

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing Review Board held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 14 January 2010

Present:

Councillors:

Vivienne Ash
Douglas Hull (Vice Chairman)
John Humphreys
Jim Knight
Pauline Stott

Co-opted tenant members:

Ann Bickham
Ted Brown (Chairman)
Victor Kemp
Sue Saunders

EDDC Officers:

Dennis Boobier, Housing Needs Manager
John Golding, Head of Housing & Social Inclusion
Christopher Lane, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present:

Councillors:

Jill Elson, Portfolio Holder, Communities
Ann Liverton

Apologies

Co-opted tenant member:

Christine Morrison

Co-opted independent community representative:

Rob Finch

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.15pm

*41 **Public Question time**

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

*42 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Review Board held on 26 November 2009, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

*43 **Chairman's remarks**

Interview for Independent Member

The Chairman confirmed that the appointment of the vacant Independent Member post had been delayed due to the weather. However it was hoped that this process would be completed shortly.

***43 Chairman's remarks (Cont)**Requirement for Chairman to keep venue and times of meetings under review

The Chairman reported that it was his responsibility to ensure that the venues and times of meetings were kept under review to encourage better attendance and accessibility. Some Members felt that any change to the time would disadvantage working Councillors and that other venues had been tried before and not found to encourage better attendance.

Special responsibility allowance

The Chairman reported that the post of HRB Chairman had been reviewed by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). The Panel's recommendations were approved by the Executive Board. The HRB Chairman (whether an elected member or not) would be entitled to claim a special responsibility allowance. However, the level of allowance had been cut as a result of the IRP's recommendations which disappointed the Chairman. He advised that the IRP would consider all special responsibility allowances in the spring when he hoped that the level for the HRB would be increased.

Alethea Thompson

The Chairman reported that Alethea had had a baby daughter called Emily. All Members of the Board wished to express their congratulations to Alethea.

***44 Demonstration of the Devon home Choice scheme**

Dennis Boobier, Housing Needs Manager, demonstrated and explained to members of the Board details of the new Devon Home Choice scheme. The system was a better tool for managing the Housing Register and customers could manage their own applications on line. The change of system had taken many hours of staff time and a further report would be made on the system at a future Board meeting. The system would go fully live at the end of January 2010. A member of the Board expressed some concern about the scheme's accessibility for those applicants without direct access to a computer and the arrangements for applicants in this situation were explained.

***45 Housing Review Board Forward Plan**

The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion presented the Forward Plan to the Board and the contents were noted. In response to a question, John Golding, Head of Housing and Social Inclusion, confirmed that a report on the Review of Sheltered Housing would be on the agenda for the March meeting of the Board.

***46 A new regulatory framework for social housing in England**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which outlined the consultation being undertaken by the Tenant Services Authority on the future regulation of social housing. A detailed consultation paper was issued in November 2009 seeking responses to the consultation proposals by 5 February 2010. The consultation paper set out a series of principles and standards for the regulation of the sector leading to ten consultation questions. It was important that the Board's views had were fed into the process as the resulting standards would be a key regulatory tool in the future.

Members noted that the Tenant Services Authority consultation paper gave more opportunities for tenant involvement. Possible responses to the consultation paper were contained within section 3 of the report. John Golding, Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that he hoped to bring a discussion paper on tenant scrutiny to the March meeting of the Board.

*46 **A new regulatory framework for social housing in England (Cont)**

RESOLVED: that John Golding, Head of Housing and Social Inclusion, prepare a response to the Tenant Services Authority to meet the consultation deadline of 5 February 2010, based on the proposed responses to the consultation in section 3 of the report and also the addition of a point about the negative housing subsidy to which the Council is subject.

*47 **Tenancy fraud initiative**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which set out some of the concerns about tenancy fraud and how to combat the problem. The government had launched a national drive to crackdown on tenancy misuse and fraud, and the report considered some of the good practice ideas designed to tackle unlawful subletting. The report outlined a series of practical measures which could be adopted to detect tenancy fraud in the Council's housing stock and which would allow the Council to participate effectively in the national initiative.

