

HOMES PDG
13 MARCH 2018

UPDATE ON EMPTY HOMES

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer: Simon Newcombe, Public Health and Regulatory Services Group Manager

Reason for Report: To provide an update on the progress of the Empty Homes Plan.

RECOMMENDATION: To note the contents of this report.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The empty homes activity links directly to the aspirations of the Corporate Plan. In particular, Economy - Improving and regenerating our town centres by intervening in empty homes, and ensuring that flats over shops are safe for occupation; and Homes – Facilitating the housing growth that Mid Devon needs, including affordable homes by bringing empty homes back into use.

There is a specific target within the Corporate Plan to bring 15 properties back into use each year.

Financial Implications: There is a capital budget in place to support the empty homes activity which can be used to support more serious enforcement interventions such as compulsory purchase. This budget has not been required during 2017/18 to date, nonetheless it remains available and interventions of this nature may be required in the future where there is a lack of engagement from property owners. Capital outlaid for this reason, and also where urgent works in default are required to improve property conditions, can be recovered.

There is revenue income available to the Council generated from the New Homes Bonus (NHB). All properties bought back into use may qualify for the NHB and are included in our annual out-turn figures.

Bringing empty properties back into use therefore makes a positive net financial contribution to the Council's revenue budget in addition to the wider beneficial social, housing and regeneration impacts.

Legal Implications: In those cases where it is appropriate to take formal action the relevant legislation will be followed.

Risk Assessment: The risks associated with this activity are low. If the empty homes activity was not undertaken some properties would continue to come back into use naturally but the numbers would reduce and some long-term empty properties impacting upon the local community may not be tackled and continue to cause problems.

Equality Impact Assessment: This activity relates to empty properties and any action taken is based on the circumstances of the property therefore there are no adverse impacts on individuals with protected characteristics.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an update on empty homes activity for 2017/18. This follows a project briefing and subsequent update to the PDG during 2017 which focussed on the delivery of phase-one of the plan. From these previous reports members will therefore be aware of the Empty Homes Plan for 2016-18.
- 1.2 The plan originally set out to achieve a minimum of bringing 15 empty properties back into use each year, as set out in the Corporate Plan.
- 1.3 Following the implementation of the plan, the empty homes project has been significantly more successful, with over 140 properties bought back into use so far.
- 1.4 In accordance with the second phase of the plan, over the course 2017/18 the team have been concentrating on:
 - Procuring a property auction partner to help empty home owners to sell their properties through auction and to assist us in selling properties where enforced sale procedures have been used;
 - Visiting the 6 months to 2 years empty properties on an area by area basis;
 - Prioritising the empty properties for action based on their impact on the local community and/or potential re-use.

2.0 Progress

- 2.1 Following a procurement exercise, we have entered into a property auction agreement with Clive Emson Auctioneers. This gives owners of empty properties access to professional valuation and guidance in addition to competitive auction rates in order to support the sale of properties.
- 2.2 567 properties have been inspected during 2017/18 and 700 since the beginning of the plan.
- 2.3 111 have been brought back into use so far this year (2017/18). This compares to 33 in 2016/17.
- 2.4 20 have been identified as requiring further intervention.

3.0 **Next Steps**

- 3.1 Writing to all the empty home owners with details of the property auction agreement and details of the Wessex home improvement loan scheme.
- 3.2 Making additional direct contact with owners of high priority properties with a view to taking further action.
- 3.3 Reviewing and updating the Empty Homes Plan for the next two years and increasing our target to 72 properties each year (6 per month). This is a significantly increased target and whilst it is below the out-turn for the current year, it reflects the fact that increased interventions will be required in the future as we tackle the more problematic properties and nonetheless mirrors the overall out-turn to date since the plan was implemented.

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Circulation of the Report:

Members of the Homes Policy Development Group
Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing (Cllr Ray Stanley)
Director of Operations
Legal Services
Audit
Leadership Team

List of Background Papers:

Empty Homes Plan 2016-18