

Decision Number: 03 - 2023-24

Portfolio Holder Executive Decision Statement

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

Subject:

Use of DIYSO refund monies to direct fund a post within the District Council's Private Sector Housing Team.

Details of Decision taken:

To approve the use of DIYSO refund monies to direct fund a post of Senior Private Sector Housing Officer within the District Council's Housing team. The post will be dedicated to delivering the permitted uses set out in the Affordable Housing SPD 2011 (SPD) for example empty homes and energy efficiency/alleviation of fuel poverty.

Any monies remaining unspent at the end of the period will be returned to the DIYSO refunds pot.

Reason for Decision:

As background, Portfolio Holder approval was obtained in 2012 to use S106 affordable housing monies to fund a "Do It Yourself Shared Ownership Scheme" (DIYSO), in partnership with Moat Housing. In total, 19 families were assisted into low cost home ownership under the scheme. DIYSO purchasers are able to "staircase" (increase) their level of ownership. At each point of staircasing, monies originally contributed are refunded to the District Council. As at 24 November 2022, DIYSO staircasing refunds totalling £423,324 had been received, of which, to date, £110,000 has been committed to other projects.

The Council previously 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 service to customers. Whilst a dedicated Empty Homes Officer was

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in post, an average of 14 long term empty homes were brought back into use each year. During 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, no long term empty homes were brought back into use.

The Housing Strategy 2022/2027 contains 4 key themes the Council's housing service will deliver over the next 5 years. This includes: *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. In December 2022, Cabinet approved an Empty Homes Strategy 2023-2028 and action plan. A dedicated officer is required within the Private Sector Housing team to deliver the action plan.

For example, the 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 officer will also 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.

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](https://www.parliament.uk)).

This role will support and help deliver the Councils 'Net Zero' Targets including working to reduce fuel poverty, inspire and support action to reduce carbon emissions and improve thermal efficiency of the housing stock.

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The officer will promote the reduction of energy use and pollution to help preserve resources and mitigate the impact of climate change by encouraging the use of sustainable and renewable sources of energy across the District. The officer will seek and advise on funding sources and to take part in available initiatives.

Unlike S106 affordable housing monies, DIYSO refund monies can be used by the District Council to fund posts and therefore allows the District Council to employ direct. However such use is dependent on posts being time limited and dedicated to delivering the aims set out in the SPD. Approval is sought to use up to £101,540 DIYSO refund monies to fund the full time post of Senior Private Sector Housing Officer, for a fixed term period of 22 months. Should any monies remain unspent at the end of the period, these will be returned to the DIYSO refunds pot.

Planning Policy have confirmed the use of DIYSO refund monies in the way described in this report, falls within the permitted uses set out in the SPD, ie Housing Pot 2 - *initiatives to make better use of the existing housing stock*.

All Documents considered:

Housing Strategy 2022-2027
Affordable Housing SPD 2011
Empty Homes Strategy 2023-2028 and action plan

Details of any alternative options considered and rejected by the Member when making the Decision:

None

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Financial implications:

The proposal can be fully funded through the use of Diyso refund monies.

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:

Sarah Robson, Deputy Chief Executive, Chief Officer People and Places
Alison Simmons, Head of Housing

Details of any conflicts of interest

a) declared by any executive member who is consulted by the Decision Taker

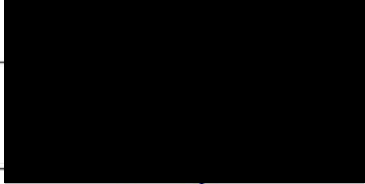
b) and any details of dispensations granted by the Chief Executive in respect of any declared conflict

Decision taken by:	Cllr. Perry Cole, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health
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Signed by Portfolio Holder	
Date of Decision	07 JUN 23
Record made by:	ABinnie
Date of record:	29/06/23

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All Documents Considered

[SDC Housing Strategy 2022 - 2027](#)

[Core Strategy and Affordable Housing SPD 2011](#)

[Empty Homes Strategy and Action Plan](#)