Members noted that the government had offered a financial incentive for local authorities to participate in the campaign. The Council had secured £10,000 to help deal with the issue locally, although it was acknowledged that the initiative was primarily aimed at cities where fraud was more prevalent. The good practice guide was deemed useful and which the Council could interpret locally.

RESOLVED: that the proposals set out in the report be adopted as the Council's policy to combat tenancy misuse and fraud.

48 **River Otter Tipton Vale, Tipton St John**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which summarised the consultant's findings following the commission to investigate the risk of erosion and concerns about possible flooding to council homes in Tipton Vale, Tipton St John adjacent to the river Otter.

The Service had received advice on the protection works necessary to prevent further erosion of the river bank on land close to the Council's bungalows. Several options were available to rectify the problem, but all had considerable cost implications and difficulties as the land subject to the erosion was not in the Council's ownership. The report proposed a way forward and an engineering project to protect some 130 metres of river bank adjacent to council homes.

The consultant's report had indicated that the cost was estimated to be around £221,000. At present there was no funding readily available in the Housing Revenue Account, but the consultants had confirmed that doing nothing was not an option if the Council wanted to protect its properties and tenants. John Golding, Head of Housing and Social Inclusion, confirmed that there could be difficulty in obtaining funding for this work from the Environment Agency, but there was the possibility of the Tipton Vale Residents Group being able to obtain funding which the Council could not access.

The Chairman welcomed 6 representatives of council bungalows in Tipton Vale, Tipton St John and the local community. Councillor John Harding from Tipton St John Parish Council stated that he appreciated the precise nature of the report and supported the recommendation. He felt that this formed an excellent basis for a way forward. The right bank of the River Otter was eroding at a rate of 1.5 metres per year and would reach the boundary of Tipton Vale

48 **River Otter Tipton Vale, Tipton St John (Cont)**

housing in 13 years. Councillor Harding would welcome the opportunity to discuss planning and funding.

Margaret Hutchinson the Chairman of the Tipton St John Residents Association, who represented the village community, expressed her concern over this issue and the threat it posed to the Council bungalows and residents. She confirmed that the Association supported the recommendations in the report which represented a very positive way forward.

Hazel Gifford, one of the land owners adjacent to this part of the River Otter expressed her support for the work proposed for this part of the river and confirmed the serious erosion that was occurring. Mary Baffidge, resident of one of the bungalows, wanted to express her concern at the river erosion and ensure that her home was going to be protected.

RECOMMENDED: that a scheme of river bank protection be prepared, funding be secured for the project and work towards implementation of the scheme in 2011.

RESOLVED: that the Council's Flood Committee be informed of the situation and also the Ward Members be notified of the decision.

*49 **Housing stock condition survey**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion in respect of the need to undertake a sample housing stock condition survey in order to underpin the improvement and modernisation programmes and update the HRA Business Plan. It was considered critical to update and understand the condition of the Housing property portfolio. Future expenditure proposals needed to help maintain and improve the housing assets in Council ownership.

RESOLVED: that the arrangements for a sample housing stock condition survey, to update the existing information held on the Council's housing stock, as set out in report be approved

*50 **Draft Housing & Social Inclusion Service Plan 2010 - 2013**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which presented the draft Service Plan for the Housing and Social Inclusion Service covering the period 2010 – 2013. The Service Plan was a document produced annually following a Service Planning Day, and set 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 given. Reference was made to the Council receiving £1,000,000 for the provision of Council Housing throughout the District.

RESOLVED: that the Housing and Social Inclusion Service Plan for 2010 – 2013 be approved.

*51 **Housing Revenue Account 2010 – 11 the impact of rent and subsidy determinations**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which informed Members that following consideration of the draft Housing Revenue Account budget for 2010/11 at the last meeting of the Board, the Government had announced the rent and subsidy determinations. These had been assessed and the net effect was that it enabled the service to add some more expenditure to the Council's initial plans and still maintain

the advisory HRA balance. The 3.1% increase in rent would produce an additional £162,000 spending capacity for the Housing Revenue Account.

RESOLVED: that the additional expenditure items for inclusion in the draft Housing Revenue Account for 2010 – 11 be approved, with the addition of £5,000 for Resident Inspectors/Scrutiny.

Chairman

Date