

Democratic Services Officer: Erica Fredericks (Ext. 37547)

18 June 2014

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

A meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group will be held in Committee Room 1 at the Arun Civic Centre, Maltravers Road, Littlehampton on **Thursday, 03 July 2014 at 6.00 pm** and you are requested to attend.

Members: Councillors; Bicknell, Mrs Bower, Clayden, Edwards, Mrs Goad, Mrs Harrison, Mrs Oakley, Oliver-Redgate, Mrs Pendleton and Squires.

A G E N D A

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

To elect the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for this working group.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSCENCE

Please send your apologies to Erica Keegan - tel: 01903 737547 or e-mail: erica.keegan@arun.gov.uk

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and Officers are reminded to make any declaration of personal and/or prejudicial/pecuniary interests that they may have in relation to items on this agenda.

You should declare your interest by stating:

- a) the item you have the interest in
- b) whether it is a personal interest and the nature of the interest
- c) whether it is also a prejudicial/pecuniary interest

You then need to re-declare your interest and the nature of the interest at the commencement of the item or when the interest becomes apparent.

4. MEETING TIMES

Members are requested to agree the preferred start time for future meetings and to note the future meeting dates of 28 August 2014, 23 October 2014, 08 January 2015, 05 March 2015.

5. *TERMS OF REFERENCE

To review & agree the Terms of Reference for this Working Group (attached).

6. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group held on 19 March 2014 (attached).

7. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

8. GAS SAFETY CERTIFICATES VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing will update Members on the current position with respect to Gas Safety Certificates.

9. ROUGH SLEEPER & STONEPILLOW UPDATE

The Housing Services Manager will update Members on the current numbers of Rough Sleepers in the Arun District. A report will be circulated under separate cover.

10. *EMPTY HOMES ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

This report is a summary of the current work that is being undertaken by the Council in regard to empty homes. It recommends that an Empty Homes Assistance Programme is created to offer financial incentives to property owners in the form of grants or loans and to also assist the Council with potential enforcement action that may be required if owners will not engage.

11. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

To note the work programme for 2014/15 and make any necessary amendments (attached).

(Note: *Indicates report is attached for Members of the Committee only and the Press (excluding exempt items). Copies of reports can be viewed on the Council's web site at www.arun.gov.uk or can be obtained on request from the Committee Manager.)

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP - TERMS OF REFERENCE APRIL 2014

Working Group	HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES
Established	Established following the decision taken at the Full Council Meeting on 24 March 2011 to change the arrangements for meetings for the new Council year 2011/12
Background	Following Consultation with working parties and all Members the Overview Select Committee meeting on 15/3/2011 recommended that Working Groups be introduced. This was agreed by Cabinet on 7 th March 2011 and forwarded to the Governance Committee so that changes to the Constitution could be made. The Full Council meeting on 24 March 2011 made the decision to implement the recommended changes. This Working Group has operated for just over a year and no change was made to the Working Group's remit following review in March 2012. In July 2012 there was a review of responsibility of Working Groups following a management restructure and reallocation of Cabinet Portfolios.
Membership	Membership as at April 2014 (Confirmed at Annual Council on 4 June 2014) Cllrs; Bicknell, Mrs Bower, Clayden, Edwards, Mrs Goad, Mrs Harrison, Mrs Oakley, Oliver-Redgate, Mrs Pendleton, Squires. Quorum – 4 Members
Chairman/Vice-Chairman	The Chairman and Vice Chairman will be nominated by the members of the Working Group at the first meeting of the Municipal Year.
Aim of Working Group	To consider policies and strategies and to review performance and other issues relating to the Housing & Customer Services Portfolios. The Working Group may be requested to consider issues by referral from the Overview Select Committee, Full Council and Cabinet. The Working Group may also determine its own work and propose items to be included in the Work Programme. The Working Group will not consider issues dealt with by existing Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council unless items are referred to it by such a Committee. It may, however, consider any outcomes from such Committees.
Work Programme	The Work Programme to be agreed and reviewed by the Working Group. Terms of Reference to be reviewed annually by the Working Group.
Reporting arrangements	Working Groups can report into the Overview Select Committee, Cabinet, and Full Council
Open to the public?	Yes
Term	Ongoing
Programme of meetings	Regular meetings will be held at least once per meeting cycle. Agreed dates for 2014/15 are: 28 August 2014, 23 October 2014, 08 January 2015 and 05 March 2015.
Consultation programme	Consultation to be carried out as required and agreed by the Working Group.
Research/documents	As required.
Lead Officers	Brian Pople and Jackie Follis
Support Officer	Democratic Services Officer (EK)

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HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

19 March 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Clayden (Chairman), Edwards, (Vice-Chairman) Bicknell, Mrs Bower, Mrs Harrison, Mrs Oakley, Oliver-Redgate and Squires

Councillors Mrs Brown, Dingemans and Gammon were also present for all or part of the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors; Elkins, Mrs Goad, Haymes, Mrs Madeley, and Mrs Pendleton.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 09 January 2014 were approved by the Working Group and were signed by the Chairman.

4. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF THE AGENDA

The Chairman stated that there would be a change the the order of the agenda and the Working Group agreed to consider the Customer Access Strategy prior to the verbal updates on Gas Safety Certificates and Rough Sleepers to assist with Peer Review timing.

5. CUSTOMER SERVICE ACCESS STRATEGY

The Head of Human Resources & Customer Services presented the report on progress with the replacement for the Lagan Customer Relationship Management System.

It was reported that, following concerns with the ongoing management of Lagan, the Customer Services Team, with input from IT, explored alternatives to the Lagan system. The objective was to look at options that were sustainable, could be developed to deliver future improvements and work well with other technologies such as electronic forms.

Members were informed that it was concluded that the best option for the Council was to develop an in-house system using Microsoft SharePoint. It was noted that SharePoint is an existing Arun District Council technology that would enable the Council to build a single information portal for customer interactions. It was pointed out that SharePoint had been able to deliver the

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majority of functions delivered by Lagan and would offer a saving to the Council from April 2015 of £19,000 per annum. The proposal to move to SharePoint was agreed by the Arun Improvement Programme Board in December 2013 and would offer:

- A platform through which communications may be shared
- A storage facility that retains and shares documents and other reference materials
- Integration of web based content and multimedia through one desktop window
- Adviser scripts which could be accessed by staff working in both front and back office teams, offering flexible working opportunities.
- Council’s existing workflow and electronic document management systems would have the ability to share data between different computer systems providing standardisation.
- Opportunity to develop web sites and intranet sites supported from within the platform
- Synchronisation and integrated working with other Microsoft Office Applications
- Improved customer case tracking and status updating
- Opportunity to develop the system as required at minimal additional cost.

The Head of Human Resources & Customer Services then informed the working group that as part of the Lagan replacement project the process flows used to get information from the customer to the relevant back office system, which includes E-Forms, had been reviewed.

It was reported that, with the inclusion of Arun’s workflow management and electronic document applications the aim was to go live with SharePoint in Arun Direct by 30th June 2014. The Head of Human Resources & Customer Services thanked the staff who had worked collaboratively to achieve this result and particularly thanked the Contact Centre Manager.

Following questions from the working group which were responded to by the Head of Human Resources & Customer Services Members were invited to a demonstration of the new system in the Contact Centre. Those Councillors interested were asked to contact the Committee Manager, in the first instance, to arrange a visit.

6. GAS SAFETY CERTIFICATES VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing reported that of the 15 Gas Safety Certificates that were outstanding, 3 had been booked for inspection, 4 cases were with the Legal Team for letter before action, 4 cases had received a 3rd hand delivered letter prior to a legal letter, 3 were related to void properties and 1 case was pending with the Council’s Legal Team for injunction.

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7. ROUGH SLEEPERS VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing provided the working group with an update on the use of Glenlogie to address rough sleeping issues in the District. It was reported that 72 different clients had been seen in the hub and 39 used accommodation. Members were pleased to note that 16 clients had moved into more secure accommodation reducing the numbers of those sleeping rough. It was noted that, in this way, Stonepillow was meeting its objective to support individuals in the most effective way to prevent homelessness.

It was reported that Stonepillow chaired monthly information meetings with organisations such as the Police and Mental Health support. Arun District Council would meet with Stonepillow early April 2014 to discuss future funding arrangements in the hope that the service could continue beyond June 2014. The working group noted that the work achieved by Stonepillow and the Glenlogie facility had been positive, with a clear demand for the service, and fully supported its continuation.

8. HOUSING COMPLAINTS UPDATE

The Senior Tenant Participation Officer updated the working group regarding the Council's position regarding the Housing Complaints process following changes in legislation in April 2013.

Members were informed that a complainant can decide whether to approach a designated person or designated tenant panel. It was noted that Cllr Clayden had been appointed as the designated person for complaints from Council tenants. Arun District Council began the recruitment process for a Tenants Panel in September 2013 and identified 10 tenants as having the skills and commitment to be appointed to a panel. It was decided that the 10 tenants would be appointed the Tenants Scrutiny Panel as this panel was of the greatest benefit to the Council and the tenant base.

It was explained that an option to utilise the Scrutiny Panel as a Designated Panel had been rejected on the advice from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service. The working group noted and agreed that tenant scrutiny was time consuming for panel Members and that complaint resolution requires comprehensive training that could detract from the main focus of the panel.

In discussing this item the working group felt that a Tenant Complaint Panel would be under-utilised as escalated complaints amounted to one or two annually. It was also pointed out that the training of volunteers was expensive and time consuming for little return. As the volume of complaints was low the Senior Tenant Participation Officer advised that there was no requirement for undue concern in not establishing a panel of this nature. Members were of the opinion that complaining tenants would more likely approach a councillor or MP rather than a designated panel.

