



North Devon Council

Report Date: Strategy & resources Committee on 6 June 2022

Topic: Empty Homes Project

Report by: Senior Enforcement Officer

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Empty Homes Project is one of a suite of projects that fall under the umbrella of North Devon Council's Housing and Community Safety Programme, developed to identify the key housing priorities for the Council and measures required to deliver them.
- 1.2. The project is a key action within the programme along with a commitment to tackle long-term empty properties, adopting a new approach, which also complements our Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. To approve the adoption of the draft Empty Homes Strategy.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. To increase the housing supply
- 3.2. To reduce the demand for temporary accommodation
- 3.3. Tackle empty property nuisance issues
- 3.4. To improve housing standards

4. REPORT

- 4.1. Empty homes are a wasted resource, they can lead to complaints from neighbours and be expensive for their owners to maintain and insure. Bringing an empty property back into use not only relieves the stress of worrying about maintaining the property, it also has a number of other benefits including:
 - 4.1.1. increasing the provision of much needed homes
 - 4.1.2. generating additional income for the owner
 - 4.1.3. contributing to the regeneration of an area
 - 4.1.4. increasing spend in the local economy
 - 4.1.5. potentially increasing the market value of surrounding properties
 - 4.1.6. reducing the risk of crime and anti-social behaviour at the property
 - 4.1.7. reducing the need to build new homes in the area
- 4.2. The draft empty homes strategy aims to reduce the number of long-term empty homes in North Devon, tackle empty property nuisance issues, increase housing supply and reduce the demand for temporary accommodation.
- 4.3. The strategy identifies four strategic priorities which are:

- 4.3.1. Provide information, advice, help and support through opportunities and incentives to owners of empty properties
- 4.3.2. Proactively engage and work with owners of long term empty properties
- 4.3.3. Improve our neighbourhoods by targeting empty properties that have become the focus of anti-social behaviour and/or neglect
- 4.3.4. Develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders.
- 4.4. The strategy brings together a range of opportunities and incentives to encourage owners of empty homes to bring their properties back into use.
- 4.5. Council tax data will be used to identify long-term empty homes.
- 4.6. Interventions will be prioritised to target empty homes that may be suitable for temporary accommodation. Collaboration with the Housing team will be a crucial element of this work. We aim to reduce the demand for temporary accommodation, as well as the cost of expensive B&B / hotel use.
- 4.7. Nuisance empty properties will be targeted to improve neighbourhoods. This action may deter and prevent further nuisance and reduce negative impacts on where people live.
- 4.8. The strategy consolidates (for the first time) a wide range of legislative powers available to the Council across different regulatory services.
- 4.9. The strategy aims to develop positive partnership with key stakeholders to promote and support efforts to reduce the number of empty homes and the impact empty homes has on people and their environment.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. An empty homes case management module has already been procured.
- 5.2. Apart from officer resource, no significant additional resource is anticipated.

6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. Please detail if there are/are not any equalities implications anticipated as a result of this report. If so, please complete the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Summary form available on Insite and email to the Corporate and Community Services Team at equality@northdevon.gov.uk.
 - 6.1.1. None

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

- 7.1. Potential improvements in energy efficiency from increased housing standards may impact positively on the environment as well as tackling nuisance empty homes that adversely affect people and their environment.

8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

8.1. What impact, positive or negative, does the subject of this report have on:

8.1.1. The commercialisation agenda:

8.1.1.1. Possible opportunity to purchase empty homes for temporary accommodation which will reduce demand and cost of B&B/hotel use

8.1.2. Improving customer focus and/or

8.1.2.1. Interventions will be prioritised to target those empty homes where there is an acute need for temporary accommodation by collaborating with the Housing team

8.1.2.2. Empty homes resulting in a nuisance to people and the environment will also be targeted

8.1.3. Regeneration or economic development

8.1.3.1. Part of the Council's response to tackle the housing crisis

8.1.3.2. Improvement in housing standards

8.1.3.3. Opportunity to target empty commercial properties that may be suitable for use as dwellings

9. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

9.1. Article of Part 3 Annexe 1 paragraph:

9.1.1. Strategy & Resources Committee

9.1.2. The adoption of the Empty Homes Strategy will contribute to the Council's Housing & Community Safety Programme, developed to identify key housing priorities for Council.

9.2. Referred or delegated power?

9.2.1. Delegated power

10. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: (The background papers are available for inspection and kept by the author of the report).

N/A

12. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers: Fred Shelton, Senior Enforcement Officer.