



Committee and Date
Council

17 July 2014

10.00 am

Item

10

Public

PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR BUILT ENVIRONMENT: STRATEGIC PLANNING, PLANNING, HOUSING, LOCAL COMMISSIONER (CENTRAL) COUNCILLOR MAL PRICE

1.0 Recommendations:

That Council approves the Portfolio Holder Statement.

2.0 The specific portfolio purpose is:

- To enable sustainable development meeting the needs of business growth and of Shropshire's communities.
- To lead the redesign of how the council commissions outcomes in the centre of Shropshire, based on customer demand, working with partner organisations resulting in action that is better, quicker and cheaper.

REPORT

Planning Services

- 3.0** This year there have been a number of significant challenges affecting the Planning Service in all teams, some of these reflect Government's focus on delivering sustainable growth or other broader ambitions as to how and where services are provided, and other impacts have arisen as a restructured, and 30% cheaper team manages with a significant rise in complex planning applications. Alongside this the model adopted for the Planning Service from 2012 onwards has been one of maximising a flexible and agile approach to service delivery which to deliver efficiencies in office resource requirements, is dependent on home and remote working as part of the offer. In working this way the Planning Service has also consolidated its area based staff providing hot desk workspace in Wem, Oswestry, Bridgnorth and now Craven Arms in place of Ludlow.
- 3.1** The aim is to maximise choice and deliver a flexible approach to work while reducing overheads and cost to the Council. Wherever re-location has taken place we have co-located with teams from Public Protection. A key benefit of this is that the two service areas are looking at joint technological solutions such as a single back office system and telephony which together would facilitate a more efficient and flexible work environment.

- 3.2 Another key change this year has arisen as a result of the Business Planning exercise and Voluntary Redundancy process which together necessitated a service re-design.
- 3.3 Other key structural changes saw the Planning Service functions brought together for the first time since Local Government Re-organisation. Specifically the Natural & Historic Environment teams are now also part of the Planning Service.
- 3.4 Development Management is a key statutory and front line service that seeks to promote and facilitate the wider economic, social and environmental well-being of Shropshire and help deliver major investment decisions by individuals, businesses and public sector organisations. It is a positive approach to shaping, considering and delivering sustainable development proposals. It is undertaken in the spirit of partnership and inclusiveness, and it supports the delivery of key priorities and outcomes.
- 3.5 This year planning fee income increased significantly (61%). However, this may change following the submission of the SAMDev plan potentially reducing the current high levels of speculative planning applications. Land Charges income is also above target indicative of a more buoyant property market. Building Control Income is however deteriorating. One of the key reasons for this is that there is increased competition from the private sector and also that the overall size of the market is still in decline
- 3.6 The key performance measure for planning is the percentage of applications which are determined in a time frame agreed with the applicant. The team have developed planning performance measures with our customers that are meaningful to them rather than simply meaningful to the service. In Shropshire over 92% of planning applications are determined in a time frame agreed with the applicant. This acknowledges the fact that it can take longer sometimes to determine a planning application than the 8 or 13 week target and the measure relies on effective communication between the officer and applicant to manage this process.
- 3.7 Looking at the regulatory planning process the percentage of applications delegated to officers for approval is around 94%. Although this seems a high figure it is similar to that of neighbouring councils and lower than the 96% target figure recommended by the Member-led Task & Finish group in November last year after its review of planning committee processes. The reason that delegation rates have not climbed higher is the same reason planning fees have increased – there has been a sharp rise in the number of complex and often controversial planning applications, typically speculative housing schemes for sites not included in SAMDev, large renewable energy schemes or poultry units all of which generate significant community interest.

4.0 Building Control

- 4.1 Building Control provides statutory regulation, advice and added value services on behalf of the council. External pressures have resulted in the need for a further restructure to reduce costs following a broader redesign in 2011.

5.0 Land Charges

- 5.1 The Land Charges team also operates in a competitive environment and generates fee income on a cost recovery basis for the processing of land and property searches. For 2013/14 the team exceeded its income target which suggests that the property transaction market is buoyant.
- 5.2 The Queen's speech recently outlined proposals as part of the Infrastructure Bill. The Bill would transfer statutory responsibility for the local land charges register and delivery of local land charges searches to the Land Registry, supporting the delivery of digital services, and extend the Land Registry's powers to enable it to provide information and register services relating to land and other property. It remains to be seen what the impact will be for land charges provision within Local Authorities.

