

ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 7
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Report of the Service Director Adult Services & Communities		
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EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2017 - 2019

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with the opportunity to scrutinise the council's new draft Empty Homes Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee are recommended to :

1. Scrutinise the draft strategy and the current incentives, initiatives and enforcement options that are available to assist or enforce owners of an empty property to bring their properties back into use.
2. Provide challenge where necessary and to suggest ideas and initiatives to support further activity.

3. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND RELEVANT CABINET PORTFOLIO

- 3.1
- Drive growth, regeneration and economic development - by increasing the available housing stock in the city, creating better places to live and increasing economic prosperity by creating a well-managed private rented housing sector
 - Improving educational attainment and skills - by creating safe, warm and good quality housing to help reduce physical and mental illness in order to promote higher levels of achievement,, particularly in education and employment
 - Safeguard vulnerable children and adults - by increasing the available housing stock for vulnerable families
 - Implement the Environmental Capital agenda - by improving the energy efficiency of existing empty housing stock and reducing carbon emissions from domestic dwellings
 - Keep all our communities safe, cohesive and healthy - by building and empowering local communities, making Peterborough safer and building pride in Peterborough's neighbourhoods
 - Achieve the best health and wellbeing for the city - by providing good quality, secure and affordable housing to all of the residents of the city
- 3.2 The Empty Homes Strategy is within the remit of the Communities & Environmental Capital Portfolio

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The population of Peterborough is expected to increase from 183,961 in 2011 to 227,890 in 2036. In January 2016 it was ranked as the third fastest growing city in the UK by population (1.5% annual growth) and as having the fourth highest housing stock growth (at 1.1% annually) with over 2,000

new homes built in the last 2 years. Housing demand is buoyant and it is likely this demand will continue.

- 1005 new dwellings are needed each year to meet current and projected population growth
- 4,637 new homes were built in Peterborough between 2011 and 2016 of which 28% were affordable housing dwellings.
- There are over 85,000 dwellings in Peterborough
- 60% of all homes in Peterborough are owner occupied

4.2 Recent planning, housing and welfare reforms are likely to reduce the supply of new affordable homes for rent.

- 1311 new affordable homes have been built in Peterborough since 2011
- 20% of all housing is in the social sector
- Average property prices are lower than in the regional and nationally
- Average earnings in Peterborough are below the national average
- A higher than average proportion of the population are in lower skilled occupations
- 40% of households are unable to afford to buy a home on the open market
- 620 additional affordable dwellings are needed each year to meet current and future housing need
- The number of households in temporary accommodation is increasing

4.3 As at October 2016 there are around 540 properties which have been empty for six months or more, this represents 0.64% of the City's housing stock. Empty homes represent a waste of a valuable resource whilst the need for decent, affordable housing in the city is increasing. Re-occupying empty homes cannot provide the whole solution to the issue but this potential waste of a source of accommodation cannot be ignored. The Empty Homes Officer is currently working on 35 high priority cases, including 3 cases where Empty Dwelling Orders are being implemented, there are an additional 39 cases where the properties are going through various stages of probate. So far this year (from April 2016) 93 empty properties have been bought back into use through the intervention of the Empty Homes Officer.

The number of long-term empty homes in Peterborough has shown a significant decline over the past 7 years, falling from over 800 in 2009 to 540 in 2016. Over 820 empty homes have been brought back into use with Council intervention in the last four years and the Empty Homes portion of the New Homes Bonus allocation has reached £3 million. Peterborough City Council's Empty Homes Officer was highly commended in 2013 by the Empty Homes Network, the Country's foremost empty homes practitioner group. He followed this the following year by being awarded 'National Empty Homes Practitioner of the Year 2014' by the Empty Homes Network.

Despite this success, continued focus on tackling long term empty property is a housing priority. If allowed to deteriorate, a single property can blight a street and neighbourhood causing nuisance to residents, reducing house prices and contributing to urban decline. As well as encouraging vandalism, fly-tipping and other criminal activity, there may also be an increase in the fear of crime which can have a detrimental effect on the lives of residents in the neighbourhood.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 Housing demand in the City far outstrips supply resulting in approximately 3,300 households on the Housing Register wanting suitable and affordable accommodation. The emerging Local Plan is seeking to deliver 27,625 homes by 2036 and it is hoped a good mix of housing, including homes for purchase and affordable homes are provided. In July 2016 the creation of a specifically housing focussed joint venture between the Council and Cross Keys Homes was agreed with the objective of delivering new housing of all types and tenures.

5.2 In addition to supporting new housing development in the City it is also important for the Council to

maximise the supply of existing housing. The aim of this strategy is to:

- Bring empty homes in the private sector back into use, utilising both voluntary means and, when appropriate, statutory enforcement powers which will contribute to an increase in the affordable housing supply, alleviate the numbers of people in housing need on the housing register, improve neighbourhoods and community confidence and contribute to tackling homelessness in Peterborough
- Introduce Empty Homes Assistance to offer as an incentive to owners of empty property that are of the type that is in high demand across the city. Assistance will contribute to improving the house condition and the property will be placed on a private leasing scheme and will be made available to families in housing need
- Work with colleagues leading on the housing joint venture partnership with Cross Keys Homes to ascertain the feasibility of purchasing empty property in suitable locations with property attributes in highest demand in the city.
- Look at the issue of empty property in the whole context of the demand for good quality and affordable housing in the City. Build on the preventative role by proactively developing relationships with owners to prevent properties becoming long term empty and provide a continuous supply of houses that can be utilised by the Housing Needs Service
- Improve and refine the evidence base by assembling relevant, accurate and current information to target specific groups depending on why their properties are empty. Tailor different solutions to bring those empty properties back into use or prevent them becoming empty
- Raise awareness of the Empty Homes issue and to promote the service and strategy to owners, neighbours and those affected by empty homes
- Maximise income from the New Homes Bonus that is received from returning empty property back into use

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Empty homes have implications for all sections of society and all wards and parishes of the local authority area.

Local Authorities have a range of powers available to deal with bring empty homes back into use. Legal advice should be obtained as to the best procedure to use in particular circumstances.

The draft Empty Homes Strategy will comply with all equalities and human rights requirements and is aimed at all privately owned empty properties. It is to be used to reduce the negative effects that an empty property can cause to surrounding houses and communities.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Empty Homes Strategy will be uploaded onto the Consultation & Engagement page of the Council's website for a period of 3 weeks.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 Following scrutiny of current actions and interventions to bring empty properties back into use, and after consideration of all comments made by the Committee, officers will further develop the Empty Homes Strategy in order to go out to public consultation. The Strategy will then be referred to the Cabinet Member for Communities & Environmental Capital for a decision.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1 None.

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2017 - 2019.