

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Review Board held at Council Chamber, Exmouth Town Hall, Exmouth EX8 1AW on 19 September 2019

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.30 pm and ended at 5.00 pm

29 Public speaking

Peter Sullivan, Vice Chairman informed members of the sad news that Victor Kemp who was formerly a member of the Board for many years had recently passed away. The funeral had been held last Friday at which both Board members and Officers had attended. All present wished to thank Victor for his work for the Board and members sat quietly in remembrance.

Councillor Ian Hall wished to talk to Board members on the Right to Buy scheme and the subsidy given to Housing Associations by the Government. The Board needed to look forward on both issues, particularly as he considered that the service provided by EDDC as a Housing Authority to its tenants was of a higher standard than that provided by Housing Associations. Cllr Hall outlined the need for options to be explored that involve EDDC looking at ways its own stock can be further increased as well as what additional funding could be available from central government to do this. Linked to the issue of the Right to Buy. The Acting Housing Service Lead highlighted the desire of the Portfolio Holder to create a working group that could look specifically at how right to buy receipts can be spent over the coming years as we see the need to accelerate spending as opposed to having to pay receipts back. Members were invited to contact the Acting Housing Service Lead directly if they wish to be part of this work.

He reported that there were particular anti-social behaviour problems in the east of the district and it was accepted that there was the need to provide extra resources to help our communities.

30 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Housing Review Board meeting held on 14 August 2019 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

31 Declarations of interest

Councillor Ian Hall: Personal interest – mother was a housing tenant and used Home Safeguard. Chairman of the Millwey Rise Action Group. Member of Devon County Council.

Councillor Dan Ledger: Personal interest – employed by a third party contractor for the current repairs and maintenance service.

Peter Sullivan: Personal interest – housing tenant.

Cat Summers: Personal interest – housing tenant.

Pat Gore: Personal interest – housing tenant

Alek Williams: Personal interest – housing tenant

32 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency raised at the meeting.

33 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no confidential or exempt items.

34 **Housing Review Board Forward Plan**

Amy Gilbert Jeans, Acting Housing Service Lead presented the forward plan and advised Members that the forward plan acted as a reminder of agenda items to come forward to future meetings. Members were reminded that they could add further items to the next forward plan by informing either herself or the Democratic Services Officer. It was noted that the Brexit report had been removed from the forward plan as it would be considered by Cabinet.

A poverty report was being prepared in conjunction with Libby Jarrett, Service Lead Revenues and Benefits and would be presented to Overview Committee in November and would also be considered by the November meeting of the Board.

In response to concerns raised by Cllr Ian Hall, Amy Gilbert-Jeans suggested an information report on financial structures and set-ups of Housing Associations and the differences between us as a Local Authority in order to ensure the Boards understanding of both and where any opportunities could arise.

Amy Gilbert-Jeans referred back to the Right to Buy working group and suggested Members may want to focus part of the work the group do on lobbying Central Government in relation to the Right to Buy scheme around the perceived unfairness and risk to the organisation that a depletion of stock creates.

Members were encouraged to read the Consumer Regulation Review 2018-19 that had been provided as an information report and suggested a report is brought back to the November meeting detailing our position in relation to the Regulatory Code.

RESOLVED: that the forward plan be noted and updated.

35 **Producing a Carbon footprint for Housing**

Members noted that John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health & Environment had been championing Climate Change on behalf on the whole of the Council. There was the need to reduce the Council's carbon footprint where possible.

The report took forward our commitment given as part of the Devon Climate Change Declaration, to produce an accurate carbon footprint for the Councils activities. This is a complex piece of work and is vital that we perform accurately as this will create a baseline against which we will be measuring our journey towards carbon neutrality.

The expertise that can be found at the University of Exeter was engaged to assist us with this piece of work. This will also provide an independent and auditable assessment of our carbon baseline.

As members of SWEEG (South West Energy & Environment Group) we receive favourable rates when commissioning the University to provide advice and investigations in relation to environmental matters.

The Housing Service has a carbon footprint and calculating this will form an important part of the Council's overall footprint and therefore a key element of our ambition to become carbon neutral as a Council.

A Board member reported that the Council's website needed a more up to date statement as the link present on climate change referred to 2017.

- RESOLVED**
1. to produce a carbon footprint for our Housing Service, identifying and quantifying the carbon emissions from our activities and assets. This includes our contractors work on our behalf and the homes and buildings in our ownership and control.
 2. that the Council's communications team be requested to update the link on climate change on the website to include more up to date information.
 3. that paper copies of the agenda be only sent to members of the Board on request.

36 **Draft of the Annual Report to Tenants 2018-19**

Members were requested to comment on and approve the attached draft of the Annual Report to tenants. The draft is in word text format only and will be graphically designed once the wording has been finalised. The reason was to meet with good practice and provide performance information to tenants.

