

**To: City Executive Board**

**Date: March 2013**

**Report of: Head of Housing Services.**

**Title of Report: EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY 2013-2018**

## **Summary and Recommendations**

**Purpose of report:** To seek approval for the refreshed Empty Property Strategy 2013-2018 for Oxford City.

**Key decision?** No

**Executive lead member:** Councillor Scott Seamons

**Policy Framework:** Corporate Plan, Asset Management Plan, Housing Strategy and Core Strategy.

**Recommendation(s):** That the City Executive Board notes the good area of work and confirm the Council's commitment to ensuring empty property is brought back into use and endorse the refreshed Empty Property Strategy.

## **Background**

1. In 2009 the Council's first empty property strategy was approved.
2. Empty properties and derelict land 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 assist in redeveloping Brownfield sites, and making the most of the existing urban fabric.

3. The Strategy's aims and objectives link into the Council's Corporate Plan and are an essential element of the Housing Strategy. The Strategy is one of a suite of strategies that are being developed to cover a range of housing priorities within the City.
4. The Strategy has regard to the Government's Housing Strategy for England published in 2011 which recognises the importance of bringing empty homes back into use
5. The Empty Property Strategy 2013 - 18 is attached at Appendix A

### **Consultation**

6. In autumn 2012, an Oxford Talkback (Oxford Citizens Panel) survey was carried out and there were 362 responses. The survey demonstrated overwhelming support for the Council's commitment to ensuring empty dwellings are brought back into use. 94% of respondents thought it was important and of those 68% thought it was very important. Similarly 85% said yes to the Council taking formal action to bring a property back into use. When asked about the impact an empty dwelling had on a neighbourhood 76% referred specifically to the issue of unsightliness.
7. Further consultation was undertaken via the Council's e consult mechanism in early 2013. The response received endorsed that of the Talkback survey; in particular 86% of respondents considered it very important that the Council should intervene to ensure empty dwellings were occupied.

### **Environmental impact assessment**

8. The implementation of the Empty Property Strategy will result in a positive environmental impact due to reducing the number of empty properties that cause nuisance to neighbourhoods and attract anti-social behaviour. Ensuring previously empty properties and derelict land are brought back into productive use has a positive impact on Oxford City regeneration

### **Financial considerations**

**In addition to much bringing much needed accommodation back into use within the city the Council's Empty Homes Strategy has a positive financial effect on the council by :**

- **Increasing council tax income by reducing the current level of exemption given and implementing a full Band D charge in a shorter period. Within the Council's Budget with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 recommendations have been made to make changes to council tax exemptions on various categories of empty property. Since the proposals reduce the exemption amount and for shorter time periods there**

will be an incentive for those in possession of empty homes to bring them back into use.

- Increasing the amount of New Homes Bonus that the council receive. New Homes Bonus was introduced in April 2011 and for the first three years of the scheme the council will receive in the order of £594k in respect of empty properties brought back into use. Currently the NHB received is used to support the Councils General Fund Revenue Account.

Within the Empty Homes Strategy is the ability to implement Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers. The use of such power will be link to a resale of any property CPO'd and will be the separate report to CEB with a recommendation to Council for budget approval.

### **Risk assessment**

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

### **Equalities impact**

10. An equality impact assessment has been carried out and is attached at Appendix C.

### **Legal Implications**

11. Legal implications may occur as a result of formal action being taken in implementing the Strategy. The statutory powers and actions adopted in delivering this Strategy are set out in the document.

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**Background papers: None**

### **Appendices**

**A Empty Property Strategy  
B Risk register  
C EQiA**

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