

Minutes of a meeting of the **POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL** held in the Meeting Room 1, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, on Tuesday, 5 March 2019 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

J D McLean (Vice-Chairman)

D Ashby
J R Astill
F Biggadike
M D Booth

L J Eldridge
P C Foyster
A Harrison
A M Newton

J L Reynolds
E J Sneath
J Tyrrell

In Attendance: Democratic Services Officer, Executive Manager - Governance, Operational Benefits Manager, Revenues and Benefits, Strategic Housing Manager, Housing Landlord Services Manager and Place Manager

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors J L King, S-A Slade and A R Woolf

52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors King, Slade and Woolf

53. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Meeting of the Policy Development Panel held on 15 January 2019.

AGREED:

That the minutes be signed as a correct record.

54. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.

There were none.

55. QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 6

There were none.

56. TRACKING OF RECOMMENDATIONS

There were no tracking of recommendations.

Action By

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 March
2019**

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

There were none.

58. KEY DECISION PLAN

Consideration was given to the Key Decision Plan dated 22 February 2019.

AGREED:

That the Key Decision Plan be noted.

59. POLICY REGISTER

Consideration was given to the Policy Register dated 18 February 2019.

AGREED:

That the Policy Register be noted.

60. RECORDS MANAGEMENT POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Customer which sought to present the proposed Records Management Policy to the panel for consideration.

The Executive Manager - Governance introduced the report stating that it had been brought before the Panel previously but it had been requested that it be presented again before it went to Cabinet for approval.

The Vice-Chairman stated that. He was pleased to see how simple and easy to read the report was.

AGREED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

61. ADDRESSING LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Place which updated the Panel on the current position of Empty Homes and the work being undertaken to increase performance.

The Housing Options Manager stated that this was the latest 6-

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 March
2019**

monthly update.

Areas to note were changes to council tax – an increase of 50% for owners of long term empty homes was due to be implemented

Although performance had gone slightly backwards in that there were more empty homes than the same period in the previous year, the banding had remained the same meaning that properties were not remaining empty for any longer than they were beforehand.

The Housing Options Manager was looking for guidance on what direction the policy on empty homes should take in the future. The Vice-Chairman stated that he felt there was an issue related to officers identifying potential long term empty properties. He stated that in the interest of promoting this there could be the potential of a guidance group on this in the new administration.

Members queried the reasons why properties had been empty for so long. The Housing Options Manager stated that there were multiple reasons why this could be the case, such as the resolving of 'no-will' deaths or simply difficulty selling a property.

Members asked whether officers reached out to Parish Councils for support with reporting Long Term Empty Homes. The Housing Options Manager stated that lists were gathered from Council Tax data.

Members asked if the increased Council Tax bands applied to empty homes were discretionary if there were circumstantial reasons why payment would be difficult. The Housing Options Manager stated that it wasn't the intention to put anyone into financial hardship, but that ultimately, that element of the policy was managed by Council Tax arrangements. He agreed that he would clarify whether there would be any alternative arrangements available. Members further stated that they felt that the policy should take into account the difficulties and need for flexibility within levying such tax increases.

PS

The Chairman stated that he agreed and wanted officers come back to the Panel after clarifying that tax increases could be discretionary to allow for circumstance.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Panel noted the contents of the report; and

2) That the Panel receive a further update in 6 months time.

PS

62. STRATEGIC TENANCY POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Manager – Growth which provided the Panel with an update on SHDC’s approach to tenancies and its Strategic Tenancy Policy.

The Strategic Housing Manager introduced the report. She stated that the requirement of this policy came from the Localism Act 2011, but also that circumstances had changed significantly since the Government introduced the requirement. Legal advice was being sought on whether the changed circumstances would require an adjusted approach and the Executive would be informed what the outcome of that would be.

The Housing Landlord Services Manager stated that a new tenancy agreement was agreed in February 2019. All tenants, regardless of whether they were new or long-standing would be moving onto the new agreement soon, allowing for a much more robust position.

Members felt that the information regarding sub-letting featured in the policy ought to be made more detailed, meaning it was clarified that tenants should ask for permission if they wished to sub-let.

CH, JK

Members queried what the procedure was around one party in a multiple person tenancy agreement being able to cancel the tenancy agreement without the other party’s consent. The Housing Landlord Services Manager responded that this was a feature of the Housing Act, but that the Council would always notify both parties and assess the circumstances – it wouldn’t ever be the case that the Council would immediately evict the other party.

AGREED:

That the Panel note the contents of the report

63. BENEFITS VERIFICATION POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Executive Director – Commercialisation which sought to present the proposed Benefits Verification Policy for consideration. It was the aim of the policy to define the standards of verification for evidence required in respect of Housing Benefit

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 March
2019**

claims and Local Council Tax Support Applications, to help protect public funds from fraud and error.

The Operational Benefits Manager introduced the report. The digital performance agenda had been taken into account, meaning that the processing of claims via the Council website was a priority service and works were underway to ensure that the technology was suitable.

Members stated that they had concerns over vulnerable people's ability to apply for benefit. The Operational Benefits Manager responded that there was a function to allow for visiting officers to be deployed to assist with vulnerable peoples' applications. He also stated that unfortunately, there was nothing that could be done to adjust the application process, as this was statutory.

The Vice-Chairman stated that he felt that the policy was just too operational to be scrutinised.

AGREED:

- a) That the Panel notes the content of the report and recommends its approval to Cabinet on 12 March 2019.
- b) That subsequent annual reviews and revisions be delegated to Executive Director Commercialisation (and S151) and Portfolio Holder for Finance.

64. 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 by the Panel.

The Vice-Chairman stated that there was a possibility of setting up a task group in the new administration to look at cross-department working opportunities. It was agreed that this be recommended as a potential option to the new PDP administration

The Chairman of the Public Open Spaces Task Group stated that, in relation to Public Open Spaces, a letter had been sent out to all Parishes and the Task Group was waiting for feedback before a new meeting would be arranged. The letter asked Parishes what

CM

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL - 5 March
2019**

their opinion on the adoption of open spaces would be.

AGREED:

That the Policy Development Panel Work Programme be noted.

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

There were none.

66. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

DECISION:

That the meeting not enter exempt session.

67. BENEFITS VERIFICATION POLICY (EXEMPT APPENDICES)

The meeting did not have to go into exempt session for the agreement of this item as it was agreed without divulging exempt information, during discussion of item 12 of the agenda.

(The meeting ended at 7.37 pm)

(End of minutes)