Peter Sullivan, Vice Chairman, reported that this report had been considered yesterday at the Tenants Forum and they were happy with the new format. It was accepted that a footnote should be added explaining regarding changes to the way statistic are captured.

RESOLVED that the Board approve the content of the annual report to tenants, subject to the information being graphically designed for reproduction in the December Housing Matters magazine

37 **HMO Update and Expenditure**

Members were requested to approve works to a recently acquired property that exceed initial budget estimates under powers delegated to the Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment – Housing 25 - authority to enter into contracts, including the appointment, liaison and monitoring of contractors and consultants working on Council homes.

The reason behind the report was to ensure that the refurbishment of the property meet regulatory compliance requirements and is suitable for occupation by our tenants, this also involved the entire refurbishment of the kitchen area that had not previously been considered. It was noted that the winning tender was £128,522 compared to the original estimate of £25,000. Members expressed their disappointment at the increase in costs and noted that the officer responsible had now left the Council and a new highly skilled Property and Asset Manager had been appointed to oversee this area going forward.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the update provided be noted.
 2. that further expenditure is approved to ensure that the property recently acquired in Morton Road, Exmouth, is fit for purpose, using available budgets, by the Strategic Lead for Housing, Health and Environment.

3. that the further expenditure be approved, subject to available budgets by the Service Lead for Housing, Health and Environment

38 **Community Development Update**

The Chairman welcomed Aaron Clark and Alex Gibson, Community Development Workers to the meeting. They gave an update on the activities on their work, including actual case studies and how it fitted within the wider context of the Housing Service Plan 2019/20. Members noted that Aaron Clark was involved with producing Mental Health strategies on behalf of the Council, the first draft of which would be available in December.

The report ensured the Housing Review Board were fully apprised of why Community Development Workers were employed and how their work can be central to achieving the wider objectives of the authority. This provided an asset based community approach that allowed residents to become more actively involved in supporting their communities. Members emphasised the need for a sustainable funding stream to continue this excellent work.

RESOLVED that Members note the work that is underway that focuses on building our communities to be more resilient.

39 **Update on Integrated Management contract**

John Taylor, Property and Asset Manager reported that the new Integrated Asset Management Contract commenced on the 1 July 2019.

This report updated Members on progress as we approached the end of the first 3 months of our new contracting arrangement with Ian Williams Ltd. The purpose of the report was to ensure Members were up to date with new contracting arrangements covering the maintenance of our housing stock.

Members noted that the Contractors were currently working on 10 voids a week compared to an average of 5. Tenants had responded well to the new repairs contract and the KPIs were monitored on a regular basis. The importance of getting the right staff in place was emphasised and there were currently 5-6 office based staff and 22 operatives working on jobs.

John Taylor took Members through the detail of each KPI with a summary of current performance in each area.

In response to a question, it was reported that the Handyperson Scheme was still available, although there was only one member of staff available at the moment as one had left for another job, but he would be replaced in due course.

RESOLVED that the Board be aware of the commencement of the Integrated Asset Management Contract and early progress be noted.

40 **Update on Your Home, Your Well Being Research Project**

Natalie Brown, Information & Analysis Officer provided the Board with an update on the progress of the three year research project being undertaken in partnership with LiveWest and the University of Birmingham.

The results of the study provided information on the relationship between housing and wellbeing and landlord satisfaction.

The report attempted to raise the profile of the project and to recognise the contribution the project is now making to national debates. It was hoped that the next stage of results could be reported to the November meeting of the Board.

RESOLVED that the ongoing progress of year 2 of the project including the wider contribution of the study to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee enquiry into the long term delivery of social and affordable rented housing be noted.

41 **Residents Involvement Strategy 2019-2022**

The Chairman welcomed Sue Saunders and Sue Dawson who read out the following statement giving their view of the new Residents Involvement Strategy.

“I became an involved Tenant in 2006 the year the Tenant & Leaseholder Customer Panel was formed, a fully constituted committee, with elected members. Formal meetings were held under the leadership of a Chair and Vice-chair. Debates were minuted and votes recorded.

The Tenant Representative Group replaced it, its constitution also gave it minutes and recorded votes. The TRG took a closer look at Housing management, unfortunately, some members thought the work too onerous, as Chairs of the Service Review Groups were required to write reports.

Then came the TIF, no constitution no minutes and no voting. The only record of matters discussed, an Action Plan. Now the TIF is to be scrapped, leaving in its place The Scrutiny Panel, the Complaints Group, and two SRGs. The Strategy’s answer to this depletion is Focus Groups, Forums and on-line chats.

With this new strategy we will have no meetings where we can come together and discuss the work of each group, just impotent, isolated little groups with no written records and no way to communicate with other tenants in order to gauge their views BEFORE decisions are made.