It was confirmed that Councillor Clayden would continue as the nominated designated person for the foreseeable future and other councillors

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could also be approached by their constituents. The Housing Complaints Update report was then noted.

9. RAISE THE ROOF PROGRESS REPORT

The Housing Strategy & Enabling Manager and the Housing Services Manager presented the Raise the Roof Progress Report that set out the Council’s housing strategy and the progress against the action plan as at February 2014.

It was reported that whilst good progress had been maintained in enabling the delivery of affordable housing, both rent and shared ownership, the Council continued to face considerable challenges in respect of its homelessness prevention work. It was noted that the Council was making good progress with its work to improve the energy efficiency of private sector housing in the District and was moving forward with plans to develop new council housing for local people.

The Housing Strategy & Enabling Manager outlined the progress on specific items in the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2010-2015. The Council’s target of developing 1,000 affordable homes by 2015 was highlighted. Members were informed that the Council had achieved the completion of 812 homes in 3 years but there was some way to go before this strategy was met. Members expressed the opinion that social rents were preferable to affordable rents. It was explained that affordable rents were charged at a rate of up to 80% of market value which amount to around £170 a week for a 3-bedroom property whereas an equivalent social rent would be around £125 a week.

Also highlighted was the strategy to make better use of the existing housing stock by bringing 60 empty homes back into use by 2015. It was reported that 36 empty homes were returned to use in 2012/13 through direct intervention of the Council. It was reported that the Council now had limited capacity in this area of work as the Empty Homes Officer post was shared with Worthing and Adur Council.

The Housing Services Manager drew attention to the Council’s homelessness prevention strategy where the objective was to increase the levels of homelessness prevention in order to reduce the economic cost of homelessness and avoid the high social cost. It was acknowledged that the Council had performed well in homelessness prevention in recent years but because there had been demand outside the Council’s control the need of temporary housing and people often staying longer in expensive Bed and Breakfast accommodation was a significant pressure. It was explained that the Council’s aim was to increase the availability of temporary accommodation to reduce the amounts spent on Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Members welcomed the provision of temporary accommodation units at Glenlogie to support this strategy.

It was reported that part of the Action Plan was to manage, retain and improve the Council’s own housing stock. To achieve this the Council aimed to decommission unsuitable sheltered accommodation, tackle Tenancy Fraud, manage and obtain Council stock, better manage disabled adaptations and

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utilisation of the under occupation scheme which, so far, had encouraged 5 tenants to downsize.

Following questions from Members which were responded to by the Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager and the Housing Services Manager the working group noted the report.

10. TENANCY STRATEGY AND TENANCY POLICY

The Housing Services Manager presented the report on Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy which updated the working group on the first year of the strategy and policy, in particular the use of Fixed Term tenancies.

Members were reminded that the Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy were approved by Cabinet in September 2012. The Strategy was implemented from October 2012 and the policy was implemented from January 2013. Since April 2013 it was noted that 106 Council properties had been let on secure tenancies, 75 had been let on an introductory basis and 22 on Flexible (fixed term) for 5 years and 21 Flexible (Fixed Term) 10 years. It was noted that none of the prospective tenants had raised concerns.

It was explained that flexible tenancies would be reviewed in their final year as the first 5 year flexible tenancies would not end until 2018/19. It was noted that a report on the impact of the new tenancy arrangements would be brought back to the appropriate committee/working group at that time.

11. PHOTO ID

The working group received a report from the Housing Services Manager on the 12 months pilot project on the use of Photo ID for each new tenant that moved into council properties.

It was noted that photos of new tenants had been collected since 1 April 2013. A total of 318 new tenancies had started since the beginning of the financial year. Photos had also been taken of new tenants who had carried out a mutual exchange. Members were pleased to note that no tenant had refused to have their photos taken as part of the identification and verification process.

The Housing Services Manager outlined the future proposal to continue to collect photographs of all new tenants moving into Council properties and extended to other adults living in Council properties even if they are not the tenant.

Following discussion the Housing & Customer Services Working Group

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET – That

- (1) Photographic ID continues to be collected for new tenants moving into Council properties.

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- (2) Photographic ID be extended to include any changes of tenancy and any other adults living in Council properties as well as the tenant.

12. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

The working group considered the work programme for the new Municipal Year 2014/15 and noted the items for inclusion.

As this was the last meeting of this working group for this Municipal Year (2013/14) the Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their contribution and support.

(The meeting concluded at 7.50pm)

AGENDA ITEM NO.10ARUN DISTRICT COUNCILHOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP – 3RD July 2014

Recommendation Paper

Subject : Empty Homes Assistance Programme

Report by : Louise Crane

Report date: 30th April 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the 1st March 2014 the Council entered into a service level agreement with Adur and Worthing Councils for the provision of 2 days of empty homes work for a 2 year period. This has ensured the continuation of empty homes work but also by working in partnership with Adur and Worthing good practice can be shared.

This report is a summary of the current work that is being undertaken by the Council in regard to empty homes. It also recommends that an Empty Homes Assistance Programme is created to offer financial incentives to property owners in the form of grants or loans and to also assist the Council with potential enforcement action that may be required if owners will not engage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to recommend to Cabinet:

- that the Empty Homes Assistance Programme be approved for a maximum up front cost of £100,000 per year for a two year period to be recouped from property owners.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Empty homes represent a wasted resource and can have a negative impact on local communities. Long term empty properties can:

- attract crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.
- become a public health hazard and magnet to vermin as well as look unsightly and pose a potential danger to the community including children.

- detract from the neighbourhood amenity.
 - reduce the value of adjacent properties.
 - cost the community for visits and action by Police and the Councils Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team as well as the loss of council tax revenue.
- 1.2 Arun District Council is committed to playing its full part in the national campaign to bring empty residential properties back into use. Since 2006 the Council has committed a part time resource in an Empty Homes Officer and has an Empty Homes Strategy 2012-2017 which details the aims and objectives in tackling long term empty residential properties.
- 1.3 As of April 2014 there were 599 Empty Homes in the Arun District based on Council Tax records. The figures for the number of properties brought back into use are detailed in the table below:

Year	Number of Properties Brought Back into Use
2009/2010	15
2010/2011	20
2011/2012	19
2012/2013	36
2013/2014	46

- 1.4 On the 1st March 2014, the Council entered into a service level agreement with Adur and Worthing Council for the provision of 2 days of empty homes work for a 2 year period. This agreement ensures the continuation of the empty homes work, but also by working in partnership with Adur and Worthing councils good practice can be shared. The new Empty Homes Officer is part of the Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team within the Housing Department.
- 1.5 The Empty Homes Officer has been working with the Council's Council Tax Department and receives monthly reports from them in regard to those properties that are empty.
- 1.6 The focus is on any property that has been empty for more than 6 months and initially a letter will be sent to the property owner advising them of the free service the Council offers in advice and the options that are available to them to bring the property back into use. This includes how they can:
- Reduce the costs of owning an empty property including council tax and deterioration in value.
 - Reduce the risks of leaving their property unoccupied - vandalism, squatters, complaints from neighbours and the decline in its condition.

- Gain rental income or lump sum by letting or selling their property.

Options available to help empty property owners:

- Free Council endorsed 'tenant finder' service called 'Lets Help You'
- List of individuals and companies interested in purchasing empty homes
- Advice and guidance on selling their home, probate, letting and renovations

1.7 It is anticipated that this initial letter will encourage owners to contact the Council, however, if no response is received there are a 2nd and 3rd letter that is sent in a hope that they will engage with the Empty Homes Officer.

1.8 Each empty property is different and there are many reasons why they become empty. These reasons can be sensitive and it is important to be understanding of all different situations. Therefore the empty homes strategy has three key steps:

- Engage – engage in methods of identifying properties
- Encourage – encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into use
- Enforce - enforcement action will be used in appropriate circumstances to target long term empty properties, if owners fail to co-operate with renewal options.

2.0 NEW HOMES BONUS

2.1 The New Homes Bonus is a grant paid by central government for increasing the number of homes and their use.

2.2 The New Homes Bonus is paid each year for 6 years and is based on the amount of extra Council Tax revenue raised for new build homes, conversions and long term empty homes brought back into use and equates to approximately £1500 per property each year.

2.3 Therefore the work that the Empty Homes Officer carries out contributes to the amount of New Homes Bonus the Council receives, and for 2013/14 the 46 empty homes brought back into use would generate £69,000.

3.0 GUARANTEED RENTAL SCHEME

3.1 Adur and Worthing Councils have been successfully working in partnership with Northwood Letting Agency for the past year to promote their guaranteed rental scheme.

