

**BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK**

**ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY PANEL**

**Minutes from the Meeting of the Environment and Community Panel held on Wednesday, 8th February, 2017 at 6.00 pm in the Committee Suite, King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn**

**PRESENT:** Councillors C Sampson (Chairman),  
Miss L Bambridge, Mrs C Bower, A Bubb, Mrs S Collop, Mrs S Fraser,  
G Hipperson, J Moriarty, T Smith, Mrs S Squire, A Tyler and Mrs J Westrop

**Portfolio Holders**

Councillor I Devereux - Portfolio Holder for Environment  
Councillor A Lawrence - Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community  
Councillor B Long – Leader of the Council

**Officers:**

Barry Brandford, Waste and Recycling Manager  
Sheila Farley, Housing Services Operations Manager  
Duncan Hall, Housing Services Manager  
Ray Harding, Chief Executive  
Honor Howell, Assistant Director

EC69: **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

EC70: **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** The Minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EC71: **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

EC72: **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was none.

EC73: **MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

There was none.

EC74: **CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE**

There was none.

**EC75: NORFOLK WASTE PARTNERSHIP WORK STREAMS**

The Waste and Recycling Manager presented the report which provided an update on waste related issues, the current work of the Norfolk Waste Partnership, the Waste and Recycling Behaviour Change programme and other waste and recycling issues.

He reminded the Panel that following a successful bid for funding to the DCLG, the Local Green Points Scheme had been implemented. He explained to the Panel that the scheme had resulted in an increase in dry recyclables and garden waste. The Waste and Recycling Manager informed the Panel that the contract for the Local Green Points scheme had been extended for a second year.

The Waste and Recycling Manager reminded the Panel that they had received an update on the Local Green Points scheme last year and comments made by the Panel had now been taken forward including the Community Rewards Scheme which could enable Parish Councils and King's Lynn Area Advisory Committee to nominate schemes for funding. It was hoped that this scheme would encourage greater take up and promotions of the Green Points Scheme and promotion of the scheme within Parishes as it would be the local community that could benefit from the Community Rewards Scheme. To be eligible for the Community Rewards Scheme the area would have to be one of the greatest performing areas under the Green Points Scheme.

The Waste and Recycling Manager referred to market conditions, as set out in his report, and commented that they were improving slightly. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that if Members were interested in visiting the Materials Recycling Facility that they should let him know and this could be arranged.

The Waste and Recycling Manager referred to the review of infrastructure and collection regimes work stream as included in his report. He explained that the Borough Council had the best pricing value for collection compared to any other Local Authority in Norfolk. He explained that it was important to try and sustain this and investigations would take place into what would happen beyond the existing contract arrangements.

The Panel was informed that currently the Council was losing money on the food waste collection service, but the loss could decrease if more people starting using their food waste caddies. It was hoped that rewards through the Local Green Points scheme could assist in encouraging take up.

The Waste and Recycling Manager informed the Panel that the Council were currently trialling a new collection vehicle for food waste, which could result in cost savings and this had been promoted by social media and a press release.

The Panel was informed that a technical report on contract arrangements and how all Norfolk Authorities could go forward was being produced by the Norfolk Waste Partnership. Delivery and service options would be looked at. Trials and alternative ways of working could be investigated along with partnership working.

The Waste and Recycling Manager referred to the contamination of bins and explained that this was still a huge problem. He explained that 16% of material in the recycling bin had found to be contaminated during a recent audit. This was a risk to the income achieved through recycling, as if the wrong materials were found, the end product often could not be sold on. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that nappies in the recycling bins were still a big problem and additional work would be carried out to investigate ways that contamination could be reduced. It was hoped that work could be carried out to educate people on recycling and find out the reasons why there were issues with contamination. The Panel was informed that the Norfolk Waste Partnership had recently employed a Principal Communications Officer for the whole of Norfolk.

The Chairman thanked the Waste and Recycling Manager for his report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

The Waste and Recycling Manager responded to questions from Councillor Tyler and explained that he hoped that the recent increase in recycling collected would continue, and the reason for the increase could be that more people had signed up to the Local Green Points Scheme, or that the different forms of communication were getting out to people. The Waste and Recycling Manager commented that there was a whole suite of options which could be used for publicity and it would continue. The Waste and Recycling Manager commented that he did not think that a two week collection for food waste would be appropriate due to the contents of the caddy, which could smell if it was left for two weeks.

