

**BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2019-2024 – ACTION PLAN REVIEW
SEPTEMBER 2022**

Key Action	Timescale	Priority	Performance Measure	Progress at September 2022 (Blue = Completed; Green = On Track; Amber = Off Track but will Recover & Red = Off Track but will Not Recover.)	Looking Ahead
Key Objective 1: Reduce the number of long-term empty homes in the Borough					
1.1 Keep a register of long term empty homes	Monthly	High	Long term empty homes listed and monitored.	The Housing Strategy Team maintains a list of long term empty homes and records of contacts with liable parties. The list is based on the information provided monthly by The Council Tax Team.	The Housing Strategy Team continues to maintain the empty homes list based on the information provided by The Council Tax Team.
1.2 Make contact with empty homes owners keeping them informed of options open to them to bring empty properties back into use	Monthly	High	Standard empty homes letters sent in sequence as required.	Contact is maintained through letters, phone calls emails and visits. Wherever contact is made liable parties are made aware of their options. Where permission is given, details are passed to other departments when they are better placed to offer advice. Standard empty homes letters are usually sent out in sequence however there are occasions, for example	Contacts continue to be made with persons recorded as liable for empty homes and their options explained. Standard and bespoke letters will be sent as considered appropriate.

				change of ownership or circumstances, where bespoke or earlier letters are sent to liable parties.	
1.3 Maintain a record of all contacts with owners of empty homes	Ongoing	High	Details of all contacts recorded to show progress made with empty properties being brought back in to use.	Contacts made with, or received from, liable parties in respect of empty homes are recorded.	The Housing Strategy Team continues to maintain and record details of contacts with recorded liable parties.
1.4 Focus on properties empty for over two years	Ongoing	High	Effective action on two year + empty properties.	The focus of the empty homes programme is on properties recorded as unoccupied for > two years. Actions commenced from when properties have been recorded as unoccupied from this time, and where there is no evidence steps are being taken to bring them back in to use, has led to a reduction of 22.4% at the end of August 2022 on properties empty for over five years since the programme commenced.	The focus of the Empty Homes programme continues to be on properties empty for > two years.
1.5 Make contact with Registered Providers about long term empty	Ongoing	Low	Registered Providers contacted when their properties are recorded as empty for six months.	Since Covid 19 restrictions have ended, contact with Registered Providers regarding their empty	Going forward contacts regarding empty Registered Provider properties

properties in their ownership				homes has returned to the six months specified. During the period October 2020 to May 2022, the number of empty units at the Wixams Retirement Village – owned by a Registered Provider - has reduced from 63 to 27.	will continue to be made when their properties have been empty for six months.
1.6 Work with colleagues to bring back into use empty properties owned by the Council	Ongoing	High	Council owned empty properties are identified and proactively managed to bring them back into use.	Details of Council owned empty properties are reported to Housing Committee. Regular meetings are held between the Housing Strategy Team & Property Services where options for bringing these properties back in to use are considered and progress monitored. Three long term empty flats at Greenhill Street are currently in the process of being brought back in to use as temporary accommodation.	Further empty properties in the Council's ownership have been identified for bringing back in to use. This process will continue whilst suitable properties exist and finances are available.
1.7 Keep under review the range of options to bring long term empty properties back into use	Ongoing	Medium	Options available to the Council reviewed.	As there is no one size fits all approach to bringing empty homes back in to use, options available to bring empty homes back in to use are regularly	The Housing Strategy Team continues to review the options available to bring empty

				reviewed both overall (for example available legislation), and on a case by case basis.	homes back in to use and occupation.
1.8 Actively look for any Government initiatives that will help finance bringing empty homes back into use	Ongoing	High	Bids made for Government funding if made available.	No government initiatives providing finance for bringing empty homes back in to use were identified during the past twelve months.	The Housing Strategy Team continues to look for any government initiatives that will provide finance to assist the Council in bringing empty homes back in to use. Where suitable schemes are identified and resources permit, a bid for funding will be submitted.
Key Objective 2: Raise awareness of empty property as a wasted resource					
2.1 Produce annual Communications Project Plan	Annual	High	Communications Project Plan produced.	Now Covid 19 restrictions have ended and the priority need to promote public health information has reduced, a new Communications Project Plan has been drafted. It is hoped reduced restrictions will enable a higher profile Empty Homes Week to take place in 2023.	A Communications Project Plan for 2022 / 2024 is approved and is being implemented.

2.2 Publicise on-going successes	Ongoing	Medium	Publicity initiatives completed.	Empty homes successes have been publicised in the local press, on local radio, on the Council's social media sites and in reports to Housing Committee. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic there has been less publicity as the need to promote public health information has taken precedence. The renewed Action and Communication Plans will however, enable the team to focus on gaining publicity for the empty homes programme successes.	Opportunities will continue to be sought for publicising the successes achieved in bringing empty homes back in to occupation.
2.3 Advise empty homes owners of options available to bring their empty homes back into use	Ongoing	High	Letters sent to owners and advice given over the phone or in person where possible.	Contact is maintained through letters, phone calls emails and visits. Wherever contact is made liable parties are made aware of their options. Where permission is given, details are passed to other departments / organisations where they are better placed to offer advice.	Contacts continue to be made with persons recorded as liable for empty homes. Where required, the options available are explained.

