

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE
4 FEBRUARY 2014**

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2014-17

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To recommend the adoption of the Empty Homes Strategy 2014-17 which sets out how the Council will deal with privately owned empty homes within the city.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council recognises that an empty property can have a considerable negative impact upon a local community and can in some circumstances blight an area and the houses in the locality. Empty homes can often attract vandalism and anti-social behaviour which can lead to crime or an increased fear of crime. Empty homes are also a wasted housing resource at a time when there is a significant housing need in the City.
- 2.2 There has been considerable recent government focus on returning empty properties back into use. With housing demand much greater than supply, returning long-term empty properties to use is a necessity for local authorities to help meet housing need.
- 2.3 To date, the Council has achieved considerable success in returning empty homes to use through the preferred route of cooperation and assistance. The number of empty properties in Exeter is currently at the lowest it has been in the last 5 years. However, informal action does not always achieve the desired outcome and the Council recognises that the use of formal enforcement action is an important tool to achieve success.
- 2.4 The empty homes Enforcement Policy approved in March 2013 reflects a growing recognition that firmer sanctions must be in place to deal with long-term empty properties and the existence of such measures must be made clear to owners. Since the policy has been adopted and where enforcement measures have been made clear to empty property owners and in some cases threatened as a last resort it has resulted in 19 long term empty properties which have been brought back into use since April 2013.
- 2.5 The strategy has been consulted upon widely amongst other Council departments and all Members during Autumn 2013. As part of the public consultation for the draft Housing Strategy, 33% of respondents stated that bringing empty properties back into use should be the main priority of the Council's Housing Service. This strategy builds upon the work carried out by the Council over recent years and follows on from the previous Empty Homes Strategy which expires in 2014.

3.0 EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2014-17

- 3.1 The Empty Homes Strategy outlines the Council's approach to ensuring that the number of long term empty properties across the City is minimised. The

Empty Homes Strategy reflects the changes in government and Council policy in recent years.

3.2 The empty homes strategy has been developed in line with the following Corporate Plan purposes:

- Improve the environment and my neighbourhood
- Help me find somewhere suitable to live
- Keep my city safe and looking good

The five key objectives which flow through the new Strategy are:

- To maintain and improve the accuracy of empty homes data.
- To raise awareness of empty homes issues.
- To encourage empty home owners to return them back into use.
- To prioritise empty homes for enforcement action.
- To strengthen and develop new partnerships to reduce the number of long-term empty properties.

3.3 It is intended that the strategy is a working document and will change over time to reflect changes in policy and procedure. It is also supported by a detailed action plan which sets out how the Council plans to achieve its objectives.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no additional financial implications over and above the Council's current commitment towards empty homes.

5.0 RECOMMENDED

4.1 That Executive approves the Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2017

Originating Officer: Caroline Massey

**ROGER COOMBES
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR HOUSING**

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None