

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Executive Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	16 November 2022
<b>Subject:</b>	Draft Empty Property Strategy 2023-2025
<b>Report of:</b>	Environmental Health Manager
<b>Head of Service/Director:</b>	Head of Community Services
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Lead Member for Clean and Green Environment
<b>Number of Appendices:</b>	One

## **Executive Summary:**

Long-term empty properties can have a significant impact on the environmental quality of an area and can attract anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, long term empty properties if utilised can represent a valuable resource to meet housing demand and achieve affordable housing objectives for the borough. A number of options are available to assist local authorities in bringing long-term empty properties back into use. This report outlines those options and presents a strategy for the Council to address the problem of long-term empty properties within the borough.

## **Recommendation:**

**To APPROVE the draft Empty Property Strategy 2023-25.**

## **Financial Implications:**

Significant capital expenditure should Compulsory Purchase Orders be required in connection with the strategy

## **Legal Implications:**

There are no specific implications to this report. There will be legal implications following review of enforcement powers and in respect of any specific action taken by the Council.

## **Environmental and Sustainability Implications:**

Successful delivery of this strategy is likely to achieve sustainable environmental improvements.

## **Resource Implications (including impact on equalities):**

It is anticipated that the officer resources required to implement this strategy can be met within the existing Environmental Health Department.

## **Safeguarding Implications:**

None directly arising from this report.

**Impact on the Customer:**

None directly arising from this report.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** A long-term empty property is defined as a property that remains unoccupied for a period longer than 6 months. This definition does not include second homes unless the property has been declared to the Council, by the owner, as being a long-term empty property. Long term empty properties can be detrimental to the amenity of an area and can also attract antisocial behaviour, vandalism and arson. Furthermore, long-term empty properties represent a wasted housing resource and can undermine the ability of a local authority to deliver key strategic housing objectives. The issue of long-term empty properties is recognised at both national and local level and overlaps with the Council's strategic housing priorities relating to housing supply, affordable housing and homelessness.

The number of long-term empty properties currently on the Council's Council tax database is as follows:

<b>Time period empty</b>	<b>Number of properties</b>
6 months to 12 months	97
12 to 24 months	70
2 to 5 years	43
5 to 10 years	20
Over 10 years	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>237</b>

**2.0 LONG TERM EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY**

**2.1** A draft strategy, including a detailed action plan, to manage long-term empty properties within Tewkesbury Borough is presented in Appendix 1. The strategy is based on three overlapping elements as follows:

**PHASE 1 – PLANNING, IDENTIFICATION & PRIORITISATION**

**2.2** The aim of this phase of the strategy is to obtain accurate and reliable information on the long-term empty properties within the borough. This will include information regarding property ownership, tenure, condition and length of time unoccupied. In accordance with best practice this will allow the Council to develop a risk-based register of empty properties which will enable each property to be risk assessed, prioritised and subject to a property action plan.

- 2.3** The empty property register will be maintained by the Council's Environmental Health Team and the options that will be pursued to achieve this element of the strategy will include:
- Putting in place robust data sharing agreements to allow for effective information sharing between the Revenues Team and the Environmental Health Team.
  - Monthly reporting of new long-term empty properties by the Revenues Team to the Environmental Health Team.
  - Training for officers within the Environmental Health Team on empty property enforcement and best practice.
  - Site visits by officers to assess the condition and impact of the empty properties.
  - Updating the Council's website to enable members of the public to report empty properties.
  - Developing an empty property toolkit for enforcement officers.

## **PHASE 2 – ENGAGEMENT WITH PROPERTY OWNERS & COMMUNITY**

- 2.4** The aim of this stage of the strategy is to engage with property owners and stakeholders with the aim of securing a viable solution for long-term empty properties. The options open to the Council to achieve this stage of the strategy include:
- Writing to property owners to enquire about their intention for the property and to provide advice regarding the assistance that may be available to bring the property back into use.
  - Ensuring that the Council's website and social media platforms are fully utilised to promote empty property advice and sources of assistance to property owners.
  - Promotion of empty property advice and assistance with key stakeholders such as registered social landlords and local landlord forums.

## **PHASE 3 – PROPERTY SOLUTIONS**

- 2.5** The goal of this element of the strategy is to ensure that the Council makes effective use of its powers to deal with long-term empty properties in circumstances where the engagement approach outlined above has not achieve a satisfactory outcome. Options available to the Council at this stage of the strategy include:
- Use of statutory Empty Dwelling Management Orders.
  - Use of statutory Compulsory Purchase or enforced sale orders.
  - Property management and leasing partnerships with registered social landlords.

## **3.0 CONSULTATION**

**3.1** None.

## **4.0 ASSOCIATED RISKS**

**4.1** None.

## **5.0 MONITORING**

**5.1** Progress with the strategy will be monitored by the Head of Community Services and the Environmental Health Manager.

**6.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITIES/COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

- 6.1** Council Plan 2020-2024.  
Housing Strategy 2021 – 22.

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**Background Papers:** None.

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**Appendices:** 1. Empty Property Strategy.