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**21 December 2017**

## **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, BN17 5LF on **Thursday, 4 January 2018 at 6.00 pm** and you are requested to attend.

Members: Councillors; Hughes (Chairman) Mrs Porter (Vice-Chairman) Mrs Ayres, Bicknell, Blampied, Edwards, Mrs Harrison-Horn, Purchase, Mrs Rapnik and Miss Rhodes.

## **A G E N D A**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and officers are invited to make any declarations of pecuniary, personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have in relation to items on the agenda, and are reminded that they should re-declare their interest before consideration of the item or as soon as the interest becomes apparent.

Members and officers should make their declaration by stating:

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

3. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group held on 2 November 2017 (as previously circulated)

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

5. \*REVIEW OF ROLE OF WORKING GROUPS

A request has been received for the operation of the current Working Groups to be reviewed. This report seeks this Working Group's views on whether there should be any change to its remit to feed into this review.

6. \*EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

This strategy has been updated and it details the positive work that has been achieved since 2012, and outlines a revised plan for the next five years to tackle empty homes across all tenures within the Arun district. The report therefore recommends the adoption of the revised Empty Homes Strategy 2018 – 2023 which is appended to the report.

7. HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT AND WELFARE REFORM PRESENTATION

A presentation will be given to the Working Group by the Group Head of Residential Services, Housing Services Manager and the Rent Arrears Team Leader.

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

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 5****ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL****REPORT TO THE HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES  
WORKING GROUP ON 4 JANUARY 2018**

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Review of role of Working Groups</b>
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<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>	Liz Futchter – Group Head of Council Advice & Monitoring Officer
<b>DATE:</b>	November 2017
<b>EXTN:</b>	01903 737610

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

A request has been received for the operation of the current Working Groups to be reviewed. This report seeks this Working Group's views on whether there should be any change to its remit to feed into this review.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Working Group is asked to compile its response to the proposals, as presented in the report, for submission to the Constitution Working Party.

**1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 A review of the remit of Working Groups was last undertaken in 2012 and concluded with a report to Full Council on 5 September 2012 when the current two Working Groups were established. The aim of this review had been to realign the responsibilities for the scrutiny function across the Working Groups and the Overview Select Committee to reflect the Cabinet Portfolios established at that time. The Working Groups have been working to a similar remit since then, undertaking a review of their terms of reference and work programme each year to ensure this reflected the priorities that Members wished to focus on. The only change has been to the name of the Environmental Services & Community Development Working Group which became known as the Environment & Leisure Working Group.
- 1.2 As part of the work that the Constitution Working Party has been carrying out in reviewing the Constitution, particularly Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) covering the Terms of Reference for Committees, Panels and Working Group, a request has been received for the operation of the current Working Groups to be reviewed. The purpose of this report is to seek Members' views to inform this review.

**2.0 PROPOSALS**

- 2.1 From the request received, two specific areas have been posed for this review:

- i. Should the Council move away from the current practice of volunteers making up the membership to introduce a maximum number? The reason for this request comes from the size of this Working Group being felt to be unwieldy and difficult to manage, with a current membership of 18 and a previous membership of 22. A membership of 10 or 15 has been suggested.
- ii. Should the remit of the Working Groups be changed to allow them some delegated authority as a decision maker? The reason for the request is based on feedback from some Members that they feel the Working Groups need a clearer purpose and role in the decision making structure.

2.2 In terms of moving to a set membership for the Working Groups, it needs to be accepted that this will introduce the need for political balance as this will be the only way to allocate seats.

2.3 A change of remit of the Working Groups to allow for decision making would completely alter current arrangements and require them to be established as Committees or Sub-Committees to allow authority to be delegated to take specified decisions. If this option was agreed, then political balance would automatically apply as legislation requires.

