



<b>Service Delivery Committee</b>	<b>Tuesday, 19 January 2016</b>	<b>Matter for Information and Decision</b>
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**Title:** **Empty Homes Strategy and Corporate Enforcement Update**

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**a. Empty Homes Strategy**

**a.1. Introduction**

This part of the report is to provide an update to the Service Delivery Committee on progress in tackling empty homes within the Borough.

**a.2. Recommendations**

Members are asked to note this part of the report and to approve the following actions contained within the report.

**a.3. Information**

There have been several reports in the past regarding empty homes and action has been taken to address the issue but so far with limited success.

Currently there are 132 properties which have been empty between 6 months and 2 years and a further 35 properties that have been empty for more than 2 years.

During 2012 a number of properties were identified as needing renovation works to make them habitable. The owners were contacted and offered financial assistance towards the cost of the works. This was on the basis of a 50% grant unfortunately none of the offers of financial assistance was taken up, the main stumbling block being the requirement for the owners to find the other 50% of the costs.

The Private Sector Housing Renewals Policy (June 2014) states that the Council can offer up to 50% grant to a maximum of between £10-£30K dependent on the size of the property. There is however the discretion to offer up to 100% of the costs of the works and for the scheme to have any chance of success it is recommended that on a case by case basis a grant of up to 100% be offered. In return the Council would expect 5 year nomination rights in respect of new tenants. Alternatively the owner of the property can lease the property to the Council under the Private Sector Leasing Scheme whereby the Council would manage the property for the period of the lease.

There is no specific budget for the provision of financial assistance for empty homes and applications will be dealt with on a case by case basis according to merit and value for money.

During the autumn of 2015 the owners of 31 long term empty properties were contacted to ascertain their intentions with regard to future occupation. In addition the owners were made aware that the Council could provide financial assistance to

bring the properties back in to use. They were also informed that the Council has legal powers to take over the property by way of compulsory purchase and enforced sale of properties.

To date we have received 9 responses the details of which are as follows:

- 1 property has been renovated and is up for sale;
- 4 properties are undergoing renovation works;
- 1 property is awaiting listed building consent;
- 2 properties are now occupied; and
- 1 property awaiting possible redevelopment.

In addition 2 of the above owners have enquired about possible financial assistance. These enquiries are currently being followed up.

There are a range of measures available to the Council to tackle the problem of empty homes and in cases where the property owners do not voluntarily renovate the property it is recommended that delegated authority be given to officers to take the appropriate action including the following:

- Enforced sales procedure;
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders under the Housing Act 2004;
- Section 215 Town and Country Planning Act 1990; and
- Compulsory Purchase Orders.

## **b. Corporate Enforcement Update**

### **b.1. Introduction**

This part of the report is to provide an update to the Service Delivery Committee on Corporate Enforcement matters.

### **b.2. Recommendations**

Members are asked to note this part of the report.

### **b.3. Information**

**b.3.1. Benefit Prosecutions** - None heard in the last quarter and 4 pending.

**b.3.2. Environmental Health** - Officers have in recent weeks utilised Private Sector Housing powers to tackle unsafe housing conditions, where a young family are living. Contractors were instructed to undertake significant electrical rewiring in a property to provide heat and light. The costs will be recharged to the private landlord.

**b.3.3. Food Safety Inspections** – With the exception of 13 Category E premises (very low risk premises) the inspections are now up to date.

**b.3.4. Graffiti** – The public toilets at Aylestone Lane were a hotspot during the school holidays. Another area at Baldwin Avenue, bordering Leicester City, has also been a recent hotspot but working in partnership with Leicester City Council, has reduced clean-up costs.

**b.3.5. Use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000(RIPA) to carry out covert surveillance for enforcement purposes** - The 3 yearly inspection by the Information Commissioner Office was carried out on 11 December. The verbal feedback given was the policies and procedures the Council has in place is satisfactory with some minor suggestions for inclusion. The Council has not utilised its powers under RIPA in the past 3 years. Quarterly reports on use of RIPA will be included in further Corporate Enforcement updates.

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<b>Implications</b>	
Health	Empty properties may attract vermin and the threat of disease and harmful waste products. CR4 - Reputational risk. CR5 - A good quality of life for residents.
Environment	Land may become contaminated. Empty properties may blight an area. CR4 - Reputational risk. CR5 - A good quality of life for residents.
Community Safety	Empty Homes may attract anti social behaviour. CR5 - A good quality of life for residents.
Financial	CR1 - Decreasing financial resources.
Legal	CR6 - Complying with relevant legislation.
Equalities	No significant implications.