivan was re-elected Vice Chairman by the Board.

The Board welcomed new Board members Councillors Tony McCollum, Kim Bloxham, Ian Hall and Dan Ledger in June 2019 and new tenant representative members Cindy Collier and Christine Morrison during the year. It also said goodbye to tenant representatives Mike Berridge, and Alek Williams during the year. The Board were saddened to hear the news that former member Victor Kemp had passed away.

### **Words from the Chairman**

“New Year New Committee, very much a learning curve for all new members but interesting and challenging.

We have seen a change of our maintenance and repairs contractor which are still finding the changeover challenging due to the back log of outstanding repairs and extraordinary weather over last 5 months. However, moving forward, I am confident we will achieve the standards required.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all The Housing Team Staff for their continued hard work and achievements, they have my continued full support.”

The year began with an induction for all members. It reminded the Board of the housing service priorities and the remit of the Board.

### **The 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 Tenant and Council Partnership Statement;
- Consulting with the Tenant Involvement Forum, 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 Tenant Involvement Forum (TIF) as appropriate. Some examples from the HRB work programme are summarised below:

## **Draft Housing Revenue Account and Capital Budgets 2020/21**

The draft Housing Revenue Account for 2020/21 was a key document for the Board to influence. The HRA currently had 4,190 dwellings and 738 garages. The annual HRA was underpinned and influenced by the 30 year HRA Business Plan. This business plan needed to be refreshed to consider a number of issues which had evolved over the years, including the implications of the climate change action plan, the Universal Credit rollout and the end of rent reductions. This future financial modelling and evaluation work was planned for 2020/21.

The draft 2020/21 budget continued to invest in and maintain existing properties to a high standard with a comprehensive planned programme of expenditure, adaptations and routine repairs. It also provided an acceptable surplus (£.0927m) which would need to be prioritised between:

- contributing to the purchase programme to counteract the impact of continuing Right to Buy (RTB) sales and ensuring capital receipts were spent and not returned to government
- the ambitions in the Council Plan on climate change.

## **Draft Housing Service Plan 2019/20**

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 Plan also considered service challenges and pressures over the next three years, as well as climate change implications.

Headlines from the service plan included a revision of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan with updated stock condition data, embedding the integrated asset management contract, a focus on mental health, recognition of poverty, commitment to tackle homelessness and acting on the climate change agenda and building towards a carbon neutral council.

## **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 2019/20 has been regularly provided at meetings. Careful monitoring throughout the year indicated that the HRA was being maintained at the adopted levels and still included the volatility reserve, with surplus being used to fund new homes in future years. The current business plan included a programme of expenditure to replace properties lost through Right to Buy sales and ensure that Right to Buy receipts are invested and not returned to central government. A further report on the future Right to Buy spend asked the Board to consider five options for spending Right to Buy receipts.

## **18A & B St Andrews Road, Exmouth**

In August 2019 an extra ordinary meeting was held to obtain the Board's permission to purchase 18A & B St Andrew's Road, Exmouth. Delegated authority was also sought to continue the programme of property acquisitions using Right to Buy receipts supplemented with HRA funds and borrowing. Before the Board meeting in January members were given a tour of the newly acquired property.

## **Future rent policy and rent standard**

The Board noted the new rent standard and its implications to EDDC. Rents had decreased by 1% since 2016 except for a small number of exceptions where rents had remained static. This had meant a reduction in the amount of rent the council could collect over the past four years and therefore a reduction in the amount of services which could be funded from the rent collected. The council had the ability to increase rents from April 2020 to maximise income for the Housing Revenue Account. EDDC was in the top quartile for rent collection, with over 99% of rents consistently collected for the past 11 years.

## **Integrated asset management procurement and contract**

A major piece of work throughout the year was the preparations, progress and mobilisation of the new integrated asset management contract. The Board were kept updated throughout the year on progress to renew the contract for day to day repairs and void work to council housing stock and the mobilisation process for the new contractor. Tenants were heavily involved in the process and officers attended Tenant Involvement Forum meetings to ensure that tenants were kept informed of progress. The contract was awarded to Ian Williams Ltd and commenced on 1 July 2019. After a good mobilisation phase, performance has struggled to be consistently high, with issues with IT integration, staffing and training difficulties. Higher than anticipated numbers of repair requests and voids, and the poor condition of voids had impacted service delivery. Specific areas were being targeted to improve performance. On the whole tenants were happy with the work that was being undertaken. Ian Williams Ltd would be invited to attend a future meeting of the HRB to update on progress and give their views on performance.

## **Producing a carbon footprint for housing**

EDDC had committed as part of the Devon Climate Change Declaration to produce an accurate carbon footprint for the Council's activities. The housing service had a carbon footprint and calculating this would form an important part of the Council's overall footprint and a key element of the ambition to become carbon neutral as a Council.

## **Grenfell Tower inquiry**

Fire safety was a regular theme in Housing Review Board meetings. The HRB were briefed on the outcome/findings of the Grenfell Tower inquiry, phase 1 report and reassured that the Council was in a good place in respect of fire safety. The Board would continue to be updated on progress.

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

- Review and update of housing policies – which would be monitored for compliance, variations and application throughout the year, including fire safety policy and tenancy policy.
- Tenancy agreement changes.
- Homes standard – self assessment of current service delivery against the Social Housing Regulators Home Standard, which set out the minimum requirements for what must be achieved to ensure tenants remain safe in their homes and specifically incorporated all compliance legislation across a range of areas including fire safety, gas safety, electrical safety, lifts and legionella. The three remaining consumer standards

are neighbourhood and community, tenancy, and tenant involvement and empowerment.

- Homes legislation – Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 came into effect during 2019. The housing service ensured that its properties complied with the Act.
- Housing complaints – annual report providing information on formal complaints received in relation to the housing service. Formal complaints were carefully monitored to learn from them and improve services wherever possible.
- Extension to gas servicing contract.
- Extension to asbestos surveying contract.
- Quarterly monitoring reports – measuring performance across the housing service.
- Countryside outreach project – from 2015 the HRB had funded one and had days per week for an Education Ranger from the Countryside team to work in areas of the district with high levels of council housing.
- Poverty – a report providing information on poverty within East Devon.
- Resident involvement strategy 2019/22 – adopted.
- Public Health Strategic Plan 2019/23 – the Board received a presentation on the East Devon Public Health Strategic Plan 2019-23 from the Public Health Project Officer.
- Community Development update – a presentation was received by the HRB informing them of the activities and projects that Community Development Workers had undertaken and how it fitted within the wider context of the Housing Service Plan.
- Annual report to tenants 2018/19 – widely distributed to tenants, staff and councillors during autumn 2018.
- House of Multiple Occupation update and expenditure.
- Housing research study: Your wellbeing, your home – the Board were updated on the progress of a joint three year project with the University of Birmingham and LiveWest, exploring the relationship between housing, wellbeing and landlord satisfaction.