

7 December 2016

Environment & Housing Management Committee

Empty Homes

Report of: *Angela Williams, Interim Head of Housing*

Wards Affected: *All*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council does not have a current Empty Homes policy or inter-service working practice in relation to privately-owned vacant properties within the Borough.
- 1.2 Legislation allows for Councils to take a number of approaches in relation to enabling those vacant properties back into usage on the housing market. Historically Local Authorities rarely made full use of these powers, due to cost and legal complexity.
- 1.3 Vacant properties in the Borough are depriving the community of suitable accommodation and are having a detrimental impact on the areas in which they are situated.
- 1.4 It is proposed that given the current housing crisis and as a reflection of the Council's determination to consider the viability and desirability of all prevention tools that an internal scoping exercise is held.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Officers are instructed to report to the Committee outlining the powers and measures that can be taken to effectively reduce the number of empty homes in the Borough.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 It is estimated that there are over 700 empty homes within the Borough (derived from vacant Council tax declarations). Some of these properties have remained vacant for long periods of time and have in some cases

deteriorated, causing concern to residents and enforcement action being taken to secure or improve the property and land.

- 3.3 The current housing position within the Borough is critical; solutions particularly in relation to homelessness need to be found. Whilst it is not anticipated that options relating to empty homes will solve the issue, they need to be investigated as a potential homelessness prevention tool.
- 3.4 The anticipated Homelessness Reduction Bill 2016-17 is likely to place further prevention duties on the Council. Investigating the potential of utilising empty homes and/or working in greater partnership with owners will support this core function.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 Currently there is no corporate strategic vision in relation to empty homes. It is proposed that Housing Services and Environmental Health should be tasked to investigate the viability of an Empty Homes Strategy.
- 4.2 The initial focus will be to:
- Review current practices.
 - Investigate the level of empty homes within the Borough.
 - Produce a scoping document outlining the issues; options and implications on resource to deliver successful outcomes
- 4.3 The proposed scoping document will allow the Council to:
- Focus on housing solutions within the Borough
 - Engage with owners of empty/derelict properties to improve the Borough in environmental terms.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

To further structure the Council's approach to housing, in particular as relevant to the Housing Strategy and Local Plan.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 No consultation required at this stage.

7. References to Corporate Plan

- 7.1 The Council's Corporate Plan aims to:

- Find new ways of working with partners and embrace support of communities.
- To deliver safe and comfortable homes which are efficient and sustainable
- Encourage thriving and engaged communities
- Develop effective partnership arrangements with key agencies
- Manage our stock to recognise the limited resources available and supporting those in greatest need.
- Review the future delivery of housing services to provide the best outcomes for Brentwood residents.

7.2 The strategic investigation of empty homes directly feeds into each of the aims listed above and will seek to provide further tools to achieve those aims.

8. Implications

Financial Implications

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8.1 Any expenditure will be contained within the current budget.

Legal Implications

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There are no specific legal implications from the content of this particular report.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

8.1 None.

9. Background Papers (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

9.1 None.

10. Appendices to this report

None

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