

Minutes of a meeting of the **POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL** held in the Meeting Room 1, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, on Tuesday, 5 July 2016 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

A R Woolf (Chairman)  
J D McLean (Vice-Chairman)

D Ashby  
J R Astill  
M D Booth

G K Dark  
H Drury  
L J Eldridge

C N Johnson  
J L Reynolds  
J Tyrrell

In Attendance: Rob Walker (Executive Director - Place), Richard Scorthorne (Housing Landlord Manager) and Shelley French (Democratic Services Support Officer)

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors A Harrison, J L King and M J Pullen.

**1. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were none.

**2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the following meetings were agreed as a correct record:

- a) Policy Development Panel – 26 April 2016;
- b) Joint Performance Monitoring Panel and Policy Development Panel – 26 April 2016; and
- c) Joint Performance Monitoring Panel and Policy Development Panel – 16 May 2016.

**3. QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 6**

There were none.

**4. TRACKING OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were none.

**5. ITEMS REFERRED FROM THE PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANEL**

There were none.

Action  
By

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 July  
2016**

**6. KEY DECISION PLAN**

Consideration was given to the Key Decision Plan, published on 6 June 2016.

**AGREED:**

That the Key Decision Plan be noted.

**7. ADDRESSING LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES**

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Place on addressing Long Term Empty Homes.

Richard Scorthorne, Housing Landlord Manager was in attendance to present the report and answer members questions.

On 13 January 2016, a report was presented to the Panel providing an update on long term empty homes within the District. At that meeting a further update was requested to be provided.

As requested the report provided an update on the Council's approach to returning long term empty homes into use. The report included information about the work of the Private Sector Housing Team and the work the team has undertaken to return dwellings to use and the progress made towards the actions that were identified in the Council's Empty Homes Strategy 2014 – 2016.

In October 2015, there were 258 empty properties within the District, this had been a reduction of 13 on the previous year.

As of 31 May 2016, there were 224 empty properties, of which 141 had been empty for between 6 months and 2 years; and 83 had been empty for over 2 years.

From 1 January 2016 to 31 May 2016, 133 properties had been brought back into use. Of those properties, 52 were brought back into use due to the direct intervention of the Team.

It was noted that it was inevitable homes would become empty during the course of each year, for a variety of reasons, such as, death of the owner/occupier, owner/occupier moved into residential care, repossession and renovation.

The Empty Homes Strategy 2014 – 2016 set out the Council's approach to returning empty homes into use. The Strategy established 4 priorities:

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 July  
2016**

- Understand the extent of empty homes in the District, including their location and reason for being vacant;
- Raising awareness of empty dwellings in the District, develop partnerships that could assist in the authority in addressing those issues;
- Development of a range of options; incentives and measures that were designed to assist, encourage and where necessary compel owners to return their property back into use; and
- Ensure that there were adequate resources to undertake empty homes work, and the development of a systematic approach to dealing with empty homes in the future.

The Strategy also provided a number of actions that were to be completed, the progress made on those actions were included in Appendix A of the written report.

The Private Sector Housing Team were also in the process of working on 4 priority cases of empty homes. It was anticipated that those cases may result in legal action being undertaken by the Council, which may include the use of Compulsory Purchase powers or an enforced sale.

Members were very impressed with the work of the Private Sector Housing Team. It was very important to all members that homes were returned to use as quickly as possible, especially as there was a nationwide shortage of housing.

Members raised the following question and The Housing Landlord Manager provided responses:

- Was there a reluctance from officers to use the Compulsory Purchase Powers the Council had?

The Compulsory Purchase powers were not a straight forward process, which carried a certain amount of risk to the Council. It was the Council wish to try and work as much as possible with owners, to understand their issues and help where possible.

- How were empty homes identified?

The Team worked closely with the team that collected Council Tax on behalf of the Council. Where Council tax was not being paid for over 6 months could help identify those empty homes, which is when the Private Sector Housing Team would start to engage with the

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 July  
2016**

property owner. Members were encouraged to assist in identifying empty homes by contacting the Team if they had identified any within their District Wards, these could then be investigated to identify if they had been empty for a significant period of time, and to engage with their owners if necessary.

- Homes that were successfully brought back into use, members enquired how that was achieved.

The Council did not market any properties for owners, but they did work with them and put them in contact with agents that would help in the process. Recently the Team had designed a card that was distributed to known empty homes, so that owners could know who to contact at the Council, this had been very well received and was having a positive impact.

**AGREED:**

That the Panel be provided with a further update in six months time.

**8. POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the report of the Executive Manager Governance, which set out the Work Programme of the Policy Development Panel. The Work Programme consisted of two sections, setting out dates of future meetings with proposed items for consideration and second, setting out the Task Groups that had been identified by the Panel.

The Chairman discussed with members a number of items that the Panel could consider.

- Paper and Postage Costs throughout the Authority:

The Chairman was keen to lessen the amount of paper used throughout the Authority and postage costs. Members agendas and other various items of correspondence alone was a great cost, it was felt that a reduction was necessary especially as digitalisation was high on the Council's agenda.

The Chairman suggested that a Task Group could be formed by members of the Panel to look at the current situation and look at the possibility of developing a strategy on how to achieve a reduction.

