



CABINET

5TH FEBRUARY 2015

AGENDA ITEM (10)

EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY

Accountable Member	Councillor NJW Parsons Deputy Leader of the Council
Accountable Officer	Jon Dearing Joint Head of Revenues and Housing Support 01285 623304 jon.dearing@cotswold.gov.uk

Purpose of Report	To propose a new strategy for managing Empty Homes within the District
Recommendation(s)	That the proposed Empty Property Strategy be adopted.
Reason(s) for Recommendation(s)	To ensure that Empty Homes within the District are managed and that the numbers of such properties are reduced

Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Key Decision	No
Recommendation to Council	No

Financial Implications	<p>There is a financial incentive for local authorities to identify empty properties and work with owners to bring those properties back into use. The incentive, under the Government's New Home Bonus is based on the Council Tax of additional homes, and those brought back into use and paid over a six-year period. In two tier areas, the New Homes Bonus is allocated 80% to the relevant District Council and 20% to the relevant County Council. This equates to approximately £1,300 per year, or £7,800 over a six-year period.</p> <p>In April 2014, it was agreed that the Council Tax levy on those properties unoccupied for more than two years be increased. Such properties now attract a 150% Council Tax liability.</p> <p>There may be a need for an additional resource should the Council decide to implement the strategy to its full potential through Legal enforcement. Where appropriate, further reports will be considered by the Cabinet or the Council, which will include details of the additional resource required and the source of funding.</p>
Legal and Human Rights Implications	None arising directly from this report

Environmental and Sustainability Implications	None
Human Resource Implications	None
Key Risks	The only risk is that of reputational damage to the Council if it is seen to be doing nothing to manage empty properties
Equalities Analysis	Please outline the outcome of the Equalities Analysis undertaken. Where issues have been identified, a brief statement of what the outcome of the analysis was, and the actions taken or under consideration, should be included. Alternatively, where outcomes and actions are more complex or are clearly shown elsewhere in the report or policy document etc., a phrase such as 'Equality analysis carried out and taken into account in report/policy' can be used. No effect on protected groups identified

Related Decisions	None
Background Documents	None
Appendices	Appendix 'A' - Statutory Powers Appendix 'B' - Empty Property Action Plan

Performance Management Follow Up	To ensure the key actions are carried out as stated in Appendix 'B' of the Strategy
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Options for Joint Working	The recommended responsibility for the delivery of this strategy sits within the Revenues and Housing Support Service, which is already a shared service. Officers from both sites will have responsibility in ensuring the key actions are delivered in order to meet the objectives within the strategy.
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Background Information	
<p>1. Empty properties within the Cotswold District are of concern although, as yet, not a significant problem. Not only can they have a negative impact on the District, but they can also have a negative impact on the Council.</p> <p>2. It is difficult to establish the true number of empty properties due to the discount regime and discounts being applied to properties and not people. I would suggest that this is too much detail and state that the latest snapshot of statistical data on empty properties is as shown in the following table. The report giving the snapshot of such properties was run on 4th November 2014:-</p>	

Description	Under 6 Months	6-12 Months	1-2 Years	2+ Years
Unoccupied and unfurnished variable discount for up to six months	304	0	0	0
Unoccupied and unfurnished 0 discount	0	115	59	0
Unoccupied and unfurnished undergoing major structural repairs 50% discount	45	16		
Unoccupied and unfurnished over 2 years subject to a premium of 50%	0	0	0	44
Last occupier has moved to a care home - 0% charge	17	20	19	10
Awaiting Probate - 0% charge	94	38	11	0
Occupation prohibited by law - 0% charge	0	0	0	0
Empty pitch/mooring - 0% charge	4	1	0	2

3. The Revenues and Housing Support service area is already proactive in its approach to identifying those empty properties by carrying out postal reviews and visits. Corporately, more could be done through working with other service areas to help support owners to bring properties back into use.

4. Although the number of households registered as having a housing need is stable, there are still insufficient properties to meet demand. This in turn has a financial impact on the Council as payments for emergency accommodation exceed that of monthly tenancies.

5. The bringing back of empty properties into use can, therefore, be a cost effective and sustainable way of increasing the supply of housing and making the best use of existing buildings to help meet local needs.

6. This Strategy supports the Local Plan and also the Government's commitments to increasing the overall supply of housing and reducing the negative impact that empty properties have.

(END)