

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING

OF THE EXECUTIVE

HELD ON TUESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2007

Present: Councillor A. Napier (Chair)
Councillors Mrs. J. Freak,
D. Myers, G. Patterson

Apologies: Councillors R. Crute, Mrs E Huntington
Mrs A Naylor, F Shaw, R J Todd and P G Ward

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 4 September 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2. **ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS**

In accordance with the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, Section 100B(4)(b) the Chair, following consultation with the Proper Officer, agreed that following item of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

4. **PRIVATE SECTOR EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY AND EMPTY HOMES OFFICER POST (AOB)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Member for Housing which sought approval for the creation of an Empty Homes Officer post to implement and develop the proposed Council Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy Statement, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member

The proposed Council Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy Statement sought to assist in tackling issues associated with long term vacant and neglected residential properties within the District and to make greater use of existing powers related to Enforced Sale Procedures (ESP) and newly created powers for Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)

Members were advised that there were significant problems with empty, abandoned and neglected dwellings across the District.

There were a number of legal powers available to the Council to tackle the problems that arose from empty properties, however, to address this in a structured and sustainable way had not proved possible within the current enforcement resources available.

To provide a policy led approach an Empty Homes Strategy Statement had been developed to set out the use of current and new powers for intervention in specific areas and properties within the wider context of the Council's agreed Housing, Planning and Regeneration objectives. A copy of the draft statement was outlined in Appendix 1 to the report.

In 2006 a temporary Empty Property Officer (EPO) post was established on a pilot basis. During the pilot period 41 properties were brought back in to use and several other long-term empty dwellings were identified as being potentially suitable for the use of ESP or EDMO.

Evidence had shown that early intervention offering support and guidance to property owners proved useful in preventing longer-term empty properties becoming more problematical.

To ensure that the objectives of the Empty Homes Strategy Statement were taken forward it was proposed to establish an Empty Homes Officer Post (Scale 8).

Details of the current response to issues of empty properties and associated complaints were outlined in the report.

To enhance the Council's response to dealing with empty properties it was proposed to take advantage of powers to use ESP and EDMO. The use of these powers was normally a last resort, when all other attempts to resolve the situation had failed.

ESP was an existing power and an effective way of dealing with long term empty properties where the owner couldn't be traced or was unwilling to work with the Council to bring the property back into occupation and a charge had been accrued on the property.

EDMO were a new provision under the Housing Act 2004 to assist Councils to tackle long-term empty homes. They could help both property owners and the Council find a solution that enabled a property to be returned to use.

The basic principle of an EDMO was to allow the Council to effectively 'step into the shoes' of the owner and secure occupation by proper management of the dwelling. There were two types of EDMO, an interim and a final. An interim EDMO lasted for a period of up to twelve months whereas a final EDMO lasted for up to seven years.

The annual cost of the Empty Property Officer Post would be financed initially by the use of reserves and savings within existing budgets until a realistic estimate could be made as to the level of costs that might be offset from 'fee income' including capital programme fee contributions, when a portfolio of properties under either ESP or EDMO had been established. The net cost to the base service budget could then be determined.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the Empty Homes Strategy Statement to guide the council's approach to tackling empty dwellings across the district, including the use of Enforced Sale Procedures and Empty Dwelling Management Orders be approved.
- (ii) the use of these powers be subject to approval on a case by case basis by the Executive
- (iii) approval be granted for the creation of a post of Empty Homes Officer within the Housing Service.