East Riding

Empty Homes Strategy

2012 Draft

"Fairer Housing Future Homes"

EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL
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Foreword

The draft Empty Homes Strategy draws on current good practice in dealing with empty homes in the East Riding. It identifies the scale of the issue, together with the options and resources available to bring empty properties back into use and to address the adverse impact on local neighbourhoods and economic regeneration, as part of the strategy development process.

The Local Plan Core Strategy is focused on building new housing to meet housing need and the Empty Homes Strategy ensures that the best use is made of existing housing stock, reducing its risk of falling into decline and causing blight on local communities. Encouraging the reuse of empty homes is one of the key ways to reduce the pressure on “greenfield development” whilst delivering much needed homes.

The Empty Homes Strategy helps the Council and its partners to meet a number of Corporate Priorities including: Reducing Inequalities; Valuing our environment; Local problem solving; Revitalising our communities; Safer communities and Retaining the East Riding character.

The Council is already taking action in this area and the Strategy will help to build upon this work to ensure that opportunities to target empty homes are maximised.

Councillor Symon Fraser
Portfolio Holder for Environment, Housing and Planning
Executive Summary

In October 2011, East Riding of Yorkshire contained 150,500 dwellings, 5,315 (3.5%) of these were empty homes; of which 1,952 (1.3%) are classed as long term empty, meaning they have been empty for six months or more. This overall vacancy rate is slightly higher than the vacancy rate for England at 3.1% but lower than the regional rate for Yorkshire and the Humber at 3.9%.

Of the total homes empty in October 2011, 3,363 were exempt from council tax and of these, almost 1,000 were empty due to the death of the occupier or because they had moved into long term residential care. Due to the population profile of the East Riding including a high proportion of older people, this figure is likely to increase. It is possible that providing assistance to owners or estate executors, to identify the most appropriate course of action for dealing with the property and the encouragement of early action could help to reduce the length of time for which properties remain empty.

In respect of the long term empty homes, just over 1,700 have been empty for more than two years. These represent the greatest challenge, as owners are often un-cooperative when approached by the Council and it is sometimes only the threat of or undertaking of enforcement action that leads to an appropriate resolution being found.

The Strategy proposes three key outcomes:

**Outcome 1** Empty properties are identified and accurate information about their ownership and condition is maintained;

**Outcome 2** Pathways to return empty homes to effective use are established; and

**Outcome 3** Empty homes are brought back into effective use and adverse neighbourhood impacts are reduced.

An ‘Action Plan’ has been developed to deliver the strategy which sets out the framework for the allocation of the funding secured through the Council’s Capital Appraisal Scheme to compulsorily or voluntarily purchase up to 15 long term empty properties between 2012 and 2015 and to manage 10 long term empty properties that are subject to an Empty Dwelling Management Order or at risk of enforcement action by the Council. It is also proposed to use funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Affordable Homes Programme to purchase and repair 56 properties, some of which will be empty homes, to assist in meeting housing need.

The Strategy also recognises that the level of empty homes in an area has a strong correlation to the strength of the local economy. The presence of empty homes can be a disincentive to invest in an area and so, where there is added value, the Strategy recommends also linking empty homes activity with wider regeneration and neighbourhood renewal activities in the East Riding.
Section 1: Linkages to National, Local Shared and Corporate Priorities

1.1 The Housing Strategy for England: ‘Laying the Foundations’ sets out the Government's policy on tackling empty homes as a priority. As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010, the Government announced a £100m fund to bring more empty homes back into use. The Localism Act offers registered providers of social housing (including the Council), greater flexibility to respond to local needs. Empty homes brought back into use can contribute to the housing supply to meet local needs and help tackle homelessness, prevent neighbourhood decline and regenerate areas.

1.2 The vision for housing as set out in the Housing Strategy is that: the range, quality and affordability of housing in the East Riding meets the needs of current and future residents, contributing towards more sustainable communities and encouraging economic growth.

1.3 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 including the private rented sector.

1.4 The Empty Homes Strategy will help the Council to achieve the following Corporate Priorities:

- Reducing Inequalities - through helping to meet the need for additional affordable housing;
- Valuing Our Environment - through ensuring that empty homes are not a wasted resource and by improving them in a sustainable way;
- Local Problem Solving - by applying the right solution to tackle the problem;
- Revitalising Our Communities - by linking this strategy to the economic development strategy and ensuring that future funding bids for neighbourhood renewal include targeting empty homes;
- Safer Communities - by ensuring that empty homes that are causing a nuisance are tackled as a priority and in the meantime made safe; and
- Retaining the East Riding Character - by ensuring that empty homes do not cause blight on the surrounding area.

1.5 The Strategy also reflects the Local Strategic Partnership's shared ambition for the East Riding as set out in the Community Plan 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.
The following key outcomes will be achieved as a result of this Strategy:

**Outcome 1**  Empty properties are identified and accurate information about their ownership and condition is maintained;

**Outcome 2**  Pathways to return empty homes to effective use are established; and

**Outcome 3**  Empty homes are brought back into effective use and adverse neighbourhood impacts are reduced.
Section 2: Background and Context

This section looks at the number of empty homes in the East Riding and the reasons why they are left empty. It also looks at the need for affordable housing in the East Riding and how the Council has performed in the last funding period of 2008-11.

Definition of an empty home

2.1 An empty home is categorised as one that has been recorded as such for council tax purposes. The majority are privately owned and analysis suggests that the majority of the owners own just one or two properties\(^1\). Often they are rented homes that have fallen into disrepair; or the owner has inherited the property. In many cases the owner lacks the funds or skills to repair and manage the property.

2.2 There are many negative social and environmental issues associated with empty homes. This includes vandalism, fly-tipping, anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood blight. 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.

2.3 There are a wide range of reasons why a property may be empty including:
- lack of refurbishment funds;
- reluctance to let out;
- bankruptcy / repossession;
- abandonment;
- long term care / hospitalisation;
- waiting for refurbishment;
- buy for investment and left empty;
- probate, estate or legal ownership issues;
- lack of awareness of options;
- inaction of owners unable to sell or let; or
- property chains.

2.4 In many cases such properties will not pose a problem for others living in the area. Indeed a proportion of empty properties is intrinsic to allowing the wider housing market to operate effectively. This strategy focuses on more problematic properties and where there are opportunities to meet wider housing needs through better use of existing stock.

Number of empty homes

2.5 The latest figures, from October 2011, suggest that there are 930,000 empty homes in the UK of which 350,000 are long term empty homes (meaning they have been empty for six months or more)\(^2\). However, some properties are excluded from these statistics. These include uninhabitable homes, homes due for demolition and flats above shops. If these were included in the figures there would be over one million empty homes at a national level.

\(^1\) http://emptyhomes.com/statistics-2/
\(^2\) http://emptyhomes.com/statistics-2/
In October 2011, East Riding contained 150,500 dwellings, of these 5,315 (3.5%) were empty homes; of which 1,952 (1.3%) are classed as long term empty. This overall vacancy rate is slightly higher than the vacancy rate for England at 3.1% but lower than the regional rate for Yorkshire and the Humber at 3.9%.

The following table shows the proportion of empty private sector homes as a percentage of all privately owned dwellings in the East Riding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empty Homes Figures</th>
<th>April 2010</th>
<th>April 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total no of private sector homes</td>
<td>135,982</td>
<td>136,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no of empty private sector empty homes (all)</td>
<td>5,445</td>
<td>4,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of all private sector homes that are empty</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of long term private sector empty homes (6 months+)</td>
<td>2,366</td>
<td>2,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of private sector homes that are long term empty</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HSSA

Of the total homes empty in October 2011, some 3,363 were exempt from council tax for one of the reasons shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Exempt Reason</th>
<th>Oct 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Undergoing major structural works (12 months+)</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Unoccupied and owned by a charity (6 months+)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Long term vacant dwelling (6 months+)</td>
<td>1,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Left Empty by a prisoner</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Previous sole or main residence of a person in hospital or in a care home</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Empty by deceased persons</td>
<td>548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Un-occupied where prohibited by law</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Unoccupied by the incumbent clergy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Unoccupied where previously the sole or main residence of a person who has moved to receive personal care</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Unoccupied where previously the sole or main residence of a person who has moved to provide personal care</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Unoccupied where the owner is a student</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Unoccupied dwelling which has been taken into possession by a mortgage lender</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Unoccupied dwelling where at least one person, who would otherwise be liable, is a trustee in bankruptcy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Council Tax Base Data

TOTAL 3,363

The above figures show that almost 1,000 homes are empty due to death of the occupier or because they had transferred into hospital or long term care. This largely reflects the demographic profile of the East Riding of Yorkshire which has a high proportion of older people.
2.10 The maps below show the spatial distribution of empty properties in the East Riding or Yorkshire and the locations with the highest number of long-term empty homes. This shows that Bridlington and Goole have high numbers of empty homes, followed by Beverley and Driffield as the main population centres.

Source: Council Tax data, April 2012
The majority of empty homes are privately owned (97%), with the remainder owned either by the Council, Housing Associations or other public bodies including the Ministry of Defence or NHS. Analysis of the figures for empty properties owned and managed by the Council shows that 24 have been empty for more than six months for reasons such as fire, flood or awaiting disposal.

**Housing need**

2.12 The Council recognises the important contribution that bringing empty homes back into use can make to meeting housing need. This reflects the Government's ambition to: "increase the number of empty homes that are brought back into use as a sustainable way of increasing the overall supply of housing, and to reduce blight on neighbourhoods".

2.13 There are sound financial reasons for bringing long term empty homes back into use. This includes reduced calls to the Council or Police to tackle the type of problems described in paragraph 2.2. It can also help the Council reduce reliance on temporary or emergency accommodation in its duties to house homeless households, by ensuring that there is an adequate supply of affordable housing to meet identified need.

2.14 The Council has an established need for an additional 1,008 affordable homes per annum. This is due in part to the high house price to income ratio, which at 6.2 far exceeds the accepted affordability ratio of 3.5 (see figure 4 below). Empty homes are a wasted resource which, if used effectively, could help to reduce the need for new housing.

![Figure 4: House price to income ratio](source: Hometrack 2011)

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3 Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England
4 East Riding of Yorkshire Council Housing Strategy 2011
**Performance 2008 - 2011**

2.15 During the 2008-11 spending review period, East Riding of Yorkshire Council was very successful in bidding and achieving an investment over £106 million in housing priorities\(^5\). This includes the National Affordable Housing Programme, Council Housing Decent Homes and the Single Housing Pot (Private Housing Renewal). During this time however, there was no specific source of funding to address the problem of empty homes.

2.16 In terms of intervention within East Riding of Yorkshire, the Council used funding from the single housing pot to offer discretionary grants to owners of empty homes to help bring them back into use. This funding was set out in the 2010 Housing Assistance Policy and includes specific reference to Homesteading\(^6\) and Humber Landlord Loans\(^7\).

2.17 During this period the Council made available £160k for Homesteading and as a result, three empty properties were brought back into use. Under this scheme, properties were sold to a buyer from the local area at a 25% discount, secured as a legal charge on the property for a period of five years. This was to ensure that the properties were brought back into use and remained owner/occupied for a minimum period of five years.

2.18 The abolition of the single housing pot, shortly after the new policy was agreed, meant that no landlords in the East Riding benefitted from the Humber Landlord Loan scheme. Opportunities to offer these schemes again in the future will be explored, subject to available funding.

2.19 The Council approved £247k of capital to be used as a recyclable fund to progress Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO), resulting in the acquisition of three long term empty properties. These have been sold on by tender for the best price with the sale only completing when the property is fully renovated and ready for occupation.

2.20 Since 2009 the Council has employed a dedicated Empty Homes Officer whose role is to assist owners of empty homes to establish the best approach to bringing their property back into use. This informal action has resulted in 44 dwellings (57 units of accommodation) being brought back into use between September 2009 and March 2012.

2.21 In 2010-11, the Council also purchased and repaired four empty homes in Beverley at a total scheme cost of £394,000. This included grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency of £185,050 (almost 50%) together with borrowing against the income stream. Since then, grant funding has been significantly reduced and future schemes will have to be delivered with more prudential borrowing.

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\(^5\) Source: Humber Housing Strategy 2009-19, figures 17 & 18

\(^6\) Under the Homesteading scheme the Council purchases (either by voluntary acquisition or compulsorily) long term empty dwellings and then sells them on to first time buyers with a local connection to the area at 75% of the open market valuation.

\(^7\) Loans of up to £30,000 were available to landlords under the Humber Housing Partnership to improve the quality of privately rented housing.
In 2011, the Government announced a £100 million fund for empty homes through the Affordable Homes Programme and a further £50 million for clusters of empty homes (partly to replace the housing market renewal funding which was withdrawn following the comprehensive spending review 2010). This is discussed under section 4.
**Section 3: Options for dealing with empty properties**

Due to the relatively high number of empty properties in East Riding of Yorkshire, the Council has adopted an approach which focuses on those that are causing local residents, the Council or Police most problems. These tend to be 'long-term' empty homes; those that have been empty for at least six months and in some cases may be abandoned for many years. These properties may not otherwise come back into use without the Council's intervention. Properties that are empty for under six months are more likely to be undergoing a process or transaction, so are less likely to be causing a nuisance. However the Council will intervene if they can be brought back into use as affordable housing - contributing directly to another key priority. This section considers the range of options available to the Council to bring empty homes back into use and identifies actions for incorporation into to the Action Plan at Annex 4.

**Encouragement**

3.1 The Council employs a dedicated Empty Homes Officer who provides a 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.

3.2 The Empty Homes Officer keeps a priority property list up to date using a scoring matrix which provides a rational to members of the public and owners of empty homes on how the Council selects properties for targeted action. This is set out in Annex 1 and shows the range of property variables recorded including: the length of time empty; location; its impact on adjacent properties; health risks; environmental impact and whether there is high demand for housing in the area and the maximum score awarded for each.

3.3 Empty homes that come to the attention of the public can be reported to the Council either by phone on 01482 396301 or via the website at: [www2.eastriding.gov.uk/housing/private-housing-residents/emptyhomes](http://www2.eastriding.gov.uk/housing/private-housing-residents/emptyhomes)

3.4 In every case, (unless there is an immediate risk of harm), the Empty Homes Officer 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, local and national funding opportunities (including reduced VAT on renovation works). The officer can also provide help to contact the current owner if a member of the public is interested in purchasing the property.

**Campaigns**

3.5 The Council runs regular media campaigns following high profile acquisitions of empty homes. This serves to raise awareness of the issue to members of the public and to make owners of empty homes aware that action will be taken if they fail to make use of the property. In addition, week of action campaigns are run in empty property 'hotspots' using the Council's 'Reuse is good use' slogan. This involves extensive media coverage including local radio, leaflet distribution and the ability for members of the public to talk to council officers about properties that concern them.
**Council Tax Exemption**

3.6 Empty properties may be exempt from council tax for a period if they meet the relevant criteria, however once the exemption period has expired, full council tax becomes payable for the empty property. Although the Government has given councils discretion to offer a discount for empty properties which are no longer exempt from council tax, no such discount is awarded by East Riding of Yorkshire Council. In addition, the Government is considering introducing a maximum premium on homes left empty for more than two years of 50% of the annual council tax charge. This will act as a strong financial incentive for owners to return their empty properties to occupation.

**Voluntary acquisitions**

3.7 As part of the on-going dialogue with owners of empty homes, the Council sometimes acquires empty properties on voluntary basis, avoiding the need to take what can be, lengthy enforcement action. This meets a number of aims including meeting housing need, reducing homelessness and tackling blight. Such acquisitions are subject to the Council having sufficient available funding (see section 4).

**Purchase and Repair**

3.8 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. This has become known as 'Purchase and Repair'. 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.

**Private sector leasing**

3.9 As well as buying empty homes the Council is sometimes asked to manage empty homes on behalf of owners. This is because they view the Council as a trusted ‘brand’ with a ready supply of tenants and linkages to Housing Benefit. The Council has approved a policy which allows them to manage empty properties on behalf of private landlords and owners voluntarily, as an alternative to enforcement action in the first instance but with a commitment to explore further opportunities to increase access to the private rented sector for households in housing need through an options appraisal.

3.10 This will allow consideration of providing a direct letting service to landlords or to work in partnership with private managing agents to provide a basic tenant finding service, support with direct payments and a tenancy health check, as well as offering advice and support. Once implemented, this will be an additional resource available to owners of empty properties wishing to rent out their home. The approach to options appraisal will be undertaken as part of the production of a Private Rented Housing Strategy, (under preparation), seeking to increase the level of available property for rent.
**Project work**

3.11 The Council currently owns a number of properties in the Bridlington regeneration area that are empty pending the approval of the Area Action Plan, whereby they will eventually be demolished. In the meantime, in recognition that homelessness is an issue in the East Riding, and in particular rough sleeping is especially high in Bridlington, the Council is utilising a number of properties as temporary accommodation for homeless households.

3.12 This project was funded by a small capital grant of £12k which is repaid from the rents collected. This has allowed two houses and three flats to be used as temporary accommodation so far, with a further three properties under consideration for the scheme. As well as making best use of the existing housing stock to meet housing need, it frees up the council’s own accommodation to be let to people on the housing register.

3.13 Other projects using empty homes to reduce homelessness will be explored as funding opportunities arise. This includes working with partners such as housing associations and charities to submit funding bids as appropriate.

3.14 A further idea to be explored as part of this Strategy is a 'Rent Back' scheme. Under this scheme, owners of dwellings that are too big for the household and who apply to the Council for re-housing, can opt to rent the property back to the Council for a fixed period of five years (the same length as their council tenancy). This allows the applicant to qualify for council housing, who otherwise might not. Importantly for this Strategy, it prevents the property from falling empty if the owner has to go into residential care when it becomes detrimental to the occupier’s health and well-being and they are forced to move out.

**Enforcement**

3.15 If the above options are unsuccessful and there is no legitimate reason for the property remaining empty, the Council will consider one of the enforcement actions set out below. Priority properties recommended for action are discussed by the Corporate Empty Property Working Group which includes representatives from legal services, planning and development management, housing strategy and development and valuation and estates.

**Empty Dwelling Management Orders**

3.16 Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) are a legal power contained within the Housing Act 2004, which enables councils to take over the management of an empty dwelling with the aim of securing its occupancy. The Council can serve the Order on an owner of a property that has been empty for more than two years and who, despite repeated requests, refuses to bring the property back into use.

3.17 An EDMO allows the Council to take over the running of the property, carry out repairs and then rent it out. The Council will only serve an EDMO as a last resort and on owners whose property is causing serious nuisance. The order remains in place for an initial period of one year, followed by final order lasting seven years.

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8 The Council’s draft Allocation Policy proposes a cap on household income of £40,000 and savings and equity of £150,000
and possibly extended for a further seven years, it relieves the owner of their responsibility for the dwelling during this time. The Council must have adequate arrangements in place for managing the property for the duration of the order.

3.18 In November 2011 the Council agreed that in order to fully utilise powers within the Housing Act 2004, it would perform the function of managing agent for properties subject to an enforcement order. To date, no such Orders have been progressed but the Council remains committed to using such powers where appropriate.

**Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)**

3.19 Specific powers set out in Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 and Section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allow councils to compulsorily purchase individual empty homes to enable them to be used for housing. However, this tends to shift the burden of responsibility for the empty property to the Council and can be a long process. It is also reliant on market conditions and interest from developers so the Council will only embark on this option once a strategy is in place for the properties’ swift disposal. The Council has compulsorily acquired three properties in the last two years and these have all been sold on by tender for the best price.

**Enforced Sale**

3.20 The enforced sale procedure is a power given under the Law of Property Act 1925 (s103) without the need to go through the complicated procedure associated with Compulsory Purchase Orders. It can be used in conjunction with Works in Default where notices have been served on owners insisting the works be done. If these are ignored, then the local authority has the right to carry out the work in default of the notice served. If this goes unpaid the Council has the right to place a charge on the property and subsequently enforce its sale to clear the debt.

3.21 Although the Council has not previously used this power, it is committed to taking the most appropriate course of action to tackle the issue of empty homes. The Corporate Empty Property Working Group will consider whether it is deemed quicker and cheaper to use Enforced Sale as an alternative to CPO for all properties on the priority list.
Actions arising from section 3

- Update the empty property database quarterly with information from Council Tax;
- Establish base data from the owners of empty homes within the East Riding using a range of communication methods including questionnaires;
- Produce lists of priority properties based on the scoring matrix;
- Maintain inter-departmental working to agree the most appropriate course of action for tackling priority properties;
- Promote the benefits of bringing empty homes back into use to owners;
- Run regular media campaigns to raise the issue of empty homes and at least one targeted 'hotspot' campaign each year;
- Undertake an options appraisal to facilitate closer working with the private rented sector;
- Utilise empty properties in Bridlington acquired by the Renaissance Team as temporary housing for homeless people;
- Explore the possibility of introducing 'Rent Back' schemes; and
- Identify a budget for upfront costs and establish procedures for the Council to utilise powers to enforce the sale of properties.
Section 4: Implementation and Resources

Resources to deliver the East Riding of Yorkshire Empty Homes Strategy over the period 2012-15 include: a dedicated Empty Homes Officer and remaining internal capital funding of £0.997m. This section looks at how the Strategy will be implemented and the range of actions that form the Action Plan at Annex 3.

Capital Funding

4.1 Of the £600k of capital funding set aside in 2012-15, £547k remains to expand delivery of CPO. As a recyclable fund this should enable up to 15 empty homes to be compulsorily purchased over the three years. However this target is subject to the Council rapidly recovering its costs on each property upon disposal. The highest scoring properties on the matrix are targeted for CPO first and the service delivery agreement sets out the procedures to be followed.

4.2 A further £450k will be used to fund loans up to £10k or improvement works (up to Decent Homes Standard) to homes subject to an enforcement order (e.g. EDMO) and those at risk of enforcement. This can include properties that are occupied but are not being managed effectively by the landlord (e.g. Interim Management Orders). The funding allows the Council to undertake essential works to the property prior to renting it out or to ensure the safety of the occupants. This is recovered through the rent collected and after other eligible costs have been deducted, the balance is paid to the owner at the end of the management term.

4.3 In order to progress this scheme the Council will ensure that adequate systems are in place for managing private properties on behalf of owners. This includes systems for agreeing which properties will be managed, rent collection and arrears management, tenancy and legal arrangements and collection of fees for services.

4.4 The above funding will allow the Council to improve properties subject to an EDMO and approval has been given for the Council to act as managing agent to carry out management and maintenance of the property for the duration of the Order. It is anticipated that up to ten empty properties over three years will be brought back into use by this method.

HCA Funding

4.5 Subject to contract, the Council has secured grant funding to purchase and repair 56 properties between 2012-15 as part of the Homes and Communities Agency Affordable Homes Programme. Some of these will have been empty for six months or more and they will all be brought back into use as council owned housing to be charged at an Affordable Rent. The total scheme cost for this, including prudential borrowing and grant funding of £1.4m is £6.6m.

Social Housing

4.6 The Council will ensure that its own properties are bought back into effective use as quickly as possible and will assist its housing association partners to do the same, wherever possible. A Low Demand Void Procedure is currently being developed which will ensure that surplus council dwellings are dealt with promptly and

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9 Affordable Rent is up to 80% of the market rent
efficiently. In addition the Council will consider all disposal requests from housing association partners to ensure that properties remain affordable to rent in the long term.

**Future funding opportunities**

4.7 The level of empty homes in an area has a strong correlation to the strength of the local economy. 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 the East Riding. Goole, Withernsea and Bridlington have all been identified as investment priorities along with other coastal and market towns. Housing Strategy and Development will ensure that any 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.

4.8 In addition, the Government's 'New Homes Bonus' awards the Council with six years of matched council tax funding for every empty dwelling bought back into use. If the property is to be used as Affordable Housing then an additional premium of £350 per dwelling is also awarded, providing a financial incentive to the Council to tackle the problem. If just half of the long term empty homes were brought back into use, the Council would receive an additional £8.6m from the Government, making a strong case to support the aims and objectives of the Empty Homes Strategy\(^\text{10}\). The funding is not ring fenced and forms part of the Council’s revenue reserves.

**Partnership working**

4.9 The Council recognises that the issue of empty homes is too large to tackle in isolation and that 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, the Police and Fire and Rescue Service and voluntary and community groups.

4.10 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.

4.11 In addition, the Council will publish lists of empty homes owned by organisations or companies, on its website, to encourage developers, individuals or voluntary groups to come up with solutions to bring the properties back into effective use.

\(^\text{10}\) \( (1,000 \text{ properties} \times £1,439 \text{ matched council tax income}) \times \text{six years} = £8.6m \)
**Actions arising from section 4**

- Purchase and Repair 56 properties in areas of high housing need, bringing them into Council ownership to be used as affordable housing, using HCA funding by March 2015;
- Dispose of surplus council dwellings, taking advantage of new Government disposals consents and according to the Low Demand Void Procedure;
- Establish a data sharing protocol between individual owners of empty homes and private landlords;
- Publish lists of empty homes owned by companies or organisations on the Council’s website twice a year; and
- Work closely with partner organisations including the Local Enterprise Partnership to identify future funding options to return empty homes back into use to improve the supply of suitable housing to meet demand.
Section 5: Development and Monitoring of the Strategy

5.1 The Empty Homes Strategy has been developed as a supporting document to the Council's Housing Strategy. It has been agreed by members of the Corporate Empty Homes Working Group which includes representatives from Housing and Public Protection, Housing Strategy and Development, Legal Services, Valuation and Estates and Planning and Development.

5.2 It has been subject to full consultation with the following external stakeholders [insert names] on [insert dates]. It was approved by the Council's Cabinet on [insert date].

5.3 The Strategy will be subject to review on at least a three year basis with annual monitoring and review of the delivery of the action plan.

Further Information
For further information on this strategy, please contact the Housing Strategy and Development Team at the address below or by telephoning 01482 393949.

Housing Strategy and Development
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
County Hall
Cross Street
Beverley
HU17 9BA

Email: housing.strategy@eastriding.gov.uk
# Annex 1 - Empty Homes Scoring System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1 Length time empty</td>
<td></td>
<td>1-2 yrs = 2 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-3 yrs = 4 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3-5 yrs = 8 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5-10 yrs = 10 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 yrs+ = 20 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 Complaints received</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>1 or 2 complaints +5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 or more complaints +10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 Previous Enforcement Action</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>0 or +10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 Other Empty Homes on the street</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>0 or +10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5 Disrepair affecting or damaging adjacent properties</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Minor +5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Major +10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6 Accumulated refuse/litter</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Minor +5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Action Required +10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7 Property a source of verminous pests</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>0 or +5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8 Property boarded Up</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Boarded +5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Repeat Boarding +10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9 Next door is empty</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Left property +5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Right property +5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11 Special Target Areas</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>0 or +5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12 Renewal Area</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>0 or +5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Major +10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13 Family sized house or bungalow (2 or more beds)</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>0 or +5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14 Property located in an area of housing need as confirmed by Housing Strategy</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Max +20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10 Property up for Sale or response from owner optimistic</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Discount max -20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EMPTY HOME PRIORITY SCORE**
Annex 2: Link to strategies and policies

Community Plan

East Riding Local Plan

Housing Strategy

Energy and Carbon Reduction Strategy (incorporating Green Deal and ECO Strategy)

Housing Strategy for Vulnerable People

Area Based Improvement and Renewal Strategies

Affordable Homes Strategy

Affordable Rent Policy

Tenancy Policy

Allocations Policy

Registered Provider (including housing associations) Tenancy Strategy

HRA Strategy

Private Rented Housing Strategy

Empty Homes Strategy

Housing Plan for People with Learning Disabilities

Older People’s Housing Strategy

Affordable Warmth Strategy

Homelessness Strategy

Housing Assistance Policy
Annex 3: Empty Homes Pathway

Empty property identified either from council tax records or referral

- Questionnaire returned:
  - Owner is co-operative. Make contact and send information pack
  - Maintain contact with owner and assist in returning the property to use
  - Voluntary solution found e.g. Purchase and Repair or Voluntary Acquisition

- Questionnaire sent to property owner:
  - Owner is not willing to bring property back into use

- Questionnaire not returned:
  - Monitor property complaints
  - Property empty for 2 years or more

- If complaints received, score property using matrix:
  - Are enforcement powers available or is the property suitable for Purchase and Repair?
  - Prioritise property and discuss at CEPWG
  - Decide on course of action and begin correspondence

- Build case for CPO

- No voluntary solution:
  - If charge paid return to score property
  - If there is a charge on the property consider Enforced Sale
  - Voluntarily manage the property on behalf of the owner

- Apply for interim EDMO, or if owner is willing:

- Dispose of property on the open market or through P&R.
  - Compulsory Purchase Order

- Contact owner again, remind of options. Ask if EDMO exempts apply and inform the owner of the possibility of an EDMO

