

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 9 September 2010

Present:

Councillors:

Pauline Stott (Chairman)
Douglas Hull (Vice Chairman)

Vivienne Ash
Jim Knight
Frances Newth
Ken Potter

Co-opted Tenant Members:

Ted Brown
Ann Bickham
Victor Kemp
Christine Morrison
Sue Saunders

Officers:

Sue Bewes, Housing Strategy Manager
Emma Charlton, Housing Projects Officer
Amy Gilbert, Support Services Manager
John Golding, Head of Housing & Social Inclusion
Sally Hammond, Housing Community Developer Worker (Youth)
Christopher Holland, Democratic Services Officer
Giles Salter, Assistant Solicitor
Hannah Whitfield, Assistant Democratic Services Officer

Also Present:

Councillors:

Jill Elson – Portfolio Holder, Communities
Sara Randall Johnson, Leader of the Council
Helen Parr

Apologies

Julie Adkin
Anne Bickham
Rob Finch

The meeting started at 6:00pm and ended at 8:41pm.

***14 Public Question Time**

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

Tenant Member, Sue Saunders, asked if the Board would consider providing additional training for Tenant Members. Specifically an induction package for new Tenant Board Members. She added that a grant may be available from the National Communities Resource Centre in Chester, which could match fund training, funds provided by the Council.

Members of the Board were in broad agreement that if match funding was available it should be investigated. It was also suggested that training could be combined with training for newly elected Council Members after the May 2011 local government elections.

***15 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Review Board held on 24 June 2010, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

Ted Brown requested that reports be made available to the Board earlier as the large number of items being considered took time to read and consider thoroughly. He suggested that the agenda should be available not less than 10 days before the meeting. Christopher Holland, Democratic Services Officer explained that agendas were already despatched 9 days before a meeting. It was noted that although it was possible to send agendas out earlier, lead times in report writing were already three weeks before a meeting. In order to send out agendas earlier still, report writers would have to construct reports even earlier. If the Board wished to receive the most up to date information without many verbal updates this would prove difficult.

***16 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor/ Officer	Agenda Item	Type of interest	Nature of interest
Sue Saunders	Car Parking Improvements – The Green, Littleham, Exmouth	Personal (Remained in chamber, but did not speak or vote)	Member of Littleham Green, Residents Association.

***17 Exclusion of the Public**

RESOLVED: that the classification given to the documents to be submitted to the Board, be confirmed, and that the reports relating to exempt information, be dealt with under Part B.

***18 Housing Review Board - Forward Plan**

The Board considered the Forward Plan presented by the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that the Housing Review Board forward plan be noted.
 - 2) that a final report on the work of the Sheltered Housing Task and Finish Forum be considered at the next meeting.
 - 3) that Cllr Vivienne Ash, requested that the Board be kept informed of developments regarding the soon to be renewed Home Safeguard maintenance contract for scheme based equipment.
 - 4) that the 'Disability Issues' item be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Board.
 - 5) that the Housing Review Board self-assessment meeting be convened as soon as practicable and preferably on the afternoon of a Board meeting.

19 Local Offers

The Board considered the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion regarding the draft local offers document.

Members noted that at the Housing Review Board meeting held on 29th April 2010 they had received a paper on the new Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England.

19 **Local Offers (cont'd)**

The new framework included the need to draw up, with tenants, a set of local standards, called 'local offers'. The offers were required in relation to three of the six Tenant Services Authority (TSA) standards; the home, neighbourhood and community, and tenant involvement and empowerment. The Council would be measured on how well it performed against these local offers.

The report set out how the Council has approached the work, how it has involved tenants in deciding on the local offers, and the proposed draft local offers. It also set out the next steps that would need to be undertaken before the draft local offers could be finalised.

It was noted that the draft local offers needed to be included in the Annual Report to tenants published by October 2010. Local Offers had to be finalised and adopted by April 2011.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- (1) that the suggested draft local offers be approved,
 - (2) that the process for consulting with all tenants on these local offers be approved,
 - (3) that the format and content of the Annual Report to tenants be approved.

