



CABINET

Tuesday, 07 December 2021

Subject	Review of Empty Homes: Recommendations from Scrutiny Committee
Report by	Councillor Richard Kerry Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing
Supporting Officers	Heather Tucker Head of Housing heather.tucker@eastsoffolk.gov.uk 01502 523144 Teresa Howarth Principal Environmental Health Officer teresa.howarth@eastsoffolk.gov.uk 01394 444206

Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN
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Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is NOT in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	Not applicable
Wards Affected:	All Wards

Purpose and high-level overview

Purpose of Report:

To consider the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations in relation to Long Term Empty Homes, identified after review of this issue by the Committee on 16 September 2021. In particular to support the development of a business case to resource additional delivery in this area.

Options:

Accept the recommendations of Scrutiny Committee and ask officers to prepare a case for additional resources to prioritise the bringing back into use of Long Term Empty Homes (LTEH).

Reject the recommendations of Scrutiny Committee and accept that LTEH will not be prioritised.

Recommendation/s:

That Cabinet accepts the recommendation by the Scrutiny Committee and requests officers to develop a Business Case to consider what additional resources or incentives could be put in place to ensure more empty homes are brought back into use. This should then return to Cabinet for review and a decision in April 2022.

Corporate Impact Assessment

Governance:

This report has been prepared in response to a recommendation made by the Scrutiny Committee. The Council is required by statute to discharge certain overview and scrutiny functions. These functions are an essential component of local democracy. Scrutiny Committees can contribute to the development of Council policies and can also hold the Cabinet to account for its decisions.

ESC policies and strategies that directly apply to the proposal:

East Suffolk Strategic Plan 2020-24

East Suffolk Housing Strategy 2017-23

East Suffolk Council Private Sector Housing Strategy 2019-2023 (updated October 2020)

East Suffolk Acquisitions Policy

Environmental:

Empty homes represent a wasted resource and where opportunities arise to renovate and return these properties to use, the end result will be a modernised, more energy efficient home utilising fewer resources than a new build.

Equalities and Diversity:

Bringing long term empty properties back into use as affordable homes can support those on low incomes and suffering poverty.

Financial:

The proposed business case will include an assessment of the cost of this enhanced service including reviewing opportunities for financing from new homes bonus reserves.

Human Resources:

Additional staff resources would be required to deliver a comprehensive empty property programme.

ICT:

Not applicable.

Legal:

The business case will include the consideration of the resources required to deliver the range of legal options that can be used to bring empty homes back into use.

Risk:

The risks of not acting on empty properties include the deterioration of the property resulting in damage and nuisance to adjoining properties, and they can also be detrimental to the amenities of the local area, both of which can result in costs to the Council.

The delivery of an empty homes programme mainly funded through NHB could be at risk due to the imminent changes to the NHB as there is potential for the funding received to be significantly altered.

External Consultees:	Not Applicable.
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Strategic Plan Priorities

Select the priorities of the Strategic Plan which are supported by this proposal: <i>(Select only one primary and as many secondary as appropriate)</i>		Primary priority	Secondary priorities
T01	Growing our Economy		
P01	Build the right environment for East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
P02	Attract and stimulate inward investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P03	Maximise and grow the unique selling points of East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
P04	Business partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P05	Support and deliver infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
T02	Enabling our Communities		
P06	Community Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
P07	Taking positive action on what matters most	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
P08	Maximising health, well-being and safety in our District	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
P09	Community Pride	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
T03	Maintaining Financial Sustainability		
P10	Organisational design and streamlining services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

P11	Making best use of and investing in our assets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P12	Being commercially astute	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
P13	Optimising our financial investments and grant opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
P14	Review service delivery with partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T04	Delivering Digital Transformation		
P15	Digital by default	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P16	Lean and efficient streamlined services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P17	Effective use of data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P18	Skills and training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P19	District-wide digital infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T05	Caring for our Environment		
P20	Lead by example	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
P21	Minimise waste, reuse materials, increase recycling	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
P22	Renewable energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P23	Protection, education and influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
XXX	Governance		
XXX	How ESC governs itself as an authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How does this proposal support the priorities selected?			
<p>Empty homes can attract anti-social behaviour (PO8) and are a wasted resource (P21). Renovation and reoccupation addresses supporting infrastructure (PO5), tackling what matters most to communities by addressing an eyesore and restoring a home (PO7). The opportunity to utilise external funding to deliver the proposal makes good use of the rewards available (P13).</p>			

Background and Justification for Recommendation

1 Background facts	
1.1	<p>Scrutiny Committee considered the Cabinet Member's report on Empty Homes at its meeting on 16 September 2021.</p> <p>The written questions submitted in advance of the meeting, together with the written responses, form an appendix to the formal report which went to the Committee.</p>
2 Current position	
2.1	<p>The current position with regards to the Council's Long Term Empty Properties Strategy was stated by the Cabinet Member and Officers within the formal report received by the Committee in September 2021. It is not proposed to restate that position here, in this report, and for the sake of efficiency readers are referred to the Cabinet Member's report on the Council's website for this information.</p>

3 How to address current situation

3.1	The Scrutiny Committee noted that clearly there was a desire to deal with empty properties but one of the main issues was that staff had been diverted to other important statutory work.
3.2	Given the apparent success of a small minority of other Local Authorities in dealing with this issue, Members were of the view that the existing processes should be reviewed to ensure best practice and that sufficient dedicated resource should be made available to address this very important issue, bearing in mind the wider impact of empty properties within a community.
3.3	The Committee, in forming its recommendations, wished to offer a constructive friend's view of the current situation. In conducting the review, it was, as always, the Committee's intention to challenge in a positive way that might also add value and assistance rather than criticism.

4 Reason/s for recommendation

4.1	It is proposed Cabinet accept the recommendation and instruct officers to produce a Business Case to consider the additional work that could be carried out to increase the number of Empty Homes being brought back into use.
4.2	Officers will consider Best Practice from other Local Authorities and consider what impact that may have within the East Suffolk area.
4.3	To allow Officers sufficient time to consider the work being carried out by other LA's and to consider the financial investment required, it is proposed a Business Case is reviewed by Cabinet in April 2022.

Appendices

Appendices:

Appendix A	Review of Empty Homes by the Scrutiny Committee
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Background reference papers:

None.