2.4 Complete promotional PR campaign as identified in the Empty Homes Communications Project Plan	Ongoing	Medium	Promotional campaigns completed.	Actions on empty homes external publicity were held during the Covid 19 pandemic. Now that the priority need to promote public health information has reduced, a new Communications Project Plan - which contains detailed proposed communications activity - has been drafted and agreed.	Implement the actions identified in the Empty Homes Communications Project Plan for 2022 / 2024.
Key Objective 3: Improve the supply of decent housing available across all tenures					
3.1 Advise property owners of the Council's Tenancy Deposit Guarantee Scheme	Ongoing	High	Persons with liability for empty properties made aware of the Tenancy Deposit Guarantee Scheme.	The Probate Letter, Standard Letters 1 & 2 plus the Empty Homes website page make persons liable for empty homes aware of the Council's Tenancy Deposit Guarantee Scheme. When contact is received and it is appropriate, additional details are provided.	Standard Empty Homes Letters and the Empty Homes web page will continue to make liable parties aware of the Tenancy Deposit Guarantee Scheme. Where appropriate this will also be provided by the Housing Strategy Team when contact is received directly.
3.2 Work with Environmental Health to bring empty properties	Ongoing	High	Liaison with Environmental Health	Where issues are identified regarding empty properties which require the	The Housing Strategy Team continues to work

back into use and ensure they are a decent standard for occupation			about relevant empty properties.	intervention of, or guidance from, Environmental Health details are forwarded directly to them. Once reported, and where appropriate, officers will liaise to try and work with the owner to undertake works to bring the property up to required occupancy standards. (NB – It may also be necessary to work with other departments to achieve this outcome for example, Building Control or Planning Enforcement.)	closely with Environmental Health (and other departments as required), where disrepair issues concerning empty properties are received. Where appropriate we will liaise with them to ensure homes brought back in to use meet appropriate standards.
3.3 Provide assistance to ensure at least the minimum property standards are achieved	Ongoing	High	Advice offered to property owners and liaison with Environmental Health.	Where issues have been identified regarding the condition of empty properties, the Housing Strategy Team provides basic advice. Where more detailed or specialist advice is required from Environmental Health or another department, a request is forwarded to them where the liable party has given their consent. Where appropriate, officers liaise to work with the liable party to undertake	The Housing Strategy Team continues to work closely with Environmental Health (and other departments as appropriate), where disrepair issues concerning empty properties are received. We continue to liaise with liable parties and departments to ensure homes

				the works required to bring the property up to required occupancy standards.	brought back in to use meet appropriate standards.
Key Objective 4: Use Compulsory Purchase Orders where they are appropriate and value for money					
4.1 Ensure appropriate enforcement policies and procedures are in place in respect of compulsorily purchasing a property and with regards to the involvement of Property Services, Planning Enforcement and Environmental Health.	Ongoing	High	Enforcement procedures maintained up to date.	The Housing Strategy Team keeps up to date with changes to the enforcement powers available to bring empty homes back in to use. If clarification is required, this is sought from solicitors. Before enforcement action is instigated Property Services, Planning Enforcement and Environmental Health are consulted. Adult Protection are also contacted. Enforcement action is not normally instigated if the liable person / property owner is known to be a vulnerable person.	The Housing Strategy Team continues to keep up to date with empty homes legislation seeking legal advice as and when required.
4.2 Record information on those empty properties where contact with the owner has been unsuccessful and intervention is deemed appropriate	Ongoing	High	Property information recorded and monitored.	Contacts made with, or received from, liable parties or third parties in respect of empty homes are always recorded. Where the Council's intervention fails to	The Housing Strategy Team continues to maintain details of all contacts regarding empty homes.

				encourage the liable party to bring the property in question back in to use, this evidence forms the basis for compiling the compelling case in the public interest when requesting permission under delegated authority to instigate enforcement action.	
4.3 Obtain Approval for long term empty properties to be Compulsorily purchased.	As and when required	High	Executive agreement received – through delegated authority.	Due to lockdowns and the genuine inability of empty home owners to make progress in bringing properties back into use, during the Covid 19 pandemic, no new authorisations were requested to commence compulsory purchase action. Since restrictions have been lifted, authorisation has been received under delegated authority to proceed with the compulsory purchase of two long term empty homes where the liable parties have continually failed to take action to bring them back in to use	The Housing Strategy Team continues to identify empty properties for compulsory purchase where all avenues to encourage the liable person to bring them back in to occupation have failed. Authorisation will be requested to commence enforcement action in these cases as a last resort.

				and occupation. Looking ahead a further four properties have been identified for potential compulsory purchase if the liable parties continue to take no action to bring them back in to use and occupation.	
Key Objective 5: Maintain the data collected on empty homes					
5.1 Record and maintain information on empty homes	Ongoing	High	Information recorded, monitored and where appropriate shared.	Contacts made with, or received from, liable parties or third parties in respect of empty homes are always recorded.	The Housing Strategy Team continues to maintain details of all contacts made in respect of empty homes.
5.2 Work with Local Taxation to obtain timely information	Monthly	High	Information providing the list of empty properties received from local taxation monthly.	Working with The Council Tax Team, the register of empty homes continues to be produced monthly.	The Housing Strategy Team works with The Council Tax Team to ensure the continued timely production of empty homes data.
5.3 Record and monitor identified metric indicators M56a, M56b, M56c & M58	Quarterly	Medium	Metric Indicators M56a, M56b, M56c & M58 monitored.	Statistics are collated, reported, published and analysed on a quarterly basis.	Empty homes metric indicators continue to be collated, reported, published and analysed on a quarterly basis.

5.4 Record and monitor the number of empty homes brought back into use due to Council intervention.	Quarterly	High	Former BVPI 64 Guidance (excluding demolitions without gain).	The number of empty homes brought back in to use through Council intervention is collated, analysed and reported quarterly and at the end of each financial year.	The number of empty homes brought back in to use following Council intervention will continue to be collated, reported and published.
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