In response to further questions from Councillor Tyler, the Waste and Recycling Manager explained that people could sometimes be too keen to recycle everything and this could result in them putting contaminates in the recycling and they may think that they are being helpful.

Councillor Squire referred to the increase in the value of some recyclables and asked if this was likely to continue. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that the value of plastic was linked to oil and paper sales to China had continued all year round, which was unusual as there was usually a break in sales during the Chinese New Year. The Waste and Recycling Manager commented that sales in foreign currency had also assisted with boosting income due to exchange rates.

In response to questions from Councillor Squire, the Waste and Recycling Manager explained that alternative collection arrangements would be investigated and trials could be carried out. He explained that schemes used by other Local Authorities would be looked at and lessons could be learnt. He provided examples of other Local Authorities who had increased the amount of recycling and decreased black bin waste.

Councillor Squire asked the Panel if they had signed up to the Local Green Points Scheme and those that had not yet done so were encouraged to sign up and lead by example by using their food waste caddies.

In response to a question from Councillor Hipperson, the Waste and Recycling Manager explained that plastic milk bottles were collected and sold as an independent stream. Glass was recycled, dependent on its size. Small particles were sold for filtration systems and sand and middle sized pieces could be re-melted. Large pieces of glass were the problem, and glass mixed with other materials, as this was not making its value.

Councillor Moriarty commented that he was pleased that work was ongoing to educate service users and he hoped that the new vehicle, which was being trialled for food waste collections, would be financially viable. He felt that this would remove the public perception that food waste was not being kept separate from other waste, even though it was being collected by a split body vehicle. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that the trial vehicle for food waste freed up the other vehicle for other collections, meaning a split body vehicle did not need to be used and this had resulted in all waste being collected in one round, whereas previously there would have had to be a trip back to the depot to empty the vehicles. Councillor Moriarty asked if the cost to the Council for the food waste collection service, took into consideration the increase that there would be in black bin waste if the food waste collection was withdrawn and the Waste and Recycling Manager explained that the figures had been calculated based on other areas that did not provide a food waste service. Councillor Moriarty commented that the other benefit of the food waste service, which was not necessarily financial, was that the black bins may have to be collected on a weekly basis if the food waste collection service was withdrawn and the amount of waste going to landfill could increase. Councillor Moriarty also referred to contaminates in the recycling and it was explained that sometimes people were too enthusiastic and sometimes electronic items were found in the recycling. The Waste and Recycling Manager commented that these should be taken to the Household Recycling Centre. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that there were not many issues with contamination in the brown bins, other than the occasional pair of gardening gloves or garden tools.

In response to a question from Councillor Bubb, the Waste and Recycling Manager informed those present that there were stickers

available for bins which stated what could and could not be recycled. The Recycling Crew could also place a red tag on bins which were found to contain contaminants to act as a reminder to households. A leaflet could also be posted through the door of the household if contaminants were found.

Councillor Smith asked at what point the Council would decide on whether to continue with the food waste collection service if it was costing the Council money and it was explained that this would be a political decision. He also made comments that people may not be willing to engage with officers trying to educate on what could and could not be recycled. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained the reception he had received from members of the public so far had generally not been negative.

Councillor Fraser referred to the food caddy liners and the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Councillor Devereux explained that investigations were ongoing and it was hoped that a new supplier of caddy liners would be brought in which should hopefully resolve issues that people were having with the existing supply. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that currently corn starch liners were used and it was hoped that the Council would move to using oil based liners which would be stronger and would cost less. It was anticipated that these would still be available for free.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Bambridge referred to the comments made by the Panel the last time they received an update on waste and recycling. She commented that not everyone used social media and it was important that other ways of publicity were looked at. She also referred to an information pack which was supposed to be sent out to households and asked if this had been done. The Waste and Recycling Manager confirmed that Local Green Points had sent information out to all householders and explained that publicity would continue.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Bambridge referred to households which had bagged collections and explained that if people worked during the day, they could have difficulty coming into the office to collect a resupply of bags. She had suggested that an e-form be created which people could fill in online to request a delivery of bags. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that when bags were delivered they were delivered with a tag. Users could then add their address to the tag and put it out with their bags when they were low on stock. A stock of bags would then be delivered to the household. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that if there were instances where individuals had not received a tag, or a supply of bags, they should contact him and he would arrange for a supply to be delivered. The Assistant Director agreed to investigate if an e-form could be developed to request a resupply of bags.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Bambridge requested that information be provided to the Panel on the implications of introducing a separate

nappy collection service in the Borough and the Waste and Recycling Manager agreed to investigate.