20 **Tenant Involvement Strategy Update**

Members considered the updated Resident Involvement Strategy which covered the period April 2010 to March 2012. Members noted that Housing staff had already been working to the new Strategy for several months.

Some Members of the Board felt that wording in part of the document alluded to the disbanding of the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel which they felt was an essential part of the Strategy. It was explained however that the document was suggesting that the Panel should be reviewed on a regular basis as with any other function which would ensure that it was delivering and achieving its aims and was still 'fit for the purpose'. The new Tenant Scrutiny Panel would also provide a completely independent body from which to examine the Strategy and other housing landlord matters.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- (1) that the Tenant Involvement Strategy for the period April 2010 to March 2012 be approved, and
 - (2) that any final changes to the draft document be made by the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Board and the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel.

21 **Tenant Scrutiny Part III**

The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion presented a report to the Board on Tenant Scrutiny.

It was noted that at the Housing Review Board meetings held on 4th March and 29th April 2010, Members had received papers on tenant scrutiny. The Board had given a direction and sought tenant input into shaping tenant scrutiny arrangements for the future.

The report provided Board Members with an update and explained the current position and next steps the Council would be taking with tenant scrutiny. An update report would be presented to future Housing Review Board meetings until implementation in April 2011.

21 **Tenant Scrutiny Part III (cont'd)**

- RECOMMENDED:** 1) that the Tenant Scrutiny action plan and scrutiny role descriptions be approved.
- 2) that the Tenant Scrutiny Panel initially report to the Housing Review Board.

22 **Service Restructuring**

The Board considered the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which set out his Service restructuring proposals following changes at senior management level within the Service. The restructuring involved regrouping the various housing activities into three teams under the managers. It was noted that the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion was keen to spread more 'generic housing working' across the service and reducing the 'silo' effect that can be created by organising work in teams. It was noted the Council restructured the Service in 2006 following the housing stock options appraisal.

Members noted that the proposals aimed to reduce management costs while protecting frontline service to customers. Like many public sector organisations the service needed to achieve more with fewer resources. The changes proposed were not dramatic, but took the opportunity to reduce and change senior management in the Service.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion and his team for the work they had put into the restructuring proposals.

- RECOMMENDED:** that the changes to the Housing and Social Inclusion Service organisational structure be approved.

23 **Council Housing: A real future –update and preparations**

Members considered the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion concerning the considered response to the consultation on changes to the funding regime for operating a local authority landlord service, discussed at the previous meeting of the Board.

Members noted that the Council had supported the proposals with some reservations about the final details of the scheme.

The report presented the final submission in response to the consultation and outlined a number of issues relating to preparations which could be made for any new self-financing proposals to be introduced in the future.

- RECOMMENDED:** that the preparations for a new housing finance system be approved.

24 **Cash Incentive Scheme for Tenants Under-Occupying Council Homes**

The Board considered the report of the Housing Needs Manager and Tenant Board Member which set out details of the proposed revisions to the Council's policy on under occupation by tenants. The financial and other incentives available were not considered to be at a level that maximizes the opportunity for tenants to move to a smaller property and release larger homes for re-letting. There was the potential to increase the number of family homes available for letting through the scheme if the financial and support package was revised to meet the needs of tenants. The changes proposed in the report would increase the number of tenants 'downsizing' each year.

24 **Cash Incentive Scheme for Tenants Under-Occupying Council Homes (cont'd)**

It was noted that there were budget implications with the change in policy that needed to be carefully considered alongside other service priorities and the scheme be progressed, if approved, in 2011/12 if the additional resources could be identified.

