



<b>Report To:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	27 <sup>th</sup> January 2026
<b>Subject:</b>	Housing Standards Policies
<b>Purpose:</b>	To approve the South and East Lincolnshire Housing Standards Policies.
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Baxter – Portfolio Holder for Housing
<b>Report Of:</b>	Emily Spicer - Assistant Director, Communities and Housing Services
<b>Report Author:</b>	Jon Challen (Group Manager, Safer Communities) Luke Settle (Housing Standards Team Leader)
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All
<b>Exempt Report:</b>	No

### Summary

There are three draft Housing Standards Policies that have been fully reviewed, updated and aligned across the Partnership. These are the Houses in Multiple Occupation, Empty Homes and Housing Standards Enforcement Policies. Reviewing these policies ensures any updates are captured within the new aligned Policies, as well as ensuring the policies are still fit for purpose and comply with all relevant statutory requirements and guidance.

### Recommendations

That Cabinet approves the draft Empty Homes Policy at Appendix 1, the draft HMO Policy at Appendix 2, and the draft Housing Standards Enforcement Policy at Appendix 3.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

To ensure the Council has suitable policies and procedures in place for responding to and dealing with housing standards issues.

These policies enable and ensure our Housing Standards Officers apply their work confidently and robustly across the three councils of the partnership and ensure we are ready for any changes that need to be applied as part of the Renters' Rights Act which comes into force this year.

For empty homes the main focus is introducing a scoring matrix to prioritise properties at greatest concern with each council of the Partnership enabling their tools available to them without committing to specific resources. For HMO licensing the policy introduces a new fee structure that is consistent across the Partnership and the Enforcement policy includes the revision of fixed penalty notice amounts reflected in the Renters' Rights Act.

## **Other Options Considered**

Keep current policies – not recommended.

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Council is responsible for ensuring it has suitable policies in place for dealing with Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), Empty Homes and Housing Enforcement matters.
- 1.2 The Council wants to deal with these matters in a way that is open, fair and compliant with legislation. A policy-led approach helps staff understand what is expected of them, what options for action are available and who can authorise these actions. Having a policy that can also be shared with homeowners, tenants, and landlords can help in managing their expectations.
- 1.3 By reviewing, updating, and aligning the Housing Standards Policies across the Partnership, the Council ensures that enforcement practices and legislative compliance are consistent with national standards, enabling all councils involved to operate under the same guidelines and statutory requirements for housing enforcement.

### **2. Report**

#### **Empty Homes Policy (Appendix 1)**

- 2.1 The Policy sets out the options and powers available to the Council to enable and encourage home owners to bring homes back into use. A Policy on this matter is not required by law, but it is considered best practice. For information, a long-term empty home is a residential dwelling which has been unoccupied for 6 months. Councils have a limited number of tools to assist with returning empty homes back into use (page 8 of the policy).

## **Houses in Multiple Occupation Policy (Appendix 2)**

2.2 A house in multiple occupation (HMO) is any house or flat which is occupied by more than one household who share (or lack) kitchen, bathroom or toilet facilities. From April 2006 the owners of certain types of HMOs must apply to the Council to have their property licensed. As of 2018 this requirement applies to dwellings of all storeys. The Council must maintain a register of licensed HMOs for the public to view. There are a range of different requirements, and we have fees and charges linked to this contained within the appendices to the policy. The fees associated with HMO licensing can be found within "Appendix 3A" as there is no "Appendix 2A" due to all fees relevant to the Housing Standards department being grouped into one appendix.

## **Housing Standards Enforcement Policy (Appendix 3)**

2.3 This policy details the way the Council will deliver private sector housing enforcement under respective legislation and what landlords and tenants can expect from the service. The alignment of fees across the Partnership enables a consistent approach to enforcement for the Council and its officers – specifically those who are authorised under section 113 arrangements.

### **3. Conclusion**

3.1. These three Policies have been fully reviewed and updated to ensure the information is easily accessible and understood by officers and members of the public alike, clearly setting out the processes for different situations. They have also been fully reviewed against prevailing legislation, national and local guidance to ensure best practice is being followed. Adoption of these policies will ensure that the Council complies with all statutory requirements and guidance primarily from the Housing Act 2004 as well as the legislation outlined within each of the three policies.

### **Implications**

#### **South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership**

This will be a set of aligned policies, so officers across the partnership are working to a single set of policies and procedures, ensuring consistency for officers and residents alike.

#### **Corporate Priorities**

Improve housing standards, deliver affordable housing based on housing needs now and in the future and bring empty properties back into use.

#### **Staffing**

None

#### **Workforce Capacity Implications**

None

## **Constitutional and Legal Implications**

These policies allow the Council to discharge its statutory duties in relation to housing enforcement, licensing of HMOs and dealing with empty homes.

## **Data Protection**

The provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 (including UK GDPR) will be complied with at all times when dealing with people in matter relating to this Policy.

## **Financial**

Section 249A of the Housing Act 2004 enables Councils to serve financial (civil) penalties as an alternative to prosecution, limited to £30,000 per offence. The alignment of these penalty amounts will see an increase for the same offence across the three Councils. The fees and charges for the Housing Standards department will align across the Partnership as well as a revision to the way in which the HMO licensing fee is calculated to reflect proportionality and transparency equal to the size and layout of each dwelling.

## **Risk Management**

The risk to the Councils lies in not taking action to return empty homes to use, not effectively managing HMOs and not having properly enforced housing standards. These matters could mean a lack of sufficient housing to meet local needs, loss of income to the Councils and a detrimental income to tenants and communities in terms of neglected or unmaintained properties.

## **Stakeholder / Consultation / Timescales**

Housing officers across the partnership have been consulted throughout the updating and aligning of the 3 policies. Portfolio Holders have also had chance to see the draft Policies for input before coming to committee for consideration, along with relevant senior officers and departments. Finally, these policies will be considered by the relevant scrutiny committee before being considered by Cabinet for final approval.

## **Reputation**

None

## **Contracts**

None

## **Crime and Disorder**

None

## **Equality and Diversity / Human Rights / Safeguarding**

The policies will support the Council's Safeguarding duties in protecting vulnerable residents.

## **Health and Wellbeing**

The policies will support the Council's health and wellbeing responsibilities in protecting vulnerable residents.

## **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

Empty homes can be detrimental to neighbouring properties and the local built and natural environment. Reducing the number of empty properties can mitigate against this. Where these are modernised and/ or brought up to decent homes standards, they are likely to be better insulated and more energy efficient, reducing their impact on the environment, as well as reducing costs to their owners and/or residents.

## **Acronyms**

HMO – Houses in Multiple Occupation

CPN – Civil Penalty Notice

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1	Draft Empty Homes Policy
Appendix 2	Draft HMO Licensing Policy
Appendix 3	Draft Housing Standards Enforcement Policy

## **Background Papers**

No background papers as defined in Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the production of this report.

## **Chronological History of this Report**

<b>Name of Body</b>	<b>Date</b>
Overview and Scrutiny	9 December 2025
Housing Standards Enforcement Policy	1 April 2024

## **Report Approval**

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