- 3.2 The Empty Homes Officer brings the scheme to the attention of owners of empty properties and introduces them to Northwood Letting Agency. The owner can choose to let the property to Northwood, who become the tenant and then sub-let the property to a homeless customer nominated by the Council's housing options team.
- 3.3 The scheme guarantees a fixed amount of rent to the owner for one year. Many empty property owners do not perhaps know how to go about renting their property or perceive it to be too difficult, therefore the guaranteed rental scheme offers a suitable solution for them. To be referred to the scheme the property must meet the decent homes standard and the owner must join the Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme.
- 3.4 Northwood Letting Agency have been operating this scheme for 15 years nationwide and have around 13,000 landlords in their 85 branches around the United Kingdom.
- 3.5 The scheme has been trialed in Arun for 3 months. As of 30th April 2014 four properties have been referred to the guaranteed rental scheme, these consist of 1 x 2 bed flat, 2 x 1 bed flats and 1 x 3 bed flat. Two of these properties have resulted in housing a homeless customer by Arun's housing options team.
- 4.0 EMPTY PROPERTIES ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME
- 4.1 Adur and Worthing Councils offer financial assistance to owners of empty properties to encourage the completion of repair works to bring the properties up to the decent homes standard for rental.
- 4.2 This assistance can be in the form of a grant which will be up to a maximum of £5,000, or an interest free loan which is up to £10,000 and paid back on a monthly basis over an agreed term.
- 4.3 In exchange for a grant or loan the property will be referred to the guaranteed rental scheme and the Council will have nomination rights for a 5 year period.
- 4.4 The grants and loans will be registered on the land registry and would be payable if sold or there is a change of tenure within the 5 year period.
- 4.5 The experience of Adur and Worthing Councils are that over the last year they have 9 potential loans in the pipeline, not all will be at the maximum amount. Also since starting through the letters that have been sent out to empty property owners the new Empty Homes Officer has 6 potential owners who would be interested in some form of financial assistance to bring their properties back into use.
- 4.6 The Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team administer the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant system and over the years have also administered a range of repair, renewal and energy efficiency loans and grants therefore are ideally placed to set up a similar system and scheme for the empty properties grants/loans.

- 4.7 If engaging and encouraging including the offer of financial assistance does not work then the final option is enforcement. This can take the form of a range of options depending upon the circumstances of the property, but may result in the service of a formal notice to require repairs or works, the Council could decide to undertake works in default, enforce a sale or compulsorily purchase the property.
- 4.8 To undertake this enforcement activity does require the availability of finances, therefore the proposal would be that any empty homes assistance programme established would also include funding to undertake certain enforcement work.
- 4.9 As the grants and loans being provided under the Empty Properties Assistance programme are recoverable, only short term financing is required. For the level of programme proposed this financing can be provided from the Council's existing funds with no material consequences for cash flow or investment income
- 5.0 RECOMMENDATION
- 5.1 It is recommended that the Empty Homes Assistance Programme be approved for a maximum up front cost of £100,000 per year for a two year period to be recouped from property owners.

Background Papers: Empty Homes Strategy 2012-2017

Contact: Louise Crane Principal Environmental Health Officer Ext: 37669

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2012-2017



Arun District Council



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Introduction

Arun District Council is committed to playing its full part in the national campaign to bring empty residential properties back into use. The Government has tasked local councils with addressing the issue of empty homes within their areas and through its Empty Homes Strategy, Arun District Council targets long-term empty residential properties within Arun.

Empty homes represent a wasted resource and can have a serious negative impact on local communities. Arun has its fair share of the over 700 000 empty homes throughout the UK. Some houses have remained empty for over 20 years, which represents a family home lost to a whole generation.










Some of the consequences of long term empty properties include:

-  Attracting crime such as vandalism, arson, squatting and dumping of rubbish
-  Causing damage to neighbouring properties
-  Being an eyesore
-  Loss of Council Tax revenue
-  Associated costs such as Environmental Health and Police action
-  Reducing the value of surrounding properties (by at least 10% - Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) and greater difficulty in selling neighbouring properties

This strategy sets out how we will work with owners of property and with local communities to make empty, wasted property a thing of the past.

Strategic Objectives

The objectives of this Strategy are designed to reflect and contribute towards local, regional and national priorities:

-  To ensure the best use of the existing housing stock.
-  To improve the existing built environment.
-  To reduce the need for greenfield development.
-  To help to ensure that housing needs are met across tenures.
-  To enhance working arrangements with Arun's Housing Partners and RSLs.
-  To complement and meet other corporate objectives.
-  To contribute towards Arun's stock of good quality affordable housing.
-  To help ensure economic stability of rural communities, economic development and growth of urban communities.
-  To maintain an "Investors in Arun" database to assist in sales of empty properties.

What constitutes an Empty Property?

In Arun an Empty Property refers to privately-owned residential properties that have remained unoccupied for at least six months.

To function effectively and to allow for residential mobility and redevelopment, the housing market needs a proportion of vacant properties. This required level of vacancy is usually supplied by new build, renovated property and short term empty property or transactional vacancies.










The recent global financial problems have resulted in this 'churn' aspect of the market becoming distorted as the level of market activity has declined, resulting in a reduction in values and slower take-up of available properties in some sections of the market. These difficulties are further exacerbated by the demand, by Lenders, for prospective purchasers to produce higher percentage deposits in order to obtain loans.

This Empty Homes Strategy is focussed on properties which fall outside those parameters and which are described as 'long term' empty properties. These properties are frequently in poor condition and are likely to have been vacant for a considerable time. Most commonly, the greater difficulties are encountered in getting the existing owners to bring their properties forward to the market and release them for sale or renovate them to a suitable standard to be let.

The Council does not regard second/holiday homes as falling within this definition, although information on optimising the potential for use of these premises will be made available to owners of such properties.