In response to a question from Councillor Bambridge, the Waste and Recycling Manager explained that it would not be possible to provide Councillors with information on who had signed up to the Green Points Scheme due to data protection. It may however be possible to provide a percentage per ward on sign ups and the Waste and Recycling Manager agreed to investigate.

Councillor Mrs Collop reminded those present that she was the Chairman of the King's Lynn Area Advisory Committee and was not aware of the Community Reward Scheme. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that the scheme was new and more information, once available, would be made available to the Committee and Parish Councils.

The Chief Executive explained that a decision on if the food waste service was unviable would need to be a political decision. He reminded those present that the Council was in a tight financial position and it would only get tighter. It was important to drive food waste up and look at ways of saving money before additional services could be brought in, for example nappy collection services. The Chief Executive commented that contamination was an issue and a cost to the tax payer, and it was important to decrease contamination rates otherwise drastic measures may have to be taken, such as withdrawing the service from areas which continually contaminated.

The Leader of the Council commented that it would be up to Members to decide on what would happen going forward. He reminded those present that it was not just about finances and consideration needed to be given to the environmental impact of the service. He explained that the food waste collection service was not necessarily the most cost effective method, but it diverted waste from landfill which was better for the environment. He explained that it was important to increase public participation in schemes and improve recycling rates and reduce contamination.

**RESOLVED:** (i) The report and the comments made by the Panel were noted.

(ii) Members of the Panel were encouraged to promote the Local Green Points Scheme within their Ward.

(iii) Updates be presented to the Panel as appropriate.

EC76: **HOMELESSNESS**

Members of the King's Lynn Area Advisory Committee had been invited to attend the meeting for this item of business.

The Housing Services Manager provided an update on homelessness and rough sleepers. He informed the Panel that the Council had a statutory requirement to conduct a rough sleeper count on an annual basis and the last count had taken place in November 2016. The count had identified 42 rough sleepers, which was a huge increase compared to previous years when there had only been three or four. He explained that the figures had been checked and information had been provided by other agencies and the figure of 42 was correct.

An analysis of people on the list had been carried out and information gathered as appropriate. People were sleeping rough on Council and privately owned land and it was happening in the rural areas as well as in the Town Centres. The Housing Services Manager explained that, due to the increase in the amount of rough sleepers, a problem had been identified and work would now be carried out by the Council, in partnership with other organisations, to look at ways to decrease the amount of people sleeping rough.

The Housing Services Manager explained that there were some common characteristics of the people who were sleeping rough. He explained that 80% had mental health issues or complex needs and some had problems with drug and alcohol misuse. In some cases tenancy arrangements had failed, which had made subsequent housing choices hard. The Housing Services Manager explained that some people simply did not want to engage or receive help and assistance.

The Housing Services Manager explained that the Council needed to look at what they could do within their limited resources. He explained that it was important to work in partnership with others such as the police and public health. The Housing Services Manager explained that the problem was apparent across the whole of Norfolk. The Housing Services Manager explained that it would be a challenge to deal with issues and there was not an outreach service available. Work was ongoing to determine if it would be achievable to commission an outreach service and what resources would be required.

The Chairman thanked the Housing Services Manager for the updated and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor Tyler asked what the Council's statutory obligations were in terms of homelessness. The Housing Services Manager explained that the team worked within the Homelessness Legislation and had a duty to try and prevent homelessness. Help was provided to those outside of the statutory framework where possible to try and prevent them from becoming a priority need. The Housing Services Manager responded to a further question from Councillor Tyler and explained that on private land the owner was responsible for rough sleepers; however the Council would assist if possible. On Council owned land, the Council would need to look at the circumstances and follow the

necessary procedure for unauthorised encampments which would move people on, although it was acknowledged that this would not necessarily resolve the problem.