6.0 Local Planning

- 6.1 During 2013/14 planning policy work has focussed on bringing work together to conclude the SAMDev Plan seeking to submit this to the Planning Inspectorate by the end of July. The final stage prior to submission has been a consultation on the Soundness of the Plan. Over 400 representations were received in respect of this consultation and these are being assessed as part of a final report to Council on 17 July 2014.
- 6.2 The Community Led Planning process is active across Shropshire. Following the success of the Kinnerley Parish Plan last year we have had Albrighton, Broseley and Oswestry bringing their plans forward for adoption by the Council. Significantly a referendum was held on 22 May 2014 on the Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan and 85% of the votes cast were in favour of the plan. This will now be an important document and taken into consideration as part of the development plan for Shropshire.
- 6.3 Now in their third annual review, one of the key roles of the Place Plans is to provide local evidence with which to agree the use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds resulting from new development, and in doing so supporting the sustainable growth of settlements. In line with agreed practice, each Parish and Town Council was encouraged to respond to the annual review process between October 2013 and April 2014. Alongside this, there has been on-going engagement with strategic infrastructure providers and internal council departments to clarify the long-term infrastructure needs for Shropshire as a result of settlement growth strategies.

7.0 CIL and Developer Contributions Update

- 7.1 Shropshire is in a unique position nationally in ensuring that most of the CIL revenue will be spent within the 'Place Plan' area within which development takes place. This approach has now been reflected nationally through the introduction of the Neighbourhood Fund on the 25 April 2013. This requires CIL Charging Authorities to provide an element of the CIL revenue collected within an area direct to the Town or Parish Council within which the development takes place

- 7.2 From the CIL liable development on which construction has started, we have collected around £1,266,000, whilst instalment payments of a further £2,500,000 have been committed. A further £2,900,000 of potential income is associated with development which has not yet commenced, however this is only payable if the development commences.
- 7.3 The Neighbourhood Fund is the portion of CIL provided directly to Town and Parish Councils to be used for the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure; or anything else concerned with addressing the demands that development place on an area. The first payment of the Neighbourhood Fund was made to those Town and Parish Councils where funds had accrued, alongside the annual precept in April 2014. These payments totalled approximately £11,000.
- 7.4 Government consulted on, and subsequently introduced further amendments to the National CIL Regulations on the 24 February 2014. Some of the most significant amendments included: extension of reliefs for affordable housing; changes to the criteria for Exceptional Circumstances Relief; introduction of the ability to accept infrastructure as payment in kind; introduction of the ability to phase payments of CIL associated with Full Planning Applications; and introduction of a form of relief for self-build development.
- 7.5 Planning obligations, or Section 106 legal agreements, continue to play a key role in helping to deliver local infrastructure in Shropshire, albeit gradually replaced by CIL in many ways. The Council inherited a large number of planning legal agreements (Section 106) from predecessor councils and continues to use such agreements in appropriate circumstances. The total value of monies in hand currently amounts to £4.2 million.

8.0 Housing Policy & Delivery

- 8.1 The Shropshire Core Strategy gives a commitment to regularly review the viability study that underpins the affordable housing target rate across Shropshire. The 2013 review suggested that the target rate should be lowered in the weaker housing markets in Shropshire, and raised by different degrees in the stronger housing market areas. From our own local evidence it is clear that there are several prevailing housing markets with differing pressures. A report was submitted to Cabinet in May 2013 detailing our response to this complex issue and Members' approved three target rates (10%, 15% & 20%), geographically targeted to reflect the relative strengths and weaknesses of these housing markets. These rates became applicable from Sept 2013 and have been unanimously endorsed by the Developer Panel and Agents Panel as an accurate and proactive approach to housing development in Shropshire.
- 8.2 In Sept 2013, the updated land supply statement was published which concluded that at that time, Shropshire did not quite have a 5 year land supply (4.95yrs). Work is underway to provide a further statement for the SAMDev submission that will reflect expected new 2014 population projections and account for the influx of early site submissions. The contention of how we are obliged to account for several years of under delivery due to the economic downturn remains fundamental to this position.

