

Minutes of a meeting of the **POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL** held in the Meeting Room 1, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, on Tuesday, 20 February 2018 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

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

D Ashby
J R Astill
F Biggadike
M D Booth

H Drury
A Harrison
J L King
A M Newton

J L Reynolds
E J Sneath
J Tyrrell

In Attendance: HR Manager, Shared Strategic Housing Manager, Democratic Services Officer and Housing Options Manager

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors L J Eldridge

	<u>Action By</u>
<p>36. MINUTES</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting of the Policy Development Panel held on 5 December 2017 were agreed as a correct record.</p>	
<p>37. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>	
<p>38. QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 6</p> <p>There were none.</p>	
<p>39. ITEMS REFERRED FROM THE PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANEL</p> <p>There were none.</p>	
<p>40. KEY DECISION PLAN</p> <p>Consideration was given to the Key Decision Plan published on 2 February 2018.</p> <p>DECISION:</p> <p>That the Key Decision Plan be noted.</p>	
<p>41. POLICY REGISTER</p>	

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The Panel gave consideration to the Policy Register that was dated 8 February 2018.

Councillors mentioned that some items had no dates assigned and some had deadlines that were long overdue (2015 deadline)

Officers provided the Panel with a verbal update on the Housing Allocations Policy and the Strategic Tenancy Policy, and the following points were raised:

House Allocations Policy

- Officers stated that this Policy set out who was eligible for housing, this was a statutory policy and it was enacted in 2013.
- It was noted that 350 households were on the register, which was a relatively low amount compared to other Lincolnshire authorities.
- A review of the Policy was to be concluded in April 2019. This timescale was set to allow the procurement of the correct IT equipment needed to set up the Policy.
- Councillors mentioned that the summary was quite broad for providing a reason for the delay in delivery. Officers responded that joining the housing register was paper based and lengthy. Better IT was the preferred solution rather than employing new staff. Members were not satisfied and requested more technical details. Officers stated that the IT implementation was a bigger piece of work than just allocation, and that a bespoke solution could be achieved perhaps slightly quicker.
- Councillors questioned why the Policy review had not taken place sooner, so that the Authority would be at least part way through the improvements at the point of the meeting. Others agreed and mentioned that the possibility of being 6 years out of date was unacceptable.
- Councillors mentioned that the review was too late in starting and that the timescale seemed far too long. It was suggested that a task group could be set up to look at this matter. However, it was agreed that this was not required. Instead, a written report providing an update would be provided to the next Panel meeting and that the relevant officer would be required to attend.

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Strategic Tenancy Policy

- Officers provided the background to this Policy.
- It was stated that there was no business need to review the Policy at the moment. This had been agreed by the relevant Portfolio Holder, and officers felt that it was better to review in a few years time.
- Councillors stated that the Policy was simply complying with statutory policy but that there was no particular activity. Officers responded that this was true that the Policy was compliant. Councillors added that it should be noted to review the Policy in 2 years time.
- Members questioned if there was currently no Business case to offer fixed term tenancies and whether the financial effects of fixed term against lifetime tenancies had been considered? Officers responded that the prevailing legal view at the time was that the fixed term element of tenancies could not be used if there had been a breach of tenancy. They added that there was already a way in place to pursue this and this would be monitored.
- Officers also advised that there was a system of introductory tenancies for new tenants prior to them potentially being offered full tenancies..
- Members asked if a mix of both life-long and fixed term tenancies could be used. Officers stated that they could.
- Members suggested that the difference between fixed term and lifelong tenancies could affect the people with the properties, as within a fixed-term tenancy, not all people in the property were entitled to stay i.e if the original tenant were to pass away. Members also asked if this would affect Right to Buy. Officers responded that it was a legal grey area, and they were waiting to see how this worked.
- Members requested that the Policy be considered by the Panel in 12 months time.

Members wanted to be advised when the Safeguarding Policy could be expected to be approved as this was a vital policy for the Authority to have in place. Members would be advised of its progress.

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AGREED:

- A)** That the Policy Register be noted;
- B)** That a full update report on the Housing Allocation Policy be provided to the next Panel meeting with attendance by the relevant officer.
- C)** That the Panel consider the Strategic Tenancy Policy in 12 months time; and
- D)** That the Panel be advised when the Safeguarding Policy would be approved.

MC

MH, DS,
GW

DH

42. TRACKING OF RECOMMENDATIONS

There were no tracking of recommendations to consider

43. REDUCTION IN PRINTING AND POSTAGE TASK GROUP

Councillor Astill provided a verbal update on progress of the Task Group's recommendations:

- It was mentioned that the amount of members using paper copies of agendas for the Planning Committee was disappointing.
- At the time of the meeting, 11 councillors were fully paperless.
- The full effects could not yet be measured but it was mentioned that there had been significant savings in both money and officer time as a result of the changes made already.
- There was a need to look at training issues to encourage members to adopt electronic copies.
- Members should advise Democratic Services if they could not access the correct Mod.Gov pages in the 'Private' section.

The following issues were raised:

- Councillors wanted to know the cost of the iPads versus paper copies.
- Some members encountered issues with their iPads because of a lack of internet connectivity at their homes. It was

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requested that IT follow up on this.

- Councillors requested a further update on this report at the meeting on the 19 September 2018, once there had been a years worth of agendas.

AGREED:

- a) That the cost of iPads versus paper copies be sought;
- b) That iPad issues due to internet connectivity at members' homes be considered.
- c) That a further update on the Task Group's recommendations be provided on 19 September 2018

AP, DS

JW

GW

44. ADDITIONS TO THE HR POLICY HANDBOOK: CAREER BREAK POLICY; STUCK NOT SICK POLICY; DRUGS AND ALCOHOL POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Manager, People and Public Protection, which presented information on a number of new policies to the HR Policy Handbook.