Councillor Mrs Westrop asked if the introduction of Universal Credit could cause problems and the Housing Services Manager commented that he felt that it would. He explained that the Council would look at other Local Authorities who had already introduced Universal Credit and the impact it had.

The Housing Services Manager responded to further questions from Councillor Westrop regarding a dual diagnosis service and how rough sleepers could become victims of crime. The Housing Services Manager explained that the lack of a dual diagnosis service was a problem and investigations were ongoing to look at potential funding which could be available to assist with commissioning additional services.

The Housing Services Manager commented that the increase in rough sleepers could be due to the increase in successful closure orders used by the Police and Anti-Social Behaviour Team and ways to work with the Police and the Anti-Social Behaviour Team to identify potentially vulnerable people could be looked at.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community, Councillor Lawrence explained that a lot of work had been carried out to look at how rough sleeping could be tackled. He thanked all the officers involved and asked the officers present at the meeting to pass on thanks to the rest of the Team. The Portfolio Holder referred to Purfleet Trust, which was the only local homelessness charity in King's Lynn. He felt that they did a fantastic job within their limited resources. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that there were some people who did not want help and would not engage, but if they did this would be the first step to getting on the right track. The Portfolio Holder informed those present that over the Christmas period several beds had been made available and other arrangements had been put in place, however, not one person had made use of the facilities provided over the Christmas period.

In response to a question from Councillor Bubb, the Housing Services Manager explained that the majority of people sleeping rough were from the local area and one third were female and there was a variety of age ranges.

The Housing Services Manager explained that the Council would continue to publicise what help was available and encourage people to make contact with the Council at the earliest opportunity. The Council aimed to prevent homelessness before it was an issue.

In response to a question from the Chairman, Councillor Sampson, the Housing Services Manager explained that homelessness often occurred because private sector tenancies had ended. He explained that the Council used the private rented sector sometimes, but it was in



high demand and competitive which made it harder to assist people with private sector tenancies. The Housing Services Manager also referred to the recent Government White Paper and the implications from this would be investigated.

Councillor Smith commented that sometimes people asked him how they could help people who were homeless or sleeping rough. The Housing Services Manager encouraged people not to give money to beggars and referred to a recent campaign in which individuals were encouraged to donate to the Purfleet Trust instead. The Housing Services Manager also advised not to approach people who were sleeping rough, instead a form could be filled out via the Council's website to report a rough sleeper.

The Housing Services Manager responded to a further question from Councillor Smith and explained that there was pressure on social housing and it was important for the Council to promote a supply of new housing in the area. The Council were looking at several innovative ways to boost the housing supply in the area.

Councillor Westrop referred to females who were sleeping rough and the risk of violence and exploitation. She suggested that the Council engage with the Pandora Project. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community explained that the Council did work with various charities and organisations including Purfleet Trust and the Benjamin Foundation which helped young people.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Bambridge thanked the officers for the report and the work carried out in this area. She commented that she had requested for the item to be considered at the meeting and asked if any other charities had been looked at beyond the ones that the Council already engaged with such as the YMCA and the Salvation Army. She commented that there may be other ways that organisations could work together.

The Chief Executive commented that rough sleeping was only one part of dealing with homelessness issues and the Housing team and Customer Information Centre worked hard to assist people and try and prevent homelessness. He commented that it was clear that Universal Credit would have an impact and this was apparent from the other Local Authorities where this had already been introduced. He explained that the Council would work with other Local Authorities and look at lessons that could be learnt before Universal Credit was rolled out in this area. The Chief Executive welcomed any extra funding which could be available from Government and explained that it was likely that the Council would have to bid for any funding. The Panel was informed that the Council was eighth in the Country in terms of rough sleepers per population and this may assist with access to funding.

The Chief Executive referred to comments made on how local people could assist and he explained that people could volunteer at one of the charitable organisations.

**RESOLVED:** (i) The report and comments made by Members were noted.

(ii) That further updates would be presented to the Panel as appropriate and Members of the King's Lynn Area Consultative Committee would be invited to future meetings of the Panel where issues regarding homelessness were discussed.

