

Subject: Empty Homes Pilot Programme

Status: For Publication

Report to: Policy Overview and Scrutiny

Date: 10th March 2009

Report of: Head of Regeneration

Portfolio

Holder: Regeneration

Key Decision: No

Forward Plan

General Exception

Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to undertake a new pilot initiative working in partnership with a Registered Social Landlord; aimed at reducing the number of long-term empty properties.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities and associated corporate objective.
- Delivering Quality Services to Customers (Customers, Improvement)
 - Delivering Regeneration across the Borough (Economy, Housing)
 - Improving health and well being across the Borough (Health, Housing)

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Long term vacant properties represent not just a negative effect on neighbourhoods but also a loss of revenue income from Council Tax.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 Officers have been working on a range of initiatives to reduce the number of long term vacant domestic properties in Rossendale. The current number of empty properties across the borough is 1,586.
- 4.2 This proposal represents the first stage in developing a range of initiatives aimed at reducing the number of empty properties and returning them into residential use.
- 4.3 The proposal involves developing a pilot programme in Haslingden in partnership with a Registered Social Landlord.
- 4.4 The aim of the pilot programme is to look at targeting long-term empty properties through a co-ordinated, proactive approach with Great Places Housing Association (Registered Social Landlord) within Haslingden. If successful, the programme would then be rolled out across the borough.
- 4.5 The basis of the project is that Great Places would purchase and refurbish the properties through the Home and Community Agency's (HCA) Regular Market Engagement Programme.
- 4.6 An initial letter from the Council would be sent out on a blanket basis to all owners of long-term empty properties within the Haslingden area reiterating the Council's policy on empty properties and the inclusion of the property on the Empty Property Register we would then identify a potential option for owners to sell their property to a Registered Social Landlord.
- 4.7 Great Places in partnership with the Council would then follow up this initial contact with the owner explaining in more detail about the process for selling the property to a Registered Social Landlord through a series of letters. This series of letters (potentially four including the initial letter from the Council) could be used as evidence to show lack of commitment and support from owners when preparing Statement's of Case for Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs). However, it is hoped that a percentage of owners would take up this option to sell.
- 4.8 As a Registered Social Landlord and governed by the Homes and Community Agency these properties would then become "affordable" houses and once refurbished to a decent homes standard would either be let on a social rented or shared ownership basis.
- 4.9 Great Places currently operate similar schemes within Blackburn and Burnley.
- 4.10 After an initial period of six months the outcomes of the project will be reported back to Overview and Scrutiny with a following report to Cabinet recommending adoption across the borough should the outcomes be successful.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

5.1 There are no immediate financial implications for the Council.

6. MONITORING OFFICER

6.1 Legal services have discussed this approach in detail.

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY

7.1 There are no HR implications for the Council.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 The pilot programme has no additional costs for the Council associated with the initiative. The project provides complementary support through Great Places to the Housing Regeneration Projects Officer to achieve the targets within the local Empty Homes Performance Indicator and Council's Empty Homes Strategy and Policy.

8.2 The programme would have the advantage, if successful, of bringing several properties back into use within a short period of time.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

9.1 That the pilot programme be endorsed and the outcomes be reported to a future meeting of Overview and Scrutiny to assess the success of the project.

9.2 That if successful, a further report be presented to Cabinet recommending adoption of the project across the borough.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1 Consultation has been undertaken with the Empty Homes Task Group (cross departments). Peer Authorities through the Lancashire Empty Homes Group.

11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Community Impact Assessment required No

Is a Community Impact Assessment attached No

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required No

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached No

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Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Files	Room 211, Futures Park