Career Break Policy

Members were advised that the Policy had arisen due to a request from a staff member for a career break. It was noted that many other employers (including some local authorities) had a Career Break Policy in place. It was stated that it had a benefit in terms of recruitment and staff retention.

Members considered the information and the following issues were raised:

- Councillors mentioned that the 26 week continuous service threshold needed for a career break seemed short. Officers responded that this was only a request system, and that the request would not necessarily be approved by managers if they felt the requester could not take the break. It was mentioned that the decisions would be made on a case-by-case basis.
- Councillors responded that they felt the 26 week threshold should be moved to a year. All Councillors agreed that a years' service as a threshold to request a career break, rather than 26 weeks, was preferable.

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- Members stated that they felt the Authority needed the policy in order to deal with these requests. Additionally, they questioned if requesters could gain employment during these breaks. Officers answered that the break was unpaid and the break would not cover any paid work. Councillors questioned how the Authority would police those who take employment during the break –especially if they went abroad.
- Councillors questioned what level of control members would have over this policy. Officers responded that changes to the policy would need final approval from Full Council.
- Members asked if a person could request this break more than once. Officers responded that an individual could make additional requests. However, the approval of such requests would be at the managers' discretion.
- Councillors wanted to know if a Manager's denial of approval would be recorded so that if there was a change in management, a record of previous requests was available. Officers answered that requests would be kept on personal HR files.
- Councillors asked what the request notice was. Officers answered that there was no number agreed at the time of the meeting, but that it could work like current annual leave policy, i.e. an amount of time equal to the request must be given as notice.

Stuck Not Sick Policy

Officers provided an overview of this Policy, and Members stated that they were happy with the Policy as it stood.

Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Misuse Policy.

Officers gave an overview of the Policy. The Panel considered the information and the following issues were raised:

- It was stated that testing would be carried out on a 'just cause' basis rather than on a random basis. Councillors questioned whether 'just cause' was sufficient to cover all relevant employees. It was stated that some supported the 'just cause' policy, and the need for confidentiality. Members also asked who would be responsible for deciding if 'just cause' applied and reporting. Officers

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answered that both of these responsibilities laid with managers.

- Councillors also mentioned that they felt that employees would be more cautious if they felt there were random checks, as a test could occur at any point. They also asked if the Policy could include both 'just cause' and random tests. Officers responded in the positive. Councillors agreed that this was optimal.
- Some members asked that others consider the financial implications of random testing. Members wondered if the Council could have its own testing kit, rather than having to rely on a costly third-party.
- The Panel favoured random checks, with 'just cause'. It also asked, that the Authority should purchase an in-house testing kit.

DECISION:

- A)** That the report be noted.
- B)** That the threshold for requesting a career break be set at 1 years worth of continuous service, rather than 26 weeks.
- C)** That a request notice be added into the Career Break Policy
- D)** That the Stuck Not Sick Policy be agreed; and
- E)** That the drugs testing protocol, set out in the Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy be based upon both 'Just Cause' and random checks, and that the Authority investigate procuring its own in-house drugs testing kit.

CB

CB

CB

45. ADDRESSING LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Place. Officers provided an update on the current situation with regard to progress made on addressing long term empty homes . The following issues were raised:

- Not as many long term empty homes had been brought back into use recently compared with previous years. It was stated that this was a national trend. Officers mentioned that they were looking to review the policy.
- Councillors asked if a list of empty homes in specific wards could be produced. Officers answered that this list was already underway and near completion. They mentioned that this would be ready within a few weeks. Members requested that this information be circulated when it

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became available.

- Members asked how many of the increased amount of empty homes were related to this policy. They also asked if the figures could be reviewed regularly and reported on a monthly basis. Officers stated that the figures were a constantly changing picture but that officers would be aiming to do this in the future.
- Members asked when the premium could be increased as it was still capped at 125%. Officers responded that the Council Tax rates had been set for 18/19 but could be reviewed for 19/20
- Councillors asked if wider housing functions could be built into the new IT systems. Officers responded in the positive.
- Councillors complimented the Housing Team in their efforts to reduce long term empty homes.
- Councillors asked who was making sure that the Housing Team's requirements were being met. Officers advised that the Housing Team had been considerably affected by the Transformation and digital agendas, however, infrastructure would be considered and the Team's views listened to.
- The Panel wished to continue to receive updates every 6 months.

AGREED:

- A)** That the update report be noted;
- B)** That a list of empty homes be circulated when it became available.
- C)** That the Panel's compliments to the Housing Team in respect of their work reducing long-term empty homes be passed on.
- D)** That a further update be provided in 6 months time.

PS

PS

DS, PS

46. POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Manager – Governance, which set out the Work Programme of the Policy Development Panel. The Work Programme consisted of two separate sections, the first setting out the dates of the future Panel meetings along with proposed items for consideration, and the second setting out the Task Groups that had been identified

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by the Panel.

Public Open Spaces Task Group

- The Task Group's Chairman reported that the Task Group was going well, but that S106 agreements needed consideration with relevant staff. It was likely that 2/3 more meetings would be required.

Data Protection and Retention Task Group.

- The Chairman of the Task Group advised that it would be ready to report by April 2018.

GW

Members requested that the Equalities Policy be presented in draft form at the meeting in April.

AGREED:

- A)** That both sections of the Panel's Work Programme, as set out in the report of the Executive Manager – Governance, be noted.
- B)** That the Equality Policy, in its draft form, be considered at the next Panel meeting.

CB, CP,
GW

47. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT.

There were no urgent items.

(The meeting ended at 8.43 pm)

(End of minutes)