

Report for Housing Scrutiny Commission

Commission meeting: 4th. July 2016

Empty Homes 2016

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Andy Connelly

Lead director: Chris Burgin



City Mayor

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: all
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- Report version number: V.2

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report has been prepared in response to a Housing Scrutiny Commission request for the following information:
- 1.2 A general update on where we are in dealing with private sector empty homes city wide.
- 1.3 An update on the recruitment of an additional 4 temporary Empty Homes Officers that were agreed as a result of a successful bid to the Transformational Fund.
- 1.4 A city wide map of all long term empty homes.
- 1.5 To review the point at which the current strategy starts, it is currently when a property has been empty for 18 months.
- 1.6 To review the 20 stage process that is used to return empty homes back into use.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the content of the report be noted, with regards to the current situation, the city wide map and the recruitment of the additional Empty Homes Officers.
- 2.2 The current strategy is reviewed in 12 months' time when the full effects of the additional Empty Homes Officers has been reviewed.
- 2.3 To continue with the current 20 Stage process.

3. Supporting information including options considered:

- 3.1 The work of the Empty Homes Team has been of particular interest to the Housing Scrutiny Commission for some time now. It is clear that there is a desire to assist officers in reducing the number of empty homes which in turn will reduce the impact these houses have on their neighbourhoods and return much needed housing to the rental or private sale market.
- 3.2 Housing Scrutiny Commission have asked for an overview of current situation relating to the work the Empty Homes Team does:

The current situation:

- 3.3 There are currently a total of 4425 empty homes city wide.(31st. May 2016)
- 3.4 When an empty home is bought back into use the council receive a New Homes Bonus from the Government equal to 6 years council tax.
- 3.5 Private sector empty homes are dealt with as follows:
- After a house has been empty for 6 months a letter is generated by council tax and the owner asked to confirm the properties current status. This is just the general churn of properties that are empty due to a variety of reasons, being sold, inherited etc.
 - The Housing Division have an Empty Homes Strategy that target homes that have been empty for longer than 18 months. The current total is 1097
 - A 20 stage process is followed which is centred on contacting the home owner and assisting them to bring the property into use themselves by offering support and advice. The majority of empty homes are bought back into use by stage 1a of the procedure which is monitoring after the Stage 1 letter has been sent.
 - If a home cannot be bought back into use with the consent of the owners then the Housing Division will apply for a compulsory purchase order (CPO).

Summary of Empty Properties as at 31st May 2016:

Citywide Empty Properties	4425
Vacant 18 months or more	1097
Active Caseload includes 124 (Awaiting Allocation) + 250 Active Caseload	374
Properties brought back into use since April 2004	2479

Recruitment of Additional Empty Homes Officers:

- 3.6 In 2015 a bid was submitted to the Transitional Fund to increase the number of Empty Homes Officers, on a temporary basis, to deal with the backlog of properties.
- 3.7 An existing part time Empty Homes Officers has increase their hours to full time and we have interviewed 7 candidates to fill the remaining 3.5 posts.
- 3.8 These posts are temporary for 3 years.

City wide map.

- 3.9 See Appendix A.

Reviewing the point at which the strategy starts.

- 3.10 Bringing forward the point at which an empty home becomes a part of an officer caseload is obvious and something that we will work towards.

Reviewing the 20 stage process:

- 3.11 In April 2004 the Empty Homes Team was set up. A 13-stage process was prepared in consultation with legal services.
- 3.12 As some empty properties continued to progress through to Stage 13, in April 2005 the process evolved into its current version of 20 stages
- 3.13 The empty homes team now operate a robust 20-stage process which mirrors the legal process and is still the same as it was then.
- 3.14 This 20-stage process has proved extremely successful in bringing empty properties back into use in a timely manner. There are 23% of properties which reach Stage 4-20. These are either resolved or simultaneously being prepared to go to public inquiry and brought back into use by using CPO.
- 3.15 The strategy contributes towards Priority 11 of Leicester's Economic Action Plan 2012-2020, Growing City: "unlocking development opportunities to meet housing and business needs".

4. Details of Scrutiny

Report request by HSC

5. Financial, legal and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

None sought for information only

5.2 Legal implications

None sought

5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

None sought

5.4 Equalities Implications

None sought

5.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

n/a

6. Background information and other papers:

7. Summary of appendices:

Appendix A , City wide map of private sector empty homes.

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

9. Is this a “key decision”?

No

All privately owned empty homes (not inc second homes)
18 months plus by duration

