

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That the Housing and Homelessness Overview and Scrutiny Panel consider the draft Empty Homes Strategy.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report proposes a new draft 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 draft 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 draft Empty Homes Strategy is attached as 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 draft 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; and
 - 4.3.3 Enforcement – Use of Legislative powers
- 4.4 The proposed draft 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 and Homelessness Services and Housing and Homelessness Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

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.

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. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 11.1 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:

Public documents

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