

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 10 November 2020

Policies – Assurance Statement - Customer

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Routine
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note that Council policies detailed in this report have been reviewed and are considered to reflect current legislative requirements and best practice and therefore remain fit for purpose.

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Policies – Assurance Statement - Customer

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Council policies are key governance tools. They help realise the Council's vision, values, pledges and outcomes, and are critical to the Council's operations, ensuring the statutory and regulatory obligations are met in an efficient and accountable manner.
- 2.2 To strengthen governance arrangements in this area, a policy framework has been developed to ensure that all current Council policies are easily accessible, and are created, revised and renewed in a consistent manner and to an agreed standard.
- 2.3 To ensure that Council policies remain current and relevant, all Council Directorates are required to review policies on an annual basis. This report provides an assurance update on key policies within the Customer Team of the Customer and Digital Services Division of the Resources Directorate. The report encompasses: Corporate Debt Policy, Discretionary Housing Payments Policy, Council Tax Policies (second homes and empty properties) and Non-Domestic Rates Policy (Discretionary Relief).

3. Background

- 3.1 Council policies are key governance tools. They help realise the Council's vision, values, pledges and outcomes, and are critical to the Council's operations, ensuring the statutory and regulatory obligations are met in an efficient and accountable manner.
- 3.2 To strengthen governance arrangements in this area, a policy framework has been developed to ensure that all current Council policies are easily accessible, and are created, revised and renewed in a consistent manner and to an agreed standard. This included the development of a comprehensive register of Council policies and introduction of a policy template to provide the Council with a standardised format in terms of content and style.

4. Main report

- 4.1 A critical element of the policy framework is to ensure that all Council policies are fit for purpose. This requires each directorate to review, on an annual basis, all policies relevant to their services, and to provide the necessary level of assurance.
- 4.2 This report confirms that the policies listed in the appendix have been reviewed by directorate senior management and are considered fit for purpose.
- 4.3 Some policies require minor adjustments to ensure on-going currency and accuracy (for example changes in legislation). Any changes are noted and detailed where appropriate.
- 4.4 Council policies are available through an interactive directory on the Council's website.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The Customer Team will continue to ensure Council policies in their remit are current and accurate.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There are no direct financial impacts as a result of this report.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 Consultation was undertaken with directorates and divisions as part of the development of a policy framework for the Council.
- 7.2 A review of the Corporate Debt Policy was recently undertaken by officers and members of the Poverty Commission Group. This review resulted in some minor changes regarding language and tone and clarified the support channels in place for citizens who face indebtedness.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee Report 22 May 2014 – Review of Council Policy: up-date.](#)
- 8.2 [Policy and Sustainability Committee Report 6 August 2019 – Policy Assurance Statement – Customer.](#)

9. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Assured Policies

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Policy title:	Corporate Debt Policy
Approval date:	3 September 2013 (with a number of subsequent amendments)
Approval body:	Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee
Review process:	Annual review taking account of changes in legislation, service improvements, regulations and wider policy initiatives.
Change details:	No material changes in last 12 months, however minor updates relating to current Court Costs and fees, revised language and tone of the policy and additional signposting for citizens to agencies providing welfare benefits and debt advice. The policy was reviewed by officers and the Poverty Commission and remains fit for purpose.

Policy title:	Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
Approval date:	06 December 2016 (Date of original approval)
Approval body:	Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee
Review process:	Annual review by Customer Manager, with Policy and Sustainability Committee to approve any material changes.
Change details:	No material changes in last 12 months, however minor updates to the policy at section 4.17 relating to updated channels for citizens to apply (citizens that do not have access to online facility can email dhp@edinburgh.gov.uk or phone 0131 608 1111) The policy remains fit for purpose.

Procedure title:	Council Tax Empty Properties Procedure
Approval date:	29 October 2015 (Date of original approval)
Approval body:	Finance and Resources Committee
Review process:	Annual review taking account of changes in legislation and service improvements.
Change details:	<p>No material changes in last 12 months, minor temporary updates relating to the policy for Covid19.</p> <p>Additional discretion applies for the removal of the empty property premium as a result of Covid19 where refurbishing work had to stop, or a property was removed from on the market for sale/let. This applies to properties after 1st March 2020 and a 10% discount can then be applied for a period of 6 months before the premium is reapplied. Additionally, exemptions for properties that are occupied solely by students and became unoccupied on or after 17 March 2020 for a</p>

	<p>reason relating to Covid19. From (and including) the 27 May 2020 such a property will be exempt from paying council tax until it is occupied, or the provisions in the Act comes to an end.</p> <p>The policy remains fit for purpose.</p>
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Procedure title:	Council Tax Procedure for Second Homes
Approval date:	9 February 2017
Approval body:	City of Edinburgh Council
Review process:	In November 2016 the Scottish Government amended the Council Tax (Variation for Unoccupied Dwellings) (Scotland) Regulations 2013 by implementing The Council Tax (Variation for Unoccupied Dwellings) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2016. This gave local authorities discretion to remove second home discounts.
Change details:	This procedure is reviewed in line with legislative changes and is operating effectively. No change in last 12 months and policy remains fit for purpose.

Procedure title:	NDR Discretionary Rating Relief
Approval date:	22 January 2013
Approval body:	Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee
Review process:	The power to grant DRR is governed by the provision of the Local Government (Financial Provisions etc) (Scotland) Act 1962. This procedure is reviewed in line with legislative changes and is operating effectively. The current policy remains fit for purpose and will be extended before an anticipated material revision linked to the Barclay Review (Empty Property Rating Relief) is completed. This is dependent on national guidance. Committee will be updated at the appropriate time
Change details:	No change and the policy remains fit for purpose.