

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE ADULT SERVICES AND HOUSING POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 17TH NOVEMBER 2016

SUBJECT OF REPORT: PANEL ENGAGEMENT WITH DEVELOPMENT OF THE EMPTY PROPERTIES DELIVERY PLAN 2016-2021

TOWN OR PARISH: N/A

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: COUNCILLOR REYNA KNIGHT, CHAIRMAN

KEY DECISION: N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) To note the work undertaken by the Panel's Empty Properties Working Group in respect of its engagement with officers on the development of the Empty Properties Delivery Plan; and
- (2) to consider the attached final consultation draft of the Plan (attached at appendix 1) - which incorporates the working group's feedback - and to comment as appropriate.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

As part of the development of the Council's Empty Properties Delivery Plan, Officers invited feedback from the Panel's Empty Properties Working Group on the draft Plan. Members' comments were incorporated into the consultation draft of the Plan which went out to public consultation on 12th October.

2. POLICY

The Empty Properties Delivery Plan supports the Council's Housing Strategy 2016-2021 by helping to meet housing need and improving the quality of housing in the district, increasing housing supply and reducing the negative impact that empty homes can have on communities and the wider housing market.

3. DETAILS

3.1 Background

The Empty Properties Working Group met with housing officers on 22nd September 2016 to consider and provide feedback on the pre-consultation draft of the Empty Properties Delivery Plan. The plan was updated, taking into account ASH Members' feedback, and was put out for public consultation between 12th October and 15th November 2015. The results of the consultation will be published on 13th December and the Plan will go before the Executive Member for approval and adoption soon after.

The purpose of the Plan is:

- to set out the Council's priorities in relation to empty homes, focussing on homes that are substantially unfurnished and which have been unoccupied for more than six months;
- to detail the actions the Council will undertake, within available resources, to prevent those properties remaining empty long term;
- to bring them back in to use; and
- to deliver a balance between providing owners with advice, information and the use of enforcement powers.

3.2 Panel feedback

The steering group considered that Plan in detail at its meeting on 22nd September and its feedback included the following:

- There was discussion around the possibility of introducing an empty property premium (a charge on empty properties amounting to 50% of Council Tax) but Members acknowledged this could be counterproductive in that it might dissuade owners from declaring vacant properties.
- Members commented that the section in the report on "reports and complaints" appeared to suggest that there were relatively large numbers of complaints. Officers were emphasised that this was not the case, acknowledging that the section would be redrafted to avoid this impression.
- In response to Members' enquiries about the extent by which costs associated with enforcement were recovered, Officers confirmed that only costs associated with legal action were currently recovered. Following discussion, it was acknowledged that a charging policy/scheme could be established under which it might be possible to recover additional staffing and administrative costs and Officers agreed to investigate this going forward.

3.3 Next steps

The draft Plan was updated to incorporate Members' comments and submitted for public consultation 12th October.

The Consultation ends on November 15th and the Panel may wish to take a further opportunity review the Plan in the light of the consultation responses - prior to its consideration by the Executive Member for approval/adoption. The work could be undertaken by the Panel's Housing Steering Group.

4. CONSULTATION

N/A

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

N/A

7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

8. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

N/A

9. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

N/A

MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUP

Reyna Knight (Chairman), Ann Harley, Ruth Jacobs, David Jolley, Liz Wells, Roz Willis

AUTHOR

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Notes of the Vacant Homes Working Group: 28th April and 22nd September 2016