

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2008 - 2009



Empty Homes Strategy 2008 – 2009

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Equal Opportunities Statement

The Council fully endorse the removal of all barriers to its services arising from ethnicity, religion, geographic location, special needs, language differences, learning difficulties, sexual orientation, gender, age or disability. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but is intended to show some of the areas where it is believed discrimination could occur. All participants shall endorse the provision of training to enhance the understanding and acceptance of diversity.

We can produce this document in other formats, such as in Braille; large print; on audiotape; CD-ROM or in other languages. You can get a copy by ringing 01388 816166 and asking for the Neighbourhood Services Department.

This document is also available in other languages, large print and audio format upon request

العربية (Arabic)

إذا أردت المعلومات بلغة أخرى أو بطريقة أخرى، نرجو أن تطلب ذلك منا.

বাংলা (Bengali)

যদি আপনি এই ডকুমেন্ট অন্য ভাষায় বা ফরমেটে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে আমাদেরকে বলুন।

(中文(繁體字)) (Cantonese)

如欲索取以另一語文印製或另一格式製作的資料，請與我們聯絡。

हिन्दी (Hindi)

यदि आपको सूचना किसी अन्य भाषा या अन्य रूप में चाहिये तो कृपया हमसे कहे

polski (Polish)

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, prosimy dać nam znać.

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ (Punjabi)

ਜੇ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ, ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਸਾਥੋਂ ਮੰਗ ਲਓ

Español (Spanish)

Póngase en contacto con nosotros si desea recibir información en otro idioma o formato.

اردو (Urdu)

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے پوچھئے۔



Data Protection Statement

Sedgefield Borough Council collects personal data, including names and addresses, in a number of different ways in order to perform its day-to-day business. We are committed to maintaining your personal information in a manner, which meets the requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998) and will take all reasonable steps to ensure that your personal data is kept secure against unauthorised access, loss, disclosure or destruction.

In order to respect your privacy, we manage personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act's eight 'Data Protection Principles', namely:

1. Personal data shall be processed fairly and lawfully.
2. Personal data shall be obtained only for one or more specified and lawful purposes, and shall not be further processed in any manner incompatible with that purpose or those purposes.
3. Personal data shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose or purposes for which they are processed.
4. Personal data shall be accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date.
5. Personal data processed for any purpose or purposes shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes.
6. Personal data shall be processed in accordance with the rights of data subjects under this Act.
7. Appropriate technical and organisational measures shall be taken against unauthorised or unlawful processing of personal data and against accidental loss or destruction of, or damage to, personal data.
8. Personal data shall not be transferred to a country or territory outside the European Economic Area unless that country or territory ensures an adequate level of protection for the rights and freedoms of data subjects in relation to the processing of personal data.

A copy of the Council's Data Protection Policy is available upon request.

1. Foreword

Sedgefield Borough Council's four key ambitions are to ensure that the Borough is prosperous, attractive and healthy with strong communities. We have adopted these ambitions for the Council and this Empty Homes Strategy will play a significant role in delivering our vision for the Borough and its residents.

The issue of vacant and neglected private sector housing is recognised by Sedgefield Borough Council as an important issue that often has a negative affect on people who live in our communities.

Dealing with the problem of long term vacant dwellings has also formed a part of the Government's wider housing strategy for England. New powers to deal with this problem were introduced in the Housing Act 2004. This will allow Councils to take over management of empty dwellings when other methods have failed, enabling them to secure occupation and proper management of privately owned homes.

The overall aim of this strategy is "to work with owners, agents and other relevant parties to reduce the number of empty private sector housing in Sedgefield Borough thereby contributing to a prosperous and attractive borough with strong and healthy communities".

Through delivery of this strategy we will: -

Raise awareness of empty homes issues in the Borough.

Ensure that accurate, relevant and up to date information on empty homes is compiled.

Use all available tools, including enforcement action, to ensure that, whenever possible, empty homes are brought back into use.



Councillor Agnes Armstrong Leader of the Council



Brian Allen
Chief Executive

Introduction

There is increasing pressure on Local Authorities to develop effective empty homes strategies and there have been proposals by the Empty Homes Agency, the Urban Taskforce, and MP David Kidney (in a Private Members Bill) to make them a statutory duty.

