

**EXECUTIVE, RESOURCES AND CONTRACTS
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the special meeting held at 7.00 pm on 30 July 2019 (extract)

Present:

Councillor Simon Fawthrop (Chairman)

Councillors Gareth Allatt, Julian Benington, Mary Cooke,
Ian Dunn, Nicky Dykes, Will Harmer, Christine Harris,
Keith Onslow, Michael Rutherford, Kieran Terry,
Michael Tickner, Stephen Wells and Angela Wilkins

Also Present:

Councillor Graham Arthur

40 PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXECUTIVE REPORTS

The Committee considered the following reports on the Part 1 agenda for the meeting of the Executive on 2nd August 2019:

**(5) EMPTY HOMES PREMIUM
Report FSD19063**

The Committee considered a proposal that a public consultation exercise be undertaken recommending that the Empty Homes Premium be introduced from April 2020.

A Member queried the amount (£59k) given in paragraph 5.1 of the report for additional collection costs. The Head of Revenues and Benefits explained that this was more than just sending out additional invoices and agreed to circulate a breakdown of these costs.

The Director of Housing explained that the Council had a number of initiatives to deal with empty properties, including offering grants and advice (including on insurance for landlords with tenants on benefits) and matching landlords to letting agencies. There was an empty property team and a rolling programme of contacting owners of properties that were empty for a long period (usually more than six months.) In addition, the Council could take enforcement action in the form of management orders or compulsory purchase orders. A Member asked whether the Council could offer incentives and top-ups of housing benefit to encourage private landlords to take on tenants on benefits - the Director of Housing confirmed that this could be done, but the Council's policy was to find more effective ways to help than providing on-going large top-ups.

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The Committee proposed that the Council should apply the maximum premiums, although it was noted that the 300% extra for properties empty for more than ten years could only be applied from 2021/22 onwards, so a decision was not required for another year.

Additional information would be circulated before the Executive's meeting on the potential additional income from applying the premium, the linking of empty periods and the additional collection costs of £59k.

RESOLVED: That the Executive be recommended to agree that:

- 1. A public consultation exercise be undertaken on the introduction of the Empty Homes Premium;**
- 2. The Authority recommends in the consultation document that the maximum "Premium" be introduced from the financial year 2020/21 at the rate of 100% for properties empty longer than 2 years, increasing to 200% where the property has been empty for 5 years.**

(Councillor Stephen Wells requested that his abstention be recorded as he had declared an interest in this item.)