

**To: City Executive Board**

**Date: 1st July 2009**

**Item No:**

**Report of: Head of Service: Community Housing & Community Development.**

**Title of Report: Empty Property Operational Strategy 2009-2012**

### **Summary and Recommendations**

**Purpose of report:** To approve the Empty Property Operational Strategy (Private Sector) 2009 -2012 for Oxford City.

**Key decision?** No

**Executive lead member:** Councillor Edward Turner

**Report approved by:**

**Finance:** Andy Collett

**Legal:** Stephen Smith

**Ward Member:** Cllr Edward Turner

**Policy Framework:** Oxford Sustainable Community Strategy; Corporate Plan; Economic Development Strategy; Housing Strategy.

**Recommendation(s):** That the City Executive Board Approve the Empty Property Operational Strategy (Private Sector) 2009 - 2012 for Oxford City

## **Background**

1. Empty properties, apart from being a wasted opportunity to provide a home, can blight areas very quickly, resulting in social, economic and environmental costs to local neighbourhoods. The reasons for having an empty property strategy are numerous, but the main ones are:
  - To provide additional housing for those in housing need
  - To encourage economic vitality
  - To discourage crime and vandalism
  - To make the most of the existing urban fabric.
2. This is the first Empty Property Strategy to be developed by Oxford City Council. The Strategy's aims and objectives link into the Council's Corporate plan and strategic aims, and are an essential element of the Housing Strategy and the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy. Consequently, the Strategy is one of a suite of strategies that are being developed to cover a range of housing priorities within the City.
3. The Strategy encompasses the Communities and Local Government Department's (CLGs) 'Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable - Housing Green Paper' considering all the issues which effect housing in the private sector, including empty homes.
4. The development of such a strategy was one of the recommendations of the Audit Commission's 2008 inspection of Strategic Housing Services.
5. It is intended that the strategy will be active, growing and evolving as further work to tackle the issue of empty property takes place. The strategy will be reviewed annually to assess whether amendments and additional resources may be required.

## **Environmental impact assessment**

6. Although it is impossible to quantify the benefits of pursuing this strategy in terms of environmental impacts, it is certain that bringing empty homes up to modern lettable standards will have a positive impact in terms of carbon use, due to improvements to the fabric and insulation values of those properties. It is officers' intention that any works carried out under potential Empty Homes orders would be done to the highest possible environmental standards.

## **Financial considerations**

7. There are no direct financial implications. However, this will be reviewed in 12 months time to ensure adequate resources are available to implement the desired level of empty homes activity.

### **Risk assessment**

8. A risk assessment has been undertaken and the risk register is attached at Appendix A. All risks have been mitigated to an acceptable level.

### **Equalities impact**

9. An equality impact assessment has been carried out and is attached at Appendix B.

### **Legal Implications**

10. Legal implications may occur as a result of formal action being taken. Officers will be extremely careful in progressing action, and will not act without the full involvement of the council's legal services, and of external legal counsel should that prove necessary.

### **Recommendations**

11. It is recommended that that City Executive Board approve the Empty Property Operational Strategy (Private Sector) 2009 -2012 for Oxford City

### **Name and contact details of author:**

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**Background papers: None**