Councillor McLean added that this could be a broader topic, looking at what resources are used and if there is any wastage that could be improved upon, looking at a possible waste strategy.

RS

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 July  
2016**

The Executive Director Place confirmed that reduction in the use of paper and postage was part of the digital and transformation agenda. Members were advised that it may be more beneficial to have a specific focus for the Task Group rather than reduction of waste as this was a very broad topic. It was noted that Task Groups were designed to be focused on specific areas in order to achieve an outcome in a specific time frame.

It was agreed that a Task Group would be formed to look at paper and postage throughout the authority, with a view of developing policy to help maintain a reduction, keeping in line with the digital and transformation agenda.

The Chairman invited members to put themselves forward to sit on the Task Group. Councillors J Astill, H Drury, A Woolf and J McLean, all agreed to form the membership.

- Planning Guidance:

There had been some concerns from members about the quality of design of properties being built within South Holland. Members enquired if there was any guidance that could be provided to applicants guide them when designing properties, to help enhance the look of the area.

The Executive Director Place reminded members that they had been advised at previous meetings that due to Planning law there was very little that the Council could enforce regarding the quality of designs. South Holland's planning service provided all applicants with the opportunity of pre-application advice, at no cost, which when used did improve the look of properties in completed applications.

The Chairman requested that a Planning Officer be invited to the next meeting to discuss pre-application guidance, to include the positive impact the planning service's guidance had on applications.

- Public Open Spaces:

Councillors Tyrrell and Eldridge expressed concerns regarding management agreements for public open space on developments. There had been occasions where developers had agreed to provide maintenance i.e. grass cutting and play equipment for areas, but once the development had been completed they were then no provided, developers stating that there were not the funds to achieve the original vision.

Members agreed that this was an issue that affected all wards within South Holland, and a Task Group could be formed to look at the

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 July  
2016**

Council's current policies on Public Open Spaces and what could be developed to help in the future.

The Chairman invited members to put themselves forward to sit on the Task Group. Councillors L Eldridge, J Reynolds, J Astill and J Tyrrell, all agreed to form the membership.

- Apprenticeships Policy:

Councillor McLean requested an update on the Council's policies in relation to apprenticeships and recruitment.

The Executive Director Place advised that as part of the Transformation Programme extensive work had taken place looking at recruitment for South Holland. Due to the areas rural geography the authority had seen some issues in recruiting to more senior posts, as was also the case for the NHS and other government authorities in the area. The Transformation Team were looking at what could be achieved to make posts more attractive to applicants, providing them with a package that was competitive with other larger more metropolitan areas.

**AGREED:**

- (a) That a Planning Officer be invited to the next meeting of the Panel to discuss pre-application guidance;
- (b) That a Task Group be formed to look at forming a strategy on reduction of paper and postage throughout the Authority;

The following members requested to form the Task Group:

Councillors J Astill, H Drury, A Woolf and J McLean

- (c) That a Task Group be formed to look at the Council's Policies on Public Open Spaces.

The following members requested to form the Task Group:

Councillors L Eldridge, J Reynolds, J Astill and J Tyrrell

*(Dennis Hannant, Spalding Town Centre Manager (Chamber of Commerce) arrived at 7.09 p.m. during consideration of the above item).*

CM

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 July  
2016**

**9. PROGRESS REPORT FROM THE TOWN CENTRE MANAGER**

The Chairman agreed to move item 3 of the agenda - Progress report from the Town Centre Manager, to later during the meeting, due to the Town Centre Manager being delayed.

The Chairman welcomed Dennis Hannant – Spalding Town Centre Manager to the meeting, he was requested to provide an update on the voluntary code of practice for shopkeepers ‘Smart Traders Scheme’.

Members were advised that after meetings with the Town Centre Traders and Chamber of Commerce he had been advised that the voluntary code would not progress further as it did not gain support from those groups. There were varying reasons why support was not given, which included; potential cost implications and lack of promotion for the town. It was noted that a lot of retailers were only occupants of their shops and landlords may be reluctant to make any investments.

A Business Improvement District (BID) had been on the agenda for local groups. A BID had potential for real improvements for Spalding, as the levy paid by businesses would be invested back into the Town Centre, complementing council services. Should a BID be proposed it would need to be voted on by residents. Should it be successful all the businesses within the area would be required to pay a levy, the rate of the levy would be determined by the amount of business rates paid. A further meeting regarding the BID was scheduled to take place on 13 July 2016, should it be progressed an outcome would be determined in around 12 – 18 months time.

The Chairman thanked the Town Centre Manager for his update, and requested that the Panel’s support for the BID be passed on.

**10. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT.**

There were none.

**11. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**AGREED:**

It was agreed to, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public were excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 July  
2016**

and 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

**12. EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING OF THE  
PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANEL AND POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT PANEL HELD ON 16 MAY 2016**

Consideration was given to the exempt minutes of the Joint Performance Monitoring Panel and Policy Development Panel, 16 May 2016.

**AGREED:**

That the minutes of the Joint Performance Monitoring Panel and Policy Development Panel, 16 May 2016 be approved.

(The meeting ended at 8.27 pm)

(End of minutes)