

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING TASK & FINISH GROUP

1 AUGUST 2024 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Cllr MJ Crooks - Chair
Cllr C Gibbens, Cllr C Lambert and Cllr P Williams

Officers in attendance: Valerie Bunting, Steven Connor, Rebecca Owen, Jon Owst, Madeline Shellard and Sharon Stacey

16. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Harris and Surtees.

17. **Declarations of interest**

No interests were declared.

18. **Minutes of previous meeting**

It was moved by Councillor Williams, seconded by Councillor Crooks and

RESOLVED – the minutes of the previous meeting be confirmed as a correct record.

19. **Private sector housing**

The letting agent was unable to attend and it was agreed he would be invited to the following meeting.

20. **Council tax and empty properties**

A representative of the revenues & benefits service updated members on changes to council tax on empty properties over recent years and the current consultation on charging 100% council tax on properties empty between one and five years and 200% for those empty from five to ten years.

Members expressed concern that owners could circumvent the legislation by adding furniture to an empty property, although it was noted that it must be 'substantially furnished' to be considered not empty.

In response to a question about whether council tax on empty properties could be used to purchase council properties, it was noted that it was returned to the council tax fund and spent according to council priorities – whilst this meant that it could be spent on council housing, this was not currently the policy.

It was noted that the increased council tax on empty homes was discretionary and could be waived if, for example, the property had been repossessed, the owner had gone into care or prison, it was unsafe to live in or it was subject to

a compulsory purchase order. It was hoped that the exceptions would be included in legislation soon.

It was noted that there were 66 long-term empty properties in 2023 – 45 had been empty for more than two years, 12 had been empty for 5 – 10 years and nine had been empty over ten years. It was agreed that a breakdown of the size of properties would be provided to the housing service, and a note of whether any of them were council properties.

It was further noted that the list of empty properties was no longer supplied to the housing service by the revenues team and it was requested that this be investigated so the private sector housing team could consider targeted work. It was also requested that a list of second homes where the owner lived in the borough be provided.

Members asked for a view on whether there were any areas that they could lobby government on in relation to council tax on empty homes which would improve the position. Officers agreed to consider the request.

21. **Lobbying**

The different areas that had been considered during the review were discussed to look at whether there would be a benefit to lobbying government. It was noted that different housing federations were lobbying the new government on different aspects of housing so it was important that the work undertaken by the authority supported the wider lobbying taking place. The following points were considered:

Empty homes

It was considered whether allocating resources to try to bring the 66 empty properties across the borough back into use would make a difference to the homelessness problem, given that they were in private ownership and not in the control of the council. Members were reminded that officers would give consideration to any areas of lobbying linked to empty homes.

Section 106 and registered providers

It was suggested that the lack of registered providers willing to take on S106 properties made it difficult for the council to achieve its affordable housing targets. It was noted that the Housing Strategy & Enabling Officer was part of an LGA group on which Homes England was also represented, and the problem had been identified by that group. It was also felt there should be changes made nationally to tie developers into S106 provisions of affordable housing so they could not claim the scheme wasn't viable further down the line.

Right to buy

It was noted that freedoms in relation to right to buy may not benefit the council as it used all receipts from the right to buy scheme already. Concern was also expressed that should the discounts available to tenants be reduced in future, there would be a flurry of purchases in a short space of time.

It was agreed that a briefing note on lobbying already underway and potential areas for the task & finish group to focus on would be brought to the next meeting.

22. **Date of next meeting**

Thursday, 5 September at 2pm.

Agenda for next meeting:

Letting agent

Briefing note on lobbying.

It was intended that the next meeting would conclude the review. A final report would then be presented to Scrutiny Commission, which would then report to the Executive or Council as appropriate.

(The Meeting closed at 11.13 am)

CHAIR