9.0 Enabling and Development

- 9.1 As well as monitoring and continuing dialogue with developers, landowners, Registered Housing Providers and other building professionals relating to nearly 450 sites, the Enabling team also administer the highly popular and nationally acclaimed single plot exception site policy that seeks to offer those with a degree of housing need, a strong local connection and a need to remain in a rural community, the opportunity to build a home there.

10.0 Affordable Housing Contributions

- 10.1 Since April 2010, Shropshire Council requires that all planning permissions for an open market dwelling contribute to affordable housing through the provision on site (depending on the site density and prevailing target rate), and/or the generation of a capital receipt. It was acknowledged by developers as a positive move because it distributed the affordable housing provision on to all new build permissions not just on a minority of larger developments as previously. However, the DCLG consultation exercise in March/April 2014 indicates government is considering exempting sites across the country of up to 10 homes from an affordable housing contribution.
- 10.2 To date this policy requirement has accumulated an affordable housing capital pot of nearly £7.0m based upon approved planning permissions, ring fenced for local affordable housing projects. There is a time lag before these sums are received and available for use by the Council, as it is only payable by the developer after work has begun on site. To date, the implemented permissions have generated receipts of £1.25m.

11.0 Housing Capital Schemes

- 11.1 Since Local Government Reorganisation, Shropshire Council has been proactive in using land, capital and developer contributions collected to help fund Registered Providers and the private sector to develop additional affordable housing. To date, the Council has used £3.5m to help deliver 195 new affordable homes. Not only is this a much needed addition to the stock of local needs housing, it is also important to note that the construction value of these schemes amounts to more than £21.7m of much needed investment into the local economy as well as the wider economic stimulus construction sites generate.

12.0 Community Led Housing

- 12.1 The Shropshire Community-Led Housing Parish Grant acknowledges the fact that because the new Community Infrastructure Levy applies only to open market housing there is no financial “reward” to communities that have actively supported new community-led housing. Plainly the principal benefit is affordable housing to meet housing need within their community, but the grant which is financed from the annual New Homes Bonus (NHB), provides some financial reward to these communities for promoting and actively engaging with “Community-Led” affordable housing schemes in their area.

12.2 The funding for these grants began in 2012/13 and continues until March 2015, when it is hoped more funding will become available from the NHB. To date, £1.45m has been used to fund an additional 121 homes on contracts worth over £14.1m.

13.0 Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing (ST&RH).

13.1 In April 2013, the Council successfully launched an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) to manage the Councils 4200 properties which are centred around Bridgnorth and Oswestry. ST&RH is responsible for the management of the properties, the well-being of tenants and the management of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). There is a main Board that runs the Company, of which Shropshire Council is the sole shareholder and has five places on the Board to be appointed from time to time. There is a Governance Board arrangement and a Governance function within the Communities and Housing Policy team. The Management Agreement is for an initial 10 years, i.e. to 2023 and defines service levels, fees, annual review processes and the on-going commercial relationship with the Council in supplying bespoke support service packages. The first year of operation has been very successful and includes starting on site to develop 65 new affordable homes, in the Oswestry and Bridgnorth areas.

15.0 Self Build

15.1 Work is progressing on this exciting opportunity to bring forward an identified piece of Council land owned land in Shrewsbury to be developed for up to 47 self build homes. Site investigations, Highway negotiations and an outline plan is being developed for submission in the late summer.

Environment and Sustainability

16.0 Update on the Local Nature Partnership

16.1 Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) are partnerships of a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people who aim to help bring about improvements in their local natural environment.

16.2 Current areas of work for the LNP include developing a Natural Environment Investment Prospectus for the Marches area, input into the Marches LEP workshop as part of the Local Environment and Economic Development (LEED Toolkit) and lobbying government for the reinstatement of the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund.

- The Natural Environment Investment Prospectus will provide a background to the concept of Natural Capital (our stock of natural resources that underpins our economy and well-being) and the role of the LNP. This will be followed by a series of best practice examples showing where natural capital is enhanced in a way that has positive economic and social impacts.
- During July the Marches LEP held the initial workshop stage of the LEED Toolkit. This event systematically considered the evidence relating to the

local economy / environment relationship in order to reveal opportunities and threats to the delivery of the Marches LEP Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and to consider appropriate responses to them.

