

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a liaison meeting of the Housing Review Board and the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 17 December 2007

Present:	Councillors:	Tenants:
	Miss V Ash	Mr T Brown
	D R Hull	Mrs J Ebborn
	J A Knight	Mr V Kemp
	Mrs A E Liverton	Mrs L Lane
	Co-opted Independent	Mrs C Morrison
	Community Representative:	Ms D Page
	Mrs H Williamson	Mr P Portman
		Mr C Rowe
		Mrs S Saunders

Also present: Dr J Rees
(Independent Member of the Standards Committee)

Apologies:	Councillor:	Tenants:
	J Humphreys	
	Co-opted Independent	Mrs A Bickham
	Community Representative:	Ms A Kellett
	Mr R Finch	

The meeting started at 10.05 am and ended at 12.15 pm

*1 **Election of Chairman**

RESOLVED that Dr Rees be elected Chairman for the meeting.

*2 **Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

RESOLVED that Mrs H Williamson be appointed Vice-Chairman for the meeting.

*3 **Welcome and introductions**

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and invited each person to briefly introduce themselves.

*4 **Verbal report on the work of the Housing Review Board**

The Chairman of the Housing Review Board, Councillor Mrs A Liverton gave those present a verbal report on the work of the Housing Review Board. It was noted that East Devon District Council was one of the first councils to set up such a Board and that the concept of a Housing Review Board was still a unique approach for local authorities. During its 18 months of existence the Board had undertaken a lot of important work and all of its recommendations had been endorsed by the Executive Board.

*4 **Verbal report on the work of the Housing Review Board (cont'd)**

The Housing Review Board was balanced, with 5 councillors, 5 tenant members and 2 independent community representatives. It was a properly constituted committee of the Council and was accountable to the Council. It was noted that the Board met approximately 5 times a year and had extensive meetings. Bi-monthly informal meetings would be held around the district. The first one had been held at Lymebourne House, Sidmouth and those involved agreed that it had been very useful and informative.

The Housing Review Board was regarded as very positive for the Council and was developing a good working relationship with tenants. It had been an education for all concerned.

*5 **Verbal report on the work of the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel**

The Vice Chairman of the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel, Mrs J Ebborn gave those present a verbal report on the work of the Panel. The aims of the Panel and its relationship with the Council were noted. The training sessions undertaken were reported and it was noted that a very successful conference had been held at Bicton earlier in the year. Due to its success, this conference would be a regular event, with the next one being held at the Knowle, Sidmouth on 4 July 2008.

The tenants felt that they needed to be clearer in their understanding of key housing issues and be better informed earlier in the process, in order to operate smarter. It was suggested that a copy of the Housing Review Board agenda, with all the associated reports be sent to the Chairman of the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel. Members of the Panel were urged to contact the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion with details of any items they wished the Housing Review Board to consider or discuss.

*6 **Governance and the role of the Housing Review Board**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which attempted to clarify the role and responsibilities of the Housing Review Board and its members, and to explain the governance arrangements which controlled the work of the Board. The Council's Constitution stated the precise terms of reference for the Housing Review Board. Its overall purpose was to advise the Council's Executive Board on landlord and housing management issues, and keep under review the options for the ownership and management of the Council's housing stock. It was noted that the Board operated as an overview committee.

Future issues for the Board were discussed and points of good governance were noted. One of the comments which arose from the recent Audit Commission housing inspection was that the tenants should provide a greater challenge to the Board. Some other ideas for improving the operation and effectiveness of the Housing Review Board included better agenda management, more training to build on the capacity and confidence of the Board, circulation of items outside the meeting timetable, better use of Board Member Champions and more visits and tours.

It was noted that officers used their judgment as to the need and extent of consultation required prior to reporting to the Board. It was felt that reports should draw attention to the need for consultation with service users and that officers should be encouraged to complete the consultation section of the standard report template more thoroughly in future.

*6 **Governance and the role of the Housing Review Board (cont)**

One of the reasons for the liaison meeting was to discuss the role of the tenants on the Housing Review Board. It was felt that tenant members of the Board had exactly the same role as councillor members, which was total individual responsibility as representatives of tenants as a whole. Tenant members were not co-opted onto the Housing Review Board as delegates of the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel and should act independently from the Panel and their own particular interests. It was thought that confusion may have arisen as the tenant members were originally appointed to the Board from the Panel. In future it was hoped that there would be a move towards tenant elections to the Housing Review Board which would help deal with some of the concerns regarding the relationship of tenant members on both the Board and the Panel. It was recognised that good practice was to have Board members who were tenants and not tenants who were Board members.

The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion Service reported that he would like to see more tenants and members of the public attending Housing Review Board meetings. It was suggested that a more comprehensive forward plan would give tenants notice of items coming up for review and give them an opportunity for discussion. Agenda items would be welcomed from the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel. It was stressed that at all stages there was an opportunity for Panel input and feedback from the Panel was encouraged.

*7 **Role and responsibilities of the Housing Review Board and the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel**

It was agreed that the overall purpose of the Panel and the Board was to progress and maintain improvements to the lives of the Council's tenants. The two-way flow of information and discussion would clarify the Panel's understanding of the structure of the Board.

*8 **Housing and Social Inclusion Service Directory – know your housing service**

The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion outlined the Housing and Social Inclusion Service Directory which had been circulated with the agenda. The directory was on the Council's website and paper copies were also available. The document aimed to improve understanding of the Housing and Social Inclusion Service. Those present agreed that it was an informative and interesting document and felt that the family tree was especially useful.

*9 **Ideas for improving the capacity and focusing the attention of the Housing Review Board on the key outcome targets – Audit Commission recommendation**

It was noted that a special meeting of the Housing Review Board would be held on 10 January 2008 to discuss the Audit Commission report. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion encouraged all those present to read the report. The Audit Commission concluded that the Housing Review Board needed to focus on key outcome targets. This meant focussing attention on areas that would make a difference to tenants and on service delivery. It was felt that some of the Board's targets and outcomes needed to be 'smarter'.

The Chairman of the Housing Review Board thanked the Vice Chairman of the Board for the radio interview that he had given on the outcome of the Audit Commission inspection.

The dedication of all the Housing and Social Inclusion Service staff who worked through the Audit Commission inspection process was commended.

*10 **Training and development needs**

The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that there was a need to invest in ongoing training and development for Panel and Board members. There was an opportunity for members to consider the format of training and also the types of training they would like. Those present were requested to contact the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion, or any of the tenant participation officers with their training and development requests so that a training plan could be drawn up for the Panel and Board. The programme would include priorities.

It was noted that the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel underwent a lot of training and that formal reports on this training were brought back to the Panel by the members who had attended. It was suggested that these reports could also be presented to the Housing Review Board.

*11 **Any other business**

Those present agreed that the meeting had been very useful and it was suggested that a liaison meeting between the Housing Review Board and the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel should be held once a year. Members of the Board and Panel were also encouraged to attend each other's meetings.

It was noted that it was important to have regard to the national housing picture when considering forward planning, particularly in relation to Government discussions on changes to security of tenure, means testing access to social housing, and changes to the housing finance system.

On behalf of the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel and the Housing Review Board, the Chairman of the Board thanked Dr J Rees for giving up his time to chair the meeting and wished everyone a happy Christmas and New Year. Dr Rees thanked all those present for their attendance.