Empty homes are now considered to be an important strategic issue nationally, as emphasised by the Urban White Paper, which contains many of the ideas proposed by Planning Policy Guidance note 3 and the findings of the Urban Taskforce in 'Towards an Urban Renaissance.' The House of Commons Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions set up an inquiry into empty homes in August 2001.

In Sedgefield Borough an effective strategy is important due to a need to assist in the successful delivery of the Housing Market Renewal master plan in Dean Bank, Chilton West and Ferryhill Station and was an integral part of Sedgefield Borough Council's submission for the selective licensing designations, currently operating in Dean Bank and Chilton West. The strategy will also assist in the work towards the prevention of homelessness.

This is all in addition to the negative impact that many of these properties have upon the local environment and economy. A 2003 Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors study found that, on average, a property next to an empty house sells for 18% less than one that is occupied.

Key Facts

There are more than 1,000 empty homes in Sedgefield Borough; 73.5% of these are privately owned.

Over 130 of the privately owned empty homes have been vacant for more than 6 months.

This represents almost 9 long term empty homes for every homeless household in the Borough, and approximately 25,000 square metres of wasted space.

Some of these properties are derelict or in a condition of serious disrepair, attracting vandalism and crime.

Empty homes can blight a whole neighbourhood and are socially, environmentally and economically unacceptable.

An empty home can cost its owner more than £5,000 in lost income, security charges and insurance.

Long term vacant homes in the Borough represent a lost income of over £665,000 a year.

Strategic Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the Empty Homes Strategy is:

“To work with Owners, Agents and other relevant parties to reduce the number of empty private sector housing within Sedgefield Borough thereby contributing to a prosperous and attractive Borough with strong and healthy communities”.

To achieve this aim we have identified three distinct strategic objectives:

Raise awareness of empty private sector housing issues in the Borough.

Ensure that accurate, relevant and up to date information on empty private sector housing is compiled.

Use all available tools, including enforcement action, to ensure that, whenever possible, empty private sector housing is brought back into use.

By focusing on these three key objectives we will reduce the number of empty homes in our communities, maximise the re-use of empty homes, improve the existing built environment, provide good quality, affordable housing and support area regeneration programmes, thereby achieving our aim and contributing to the creation of a sustainable environment in Sedgefield Borough.

Strategic links

The Empty Homes Strategy is not a stand alone document; the strategy has been developed within the context of a broader strategic framework and links to the following: -

The Sedgefield Borough Council Corporate Plan 2006/7 – 2008/9 which provides a strategic overview of the council’s aims and objectives over a three year period.

The LSP Community Strategy 2004 – 2014 that is structured around four key aims to ensure that Sedgefield Borough is a place where:

People can live healthy, active and fulfilling lives as part of vibrant and strong communities.

High quality businesses can prosper and local people have the confidence and skills to access jobs that they offer.

The natural and built environment is valued, conserved and enhanced

People can access the housing they want in attractive and safe neighbourhoods.

These four aims are usually expressed as **“Healthy, Prosperous, Attractive Borough with Strong Communities”.**

The wider Housing Strategy for County Durham 2008 – 2011 which identifies four key objectives:

1. To rejuvenate the housing stock to meet 21st Century aspirations, replacing market failure with high quality housing in the right locations to help create successful, cohesive and sustainable communities.
2. To secure the improvement and maintenance of existing housing so that it meets required standards, investing in sustainable neighbourhoods.
3. To ensure the type and mix of new housing provides choice, supports economic growth and meets housing needs and demand.
4. To promote good management and targeted housing investment to address specific community and social needs, including an ageing population and the needs of minority communities; this will be integrated with the Supporting People programme and promote greater community involvement.

The Sedgefield Borough Housing Strategy 2006/2007 - 2008/2009 which has identified a number of broad housing priorities for the Borough including regeneration and the renewal of housing stock to address market failure, availability of housing, the delivery of decent homes in the private sector and addressing poor quality private sector housing.

