

REPORT FROM: HOUSING, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES MANAGER

TO: EXECUTIVE

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EMPTY HOMES PLAN AND EMPTY HOMES LOANS UPDATE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform Executive of the progress being made against the Empty Homes Plan and Empty Homes Loans and to update the Empty homes action plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Note the work already completed towards achieving the targets in the Empty Homes Plan
- (2) Adopt the empty homes action plan for 2016 – 2017 attached to this report
- (3) Note the progress with the Empty Homes Loans

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) To enable the Empty Homes Plan Targets to be met
- (2) To continue the reduction in empty properties across the Borough

ISSUE

1. Empty Homes are a key factor in low demand housing areas, they are a wasted asset, encourage anti-social behaviour and can cause neighbourhoods to decline. It is therefore essential that the problem is tackled as part of the overall regeneration of Pendle.
2. A range of proactive work has been undertaken by Housing, Health and Economic Development Services, since 2012 as part of the Empty Homes Plan . The actions so far have resulted in a significant reduction in the numbers from over 2131 in 2008/9 to the present level of 1299 but there are still some problem areas across the Borough.

3. We need to look at ways of building on our successes and developing new ways to bring the more challenging long term empty properties back in to use and hence increase the level of New Homes Bonus brought into the district.
4. Since the appointment of the Council's dedicated Empty Homes Officer there has been a marked increase in the number of empty homes that have been brought back into use. The table below shows the numbers brought back into use and the numbers of empties for each of the years since 2011/12

Year	Brought back into use through our action	6 month to 2 years	Over 2 years	Total empty properties	Yearly change
2011/12	107	1029	741	1770	
2012/13	74	776	692	1468	-302
2013/14	85	931	483	1414	-54
2014/15	793	667	401	1068	-346
2015/16	921	716	382	1098	+30

5. Overall the number of long term (over 6 months) private sector empty properties has fallen from 1770 in 2011/12 to 1098 in 2015/16 a reduction of 672. The total number of long term empties has fallen year on year and has only increased by 30 in the last 12 months. However, the houses that have been empty for over 2 years have decreased by 48.4% (359 properties) in the same period. This represents a current vacancy rate of 2.7% on average across the borough.
6. Whilst there are significant number of properties becoming reoccupied and numbers have fallen there is still a high turnover of properties which are left empty for over 6 months resulting in the discrepancy between the numbers brought back into use and the yearly change in the table above.
7. Whilst the vacancy rate is below the target of 3.7% set in the Sustainable Communities Strategy there are still clusters of empty properties around the borough.
8. The wards within the Colne and District Committee, West Craven Committee and Barrowford and Western Parishes areas have a vacancy rate of around 2.5% meeting the target set in the Sustainable Communities Strategy. Brierfield and Reedley Committee has a vacancy rate of 3.9% (158 houses) and the Nelson wards are 6.8%.(602 houses)
9. The introduction of the empty homes premium in the council tax of 150% has had a significant impact on the reduction of long term empty properties. A lot more owners are talking to us about the options to bring their properties back into use.
10. The remaining refurbishment work in Whitefield Nelson has now been completed and we are continuing to market these properties for sale which will help to reduce the percentage of empty properties. There are currently 20 properties still to be sold. However, we have accepted offers on 4 of these.
11. The Council also offers the owners of long term empty properties (over 6 months) anywhere in the borough the opportunity of an Empty Homes Loan. The loan will cover the cost of 80% of the renovation cost up to a maximum of £15,000. The loan is repayable over 5 years. However if repayment is made within 3 years it is interest free and loans only attracts interest on the 4th and 5th year.

12. Since the introduction of the Empty Homes Loans we have received 94 enquiries. This has led to 55 loans being offered. However it is important to note that although we have offered loans to improve 55 properties in 32 cases the properties have been improved but the loan has not been claimed. This means that we are able to continue to offer this assistance to other empty home owners across the borough.
13. The empty homes officer has received 8 enquiries since January and reports that the interest in the product is growing.
14. The Action Plan attached to this report, in appendix 1, sets out the actions that the Council has used and intends to use to reduce the number of empty homes in the borough, including the actions that have been taken since the report to the Executive in March 2015.

CONCLUSION

Whilst we must recognise what has been achieved in reducing the numbers of empty properties to below the target set in the Sustainable Communities Strategy there are still clusters of empty properties that are causing problems and attracting anti social behaviour. The emphasis must now be to tackle these clusters and reduce the long term vacancy rates in these areas to those seen in other parts of the borough by continuing to work with owners, partners and other Local Authorities.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: There are no changes to Policy arising from this report

Financial: There are no additional costs to the council involved with the implementation of the action plan

Legal: Nothing arising from this report

Risk Management: There is a significant risk that without the implementation of the action plan the problem will continue to get worse

Health and Safety: Nothing arising directly from this report

Sustainability: Continuing to implement the empty homes action plan will assist in meeting the target set in the Sustainable Communities Strategy across all areas of the borough

Community Safety: Reducing empty properties can reduce the anti-social behaviour that is often associated with them

Equality and Diversity: None

APPENDICES

Empty Homes Action Plan

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Action	Lead	Project Start and End Date	Milestones	Milestone Completed date	Comment
2015-16 Action Plan					
Actively target the most long term empty priority properties.	Jake Piergies		Review data monthly Informal action Take formal action		Ongoing
Raise awareness of empty properties and Economic and Housing Regeneration's policies with other service units of the Council, partners and the public	Paul Lloyd/Jake Piergies	01/08/15 to 31/12/15	Produce information literature for other service units, partners and the public.	31/10/15	Completed
			Circulate the information to other service units, partners and public.	31/12/15	Completed
Identify all Registered Provider (RP) long term empty properties and work with the RP to bring them back into use	Jake Piergies	01/05/15 to 01/10/15	Ask RP for empty property data.	31/08/15	Completed
			Agree action plan with RP to bring their long term empty properties back in to use	31/10/15	Completed
Encourage the take up of empty homes loans	Jake Piergies	01/01/15 to 31/03/16	I identify properties empty for over 6 months	30/04/15	Completed
			Contact owners with information and examples of the loan available	31/05/15	Completed
			Monitor the take up and reasons why the loans are not being used	01/03/16	ongoing
Investigate the use of compulsory purchase in streets where there are blocks of empty properties	Jake Piergies	01/01/15 to 30/9/15	Identify blocks of properties	01/03/15	Completed
			Cost the options and identify partners	01/06/15	Completed
			Report to Management team	30/09/15	Cary forward
Work with neighbouring authorities to tackle empty properties and share best practice	Jake Piergies	01/01/15 to 31/7/16	Attend empty homes meeting to keep up to date with best practice and innovative solutions to bring properties back in to use	31/07/16	Completed
Review the need for the dedicated empty homes	Paul Lloyd	01/01/16 to 31/5/16	Consider the need and role of the Empty property officer	01/03/16	Completed

officer post			Report to management team	31/05/16	Contract extended
Review and update the Councils empty homes Action Plan	Paul Lloyd/Jake Piergies	01/10/15 to 31/5/16	Review current action plan	01/01/16	Completed
			Update the action plan	01/03/16	Completed
			Report updated action plan to the Executive	31/5/16	Completed
2016/17 Action Plan					
Action	Lead	Project Start and End Date	Milestones	Milestone Completed date	Comment
Investigate the option to repay six months Council Tax premium to new owners who refurbish and reoccupy properties within six months of acquisition	Paul Lloyd/Jake Piergies	01/06/16 to 31/03/17	Identify how many properties potentially involved	01/08/16	
			Cost the options	01/10/16	
			Report to management team	01/02/17	
Review the feasibility and implications of reintroducing the former Council Tax Class C discount for a short-term period (up to 8 weeks) for owners of vacant properties	Vince Green/Paul Lloyd	20/6/16 to 30/8/16	Conclude the review by mid-July	16/7/16	
			Report to The Executive	18/8/16	
Investigate the use of enforced sale for long term empty properties who have significant council tax debt	Paul Lloyd/Jake Piergies	01/03/16 to 31/03/17	Identify properties	01/05/16	
			Liaise with Council Tax to develop a protocol	01/07/16	
			Report to management team	31/03/17	
Target the long term empty properties in Nelson and Brierfield and reduce numbers by 20%	Jake Piergies	01/03/16 to 31/03/20	Review the empty data for nelson and Brierfield every 3 months	31/03/20	
			Report progress to management	31/03/17	

by 2020			team		
			Report progress to management team	31/03/18	
			Report progress to management team	31/03/19	
			Report to management team	31/03/20	
Identify 2 nd homes that are recorded as empty and inform Council Tax	Jake Piergies	01/04/16 to 30/09/16	Identify properties from Council Tax data	01/10/16	
			Report findings to Council Tax	31/12/16	
Develop a scheme to enable us to offer financial assistance to bring vacant space above shops and offices into residential use	Jake Piergies	01/04/16 to 31/3/17	Identify commercial properties with vacant space	01/07/16	
			Develop a loan product and identify possible funding	01/01/17	
			Report to management team	31/03/17	
Set up monthly meetings between Council Tax and Private Sector Housing to facilitate sharing of information around empty properties.	Paul Lloyd	01/04/16	Set up meetings	01/06/16	
Review the need for the dedicated empty homes officer post	Paul Lloyd	01/01/16 to 31/5/16	Consider the need and role of the Empty property officer	01/11/16	
			Report to management team	01/02/17	