

EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

2015

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FOREWORD

This Empty Homes Strategy sets out how the Council will tackle issues surrounding empty properties over the next three years and maximise the re-use of empty homes throughout East Riding. The Council remains committed to reducing the number of empty homes within East Riding and to facilitating and assisting the creation of good quality affordable accommodation for local people. Making best use of existing housing stock will help ensure that there is a good quality supply of homes for people to rent or buy in East Riding.

The aims and objectives of this strategy can only be achieved by working closely with internal and external partners and other key stakeholders, such as property owners and local communities.

There are many reasons why properties become empty and the skills required for resolving the issue are significant and diverse. Much of the work outlined in this strategy is already under way and producing results. Delivering this strategy will help to ensure that this good work continues.

Communities, owners of empty homes and other stakeholders are strongly encouraged to contact the Council for help, advice and information about empty homes in their area. By working together we can help ensure that the number of empty homes in the East Riding continues to reduce.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are approximately 4,100 empty homes in the East Riding of which 1,500 have been empty for six months or more¹. These figures have declined over the last three years due in no small part to the East Riding of Yorkshire Council's ("the Council") approach to tackling empty homes, but the waste of good housing and neighbourhood blight associated with empty homes remains. There are also approximately 6,100 people on the Council's housing waiting list which highlights the wasted resource that empty homes represent.

The introduction of the New Homes Bonus (NHB) scheme that rewards local authorities for a reduction in the number of empty homes and penalises them for an increase, has added a new dimension to empty homes work. The potential of empty homes, both as good housing for residents of East Riding and as a source of income for the Council cannot be ignored.

When dealing with empty homes, a voluntary way forward is the preferred approach. Advice and assistance to the owners reduce the demand on Council resources and the need for enforcement action at a later date. In the vast majority of cases this is sufficient, but there are cases when owners cannot be traced or are unwilling to enter into a voluntary dialogue. In these cases, the use of enforcement action needs to be considered.

This Strategy provides a framework for the Council to ensure that it builds upon the work already undertaken to bring empty homes back into use and that benefits for the residents of East Riding are maximised.

¹ Council Tax Base Return, October 2014

I. INTRODUCTION

There are an estimated 4,100 empty homes in East Riding of which 1,500 (1%) have been empty for over 6 months. The proportion of long term empty properties compares favourably with the Yorkshire and Humber region (1.2%) and is only marginally higher than England overall (0.9%). Although long term empty properties are not a large scale problem within East Riding, these properties are;

- A wasted housing opportunity at a time of high demand for housing across East Riding;
- A cause of blight or focus of antisocial behaviour in neighbourhoods; and
- A potential loss of New Homes Bonus income for the Council.

The Council published an Empty Homes Strategy in 2012. This review provides an opportunity to consider the progress that has been made since then, to set out the nature and extent of the problem now and to promote a range of different approaches to tackling the problem. This Empty Homes Strategy has been developed to address the problem by giving an understanding of the issue of empty homes and how it impacts on the local environment. Reviewing the Strategy provides the Council with a targeted, effective and co-ordinated approach to tackling the problem of empty homes. Specifically, it looks at:

- Why properties become empty;
- What advice and assistance is available to empty home owners; and
- How the Council uses the range of powers it has available to return empty homes back into use.

It is important to highlight that the numbers of empty properties in East Riding is constantly fluctuating. High levels of empty properties are continually returning to use and, accordingly high numbers of empty properties emerge. This churn of properties is reflective of how the housing market operates and is largely beyond the control of the Council. However, through delivery of this Strategy, the Council aims to make better use of all properties within the area, both residential and commercial, that may be underutilised and able to contribute to the supply of housing and, accordingly, is committed to bringing such properties back into use.

In implementing this Strategy, the Council will ensure that clear strategic leadership is maintained and that it works collaboratively across directorates to try to resolve the issue of returning empty homes back into use. The Council itself must also work with local landlords, the fire and police services as well as with other stakeholders, such as town and parish councils, in order to ensure that continuity is achieved and advice shared.

It is anticipated that this Strategy will help to build on the procedures and skills already in place in bringing empty homes back into use through a joined up approach throughout the Council and other organisations.

1.1 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The focus of the strategy is reflected in its three objectives:

- Empty homes are identified and accurate information about their ownership and condition is maintained;
- Pathways to return empty homes to effective use are established; and
- Empty homes are brought back into effective use and adverse neighbourhood impacts are reduced.

The Strategy recognises both the linkages between empty homes and the strength of the economy in a local area and how the presence of empty homes can be a disincentive to invest in a community. The Strategy therefore recommends the linking of empty homes activity with wider regeneration and neighbourhood renewal activities in the East Riding.

An action plan, based on these objectives, is set out at the end of this Strategy.

1.2 LINKAGES TO KEY STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1.2.1 The Housing Strategy

The vision for housing as set out in the Housing Strategy is that:

the range, quality and affordability of housing in East Riding meets the needs of current and future residents, contributing towards more sustainable communities and encouraging economic growth.

The Empty Homes Strategy will help the Council to meet its vision for housing by making better use of existing housing stock and supporting the provision of good quality housing.