The Sedgefield Borough Housing Advice and Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2007 – 2010, which identifies the need to establish working relationships with private sector landlords by linking into selective licensing and private sector renewal team.

National and Local Context

National Context

The Government have recognised that tackling empty private sector housing is a priority, within a wider regeneration context, and Local Authorities are recommended to adopt an Empty Homes Strategy. New powers were introduced in the Housing Act 2004 to assist Local Authorities to deal with the problem.

The latest figures released by the Empty Homes Agency, responsible for collating data on the number of empty properties across all Local Authorities in England, show that there are a total of 672,924 empty homes recorded in England. This figure equates to 3.02% of the total housing stock for the country. The largest numbers of empty homes were recorded in the private sector, a total of 587,229 or over 87% of the total number of empty homes.

In the North East the total number of empty homes was recorded as 43,686 or 3.76% of total housing stock. The highest numbers of empty homes in the region are in the private sector with a total of 34,600 or approximately 79%.

Local Context

A breakdown of the empty homes vacant for more than six months across Sedgefield Borough highlighted 132 unoccupied properties. This figure does not include those properties that are subject to selective demolition in the Master Plan areas, commercial properties, Council properties or Registered Social Landlord properties. This data has been collated from our internal Council Tax records and is not exhaustive.

Of the 132 unoccupied properties those rated poor, very poor or uninhabitable due to major structural repair figures are listed below:-

Poor – 16

Very Poor – 18

Uninhabitable/Structural – 17

Sedgefield Borough Council's Corporate Plan indicator CPS04 monitors:

'Proportion of private sector vacant dwellings which have been empty for over 6 months as at 1st April that are returned to use during the financial year with Council intervention.'

The Council currently has an annual target of 15% in respect of this indicator.

Appendix 1 - Action Plan

Objective One – Raise awareness of empty property issues in the Borough, both internally and externally

Action	Key Dates		Responsible Officer	Additional Resource Implications	Required Outcome	Associated Success Measure(s)	Completed Date/Further Actions
	Start	Finish					
Promote Empty Property Strategy	Oct 08	Nov 08	Senior Private Sector Renewals Officer	Publicity costs	press release	Raised awareness	30 th November 2008
Establish an Empty Homes Steering Group	Oct 08	Ongoing	Senior Private Sector Renewals Officer	Existing resources	Operational internal planning and strategy group	Strategic planning	Ongoing
Provide basic empty homes information on the council's website	Oct 08	Ongoing	Senior Private Sector Renewals Officer	Existing resources	A link on the website to an empty properties information screen	Increase information availability Increase public confidence	30 th November 2008
Produce and distribute a public information leaflet	Oct 08	Nov 08	Senior Private Sector Renewals Officer	Printing costs	Print an information leaflet with pre paid postage tear off page	Encourage public participation Raise awareness	30 th November 2008