2.4 Initial consultation on these proposals was undertaken with the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the two Working Groups and the Group Leaders. There was support to the proposals for change from the Chairman of this Working Group and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Environment & Leisure Working Group. The Leader of the Council has also given her support; no formal comment has been received from the other Group Leaders. Based on this feedback, the Constitution Working Party then discussed the proposals at their meeting on 17 October and they concluded that:

- both Working Groups should become Sub-Committees;
- they should be politically balanced with a membership size of no more than 10 to 15; and
- they should have a degree of decision making powers with these being clearly specified.

2.5 If the proposals were to be taken forward, then the types of delegation that could be given to a Sub-Committee would be:

- To agree consultation on relevant plans/proposals
- To monitor progress against agreed projects and seek action to address any problems or issues raised
- To agree the scoping and development of new policies and strategies with final sign off being a recommendation to Cabinet or Full Council, dependent on who was the decision taker
- To undertake service reviews and seek action to address any problems or issues raised

2.6 These proposals are being presented for comment to this Working Group and were also presented to the Environment & Leisure Working Group on 19 December 2017. The feedback from this consultation will then be fed into a final report to be considered by the Constitution Working Party on 13 February 2018 and then at Full Council on 7 March 2018 so if any change is to be made, it can be introduced from the new Council year in May 2018.

**3.0 OPTIONS:**

1. To consider the proposals, as presented.
2. To propose alternative arrangements for this review.

**4.0 CONSULTATION:**

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		✓
Relevant District Ward Councillors		✓
Other groups/persons (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group Leaders and Working Group Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen</li> </ul>	✓	
<b>5.0 ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail below)</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Financial	✓	
Legal	✓	
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		✓
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		✓
Sustainability		✓
Asset Management/Property/Land		✓
Technology		✓
Other (please explain)		✓

**6.0 IMPLICATIONS:**

None

**7.0 REASON FOR THE DECISION:**

To respond to a request for a review of the current operation of Working Groups.

**8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Full Council report – Review of Responsibilities of Working Groups : 5 September 2012

AGENDA ITEM NO.6ARUN DISTRICT COUNCILHOUSING AND CUSTOMER AND SERVICES WORKING GROUP – 4<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2018

Subject : Empty Homes Strategy 2018 - 2023

Report by : Nat Slade

Report date: 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council is committed to playing its full part in the national campaign to bring empty homes back into use and has an Empty Homes Strategy 2012-2017 which details the aims and objectives in tackling long term empty properties.

The strategy has been updated and it details the positive work that has been achieved since 2012, and outlines a revised plan for the next five years to tackle empty homes across all tenures within the Arun district. The report therefore recommends the adoption of the revised Empty Homes Strategy 2018 – 2023 which is appended to the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to recommend to Cabinet:

- That the Empty Homes Strategy 2018 – 2023 appended to this report is adopted.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Empty homes represent a wasted resource and can have a negative impact on local communities. Long term empty homes 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 Properties Officer and from April 2017 this position was made full time. In addition an Empty Homes Strategy has been in place since 2012 and this details the aims and objectives in tackling long term empty residential properties and due to the strategy expiring in 2017 it is important that it is updated.
- 1.3 As of September 2017 there were 385 empty homes within the district based on Council Tax records. The Empty Properties Officer works closely with the Council's Council Tax Department and receives monthly reports from them in regard to those that are empty. The focus is on any property that has been empty for more than 6 months.
- 1.4 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 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.
- 1.5 The updated strategy identifies the positive work and achievement during the first Strategy (2012 – 2017) and details the plan and approach for the next five years to tackle the issue of empty homes across the district. It reflects the fact that there is now a full time resource and also details new areas of work that have been implemented since the introduction of the strategy in 2012 and these are detailed below.

