FROM EMPTY PROPERTIES TO NEW HOMES
2012 - 2015
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding effectively to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

FOREWORD

Since the introduction of the District Council’s Empty Homes Strategy in 2007 we have worked hard to return unoccupied houses into use. Our hotspots initiative has focused work on where it provides the greatest returns and in total, our work with empty property owners has brought a total of 66 properties back into use, which would otherwise have remained empty.

Nationally there are approximately 285,000 homes empty and there has been increased central government and media attention on this wasted resource. Accordingly, the return of these properties to use remains a corporate priority for the District Council. Despite the considerable efforts and significant success Stratford-on-Avon District Council has had since 2007, there are still around 700 empty properties within the District at any one time.

There remains an urgent need to provide more housing within the District and with the help of new grants from Central Government that incentivise returning empty homes to use, we will achieve our corporate aspirations of ‘addressing local housing need’ whilst giving ‘value for money’. I believe this is an appropriate time to introduce our new Strategy ‘From Empty Properties to New Homes’, which I am convinced will provide a very useful framework to aid the return of increasing numbers of empty homes to use.

Councillor Valerie Hobbs
Portfolio Holder for Enterprise, Housing and Revenues.
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding effectively to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Empty Homes Strategy 2012 - 2015

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is Stratford-on-Avon District Council’s third Empty Homes Strategy and is effective for the financial period 2012 - 2015. The aim of this Strategy is to bring empty residential properties in the District back into use to create affordable housing for local people. The work to return empty properties to use is a corporate priority in ‘addressing local housing needs.’

A great deal has been achieved since 2008 when the District Council last produced an Empty Homes Strategy, including the return of 66 properties as a result of direct and intensive work. Eleven have or will shortly be occupied as a result of awards of the Empty Homes Assistance Grant. Hotspots have been identified where significantly greater success has been seen and an Empty Dwellings Management Order Policy has been adopted.

Despite all this good work we cannot rest on our laurels as there are currently still up to 700 homes that have been empty for over 6 months across Stratford-on-Avon District\(^1\) and these empty homes contribute to the housing shortage. As at April 2011, there were a total of 4127 households registered on Home Choice Plus, the District Council’s housing register, 589 of these households had a higher housing need and a local connection to the District.\(^2\)

The Strategy has the following objectives to tackle the problem of empty homes:

1. Identify empty homes across Stratford-on-Avon District.
2. Develop effective pathways to bring empty homes back into use.
3. Create good quality, affordable housing for local people in housing need.

Section 7 sets out a detailed analysis of the aims and objectives of this Strategy.

The key outcomes are summarised below:

- Have record of location of empty homes in the District.
- Through information and publicity raise awareness of empty homes initiatives.
- Have a coordinated corporate approach to empty property work.
- Provide encouragement and support to empty property owners.

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\(^1\) Council Tax Base, October 2011
\(^2\) Housing Advisory Panel Information Sheet 1 July 2011
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- Develop and adopt enforcement procedures.
- Utilise funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing solutions across the District for local people in housing need.

Delivery of the Strategy will be achieved through a variety of actions set out in a detailed plan under section 9 of this document.

Consultation on the Strategy has taken place and we will review the Strategy annually to ensure its continued relevance and publish any revised editions.
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2. INTRODUCTION

Stratford-on-Avon is a desirable District to live in and offers a high standard of living for many residents. However, there are also significant challenges which need to be addressed to increase the availability of housing for those who struggle to afford properties available on the market.

Empty homes contribute to a lack of available housing across the District where an annual shortfall of 532 affordable homes was identified in the latest assessment of district-wide housing needs.

There are in the region of 700 long-term empty homes across Stratford-on-Avon District. These are privately owned residential properties which have been empty for at least 6 months, however many of these have stood empty for a number of years. Empty Homes are a wasted resource in a time of housing need and as such the District Council has made tackling them a corporate priority.

The District Council produced the Empty Homes Strategy ‘From Empty Houses to New Homes’ in 2008. This has steered the work of the District Council over the past 3 years facilitating 66 long-term empty homes to be brought back into use with the Council’s intervention.

This Strategy continues to cement the District Council’s commitment to tackling empty homes across the District, building on our achievements over the last three years. It sets out future actions to reduce the problems associated with empty homes to enable us to build on our success and move forward in alignment with Government initiatives.

This document is an element of Stratford-on-Avon District Council’s approach to private sector housing and is part of the wider housing initiative contained within Stratford-on-Avon District Housing Strategy 2009 - 2014, available at www.stratford.gov.uk/housing/community-202.cfm.
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3. **VISION**

Reduce the number of empty homes across the District, utilising funding effectively to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in need.

**3.1 Key challenges in returning empty homes to use**

One of the main problems for people seeking a home in Stratford-on-Avon District is affordability. Because of the high demand, house prices and monthly rental charges are significantly higher than average, with figures for the District indicating private rents of £701, £886 and £1357 for 2, 3 and 4 bed properties respectively. Home ownership continues to be difficult for many to access despite recent house price falls, the result of difficulties encountered in trying to obtain mortgages. The average home in Stratford-on-Avon District cost £289,351 in 2010, thirteen times the average income of for District of £21,414.

There is a clear need to provide additional affordable housing within the District. The Stratford-on-Avon District Strategic Housing Market Assessment: Market Review 2009 states that there is an annual shortfall of 532 affordable homes across the District.

The Private Sector Stock Condition Survey identified a higher proportion of empty homes across Stratford-on-Avon District than the national average of 1.5%. The survey estimated that 1.7% of all dwellings have been empty for 6 months or more.

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4Private sector rents in Stratford-on-Avon District 2011, Summary for District Housing Forum February 2012
5 Home Truths 2011 Fixing our broken housing market, National Housing Federation November 2011
6 The Private Sector Stock Condition Survey for Stratford on Avon District November 2009
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4. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

4.1 National

Nationally, there has been increasing acknowledgement of the resource empty properties represent and the problems associated with them. This led to the establishment of the Empty Homes Agency in 1992.

The latest figures show that there are over 285,000\(^7\) domestic properties reported as long term empty in England. This figure compares to 1.8million\(^7\) on the housing waiting list across England. Although the number of empty homes has decreased since last year, this is still a significant number of homes that contribute towards the national shortage of housing.

The 2007 Housing Green Paper, ‘Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable’ states that action is required to make the most of existing homes and land. It states that local authorities must take a strategic and proactive role in reducing the numbers of empty properties within their District.

The Audit Commission publication ‘Building Better Lives’ identifies the financial advantages of bringing empty homes back into use noting that the cost of bringing 6 empty properties back into use to provide housing for 14 people can cost the same money as building one affordable home for 2 people.

In May 2010 the Coalition Agreement set out Central Government’s commitment to explore a range of measures to bring empty properties back into use. The Government recognised the need to harness the potential of empty homes to meet pressing housing need.

In May 2011 the Communities Minister outlined the financial incentives introduced by the Government. There was a clear desire in this report for Councils to implement projects that deliver both new homes and opportunities.

The Coalition Government’s new Housing Strategy identifies the importance of returning empty homes stating: “We are committed to bringing empty homes back to use, as a sustainable way of increasing the overall supply of housing and reducing the negative impact that neglected empty homes can have on communities.”

The Government’s Strategy outlines a number of objectives including the award of the New Homes Bonus to encourage local authorities to increase

\(^7\) Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA) – Data returns for 2010/11
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housing stock; providing information and advice to deal with empty homes; investing £100 million to enable housing associations to support local authorities to bring over 3,000 empty homes back into use as low cost housing; consultation on Council Tax premium for long term empty homes and proposed changes to Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) to tackle the worst long-term empty homes.

New Homes Bonus

New Homes Bonus is a scheme designed to create a financial incentive to encourage local authorities to facilitate housing growth. The annual award will provide local authorities with a grant based on increases in net housing stock. Local authorities will receive six years of grant based on the council tax for each additional home delivered (net). Empty homes returned to use are identified as increases in housing stock alongside new developments. An increase in empty homes would therefore have a detrimental effect on the net housing numbers and New Homes Bonus received.

The New Homes Bonus is designed to strengthen the incentive for local authorities to identify empty properties and work with property owners to find innovative solutions that allow these properties to be brought back into use. Pro-active local authorities will see the benefits as the grant is unringfenced, they will be able to decide how to spend the grant to meet the needs of local neighbourhoods and communities. The New Homes Bonus is drawn from Central Government funding set aside for this purpose.

Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Empty Homes Fund

The HCA Empty Homes Fund is a Government initiative to target £100 million of investment towards empty homes as part of the Affordable Housing Programme. The funding is intended to deliver at least 3,300 affordable homes by March 2015. The funding available will be allocated through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) formal bidding rounds to enable both Registered Providers of social housing and smaller not-for-profit community and voluntary groups to be able to apply.

The HCA Empty Homes Fund is available to local authorities, house-builders and developers, affordable housing providers and local community groups. They can all bid for a share of the funding to bring long-term empty properties which would not come back into use without intervention to become homes once again.
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Draft National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government’s economic, environmental and social planning policies for England. It identifies the need to significantly increase the supply of housing by identifying and bringing back into residential use empty housing and buildings.

Nation Planning Policy

Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) underpins the delivery of the government's strategic housing policy objectives and supports 'Making effective use of existing housing stock’. The Policy notes that local authorities should develop positive policies to identify and bring into residential use empty housing and buildings.

Council Tax and Business Rates

Council Tax

The Local Government Act 2003 allowed local authorities to change the discount on Council Tax for second homes and empty homes. Stratford-on-Avon District Council now charge 100% Council Tax on properties unoccupied for 6 months or more to discourage owners from leaving properties empty.

The Council do, however, recognise that some empty properties require renovation works and time to be sold. Certain discounts and exemptions exist for properties being renovated and for properties unoccupied for less than 6 months.

The Government have recently consulted on Council Tax technical reforms with proposals to give billing authorities greater discretion over the reliefs from Council Tax available in respect of some empty properties. In summary the proposed changes being contemplated that affect empty homes are:

- Replacing exemption classes A and exemption classes C with discounts, the amount of which would be for billing authorities to determine.
  - (Class A - vacant dwellings where major repair works or structural alterations are required, under way (up to twelve months)).
  - (Class C - vacant dwelling which has been such for a continuous period of less than six months ending immediately before the day in question).
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- Abolishing Class L exemption and making mortgagees in possession of empty dwellings liable to Council Tax in respect of them. (Class L - an unoccupied dwelling where a mortgagee is in possession under the mortgage).
- Allowing billing authorities to levy an ‘empty homes premium’.

Business Rates

The Government reformed empty commercial property relief in 2008 in order to provide a strong incentive to bring empty commercial property back into use. Once a commercial property becomes empty, the first three months are exempt from rating (six months in the case of an empty industrial property) thereafter, the full 100% rates are payable.

4.2 Regional and sub-regional

The West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy 2005; Delivering a Housing Vision for the West Midlands in the 21st Century: Pathways of Choice, acknowledges the wasted resource that empty homes represent. The document encourages the use of empty properties strategies to increase the supply of affordable homes through the region. Within the West Midlands over 31,000 private dwellings are long-term empty.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council withdrew from the South Housing Market area in autumn 2009 and our sub-regional partnership working is now focused on two overlapping combinations of local authority areas; Warwickshire and Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire(CSW). Within these areas there are a total of 4800 homes which have been classed as empty for more than 6 months.

4.3 Guidance documents

Empty Property: unlocking the potential: (ODPM, 2003) provides a case for action on empty property and an implementation handbook on how to tackle it.

A Cure for Empty Homes: (IDeA, 2006) evaluates the methods used in bringing empty homes back into use and suggests improvements to these.

Building Better Lives: Getting the best from strategic housing, (Audit Commission 2009) presents the findings of research into the strategic housing function of local authorities.

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**Empty Prospects:** Article by Communities Minister Andrew Stunell (LocalGov.co.uk. 2011)

**Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England:** (DCLG, 2011) A radical new Strategy launched by the government to reignite the housing market and get the nation building again.

**New Homes Bonus: final scheme design:** (DCLG February 2011) The New Homes Bonus is a powerful, simple and transparent incentive for housing growth and is a key part of the housing growth focus of the Government’s national strategy.

**Bringing Empty Homes back into use:** (DCLG January 2012) Application guidance for community and voluntary groups for the Empty Homes Community Grant.

**Draft National Planning Policy Framework:** (DCLG 2011) A key part of the government’s reforms to make the planning system less complex and more accessible, and to promote sustainable growth.


**Technical reforms of Council Tax:** (DCLG October 2011) Consultation.

### 4.4 Support

**Empty Homes Agency:** The Agency are an independent campaigning charity which aims to raise awareness of the potential of empty homes in England to meet housing need and devise and promote, with others, sustainable solutions that will bring empty homes back into use.

**Empty Homes Network:** The Empty Homes Network (EHN) is the successor to the National Association of Empty Property Practitioners (NAEPP). EHN was established in May 2001 to support people involved in delivering empty property strategies and supporting the people who bring empty property back into use for housing.

**Homes & Communities Agency:** (HCA) As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010, the government announced their intention to invest £100m through the HCA in supporting housing associations to refurbish over 3,000 empty properties and manage them at an affordable rent for up to 10 years. An Empty Homes Toolkit is available through the HCA website.

**The Great British Property Scandal:** Report an empty home. National campaign to highlight the problem of empty homes across the UK.
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5. LOCAL

5.1 Introduction to the District

Stratford-on-Avon District covers 979km² and is predominantly rural. There are around 250 towns and parishes with the majority of the population located within the principal towns and villages. The population of the District is expected to grow by 25% between 2007 and 2031 from 117,000 to 145,600.

5.2 Links with other strategies and local plans

Warwickshire Sustainable Communities Strategy

People, Places & Prosperity – A Sustainable Community Strategy for Warwickshire 2009 - 2026 details the long term vision for the County. One of the nine outcomes within the Strategy is “Our housing is appropriate and affordable”. This Strategy notes the presence of empty homes across the community “that could be brought back into use to create much needed homes for households struggling to find somewhere to live.”

Stratford-on-Avon District Sustainable Community Strategy

Stratford-on-Avon District Partnership’s Improving the Quality of Life for everyone – a 2026 Vision for Stratford-on-Avon District is the Sustainable Community Strategy for the District. It sets out a long-term vision for the area and provides the context for the Council’s Housing Strategy.

Improving the Quality of Life identifies a number of key challenges relevant to the Empty Homes Strategy:

**Stronger Communities**

‘Making more accommodation available by bringing more empty homes into use.’

**Safer Communities**

‘Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.’

Given the links between empty and dilapidated properties and anti-social behaviour and crime it is clear that the activity to reduce these will assist in meeting these targets.

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8 Stratford-on-Avon District Housing Strategy 2009-2014
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Economic Development and Enterprise

‘Increasing the economic vitality of the main rural centres.’

Climate Change and Environment

‘Supporting and setting standards for home energy efficiency and the supply and use of renewable energy.’


The South Warwickshire Community Safety Partnership (Safer South Warwickshire) Partnership Plan 2011 - 2014‘ notes that Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) accounts for a major proportion of all incidents reported to the police across South Warwickshire.

Where homes are empty and isolated, they attract criminal damage of this nature, including graffiti, fly-tipping, broken windows and theft. Clearly links exist between the issues of empty homes and anti-social behaviour. Working in partnership with local police and communities will ensure that the impact of empty homes is recognised and problems tackled.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council Corporate Strategy 2011 - 2015

Returning empty homes back into use is a corporate priority identified within the aims of the Corporate Strategy:

Corporate Strategy Aim 1:

‘Addressing local housing need’

“More housing is available at a price people can afford.”

“we will promote investment in the existing stock of housing that enhances its affordability, seeking in particular to bring empty properties back into use and to reduce the high cost of heating experienced in many existing properties.”

Empty homes in our District represent a wasted resource especially where demand for housing is high. By bringing empty homes back into use we will provide much needed housing, within existing communities.

The continuing high demand for housing is illustrated within the Strategic Housing Market Assessment - Market Review 2009 and the District Council’s
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Housing register. Empty homes that are rented out or sold will help meet housing needs across tenures.

Corporate Strategy Aim 2:

‘A District where business and enterprise can flourish’

“Increased economic vitality across the District.”

Keeping a property empty is expensive. Owners have to pay Council Tax and insurance costs, and at the same time they miss out on potential income from renting the property out. Over £9,000 can be lost annually, based on average rent for a 2 bedroom property in Stratford-on-Avon town of £751 per calendar month. 4

Empty homes can be costly to communities, decreasing the value of neighbouring properties by an average of 18%. They also attract crime and anti social behaviour utilising the resources of the police and fire services. Encouraging owners to bring their empty home back into use will save and generate money and contribute to the economic vitality of the District.

Corporate Strategy Aim 3:

‘Minimising the impacts of climate change’

Bringing empty homes back into use relieves the pressure to build new housing on brownfield and greenfield sites. Building a new home can emit almost five times as much carbon as a comprehensive refurbishment of an equivalent size existing property 9.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council Housing Strategy 2009-2014

The Housing Strategy is the overarching plan which describes how the Council will address housing issues within the District over a five year period. As part of its aim to increase the supply of good quality affordable housing for local people, it includes actions to make more accommodation available by bringing empty homes back into use and an action to deliver a well resourced programme of interventions designed to bring empty homes back into use.

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Stratford-on-Avon District Council Draft Core Strategy is a strategic policy document and will provide a broad framework for determining planning applications and for making development control decisions. It forms part of the Local Development Framework which is the plan which will set the strategic context for new development in the District until 2028. The Core Strategy will set the levels of development to be accommodated in the District, determine its distribution and provide the strategic direction for the location of future development.

Policy CS 18 of the Core Strategy deals with the protection of housing stock; ‘The District’s existing housing stock will be managed and safeguarded as a vital resource by restricting the loss of existing dwellings to other uses, unless specific overriding circumstances apply and by securing the re-use of empty dwellings for residential use.’

5.3 Property condition in the District

In 2009, Stratford-on-Avon District Council commissioned the Private Sector House Condition Survey as a means of maintaining a detailed picture of housing conditions in the private sector. The survey was based on a stratified random sample of addresses in order to gain a representative picture of housing conditions across the District.

The survey indicated 1,360 dwellings or 2.9% of the private sector housing stock as vacant, noting this to be lower than the national average of approximately 4.1%. It was estimated that 800 or 1.7% of these dwellings have been empty for 6 months or more (as this figure is an estimate it differs from numbers of empty homes previously quoted). The national average of empty homes for England is approximately 1.5%.

5.4 Why do homes remain empty?

The work undertaken since the first Empty Homes Strategy in 2007 has revealed that homes become and remain empty for a wide variety of reasons. Some homes may remain empty due to a change of ownership and this is expected in many circumstances, however, where homes remain empty for a significant period of time there may be other underlying reasons. Homes may be left empty for longer than six months due to a variety of reasons including the following:

- Lack of funds for refurbishment.
- Slow refurbishment.
-Awaiting planning decisions.
- Reluctance to let out or sell.
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- Owner in long term care / hospitalised.
- Probate, estate or legal ownership issues.
- Poor housing market.
- Perception that the property is an investment.
- Undecided on how or unable to deal with the empty property.
- Lack of awareness of available options.
- Owner prefers the property empty.
- Lack of business acumen to see the potential of the empty home.

According to Council Tax data, there are approximately 700 empty homes in the District in any given month. However, a significant proportion of these are transactional empty properties, i.e. for sale, in probate or undergoing renovations. There are also a number of properties that have been reoccupied but which are still classed as empty. Investigations have shown that this is where owners have not immediately communicated their occupation of the property to the District Council.

The cost of bringing empty homes back into use will vary from site to site and is dependent on a number of factors. Some properties may need very little work in order to bring them up to a habitable standard and these will cost comparatively small amounts of money. Larger projects where considerable building work is required are likely to cost significantly more.

There are many benefits to owners of empty homes where intervention results in the property being brought back into use, as follows:

- The Council Tax is paid by the occupants.
- An income is generated for the owner where the property is let.
- The equity is released where a property is sold.
- The natural physical deterioration of empty property such as damp, pest ingress and structural dilapidation is negated.
- Crime and antisocial behaviour associated with the property remaining empty is prevented.
- The psychological burden of owning empty property is removed.
- The occupant will contribute towards maintaining the property.
- The environmental impact of the property is improved.
- Improved relationships with neighbouring properties and the community.
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6. ACHIEVEMENTS 2008 - 2011

The Empty Homes Strategy 2008 - 2011 outlined an approach to bringing empty homes in the District back into use in order to create housing for people in housing need. Achieving the objectives of this Strategy facilitated the return to use of 66 empty homes through the Council’s direct intervention, providing advice and support to owners of empty homes. The total number of empty homes has also reduced approximately 700, a significant reduction from 800 recorded in the Empty Homes Strategy 2008 - 2011, an indication of the successful outcomes achieved from the actions taken in this Strategy.

Hotspots

It was important to prioritise the resources of the Empty Homes Officer across a large geographical district and this was achieved through the identification of hotspot areas where there were a high proportion of empty homes and significant numbers of people registered for affordable housing. Direct intervention in the hotspots resulted in a net reduction of 35% in these areas compared to a 29% net reduction in all other parishes. Further details on this scheme can be found in 8.3.

Empty Homes Assistance Grants

The provision of Empty Homes Assistance Grants has enabled the Council to increase the availability of housing for people in housing need across the District. Seven grants have been facilitated to provide eleven units of accommodation suitable for families and individuals. Each unit was subject to a minimum of 3 years occupation at a target rent determined in accordance with the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) guidance and let through the Council’s Home Choice Plus Allocation Scheme.

Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) Policy

The adoption of the EDMO Policy in 2010 has enabled the Council to tackle a number of problem empty properties where owners had failed to respond effectively to bring their properties back into use. The support provided by the presence of an adopted policy has enabled the District Council to bring 4 empty homes back to use without the need to follow any legislative process.

Empty homes promotion

Presentations at community fora have provided a platform for informing communities throughout the District about the Council’s work to reduce the number of empty homes. Through this process, the Council has built relationships with local communities to be able to help them deal effectively with problem empty homes.
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New Homes Bonus

The New Homes Bonus is calculated from an increase in the net housing stock resulting in a grant award to the District Council. The net housing figure combines the development of new homes and the reduction in the number of empty homes reported annually. The payment of the New Homes Bonus is split with 20% paid to Warwickshire County Council and 80% to Stratford-on-Avon District Council.

New Homes Bonus is calculated on each additional home, receiving 6 years of grant based on the national average Council Tax for band D property. Currently the amount of grant relating to an additional Council Tax band D property will be about £1,439 per annum or £8,634 over six years, and the grant relating to an additional band E property will be about £1,759 per annum or £10,553 over six years.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council received £217,738 New Homes Bonus for 2011/12 in addition to the Central Government funding. The New Homes Bonus Calculator shows that a total of 167 additional new homes were reported in Stratford-on-Avon District between November 2009 and October 2010, there were only 3 additional empty homes. This means that the New Homes Bonus was reduced by three units to reflect the increase in empty homes.

The 2012/13 New Homes Bonus has been confirmed as £379,257. The New Homes Bonus Calculator shows that a total of 292 additional new homes were reported in Stratford-on-Avon District between November 2010 and October 2011, of which 116 were empty homes returned to use. The reduction in empty homes over this period reflects, in part, the impact of empty homes interventions.

It is noted that the above figures differ from those recorded for the targets met, detailed on page 3. To date, the Council have worked under the target description of ‘Number of non-local authority-owned vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished during the financial year as a direct result of action by the local authority’, aligned to BVPI64 indicators.

As can be identified by the figures for both October 2010 and October 2011 the work done to return empty homes to use has had a significant positive impact on the total number of homes reported on the Council Tax Base.

Table 1 that follows shows the impact of the returning empty homes to use during the 2010/11 year on New Homes Bonus to be received in April 2012 and over the following 5 years.
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Table 1: Positive financial impact through the reduction of empty homes for 2011/12 assuming Council Tax Band D properties

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<th>April 2013</th>
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<th>April 2015</th>
<th>April 2016</th>
<th>April 2017</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total NHB receipt (SDC)</td>
<td>379,257</td>
<td>379,257</td>
<td>379,257</td>
<td>379,257</td>
<td>379,257</td>
<td>379,257</td>
<td>2,275,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116 Empty Homes Total (SDC 80%)</td>
<td>166,924</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

These net stock increases are contributed by the reduction in empty homes which not only provide revenue that can be utilised within the community but have the wider benefit of contributing to the availability of housing across the District. This in turn reduces the number of households facing homelessness and seeking temporary accommodation.
7. AIMS, TARGETS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGY

7.1 Aims and Targets

Aims

Bring empty properties back into use and create affordable housing solutions.

Targets

Corporate Strategy Target:

Bring 75 empty properties back into use by 2015.

7.2 Objectives

1) Identify empty homes across Stratford-on-Avon District.

Outcomes sought
   A. Have a record of empty homes in the District.
   B. Through information and publicity raise awareness of empty homes initiatives.

2) Develop effective pathways to bring empty homes back into use.

Outcomes sought
   C. Have a Coordinated Corporate Approach to Empty Property Work.
   D. Provide Encouragement and Support to Empty Property Owners.
   E. Develop and Adopt Enforcement Procedures.

3) Create good quality, affordable housing for local people in housing need

Outcomes sought
   F. Utilise funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing solutions across the District for those in housing need.

7.3 Achieving the objectives

The objectives and actions are addressed in the Action Plan where each action contributes to one of the three objectives above (Section 9.2).

Objective 1: Identify empty homes across Stratford-on-Avon District
From Empty Properties to New Homes
Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

**Outcome A:**
*‘Have a record of empty homes in the District’*

i) **Council Tax Data**

The main source of empty homes statistics is the Council Tax register. It is important that the figures here are kept up to date through good communication and proactive visits. The Empty Homes Officer must liaise with the Council Tax department where the original data is determined to be inaccurate.

ii) **Referrals**

The Empty Homes Officer will respond to complaints and referrals of empty homes in the District.

These may come from:
- Members of the public e.g. neighbour of the empty property, ‘report it’ function on Stratford-on-Avon District Council empty homes webpage.
- Parties interested in purchasing the property.
- Police or Fire Service.
- District and County Councillors and Parish Councils.
- Council employees.

iii) **Reasons for the property being empty**

An essential factor in tackling empty homes in the District is to determine why each empty property has become empty. This knowledge enables appropriate intervention to be deployed to assess the condition of the property and the circumstances of the owner. This information also enables the development of strategies to prevent properties becoming empty in the first place.

iv) **Digital mapping location of empty homes**

Detailed mapping of the empty properties provides a visual representation on the location of empty homes and identifies any ‘hotspots’. This information will inform the approach and where appropriate help focus the activity of the Empty Homes Officer.

**Outcome B**
*‘Through information and publicity raise awareness of empty homes initiatives’*

Benefits of raising awareness using information and publicity:
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

- Owners of empty homes aware of the problems associated with their empty property and the opportunities missed.
- Owners become more aware of the assistance available through promotion of the Council’s role and the enforcement actions available for dealing with uncooperative owners.
- Neighbours and members of the community affected by empty homes are more informed and are more amenable to assisting the Council to deal with these properties.
- Corporately, the engagement of Councillors and other departments is essential for a coordinated approach to tackling empty properties.

i) Champion successes

Where successful interventions enabled by the District Council have turned empty homes into new homes these should be promoted through the local media, the Private Landlords Forum and ongoing empty homes publicity material.

ii) Media coverage

The Empty Homes Strategy will be publicised through press releases submitted to local newspapers and media.

iii) Publicity materials

Publicity materials to raise awareness of empty property work in the District will be reviewed and updated to ensure continued relevance.

iv) Community meetings

Presentations and question and answer sessions at Parish and Town Council, Community Fora and similar meetings should take place in order to both raise awareness in the community and to build valuable information-sharing relationships.

v) Empty Homes Webpage

The Stratford-on-Avon District Council Empty Homes Webpage is a useful communication point for residents across the District. The website provides information for owners of empty homes and a facility to report empty homes.

Objective 2: Develop effective pathways to bring empty homes back into use

Outcome C

‘Have a Coordinated Approach to Empty Property Work’
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

i) Meetings with Internal Departments

Successful interrelationships between Building Control, Environmental Services, Council Tax, Street Scene, Planning and Policy colleagues are important to the success of the role. Presenting details of the progress achieved to date, outlining the revised Strategy objectives and obstacles to overcome will help to gain ideas from these departments on the best ways to achieve these aims by working alongside them.

ii) Engage External Agencies

Engage and maintain external partnerships with local estate agents and local Police referring cases as necessary in the instance of criminal activity, and share local knowledge regarding empty properties within their area.

iii) Liaise with local housing associations

A number of organisations have submitted bids for The HCA Empty Homes Fund as part of the Affordable Housing Programme. Successful applicants will be required to work with local authorities to deliver empty homes back to use. As part of this the Council will need to investigate the possibility of a Private Sector Leasing scheme or alternatives and promote the chosen scheme across the District.

iv) Maintain database of developers

Identify any property developers who wish to purchase and develop empty properties in any given condition. Maintain database of contacts to pass on to empty home owners.

v) Hotspots

Where hotspots are identified; target these areas for comprehensive Empty Homes Officer interventions.

vi) Empty homes outside hotspots

As the number of empty homes reduces in hotspots, empty homes outside hotspots should be targeted for intervention.

vii) West Midlands Empty Property Officers’ Group

The West Midlands Empty Property Officers’ Group is a well-established bi-annual meeting between many local authorities in the Region. The group enables networking, support, discussion of common issues, and development
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Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

of action plans to take place. The group is a valuable resource of information and support for the Empty Homes Officer.

Outcome D

‘Provide Encouragement and Support to Empty Property Owners’

i) Initiate written contact with empty property owners

Raising awareness of empty properties has generated referrals from members of the community, Councillors, Warwickshire Police and Fire & Rescue Service and other Council Officers. Empty property owners have also come forward.

When an empty property is identified, the name of the legal owner will be sought from the Land Registry. Where the property is not registered, the Council will utilise its information-sharing powers under section 85 of the Local Government Act 2003 to acquire the name and address of the property owner. As permitted by the Local Government Act 2003, section 85, the Council Tax register will be referred to in order to identify empty homes in the District. Government guidance is that this complies with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Once the reason for an empty property is established, empty homes procedures tailored to assist each individual case are followed to provide the most appropriate solution to bring the property back into use.

ii) Contact owners of all properties when they become empty for longer than 6 months.

By sending letters to owners of all properties when they become empty for longer than 6 months, owners will be able to utilise the advice and support available to bring their properties back into use.

iii) Target properties empty for less than 12 months

Properties which have been empty for less than 12 months generally require less time and investment to return them back to use. By making owners aware of the help and support available the Council aims to facilitate the return of these homes back into use before the properties deteriorate and become a problem for owners and the community.

By targeting for early intervention, those properties which have been empty for less than 12 months, the cost for owners to return these properties back to use can be reduced and homes can be prevented from remaining empty for long periods.
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

iv) Empty shops, spaces and flats above shops, and empty commercial spaces

Assistance can be given to businesses to increase their economic viability by identifying empty shops, spaces and flats above shops, and empty commercial spaces in ‘hotspots’. By promoting schemes available to owners including VAT relief to utilise these spaces the availability of housing in town and village centres can be increased.

v) Maintain Empty Homes Officer toolkit

When the reason for the property remaining empty has been established, the following options are available for dealing with it:

- Selling on the open market or housing auction.
- Selling to a third party e.g. property developer.
- Letting through the Council’s Rent Express Scheme.
- Leasing to a Registered Provider or other organisation.
- Private letting.
- Renovating and/or converting with the aid of the empty homes assistance grants or loans.
- Demolishing.

These options are discussed between the Empty Homes Officer, the owner and third parties that may include Planning and/or Building Control. The most suitable option is promoted to the owner.

The Empty Homes Officer has developed and utilises a toolkit for helping owners to achieve the agreed decision on how to bring the empty property back into use.

vi) Publish Empty Homes Information Pack

The Empty Homes officer will develop and publish an Empty Homes Information Pack, to be sent out to all empty home owners on initial contact. This will enable the owner to make an informed choice on the options available to bring their property back into use.

vi) Landlords forum for owners of empty homes

Owners of homes empty for less than 12 months will be invited to Stratford-on-Avon District Council Landlords Forum to enable owners to realise the benefit of returning their property back into use as soon as possible. This forum will provide advice and support for owners to avoid prolonged vacancy and escalating costs associated with long term empty homes.
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

vii) Promote Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme

The Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme (MLAS) is a scheme to recognise and promote good landlords who provide their tenants with high quality, safe accommodation. The Council will promote this scheme to all landlords to increase the availability of high quality, safe accommodation across the District.

Outcome E

‘Develop and adopt Enforcement Procedures’

In exceptional circumstances, where the owner of an empty home refuses to work with the Council towards bringing the property back into use or is untraceable, enforcement action is considered.

The Empty Homes Officer has several enforcement options available to deal with the empty property.

i) Enforced Sale

Where there is a local land charge or another debt; which by statue is a charge on the land; owed to the Council by the empty property owner. The Council can force the sale of the property to a third party; recover the amount of the debt owed together with the Council’s costs.

ii) Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)

Where a property has been empty for 6 months or more and the owner has refused all reasonable offers of assistance, the Council can apply for an interim EDMO. If the empty property is not bought back into use within the 12 months of an interim EDMO then a final EDMO can be made whereby the Council takes over management of the property for up to 7 years. Approval was obtained from The Cabinet for the use of EDMOs as a means to bring empty properties back into use in September 2010.

Draft amendments to the EDMO legislation were detailed in January 2011 with proposals that EDMOs are to be restricted to empty properties that have stood empty for at least two years and have become a magnet for vandalism, squatters and other forms of anti-social behavior. The intention is for the government to make changes to the legislation early 2012. To date, the amending regulations have not been introduced.

iii) Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) Management agreements

As the Council no longer manages housing stock, management agreements need to be in place with local Housing Associations and/or managing/letting agents before an EDMO is made.
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Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

iv) Compulsory Purchase

When no other enforcement measures are suitable, the Council may consider the threat and use of its compulsory purchase powers. Alternative and prompter enforcement action may be necessary depending on the circumstances of each individual case. These are displayed and explained in section 8.5.

v) Other local authority enforcement

Procedures are maintained to utilise enforcement available within other Council departments. The Empty Homes Officer must liaise with other Council departments should any other enforcement matters arise ensuring a corporate approach and identify the most appropriate course of action to take.

vi) Funding for EDMOs

Where an interim EDMO is served funding would be required to insure the property. Should this proceed to a Final EDMO funding to renovate the property would be required. Funding will be identified for implementing EDMOs where necessary.

Objective 3: Create good quality, affordable housing for those in housing need

Outcome F
‘Utilise funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing solutions across the District for those in housing need.’

i) Revise Empty Homes Assistance Grant scheme to consider amendments or alternative scheme

Many applicants for the Empty Homes Assistance Grant scheme will be unsure about the process of bringing their property back into use and any support the District Council is able to give them will be welcome. It is important that the Council are able to demonstrate to customers how we will interact with them and the production of a range of leaflets will provide owners with detailed information on the scheme, service standards that we guarantee to perform to and owners obligations.

Any revision or amendment to the Empty Homes Assistance Grant Scheme will include updating the Council's Policy to make assistance available using the powers in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002.
From Empty Properties to New Homes

An element of the grant scheme will be to provide affordable housing for local people in housing need, the terms of the scheme will therefore note nomination rights. An element of the scheme will also include links to the Rent Express Scheme.

ii) Research, develop and implement loans scheme for renovation of empty homes

Current financial constraints necessitate the Council to consider implementing a loans scheme for the renovation of empty homes, following similar objectives to the current Empty Homes Assistance Grant scheme.

iii) Identify further funding as grant and loans use and targets necessitate

To ensure that we meet Corporate Strategy targets the Council will need to continually identify funding for the grants and loans scheme.

iv) Research the viability of a self-help housing approach

This will enable local communities to become involved in the regeneration of their communities.

Self-help housing is a term applied to a variety of schemes that involve groups of local people renovating and bringing empty homes back into use for affordable rented housing. Many schemes use volunteers to carry out building works, offering experience and sometimes formal construction skills training. In some schemes the volunteers go on to become tenants of the completed homes.

Volunteers are normally drawn from groups of people who can’t afford to buy their own housing and whose housing needs are such that they will not be offered a permanent tenancy by the local authority or a housing association. The empty properties are effectively “borrowed” from the owner on the basis of a licence or sometimes a lease, for a specified period of time. On occasion, future plans change and the buildings may even become available on a permanent basis.

v) Work with Registered Providers and the HCA to enable their programme to return empty homes to use

The District Council has supported two organisations to submit bids for funding through the HCA Empty Homes Fund as part of the Affordable Housing Programme, relationships will need to be developed to facilitate the success of these programs.
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Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

vi) **Work with community groups to return empty homes back to use**

The Empty Homes Community Grant fund enables communities to bid for funding to return empty homes to use. The Council need to identify suitable communities and support them in their bid for funding.
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Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

8. HOW WILL WE TAKE ACTION?

8.1 Priorities
Properties which remain empty for long periods can be significantly more difficult to return to use. The escalating cost of repair after so many years and the inertia of owners to deal with their empty home compound the problem.

According to the Council Tax base, October 2011 there are 166 or 24% of empty homes which have been empty for between 6 to 12 months. Early intervention from the Empty Homes Officer of these homes should result in prompt action by the owners to return them back to use before they become a financial and psychological burden. The intention here is to work towards stopping properties becoming long term empty in the first case, prevention rather than cure.

A focus on these empty homes in hotspot areas will enable the Council to return greater numbers of empty homes back into use.

8.2 Digital mapping
Empty homes digital maps have been produced annually since April 2009 to provide a visual interpretation of the location of empty homes across the District. These maps have enabled the Council to see where there are proportionally higher numbers of empty properties.

Map 1 details the position as at April 2011 for the total number of empty homes across the District.
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Map 1 - Distribution of empty homes April 2011

Map 2 shows the location of empty homes by ward and map 3 shows the location of empty homes by parish for April 2011.

Maps to monitor the progress of the empty homes intervention and the location of empty homes returned to use have also been produced.
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Map 2 - Number of empty homes by ward April 2011

Map 3 – Number of empty homes by parish April 2011
From Empty Properties to New Homes
Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

8.3 Hotspots

8.3.1 Hotspots 2009-2011

The production of maps indicating distribution of empty homes within the District has informed our work and enabled the District Council to identify empty homes hotspots.

We first undertook digital mapping in April 2009, which formed the baseline for identification of hotspots. Map 4 highlights the parishes containing the highest proportion of empty homes, shown in the darker shades. The data from the parishes with the highest number of empty homes was compared with data on housing need in these areas. This assessment enabled the mapping of housing needs across the District in relation to the number of empty homes. This provided data on where interventions would prove most valuable.

The total number of empty homes identified within the digital mapping exercise as at April 2009 was 754 of which 365 were located within the hotspots. Table 2 provides details of empty homes in the hotspots compared with housing needs in these areas.

**Map 4 - Empty homes hotspots April 2009**
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Table 2: Baseline for hotspots detailing empty homes and housing need across Stratford-on-Avon District April 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wards</th>
<th>Empty Homes in hotspots 1 April 2009</th>
<th>Total number of households on waiting list 31 October 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>% of the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcester</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaudesert and Henley</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipston-on-Stour</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southam</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratford-upon-Avon (3 wards)</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studley</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The hotspots identified back in 2009 sat within the District’s principle settlements. Unsurprisingly this was where we experienced the highest levels of demand for housing. The targeted work within hotspot areas has delivered more efficient use of resources than a wider less focussed approach.

8.3.2 Future hotspot activity

Hotspot intervention commenced in April 2010, targeting Studley, 3 wards in Stratford-upon-Avon, Southam and Alcester. Table 3 provides a comparison at the beginning of the project in April 2010 against Council Tax base figures from October 2011. There has been a net reduction of 35% of empty homes in the hotspot areas. This compares favourably against the areas not subject to targeted intervention which have reduced by 29%. There is a trend of the number of empty homes reducing district wide but it can be demonstrated that reductions have been greater in the hotspots, particularly in the ward of Studley where the greatest intervention has taken place and the numbers of empty homes have reduced by 51%.
**From Empty Properties to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### Table 3 - Analysis of hotspot activity April 2010 to October 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotspots targeted for intervention</th>
<th>Number of empty homes</th>
<th>Net reduction of empty homes April 2010 to October 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 2010</td>
<td>October 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studley</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratford-upon-Avon (3 wards)</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southam</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcester</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals in hotspots targeted for intervention</strong></td>
<td><strong>440</strong></td>
<td><strong>286</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other parishes</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of all empty homes</strong></td>
<td><strong>987</strong></td>
<td><strong>676</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reassessment of the data collated on hotspots ensures future intervention is directed to the areas with the highest number of empty homes.

In the preparation of this Strategy further analysis of the location and concentration of empty homes was undertaken and this was mapped onto housing needs data. Table 4 (below) details the wards with the highest concentration of empty homes (3% or higher) using data from the Council Tax base October 2011. Future work on empty homes hotspots will retain the same principles and focus exclusively on these areas.
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Table 4 - Empty Homes February 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empty Homes as at</th>
<th>Housing need up to October 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 2011</td>
<td>Number of households who bid on the most recently advertised property on Home Choice Plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>% of the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcester</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaudesert and Henley</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipston-on-Stour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southam</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratford-upon-Avon (3 wards)</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studley</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanworth in Arden</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>369</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals for district</strong></td>
<td><strong>676</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The demand for housing has been determined by analysis of Home Choice Plus bids for properties coming vacant, to provide an indication of the demand for accommodation in these areas. The number of households bidding on the most recently advertised 2 and 3 bedroom properties on Home Choice Plus in wards with high concentrations of empty homes are noted.

8.4 Funding

Regional Housing Pot

In order to improve the standards of accommodation in the private sector central government provided capital funding through the Regional Housing Pot, with an allocation made each year to local authorities. This allocation ceased in 2011 and there is no further provision of funding of this nature for local authorities.

The District Council previously allocated £299,000 of this private sector renewal funding towards projects to renovate empty homes with £171,000 remaining as at April 2012. A review of the Empty Homes Assistance Grants programme is to be undertaken with a view to implementation of a loans based renovation scheme.
From Empty Properties to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

HCA Empty Homes Fund

Within the 2011-2015 Affordable Homes Programme the government have allocated £100million to tackle long-term empty properties. Bids for the funding can be made by not-for-profit voluntary and community groups and Registered Providers.

The Community Grants Programme is part of the Coalition’s £100m Empty Homes Programme, which runs from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2015. This will be accessible to community-led-organisations and it is possible this could be promoted alongside the wider rural housing enabling programme.

The Council will need to liaise closely with successful bidders and identify suitable empty homes which may benefit from this scheme.

New Homes Bonus

A reduction of empty homes resulting in a net increase in housing stock will provide increased revenue for the Council as illustrated in section 6. The government notes that proactive authorities will see the benefits of the grant so it is important to harness the opportunities available from this funding stream.

By targeting intervention in hotspots and prioritising the return to use of homes left vacant for less than 12 months the Council aims to return to use a greater number of empty homes. Early intervention will enable owners to return their homes back to use with minimal costs and reduce the inertia associated with properties left empty for long periods of time. The longer a property remains empty the greater the need for renovation works to return to use. By providing owners with a range of solutions and support at an early stage will equip them with the tools to deal with their empty property.

8.5 Enforcement

A number of tools are available to support and encourage owners to bring their properties back into use. However many owners are reluctant to take advantage of this opportunity, preferring to progress works very slowly or simply ignoring the Council’s offers of advice and assistance or grant funding.

As previously noted, owners can be slow to progress with renovation works due to a lack of funds or time. As a result properties can be undergoing renovation for several years with no immediate prospect of being returned to use.

Diagram 1 illustrates how many Council service areas are involved in dealing with empty properties in the District followed by a definition of each enforcement option.
From Empty Houses to New Homes
Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Diagram 1

Enforcement options available with the Council

EMPTY PROPERTY ISSUE

Empty Homes Officer decides on the appropriate action to take

1. Hazards affecting others
2. Property Insecure
3. Statutory Nuisance
4. Pest Problems
5. Fly Tipping
6. Vandalism / Graffiti
7. Statutory Nuisance
8. Major Eyesore
9. Dangerous Structure

Private Sector Housing

1. Section 11 or 12 Improvement Notice Local Govt. Act 2004
2. Section 29 Notice Environmental Protection Act 1990
3. Section 59 Environmental Protection Act 1990
4. Section 4 Notice Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949
5. Section 28 Clean Neighbourhood & Environmental Act 2005
7. Section 79 Notice Building Act 1984
8. Section 77 Action Building Act 1984

Environmental Services

Street Scene

Building Control

Planning
1. **Housing Act 2004 – Section 11 or 12 Improvement Notice**
   If a Housing Health and Safety Rating System assessment reveals that one or more Category 1 or 2 hazards exist within the dwelling, the local authority may serve an improvement notice requiring the owner to undertake works to remove, or reduce these hazards.

2. **Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 – Section 29 Notice**
   If a building is unoccupied and not effectively secured against unauthorised entry, or is likely to become a danger to public health, the local authority may serve notice on the owner to secure the building within 48 hours.

3. **Environmental Protection Act 1990 – Section 80 Notice**
   Where a local authority is satisfied that a statutory nuisance exists, or is likely to occur or recur, in the area of the authority, the local authority shall serve a notice imposing all or any of the following requirements:
   
   a) requiring the abatement of the nuisance or prohibiting or restricting its occurrence or recurrence.
   
   b) requiring the execution of such works, and the taking of such other steps, as may be necessary for any of those purposes.

   Any of the following problems regarding empty properties may amount to a statutory nuisance:

   • any premises in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance
   • any accumulation or deposit which is prejudicial to health or a nuisance
   • any other matter declared by any enactment to be a statutory nuisance.

4. **Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 – Section 4 Notice**
   If in the case of any land it appears to the local authority that steps should be taken for the destruction of rats or mice on the land or otherwise for keeping the land free from rats and mice, they may serve on the owner or occupier of the land a notice requiring him to take these steps.

5. **Environmental Protection Act 1990 – Section 59 Action**
   If any controlled waste is deposited in or on any land, the local authority may, by notice, require the occupier to do either or both of the following:
From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

a) to remove the waste from the land within a specified period not less than a period of 21 days beginning with the service of the notice
b) to take within such a period specified steps with a view to eliminating or reducing the consequences of the deposit of the waste.

Local authorities have powers to serve fixed penalty notices on individuals who graffiti private property.

If it appears to the local planning authority that the amenity of a part of their area, or of an adjoining area, is adversely affected by the condition of land in their area, they may require the owner and occupier of the land to take such steps for remedying the condition of the land as may be specified in the notice.

8. Building Act 1984 - Section 79 Notice
If it appears to a local authority that a building or structure is by reason of its ruinous or dilapidated condition seriously detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood, the local authority may by notice:

a) require the owner to undertake works to restore or repair the structure
b) take steps to demolish the structure or part of the structure

If it appears to a local authority that a building or structure, or part of a building or structure, is in such a condition as to be dangerous, the authority may apply to a magistrates’ court, and the court may, where danger arises from the condition of the building or structure, make an order requiring the owner thereof:

a) to execute such work as may be necessary to obviate the danger; or
b) if he so elects, to demolish the building or structure, or any dangerous part of it.

The actions detailed above would be the initial approach the Council would follow when dealing with problematic empty homes, however, where owners remain unresponsive or uncooperative, further enforcement options are available to local authorities as follows:
From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)

Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) were introduced in the Housing Act 2004. The intention was to provide a legal tool which could be used by local authorities to bring properties back into use where they had become empty and the owners either had no intention of doing this, nor the resources.

The fundamental principle behind the EDMO is that the Council should not take on ownership of a property; the emphasis is on helping the owner manage the property in a way that is beneficial to both the owner and the community, or in the final event managing the property directly and without the consent of the owner to ensure its occupation.

The legislation and guidance encourages local authorities to engage closely with the owner and work with them to bring the property back into use. Only when the approach fails does the EDMO become accessible to the authority. The process is policed by the independent Residential Property Tribunal (RPT) to ensure that local authorities keep within the parameters prescribed within the legislation and subsequent guidance.

The Council obtained approval from The Cabinet for the use of EDMOs as a means to bring empty properties back into use in September 2010.

Draft amendments to the EDMO legislation were detailed in January 2011 with proposals that EDMOs would be restricted to empty properties that have stood empty for at least two years and have become a magnet for vandalism, squatters and other forms of anti-social behaviour. The implication is that the Council will need to have the support of the surrounding community prior to implementing an EDMO.

Enforced Sales Procedure (ESP)

The Enforced Sales Procedure uses powers under Section 101 (1) of the Law of Properties Act 1925. Where there is a local land charge or other debt; which statute says is a charge on the land; owed to the Council by the empty property owner, the Council can force the sale of the property to a third party. The Council will recover the amount of the debt owed and its costs from the proceeds of sale of the property.

The Enforced Sales Procedure (ESP) is a process by which the Council brings about the sale of a privately owned house. It is used as a means to “sell on” a long-term vacant house to a new owner, in circumstances where the present owner is either unwilling or unable to deal with the house and its associated problems.
From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

By bringing about a change in ownership, it is hoped that a new owner would be more willing and able to invest in the property, and ensure its likely re-occupation, upkeep, and proper use.

Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO)

The Housing Act 1985, section 17 allows the local authority to acquire underused, or ineffectively used, property for residential purposes if there is a general housing need in the area. In addition, section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by section 99 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) allows local authorities to acquire land or buildings if their acquisition will allow improvements or redevelopment to take place. CPO can be a lengthy process and the possibility of a CPO is intended to prompt the owner to enter into constructive dialogue with the local authority that then avoids the need to resort to such a measure.
From Empty Houses to New Homes
Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

9. DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

9.1 Targets 2012 - 2015

Corporate Strategy Target
Bring 75 empty properties back into use by 2015.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective 1: IDENTIFY EMPTY HOMES ACROSS STRATFORD DISTRICT.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Have a record of empty homes in the district</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Maintain accurate database using and updating Council Tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>database of properties empty for 6 months or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Incorporate referrals and intelligence from the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regarding empty homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Identify why properties are empty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) Provide a record of the location of empty homes from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>digital mapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Responsibility:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty Homes Officer with assistance of Council Tax team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leader and Change and Performance digital mapping staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Cost:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timescale:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate, regularly updated database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information to assist the identification and targeting of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'hot spots'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be completed annually in April</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Through information and publicity raise awareness of empty homes initiatives</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>To be completed annually</td>
<td>Engaging owners of empty homes</td>
<td>To provide information to engage with owners of empty homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Publicise by press release and website three empty homes awards or returns</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>By June 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Publicise by press release the Empty Homes Strategy in local media</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Review and update publicity materials</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>3 Town Councils, 1 Chamber of Commerce and 3 community forums within hotspot areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) Attend Town and Parish Council meetings, Neighbourhood Watch groups and Community in hotspot areas</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>By March 2013 and then annually</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v) Update webpage to include service standards and performance data</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Annually in December</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# From Empty Houses to New Homes