What Causes Empty Properties?

There are various reasons why properties become empty. Understanding these reasons allows for a range of different approaches to be adopted to tackle the problem. Some of these reasons or causes include:

-  Abandonment, sometimes due to age, or ill-health of owners or family disagreements.
-  Property inherited – owner lacks knowledge or inclination to deal with the property.
-  Property involved in a protracted probate case.
-  Owners unaware of options to bring property back into use: e.g. VAT concessions.
-  Owner may not be in a position to finance refurbishment or repair costs.
-  Speculative purchase by an owner who lacks funds to redevelop and/or skills and knowledge to manage the project.
-  Properties abandoned by the owner-occupiers or repossessed by finance institutions.
-  Empty residential property above shops – unsuitable means of access, security problems for the business property, reluctant freeholders or lease restrictions.
-  Properties bought for the purpose of site assembly and left empty pending refurbishment or redevelopment.

Aims

The Council is committed to making optimum use of its available resources to bring empty properties back into use and the Council's Empty Homes Strategy aims to:

-  identify long term empty homes within Arun, trace the owners and enquire as to the reasons why these empty properties remain void and unused;
-  make the best use of existing properties within Arun by encouraging a range of initiatives designed to bring empty homes back into use as an alternative option for the provision of housing without the need for further landtake;
-  contribute towards the provision of homes for households in housing need;
-  target 'long term empties' and improve the condition of 'eyesore' properties to create a better environment;
-  provide appropriate advice and support to owners of empty properties to assist them in bringing the properties back into use;
-  encourage refurbishment of existing properties because that process has a much lower environmental impact in terms of encapsulated carbon than the construction of a comparable new unit and it also utilises existing infrastructure.

The Approach

The Arun approach to Empty Homes

The starting point of our Empty Property approach is to identify the empty property. The Council is dedicated to working with property owners to bring these properties back into use where possible.

Each empty property is different and there are many reasons why they become empty. These reasons can be sensitive and it is important to be understanding of all different situations. However, it is also important to be committed to the principles of our strategy and recognise that to the community an empty property is an empty home and a wasted resource.

Owners of empty properties should be aware that while the Council would prefer to work with them, non-action is not an option. By owning a property they have a responsibility for it and must act accordingly.

Our strategy follows three key steps, the 3 E's:

Engage

Engage in methods of identifying empty properties.

Encourage

Encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into use.

Enforce

Enforcement action will be used in appropriate circumstances to target long term empty properties, if owners fail to co-operate with renewal options.

Identifying Empty Homes

The Council will use existing information held on empty properties and through other services endeavour to identify further empty homes that can be brought back into use under the Empty Homes Strategy.

An Empty Homes database will be maintained and include details of properties which have been identified as long term empty properties and which will be prioritised and targeted by the Council to return them to use.

The Empty Homes Officer will ensure that the Empty Property database is maintained and updated and the Empty Homes Officer will also maintain the Investors in Arun database, which contains details of parties interested in purchasing long term empty properties for refurbishment, for sale or letting.

The database will provide information to enable the regular monitoring and analysis of work undertaken on individual initiatives and on the Strategy as a whole.

Bringing Empty Properties Back Into Use

The Council will use a range of incentives to encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into use.

The Empty Homes Officer seeks to work with owners of empty properties, providing them with advice and assistance aimed at bringing those empty properties back into use. Enforcement action may also be considered where there appears to be no realistic prospect of a property being re-occupied without the active intervention of Arun District Council.

Partnership working with Registered Social Landlords are maximised wherever possible.

The Council also offers advice and support for VAT concessionary rate certification which may be charged on qualifying works including labour, materials and associated services in connection with refurbishment works undertaken to bring long term (over 2 years) empty property back into use.

Every empty property that is brought back into use effectively increases the housing supply in the area and provides a home for somebody.

Enforcement Action

Enforcement action through the Empty Homes Strategy is designed to ensure the reoccupation and/or refurbishment of an empty property.

Enforcement powers will be used in appropriate circumstances to target long term empty properties, if owners fail to co-operate with renewal options. This will include the service of Enforcement Notices and Empty Dwelling Management Orders under the Housing Act 2004 and the possible use of an Enforced Sale or Compulsory Purchase powers as a last resort.

Enforcement options are:

Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)

Compulsory Purchase carried out under Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended) or under section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This allows Local Authorities to acquire property for either 'quantitative or qualitative Housing gain'.

A CPO is the final solution to a problem empty property, as it removes ownership from the current owner. Once approved, we arrange the sale of the property, in some cases to a Housing Association partner to develop as Affordable Housing. Alternatively, the property will be sold on the open market, subject to covenants ensuring the refurbishment and reoccupation of the property.

Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)

This is a more recent section of legislation introduced as part of the Housing Act 2004. It is also the first piece of legislation to specifically target empty property. It involves the Local Authority taking over management of a property; carrying out works if applicable and then renting the property out, on behalf of the owner.

