

# HOUSING AND TRANSITION PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD

18 October 2011

The meeting commenced at 4.00 p.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

**Present:**

Councillor Jonathan Brash (Housing and Transition Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Damien Wilson, Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning)  
Nigel Johnson, Housing Services Manager  
Joanne Burnley, Senior Environmental Health Officer  
Karen Kelly, Housing Strategy Officer  
Jo Stubbs, Democratic Services Officer

## **1. Housing Services Enforcement Policy** *(Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning))*

### **Type of decision**

To inform the Portfolio Holder of the overarching Housing Enforcement Policy, aimed at consolidating existing policies already in use across the whole housing services area.

### **Purpose of report**

Non-key

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

A number of policies already exist across the range of housing services including housing standards, empty properties and licensing of houses in multiple occupations and enforcement activity is carried out in accordance with these policies. The new Housing Standards Enforcement Policy is designed to formalise these existing policies in one overarching strand, providing guidance to Enforcement Officers, businesses, consumers and the general public. A range of enforcement options are set out ranging from informal advice through to prosecution with the most appropriate action being used depending on the circumstances of the case. The Policy also sets out a range of options in relation to empty properties with regards to dealing with their condition and securing their re-occupation. Section 215 powers of the Town and Country Planning Act can be used to improve the external appearance of unsightly land considered detrimental to the amenity of the neighbourhood. Housing Services were proposing the adoption of a proactive approach to the use of these powers, working alongside planning officers in the application of this enforcement power.

The report also highlighted the need to review the Unauthorised Encampments Policy which had last been considered by the Portfolio Holder for Public Health in 2004. Housing Services currently took the lead role in enforcement action in this area however a number of operational changes had taken place since 2004.

A copy of the Housing Services Enforcement Policy was appended to the report. A further report would be brought back at the end of the year giving details of which enforcement powers had been used in the previous 12 months. Comparison details would then be given in December 2012.

The Portfolio Holder noted that figures had been collated regarding the number of properties in need of improvement and asked whether this should be highlighted as a target. However the Assistant Director felt that by doing so it would appear that the Council were chasing enforcement. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged this but commented that any targets of this kind would be aimed at the effectiveness of the system and it should be made clear that Council policy was to fix these properties. The Assistant Director agreed that the outcomes were more important than the number of prosecution notices served.

With reference to the authorisations and indemnification of officers the Portfolio Holder queried whether consideration had been given to expanding the number of officers with authority. He suggested the possible inclusion of neighbourhood management officers and anti-social behaviour officers. Officers confirmed that expanding the workload had been considered but only for the initial stages as magistrates would expect to see officer with full credentials and relevant experience at the prosecution stage. The Portfolio Holder asked if officers had spoken to magistrates in order to ensure that aspirations on penalties and enforcement were in line. The Assistant Director would arrange such a meeting, which the Portfolio Holder indicated he would be happy to attend.

In terms of the recommendations the Portfolio Holder requested the addition of a recent recommendation made by Planning Committee that officers be delegated to serve Section 215 notices provided ward councillors were informed. He also asked that a communication strategy detailing the rights of residents in private accommodation be prepared. The Portfolio Holder commented that a tougher line needed to be taken than previously in this area. The purpose was to improve communities and a clear message needed to be given. The Assistant Director acknowledged this, commenting that rigorous targets and tight action plans would be set for the future.

## **Decision**

- i. That the Housing Services Enforcement Policy be approved
- ii. That the proposal to pursue a pro-active and co-ordinated approach in the use of the Town and Country Planning (Section 215) powers in

relation to empty dwellings be approved and that updates on the use of these powers be provided at future Portfolio meetings as part of the Empty Homes Strategy update

- iii. That officers be given delegated powers to use Town and Country Planning (Section 215) powers, provided ward councillors were kept fully informed
- iv. That a further report be brought to the Portfolio Holder once an appraisal has been carried out on the enforcement of unauthorised encampments, together with any proposed changes to the policy approved in 2004
- v. That a further report be brought to the Portfolio Holder in December giving details of the enforcement powers used during the previous 12 months.
- vi. That a communication strategy detailing the rights of residents in private accommodation be prepared and brought to a future portfolio.

## 2. **Housing Adaptations Policy 2010-2013 Progress Report** *(Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning))*

### **Type of decision**

Non-key

### **Purpose of report**

To update the Portfolio Holder about progress made with implementation of the Housing Adaptations Policy 2010-2013 and annual Implementation Plan for delivery of this policy.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

An update was given on the progress of the Housing Adaptations Policy and Implementation Plan 2010-2013 since its approval by Cabinet in January 2011. Details were given of the current progress against key actions and objectives and information on financial considerations was provided. A copy of the implementation plan was appended to the report.

The Housing Strategy Officer highlighted that the overall time taken to complete housing adaptations had reduced by 243 days since August 2010. The Portfolio Holder congratulated officers and staff on this extraordinary achievement, but noted that this had brought the council into line with the average for the North-east and asked that every effort be made to continue this downward trend in the future. The Assistant Director queried the average time taken across the North East but the Housing Strategy Officer did not have that information. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that Hartlepool had suffered as a result of the Government's budget cuts but did not believe this should preclude their striving to be the best. He referred to plans to recharge to owners and urged officers to pursue this as it appeared attractive to home

owners and simple to process. He also felt that a loans scheme should not be ruled out as this could potentially have a wider application to home improvement

The Portfolio Holder queried the membership of the Adaptations Operations Panel. The Housing Services Manager advised that it was himself, the Head of Service for Child and Adult Services and the Lead Occupational Therapist.

The Assistant Director highlighted that consideration was being given as to possible funding for these projects through health agencies. The Portfolio Holder agreed that public health and inadequate housing were inextricably linked and felt that the Council should be pushing for increased partnership working between the two.

### **Decision**

That the contents of the report and progress made against the Housing Adaptations Policy Implementation Plan be noted.

The meeting concluded at 4:30pm

**PETER DEVLIN**

**CHIEF SOLICITOR**

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