- The LNP has led a national call to government for the re-instatement of the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. The Fund provided Councils with a relatively small (c.£100k) but very useful resource which primarily helped mitigate the impacts of the quarrying industry on local communities and the environment. The Mineral Products Association and specific aggregate extraction companies are also behind the reinstatement due to the positive influence the fund had on the image of their industry and future planning applications.

16.3 Award of funds from SITA Trust Limited

- Eardington Sands and Gravels Quarry was leased last year by Shropshire Council for 99 years from Lafarge Tarmac in order to maintain this important site for the local community and wildlife. A very active 'Friends of Eardington Nature Reserve Group' has since been established and is working with the Natural Environment Team and Outdoor Recreation to agree a management plan for the site.
- The Natural Environment Team has been successful in their bid to the SITA Trust for £18,599 which will be spent on primarily capital items designed to improve the site for wildlife and the local community.

17.0 Historic Environment

17.1 In July 2013 the Historic Environment Team was commissioned to act as consultants on a national project being run jointly by Natural England, English Heritage to assist with finalising and piloting a new on-line system for delivering archaeological management advice to those applying for Natural England's Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Scheme, through which farmers and land owners can claim payments for managing the environment on their holdings.

17.2 The Historic Environment Team was approached because of its acknowledged expertise in delivering advice on Environment Stewardship Schemes and track record of delivering Historic Environment Records data.

17.3 Members of the Historic Environment Team also prepared guidance documents for use nationally and recruited a group of Local Authority historic environment advisors to participate in a live trial of the new system from November 2013 – May 2014. To assist with this, Shropshire officers delivered training at four events around the country for Local Authority and English Heritage staff, and also provided a support service to users during the course of the trial. Natural England are currently evaluating the results of the pilot and will use the information from this exercise to further refine the system before it is rolled out next year as part of the new agri-environment schemes.

18.0 Flood and Water Management

- 18.1 Flooding, and its effects in the county, are high on the risk register of all the agencies engaged in planning to prevent or respond to major incidents that would disrupt the lives of local communities. Alongside the police, fire and rescue services, the council regularly reviews the level of flood risk from various sources. The council has continued to lobby central government for additional resources so that it can strengthen the county's flood defences.
- 18.2 The winter of 2014 was very wet nationally. Although not affected to the extent of some parts of the UK, Shropshire did suffer flooding as a result. The Flood and Water Management Team undertook two formal flood investigations under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. Many other, non-formal, investigations were also undertaken.
- 18.3 Funding applications were prepared for flood alleviation schemes in Gobowen, Craven Arms, Westbury, Oswestry and a number of smaller bids were entered for individual properties. Additionally, the bid for the Much Wenlock Flood Alleviation Scheme was resubmitted due to increased construction costs. These will be endorsed at the Severn and Wye Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) meeting, funding will be confirmed early 2015.
- 18.4 A collaborative working approach with Staffordshire County Council has commenced and has brought savings through procurement and sharing of resources.
- 18.5 Shropshire's Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, a legislative requirement, is currently out to consultation. Being undertaken in partnership with Staffordshire County Council, it sets out the future of local flood risk management in Shropshire.
- 18.6 Work on the flood alleviation scheme in Church Stretton was completed on budget. The Much Wenlock scheme has been delayed whilst additional funding is sought. A planning application for the scheme has been made, however.
- 18.7 The team continued to act as a consultee to the planning process, checking between ten and fifteen planning applications per day. This ensures not only that new development is not placed in an area at risk of flooding, but also that flood risk does not increase as a result of new development. This process is now firmly established and Shropshire is seen as exemplary in this regard.
- 18.8 Defra confirmed that the implementation of the SuDS Approval Body role was again to be delayed. It seems unlikely now that this will happen prior to the general election in May 2015.
- 18.9 In April 2012 Shropshire Council, as Lead Local Flood Authority, took on the role of consenting works affecting ordinary watercourses. Experience as a consultee to the planning process, meant this additional role could be easily absorbed.

18.10 A programme of education continued throughout the year, with landowners being told about their rights and responsibilities for the management of watercourses. Assistance to homeowners on the types of action that can be taken to protect property from flooding was also given.

Flax Mill Maltings Update

19.0 The council is continuing to work with English Heritage to help bring forward the regeneration of the Flax Mill Maltings. Following increased costs from the tender exercise undertaken by Wates (who were appointed to secure a tender price) and the challenging deadlines to deliver the ERDF eligible scheme it has been agreed that English Heritage will now lead the project with the council remaining an active partner.