## 2.0 EMPTY PROPERTIES ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

- 2.1 The Housing and Customer Services Working Group on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2014 recommended to Cabinet that the Empty Property Assistance Programme was set up to help provide grants and loans to owners of empty properties to bring them up to decent home standard and back into occupation.
- 2.2 The 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.
- 2.3 In exchange for a grant or loan the property will be referred to the guaranteed rent scheme and the Council will have nomination rights for a 5 year period, also the property owner will be required to join the Arun and Chichester Landlord Accreditation Scheme and meet these standards.

2.4 The grants and loans are registered on the land registry and would be payable if sold or there is a change of tenure within 5 years.

### 3.0 GUARANTEED RENT SCHEME

3.1 The aim of this scheme is to bring properties back into use, but also be able to offer home owners the opportunity to receive a guaranteed rental income and the Council to nominate a local person in housing need to these properties. The scheme is fully managed by a local letting agent that will be the homeowner's primary point of contact (not the tenant in the property). The agent will guarantee the monthly rental income, the internal condition of the property, minimum of six monthly checks and the legal fees will be covered should any tenancy result in eviction.

3.2 Through the work of the Empty Properties Officer they will identify potential properties and owners who wish to participate in the guaranteed rent scheme and work with them until the property is occupied.

### 4.0 ENFORCEMENT

4.1 If engaging and encouraging including the offer of financial assistance does not work then the strategy supports the final option of enforcement. This can take the form of a range of options depending upon the circumstance of the property but may result in the service of formal notice to require repairs or works, in properties that are so dilapidated and it is not financially economical to bring them back into use then a Demolition Order could be served, the Council may decide to undertake works in default, enforce a sale or compulsorily purchase the property.

### 5.0 NEW HOMES BONUS

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

5.2 The New Homes Bonus until 2017 was paid each year for 6 years and 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 equated to approximately £1500 per property each year.

5.3 In 2017/2018 changes to the way the New Homes Bonus was awarded has seen a reduction in the amount of money earned by reducing the reward from 6 years to 4 years.

5.4 Therefore the work that the Empty Properties Officer carries out contributes to the amount of New Homes Bonus the Council receives and since 2014 this has equated to approximately £1 million.



6.0 RECOMMENDATION

6.1 To resolve to recommend to Cabinet that the Empty Homes Strategy 2018 – 2023 is adopted.

**Background Papers:** None

**Contact:** Nat Slade Group Head of Technical Services Ext: 37683



# Empty Homes Strategy

2018 - 2023

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## Introduction

Arun District Council welcomes you to their second Empty Homes Strategy this will review the positive work that has been achieved during our first strategy (2012-2017) and the work we will continue to progress in order to address the problem with long term empty homes within our district.

This Empty Homes Strategy provides a revised plan for the next five years and what we are consistently doing to tackle the problem with empty homes across all tenures within the area. The document demonstrates our corporate approach and commitment in dealing with long term empty homes and ensures we and other departments within the council are working together in bringing these much needed homes back into use.

As of September 2017 there are currently over 385 homes within our district that are unoccupied and unfurnished. This figure does not include second homes, holiday homes, homes that the owner is receiving care elsewhere for or homes where the owner has passed away. In line with central government guidelines the intention is for the council to work with all empty home owners to bring their properties back into use, primarily to start with, our focus is on the homes that are unoccupied and unfurnished as these are a wasted resource that could provide a much needed home for local people.



Before



After

**CLlr Stephen Haymes, Cabinet Member for Technical Services said,**

*“Returning empty homes within the district back to an occupied status is vital to the housing provision the Council offers. As a Council we aim to work closely with property owners and key agencies to ensure that this happens as quickly and effectively as possible as this has a direct and positive impact on the housing supply in the area.”*



## Why do we need an Empty Homes Strategy?

Arun's district comprises of three towns, Arundel, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton all of which are popular places to live and work. As of August 2017 records show there are 75,496 residential properties with a population of 156,997 (*figures taken from June 2017 census*) this amount is discretionary to each council and subject to change. Empty homes within any area of the country represent a wasted resource in a current climate where housing needs are critical and properties are built to be lived in and used as a home for individuals or larger families.

