

Bolsover District Council

Executive

4th January 2015

Joint Empty Property Strategy

Report of Councillor John Ritchie (Cabinet Member for Housing and I.T, Bolsover District Council) and Councillor Mary Dooley (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Plan, HR and Leisure, Bolsover District Council)

This report is public

Purpose of the Report

- This report provides Executive with the details of the proposed Joint Empty Property Strategy for Bolsover and North East Derbyshire District Councils

1 Report Details

- 1.1 In July 2014 Cabinet approved the appointment of a Joint Empty Properties Officer for North East Derbyshire District Council and Bolsover District Council.
- 1.2 The Empty Property Officer was recruited into post in March 2015
- 1.3 The primary functions of the Empty Properties Officer are to:
 - Identify, develop and implement measures to bring empty properties back into use to help meet the housing needs of the District's residents
 - Support the development and delivery of an Empty Homes Strategy for the Councils which will contribute to the Growth Strategies in increasing the number of housing units.
 - To monitor the Council's empty properties data and ensure that New Homes Bonus is maximised for both Councils.
- 1.4 As at March 2015 there were over 1200 long term empty properties spread across both districts. Over 500 of these have been empty for over 2 years.
- 1.5 These properties represent a wasted resource and are the main focus of the Empty Property Strategy
- 1.6 The strategy ties together the three main strands of Empty Property work, i) Advice, ii) Assistance and iii) Enforcement, and presents a framework for co-ordinated work moving forward in the shape of the Empty Property Action Plan.
- 1.7 The strategy details measures under each of the strands of Empty Property work which, once implemented, will help to realise a reduction of long term empty properties and an increase in New Homes Bonus realised.

2 Conclusions and Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 To approve the Empty Property Strategy for adoption by Bolsover District Council and North East Derbyshire District Council.
- 2.2 This will enable the Councils to implement a raft of measures to reduce the number of long term empty properties resulting in additional housing units, additional New Homes Bonus and greater community sustainability which contribute to the delivery of each Council's Growth Strategy.

3 Consultation and Equality Impact

- 3.1 Comprehensive consultation has taken place over the development of the strategy with colleagues in Legal, Revenues, Environmental Health and Planning
- 3.2 Members have been consulted at both Councils through North East Derbyshire's Leadership team and Bolsover District Councils Cabinet Process
- 3.3 Senior officers have been consulted at the Strategic Alliance Management Team.
- 3.4 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out as part of the development process of the strategy, a copy of which is included with this report.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 The Councils have previously identified a need for an Empty Property Officer to deliver on and co-ordinate all the elements of empty property related work with the ultimate aim of reducing numbers of long term empty properties in both districts.
- 4.2 A key element of the Empty Property Officers work is the development and implication of a Joint Empty Property Strategy to co-ordinate all streams of empty property work.
- 4.3 Not implementing the Joint Empty Property Strategy will affect the amount of New Homes Bonus the Councils receive
- 4.4 Not implementing the Joint Empty Property Strategy will seriously impact upon the Councils ability to reduce the number of long term empty properties within the districts and their ability to deal effectively with the problems associated with them.

5 Implications

5.1 Finance and Risk Implications

Implementing the Joint Empty Property Strategy will result in sustained positive financial benefits to the Councils over the long term. Reducing the number of long term empty properties results in an increase in New Homes Bonus, the value of which equates to the annual Council Tax charge for each property returned to use, for a period of six years.

Financial and risk analysis will be completed prior to implementation of each measure on the Empty Property Action Plan contained within the Strategy. Consideration of each analysis will determine whether the proposed measure presents an acceptable level of financial and operational risk on which to proceed with implementation.

5.2 **Legal Implications including Data Protection**

A number of the measures contained within the Joint Empty Property Strategy will require input from the legal team. These are primarily operational matters pertaining to particular statutes involved in empty property enforcement work. The legal team have identified a representative to work with the Empty Property Steering Group to ensure the Councils empty property work follows correct legal procedures and guidance at all times.

Specific information relating to empty properties is held in a secure folder on the Councils computer network. Access is restricted to the Empty Property Officer and their immediate line management. All information pertaining to empty property work is managed in line with the Data Protection Act.

5.3 **Human Resources Implications**

Delivery of the measures in the action plan detailed within the Joint Empty Property Strategy will be co-ordinated by the Empty Property Officer currently in situ. Individual measures which require officer input from other teams and departments within both Councils will be managed on a case by case basis through the Empty Property Steering Group.

6 **Recommendations**

6.1 That members approve the Joint Empty Property Strategy.

7 **Decision Information**

Is the decision a Key Decision? (A Key Decision is one which results in income or expenditure to the Council of £50,000 or more or which has a significant impact on two or more District wards)	Yes
District Wards Affected	All
Links to Corporate Plan priorities or Policy Framework	Unlocking our growth potential – “Enabling Housing Growth”

8 **Document Information**

Appendix No	Title
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A B C	Draft Joint Empty Property Strategy Equality Impact Assessment LGA Guide on Empty Homes
Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet (NEDDC) or Executive (BDC) you must provide copies of the background papers)	
Equality Impact Assessment for the Empty Property Strategy Local Government Association – Empty Homes (Council action to tackle Empty Homes)	
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Report Reference –