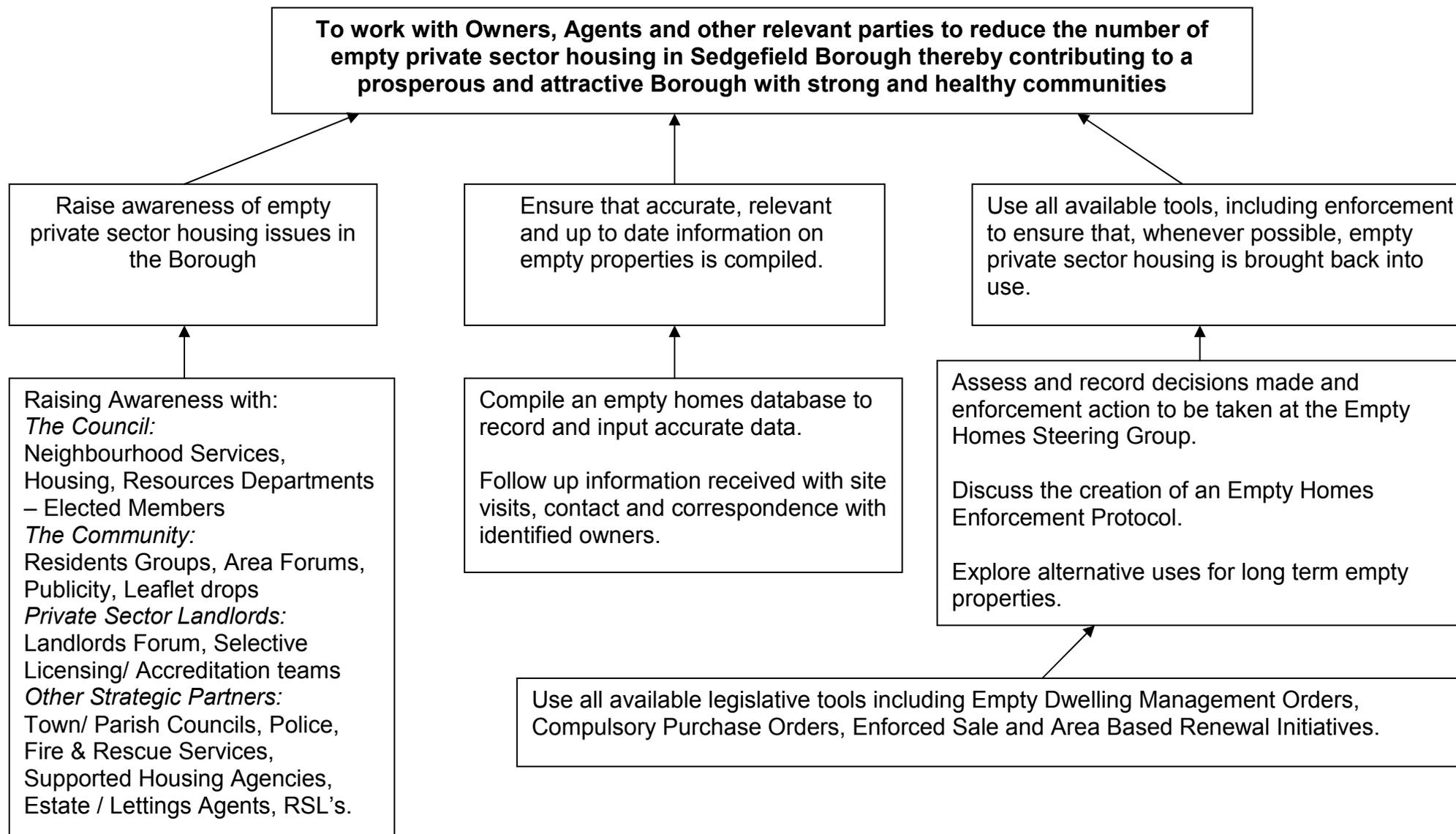
Objective Two – Ensure that accurate, relevant and up to date information on empty properties is assembled

Action	Key Dates		Responsible Officer	Additional Resource Implications	Required Outcome	Associated Success Measure(s)	Completed Date/Further Actions
	Start	Finish					
Complete a site visit, within 7 days, following information about a new empty property	Oct 08	Ongoing	Senior Private Sector Renewals Officer	Existing resources	Site visit including photos and external survey	Accurate information compiled	Ongoing
Establish a baseline of empty property information and record on a database	Oct 08	Ongoing	Senior Private Sector Renewals Officer	Existing resources	Set up a basic database and input data from existing records	Accurate analysis of numbers and ownership details	Ongoing

Objective Three – Use all available tools including enforcement action to ensure that, whenever possible, empty properties are brought back into use

Action	Key Dates		Responsible Officer	Additional Resource Implications	Required Outcome	Associated Success Measure(s)	Completed Date/Further Actions
	Start	Finish					
Discuss the creation of an Enforcement Protocol	Oct 08	Dec 08	Senior Private Sector Renewals Officer	Existing resources	Draft a protocol with input from key internal partners on steering group	Consistency of approach Robust framework	31 st December 2008
Evaluate alternative uses for empty properties	Dec 2008	Ongoing	Senior Private Sector Renewals Officer	Possible refurbishment or management costs	Increase available housing stock	Decant and temporary housing options would increase	Ongoing

Appendix 2 – Delivery Flow Chart



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