

Wellbeing Policy Development Panel

Agenda

Members of the Panel

Cllr S M Prutton (Chairman)	Cllr L H Hemsall
Cllr M L Murrell (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr J A Neesam
Cllr A D Crotch	Cllr C E Ryman-Tubb
Cllr R R Foulger	Cllr N C Shaw
Cllr N J Harpley	Cllr L A Starling

Cllr F Wymark (ex-officio)

Date & Time:

Tuesday 22 June 2021 at 6pm

Place:

Council Chamber, Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich, NR7 0DU

Contact:

Dawn Matthews tel (01603) 430404 Email: committee.services@broadland.gov.uk
Website: www.broadland.gov.uk

PUBLIC ATTENDANCE:

If a member of the public would like to observe the meeting in person or to speak on an agenda item, please email your request to committee.services@broadland.gov.uk, no later than 5.00pm Thursday 17 June. Please see further guidance on the options for public speaking at page 2 of this agenda.

Large print version can be made available

If you have any special requirements in order to attend this meeting, please let us know in advance.

Rules on Public Speaking

All public speakers are required to register a request to speak at public meetings by the date / time stipulated on the relevant agenda. Requests should be sent to:
committee.services@broadland.gov.uk

Public speaking can take place:

- Through a written representation (which will be read out at the meeting)
- In person at the Council offices

Please note that due to the current rules on social distancing, the Council cannot guarantee that you will be permitted to attend the meeting in person. No more than 20 people are permitted in the Council Chamber at any one time and the numbers of public speakers permitted in the room will vary for each meeting. Democratic Services will endeavour to ensure that each relevant group (i.e. supporters, objectors, representatives from parish councils and local members) can be represented at meetings for public speaking purposes.

All those attending the meeting in person must, sign in on the QR code for the building and promptly arrive at, and leave the venue. The hand sanitiser provided should be used and social distancing must be observed at all times. Further guidance on what to do on arrival will follow once your public speaking registration has been accepted.

AGENDA

1. **To receive declarations of interest from members;**
(guidance and flow chart attached – page 4)
2. **To report apologies for absence and to identify substitute members;**
3. **To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2021;**
(minutes attached – page 6)
4. **Matters arising from the minutes;**
5. **Prevention, Advice and Support** – a presentation will be given by officers at the meeting. The presentation will describe our current offer and response to prevention, advice and support (the help hub). This will enable members to understand the reasons behind the Council needing to offer this type of support, and the demands that may impact on our future response. The presentation will enable officers and members to explore what works well and future aspirations for our prevention services

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AT MEETINGS

When declaring an interest at a meeting Members are asked to indicate whether their interest in the matter is pecuniary, or if the matter relates to, or affects a pecuniary interest they have, or if it is another type of interest. Members are required to identify the nature of the interest and the agenda item to which it relates. In the case of other interests, the member may speak and vote. If it is a pecuniary interest, the member must withdraw from the meeting when it is discussed. If it affects or relates to a pecuniary interest the member has, they have the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public but must then withdraw from the meeting. Members are also requested when appropriate to make any declarations under the Code of Practice on Planning and Judicial matters.

<p>Have you declared the interest in the register of interests as a pecuniary interest? If Yes, you will need to withdraw from the room when it is discussed.</p>
<p>Does the interest directly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. affect yours, or your spouse / partner's financial position? 2. relate to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to you or your spouse / partner? 3. Relate to a contract you, or your spouse / partner have with the Council 4. Affect land you or your spouse / partner own 5. Affect a company that you or your partner own, or have a shareholding in <p>If the answer is "yes" to any of the above, it is likely to be pecuniary.</p> <p>Please refer to the guidance given on declaring pecuniary interests in the register of interest forms. If you have a pecuniary interest, you will need to inform the meeting and then withdraw from the room when it is discussed. If it has not been previously declared, you will also need to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days.</p>
<p>Does the interest indirectly affect or relate any pecuniary interest you have already declared, or an interest you have identified at 1-5 above?</p> <p>If yes, you need to inform the meeting. When it is discussed, you will have the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public, but you should not partake in general discussion or vote.</p>
<p>Is the interest not related to any of the above? If so, it is likely to be an other interest. You will need to declare the interest, but may participate in discussion and voting on the item.</p>
<p>Have you made any statements or undertaken any actions that would indicate that you have a closed mind on a matter under discussion? If so, you may be predetermined on the issue; you will need to inform the meeting, and when it is discussed, you will have the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public, but must then withdraw from the meeting.</p>

**FOR GUIDANCE REFER TO THE FLOWCHART OVERLEAF.
PLEASE REFER ANY QUERIES TO THE MONITORING OFFICER IN THE FIRST
INSTANCE**

DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF



WELLBEING POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Wellbeing Policy Development Panel of Broadland District Council, held on Wednesday 12 May 2021 at 6pm at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: M Murrell (Chairman), A Crotch, J Neesam, S Prutton, L Starling

Other Members present: Councillor F Whymark (ex officio)

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director of Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse), the Policy and Partnerships Officer (V Parsons), the Housing Standards Senior Manager (K Philcox) and the Committee Officers (DM and LA)

39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE NO 8

No declarations of interest were made.

40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Foulger and N Shaw.

41 MINUTES

The minutes of the Wellbeing Panel meeting held on 3 February 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

42 EMPTY HOMES ENFORCEMENT POLICY

Members considered the report of the Policy and Partnerships Officer setting out options for the Council's position and prioritisation in relation to discretionary enforcement activity for empty homes within the housing standards team. This included a proposed direction for members to consider and recommend to Cabinet which would inform a draft Empty Homes and Houses in Multiple Occupation Discretionary Activity and Enforcement Policy to be presented to Cabinet for approval.

