

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 7
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Report of the Strategic Housing Manager

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EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2012 - 2015

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

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1
- *Creating Opportunities & Tackling Inequalities* - by regenerating neighbourhoods, including tackling the blight of empty properties
 - *Creating Strong & Supportive Communities* – by building and empowering local communities, making Peterborough safer and building pride in Peterborough
 - *Creating the UK's environmental capital* – by improving the energy efficiency of existing empty housing stock and reducing carbon emissions from domestic dwellings
 - *Delivering substantial and truly sustainable growth* – by creating better places to live and increasing economic prosperity by creating a well managed private rented housing sector

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The current population of Peterborough is 183,600. In 2010 Peterborough City Council and three neighbouring local authorities commissioned an update to the 2007 sub-regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment. Some key findings of this study were:
- At the current rate of household formation and housing supply, an average of 1,008 households will fall into housing need each year in Peterborough
 - If we were to solely address the highest levels of housing need, 38% of all new housing built in Peterborough would need to be affordable
 - Based on present housing needs, around two thirds of future new affordable housing would need to be smaller one and two bed units. However, based on future demographic trends, long term housing need is expected to shift towards a requirement for two and three bed properties
 - The percentage of households in need is lower in rural areas than in urban Peterborough, however, housing need as a proportion of supply in rural Peterborough is ten times higher than it is in the urban area.
- 4.2 Data from the Peterborough Homes Housing Register confirms the findings of this assessment. As at the 14th October 2012 there were 9,622 applicants on the register.

- 4.3 At the same time a significant number of homes in Peterborough remain empty for varying reasons and for varying lengths of time. Whilst the reoccupation of empty homes is not the whole answer to the current shortage of homes in the City, they are recognised as a valuable resource with huge potential to be turned into occupied homes thereby increasing the supply of and reducing demand for housing. Bringing empty properties back into use will make a significant contribution to alleviating the huge demand for affordable housing in the City. Local Authority intervention to assist owners in bringing their properties back into use means that the Housing Needs Service will receive nomination rights to allocate people on the housing register in housing need into these properties. This will contribute to the reduction of applicants on the housing register.
- 4.4 Peterborough City Council will also have more scope to prevent homelessness with the Housing Needs Service being able to discharge its homelessness duty into the private sector with the knowledge that the properties have reached the required standard and are being effectively managed. Increased supply of properties in the private sector will in turn result in the reduction in the use of expensive Bed & Breakfast accommodation to temporarily house people until more permanent accommodation is sourced and secured.
- 4.5 The majority of empty properties in the city are privately owned. Often owners do not know how to get their property back into use. The aim of this strategy is to set out how we will work with property owners, the local community and our partners to bring empty properties back into a functioning and habitable state.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 Empty Homes – Increasing Housing Supply

- 5.1.1 A Private Sector Stock Condition Survey was commissioned by Peterborough City Council in 2009 and the final report was published in February 2010. It estimated that there were 60,041 private sector dwellings in the city of which approximately 2,300 were empty, representing 3.8% of the private sector stock.
- 5.1.2 The Empty Homes Strategy aims to:
- bring empty homes in the private sector back into use, utilising both voluntary means and statutory enforcement powers, which will increase the 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
 - offer a comprehensive advice and assistance service to the owners of empty property, those who are looking to purchase or develop empty property and those who are experiencing problems arising by living near to empty properties.
 - maximise income from the New Homes Bonus and to utilise it effectively by delivering initiatives to tackle empty homes
 - improve our evidence base by assembling relevant, accurate and current information
 - raise awareness of the Empty Homes issue and to promote the service and strategy to owners, neighbours and those affected by empty homes
 - retain dedicated staffing resource to tackle the problems of empty homes and to effectively bring them back into use thus preventing the waste of valuable housing resource across the city.

5.2 Progress to Date

- 5.2.1 Problematic or long term empty properties, which are empty for more than six months, are targeted under the City Council's Empty Homes Strategy.
- 5.2.2 In July 2011 the council recruited a dedicated empty homes officer. At the time of his appointment there were 2,099 empty properties in the city, comprising:
- 523 long term empty, of which
 - 396 had been empty between 6 and 23 months, and
 - 127 had been empty for more than 2 years
- 5.2.3 As at the 1st October 2012 there were a total of 1,915 empty properties in the City, comprising:
- 453 long term empty, of which
 - 338 have been empty between 6 and 23 months, and
 - 115 have been empty for more that 2 years

6. IMPLICATIONS

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

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Full consultation will take place on the Empty Homes Strategy.

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 pubic consultation.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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

- 9.1 None

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Appendix 1 – Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2012 - 2015

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