

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That the Cabinet recommend to Council that the proposed Empty Homes Strategy be adopted.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report proposes a new Empty Homes Strategy which identifies 3 key priorities to assist private owners to bring empty homes back into use within the district

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The proposed Empty Homes Strategy was produced in conjunction with the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2020 – 2025 which sets out 5 key priorities including tackling privately owned empty homes.

4. THE PROPOSED DRAFT EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

- 4.1 The proposed Empty Homes Strategy is attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The main aim of the strategy is to focus actions on privately owned empty homes that have been vacant for more than two years.
- 4.3 The proposed Empty Homes Strategy identifies 3 key priorities:
 - 4.3.1 Pro-actively work to identify long term empty properties and target those which have a significant detrimental impact to the neighbourhood
 - 4.3.2 Provide support, advice and information to homeowners to bring empty properties back into use.
 - 4.3.3 Enforcement – Use of Legislative powers
- 4.4 The proposed Empty Homes Strategy sets out the various challenges that long-term empty properties bring within the New Forest District.
- 4.5 Council Tax records in May 2021 showed 193 properties were vacant for over two years.
- 4.6 Properties that have been empty and unfurnished for more than two years are charged a premium of 100% on top of the full Council Tax. A premium of 150% is applied to properties which have been vacant for more than 5 years. These Empty Homes Premiums are to be reviewed by a Task and Finish Group during 2021 and the proposed draft strategic actions and outcomes should feed into the group annually, as these premiums are reviewed.
- 4.7 The Strategy highlights the importance of establishing a catalogue of long-term empty properties with regular review dates, so that owners can be contacted to establish the likelihood of the property being returned back into use.
- 4.8 The Strategy also highlights the importance of engaging with the property owners to provide good quality advice and assistance to enable them to bring the property back into use.
- 4.9 The final priority of the Strategy is enforcement action which may be considered when all other interventions fail.

4.10 Progress against the key priorities will be monitored through reports to the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services, the Housing and Homelessness Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Council Tax Task and Finish Group.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The proposed draft Empty Homes Strategy sets out how the Private Sector Housing Team will target long term empty properties to bring them back into use.

5.2 It is intended that the new Empty Homes Strategy is implemented following formal approval by Council.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are none arising immediately from this report. However, should enforcement action be taken in the future the Council is liable to incur legal costs which will be sent for appropriate consideration at that time.

7. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Regular monitoring and reduction of empty homes will have a positive impact on communities.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are none arising from this report.

9. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are none arising from this report.

10. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are none arising from this report.

11. HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL'S COMMENTS

11.1 The panel were fully supportive of the proposed Strategy and requested to be updated on the progress of the Strategy at further meetings.

12. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

12.1 This strategy is particularly welcomed at a time where demand for housing in the district remains high, whilst at the same time there are nearly 200 properties empty for over 2 years in the district. I am keen for the work to bring empty homes back in to use to focus on support to owners, and landlords through our new and forthcoming landlord forum. I am also pleased this work will inform the Council Tax Task & Finish Group and demonstrates excellent cross departmental working to achieve corporate objectives.

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Background Papers: (Bold)

Public documents

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