

Review of Empty Homes Strategy – Action Plan

Objective 1 – Ensure the availability and effective use of information on empty homes within the district. Through the maintenance of a database of all empty homes using information from Council Tax and other areas of the Council, supported by information from owners and other individuals.				
Action		Outcome	Responsible Officer (Supported by)	Date
1.1	Finalise export/Input reports and process to ensure Council Tax information is efficiently transferred to the Empty Homes Module and populate this system with current empty homes.	Initial population of the new empty homes Module in the Environmental Health system.	Empty Homes Officer, Licensing & Business Support Officer	30/6/10
1.2	Update the Empty Homes module at least twice each year with information from Council Tax.	Regularly updated information.	Empty Homes Officer, Licensing & Business Support Officer	Ongoing

Review Comments

Despite setbacks the import of information from Academy into M3 has now been resolved with a monthly report from Academy input to M3 generating new worksheets and allowing properties no longer recorded as empty to be identified.

The impending change of systems within Environmental Health means that this work needs to be repeated to ensure the same facility is available in the new system

Proposed Objective

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Action		Outcome(s)	Responsible Officer (Supported by)	Date
1.1	Work to develop processes and formats to support empty homes work in Uniform (New Environmental Health System)	Process to auto input information from Academy (Council Tax) to Uniform. Uniform customised to support Empty Homes Work	Empty Homes Officer, (Empty Homes Assistant, Uniform Project Officer, IT, Revenues Systems Support)	July 2016

Essential Reference Paper “B”

1.2	Develop process and systems to allow Councillors to receive information on empty properties in their wards	Ward lists can be prepared for interested Councillors	Empty Homes Officer, (Uniform Project Officer)	Jan 2017
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Objective 2 – Maintain effective partnership working within the Council and with external partners. Effectively using Council resources in identification and investigation of empty homes, and in prioritising for action if required. Working with external partners to support empty homes activities.				
Action		Outcome (Comments)	Responsible Officer (Supported by)	Date
2.1	Discuss priority properties with officers from other service areas developing joint action plans where appropriate.	Agreed plans of action to progress specific properties.	Empty Homes Officer	Ongoing
2.2	Develop process for sharing of information to allow targeting of action on areas of high housing demand.	Appropriate targets for action on empty properties in areas of high housing demand.	Empty Homes Officer, Housing Strategy and Policy Officer, Housing Development Officer	31/12/10

Review Comments

Good relationships established with individuals in some departments. Individual properties worked on in an ad hoc basis.

As the total district has high demand for housing 2.2 has not proved an effective objective. In future it is planned that the Housing Development Officer will be involved in the annual prioritization exercise

Proposed Objective

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Action		Outcome (Comments)	Responsible Officer (Supported by)	Date
2.1	Involve other departments in annual prioritisation exercise and mid year reviews (including Planning, Building Control, Council Tax, Housing, Estates)	Manageable list of targeted properties far action each year	Empty Homes Officer, (representatives from other departments)	Feb each year

Essential Reference Paper “B”

2.2	Identify and build relationships with external partners developing specific projects where appropriate. (eg Fire, Police, Herts County Council, RSL’s)	Key Contacts identified and discussions held with 3 external organisations	Empty Homes Officer,	July 2017
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Objective 3 - Raise the awareness of empty homes in East Herts and encourage action to bring them back into use. Effectively publicising the opportunities there are to help bring empty properties back into use for the owners and for those affected by an empty property in their locality. Encourage owners to take up the opportunities.				
Action		Outcome (Comments)	Responsible Officer (Supported by)	Date
3.1	Maintain empty homes web pages, review pages and links at least annually.	Access for members of the public to understand East Herts approach and report empty properties.	Empty Homes Officer (web officer)	Ongoing
3.2	Provide annual newsletters to the owners of empty homes with current news and information to further encourage action.	Provide information to owners and continue to encourage reuse.	Empty Homes Officer	Annually
3.3	Publicise empty homes activities through internal and local press.	Increased awareness of the empty homes issues and activity in East Herts.	Empty Homes Officer, Communications	Ongoing

Review Comments

Web pages maintained annually but no further development achieved.

Newsletters not sent due to work load and issues with the accuracy of information on database. In future communication to existing known empty homes owners can be directed through letters at least annually after the prioritisation process.