- Prepare case for EDMO and inform owner of progress
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>In Year Targets</th>
<th>Resources (£000s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EHS</td>
<td>Establish base data from the owners of empty homes within the East Riding to establish why they are empty and the owner’s intentions.</td>
<td>Send questionnaires to owners of empty properties for the highest scoring 100 properties on the database on a quarterly basis and to newly identified empty properties on an ongoing reactive basis.</td>
<td>Within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS</td>
<td>Update the empty property database quarterly with information from Council Tax</td>
<td>Information obtained from Council Tax quarterly</td>
<td>Within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS</td>
<td>Produce lists of priority properties based on the scoring matrix</td>
<td>Quarterly lists produced</td>
<td>Within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS</td>
<td>Produce lists of empty homes owned by companies or organisations on the Council's website twice a year</td>
<td>List produced November 2012, List produced May 2013 and November 2013, List produced May 2014 and November 2014</td>
<td>Within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS</td>
<td>Maintain Corporate Empty Property Working Group to agree the most appropriate course of action for tackling priority properties</td>
<td>Corporate empty property working group to meet twice a year</td>
<td>Within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ref</td>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>In Year Targets</td>
<td>Resources (£000s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS 2.2</td>
<td>Undertake an options appraisal to facilitate closer working with the private rented sector</td>
<td>Options appraisal undertaken and report taken to Cabinet - Nov 2012</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS 2.3</td>
<td>Promote the benefits of bringing empty homes back into use to owners</td>
<td>Send information to owners of empty homes on the options available to them and maintain regular contact with them - ongoing</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS 2.4</td>
<td>Run regular media campaigns to raise the profile of empty homes and at least one targeted 'hotspot' campaign each year</td>
<td>Empty Homes 'Week of Action' campaign run in a 'hotspot' locality at least once a year and other campaigns launched as appropriate following high profile properties returned to use by the Council</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS 2.5</td>
<td>Explore the possibility of introducing 'Rent Back' schemes</td>
<td>Options appraisal undertaken by November 2012</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS 2.6</td>
<td>Identify a budget or examine containment within existing resources for upfront costs and establish procedures for the Council to utilise powers to Investigate scheme costs by March 2013</td>
<td>Submit a capital bid for funding and establish procedures by -</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ref</td>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>In Year Targets</td>
<td>Resources (£000s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2012/13 2013/14 2015/16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS</td>
<td>Enforce the sale of properties</td>
<td>July 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Establish a data sharing protocol between individual owners of empty homes and private landlords</td>
<td>Protocol established with Legal Services by September 2012</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Housing &amp; Public Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS</td>
<td>Work closely with partner organisations including the LEP to identify future funding options to return empty homes back into use to improve the supply of suitable housing to meet demand</td>
<td>Link the Empty Homes Strategy to the Economic Development Strategy - October 2012</td>
<td>Funding bids submitted as appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Housing Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manage 10 empty properties either voluntarily or by enforcement between 2012-15</td>
<td>Suitable empty properties identified for EDMO or Voluntary Management on an on-going basis</td>
<td>£450k (ERYC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS</td>
<td>Purchase and Repair 56 properties in areas of high housing need and bring them into Council</td>
<td>20 properties identified and 18 properties identified and 18 properties identified and</td>
<td>£6.6m (HCA &amp; ERYC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ref</td>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>In Year Targets</td>
<td>Resources (£000s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>2013/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS 3.3</td>
<td>Ownership to be used as affordable housing by March 2015</td>
<td>purchased</td>
<td>purchased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispose of surplus council dwellings according to the Stock Rationalisation Policy</td>
<td>Policy produced by July 2012</td>
<td>Surplus properties disposed according to policy - ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHS 3.4</td>
<td>Utilise empty properties in Bridlington acquired by the Renaissance Team as temporary housing for homeless people</td>
<td>11 units of accommodation leased from Bridlington Renaissance team</td>
<td>11 units of accommodation leased from Bridlington Renaissance team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outcome 1** Empty properties are identified and accurate information about their ownership and condition is maintained.

**Outcome 2** Pathways to return empty homes to effective use are established.

**Outcome 3** Empty homes are brought back into effective use (including as affordable housing) and the environmental consequences of empty homes are reduced.
Annex 5: Glossary and Abbreviations

**Affordable homes** - Homes provided at sub-market prices.

**Affordable warmth** - The ability to heat homes without the householder getting into debt

**Affordability ratio** - Average house price divided by average annual earnings

**Affordable Rent** - Up to 80% of gross open market rent

**AHP - Affordable Homes Programme** - provides public funding

**Community Plan** - Sets out the Councils long term programme of action for delivering sustainable communities

**Comprehensive Spending Review** - An assessment of the government's spending priorities, over a four year period

**CPO - Compulsory Purchase Orders** - Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 provides the council with the power to purchase a property for housing need.

**DCLG - Department of Communities and Local Government**

**EDMO - Empty Dwelling Management Order** - The Housing Act 2004 provides discretionary power for local authorities to take over the management of long-term privately owned empty homes.

**Empty Homes Database** - database of all empty homes with score applied. Used to produce the priority property list.

**Enforced Sale** - The Law of Property Act 1925 (s103) gives the Council the right to place a charge on a property in the event that debts (including council tax) remain unpaid and subsequently to enforce its sale.

**HAP - Housing Assistance Policy** - Includes assistance relating to aids and adaptations, homes security and insulation

**HCA - Homes and Communities Agency** - Central Government body which funds and supports housing and regeneration initiatives

**Homesteading** - Empty homes are made available to people at a discounted cost on condition that they renovate the property and move in.

**Housing Association** - Housing organisations which provides affordable or supported housing

**Housing General Fund** - Expenditure on housing activities that is not connected with the council’s role as landlord within the HRA

**Housing, Health and Safety Rating System** - Measures a dwelling according to the number and seriousness of hazards that it has

**New Homes Bonus** - Government funding paid to Local Authorities as an incentive for them to facilitate the building of new homes in their area.

**Priority Property List** - List of empty homes that score highly on the scoring matrix that is discussed for further action by the Corporate Empty Property Working Group.

**Purchase and Repair** - Voluntary scheme where the Council purchases
empty homes to be used as affordable housing. The scheme is subject to the Council having the relevant funds.

**Registered providers** - housing associations and local authorities registered with the HCA.

**Scoring Matrix** - System for scoring empty homes in order to prioritise them for action.

**Voluntary acquisition** - where an empty property is acquired by the Council voluntarily and without the need for enforcement action.
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