There is a force growing with-in the Housing Department for meetings to be held via the internet. This new Involvement Strategy is designed to bring that goal nearer. Is this also the way the Council and the Housing Review Board are moving, will full Council meetings be held on Twitter or on-line? No of course not because you know there is no substitute for formalised face to face debate.

I recall a time when tenants were fully involved at all levels. I personally was part of the team responsible for preparations for the Audit Commission investigation. I was on the team that set up the tenant Scrutiny Group and another which set up this Board, of which I was proud to be a founder member. I worked alongside tenants such Ted Brown, Ann Bickham and Victor Kemp, who sad to relate died recently, these people understood the responsibility needed to be a tenant representative. It’s obvious the officers don’t share that view.

Version 3 of the new strategy given to tenants to consult upon is, in Sue’s opinion, an insult to our intelligence. Some wording has obviously been cut and pasted, as

evidenced when the text contains the word City when describing East Devon. As far as she is aware there are no cities within the East Devon boundary. This is just an example of the level of importance officers are placing on Tenant Involvement.

The new Residents Involvement Strategy is being described as an EVOLUTION, incidentally, a word I suggested before I became aware of the true nature of the strategy being proposed I would now describe it as a Mutation.

Evolution suggests an improvement, a moving forward. In my opinion this strategy is a giant step backwards.”

Members considered the contents of the refreshed Resident Involvement Strategy and adopting it as fit for purpose for the period 2019/22. The purpose of the report was to ensure our Resident Involvement Strategy is agreed at the highest level and recorded for all to see. It was the result of 18 months of consultation with tenants.

It was noted that the movement to a more internet based approach was designed to improve the involvement of a younger resident demographic and those less physically able and was essential if the Resident Involvement Strategy was to be fit for the future.

Peter Sullivan, Vice Chairman reported that tenants had been consulted on this issue for 18 months. The younger age and disabled tenants were really struggling to be involved and the new strategy presented a number of opportunities for this to be enhanced. These days there were other ways to communicate other than face to face meetings and we must all work harder at making this happen. The Council needs to modernise and use technology. The new Resident Involvement Strategy would help make tenants more involved.

RESOLVED that the Resident Involvement Strategy 2019/22 be adopted.

42 **Public Health Strategic Plan**

The Chairman welcomed Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer who gave a presentation on the East Devon Public Health Strategic Plan 2019-2023.

Councillor Ian Hall reported that the east of the district was being cut off and that the East Devon Public Health Strategic Plan 2019-2023 needed to ensure it was district wide, which meant including the east of the district. He considered that the plan contained nothing at all about issues around drugs and county lines.

Helen Wharam reported that the priorities in the Plan were based on statistical evidence from Devon County and are intended to help focus resources. We will work across the district, with a focus on those areas of most need. She advised that EDDC has an Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety Coordinator.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

43 **Consumer Regulation Review 2018-19**

Members of the Board received details of the Consumer Regulation Review 2018-19. This provided a summary of the Regulator’s consumer regulation work for the year 2018-

19. It included case studies to demonstrate the approach to consumer regulation, as well as key lessons the Regulator of Social Housing wished to share with the housing sector and explained its current role and mandate as set by Parliament.

Amy Gilbert-Jeans reminded Members that as set out in the Forward Plan, a position statement on our performance in relation to this report will be brought back to the November meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted

44

Housing Revenue Account update to end of August 2019

Members receive a report from Rob Ward, Accountant which provided the Housing Review Board with the current position to August 2019 and details of the year end forecast of the draft Housing Revenue Account for 2019/20. This account shows the main areas of anticipated income and expenditure on landlord activities for the year ahead. Producing a Housing Revenue Account has been a statutory requirement for Councils who manage and own their housing stock for some time, and therefore a key document for the Board to influence.

Rob apologised that the report had been a late addition to the agenda.

The report also provides the position of the HRA capital programme for both affordable housing and other capital items outside of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. Members requested that they receive a copy of the presentation.

RESOLVED that the Housing Revenue Account update to August 2019 be approved and it be recommended Cabinet.

Attendance List

Board members present:

Councillor Tony McCollum (Chairman)
Peter Sullivan, Tenant (Vice-Chairman)
Christine Drew, Independent Community Representative
Pat Gore, Tenant
Alek Williams, Tenant
Councillor Ian Hall
Councillor Dan Ledger
Councillor Helen Parr

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

Megan Armstrong
Paul Millar

Officers in attendance:

Sue Bewes, Landlord Services Manager
Natalie Brown, Information and Analysis Officer (Housing)
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead Housing
Christopher Lane
Paul Lowe, Housing Enabling and Allocations Manager
Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs and Strategy Manager
Giles Salter, Solicitor

John Taylor, Property and Asset Manager
Rob Ward, Accountant
Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer

Councillor apologies:
Cat Summers, Tenant
Councillor Kim Bloxham

Chairman

Date: