

For publication

PRIVATE SECTOR EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY (H010R)

Meeting: Cabinet

Date: 28 June 2016

Cabinet portfolio: Cabinet Member for Housing

Report by: Housing Manager - Alison Craig

For publication

1.0 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To seek approval for the adoption and publication of the Council's Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2016 – 2020.
- 1.2 To seek approval for the delegation of legislation, relating to empty homes, to the Health and Wellbeing Manager and Private Sector Housing Manager.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the adoption and publication of the Chesterfield Borough Council Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2016 - 2020.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approve the delegation of legislation, relating to empty homes (set out in **Appendix B**), to the Health and Wellbeing Manager and Private Sector Housing Manager.

3.0 **Background**

3.1 Chesterfield Borough Council's Empty Homes Strategy, was last reviewed in 2004 and incorporated Private Sector, Council and Housing Association owned empty properties.

3.2 Since 2004 there have been many changes to funding, legislation, housing policy and practice. Some of the changes that have occurred since 2004 have included:

- The Housing Act 2004
- The Decent Homes Standard
- New Homes Bonus.

3.3 In addition, much of the finance that was previously available to empty home owners to enable them to bring properties back into use is now no longer available.

3.4 The Council would always prefer to find a voluntary way forward when trying to bring a property back into use. However, on occasion this approach is unsuccessful and the use of available enforcement action must be considered, this can include:

- Compulsory Purchase
- Enforced Sale
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders.

3.5 The Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2016 - 2020 (attached at **Appendix A**) will highlight why it is necessary to have such policies in place and recommend that associated delegations are given to the Health and Wellbeing Manager and the Private Sector Housing Manager in order to secure an effective robust Private Sector Empty Homes Service.

3.6 Traditionally the delegations for legislation that can be used in association with empty homes have sat with other departments. Equipping the Health and Wellbeing Manager and Private Sector Housing Manager with delegated powers in relation to the legislation as

listed in **Appendix B**, will allow the Private Sector Empty Homes Service to operate in an efficient manner, avoid duplication and provide a robust service.

- 3.7 It should be noted that the request for the extension of delegated powers to the Private Sector Housing Team, does not infer that these powers would be removed from the services that currently hold these delegations.
- 3.8 The 2016 – 2020 Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy will focus on national policy, funding opportunities and the development of best practice. It will also highlight the Empty Homes Teams role in securing additional affordable housing, reducing demand on other council services and the positive impact that the service can have on general housing supply, New Homes Bonus income and debt recovery. These elements are crucial in a time of increased housing need and reduced budgets.
- 3.9 Chesterfield Borough Council’s Housing Strategy includes a Strategic Objective to make best use of the existing stock and actions to reduce the numbers of long term empty properties in the Borough. The Private Sector Housing Empty Homes Strategy is a dedicated strategy that helps to achieve this objective.

4.0 **Human resources/people management implications**

- 4.1 All administration and enforcement of legislation in connection with Empty Homes will be carried out within the existing resources of the Private Sector Housing Team. A restructure of this team took place in 2015 which has taken account of the implementation of the Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2016 - 2020.

5.0 **Financial implications**

- 5.1 The Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy will be delivered within the existing General Fund Budget.

6.0 **Legal and data protection implications**

6.1 Local authorities are not under a duty to prepare an Empty Homes Strategy, irrespective of tenure.

7.0 **Risk management**

7.1 The actions contained within the Strategy concern the implementation of statutory and good practice performance requirements. All relevant documents and reports have to be published and available for public scrutiny. The individual risks associated with the implementation of any proposal will be considered as part of any specific report brought on that

8.0 **Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

8.1 The new Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy will not discriminate against any residents within the Borough under the protected characteristics listed below as the strategy is aimed at all privately owned empty properties and is aimed at reducing the negative effects that an empty property can cause to surrounding houses and communities. A preliminary EIA is attached at **Appendix C**.

9.0 **Alternative options and reasons for rejection**

9.1 It is not a statutory duty for an authority to produce an Empty Homes Strategy. However, without such a strategy it would be difficult for an authority to adopt an effective approach towards empty homes within their Borough.

10.0 **Recommendations**

10.1 That Cabinet approves the adoption and publication of the Chesterfield Borough Council Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2016 - 2020.

10.2 That Cabinet approves the delegation of the legislation as listed, relating to empty homes, to the Health and Wellbeing Manager and Private Sector Housing Manager.

11.0 **Reasons for recommendations**

- 11.1 To allow the Private Sector Housing team to investigate complaints, take necessary remedial action and provide the team with the necessary authorisation to implement a robust and practical approach towards the reoccupation of empty homes within the borough.

Decision information

Key decision number	628
Wards affected	All
Links to Council Plan priorities	The Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy links in the Council Plan priority to ‘Improve the quality of life for local people’ and within this the objective: ‘To increase the supply and quality of housing in Chesterfield Borough to meet current and future needs’.

Document information

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Background documents	
Appendices to the report	
Appendix A	Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2016 – 2020
Appendix B	Provision of Delegations to the Private Sector Housing Team
Appendix C	EIA