Such housing should be accessible to all, enhancing residents' health and wellbeing and supporting economic growth and social opportunities. This will also have positive impacts on energy efficiency and reduced carbon emissions. The Strategy considers empty properties on a cross tenure basis although the main focus is on privately owned housing.

1.2.2 The Council Business Plan

The Empty Homes Strategy will help the Council to achieve the following Corporate Priorities, as outlined in the Council Business Plan 2011-2016.

- Maximising our potential - Enabling towns to become attractive centres for businesses, homes, services and facilities
- Valuing our environment - Ensuring that empty homes are not a wasted resource and by improving them in a sustainable way
- Supporting vulnerable people, reducing inequalities - Securing additional and improved homes
- Reducing costs, raising performance - Securing investment to improve facilities

1.2.3 The East Riding Community Plan

The Strategy also reflects the Local Strategic Partnership's shared ambition for East Riding as set out in the Community Plan 2006-2016 where:

- Communities are thriving, prosperous and safe;
- Regeneration transforms deprived areas and reduces health and other inequalities and;
- We value and care for the diverse character of the area.

2. DEFINING THE ISSUE

This section seeks to define the problem of empty homes, including in particular those that fall into the category of 'long term' empty. It also explains why they remain empty and outlines the challenges with returning them into use.

2.1 WHAT IS AN EMPTY HOME?

Empty homes are properties that are unoccupied. They may be empty as they wait to come onto the market, sit empty despite being available for sale or rent, or be held off the market as an asset. Short-term vacant properties are a natural part of the housing market, occurring as sellers await buyers, or as landlords await new tenants. Where short-term vacancies and gaps in tenancies exist, these will usually be filled quickly, particularly in markets where demand for property is high. In these cases, there is no need for the Council to intervene.

It is only when properties stay empty longer than six months without any obvious signs of renovation, rental or sale that they become 'true' empty homes.

There are many negative social and environmental issues associated with empty homes. This includes vandalism, fly-tipping, anti-social behaviour including arson attacks and neighbourhood blight. As a result, adjacent properties can suffer significant falls in value and may even be affected by structural and/or environmental health issues such as vermin or damp. However not all the problems perceived by neighbours and other interested parties have legal solutions within Local Authority powers.

2.2 WHY DO PROPERTIES BECOME EMPTY?

Homes will be vacant for various reasons. They may be property investments where no tenants are sought, it may be that the property has been inherited and is awaiting resale, or the dwelling may be used for only a few weeks of the year. Empty homes may also be present where housing markets are weak and neither buyers nor tenants can be found. Other common reasons why properties may become empty include:

- Death of the occupant;
- Occupant being admitted to hospital or residential care facility;

- Eviction or repossession;
- Maintenance or value issues obstructing ability to rent the property; and
- Need for repair and refurbishment beyond budget of the owner.

Some of these events can leave a property without an occupant for a period of time, and the new owner may experience difficulties taking the next steps required to return the property back into use. Often, they may lack the resources, both in terms of time and money, needed to renovate their property and then find a tenant or buyer for it.

The Council offers advice, assistance and options designed to help empty home owners and it expects owners of empty homes to engage with the process of returning them back to use wherever possible and to co-operate with the Council.

If this advice is consistently refused, the Council may have no option but to take enforcement action to return the empty home back into use. Under key legislation, for example the Housing Act 2004, Housing Act 1985, Law of Property Act 1925 and Acquisition of Land Act 1981, the Council may act to remove control of a long term empty property from its owner.

2.3 WHERE DOES THE INFORMATION ON EMPTY HOMES COME FROM?

The best statistical source available to East Riding Council for information about empty homes is held on the Council Tax database. This information is as up to date as possible, and a record exists for the majority of dwellings in the area. Exceptions do exist however, and these may cause the data to be incomplete in certain circumstances.

An alternative source of information is through monitoring complaints made by neighbours to a property in relation to some of the negative social and environment issues outlined above.

2.4 EMPTY HOMES: CHALLENGES

There are a number of challenges involved with returning empty homes back into use. The major issues are listed below.

2.4.1 Council Tax changes

Council Tax discounts for empty homes and second homes changed in April 2013. As of April 2013:

- Empty properties are charged 100% Council Tax after being empty for two months; and
- After two years, empty homes will be charged an additional 50% Council Tax in respect of the Empty Homes Premium.

Prior to these changes to the Council Tax Scheme there was an incentive, through the council tax discounts, for home owners/residents to register properties as 'empty and unfurnished'. Whilst these changes are intended to encourage owners to bring properties back into use quickly, it may in some cases result in owners not registering their properties as empty under Council Tax. This causes a problem in terms of recording the real number of empty homes in East Riding.

2.4.2 Ownership disputes

A property may be part-owned by a developer or housing association, or even by several members of a family who have differing plans for the property's future. Court proceedings and divorce settlements can also further delay the occupation of a property.

There may also be Land Registry issues. Although there has been a requirement for owners to register their properties with the Land Registry, this requirement did not come into effect until the 1980s and therefore properties owned by the same owners from a time predating the 1980s can still remain unregistered. In these cases, establishing the owner of a property can be difficult and often impossible.

2.4.3 Disappearance of owners

The occupants of a property may have moved or a deceased owner may have died intestate or have left the property to a relative who is unaware of their new responsibility. In either

case the Council may have to commit resources to finding the rightful owner before the property can be dealt with. Even after finding the individual(s) concerned, they may be unwilling to enter into discussions or negotiations with the Council.

2.4.4 Ensuring security of property

Long term empty homes have a tendency to fall victim to acts of vandalism, arson or squatting due to their often vulnerable condition. The Council does not have a statutory duty to ensure that empty properties are adequately protected and secured however it does have a role to play and would work with the police or fire services as appropriate in the event of misuse.

2.4.5 Intentionally empty properties

These are properties that are kept empty intentionally for no specific reason or for unreasonable purposes by their owners. This type of action can result in a property remaining empty for many years.

2.4.6 House price speculation

The financial crisis that began in 2007/08 had a severe impact on house prices. It is likely that some owners of empty homes are still waiting for the 'right time' to sell their property.

The Council does not consider any of the above issues sufficient to justify the continued existence of an empty property. None of the above will be tolerated as an excuse for inaction and owners to which the above issues apply will be approached by the Council and expected to engage with the process of bringing their property back into use or face enforcement action. However, where the Council is unable to trace an owner or they fail to engage, difficult choices need to be made as the simple fact that a property is empty is an insufficient reason for formal action to be taken.

2.5 BENEFITS OF BRINGING EMPTY PROPERTIES BACK INTO USE

Taking targeted action to bring empty homes back into use helps tackle a number of social, economic and public health issues. The following benefits flow from bringing empty properties back into use:

For the owner

By bringing an empty home back into use an owner can benefit in a number of ways. If an empty home is sold an owner will receive capital income. If the property is let on the rental market, the owner would receive a regular monthly income. Leaving a home empty increases the risk of vandalism and crime. Leaving a property vacant is often associated with a lack of maintenance. The fabric of the building will deteriorate without regular maintenance, bringing the property back into use will protect the value of the property.

For people who need a home

Bringing empty homes back into use helps meet East Riding's housing need. Long term empties are a wasted resource. There are approximately 6,500 people on the Council's housing waiting list and the current Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2011) tells us that there is a need for over 1,000 affordable houses a year. Bringing empty homes back into use increases the amount of decent housing stock available.

For local residents

Bringing an empty home into use will significantly reduce the opportunities for vandalism, fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour. Unsightly homes can have an impact on neighbouring house prices, reduce pride in the community and have a direct impact on adjoining homes through dampness and structural problems. Tackling empty homes will improve the built environment, helping to maintain safe, attractive neighbourhoods.

For the local economy

Bringing an empty home back into use encourages economic vitality and can increase spending in the local economy. Unsightly homes deter investment in an area and can lead to decline or area blight.

For the wider community

Removing the impact of empty properties helps to boost the wellbeing of communities. Reduced demand on services such as the Fire and Rescue Service, the Police and Council Services mean that resources can be used more effectively elsewhere.

3. NATIONAL CONTEXT

The problem of long term empty homes is a national one. The Government has sought to address this problem through significant changes in the empty homes legislation affecting empty homes work at a local level.

3.1 LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES IN ENGLAND

Just over 635,000 homes in England are empty, and 216,000 of these have been empty for over 6 months². Returning these properties back to use would help to ease England's housing needs.

Over recent years, the Government has recognised and prioritised the issue of empty properties and is committed to “exploring a range of measures to bring empty homes into use” (Laying the Foundations, 2011³) to contribute towards meeting housing need. The following paragraphs explain the key legislative actions taken by the Government to reduce the number of long term empty homes. These changes impact upon the ability of local authorities to deal with long term empty homes.

3.2 KEY CHANGES TO EMPTY HOMES LEGISLATION

3.2.1 The New Homes Bonus (NHB)

Introduced in April 2011 with the aim of boosting home creation in England, this policy recognises that empty homes returned to use provide additional accommodation in the same way as new build properties. For each net additional property brought into use, the Government presently pays to the local authority an amount equivalent to the national average of the property's Council Tax band over the following 6 financial years following its return to use. These funds take the form of a non ring-fenced grant, giving the local authority greater flexibility to decide what projects to invest in.

In the same way that a reduction attracts a bonus, an increase in the number of empty homes attracts a penalty, reducing any NHB that may be payable on new build properties. It

² DCLG Live Table 615, last updated April 2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

³ Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/laying-the-foundations-a-housing-strategy-for-england--2>

is therefore in the financial interest of the Council to not only reduce the number of properties left empty, but also to ensure that the number remains as low as possible.

Where the Council takes action to bring a property back into use effective links are in place to make sure that the NHB is maximised.

3.2.2 Technical reforms to Council Tax

Since 2013, powers previously held by central government to vary the amount of Council Tax paid on some empty properties has been devolved to the local level. The aim of this policy is to further incentivise the re-occupation of long term empty homes by increasing Council Tax payable or by removing reductions or exemptions that were previously in place.