The Housing Options Team has a current register of 1357 families (*March 2017*), if the long term empty homes were bought back into use, alone, it would reduce the Housing Register list by over a quarter. Reusing empty homes, flats over shops or derelict units increases the housing supply and improves our neighbourhoods.

If properties are allowed to remain, unused and neglected, they can begin to cause issues within the community including:

- Attracting anti-social behaviour, vandalism and arson;
- Fly tipping , accumulations of waste and pests;
- Adverse Possession - when a person who does not have the legal title to land (or property) and occupies the land without the permission of the legal owner;
- Causing damage to neighbouring properties;
- Being an eyesore;
- A cost to the council in lost council tax revenue;
- Wasted resource of a capital or rental income.

This strategy sets out how Arun District Council will work with owners of properties and with local communities to make empty, wasted homes a thing of the past.

## What is an 'Empty Home?'

In Arun an Empty Home refers to privately-owned residential properties that have remained un-occupied and unfurnished for at least six months. Empty home owners will continue to pay council tax at the normal rate, however the **council tax is increased by an extra 50%** on every single empty residential property when it reaches two years empty, this is regardless of how many owners it has had prior to the current owner. This increase was introduced in 2013 by Central Government as a tool for local authorities to encourage the 'long term' empty property owners to bring them back into use.

Information is provided to the dedicated full time Empty Properties Officer on a monthly basis by Council Tax. Permissions were introduced in the Local Government Act 2003 to enable council tax data to be used for the sole purpose of bringing empty properties back into use. **It is important your council tax records are up to date as your property maybe recorded as empty following refurbishments, sales, probate etc. but is actually occupied.**

Empty homes are not always easy to identify, a rundown property with an overgrown garden may appear empty, but is actually someone's home. On the flip side a well-kept, tidy property could have been vacant for a number of years. The property needs to be unfurnished and un lived in, therefore someone's second/holiday home is not classed as an empty home.

## What are we trying to achieve?

- Overall reductions in homes becoming empty and remaining empty within the district and a continued reduction in the number of Arun's current empty homes;
- The correct identity and recording of the registered property owner along with contact details and the reasons why it has remained an empty home;
- Improve the existing built environment by

bringing derelict land and buildings that are uninhabitable back to occupied use;

- Returning un-occupied residential properties to use;
- Improvement and re-occupation of long term empty homes;
- Reducing the need for greenfield development by using the existing housing stock and ensuring housing needs are met across tenures.
- Contribute towards Arun's stock of good quality affordable housing.

### How will it be achieved?

- By liaising with the council tax department on a monthly basis to obtain a database of empty home owners
- Monthly mailshots to all empty home owners within the district to ensure records are up to date with the most current information via our e-form.
- To encourage property owners to engage with the local authority who will provide advice, guidance and financial assistance regarding ways to bring the property back into use.
- Carrying out inspections to ensure properties are free from category one hazards as assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and meets the decent homes standard.
- Consistently working with long term

empty home owners to encourage their engagement with the council to bring their property back into use.

- Where informal action has been unsuccessful then enforcement action maybe taken to facilitate re occupation of the properties.

### Why are there Empty Homes?

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;
- 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



Before works



After works

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;
- Owner just wants to have an empty property.

The Council will use existing information held on empty homes 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 has been maintained by the Empty Properties Officer since 2014 and includes details of properties which have been identified as empty for 6+ months as well as the long term empty properties which are prioritised and targeted by the Council to return them to use.

The Empty Properties Officer will ensure that the Empty Home database is maintained and updated on a monthly basis with any relevant/new information received being passed to the relevant teams within the council to ensure transparency.

## How many Empty Homes are there?

The following tables give you an idea of some of the reasons why properties are empty and the number of these that are recorded within Arun as of October 2017.