19.1 Over the last 12 months external funding towards the sites regeneration has been offered by ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) and Heritage Lottery Fund and council officers are working with the funders and English Heritage to provide the paperwork needed so the funds can be novated from Shropshire Council to English Heritage for the regeneration of the first stages of the site's development.

HOUSING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SERVICES

20.0 Housing Options

20.1 A summary of service demand is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14*
Enquiries into Housing Options	3998	2349	3000
Housing Advice / Prevention	2820	1338	1984
Homelessness Prevention (28 days)	921	1011	1016
Homelessness Applications	1178	938	900
Homelessness Decisions	934	770	708
Accepted with Full Duty	276	238	200

* Figures require verification

20.2 The above table reflects a number of changes to the handling of enquiries combined with the changing nature of demand on the Housing Options service:

- During 2011/12, a new approach was put in place to signpost more initial housing advice enquiries more effectively toward alternative avenues for assistance.
- 2012/13 reflects this change in practice to better manage demand on the service, however demand significantly increased again during 2013/14, reflecting a rise in real external demand for advice and assistance with respect to housing

- The number of homelessness prevention cases is steadily increasing, with a corresponding slight fall in homelessness applications, homeless decisions and numbers of households where a full duty is owed. This reflects service enhancements around preventive intervention.

21.0 Temporary Accommodation

21.1 The number of households in Temporary Accommodation has been declining steadily:

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14*
Number in Temp Accommodation	325	253	244

21.2 This decline is the result of a number of factors:

- Improvements made to preventive early-intervention.
- Enhanced use of 'spend to save' initiatives (eg. rent bonds).
- Improved joint working eg. with Children's Services through the implementation of the 16/17 year old Homelessness Prevention Protocol
- Further development of the Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme has given enhanced priority to households who may previously have been rehoused through the homelessness route.

22.0 Housing Support for Households in Temporary Accommodation

22.1 In September 2013 Housing Options employed two Floating Support Officers to work exclusively with our clients placed into Temporary Accommodation (TA). Employing the support workers directly has enabled the Council to ensure that support is in place as soon as the client has signed the tenancy agreement.

22.2 The main success of employing the support workers directly has been that we can get the support to our clients at short notice in times of crisis, something that wasn't always possible before. Once re-housed, should the client wish to continue receiving housing support a referral is made to one the external Housing Support providers.

23.0 Meadow Place

23.1 The Meadow Place project consists of four units of accommodation providing supported housing for clients who are recovering from drug or alcohol addiction. Housing Options (TA) provide management services for this scheme.

24.0 Welfare Reform

24.1 The Housing Options Team has created a fixed-term secondment to a Welfare Reform Officer in September 2013. One of the main objectives of this role is to research, review and evaluate Welfare Reforms with particular emphasis on their impacts for housing

24.2 Our Welfare Reform Officer represents Shropshire Housing Options at Shropshire's Digital Forum, The National Landlord's Forum, The West Midlands Homelessness Forum and is a member of Shropshire's Welfare Reform board.

25.0 No Second Night Out

25.1 Shropshire Council (Housing Options Team) is the lead authority for sub-regional (Shropshire/Telford&Wrekin/Staffordshire) grant funded work with respect to the Government's No Second Night Out programme, aimed at addressing single/ non-priority need homelessness and preventing rough sleeping. The total funding secured was £563,000 across the sub-region.

25.2 The Shropshire & Staffordshire Homelessness Prevention Partnership (SSHPP) have commissioned:

- A pilot for outreach for rough sleepers.
- A pilot looking at shared housing in the Private Sector for 18-35 year olds.
- A programme of one-day training sessions ("Released...Rehoused") delivered in West Midlands prisons to give information , about housing to offenders who will be homeless on release.
- A Project Support Officer hosted by Shropshire Council

26.0 Single Referral Schemes

26.1 The Housing Options Team facilitate Single Referral Schemes in order to explore accommodation options for vulnerable client groups through a multi-agency approach. This spans across:

- Mental Health
- (ex)offenders
- 16/17 year olds and those Leaving Care

26.2 Due to the success of this approach the Schemes were extended across:

- Rough sleepers
- Drug and Alcohol (DAAT commissioned properties – Meadow Place)

26.3 Remaining in place is the Joint Protocol for the assessment of and response to housing and support needs of 16/17 year olds and those Leaving Care with a housing need, who are under the threat of homelessness, or, who are homeless. The Protocol is held up as good practice for working arrangements between Housing and Children's Services.