EC77: **RESIDENTIAL CARAVAN SITE LICENSING**

The Housing Services Operations Manager presented the report which provided information on the progress made in relation to Residential Caravan site Licensing and issues which had arisen in the first year of operation of the framework.

She explained that there was still a lot of work to do to identify sites and licence breaches. The Panel was informed that a fees policy had been introduced and was reviewed on an annual basis. The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that the amount of licensed sites had increased from 41 to 67 between 2014 and 2016.

The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that investigations would be ongoing as it was believed that there were more sites yet to be discovered in the Borough. The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that one option to identify sites could be aerial surveillance.

The Chairman thanked the Housing Services Operations Manager for her report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

The Chairman, Councillor Sampson commented that he felt that aerial surveillance was the way forward as it would be the best way to cover the whole area.

Councillor Hipperson asked if discussions had been held with Parish Councils, so that if they were aware of any sites within their Parish they could be reported and investigated. The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that if anyone was aware of any potential unlicensed sites they could report them to the Council. She advised individuals not to approach individual sites and instead report them for investigation. The Housing Services Operations Manager also agreed to look at how information could be made available to Parish Councils.

The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that she was in discussion with the Council's Communication Team regarding publicity of the services provided by the Housing Team in general and looking at different ways to get messages out to people.

Councillor Smith commented that he thought that some caravans had restrictions on how long they could be lived in during the year and the Housing Services Operations Manager stated that this was dependent on the Planning Permission. Holiday Caravans often had residential restrictions and occupancy conditions on them and should not be the principal home. The Housing Services Operations Manager informed the Panel that a list of licensed sites was available to view on the Borough Council's website and the site needed to have Planning Permission before it could be licensed.

The Housing Services Manager explained that the Council had to take a risk based approach, due to the limited resources available. Sites would be prioritised and if there was a risk, for example, people living in caravans that are not designed for permanent living or renting out caravans to vulnerable people, would be investigated as a priority.

**RESOLVED:** (i) The update was noted.  
(ii) Updates be presented to the Panel as appropriate.

EC78: **LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY**

The Housing Services Operations Manager presented the update (as attached). She highlighted that the number of empty homes fluctuated and was monitored on a regular basis. Focus was on homes which had been empty for over six months and had a detrimental impact on the surrounding environment. The number of long term empty homes had reduced from over a thousand in 2013, to 836 in January 2017. The trend was for approximately 800 to 900 to be empty at any given time.

The Council had a Long Term Empty Homes Strategy which was available on the Borough Council's website and if a property was empty for over 24 months it would be subject to 150% Council Tax.

The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that there was a variety of reasons why a property could be empty and each case was looked at individually.

The Chairman thanked the Housing Services Operations Manager for the update and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor Moriarty referred to the Government White Paper which had recently been published and asked if this would have an impact. The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that she was still digesting the information in the White Paper, but it was not thought that it would have a significant impact above what the Council was already doing.

Councillor Moriarty referred to information which indicated that loans could be made available to bring empty homes back into use and the Housing Services Operations Manager explained that this had been looked at, but there was little interest in comparison to the amount of work which would be required by the Council and the complex process involved so this had not been taken forward.

Councillor Mrs Westrop referred to empty shops with flats above them and asked if the strategy covered this. The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that some of these properties were not classed as residential or were not registered as habitable. She explained that work was ongoing to increase the housing supply and flats above shops were something that could be investigated. The Housing Services Manager explained that he had recently met with Freebridge Community Housing to look at opportunities for flats above shops.

In response to a question from Councillor Tyler, the Housing Services Operations Manager explained that it was good that the amount of empty homes had decreased, but it would continue to be monitored on a monthly basis so that issues could be addressed early.

**RESOLVED:** (i) The update was noted.  
(ii) Updates be presented to the Panel as appropriate.

EC79: **WORK PROGRAMME**

Members of the Panel were reminded that an eform was available on the Intranet which could be completed and submitted if Members had items which they would like to be considered for addition to the Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:** The Panel's Work Programme was noted.

EC80: **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Environment and Community Panel would be held on **Wednesday 15 March 2017 at 6.00pm** in the Committee Suite, King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn, Norfolk, PE30 1EX.