RECOMMENDED : that the following policy changes be approved:

1. To increase the financial incentive to a maximum of £3,000 made up of £1,500 for reimbursement of costs, and £500 per bedroom.
2. To allocate a budget of £75,000 annually (including the cost of staff resource to administer this policy).
3. To set a target of 30 tenants to downsize each year.
4. To identify a staff resource to support the tenant through the process including helping to arrange the move (removals, gas, electric, telephone etc).
5. Tenants to be given a choice of decoration.

25 **Car Parking Improvements – The Green, Littleham, Exmouth**

The Board gave consideration to the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which presented options for increased vehicular parking on council owned land on the Littleham estate. Officers were aware of limited parking on a number of Council operated estates and it was felt that there was a need to prioritise improvement projects based upon available finances and the severity of the problem. The scheme presented, was seen as a priority following liaison many years ago County Highways engineers.

Some Members of the Board felt that the scheme was a much needed safety feature and should be implemented by a responsible Council. However, other Members of the Board felt that in a time of public spending being reduced and with other deserving areas of need, the scheme should not go ahead.

RECOMMENDED: that the car parking improvement scheme for The Green, Littleham, Exmouth not be implemented.

*26 **Housing Community Development (Youth) Report**

Sally Hammond, Housing Community Development Worker (Youth), gave a report which updated the Board on Community Development work to date and discussed plans for future work.

It was noted that three specific projects had been considered and a progress report given on each. The report raised awareness of some of the work going on to champion social inclusion and help create strong communities in areas where the Council has a significant presence as a landlord.

Councillor Jill Elson, Portfolio Holder, Communities gave thanks to the officers involved with the work to date.

RESOLVED: that the achievements and potential of community development work involving young people within East Devon District Council be noted.

***27 Anti Social Behaviour benchmarking report**

Members noted the report by the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion. They noted that at the end of March 2010 the Council completed its first Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) benchmarking exercise. The new report analysed the results in greater detail. It looked at the types of ASB being encountered, how these were being resolved, satisfaction levels of tenants, and how trends could be examined to consolidate or improve the service. This new facility allowed the Council to benchmark various aspects of ASB internally and with peer organisations.

RESOLVED: that the contents of the Anti Social Behaviour benchmarking report be noted and used to build an accurate picture of the types of ASB being tackled.

***28 Empty Properties (Voids) Performance**

Members were asked to note a report which set out the performance in respect of letting void properties required by the Housing Review Board for the period January 2010 to March 2010 (4th Quarter) and for the year 2009/2010 (April 2009 – March 2010).

The report showed the average length of time taken to re-let properties. Performance for the year shows that it has taken on average 28 days to re-let each empty property compared with a target for 2009/10 of 25 days.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

***29 Exclusion of the 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, is likely to be disclosed and on balance the public interest is in discussing the items in private session (Part B)

***30 Partnering Contractor – Position Update**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion concerning one of the Council's contractor partners which had recently been placed into administration. A verbal update was given on the weeks events and the impact on the Council's Tenants in the west of the district.

Members were reassured that the most urgent work that needed carrying out was being taken on by the other partner in the partnership agreement and a number of other contractors in the interim.

Members of the Board re-iterated how the forethought in appointing two partners rather than one had been proved to be an extremely wise decision.

- RECOMMENDED: 1)** that the report be noted and further information be communicated if the situation deteriorated.
- 2)** that the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion in consultation with the Chairman and Portfolio Holder, Communities, be given delegated authority to terminate or vary the partnership agreement following discussions with other partners and the administrators.

***30 Partnering Contractor – Position Update (cont'd)**

The Chairman and Portfolio Holder, Communities gave thanks to the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion and other officers involved with the partnership contract during what was a difficult time.

***31 Gas Servicing Contract**

Members of the Board gave consideration to the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion regarding the appointment of a new contractor for the Gas Servicing Contract.

RECOMMENDED: that a four year contract be offered to the contractor named in the report for the annual servicing and maintenance to 3371 gas fired appliances installed in council properties, to commence on Friday 1st October 2010, and with a forecast annual service and repair cost of £395,000.

Chairman Date