The Assistant Director of Individuals and Families reminded members that the proposals had been considered by the Panel at its informal meeting on 14 April 2021 and the comments made at that meeting were now reflected in the updated report now being considered. The issue of the enforcement approach relating to empty homes was a challenging one and there was a need to ensure the approach adopted had regard to public expectations/member expectations and the complexities of enforcement activity. Going forward with a Policy would require a clear set of criteria to enable expectations to be managed.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer drew attention to the key areas for members' consideration: the proposed model to tackle empty homes, the changes to best practice guidance, the criteria for action assessment and the approval process to commence Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) or Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO). With regard to the number of empty homes, Broadland currently had one of the lowest number of empty homes in the County and was well below the England average with 0.6% of all properties empty putting it in the top 15% in the Country. Most empty properties in the district tended to be detached, rural 3 / 4 bed properties. The Policy and Partnerships Officer outlined the main reasons properties became empty including financial difficulties associated with the upkeep of a property, poor market price, difficulties identifying owners, planning restrictions and an unwillingness to sell/let or inhabit a property. She then went on to outline the options for tackling empty homes which included engagement with owners, utilising other legislation, EDMOs and CPOs. With regard to the use of CPOs, she drew attention to the changes in best practice guidance which recommended that Council's should make at least one voluntary offer of purchase before resorting to a CPO.

The Housing Standards Senior Manager gave examples of two empty home case studies involving a successful outcome and an unsuccessful outcome to demonstrate the complexities of the process. There was no "typical" empty house and each property had a unique set of complex circumstances. It was noted that even in the unsuccessful case study referred to, the property had eventually been brought back into use and this was the case with most properties; intervention by the Council sought to speed up this process and avoid a property being empty and causing a nuisance for a number of years pending it being dealt with privately.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer then outlined the proposed approach to responding to reports of empty homes and to the proposal to adopt an enforcement approach based on exploring approximately 2 cases per year with a 0.65 fte staff resource (24 hours per week across both districts) dedicated to the work. These included offering an online facility to report empty properties and carry out a high level assessment, offering advice, guidance and support to owners, provision of financial assistance and council tax banding checks, followed by use of a comprehensive criteria for action assessment to prioritise properties for enforcement, a financial assessment for those properties with a score in excess of 700 points and delegated

authority to approve the commencement of enforcement work and costs up to a set value. There was also a proposal to provide ward members with quarterly data on properties empty for longer than 2 years.

The Housing Standards Senior Manager then took members through the propose criteria for action assessment form which used a number of factors to “score” a property. A score of over 700 points would culminate in the initiation of action to seek delegated authority to move forward with a financial assessment of enforcement action. The whole process was accountable, complied with Policy and could be used in response to any appeals to demonstrate a considered approach to enforcement action. Two levels of delegated authority were being proposed, one for properties valued up to £350k with costs up to £25k to bring the property back into use and one for those valued over £350k and with costs likely to be over £25k.

In summary, officers were seeking to ensure there was a robust process in place for tackling empty properties in the district which was clear and transparent and embedded within was a supportive approach for owners. It also needed to provide for a muscular approach to enforcement when required and provide clear approval mechanisms and consistency when exploring CPO and EDMO processes including costs. It needed to form an evidence base for formal enforcement and needed to link to the wider strategic ambitions of the Council.

Officers then answered questions from members. With regard to the EDMOs, it was noted that properties were often not in a fit state for rent. The option was available to owners to apply for a £4k interest free loan to improve the property which would remain as a charge on the property until its sale. It was noted that the best practice example introduced by Breckland Council in 2019 had seen approximately 4/5 restore grants of £10k taken up and the scheme was due for review. Members noted that, typically, approximately 2/3 enforcement cases were progressed each year with each case taking on average 12 months from start to conclusion. It was noted that, where possible, support was given to owners, including signposting to other services if needed.

There was general support for the proposals and an acknowledgement that, whilst there were risks associated with the enforcement process and the costs involved, ultimately these risks were mitigated by the acquisition of an asset. Members felt there was sufficient justification to proceed with an enforcement policy as proposed but they were of the view that the property values referred to in the delegated authority sought would better reflect current average property values if they were reduced from £350k to £250k. Members also sought confirmation that the sums referred to were in accordance with the constitution and officers undertook to ensure this was the case.

It was then agreed to support the recommendations contained in the report subject to the property values referred to being reduced from £350k to £250K.

RESOLVED that

1. The Panel notes the options contained within the report;
2. The Panel endorses and **recommends to Cabinet** adoption of the suggested resource and activity model for the Council's approach to discretionary enforcement activity in relation to empty homes to inform a draft Empty Homes and Houses in Multiple Occupation Discretionary Activity and Enforcement Policy;
3. The Panel endorses and **recommends to Cabinet** the proposal that delegated authority is approved for the Assistant Director for Individuals and Families in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing to authorise costs for Compulsory Purchase Order(CPO) and Empty Dwelling Management Orders(EDMO) where assessment indicates, for:
 - Commencement of a CPO process, including a voluntary offer of purchase for properties valued up to £250,000
 - A total capital budget of up to £25,000 per property to bring back into use (a maximum of £50,000 per year for the Council).
4. The Panel endorses and **recommends to Cabinet** the proposal that where assessment indicates that:
 - Evaluation of property price exceeds £250,000 and/or
 - Capital budget to bring a property back into use exceeds £25,000,delegated authority is approved for the Assistant Director for Individuals and Families in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing and the Portfolio Holder for Finance to assess and authorise a Compulsory Purchase Order or Empty Dwelling Management Order process.

(The meeting concluded at 7:05pm)

Chairman