

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP REPORT – EMPTY HOMES
REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS CONSIDERED BY CABINET ON 13th MARCH 2013**

| Review Recommendation | Progress Report of Action taken to implement recommendation | Resib'ty | Timescale |
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| <p>1) Cabinet agree that an assessment/evaluation be undertaken by the Regeneration and Economic Development service grouping of the effectiveness of the existing housing renewal and regeneration policies within the Council's 8 priority housing regeneration areas to ascertain whether they have delivered the expected reduction in vacancy rates within the housing stock; and to ensure that this area of work is aligned to future regeneration priorities so that the Council is able to target scarce resources on areas where we have the greatest chances of bringing empty homes back into use and thereby making a difference.</p> | <p>There has been recent realignment of functions within the Housing regeneration service and the responsibility of bringing empty homes back into use sits within the Housing Solutions Service, within the Private Sector Housing team.</p> <p>Resources are targeted at bringing homes back into use through the Empty Homes Cluster Programme. Following very slow take up within the previous cluster areas and a conversation with DCLG the scope of the programme is now countywide.</p> <p>Advice guidance and financial assistance is provided to all owners and potential purchases of empty homes with added incentives for those properties that fall within council tax band A and B.</p> | <p>Housing Solutions</p> | <p>March 2015</p> |

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| 2) Cabinet agree that the development of projects/ bids as part of the Affordable Homes programme and associated Empty Homes 'Cluster Bid' scheme be supported and that the Council continues to work with housing partners in the RSL and Private sector to deliver projects that will increase the number of empty homes brought back into use. | <p>A package of interest free loans and grants was implemented in November 2013 and together with other initiatives a package of assistance is offered to owners of empty properties. Some options include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interest free loan up to £15,000 over a 10 year repayment term• £5,000 move in grant for those purchasing a property to live in for a minimum of three years• Project management service for renovation of properties• Assistance in selling properties• Assistance in letting properties through Durham Key Options (DKO)• Referencing of prospective tenants• Leasing properties to Registered Providers <p>The Homesteading scheme is now progressing. This is where RP's in the priority areas are selling long term empty homes to first time buyers at a discounted price. To date 14 homes have buyers.</p> | Housing Solutions | Ongoing |
| | | Housing Solutions | March 2015 |

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| <p>3) Cabinet agree that those Empty Homes Cluster bids identified within the report be supported and approve any associated requests for Capital resources as 'matched funding' that is required as a condition of Homes and Communities Agency funding to implement these schemes.</p> | <p>This has been achieved – revisions to the Council's Financial Assistance Policy are being made so that funds from the HCA's cluster programme can be spent.</p> | <p>Housing Regeneration</p> | <p>March 2015</p> |

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| <p>4) Cabinet support the development of new business models aimed at bringing empty homes back into use, particularly those identified within the ARC4 Consultant's report regarding 'purchase to lease' and 'homesteading' schemes.</p> | <p>The homesteading scheme is being progressed in priority cluster areas. The three housing associations who have empty stock in the areas are participating and have homes currently for sale.</p> <p>The purchase to lease model has been progressed as part of the HCA's empty homes programme – especially through Derwentside Homes and Five Lamps. The leaseback arrangement requires a private landlord to allow a long lease to be agreed with a provider (normally a housing association) in return for their home being improved and let at an affordable rent. The model works with subsidy but has not been tested without grant.</p> | <p>Housing Solutions</p> | <p>March 2015</p> |

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| <p>5) Cabinet agree that the proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS) be supported and cabinet consider the ring-fencing of surplus resources generated by the removal of Council Tax discounts for empty homes and the introduction of the empty homes premium (over and above that required to ensure that the LCTSS is cost-neutral to the MTFP) for empty homes projects.</p> | <p>The new Council tax regime has been implemented. No surpluses from council tax collection have been identified as it has all been used to cross subsidise the LCTSS.</p> | <p>Housing Solutions/Revenues and Benefits</p> | <p>tba</p> |

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| <p>6) Cabinet agree that a root and branch review of the existing products, advice, funding streams and associated policies relating to empty homes and housing regeneration/renewal be undertaken to examine any potential to relax conditions that are placed upon development partners which may adversely impact on their ability to secure investment funds/capital from financial institutions.</p> | <p>A new Action Plan dedicated to empty homes has been developed that will offer wider opportunities to address empty homes. The draft version of this Action Plan is attached.</p> | | |

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| <p>7) Cabinet agree that in accepting the reduced performance targets for 2012/13 from 70 to 50 empty homes brought back into use, further work be undertaken by the RED Service Grouping Housing Regeneration and renewals team to implement a systematic approach to performance management which will enable the development of robust benchmarking regarding empty homes and SMART targets.</p> | <p>2013/14 target was to bring 75 homes back in to use and 110 were achieved.</p> <p>The target for 2014/15 is 120. Performance is monitored quarterly however between 1st April and 31st May, 14 properties have been brought back into use through service intervention with a further 55 properties in the pipeline.</p> | <p>Housing Solutions</p> | <p>ongoing</p> |

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| <p>8) Cabinet agree that a feasibility study be undertaken by the RED Service Grouping to examine a potential 'invest to save' initiative to increase the complement of Empty Homes officers utilising potential New Homes Bonus resources generated through improved Council performance in bringing empty homes back in to use.</p> | <p>This has not progressed. The introduction of further restrictions on a local authority's discretion to spend the New Homes Bonus (which following the Spending Review in June now has to cross subsidise LEP growth funding) makes this initiative much more difficult to deliver.</p> | <p>Housing Solutions</p> | <p>ongoing</p> |