

## COUNCIL – 29 MAY 2019

### RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES

**Minute /  
Page No.**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL  
REPORT 2018/19**

Overview  
and  
Scrutiny  
Committee

The Committee considered the proposed Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Council, which set out the terms of reference and work of the Committee in the municipal year 2018/19, accompanied by a conclusion from the Chair, and information on attendance at meetings. It was suggested that the information on attendance provided might benefit from accompanying information on representation of absent Committee members by substitutes, and it was agreed that this would be considered for future reports.

10 April  
2019

81/  
239-240

The Annual Report was approved by the Committee, and it was:

**RECOMMENDED that the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2018/19 be noted.**

Executive

**EMPTY HOMES POLICY**

18 April  
2019

Councillor G.J. Knight, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing and Benefits, introduced the report as set out.

134/  
254-255

The Executive was informed that in accordance with the Local Government Act 2012, local authorities had been able to charge a Council Tax premium in respect of properties that had been empty for more than two years. It was noted that the Council had implemented this policy from April 2013, along with other changes to local Council Tax discounts, and had been charging owners of long term empty properties an additional amount equivalent to 50% of their Council Tax liability. In other words, these owners had been paying 150% Council Tax.

Councillor Knight went on to explain that new proposals, permitted under the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, allowed local authorities to increase this additional charge, or premium, to an amount equivalent to 100% of the Council Tax liability. The Executive was also asked to note that where a domestic

Executive

18 April  
2019

134/  
254-255

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property had been empty for over five years, the premium could be increased to 200% of the Council Tax charge.

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing and Benefits highlighted that the Council was committed to Addressing the housing shortage across the borough and explained that the proposals set out in the report presented one way to do this. It was explained that increasing the Council Tax charge for empty properties would help to reduce the number of empty homes by incentivising owners to bring their properties back into use.

The following points were noted:

- As of 9 April 2019, the number of domestic properties that had been empty for over six months was 401. This included all properties that had been empty for at least 6 months, and included 60 which were classed as “long term empty” and were already paying the 50% additional Council Tax premium. It was noted that only long term empty properties would attract the 100% premium.
- As of 9 April 2019, there were 123 empty offices or business premises and 14 empty flats situated above retail outlets.
- The Council’s housing officers were committed to providing help and advice to home owners about letting their properties.
- There were already discretionary powers in place, to reduce the charges as appropriate, where an owner was likely to experience financial hardship as a result of the changes.
- It was also noted that the additional Council Tax provided a secondary benefit by raising revenue which would be used to help borough residents.

**RECOMMENDED that:**

- (i) **The Council agree that from 1 April 2020 homes that have been empty and substantially unfurnished for more than two years and less than five years be charged a Council Tax long term empty premium equivalent to 100% of the Council Tax in addition to their current Council Tax.**
- (ii) **The Council agree that from 1 April 2020, homes that have been empty and substantially**

Executive

18 April  
2019

134/  
254-255

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**unfurnished for five years and more be charged a Council Tax long term empty premium equivalent to 200% of the Council Tax.**

**Reason for decision:** To help reduce the number of empty homes by incentivising owners to bring their properties back into use.

**Alternative options:** To not apply an increase or to only apply the increase of 100% to all long term empty properties from April 2020, and to further consider the additional increase in subsequent years in respect of properties empty for five years or more.