Some publicity achieved including a small feature in local press

Proposed Objective

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Action		Outcome (Comments)	Responsible Officer (Supported by)	Date

Essential Reference Paper “B”

3.1	Refresh empty homes web site to include simple suite of web forms to allow information to be received	Improved information including PLACE scheme. Contact made by owners and complainants through webforms	Empty Homes Assistant, (Empty Homes Officer, web team)	Ongoing
3.3	Publicise empty homes activities through internal and local press. Including publicity of enforcement action.	Increased awareness of the empty homes issues and activity in East Herts.	Empty Homes Assistant, (Communications)	Ongoing

Objective 4 – Enhance the character of the local community through improvement and reuse of empty homes. Prioritise for action those empty homes that are problems in their local neighbourhoods and those that could alleviate particular housing need.				
Action		Outcome (Comments)	Responsible Officer (Supported by)	Date
4.1	Risk assess all properties that receive complaints and produce a prioritised list for action.	Action targeted on problematic empty properties.	Empty Homes Officer	Ongoing
4.2	Identify those properties known to have been empty for the longest time and prioritise for investigation.	Longest term empty properties investigated and additional problematic empties identified.	Empty Homes Officer	Ongoing

Review Comments

Properties with complaints have been visited and risk assessed however, this has not helped with prioritisation due to the large number of long term empty properties with no assessment

Proposed Objective

This objective will be removed with prioritisation forming a central part of the revised approach

Essential Reference Paper “B”

Objective 5 – Take enforcement action where appropriate and where resources permit. Where a property is prioritised for action and the owner refuses to bring the property into use, undertake the most appropriate enforcement action for that situation.				
Action		Outcome (Comments)	Responsible Officer (Supported by)	Date
5.1	Develop procedure to be followed for Enforced Sale.	Documented procedure available to allow correct and consistent processes to be followed.	Empty Homes Officer	31/3/11
5.2	Initiate appropriate enforcement action on at least one property per year.	Bring empty property back into use and maintain a credible threat of enforcement action.	Empty Homes Officer	Ongoing

Review Comments

Writing of specific procedures delayed due to changes and potential changes in legislation and changing priorities giving CPO procedure priority over enforced sale. CPO Procedure now being completed as work on initial CPO progresses

Enforcement action limited by resource availability and through owners taking action once threatened with enforcement.

Proposed Objective

Objective 4 – Take enforcement action where appropriate and where resources permit. Where a property is prioritised for action and the owner refuses to bring the property into use, undertake the most appropriate enforcement action for that situation.				
Action		Outcome (Comments)	Responsible Officer (Supported by)	Date
5.1	Develop procedures for Empty Homes enforcement to include CPO, EDMO and Enforced Sale.	Documented procedures to allow consistent processes to be followed.	Empty Homes Officer	Jan 2018
5.2	Initiate appropriate enforcement action on at least two properties per year. (With additional resources this could be increased to 4 per year)	Bring empty property back into use and maintain a credible threat of enforcement action.	Empty Homes Officer	Ongoing

<p>Objective 6 – Develop opportunities to bring back homes in partnership with Registered Social Landlords where this supports the overall housing strategy. Develop general schemes with partner RSL's which can be offered to the owners of empty homes. Work with RSL's on individual cases where this could provide the most effective use of the property.</p>				
Action		Outcome (Comments)	Responsible Officer (Supported by)	Date
6.1	Develop existing schemes as necessary to maximise benefit.	Support for bringing empty homes into use.	Empty Homes Officer	Ongoing
6.2	Aim to bring at least two properties back into use each year through partnership activity.	Empty property brought back into use and available for Housing Options Clients.	Empty Homes Officer	Ongoing

Review Comments

Further changes to the PLACE Scheme has allowed the scheme to include the offer of grants and loans and have been formalised in the new PLACE Consortium Agreement however currently members are not able to offer grants pending a decision to continue with this part of the offer and if so there will be the need to undertake a procurement process to engage (or reengage a partner).

There is growing interest in the PLACE loans although none have yet progressed to approval in East Herts

Proposed Objective

This objective will not be continued although through objective 2 we will continue to take opportunities to work with other partners and we will continue as a member of the PLACE consortium seeking further developments in the scheme as appropriate to meet our housing needs