

(For Democratic Services use)

Decision Number: 04/2022-23

Portfolio Holder Executive Decision Statement

The Local Authority (Executive Arrangements)(Meetings and Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

Subject:
Re-allocation of previously committed S106 affordable housing monies to deliver a dedicated Empty Homes Service.
Details of Decision taken:
To approve the re-allocation of £35,878.55 S106 affordable housing monies, previously committed to deliver a dedicated Empty Homes Service
Reason for Decision:
<p>For 11 years, the Council employed a dedicated, full time Empty Homes Officer. However, this provision ceased in 2020 and the empty homes function was subsumed within the Private Sector Housing Team. As a result, the Team has only been able to provide a basic signposting Empty Homes Service to customers.</p> <p>Whilst a dedicated Empty Homes Officer was in post up to 2019/2020, an average of 14 long term empty homes were brought back into use each year. Without the officer During 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, no long term empty homes have been brought back into use.</p> <p>The Housing Strategy 2022/2027 contains 4 key themes the Council's housing service will deliver over the next 5 years. This includes:</p> <p><i>Theme 2: Promoting quality and optimising range and suitability of new and existing homes, which has an objective to reduce the number of empty homes.</i></p>

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To deliver the ambition of fewer empty homes, a dedicated Empty Homes Officer will be required within the Private Sector Housing Team.

A draft Housing Strategy Action Plan will be considered by Housing and Health Advisory Committee (HHAC) and Cabinet in September 2022. The Action Plan includes the delivery of a 5 year Empty Homes Action Plan, to direct activity to bring empty homes back into use.

The draft Empty Homes Action Plan will be considered by HHAC in November 2022 and approval sought at Cabinet in December 2022. Both Action Plans will consider available resources, to ensure they are SMART and deliverable.

The Empty Homes Action Plan will help to regenerate empty buildings, build close working relationships with teams across the Council to provide much needed homes at affordable rents in the District.

The Empty Homes Officer will work with owners and landlords and Kent County Council's No Use Empty funding scheme to support bringing long term empty properties back into use.

The Empty Homes Officer will work closely with Council Tax Officers to charge the Council Tax premiums for those owners not willing to bring their empty homes back into use.

Empty homes brought back into use and offered for private rent will increase the number of homes of this tenure available to applicants on the Council's Housing Register, or to those currently placed in temporary accommodation.

S106 affordable housing funds were previously committed to Quercus Housing for its acquisition of 11/13 High Street, Swanley. All expenditure on this project has now been accounted for and monies totalling £35,878.55 remain unspent and are not required.

Following support by the Chief Officer - People and Places, approval is sought to re-allocate these funds to provide a dedicated Empty

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<p>Homes Officer within the Private Sector Housing Team, managed by the Team Leader. The Council is unable to use S106 affordable housing funds to employ staff itself and are in the process of identifying an external partner agency to host the post. The funds will enable the employment of an officer for a 2 year period, on at least a 0.5 FTE basis, subject to grading.</p>
<p>Returning empty homes back into use ensures the best use of existing housing stock, whilst providing income to the Council through the through New Homes Bonus payments. Under the Government's New Homes Bonus scheme, Council Tax raised from new homes or long term empty homes that are brought back into use, is matched funded with the grant being calculated in October of each year and paid annually. Information on the scheme can be found at The New Homes Bonus Scheme (England) - House of Commons Library (parliament.uk).</p> <p>Using S106 affordable housing funds in the way described in this report, falls within the permitted uses set out in the Affordable Housing SPD 2011, i.e. Housing Pot 2 - <i>initiatives to make better use of the existing stock</i>.</p>
<p>All Documents considered:</p> <p>Housing Strategy 2022/2027</p>
<p>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected by the Member when making the Decision:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Financial implications:</p> <p>The proposal can be fully funded through the re-allocation of S106 affordable housing monies.</p>

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Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement: None	
Equality Impacts (Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty): The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.	
Local Member (s), other Portfolio Holders and Chief Officer/Head of Service Consulted: None	
Details of any conflicts of interest a) declared by any executive member who is consulted by the Decision Taker b) and any details of dispensations granted by the Chief Executive in respect of any declared conflict	
Decision taken by:	Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health
Signed by Portfolio Holder	
Date of Decision	1/9 / 2022.
Record made by:	

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Decision Number:

Date of record:	02/09/2022
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