

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 28 June 2019 at 9.30am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: G Minshull, V Clifford-Jackson, J Rowe, T Spruce and J Worley

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: B Bernard, B Duffin, R Savage and J Wilby

Substitute Members in Attendance: Councillors: C Brown for B Bernard, S Ridley for B Duffin, J Easter for R Savage and N Legg for J Wilby

Cabinet Members in Attendance: Councillor: Y Bendle

Officers in Attendance: The Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Assistant Director, Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse), the Housing Standards and Community Protection Manager (T Cooke) and the Senior Governance Officer (E Goddard)

1250. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Minute	Declaration
N Legg	1252	Cllr N Legg declared an other interest: he had previously been part of the original committee that set up the Long-Term Empty Homes Policy.

1251. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 6 February 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1252. LONG-TERM EMPTY HOMES – APPROACH AND POWERS

Cllr Bendle introduced the report which sought to provide details on the number of long-term empty homes in South Norfolk, the reasons for them being empty and the approach the Council would take in respect of issues arising.

The Housing Standards and Community Protection Manager provided members with a presentation, drawing attention to the rise in empty homes in 2018 and noting that the figures fluctuated due to differing circumstances, as set out in the

report. Members noted that the Housing Support and Regulation Strategy had been adopted by the Council in 2017, which gave the Council powers to bring empty homes back into use by various means. In response to a member's question regarding whether delays in applications for probate contributed to the rise in empty homes and any evidence of this, officers agreed that this was a contributing factor and referred members to paragraph 4.7 the report, which detailed the various reasons for homes being empty. Officers also agreed to review data from previous years and report back to members by email.

The Committee discussed the Council's approach to dealing with empty homes and noted that it was not always cost-effective for the Council to exercise its powers, particularly legal action (compulsory purchases) if there was no detrimental impact on the street scene and environment, and each case would be judged on its own merits.

Members were reminded that Cabinet had agreed in February 2019 that the council tax charge levied on long-term empty homes would continue to increase the longer the property remained empty, and it was noted that there were currently only two homeowners in dispute with the Council regarding this.

Members raised concerns regarding homes remaining empty after 24 months and whether the Council could assist in preparing those properties for market sale. After discussion, it was suggested that a more proactive system was needed and it was agreed that officers would review the properties in the District that have been empty for two years or more, in liaison with the portfolio holder, and circulate the findings to the Committee with the view of bringing back to a future meeting if necessary. It was then:

RESOLVED:

1. To note the Council's approach to dealing with empty homes;
and
2. For officers to review the properties that have been empty for two years or more.

1253. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Work Programme, Tracker and Cabinet Core Agenda.

Regarding the Scrutiny Committee member training session scheduled for 8 July, the Senior Governance Officer clarified that only members of the Scrutiny Committee were permitted to attend, but that she would be happy to brief other members, if requested, and would email a guide to all members.

(The meeting concluded at 10.45am)

Chairman