A number of the categories are excluded from the empty homes remit as they still remain someone's primary residence i.e. hospital, prison or receiving care elsewhere, however if you are concerned about a property – report it via the online form here and it can be looked into.

Reason for being unoccupied (council tax exemption class)	Council Tax code	Number of properties
Second Homes or Holiday Homes (furnished)	PCLBO	1519
Unoccupied and unfurnished for 0-3 months	PCLC503	425
Unoccupied and unfurnished for 3-24 months	PCLCO	294
Unoccupied and unfurnished for 2+years	Prem2nd	85
Liable person in prison or detention	D	2
Liable person in a nursing home, rest home or hospital	E	191
Liable person deceased and probate NOT granted	F1	363
Liable person deceased for up to 6 months after probate	F2	26
Occupation prohibited by law	G	3
Liable party receiving care elsewhere	I	6
Liable party providing care elsewhere	J	7

Information provided by council tax records 2017

The Empty Properties Officer remit is to primarily work on the properties that have been recorded as unoccupied and unfurnished for 6+ months (highlighted in yellow on the table above).

The table to the right provides the figures from 2014 – 2017 for these two categories and how the work of the Empty Properties Officer reduces the figure each year returning a wasted resource into a home.

Year	Number of Empty Homes in Arun
2014	605
2015	495
2016	375
2017	301

## Our approach

### Engage

The starting point for us is to 'engage' with the home owner and where possible talk to them directly. A face to face meeting is sometimes more helpful to an empty home owner as it's a more personal approach, however this is not always possible. We will endeavour to offer information to homeowners on how they can bring their property back into use. Ultimately there are three options, rent the property privately, live in the property themselves or sell it.

Each empty home 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 homes 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.

### Encourage

Every empty home that is brought back into use effectively increases the housing supply in the area and provides a home for somebody. The Council offers advice and support on a number of schemes

- Probate
- VAT Reduction
- Financial Assistance
- Guaranteed Rent

We are also keen to encourage Partnership working with our partnership agencies such as the YMCA.

### Enforce

Enforcement action through the Empty Homes Strategy is designed to ensure the reoccupation and/or refurbishment of an empty property. This could include the service of Enforcement Notices under the Housing Act 2004

Enforcement action will be taken where it is deemed appropriate and/or the property has been empty for at least one year. Action can be taken earlier if the council view a property to be dangerous or seriously dilapidated. It will also be taken when it is considered that the property will not be bought back into use unless enforcement action is used and on empty properties that the owner has failed to co-operate with us. Local authorities have a number of 'enforcement tools' that can be used when communication and arrangements break down.

The following Enforcement Powers are available to the Empty Properties Officer in all of the above cases to address any immediate risks posed by a problem property, to improve an empty properties appearance or to secure an empty property. If the owner does not take the action required in order to remedy the problem then the local authority will carry out Works in Default, the defects found with the property will not just be left, the debt will be recorded against the property by the Local Land Charges Department.



When a property is identified as empty or reported to the Empty Properties Officer via the online form it is worth bearing in mind that whilst the council's main aim is to bring that property back into use, it is not a quick process. Investigations, engagement and encouragement are all processes that are undertaken prior to ANY enforcement action being taken. Once enforcement action is instigated it can take several months to a year before you see any improvements to a property. As a council we have to ensure that we are following the correct legal procedure and allowing a 'reasonable' timescale for improvements to be made. This is to ensure any appeal processes that may be instigated following the service of a notice are upheld in favour of the council and the works carried out in order to achieve the end result of an empty property becoming a home.

## Some Enforcement options

### Power of Entry Notices:

These are served to allow an inspection to be undertaken of the property under the Housing Act 2004 using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). This notice requires at least 24 hours warning to be provided to the owners (as per HM Land Registry documents) and the occupiers of the intention to inspect the property. If access is not provided by either parties on the given date and time, then a warrant of entry can be applied for from the magistrates' court. This warrant allows the council to enter the premises with or without your permission and by force if necessary.

### Improvement Notice and Demolition Order:

These are served following an inspection of a property using the Housing Health and Safety Rating system. When a category 1 or 2 hazard is identified within a property the council has a duty to act on it. This can be achieved by serving either an Improvement Notice under section 11 and/or 12 of the Housing Act 2004 which will list the deficiencies found within the property and the remedial action required to remedy the hazard within a reasonable

timescale or in properties that are so dilapidated and it is not financially economical to bring back into use the imposition of a Demolition Order under Part 1 section 265 of the Housing Act 1985.

### Enforced Sale Procedure (ESP):

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, which would cease the process, prior to sale. If the debt is still outstanding 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.

### 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.

Arun District Council can also acquire empty properties via an Order for Sale following a final charging order being granted by the Magistrates Court for non-payment of council tax. The

property will then be marketed for sale as it is for an Enforced Sale.

## How can we help bring Empty Homes back into use?

### Guaranteed Rent Scheme

The aim of this scheme is to bring properties back into use, but also be able to offer home owners the opportunity to receive a guaranteed rental income and the Council to nominate a local person in housing need to these properties. The scheme is fully managed by a local letting agent that will be the homeowner's primary point of contact (not the tenant in the property). The agent will guarantee the monthly rental income, the internal condition of the property, minimum of six monthly checks and the legal fees will be covered should any tenancy result in eviction. They will also inform the council of any issues within the properties immediately; they will not charge the property owner any administration fees, inventory costs or set up fees. They will pay the property owner rent even if the tenant does not pay.

Through the work the Empty Properties Officer they will identify potential properties and owners who wish to participate in the guaranteed rent scheme and work with them until the property is occupied.

Rents must be based on the current Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate. The managing agent sub-lets the property to a local person in housing need who is nominated by the Council's Housing Option's Team.

The tenancy agreement is between the agent and the homeowner and the homeowner's point of contact throughout the let will be solely the agent. The agent will manage all aspects of the tenancy for a minimum of one year and a maximum of 5 years.

### Grants and Loans

The council has also secured funding to enable the Empty Properties Officer to offer financial assistance to empty home owners in the form

of non-repayable loans of up to £5,000 or interest free repayable loans of up to £10,000 the finances will be used to assist in bringing properties up to the required standards and then let out. Where home owners accept this financial assistance an agreement is entered into and it will be part of the criteria that they also join the guaranteed rent scheme. Before the funds are released to the homeowner/contractor a charge is secured via the land registry and entered into the charges register for the term of the tenancy i.e. 1-5 years. Once the completed works to the property have been approved funds will be released to the homeowner/contractor, upon completion of the terms of the agreement the charge is removed from the property and the homeowner receives their property back in a habitable condition.

In exchange for the financial assistance and the guaranteed rent scheme, empty home owners would have to accept tenants from the councils housing options team. All tenants are vetted and checked, as well as having tenancy sustainment officers who will support them to apply for any benefits they are entitled to. The amount of financial assistance awarded will affect how long the nomination rights are for i.e. £1000 = 1 year's nominations or £5,000 = 5 years of nominations.

### YMCA

Arun District Council is working with the YMCA on a scheme to bring long term empty properties back into use and assist in financing the YMCA. In turn they would arrange and pay for any works needed to bring the property up to a lettable standard and then lease the property from the owner for 5-10 years and rent it out to a household in housing need. The owner would receive a guaranteed rental income; the YMCA would manage the tenancy. The council would receive the nomination.

### Accreditation scheme

As part of the conditions of the financial assistance and the guaranteed rent scheme the owner of the property will be required to join

the Arun and Chichester Landlord Accreditation Scheme. Further information on this scheme can be found at [www.arun.gov.uk/landlord-accreditation-scheme](http://www.arun.gov.uk/landlord-accreditation-scheme).

