

DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND HOUSING	ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE	15 th NOVEMBER 2022	7
EMPTY HOMES POSITION STATEMENT AND FYLDE EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY			

PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the numbers of long-term empty properties in the Borough and to introduce Fylde Council Empty Homes Strategy.

The most recent report on long term empty properties was on the 4th January 2022 to this Committee. In recent years, a number of changes have been made to the council tax scheme in relation to empty residential property and members have asked for regular updates to monitor the effect of those changes.

The Empty Homes Strategy proposes an approach to targeting empty units that have been empty for two years or more and working with Registered Providers to bring the units into the affordable housing stock within the borough.

RECOMMENDATION

Committee are requested to:

1. Note the contents of the report
2. Approve the formal adoption of Fylde Council Empty Homes Strategy, with regular updates included with the annual Empty Homes Position Statement.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

HYPERLINK

<https://fylde.cmis.uk.com/fylde/MeetingsCalendar/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1244/Committee/19/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx> [Empty Homes Position Statement January 2022](#)

<https://fylde.cmis.uk.com/fylde/MeetingsCalendar/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1163/Committee/19/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx> [Empty Homes Position Statement November 2020](#)

[ar/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1098/Committee/19/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx](https://fylde.cmis.uk.com/fylde/MeetingsCalendar/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1098/Committee/19/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx) [Empty Homes Position Statement November 2019](#)

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

Economy – To create a vibrant and healthy economy	√
Environment – To deliver services customers expect	
Efficiency – By spending money in the most efficient way	√
Tourism – To create a great place to live and visit	

2022 Empty Homes Position Statement

1. In 2013 the Government introduced legislation allowing local authorities the discretion to charge an additional 50% premium to the owners of properties left empty for over two years. The Council introduced this additional charge with effect from 1st April 2014. The premium is an additional 50% of the council tax charge such that 150% of the council tax for the property becomes payable. The additional premium complements other council tax measures that require 100% of the council tax to be paid for months 6-24 of being empty.

2. In November 2018, Government introduced further legislation allowing local authorities the discretion to increase the premium to 100% for properties left empty for over two years with effect from 1st April 2019. At the Environment Health and Housing on the 11th February 2019 the Council approved the introduction of a new Council Tax Premium level of 100% payable in respect of properties left empty for over two years, to be effective from 1st April 2019. On the 7th January 2020 the premium was increased by the Committee to 200% and then 300% for properties left empty for over 10 years.

3. In summary:
 - 100% in respect of properties left empty for 6-24 months, effective from 1st April 2014;
 - 150% in respect of properties left empty for over two years, effective from 1st April 2014;
 - 200% in respect of properties left empty for over five years, effective from April 2020; and
 - 300% in respect of properties left empty for over ten years, effective from April 2021.

4. Table 1 details the numbers of both long-term empty properties and properties which have been empty for over 2+, 5+ and 10+ years. Between October 2021 and October 2022 there has been no change in the numbers of properties that are over 5 years being empty. There has been a drop of 10 for the units empty over 2 years.

Table 1 – Long Term Empty Properties in Fylde

Date	Long term empty	2 years+ empty	5 years+ empty	10 years+ empty
Oct 13	688	N/A		
Oct 14	611	126		
Oct 15	612	122		
Oct 16	604	93		
Oct 17	584	125		
Oct 18	634	123		
Oct 19	650	110		
Oct 20	808	97	37	
Oct 21	626	114	15	11
Oct 22	616	104	15	11

5. At the meeting of the former policy development scrutiny committee of November 2013 members resolved that, additional actions to deal with empty properties could only be taken within existing resources and actions the housing service and environment protection can take are limited to complaints received from members of the public.

6. Within the Council complaints about empty homes can come from a number of sources:

- Council Tax can be notified by the former occupant moving, or a landlord advising that a tenant has left a property and by a property inspection following returned mail. They welcome information received from any source and this can be emailed direct to <mailto:fylderevenues@blackpool.gov.uk> fylderevenues@blackpool.gov.uk.
- The Housing Service occasionally receive complaints from neighbours to empty homes. Between October 2021 to October 2022 the Housing Services have received no such complaints from neighbouring residents in relation to empty properties.
- The Private Sector Team are undertaking an inspection programme from January 2022 of all Houses of Multiple Occupancy within the Borough. This programme is identifying empty properties that appear to be in disrepair, but these tend not to be longer term empty units.
- Environmental Protection continue to see an increase in complaints, mainly in relation to overgrown land, filthy and verminous properties that do appear to be empty. If the occupier is resident and requires support as they are no longer keep up with the upkeep of their home a Welfare Check can be made by Environment Protection or Housing Services and if required a referral will be made to Adult Social Care for support.

