



Portfolio Holder Decision
Making Session and date/time

Portfolio Holder Decision
Making Session

10 November 2014, 10.00am

Item

Public

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2014 - 2017

Responsible Officer

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1. Summary

- 1.1 As part of the Council's priority of returning empty homes to use to contribute to the provision of affordable homes in the County, and the regeneration of Shropshire's towns and communities, the Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2017 has been developed as a directive for the work undertaken by the Empty Homes Team.
- 1.2 On the 23rd June 2014, a stakeholder consultation on the Council's draft Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2017 started. The consultation has now been completed and the consultation process and responses received are summarised in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Portfolio Holder approves the Empty Homes Strategy 2014 - 2017 for adoption.
- 2.2 **Reason for decision:** The implementation of this strategy will reduce the number of empty homes and utilise empty space in buildings within the County to assist in increasing the provision of much needed affordable homes. The strategy will also greatly contribute to the regeneration of towns and communities within Shropshire to create better places to live, work and visit.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

(NB This will include the following: Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community, Environmental consequences and other Consultation)

3.1 Human Rights Act Appraisal

The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights act 1998.

3.2 Environmental Appraisal

There are no significant implications directly arising from this report.

3.3 Risk Management Appraisal

Although not a statutory requirement, an Empty Homes Strategy provides a clear basis on which all work in connection with empty homes is pursued.

3.4 Community / Consultations Appraisal

Consultation and appraisal are detailed in the report

3.5 Equality Impact Needs Assessment

An assessment has been carried out for the Strategy and is included in Appendix 4.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications in relation to the implementation of this strategy.

4.2 The Empty Homes Incentive Grants are funded from New Homes Bonus monies and are bid for on a two-yearly basis. These grants will be provided whilst there is funding, but the approach in the strategy will continue, even if such a bid was unsuccessful and no funding was available.

5. Background

5.1 Council Tax for empty residential properties was revised in April 2014 to encourage the re-occupation of long-term empty homes. Homes in Shropshire which have been empty for two or more year now attract a Council Tax premium of 50% meaning 150% Council Tax is payable on these properties.

5.2 Since the 2010-2013 Strategy, an Empty Homes & Regeneration Officer post has been appointed alongside the existing Empty Homes Officer post to enable the implementation of the Empty Homes Strategy across Shropshire. In addition, capital funding for the popular Empty Property Incentive Grants has been agreed for 2014/15 and 2015/16.

5.3 The Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2017 has been produced to build on the initiatives started through the 2010-2013 Empty Homes Strategy. It details the basis on which work to return empty properties to use will be undertaken and in particular work with local communities to continue the Empty Home Action Zones initiative, where resources and the Empty Property Incentive Grants will be concentrated.

5.4 In June 2014, a 12 week consultation process on the draft Strategy began.

5.5 Consultation: Current Position

1. Consultation on the draft Empty Homes Strategy 2014 – 2017 was completed on 20th September 2014.

2. Details of the consultation process are outlined in Appendix 1.

3. Significant interest was demonstrated during the consultation period from a wide range of stakeholders. The majority of respondents were extremely supportive of the Strategy's approach, and felt the Council should prioritise resourcing and addressing the issue of empty property in Shropshire.
4. In total 79 formal responses were received, 72 via the online consultation portal and 7 via email; a summary of feedback is given in Appendix 2. The feedback received was predominantly in support of the approach proposed by the Strategy, on average 86% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the survey questions. The Strategy consequently remains largely unchanged. On average only 4% of respondents disagreed with the approach, the concerns they raised have been responded to in Appendix 2, and where necessary changes and amendments have been made which are documented in Appendix 3.

6. Additional Information

Empty Homes Development Work: Summary of Progress

- 6.1 In addition to the existing Empty Homes Officer appointed in 2010, an Empty Homes & Regeneration Officer was appointed in 2012 to enable further development of the aims and objectives of the empty homes work countywide.
- 6.2 Increasing the capacity of the Empty Homes Team has allowed the successful progression of Empty Homes Action Zones (EHAZ) in two of Shropshire's Market Towns and the implementation of Empty Property Incentive Grants, which have proved popular and useful tool for encouraging the return to use of long terms empty properties.
- 6.3 Work has progressed well in the two existing EHAZ of Market Drayton and Oswestry. Provision of Empty Property Incentive Grants has integrated well with existing regeneration and revitalisation programmes administered by the Town Councils and the communities. A number of properties have already been returned to use and there is significant on-going work in both towns to return further prominent long term empty properties to use.
- 6.4 The Empty Homes Action Zone for 2014/15 has been identified as Whitchurch and this has received a very positive reaction in the town. Significant preparation work has been undertaken in recent months, working alongside the Town Council, local members, community groups, residents and owners of empty property to identify projects ahead of receiving the grant funding.
- 6.5 The Empty Homes Team work in close partnership with the Council's Planning, Historic Environment, Housing Enabling and Community Enablement Teams as well as the Parish and Town Councils, local members, community groups and organisations and other stakeholders to ensure that priority and problematic properties are tackled in the most effective way. Registered provider partners also play a key role, particularly in larger more complicated projects. The Empty Homes Team has developed a good working relationship with these organisations in order to make the best use of properties being returned to use in the Action Zones.

Further amendments to the Strategy

6.6 These are detailed in Appendix 3.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Council's aim is to encourage owners of empty property to bring them back into use voluntarily. The initial approach of the strategy is therefore focused on working with owners, offering support, advice and assistance where appropriate.

7.2 Returning an empty property to use brings considerable benefits to the owner (reducing the likelihood of crime and vandalism, reducing the likelihood of deterioration, and providing rental income or capital.)

7.3 In turn this increases the availability of homes for rent or sale in the county, including affordable homes for local people, as well as bringing benefits to the wider community as neglected empty homes can become a blight on their local area, attracting unwanted attention and having a negative visual impact.

7.4 However, where an owner is unwilling to bring the home back into use, and it is either causing a specific problem within its neighbourhood, or would meet a particular housing need, the Council will consider the use of its legal enforcement powers.

7.5 The Empty Homes Strategy is intended to provide a 'toolkit' of options for bringing empty homes back into use, in collaboration with a range of partners, including owners and communities. Successful implementation of the Strategy is expected to contribute to the supply of affordable housing in the County as well as bringing homes back into use with respect to the open market.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information):
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Empty Homes Strategy 2010-13

Key Decision: Yes

Included within Forward Plan: Yes
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Name and Portfolio of Executive Member responsible for this area of responsibility:
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Cllr Malcolm Price

Local Member: All areas

Appendices:

1. Consultation
2. Consultation Summary Feedback
3. Changes and Amendments
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment

Declaration of Interest

- I have no interest to declare in respect of this report

Signed Date

NAME:

PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR:

- I have to declare an interest in respect of this report

Signed Date

NAME:

PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR:

(Note: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter.)

For the reasons set out in the report, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled

Signed

Portfolio Holder for

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and pro-forma is returned to Democratic Services for processing.

Additional comment :

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Note: If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Chief Executive and the Head of Finance, Governance and Assurance (S151 Officer) and, if there are staffing implications the Head of Human Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Portfolio Holder: Your decision will now be published and communicated to all Members of Council. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication.