

REPORT FROM: Housing, Health and Economic Development Services
Manager
TO: Barrowford and Western Parishes Committee
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VACANT HOUSES

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the Committee on the position regarding the management of vacant houses in Barrowford and Western Parishes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the Committee note the action that is being taken to manage empty houses in their wards
- (2) That the Committee receive an update report in six months time unless there is a particular issue regarding a property in the Committees area

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) To ensure that empty properties in the borough are managed
- (2) To ensure that the Committee is kept up to date with the position regarding the priority properties in their area.

ISSUE

1. There are a number of known vacant houses in the Barrowford and Western Parishes Committee's wards. These houses are a wasted resource, attract anti social behaviour and detract from the amenity of the area.
2. The Committee have asked for regular updates regarding the management of empty properties across their areas
3. The Empty Property Loan scheme is still available to all owners of empty properties across the Borough. However we are finding that when we have provided schedules of work properties are being improved and the financial assistance is not being taken up.

4. Over the borough the total number of properties that have been empty for more than six months has fallen from 2131 in 2008/9 to 911 in December 2017 a reduction of 1220 properties. This represents a vacancy rate of 2.4%. This is significantly below the average for the North West of England (3.29%) and the average for England (2.54%). However there are still some problem areas across the borough.
5. There are currently 87 empty residential properties in Barrowford and Western Parishes Committee area which represents 2.0% of the housing stock covered by the Committees wards. The table below shows the number of empty properties in each ward for over 2 years and over 6 months up to 2 years.

Ward	Over 2 years	Over 6 months up to 2 years	Total
Barrowford	5	34	39
Blacko and Higherford	6	14	20
Higham and Pendleside	9	19	28
Old Laund Booth	0	0	0
Committee Area Total			87

6. The number of vacant houses in the Barrowford and western Parishes wards is below the average for both the North West and England. Even though overall numbers are low there are a number of vacant houses in the area that are considered to be a priority and require action to bring them back into use and we are targeting these and in appropriate cases seeking to use compulsory purchase powers to bring them back into use.
7. The owners of all these empty houses have been written to and the Empty Homes Officers from Environmental Health Residential Team is constantly monitoring the properties and in contact with the owners and they are being encouraged to bring the property back into use. Where owners inform us of their intention to renovate the property we offer loan assistance and monitor the house to ensure that the renovations proceed and do not stall.
8. The actions of the Council over the last 3 months have resulted in 514 long term vacant properties being removed from the list across the Borough with 48 of these properties being in the Barrowford and Western Parishes Area. Whilst the numbers of properties that have been empty for over 6 months has slightly increased over the last 12 months we have seen a drop across the borough of the more long term over 2 year empty properties.
9. Whilst there are significant numbers of properties becoming reoccupied and overall numbers have fallen there is still a high turnover of properties which are left empty for over 6 months, explaining the discrepancy between the numbers brought back into use and the yearly change.
10. The Empty Homes Officer is also reporting that there are a large number of properties that are undergoing refurbishment and we anticipate that these properties will be returned to occupation in the near future.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: None

Financial: None

Legal: None

Risk Management: None

Health and Safety: As empty houses attract anti social behaviour there are potential risks for officers inspecting these houses. However there are departmental risk assessments in place to minimise these hazards

Sustainability: The reoccupation of empty properties will bring a valuable resource back into use.

Community Safety: Empty houses attract anti social behaviour and fly tipping bringing them back into use will reduce these activities and improve the neighbourhoods.

Equality and Diversity: None

APPENDICES

None

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