Management costs and any refurbishment costs are reclaimed by the Council from the rental income – with any balance going to the owner.

Enforced Sale Procedure

Carried out using enforcement powers under Section 103 of Law of Property Act 1925, this allows the Local Authority to force the sale of a property with a local land charge on it. It is a step on from Works In Default action by the Local Authority (where the Local Authority has paid for works to be done in lieu of the owner who is unwilling to act or untraceable).

However, if known, the owner has to be given the opportunity to repay the debt prior to sale. The Council does not acquire the property; it is sold to a third party. Any outstanding charges against the property, including any mortgage, are paid following the sale and any remaining money is put into an account for the owner to claim.

Empty Homes supporting affordable homes

Empty Homes is now recognised by central government as a key housing priority and this is reflected in the way in which central funding is allocated via the New Homes Bonus.

The publication of the Government's proposals for the introduction of the "New Homes Bonus" ("NHB") to provide Councils with additional funding for new affordable homes has placed a greater emphasis on the importance of Council Tax data, upon which the calculation of NHB is based.

Empty Homes brought back into use are included in the calculations for the New Homes Bonus. The government is match funding the Council Tax on long-term empty properties brought back into use for the following six years, using the national average in each band, with an additional amount being provided for those brought back into use as new affordable homes.

Arun's Empty Homes activity will help to support the delivery of NHB in Arun, but will also continue to focus upon the specialist work to deal with problem cases; particularly where there is no other party with the legal power to deal with a problem empty property.

Promoting the Strategy

The Empty Homes Strategy will be publicised locally and on the Council website to promote awareness.

The general public is encouraged to advise the Council of empty homes of which they are aware and property owners are encouraged to make their unused home available.

An e-form was launched on the Council website in 2012 which enables members of the public to 'Report an Empty Property' to the Council.

This QR code below directs you to the 'Report an Empty Property' e-form.



The Council has established a database of parties who have registered their interest in purchasing empty residential properties for refurbishment and subsequent letting or onward sale.

The database gives the contact details of those individuals and companies who are interested in buying empty properties for refurbishment, however, it is not a register of builders or contractors who simply carry out such works for clients.

There is also an e-form on the Council website www.arun.gov.uk, which allows those interested to register directly online.

This QR code below directs you to the 'Investors in Arun' e-form.



National Policy

Empty property has become an important issue nationally over the last few years, with more pressure on Local Authorities to develop effective strategies for tackling this problem. The government has produced a range of guidance and legislation, designed to help Councils set and achieve challenging targets on this issue.

Over 700 000 homes in England are empty, and over 300 000 of those have been empty for over six months.

The government wants 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.

As a means of supporting this, various incentives and levers, both practical and financial, to support local authorities, housing providers and community and voluntary groups have been put into place.

The Government's Housing Strategy for England, includes a section on its strategy for tackling empty properties. The strategy, as part of the Government's wider approach to housing outlines a number of tools, approaches and potential resources for tackling empty properties, including £100m capital funding from within the 2011-15 Affordable Homes Programme (AHP), which was allocated by various bidding procedures. This funding has been set aside to tackle long term empty properties which would not come back into use without additional financial intervention.

The bid round was aimed at Registered Providers of Social Housing, local authorities, charities and community groups with the grant funding being made available from the HCA. There was also a separate bid round for community led developers, such as charities, smaller not-for profit organisations and community and voluntary groups, to bid for a share of £100m Empty Homes 2012-15 programme. This part of the programme is not being administered by the HCA, but is being managed by Tribal Education, who have been appointed by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to deliver this part of the programme.

Regional Policy

As part of a broader initiative, the Council is working actively on the problem of Empty Homes in co-operation with the other local authorities across East Sussex and West Sussex, through the Sussex Empty Homes Forum (SEHF).

The thirteen local authorities that make up East and West Sussex may differ widely but have shared aims when it comes to privately owned empty homes.

The Forum provides a strategic framework for a co-ordinated approach to empty homes work. It complements individual Council's strategies to deal with privately owned empty homes by sharing knowledge and best practice to improve performance.

Target for Arun

We will focus on a minimum of 50 properties with a target of returning 17 properties back into use each year through direct intervention.

The table below shows the number of Empty Homes which have been brought back into use through direct intervention by Arun District Council in the last 6 years.

YEAR	UNITS BROUGHT BACK INTO USE
2006-2007	10
2007-2008	14
2008-2009	14
2009-2010	15
2010-2011	20
2011-2012	19



Useful contacts

DCLG - Department of Communities and Local Government

www.communities.gov.uk

Created in May 2006 with a powerful remit to promote community cohesion and equality as well as responsibility for housing, urban regeneration, planning and local government. This supersedes ODPM in these areas.

Empty Homes

www.emptyhomes.com

Empty Homes is an independent campaigning charity, which exists to highlight the waste of empty property in England and works with others to devise and promote solutions to bring empty property back into use.