As outlined earlier, Local authorities are now able to decide whether to apply a discount for properties empty for up to six months and those properties empty and in need of renovation. There is also the option of imposing a 50% premium on properties empty for longer than two years and substantially unfurnished, on top of the existing Council Tax charged on an empty property.

4. THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Despite a relatively high level of housing demand, East Riding still faces the issue of long term empty homes. In October 2014, Council Tax data showed that East Riding of Yorkshire contained 152,161 dwellings, 4,105 (2.7%) of these were empty homes; of which 1,528 (1%) are classed as long term empty, meaning they have been empty for 6 months or more. At the same time there are approximately 6,800 people on the council housing register.

Re-occupying empty homes is not the sole answer to meeting all of the need for housing in East Riding but their potential cannot be ignored, both as units of accommodation and a source of income to the Council. This is evidenced by incentives such as the New Homes Bonus scheme.

For local communities however, there are other concerns in regards to empty homes. If allowed to deteriorate, even a single empty property can blight a whole street or community, reducing the values of surrounding properties, causing nuisance to local residents and contributing to neighbourhood decline. Empty homes can also attract vandalism, fly-tipping and other criminal activity.

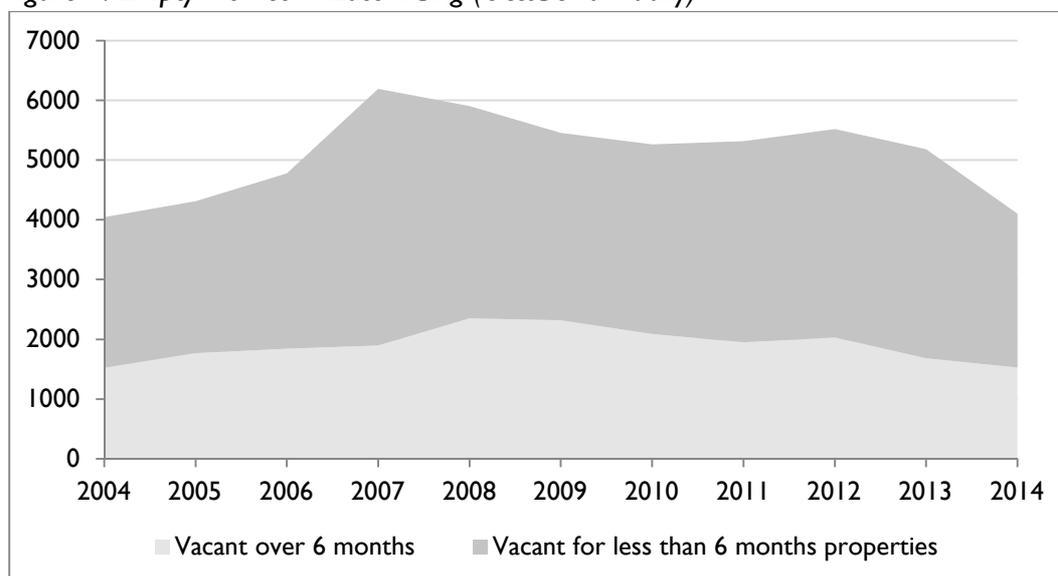
Details of the numbers of empty properties in East Riding since 2004 as measured by the Council Tax base return in October are highlighted in Table I and Figure I below. This data demonstrates that the numbers of empty properties have been on a downward trend since 2007.

Table 1 Empty Homes (October annually)

Date	Vacant for less than 6 months properties	Vacant over 6 months	All Vacant properties
2004	2518	1,526	4044
2005	2540	1,771	4311
2006	2933	1,845	4778
2007	4296	1,897	6193
2008	3556	2,350	5906
2009	3135	2,322	5457
2010	3173	2,091	5264
2011	3363	1,952	5315
2012	3490	2,030	5520
2013	3497	1686	5183
2014	2577	1528	4105

Source: ERYC Council Tax Base return

Figure 1: Empty Homes in East Riding (October annually)



Source: ERYC

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the reasons for properties being long term empty at April 2015. 77% of the long term empty homes are either ‘unoccupied and furnished’ or ‘unoccupied and unfurnished’. A further 19.5% of long term empty homes are empty due to the liable person being in care or the property is awaiting probate.

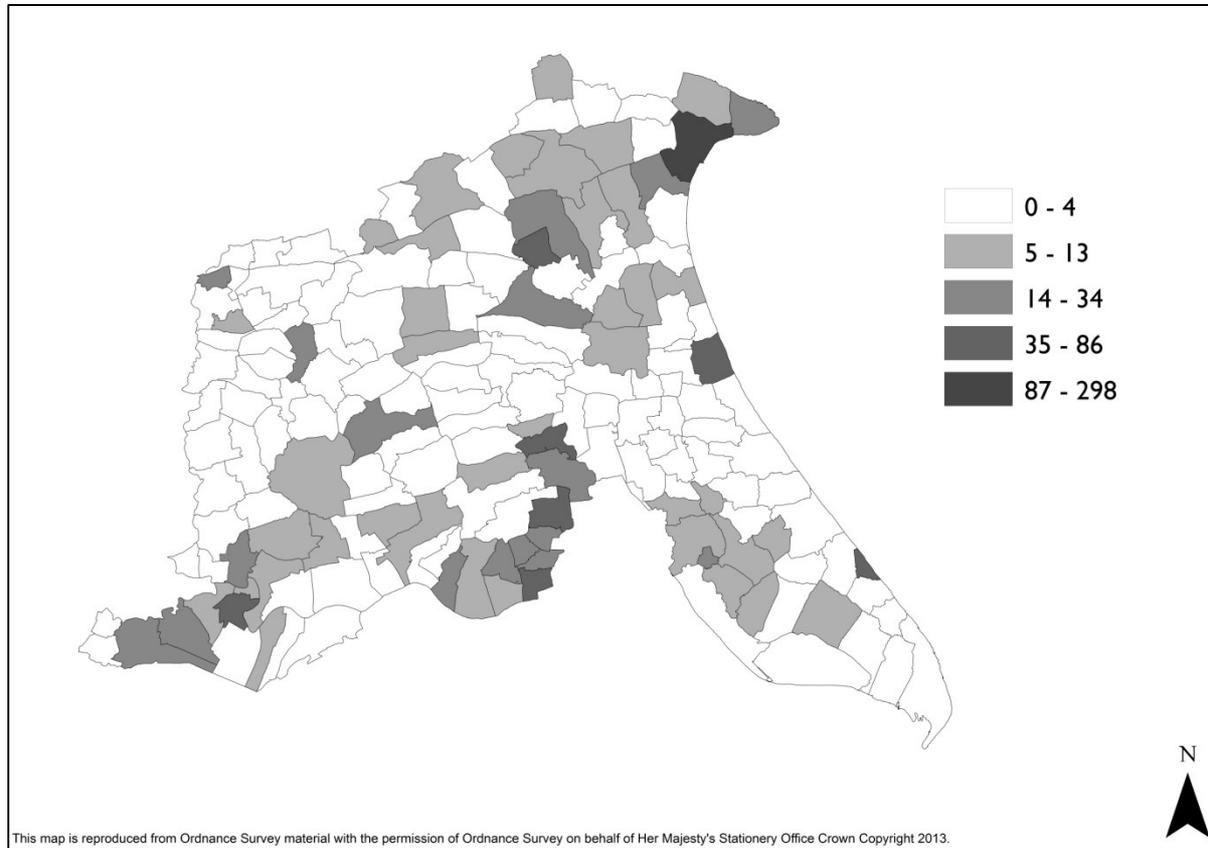
Table 2; Properties empty over six months (April 2015)

Reason for being empty	Number of properties	%
Occupant moved to permanent care	219	13.2
Awaiting probate	104	6.3
Receive care other than a care home hospital	24	1.5
Possession order against the property	9	0.5
Occupant moved to provide personal care	8	0.5
Occupant detained elsewhere	6	0.4
Trustee in bankruptcy	5	0.3
Held available for minister of religion	3	0.2
Occupation prohibited by law	2	0.1
Empty and unfurnished/furnished	1275	77.0

Source: ERYC

Map 1 provides a spatial distribution of known long term empty homes in East Riding. The vast majority of these are privately owned and located in the main population centres of Bridlington, Driffield and Goole. Relatively high numbers of long term empty properties are also found in Beverley, Cottingham, Hessle, Hornsea, Withernsea and Market Weighton.

Map 1: Long term empty homes by parish (April 2015)



4.1 HOUSING NEED

The latest analysis of the Housing Register in April 2015 showed that there were 6,876 applicants on the waiting list, with 2,186 applicants included in Bands 1-7, meaning that they have an identified housing need. Furthermore, the 2011 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) identified the need for the delivery of an additional 1,008 affordable homes annually in East Riding between 2011 and 2016.

The need for these units is largely concentrated around the more urban areas of East Riding including Bridlington, Goole, and the Hull Borders which coincide with the areas with most empty homes. The Council recognises the important contribution that bringing empty homes into use can make to meeting housing need.

4.2 PROGRESS 2012 - 2015

Despite the constraints of the current economic climate, the Council positive progress has been made since the publication of the 2012 Empty Homes Strategy including the compulsory purchase of 3 high profile empty properties which were empty for a combined total of 37 years, with a further two dwellings pending. In such cases, the Council sells properties on to a willing buyer who must improve them to a good standard of accommodation, helping to meet housing need. Funding from the subsequent sale is recycled allowing the Council to target its enforcement activity on other long term empty homes, of which a further six properties are currently being considered for action.

In addition to the above, the Council has assisted over 30 owners of empty homes to bring them back into use through advice and information.

The Council has an active programme to voluntarily purchase some empty homes and bring them back into use as affordable housing to rent to people on the housing register, using funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). Between 2012 and 2015 the Council has purchased and brought back into use 25 such properties that had previously been empty for an average of over 2 years.

The Council has also successfully secured further grant funding from the HCA to deliver a new programme over the next 3 years (2015/18) providing an additional 85 new homes of which 10 will be long term empty homes.

Since April 2013 local authorities have been able to charge a premium for the majority of properties that have been unoccupied and unfurnished for two years or more. The premium can be up to 50% of the council tax on the property and acts as an incentive for owners to bring it back into occupation. At 31 October 2014 the number of properties subject to the premium was 515 and the amount of additional council tax charged was over £300k. .

5. OPTIONS FOR DEALING WITH EMPTY HOMES

The Council will always seek to work positively with the owners of long term empty homes in the first instance, focusing on encouragement and assistance as the primary method of returning an empty home back into use. However, should such an approach be refused or an owner be unco-operative, the Council may adopt enforcement action where appropriate.

By providing owners of empty homes with a comprehensive set of information on Council assistance and enforcement powers, it is hoped that owners will decide to work proactively to return their properties back into use. The following sections outline the key focus of assistance, advice and enforcement options available to the Council.

5.1 ADVICE, ENCOURAGEMENT AND ASSISTANCE

The Council will always do its utmost to resolve an empty homes issue in the most co-operative way possible, finding a mutually beneficial solution which allows the owner to retain the property. Guidance can also be given on how to proceed with the different options to ensure the best outcome. For example, advice on VAT relief for renovating empty homes or assistance with finding tenants.

As well as offering advice to owners of long term empty homes, the Council has a dedicated point of contact for the public to report issues relating to empty homes, including; empty homes that are open for unauthorised access, fly tipping, vermin or that the property is attracting anti-social behaviour.

Empty homes that come to the attention of the public can be reported to the Council either by telephone on 01482 396301, by email at private.sector.housing@eastriding.gov.uk or online at www.eastriding.gov.uk/housing/private-housing-residents/emptyhomes.

It is important that the Council maintains a detailed picture of long term empty homes if it is to be successful in returning them to use. The Council Tax database is used to capture the number of empty homes. This information changes daily and can quickly become out of date as it relies on property owners updating the Council when changes in occupation

occur. Funding through the New Homes Bonus, as outlined in paragraph 3.2.1, highlights further the importance of maintaining an accurate and up to date empty homes database.

The Council has a priority property list which is kept up to date through use of a scoring matrix that provides a rationale for why properties are selected for particular attention. The range of property variables measured by the matrix include the length of time empty, location, impact on adjacent properties, health risks, environmental impact and whether there is a high demand for housing in the area. The matrix is reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure it reflects the Council's priorities.

In every case, (unless there is an immediate risk of harm to the general public), the Council will attempt to make contact with the property owner and offer advice and assistance to facilitate the dwelling being returned to use. Such assistance includes advice on selling or renting the property, and funding opportunities. The Council can also provide help to contact the current owner if a member of the public is interested in purchasing the property.

5.1.1 Campaigns

The Council will develop a media plan to raise awareness of the issue of long term empty homes and to make owners aware that action may be taken if they fail to make effective use of the property. The Council will take every opportunity to issue press releases when a property has been brought back into use. The intention here is to highlight what the Council is doing to address issues and send a message that the Council will take action where necessary.

The empty property database can be broken down by geographic or other criteria to select batches of properties for targeted campaigns using the most appropriate approach. These can also be mapped against requests for action or anti-social behaviour reports to identify hotspots for targeted action.

5.1.2 Voluntary acquisitions

As part of the ongoing dialogue with owners of empty homes, the Council can sometimes acquire empty homes on a voluntary basis, avoiding the need to take what can be lengthy and costly enforcement action. Such acquisitions are subject to the Council having sufficient available funding.

5.1.3 Purchase and repair

Occasionally the Council is approached by an owner of an empty dwelling requesting the Council to buy the property from them or, alternatively, the Council actively seeks out suitable dwellings to increase the amount of affordable housing in the area to meet local needs. This is known as 'Purchase and Repair' whereby empty homes are acquired, brought up to a decent standard and added to the Council's own stock of housing. A list of potential properties is maintained, ready for when funding becomes available.

In order to prioritise funding, a financial appraisal of suitable properties is undertaken to ensure that the scheme costs are within budget and represent value for money. The type and location of the empty homes targeted for acquisition are firstly determined by the conditions of the grant funding (if applicable) and secondly by housing need information.

The Council has secured grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency, as part of the Affordable Homes Programme, to bring 10 Empty Homes back into use and to purchase and repair 75 properties between 2015 and 2018. Some of these will have been empty for six months or more and will be brought back into use as council owned housing to be charged at an affordable rent. The Council complements the grant secured from the HCA through a combination of capital funding from the Housing Revenue Account and borrowing on rental income.

5.1.4 Project work

Throughout the life of this Strategy, the Council will look to explore a number of other options and funding opportunities for bringing empty homes back into use. For example, current work includes identifying funding to support regeneration work in Bridlington through bringing key long term empty properties back into use. The objectives of the project are to help reinvigorate the local housing market, attract new and long term investment into the town's private sector housing stock and to support wider regeneration objectives and developer confidence.

There is a commitment to re-visit opportunities to increase access to the private rented sector for households in housing need through an options appraisal on the advantages and disadvantages of running a 'social letting agency' whereby the Council manages privately owned housing on behalf of owners to let to people in housing need. If implemented, this

will be an additional resource available to owners of empty properties wishing to rent out their home. This will seek to increase access to the private rented sector for households in receipt of welfare benefits and/or at risk of homelessness.

The Council will be proactive in looking for new ways to persuade owners of long term empty homes to take action and further ideas will be explored as part of this Strategy based on best practice elsewhere.

5.2 ENFORCEMENT

Where an owner of a long term empty home refuses the assistance of the Council, or fails to return the property back into use within a reasonable timescale, firmer measures may be pursued which would require the owner to engage or, in some cases, risk losing their property.

The enforcement tools available to the Council are set out in the paragraphs below. Priority properties recommended for action are discussed by the Council's Empty Properties Corporate Group which includes representatives from Private Sector Housing, Housing Strategy and Development, Asset Strategy, Legal Services, Planning and Development, Valuation and Estates and Economic Development.

5.2.1 Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)

An EDMO involves the Council taking over the management of an empty home. The Council can take action against an empty home which has been unoccupied for over 2 years, bringing it up to the Decent Homes Standard before letting it at an affordable rate. Any costs incurred in renovation are recovered from the property rental. A full EDMO may be granted for 7 years, after which responsibility can be handed back to the owner. Nationally the number of properties brought back into use through EDMOs has been extremely low and whilst it remains an option, it is not the Council's preferred approach due to the level of resources required and the risks associated with recovery of invested funds.

5.2.2 Planning Powers

The Council has permissive planning powers (under s215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) to require an owner to undertake external work to tidy up the appearance of a property where this is unsightly, and these powers are sometimes used in respect of empty

or derelict houses. The threat of such action may encourage the owner of an empty property to sell that property, thus bringing it back into use. This form of action cannot require an owner to bring a property back into use but can ensure the property is not damaging to the amenity of the area.

5.2.3 Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)

A CPO is the strongest measure available to the Council and involves the Council acquiring an empty property. This course of action should only be used as a last resort. Government guidance states that a CPO should only be made where there is a compelling case for doing so in the public interest. More recently the National Planning Policy Framework encourages authorities to acquire empty properties under compulsory powers, where it is appropriate to do so.

5.3 SOCIAL HOUSING

The level of empty social housing in East Riding is extremely low and the Council is committed to ensuring that its own properties are bought back into effective use as quickly as possible using its current void procedure and void monitoring arrangements. In addition, the Council will consider all disposal requests from housing association partners with a view to ensuring that properties remain affordable to rent in the long term, wherever possible.

6. DELIVERY AND MONITORING

Capacity is limited and there is a need to prioritise how resources will be allocated and targeted to maximise impact. The first and preferred approach to working with owners to bring long term empty homes back into use is to offer advice and support which can take time and be resource intensive. There are currently 1,650 long term empty properties in the East Riding and clearly these cannot all be dealt with at the same time. Resources will therefore need to be targeted towards achieving the outcomes which are a priority for the Council, such as properties which have the greatest impact to their communities and /or where the need for housing is greatest.

6.1 FUTURE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The level of empty homes in an area has a strong correlation to the strength of the local economy and the presence of empty homes can be a disincentive to invest in an area. For this reason, the Council is keen to link empty homes activity with wider regeneration and neighbourhood renewal activities in East Riding. The Housing Strategy and Development team will ensure that funding bids submitted by the Council include priorities to return empty homes back into use to pump prime the wider economic development of the area.

6.2 PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The Council recognises that the issue of empty homes is too large to tackle in isolation and there are a range of partners that can bring expertise, knowledge and funding to deliver the outcomes of the Empty Homes Strategy. This includes private landlords, Parish and Town Councils, the Police, Fire and Rescue Service and voluntary and community groups.

The Council runs a successful property accreditation scheme for private landlords. This encourages self-regulation and helps to improve the quality of the private rented sector. The Council will share information on empty homes with landlord members of the accreditation scheme, upon their request and with the permission of the owner. This could lead to private arrangements between the owner and the private landlord to rent or buy the property.

6.3 MONITORING

Delivery of the Strategy will be monitored through the Empty Homes Corporate Working Group which meets bi-annually. The Strategy will be subject to review in 3 years and there will be annual monitoring of the delivery of the action plan. Annual monitoring will be reported to the Council's Strategic Housing Group and key messages shared with other relevant stakeholders.

Appendix I: Key enforcement legislation (applies to works in default)

Problem	Legislation	Power Granted
Dangerous or dilapidated building structures	Building Act 1984, ss77 and 78 Housing Act 2004. Part I	Section 77 – requirement for owner to make property safe Section 78- Enables Council emergency action to make building safe Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) enables councils to evaluate potential risks to health and safety arising from property deficiencies and take appropriate enforcement action
Unsecured properties (risk that it may be entered or suffer vandalism, arson etc)	Building Act 1984, s78 Local Government (miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, s29	To allow councils to fence off property To allow councils to take steps to secure property
Blocked or defective drainage or private sewers	Local Government (miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, s35 Building Act 1984, s59 Public Health Act, 1961, s17	To require the owner to address obstructed private sewers To require the owner to address blocked or defective drainage To require the owner to address defective drainage or private sewers
Vermin (either present or there is a risk that they will be attracted)	Public Health Act 1961, s34 Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, s4 Public Health Act 1936, s83 Environmental Protection Act 1990, s80 Building Act 1984 s76	To require the owner to remove waste so that vermin is not attracted to the site, to destroy an infestation and to remove any accumulation prejudicial to health