**Vision:** Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OBJECTIVE 2: Develop effective pathways to bring empty homes back into use.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C. Have a coordinated approach to empty property work</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Present new strategy to Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health with progress so far and revised strategy objectives</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>By September 2012</td>
<td>Increased public and corporate awareness of empty homes and the associated issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Engage and maintain external partners such as local Police, Housing Associations and Estate Agents</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Attend 4 town police stations within hotspot areas by March 2013.</td>
<td>Establishment of partnerships for the purposes of information sharing, and the possibility of EDMO management agreements and Private Sector Leasing scheme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Liaise with local Housing Associations and investigate the possibility of a Private Sector Leasing scheme or alternatives and promote proposed scheme across the district</td>
<td>Private Sector Housing Team and Housing Services Manager</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>By March 2013</td>
<td>To ensure cohesive approach to be able to deliver planned numbers of empty homes back into use on ‘hotspots’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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From Empty Houses to New Homes
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<tr>
<td>iv) Identify any property developers who wish to purchase and develop empty properties in any given condition. Maintain database of contacts to pass on to empty home owners</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>To create housing within local community and support the vitality and continuation of local businesses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v) Update hotspots action plan to engage with 100% of empty property owners in ‘hotspots’ as priority areas of intervention. Implement timescales for intervention of each hotspot</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>By June 2012</td>
<td>Discussion of current issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi) As number of empty homes in hotspots reduce create action plan to target empty homes outside hotspots</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>By July 2015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii) Attend West Midlands Empty Property Officers Group</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Bi-annually</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Provide encouragement and support to empty property owners</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Maintain paper trail of contact with EP owners and record on Flare</td>
<td></td>
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## From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

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<tr>
<td>ii) Provide advice and support by letter to owners of all empty homes when they become empty for longer 6 months, or on termination of Council Tax exemption ‘A’</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer and Revenues Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Build working relationships with EP owners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Contact owners of all properties empty for less than 12 months promoting benefits for owners to return properties to use before escalating costs makes this more difficult.</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>By March 2014</td>
<td>Tailored advice for each individual case</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) Research empty shops, spaces and flats above shops, and empty commercial spaces in ‘hotspots’ and promote empty homes initiative to create housing in town and village centres. Implement timescales within hotspot action plan to coincide with promotion to communities.</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>By March 2013, to review annually</td>
<td>Empty homes bought back into use informally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advice and support for owners of empty homes

Improve housing standards
From Empty Houses to New Homes
Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

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<tr>
<td>v) Maintain a toolkit of contacts, information and options to help owners bring their empty properties back into use</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi) Publish Empty Homes information pack</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Complete by May 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii) Set up a presentation at the Council’s landlord forum to provide advice and support for owners of empty homes whose properties have recently become empty for less than 12 months.</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer with Housing Standards Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Complete by August 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii) Promote Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme.</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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**From Empty Houses to New Homes**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E. <strong>Develop and adopt enforcement procedures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) An Enforced Sales policy and procedure has been prepared. A proposal to adopt this will be investigated as part of the revised loan arrangements</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer in partnership with Legal.</td>
<td>Officer time.</td>
<td>Complete by July 2012</td>
<td>Should informal action not be successful, enforcement actions should commence to secure the re-use of the empty property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Review EDMO Policy in line with any revisions to EDMO legislation</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer in partnership with Legal and managing/letting agents and/or a local Housing Association</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Complete by March 2013</td>
<td>Policies and procedures in place for all viable enforcement measures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Agree individual management agreements with partners identified in Priority 3 for Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) and develop policy and procedures as necessary</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Complete by March 2014</td>
<td>Shorter term enforcement measures take action on present issues such as: unsafe buildings, insecure buildings, major eyesores, pest harborage, hazards to others statutory nuisances</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**From Empty Houses to New Homes**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iv) Review effectiveness of Compulsory Purchase Orders in this area</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer Time</td>
<td>Complete by March 2014</td>
<td>Funding to be identified to enable Stratford District Council to carry out EDMO enforcement activity if and when required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v) Maintain procedures to utilise enforcement available within other Council departments</td>
<td>Private Sector Housing, Planning, Street Scene Building Control, Environmental Health</td>
<td>To be determined in EDMO policy</td>
<td>Ongoing Complete by October 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi) Identify funding for EDMOs where necessary</td>
<td>Private Sector Team and Housing Services Manager</td>
<td>Complete by September 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**OBJECTIVE 3: Create good quality, affordable housing for local people in housing need.**

| F. Utilise funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide | i) Revise financial support scheme to consider amendments or alternatives and additional loan scheme to include updating the Council's policy to make assistance available using | Empty Homes Officer | Officer time | Complete by August 2012 | Provide financial assistance to empty property owners to bring their properties up to the Decent Homes standard in return for |                                                                          |
From Empty Houses to New Homes
Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>affordable housing solutions across the district for those in housing need</td>
<td>the powers in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>nomination rights and provision of affordable housing to those on the Housing waiting list</td>
<td>Provide housing from empty properties, create work and training opportunities, build local communities and support neighbourhood regeneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Identify further funding as grant use and targets necessitate</td>
<td>Private Sector Team and Housing Services Manager</td>
<td>To be determined by grant take up</td>
<td>Annually in line with budget setting process</td>
<td>Complete by August 2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Research, develop and implement loans scheme for renovation of empty homes</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer and Housing Services Manager</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Complete by August 2012</td>
<td>Complete by August 2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) Research the viability of a self-help housing approach</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Complete by March 2014</td>
<td>Complete by March 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v) Work with Registered providers and the HCA to enable their programs to return empty homes to use</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Ongoing from June 2012</td>
<td>Ongoing from June 2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi) Identify community groups to work with to be able to return empty homes back to use.</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Officer time</td>
<td>Complete by April 2012</td>
<td>Complete by April 2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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From Empty Houses to New Homes

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10 Monitoring and Feedback

Measuring Performance

Performance management is important to ensure the successful delivery of our Empty Homes Strategy.

The Best Value Performance Indicator for bringing empty properties back into use (BVPI64) measured “the number of non local authority owned dwellings returned to occupation or demolished during the year as a result of action by the local authority”.

Although this no longer exists as a national performance indicator, it will still be employed by Stratford-on-Avon District Council for benchmarking and to assess performance.

Monitoring the implementation of this Strategy

The success of this Strategy will be in the timely completion of the actions contained within the action plan. An annual report to the Council’s Housing Advisory Panel, an executive committee of The Cabinet, will provide information on the implementation of the measures included.

Service Standards

We aim to respond to general requests for service within 5 days and will prepare further standards in accordance with the Strategy action plan.

Consultation and Review

We will review the Strategy and action plan annually to ensure its continued relevance publish any revised editions. Consultation on this Strategy has taken place with owners of empty homes in receipt of grant funding, West Midlands Empty Property Officers Forum, Homestamp, Empty Homes Agency, Empty Homes Network, Stratford-on-Avon District Council’s Private Sector Housing, Housing Policy, Planning, Building Control and Revenues and Council Members.