27.0 Private Sector Housing

27.1 During 2013/14, the Private Sector Housing Team dealt with 678 service requests, ranging from over-crowding and poor property condition to the licencing of houses in multiple occupation (HMO's). This figure is marginally

lower than 2012/13 (688), and reflects the increased complexity of the casework. During this period over 213 homes were made free from Category 1 Hazards.

- 27.2 The service is seeing a significant increase in reports of hoarding where hoarding is a significant contributor to poor and hazardous home environments. New ways of working in partnership with Public Health, Community Mental Health, Adult Social Care and the Shropshire Home Improvement Agency have been explored.

This approach can be split into 4 key areas:

- 1) Multi-agency case conferences with colleagues from Mental Health, Social Care and the voluntary sector to develop individual care strategies.
 - 2) Health and safety risks are identified by officers from the Private Sector Housing Team who work closely with colleagues from Public Health.
 - 3) Property Condition issues are normally addressed following the clearance and cleansing of the building.
 - 4) Financial assessments are carried out to identify potential funding opportunities as often individuals are owner occupiers who own their property outright.
- 27.3 Shropshire HeatSavers developed in partnership between Shropshire Council's Private Sector Housing Team, Public Health, Age UK and Mears plc, to identify and respond to fuel poverty and poor heating amongst vulnerable people. The Private Sector Housing team act as the referral hub in Shropshire HeatSavers
- 27.4 In collaboration with Telford and Wrekin and Herefordshire Councils, and Marches Energy Agency, the Council's Private Sector Housing Team successfully bid for funding under the Department of Energy and Climate Change Green Deal Pioneer Places scheme, successfully securing a share of £450,639 funding.
- 27.5 The same project group supported a national bid Cheaper Energy Together that ran in many areas to encourage people to switch energy suppliers and secured £178,400 of funding.
- 27.6 During 2013/14 Pioneer Places funding has been provided to improve the energy efficiency at two community buildings.
- 27.7 Pioneer Places funding has also enabled the Council to develop its intelligence on the current levels of energy efficiency in existing homes.
- 27.8 An aerial thermal imaging survey of a significant part of the County has been commissioned to take place at the end of 2014. This information will be essential in helping to target those vulnerable households with advice and

assistance to improve their properties through the Government's Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation Schemes.

28.0 Disabled Adaptations

28.1 During 2013/14, the total number of DFG recommendations received by Private Sector Housing from OT's was 241, similar to the 231 received in 2012/13. The total number of DFG approvals was 167. The total budget for DFG's for 2014/15 is £1,758,124.

29.0 Empty Homes

29.1 In 2012/13, Market Drayton was identified in the Council's Empty Homes Strategy as the first Empty Homes Action Zone in the County.

29.2 £300,000 of New Homes Bonus funding was committed to the area in the form of Empty Property Incentive Grants to bring empty homes and other premises back into use as affordable homes for local people.

29.3 Work at 16 High Street, the building purchased as a result of a successful bid for funding by Shropshire Housing Alliance and Wrekin Housing Trust, is now well underway.

29.4 Following the success of the grants in Market Drayton, a further Empty Homes Action Zone was created in Oswestry for the period 2013/14. £200,000 of New Homes Bonus was committed to providing Empty Property Incentive Grants in the area.

29.5 There is also a focused ongoing project in Whitchurch, working with the Whitchurch Joint Commissioning and Economic Board, to identify and tackle the most problematic empty properties in the town centre area.

29.6 In the south of the County, Wrekin Housing Trust successfully bid for £400,000 of funding to return 10 long term empty properties to use. To date they have identified and begun work on nine homes, and are working with the Empty Homes Team to identify one more appropriate property.

29.7 In the 2013/14 period 45 empty properties were returned to use. This figure is slightly lower than the previous few years, the availability of Empty Property Incentive Grants during the 2013/14 period has meant we have been able to support projects which are much bigger and more ambitious than in previous years, tackling more problematic properties than in the past.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Malcolm Price

Local Member

Appendices

None.