Appendix I: Key enforcement legislation (applies to works in default)

Problem	Legislation	Power Granted
Unsightly land and property affecting the amenity of an area	Public Health Act 1961, s34 Town and Country Planning Act 1990, s215 Building Act 1984, s79	To require the owner to remove waste from the property To require the owner to take steps to address a property adversely affecting the amenity of an area through its condition To require the owner to repair ruinous or dilapidated buildings seriously detrimental to the neighbourhood

Appendix 2: Empty Homes Strategy 2015 Action Plan

Ref	Priority	In year target			Lead Service
		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	
1.0	Maintain and build upon base data from the owners of empty homes within East Riding to establish why they are empty and the owners intentions	Property database is updated quarterly	Property database is updated quarterly	Property database is updated quarterly	Housing Strategy and Development
		Owners of the 100 highest priority properties contacted bi-annually, as appropriate	Owners of the 100 highest priority properties contacted bi-annually, as appropriate	Owners of the 100 highest priority properties contacted bi-annually, as appropriate	Private Sector Housing
		Owners of newly identified empty properties are contacted on a reactive basis, as appropriate			Private Sector Housing
1.1	Produce lists of priority properties based on the scoring matrix	Live list reviewed on an ongoing basis and monitored through the Empty Properties Corporate Working Group			Private Sector Housing
1.2	Raise awareness of the empty homes issue.	Ongoing programme of targeted campaigns and positive media regarding success stories			Housing Strategy and Development and Private Sector Housing
2.0	Regular Corporate Empty Properties Working Group (CEPWG) meetings to agree the most appropriate course of action for tackling empty properties	2 Meetings held	2 Meetings held	2 Meetings held	Housing Strategy and Development and Private Sector Housing
		Protocol for remit of the CEPWG reviewed	-	Protocol for remit of the CEPWG reviewed	Housing Strategy and Development and Private Sector Housing

Appendix 2: Empty Homes Strategy 2015 Action Plan

Ref	Priority	In year target			Lead Service
		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	
2.1	Options appraisal on schemes for bringing empty properties back into use	Report to Corporate Management Team on options including the use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refurbish and lease schemes, • Use of EDMOs • Financial assistance for empty homes owners, and • Partnership approaches with housing associations and the voluntary sector 	Recommendations of report implemented	Impact of recommendations reviewed	Housing Strategy and Development
2.2	Improve information available on advice and assistance	Review of publicity material available to empty home owners		Review of publicity material available to home owners	Housing Strategy and Development
		Review of website for information on Empty Properties			Private Sector Housing

Appendix 2: Empty Homes Strategy 2015 Action Plan

Ref	Priority	In year target			Lead Service
		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	
2.3	Contribute and respond to the national debate on empty homes policy and procedures	Maintain attendance at meetings of regional and national empty homes bodies, as appropriate			Housing Strategy and Development
		Respond to national consultations, as appropriate			Housing Strategy and Development
2.4	Review data sharing protocol between individual owners of empty homes and landlords	Protocol reviewed and established	-	-	Private Sector Housing
2.5	Work closely with partner organisations and the Local Economic Partnerships to identify future funding options for bringing empty properties back into use	Seek other funding streams to deliver projects			Housing Strategy and Development
3.0	Purchase and Repair 10 empty properties and bring them into Council ownership by 2018	3 Properties identified and purchased	3 Properties identified and purchased	4 Properties identified and purchased	Asset Strategy
		Continue to bid for further funding through the process of continuous market engagement			
3.1	Bring back into use 18 properties through either CPO or voluntary acquisition using capital funding by March 2018	6 Properties brought back into use	6 Properties brought back into use	6 properties brought back into use	Private Sector Housing

Appendix3: Empty Homes Strategy 2015 Scoring Matrix

	SCORING QUESTIONS	ANSWER	MAX SCORE	SCORE
Q1	Property type and identified housing need in area; (Score depends on housing need in area, info from Housing Strategy)	Yes/No	15	
Q2	Length of time empty	6 mths to 2yrs = 5 Over 2 years = 10	10	
Q3	Number of Complainants -	None = 0 1-2 = 5 3 + = 10	10	
Q4	Past enforcement action by LA (EH, Planning/BC, ASB team etc.) -	Nil = 0 Minor = 10 Major = 15	15	
Q5	Disrepair affecting/damaging adjacent properties –	None = 0 Minor = 10 Major = 15	15	
Q6	Unsightly/overgrown gardens, rubbish -	None = 0 Minor = 2 Major = 5	5	
Q7	Cost to bring back to decent homes condition -	Nil = 0 Up to £5k = 5 £5k - £10k = 10 £10k + = 15	15	
Q8	Owners willingness to engage	Unresponsive = 15 Partial = 10 Full response = 5	15	
		Total Score	100	