

REPORT TO CABINET

Open		Would any decisions proposed :		
Any especially affected Wards	Discretionary / Operational	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide	NO	
		Need to be recommendations to Council	YES	
		Is it a Key Decision	NO	
Lead Member – Cllr Adrian Lawrence		Other Cabinet Members consulted:		
E-mail: : Adrian.lawrence@west-norfolk.gov.uk		Other Members consulted:		
Lead Officer: Sheila Farley E-mail: sheila.farley@west-norfolk.gov.uk Direct Dial: 01553 616714		Other Officers consulted: Ray Harding, Duncan Hall, Lorraine Gore, Jo Stanton		
Financial Implications NO	Policy/Personnel Implications NO	Statutory Implications NO	Equal Impact Assessment NO	Risk Management Implications NO

Date of meeting: 27 June 2017

LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

Summary This Strategy outlines the Borough Council's approach in relation to long term empty homes

Recommendation

Cabinet is requested to:

1. Approve the Long Term Empty Homes Strategy as set out in Appendix A
2. Delegate authority to make minor amendments to the Strategy to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder responsible for housing

Reason for Decision

To ensure that appropriate advice, assistance and action is taken in relation to long term empty homes

Background

The Council adopted a Long Term Empty Homes Strategy in 2013 and this needs to be reviewed and updated.

This report brings forward an updated Strategy which reviews progress in the last 3 years and sets out the Council's approach in the future.

Most empty homes are short term and part of the normal housing market e.g. whilst being renovated, sold or relet.

The Council's focus is on homes empty for more than 6 months. The number of long term empty homes has reduced from 1026 in 2013 to 846 in January 2017. More details on definitions and statistics can be found in the draft Long Term Empty Homes Strategy which is attached as Appendix A.

There is a monthly review of numbers and trends and letters are sent to owners when homes show as empty for 6 months.

Homes empty and unfurnished for more than 24 months are subject to 150% council tax. In 2017/18, council tax will be levied for empty/unfurnished homes from the second month they are empty (approved by Council in January 2017).

A private sector leasing scheme with Freebridge Community Housing created 40 new social homes from empty properties. There is no longer specific funding for such a scheme but individual cases are reviewed in appropriate cases to see if they can be brought back into use as social housing.

The revised Long Term Empty Homes Strategy proposes the current priorities are retained:

1. Gain a greater understanding of why homes are empty
2. Raise awareness of empty homes
3. Adopt a systematic approach
4. Develop initiatives to bring empty homes back into use

Within these priorities it is additionally proposed to

- Lobby for changes to council tax regulations to enable an additional premium at 12 months
- Explore initiatives to bring empty homes into use including consideration of funding a scheme to bring low cost long term empty homes into use to meet housing needs where acquisition and/or remediation costs are not prohibitive

Enforcement is considered where appropriate and action will be considered if a property is dangerous or having a significant impact on neighbours or communities.

Policy Implications

The Long Term Empty Homes Strategy, if adopted, will form the Council's Policy on the matter.

Financial Implications

There are no specific financial impacts based on this report. The potential to charge an additional premium for council tax at 12 months and to bring forward a funded scheme to bring empty homes back into use would have financial implications. These would be considered when specific regulations or schemes are considered.

Personnel Implications

Work as detailed within the Long Term Empty Homes Strategy will be contained within existing staffing resources.

Statutory Considerations

N/A

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(Pre screening report template attached)

N/A

Risk Management Implications

N/A

Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

Background Papers

N/A



Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment

Name of policy/service/function	Long Term Empty Homes Strategy – impacts across services but Housing Services co-ordinate and lead on the Strategy				
Is this a new or existing policy/ service/function?	Update of Existing				
Brief summary/description of the main aims of the policy/service/function being screened. Please state if this policy/service rigidly constrained by statutory obligations	To ensure that appropriate advice, assistance and action is taken in relation to Long Term Empty Homes				
Question	Answer				
<p>1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups according to their different protected characteristic, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service?</p> <p>Please tick the relevant box for each group.</p> <p>NB. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group.</p>		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
	Age			X	
	Disability			X	
	Gender			X	
	Gender Re-assignment			X	
	Marriage/civil partnership			X	
	Pregnancy & maternity			X	
	Race			X	
	Religion or belief			X	
	Sexual orientation			X	
	Other (eg low income)			X	
Question	Answer	Comments			
2. Is the proposed policy/service likely to affect relations between certain equality communities or to damage relations between the equality communities and the Council, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular community or denying opportunities to another?	No				
3. Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?	No				
4. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?	No				
<p>5. Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions? If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section</p>	N/A	Actions:			
		Actions agreed by EWG member: Jo Stanton 17/02/2017...			
Assessment completed by: Name					
Job title	Date				

Please Note: If there are any positive or negative impacts identified in question 1, or there any 'yes' responses to questions 2 – 4 a full impact assessment will be required.