

Scoping Document

Name of Review/Project: Empty Properties.

Terms of reference:

Definition of empty properties.

“An empty home is a property which has been vacant for more than 6-months”.

Please provide details of relevant Corporate Plan Themes and Priorities:

The review will address the following themes and priorities:

- Safe and Secure - Theme 2
- Value for Money - Theme 4

Key Issues and Aim(s) of the Review

Key Issues:

Government funding for improving the quality of the existing housing stock (Decent Homes Funding) within the District has ceased. The impact being that other than taking enforcement action the Council has limited opportunities to encourage homeowners and private landlords to bring empty properties back into use, yet there is an incentive through the New Homes Bonus for the Council to do so.

Summary of the key issues:

- Quality of the source data.
- Lack of funding to bring empty properties back into use.
- The potential loss of income via the New Homes Bonus.

Extent of Empty Properties in the District:

The key data source is the Council Tax Database, which the Government also uses to calculate the New Homes Bonus reward. Therefore, ensuring this data is accurate is essential to maximising income, as well as ensuring staff time and resources are appropriately targeted.

The Strategic Housing Team with support from Housing Officers have jointly undergone a review of the source data for April 2011 to assess the current status of properties recorded on the Council Tax database as vacant for more than 6-months properties. The review consisted of a site visit to assess whether the 468 properties recorded on the database were empty or occupied.

The outcome of this review was: -

	Number of homes	Percentage
Empty	247	53%
Occupied	145	31%
Demolished	32	7%
Potential Business	5	1%
Pending further investigation	39	8%
Total	468	100%

The Council Tax records are currently being updated which should result in a significant increase of up to £225,000 in the Councils New Home Bonus allocation for 2012/13.

With regards to those properties found to be empty, without capital funding the Councils options to incentivise a homeowner/landlord to bring properties back into use are limited mainly to enforcement action.

Next Steps:

- Options for bringing empty properties back into use to be discussed at Core Strategic Housing Group on 11th September 2011.**
- Draft Empty Property Strategy to be considered by Housing & Community Services Committee – November 2011
- Consultation on the Strategy – December/January
- Empty Property Strategy adopted from April 2012

** *Update and presentation to be given at the meeting.*

Why should the review take place now?

Empty properties that are returned back into use qualify for New Homes Bonus and also have the potential to meet a housing need.

Potential outcome/s

To make recommendations for the most effective use of District Council resources.

To develop a strategy for bringing empty properties back into use.

What will not be included:

Area already researched and outlined above.

Risks:

Potential loss of New Homes Bonus reward.

Members undertaking the Review (if a sub-group is to be used):

NA

Possible co-options:

NA

Which policy committee(s) does it relate to?

Housing & Community Services Committee

Key stakeholders/ consultees:

Members of Core Strategic Housing Group
Private Landlords
Registered Providers
Wider Community

Potential contributors and research required:

Research area already completed

Potential visits:

NA

Are there any Budgetary Implications?

NA

Officer support required:

Beverly Wagstaffe – Strategic Housing Manager

Period for Review:

Start date: 14/09/2011

Approximate meeting dates:

Proposed completion date:

Report date(s) to committees:

Publicity (e.g. of recommendations)

None

Date Scoping Document Completed: 14th September 2011