

Empty Homes Programme**Report to Executive**

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PORTFOLIO	Housing and the Environment
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PURPOSE

1. To invite Members to consider the option of adding additional resources to the empty homes programme to increase project outputs.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That Members approve the appointment of an Empty Homes Project Assistant.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3. To introduce additional resources into the empty homes programme to increase project outputs.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS**Introduction**

4. In August 2017 there were 2498 empty homes in the Borough, 6% of the overall stock, the average for England is 2.6% and 3.3% in the North West. Long term empty properties (those classed as being empty for six months or longer) numbered 1052. Properties empty for two years or more numbered over 400.
5. The majority of the empty homes in Burnley are within the pre 1919 terraced stock with terraced housing representing 74.6% of the overall housing stock in Burnley compared to 29.1% nationally.

Progress to date

6. Burnley Council has run an empty homes programme since 2002 which has seen 120 empty homes purchased, renovated and reoccupied. There has been an overall reduction in empty homes from 3035 in April 2005 to 2489 in August 2017.
7. In 2013 Burnley was awarded £3.5 million Government funding for the Clusters of Empty Homes Programme to tackle concentrated empty properties in three neighbourhoods across the Borough, Gannow, Queensgate and Trinity. This programme returned 223 properties back into use against a target of 175.

8. The Council have a successful empty homes leasing scheme in partnership with Calico Homes. This programme began 3 years ago to ensure that empty homes, compulsorily purchased by the council on streets that were in lower housing demand, would be brought back into use. In addition these streets tend to have an extremely high percentage of privately rented properties, often in a poorer condition with unacceptable management practices. Introducing a Registered Provider into those streets will help to improve the overall management of the housing stock within the neighbourhood.
9. To support the work of the empty homes programme neighbourhood improvement schemes have been carried out with key streets targeted for improvement. Since 2012 over 160 properties have benefited from this work in Brennand Street, Accrington Road, Branch Road and Heap Street.
10. Further to direct intervention on empty homes the Council provides incentives to owners to return their empty home back into use. There are interest free loans for accredited landlords with 60 currently completed, a Council Tax charging system to incentivise owners to return properties back into use and under certain circumstances the payment of selective licensing fees.
11. Despite this progress long term empty homes still remain a problem in the Borough. The Housing Strategy 2016 to 2021 recognises this and identifies a key priority as *"Reducing the proportion of empty homes in the Borough"*. To achieve this in April 2017 the Council committed £2.4 million to the programme aiming to bring 40 empty homes back into use each year and by 2018 to have acquired and renovated 30 problematic long term empty homes. The Local Plan requirement for the empty homes programme is that between 2016/17 to 2018/19 120 empty homes should be brought back into use.
12. Since April 2015 the Council have;
 - Acquired 29 empty homes and have a further 6 CPOs ongoing. All the properties that have been acquired are either sold or leased with just 1 currently on the open market.
 - The target of 30 properties will be exceeded
13. A compulsory purchase update report by Bond Dickenson in 2015 contained information about housing and planning act CPOs and reported that 21 of 92 CPOs made in England in 2013 were made in Burnley. The report went on to confirm that Burnley made the largest number of CPO compared with other local authorities and "...has used housing CPO powers extensively as part of its Vacant Property Initiative".

Programme Review

14. Over recent months Officers have undertaken a wholesale review of the empty homes programme focusing on two central themes,
 1. Achieving a faster turnaround when a property is identified as a problem empty.
 2. Taking more problem empty properties down the enforcement route year on year.

15. The level of the Council's current programme is based on the staff resource we have to engage with owners, landlords, contractors and residents. Following the review Officers have concluded that the most cost effective way to increase the impact of the programme is to introduce some additional staffing resource.
16. With the additional staffing resource the proposal would be to increase the number of empty homes that the Council takes direct intervention on through enforcement powers, setting a target of 20 compulsory purchase orders/enforced sales per year. In addition this proposal would also increase the number of empty homes brought back into use through other Council intervention e.g. letters, loans, incentives, setting a target of 60 properties returned in to use per year.
17. This would mean that each year the Council's Empty homes Programme would return a minimum of 80 empty properties back into use. The current target is 40 per year.
18. The additional staff resource would consist of one full time Project Assistant (grade 8) who would focus on the initial contact with the owners doing one of two things,
1. either encouraging the owner to return the property back into use,
 2. or gathering the necessary evidence to make the case for compulsory purchase/enforced sale.

This would free up the Project Officer to prepare more compulsory purchase orders and enforced sale procedures.

19. This approach is very similar to the one taken for the clusters programme where it was necessary to deal with a large amount of empty homes in a relatively short space of time through an intensive programme of liaising with owners and enforcement action.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND BUDGET PROVISION

20. A grade 8 Project Assistant would cost £32,500. The proposal recommends that this cost is capitalised and funded through the recycled receipts generated by the empty homes programme. This would avoid any burden on the Council's revenue resources.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

21. None

DETAILS OF CONSULTATION

22. None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

23. None

FURTHER INFORMATION

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