### VAT Reductions

Properties that have been empty for two years or more can benefit from a VAT discount of between 0%-5% for carrying out works to bring it back into use. We can often provide a letter confirming how long a property has been empty for, to provide evidence for the reduction. For further information contact the Empty Properties Officer or visit the Arun District Councils website at [www.arun.gov.uk/empty-properties](http://www.arun.gov.uk/empty-properties).

### Buy with confidence

Trading Standards in West Sussex provides useful advice for those undertaking building works. Their 'Buy with Confidence' scheme has a regularly updated list of approved traders which the Empty Properties Officer can provide you with further details or you can visit their website for further details at [www.arun.gov.uk/empty-properties](http://www.arun.gov.uk/empty-properties).

### Empty Homes supporting affordable homes

Empty Homes has been recognised since 2012, 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. In 2017/2018 changes to the way the NHB is awarded has seen the amount of money earned by reducing the reward from six years to four years and the introduction of a 0.4%

baseline in respect of 'deadweight' (what the government considers to be a 'natural increase' in dwellings that might be expected to happen anyway and is therefore not, in their view, worth incentivising). There is no guarantee that the NHB award will continue in its current form and there may well be further changes in the near future.

The Empty Properties Officer has brought in an income, from the New Homes Bonus, of around £1 million since 2014.

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.

### National Policy

Empty properties have 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.

Latest Government data suggests that there are over 200,000 homes that have been empty for over six months. (The Government data is derived from local authority Council Tax base

data, which is a snapshot of the position in October each year) Some of these may not stay empty (if they are on the market, or are being renovated). But others are stuck empty, perhaps because of inheritance issues or because their owners are holding on to the property hoping for a rise in its value before selling it.

The government cannot afford to waste such properties, given the shortage of affordable homes. England needs about 240,000 to 245,000 additional homes each year to meet newly arising demand, and nearly one third of those homes need to be at below market prices and rents.

While there is clearly a need to build new homes, ignoring the potential of existing empty homes in meeting housing supply is a costly environmental mistake. Creating homes from empty properties saves substantial amounts of material compared to building new houses, and also minimises the amount of land used for development.

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.

## 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 meets twice a year and provides a strategic framework for a co-ordinated approach to empty homes work. We share information on what we have achieved or fought with since the last meeting in order to promote best practices and improve performance between all authorities.

An Empty Properties Officer will also have the opportunity to attend the yearly Empty Homes Network (EHN) conference. This allows local authorities to remain up to date with the most current information in order for it to be applied during day to day works.

## Target for Arun

We will continue to focus on all empty properties within the district with our target increasing from 17 to 30 empty properties bought 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 4 years.

Year	Target	Actual
2014	17	35
2015	17	20
2016	17	40
2017	17	23

## The Local Plan

A local plan sets out local planning policies and identifies how land is used, determining what will be built and where.

Following directives to all Local Authorities from Central Government Arun District Council's Local Plan has been compiled since 2011 and is now in the final stages of completion. The trajectory figures for Arun District Council Local Plan for 2011-2031 are to build 19,045 new homes. These homes need to be built in

order to keep up with the current and projected demand for local housing. Many of these homes will need to be built on Greenfield/brownfield sites in order to keep up with the demand.

The table below shows a breakdown of these figures since the plan was commissioned and what has been built to date.

Year	Greenfield	Brownfield
2011/2012	370	378
2012/2013	363	136
2013/2014	181	203
2014/2015	356	286
2015/2016	628	284
2016/2017	458	200

## Other useful websites

### DCLG - Department of Communities and Local Government

[www.communities.gov.uk](http://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.

### Empty Homes

[www.emptyhomes.com](http://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 homes back into use.

### Empty Homes Network

[www.ehnetwork.org.uk](http://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](http://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.'

### Sussex Empty Homes Forum

[www.sussexhousingpartnerships.org.uk](http://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](http://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.



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