Fylde Council Draft Empty Homes Strategy

7. The Adopted Local Plan for Fylde to 2032 note in paragraph 9.59:

“the Council will identify and bring back into use empty housing and buildings in line with local housing and empty homes strategies and, where appropriate, acquire properties under compulsory purchase powers”

- 8. The Private Sector enforcement policy makes a commitment, subject to available resources, to work with owners of empty homes to bring them back into use.
- 9. The Housing Service are proposing an Empty Homes Strategy to bring empty homes back into use as affordable housing by means of a partnership with Registered Providers of Social Housing.
- 10. Fylde Council defines a long-term empty home as “A residential property that has been unoccupied for 6 months or more and does not have a reasonable prospect of being brought back into use by the owner without local authority intervention”.
- 11. The key aim of the Empty Homes Strategy is to maximise the number of empty homes that can be returned into use as affordable housing.
- 12. ‘Houses to Homes’ is the Preston City Council Empty Homes project which works closely with the RP ‘Community Gateway’ to bring empty homes back in to use. The Houses to Homes project helps to identify empty properties and locate the owner or next of kin. Fylde Council have been working closely with Preston City Council to develop the Empty Homes Strategy, along similar lines.
- 13. Preston City Council offer guidance and work with the owners to bring the property back is to use. Preston City Council are aware that all situations are different and that not everyone may wish to sell so they additionally offer advice and support to those owners who do not wish to sell but would like to renovate the property.
- 14. Fylde Council’s Empty Homes Strategy has four priorities:
 - Priority 1: Improve the recording and identification of properties and recording and monitoring information on progress with bringing properties back into use.
 - Priority 2: The Empty Homes Service will provide encouragement and detailed information to empty property owners.
 - Priority 3: Create a user-friendly web-based approach to identifying empty homes which can be accessed by members of the public and internal departments within the Council.

Priority 4: Working with Registered Providers (RPs) to reduce the number of empty homes. All RPs All registered Providers will be invited to submit a bid to become the dedicated RP for Fylde Empty Homes.

15. The draft Empty Homes Strategy, flow chart detailing the process and assessment and scoring sheet to be completed for every empty home (where there is a possibility of it being brought back into use) can be found in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 respectively.
16. A formal procurement exercise will be undertaken to identify one or several Registered Providers who wish to work with the local authority to take the Empty Homes Strategy forward.
17. The strategy will target units that have been empty for in excess of two years. When a unit has been identified the assessment and scoring sheet will be completed and liaison with the Registered Provider(s) will commence with the interested Registered Provider taking forward negotiations and purchase arrangements with the owner.
18. Internal departments within the local authority that will form part of the consultation on the suitability of a unit include: Council Tax, Legal Services, Finance, Environmental Protection and Private Sector Housing Enforcement.
19. Potential funding available will come from three sources and Committee approval will be sought in relation to Options b. and c for each individual unit. The Registered Provider will be responsible for drawing down funding from Homes England in relation to the sale and agreed purchase price.
 - a. The Registered Provider will draw down on funding from Homes England to purchase the property.
 - b. Fylde Council will use S106 funding to contribute towards the renovation costs of the property. We will propose an amount of approx. £20,000 per property.
 - c. If there is an element of community enhancement an option could be to draw down funding from the Community Housing Fund Grant held by Fylde Council.
20. An update on the number of units the Empty Homes Strategy is working towards bringing back into use will be presented to this Committee annually with an update on the Empty Homes Position Statement.

Ends

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	The proposals in this report will be met from existing budget provision. Fylde Borough Council has a dedicated Affordable Housing Officer who will manage the Empty Homes project and deliver the Empty Homes Strategy. Initially it is anticipated that The Affordable Housing Officer will be working alongside other departments within the council in order to set the scheme up. There is the potential for future use of S106 capital funding held by the council to help fund improvements to properties identified as part of the strategy.
Legal	Consultation on suitability of units
Community Safety	Improving safety of areas where empty homes are a target for ASB
Human Rights and Equalities	None
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	None
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None

LEAD AUTHOR	CONTACT DETAILS	DATE
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Name of document	Date	Where available for inspection
Various sources of advice on empty homes	01/11/2022	https://ehnetwork.org.uk/ "Empty Homes Network (ehnetwork.org.uk)"

Attached documents

Appendix 1 – Draft Fylde Empty Homes Strategy

Appendix 2 – Process flowchart

Appendix 3 – Assessment and scoring sheet