**The meeting closed at 8.28 pm**

## Long Term Empty Homes Strategy

Sheila Farley

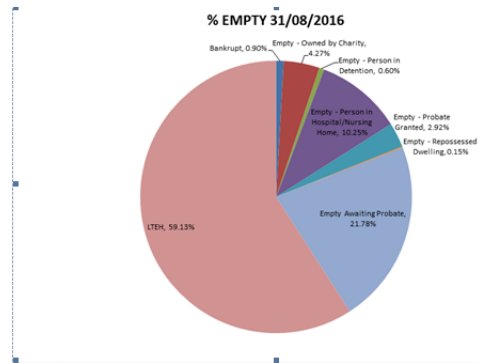


### Long Term Empty Homes Strategy – summary

- Most empty homes are short term and are part of the normal housing market e.g renovations, in process of sale or rent
- Our focus is on homes empty for more than 6 months which are dangerous or with significant impact for neighbours or communities
- Enforcement is a last resort and action is co-ordinated through Derelict Land and Buildings Group
- LTEH Strategy adopted in 2013 and needs refreshing
- This presentation summarises progress since 2013 and sets out a proposed future approach



## Reasons for LTEH – council tax classification



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## Numbers of Long Term Empty Homes

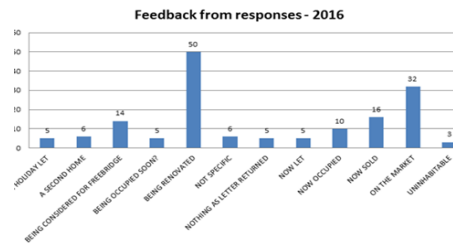
- The Strategy and statistics relate to the LTEH (59%) shown in previous chart
- The number of Long Term Empty Homes has reduced from 1026 in 2013 to 846 in January 2017
- Although the trend for the total LTEH has stabilised around 800 - 900, the individual properties change as homes become empty and are re-occupied



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## Priority 1 Gain a greater understanding of why homes are empty

- Improved systems and recording
- 6 month questionnaire



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## Priority 2 To raise awareness of empty homes

- Empty Homes Forum held to promote empty homes schemes
- LTEH Strategy published on website
- Press releases for promotional activity



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### Priority 3 To adopt a systematic approach

- Robust systems established
- Monthly review of numbers and trends AND:
- Letter sent to owner when homes shows as empty for 6 months
- Homes empty and unfurnished for more than 24 months subject to 150% council tax
- Complaints about empty homes assessed in accordance with LTEH Policy



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### Priority 4 - develop pathways to bring empty homes back into use

- Private sector leasing scheme and acquisitions with Freebridge Community Housing created 40 new social homes from empty properties
- No specific funding but individual cases reviewed



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## Issues relating to lease or purchase of empty homes

- Acquisition rather than leasing more appropriate in many cases
- Flats problematic – no freehold interest and covenants restrict use of property
- Some not suitable to meet housing need e.g. area and type of property
- Renovation costs can be prohibitive especially in conservation areas
- Not suitable for many empty homes



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## Proposed future direction

- Retain our broad approach and 4 priorities but also:
- Lobby for changes to council tax regulations to enable additional premium at 12 months
- Explore initiatives to bring empty homes into use including consideration of funding a scheme to bring low cost LTEH into use to meet housing needs where acquisition and/or remediation costs are not prohibitive

Note – changes to council tax for empty/unfurnished homes from second month to be introduced (approved Council 19 January 2017)



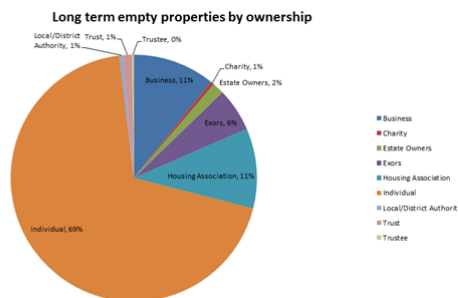
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# Questions and comments



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# LTEH by ownership



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# Comparisons across Norfolk

Authority	Total number of dwellings	% of which are long term empty	
BCKLWN	71881	1.140%	819
Breckland	58000	0.700%	406
Broadland	56124	0.504%	283
Great Yarmouth	47232	1.750%	827
North Norfolk	53590	1.010%	541
Norwich	65022	0.520%	338
South Norfolk	58364	1.330%	776



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