

Subject:	Pennine Lancashire Empty Homes Project	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	15 th February 2012
Report of:	Head of Health Housing & Regeneration	Portfolio Holder:	Regeneration
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Community Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required:	No	Attached: No
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1.	RECOMMENDATION(S)
1.1	That Cabinet approve the role of Rossendale Borough Council as the accountable body for this project.
1.2	All future minor amendments to the project to be delegated to the Head of Health Housing & Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To brief members on the development of a project bid for Empty Homes Fund and to seek approval for Rossendale to take the role of accountable body on behalf of Pennine Lancashire.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:
- **A clean and green Rossendale** – creating a better environment for all.
 - **A healthy and successful Rossendale** – supporting vibrant communities and a strong economy.
 - **Responsive and value for money local services** – responding to and meeting the different needs of customers and improving the cost effectiveness of services.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:
- The role of Accountable Body relates to the administration of the fund should the bid be successful. There are no financial risks related to this role as other LA partners will be subject to the same funding conditions as the host authority.

5. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 5.1 As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010, the Government announced a £100m fund to bring more empty homes back into use. The funding is intended to deliver at least 3,300 affordable homes nationwide by March 2015. As much as £30m of the funding is likely to go direct to not-for-profit community and voluntary groups.
- 5.2 There are over 700,000 empty homes in the England; over 300,000 have been empty over 6 months. Latest figures show 5,649 private sector owned properties that have been empty for over 6 months in PLACE local authority areas.

- 5.3 Members may recall that the Council's Vacant Property Strategy which was approved in November 2010 identified over 600 properties as falling into the long term vacant category.
- 5.4 The Council's Vacant Property Task Group has a target to reduce the number of long term vacant residential properties by 50% over a five year period. If this bid is successful it will provide much needed resources to support this ambition.
- 5.5 The funding available through this initiative may be used to bring empty homes and other types of property, including commercial property, into use as affordable housing. Existing social housing is not eligible.
- 5.6 Qualifying properties must have been empty for a significant period of time (on average 2 years). It is anticipated that the majority of properties will be brought back into use as affordable rent, although shared ownership models will also be eligible. The funding available is capital and cannot be used to fund revenue posts. It will be a requirement that the ultimate landlord of the property is a Registered Provider.
- 5.7 Government will only support proposals that have clear local authority support, and where bids meet local priorities or support local strategies to tackle empty homes.
- 5.8 It is an absolute requirement of the programme that properties brought back into use must be complete by 31 March 2015.
- 5.9 The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) want to avoid competing bids and would prefer to receive one bid from Pennine Lancashire. The HCA have confirmed that Rossendale Borough Council's Registered Provider status would enable them to submit a bid and are supportive of a consortium approach.
- 5.10 The advantage of the proposed consortia is that it would give:-
- Local authorities greater control over which houses are identified as part of the selection process;
 - Local authorities would be able to prepare a pipeline of properties ready for delivery utilising statutory enforcement measures including Compulsory Purchase Orders and Empty Dwelling Management Orders;
 - Alternative options can be worked up and delivered by the consortia through the scheme funding such as loans products utilising existing forums such as landlords etc.;
 - Registered Providers are to establish a social enterprise which will act as the delivery arm of the consortia and bringing both additional staffing and financial resources to the initiative.
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- In addition Local Authorities are able to link more effectively into the existing PLACE housing strategies
- 5.11 The Pennine Lancashire bid is for a total of £5.6m which will bring 515 empty properties back into use between 2012 and March 2015. Rossendale's element of the bid amounts to £1.07m and will bring 120 properties back into use within the borough. This in turn will bring in additional resources via New Home Bonus which includes financial reward for the re-occupation of empty homes.
- 5.12 The Pennine Lancashire Registered Provider Forum has been consulted and they are

supportive of the bid with RBC leading on behalf of Pennine Lancashire. The bid has been developed in partnership with Local Authorities, Private Sector and Registered Providers providing a consortium of key partners utilising the skills and capacity of the Pennine Lancashire Housing Partnership.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

6. SECTION 151 OFFICER

6.1 The total application over 3 years is for £5.6m, including the Council’s own element of £1.07m.

6.2 As accountable body Rossendale has a responsibility, amongst other things, to consider:

- Ownership of assets
- Contract procedures
- Vat accounting and its eligibility for recovery
- The Audit inspection regime
- Administration and the making of claims
- Management and approval of projects

7. MONITORING OFFICER

7.1 Any legal implications are commented on in the report.

8. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

8.1 Any human resource implications will be met from existing resources.

9. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

9.1 Pennine Lancashire Housing Partnership, Pennine Lancashire Registered Provider Forum, PLACE

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 The bid, if successful, will provide much needed funding to address the levels of long term empty homes across Pennine Lancashire.

10.2 Through local authorities taking a lead role on developing the Empty Homes Fund proposal it will enable greater integration with existing local housing strategies and delivery plans.

Background Papers

Document	Place of Inspection
Rossendale Borough Council Vacant Property Strategy 2010 - 2015	Room 206: The Business Centre, Futures Park, Bacup.