English Partnerships

www.englishpartnerships.co.uk

English Partnerships is the national regeneration agency, supporting high quality sustainable growth across the country. They are a key delivery agency for the urban renaissance and the government's new Sustainable Communities agenda.

Housing Corporation

www.housingcorp.gov.uk

Funds and regulates housing associations in England, investing for the creation and maintenance of safe and sustainable communities. Through regulation it promotes a viable, properly governed and properly managed housing association sector

Empty Homes Network

www.ehnetwork.org.uk

The Empty Homes Network (EHN) is the successor to the National Association of Empty Property Practitioners (NAEPP). NAEPP was established in May 2001 to support people involved in delivering empty property strategies. It was launched by empty property practitioners with the support of government ministers, the Housing Corporation and the Empty Homes Agency. The main criterion to be a member is that you are involved in tackling empty property as a part of your job.

National Land Use Database

www.nlud.org.uk

'The objective of the full National Land Use Database is to develop a complete, consistent and detailed geographic record of land use in England, extendable to the other countries of the United Kingdom.' [ODPM website Jan 2006]

Sussex Empty Homes Forum

www.sussexhousingpartnerships.org.uk

Forum with representatives from all the local authorities in Sussex specifically to discuss and share good practice on empty homes work.

Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)

www.homesandcommunities.co.uk

The national housing and regeneration delivery agency for England, enabling local authorities and communities to meet the ambition they have for their areas.



Empty Homes - A wasted resource

Housing & Customer Services Working Group - 2014/15 (please note all dates for agenda items subject to review)								
Meeting Date			03-Jul-14	28-Aug-14	23-Oct-14	08-Jan-15	05-Mar-15	
Item	Lead	Origin						COMMENTS
Election of Chairman & Vice-Chairman		ToR	*					
Terms of Reference		ToR	*					
Work programme - set and review		ToR	*	*	*	*	*	
Stonepillow Update			*					
Gas Safety Certificates - verbal update at every meeting			*	*	*	*	*	
Rough Sleeper Update - verbal update at every meeting			*	*	*	*	*	
Allocations Review								The Allocations Review will be scheduled when extensive consultation has been undertaken.
Empty Homes Assistance Programme	LC		*					
Items for 2014/15								
Impact of Welfare Reform Act (including Bedroom Tax, Housing Rent Arrears and Housing Allocations)								
Housing Business Plan Annual Review								
Development of Tenants Panel								
Landlord Accreditation Scheme (include Choice Based Lettings)								
Disabled Facility Grants (Sept/Oct 2014)								

Housing & Customer Services Working Group - 2014/15 (please note all dates for agenda items subject to review)							
Meeting Date			03-Jul-14	28-Aug-14	23-Oct-14	08-Jan-15	05-Mar-15
Item	Lead	Origin					COMMENTS
Review of Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy following implementation.							From OSC: It was also noted that the Committee would receive a further report in around nine month's time so that Members could be advised of the outcomes achieved following the appointment of the Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Caseworker.
Agenda Prep Timetable							
Send to Gemma for CMT by 2pm Thurs			29-May-14	24-Jul-14	18-Sep-14	27-Nov-14	29-Jan-15
CMT Tues			03-Jun-14	29-Jul-14	23-Sep-14	02-Dec-14	03-Feb-15
Draft Reports to Erica by 11am Thurs			05-Jun-14	31-Jul-14	25-Sep-14	04-Dec-14	05-Feb-15
Agenda Prep Date 3pm			11-Jun-14	06-Aug-14	01-Oct-14	10-Dec-14	11-Feb-15
Room			CR2	Ash	Ash	Ash	Ash
Final Reports to Erica by 11am Mon			16-Jun-14	11-Aug-14	06-Oct-14	15-Dec-14	16-Feb-15
Despatch Agendas by 2pm Thurs			19-Jun-14	14-Aug-14	09-Oct-14	18-Dec-14	19-Feb-15
Date of Meeting 6pm			03-Jul-14	28-Aug-14	23-Oct-14	08-Jan-15	05-Mar-15
Room			CR1	BRTH	BRTH	BRTH	CR1
OSC Meeting Dates			29-Jul-14	23-Sep-14	18-Nov-14	27-Jan-15	10 Mar/TBC
Cabinet Meeting Dates			21-Jul-14	13-Oct-14	08-Dec-14	19-Jan-15	16-Mar-15
Full Council Meeting Dates			16-Jul-14	10-Sep-14	05-Nov-14	18 Feb/11 Mar	11 Mar/TBC
Deleted Items							
Suggested items for 2015/16							

Housing & Customer Services Working Group - 2014/15 (please note all dates for agenda items subject to review)							
Meeting Date			03-Jul-14	28-Aug-14	23-Oct-14	08-Jan-15	05-Mar-15
Item	Lead	Origin					COMMENTS