

Bromsgrove District Council

Housing Strategy

2006 - 2011

EMPTY PROPERTY ADDENDUM

Unlocking the door to
meeting housing needs
in Bromsgrove District



Strategic Housing Strategy “Unlocking the Door to Meeting Housing Needs in Bromsgrove”

Empty Property Addendum

Introduction

The purpose of this addendum to the Strategic Housing Strategy is to highlight the issue of empty homes in Bromsgrove District and to detail what actions will be undertaken by officers at the Council to help support the return of more empty properties into use.

The Problem of Empty Properties

The justification against empty properties is quite simply that these properties constitute a wasted resource. They are also linked with and contribute to a wide range of problems including:

- Attracting crime
- Attracting anti-social behaviour
- Blighting local neighbourhoods
- Denying homes to those in greatest need
- Increasing pressure for new development

The obvious benefits therefore for the individual empty property owner and the wider community are huge. They are:

- Increased rental income
- Increased capital value of property
- Increased sales potential for property and neighbouring area
- Security against vandalism and squatters
- Loss of liability for council tax if property rented out
- Improvement to the neighbouring community.

The National Picture

Over the past 10 years the problem of empty properties has come to the forefront of both local and national policy. Government statistics indicated that on the 1st April 2006 the total number of empty dwellings in England was 663,328. This figure has decreased by 3.8% since 1st April 2004, which demonstrates that progress is being made, but there still remains a lot of work to be done to bring empty properties back into use.

The government has recognised that this pool of un-utilised accommodation could significantly contribute towards the increasing housing need being experienced nationally. As part of this drive towards supporting local authorities

in bringing these properties back into use, the government introduced the Best Value Performance Indicator 64 (BVPI64) in April 2000, which requires Council's to record the number of private sector dwellings that the Council have proactively helped return to occupation.

Additional support has also come from the Local Government Act 2003 and the Housing Act 2004 which allows authorities to use information obtained for council tax purposes to identify empty properties and to support the work required to bring those properties back into use.

The Local Government Act 2003 further supported local authorities by giving them the power to use their discretion over whether they remove or reduce the previous discounted council tax on empty properties.






The Local Picture




As of the 1st April 2007, there were 354 empty properties in Bromsgrove District, which equates to there being 1.1% of the total housing stock being empty at this time in comparison to 3.1% national average. Of this total number of properties, 215 properties were identified as long term empty properties (properties that have been empty for longer than 6 months).



Although comparatively, empty properties do not represent a large issue for Bromsgrove, it is still important that mechanisms are in place to maximise the potential resource that they constitute and that the Council are focused upon supporting the community in removing these potential problematic properties from local neighborhoods.

Bromsgrove District Council have utilised the discretionary power given by the Local Government Act 2003, and from April 2004 began to charge owners of properties that have been empty for longer than 6 months the full council tax rate.

Action Plan

CORPORATE ACTIONS	Target Completion Date	Milestone	Lead Officer	Partner Organisation Involved	Resources	Monitoring Status and comments ¹
Investigate the possibility of developing Private Sector Leasing Scheme to help bring properties back into use.	Dec 2006	Agreed and implemented	Housing Initiatives Officer	Strategic Housing Team, BDHT		 <p>Potential Scheme fully investigated and report put to Council. Scheme was turned down as presented to higher risk for the Council</p>
Develop advice/information pack for owner of empty properties	Dec 2006	Pack compiled and ready for submission	Housing Initiatives Officer	Building Control, Planning, BDHT	Stationary Budget	 <p>Pack developed and being disseminated to owners on request</p>
Identify list of properties that have been vacant for more than 6 months and transfer information into empty property register	Jan 2007	Empty Property created and in regularly updated	Housing Initiatives Officer	Council Tax		 <p>Empty Homes register compiled and being regularly updated</p>
Produce and disseminate an empty property information leaflet	Mar 2007	Leaflet produced	Housing Initiatives Officer		Stationary Budget	 <p>Leaflet produced and available in all public offices and on request</p>
Write to available contact persons in connection with known empty properties to ask for an update of situation and to offer advice and assistance	Start August 2007 and Ongoing	Letters sent	Housing Initiatives Officer	Council Tax		 <p>Proactive letters being sent out to contact persons on empty property register</p>

Improve internal awareness of initiative by promoting tools available and encourage colleagues to signpost queries to Strategic Housing Team.	June 2007	Meet with internal depts to make them aware of empty property initiative	Housing Initiatives Officer	Council Tax, Building Control, Planning, Environmental Health, Housing Benefit, HUB, Communications Officers		 <p>Have spoken to Developmental Control and Building Control about Empty Homes Initiative. Internal e-mail on initiative circulated to all staff.</p>
Update Council Website with information on advice for empty homes owners and encourage members of public to report any problem empty homes	Jan 2008	Information available on internet on empty properties	Housing Initiatives Officer	IT		
Investigate and create empty property grant application form, leaflet and policy	Jan 2008	Start utilising empty homes grant	Housing Initiatives Officer and Private Sector Housing Team Leader	Strategic Housing Team	Discretionary Empty Homes Grants allocated from Discretionary Grant of £161K	
Develop procedural flowchart, to include possible enforcement action	Jan 2008	Flowchart produced	Housing Initiatives Officer and Private Sector Housing Team Leader	Strategic Housing Team, Environmental Health, Planning, Building Control.		
Develop a procedure for the management of properties subject to EDMOs	March 2008	EDMO procedure agreed	Housing Initiatives Officer and Private Sector Housing Team Leader	Local RSLs		

Ongoing casework to ensure that national target are achieved	Ongoing	Maintain accurate casework	Housing Initiatives Officer	All internal depts in Council		 Achieving National Targets
Attendance at Regional Empty Property Officer's Forum	Ongoing	Attend when available	Housing Initiatives Officer			 Attendance when possible

