

EFFICIENCY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 12 September 2019

PRESENT – Councillors Durham (Chair), Harker, L Hughes, Mrs D Jones, Keir and K Nicholson

APOLOGIES – Councillors Allen, Bartch, Cossins, Paley and Renton,

ABSENT –

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Curry and Johnson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Elizabeth Davison (Assistant Director Resources), Anthony Sandys (Head of Housing and Revenues) and Shirley Burton (Democratic Manager)

ER8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER9 MINUTES

Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 11 July, 2019.

RESOLVED - That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

ER10 COUNCIL TAX EMPTY PROPERTY PREMIUM

The Director of Economic Growth and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting the Scrutiny Committee's views on proposed changes to the Council Tax empty property premium.

It was reported that new legislation had been introduced in November 2018 which allowed Councils to increase the council tax premium for properties which had been empty for two years or more. The aim of the legislation was to encourage landlords and property owners to bring their empty homes back into use as soon as possible and to penalise those owners who deliberately left their properties empty for years.

The Officers reported that, as at June 2019, there were 154 domestic properties in Darlington which were classed as long-term empty, however, only 25 of these were in arrears with their Council Tax, meaning the majority of owners were paying the current Council Tax empty property premium. It was anticipated that for 2019/20, if agreed, the Council Tax empty property premium would generate an additional £106k of Council Tax income.

The submitted report outlined a number of exemptions as part of the proposed changes, to provide protection for those owners who were making genuine efforts to bring their long-term properties back into use and it was reported that Officers would be working closely with landlords and owners of long-term empty properties to

provide advice and assistance.

Reference was also made to a consultation exercise which had been undertaken with the owners of long-term empty domestic properties and to an Impact Quality Assessment which had also been undertaken.

Discussion ensued on the negative impact of empty properties on communities, the ability to access information on the owners of those properties through the Land Registry, the role of the private sector housing section in working with landlords, and the need to look at each case individually in relation to the application of the exemptions, particularly in relation to properties which were on the market.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and that Cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny Committee supports the proposed changes to the Council tax empty property premium.

ER11 WORK PROGRAMME

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee and to give consideration to any additional areas Members felt should be added to the previously approved work programme.

It was reported that the main focus of work for this Scrutiny Committee from December 2019 to January 2020 would be in relation to the Medium-Term Financial Plan and that a number of special meetings would be held.

Members were requested to highlight and identify any additional areas they wished to include on the agreed work programme.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.