

Report To: **OVERVIEW (AUDIT) PANEL**

Date: 23 November 2015

**Executive Member /
Scrutiny Panel:** Cllr Maria Bailey – Chair of Place Scrutiny Panel
Councillor Gerald P Cooney, Executive Member (Learning,
Skills and Economic Growth)

Subject: **REVIEW OF HOUSING STRATEGY - EMPTY HOMES**

Report Summary: The Chair to Place Scrutiny Panel to comment on the Executive Response (**Appendix1**) to the Scrutiny review of the of Housing Strategy – Empty Homes and the recommendations made to support future services – **Appendix 2.**

Recommendations: That the Overview (Audit) Panel note the Executive Response to the recommendations detailed in section 9 of **Appendix 1.**

Links to Community Strategy: This review supports the Community Strategy priority relating to ‘Prosperous Tameside’ but also recognises links across all Community Strategy areas.


Policy Implications: The review itself has no specific policy implications. Should the recommendations of this report be accepted by the Tameside Council’s Executive, the relevant services will need to assess the policy implications of putting individual recommendations in place.

Financial Implications: There are no direct financial implications of this report.
(Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)

Legal Implications: The Council has to operate within a reducing budget it is important that it has confidence that its statutory duties are being undertaken efficiently and effectively.
(Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

Risk Management: Reports of Scrutiny Panels are integral to processes which exist to hold the Executive of the authority to account.

Access to Information: The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Paul Radcliffe by:

 Telephone: 0161 342 2199

 e-mail: paul.radcliffe@tameside.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1**Post Scrutiny - Executive Response**

In Respect of: Scrutiny Review of Housing Strategy-Empty Homes

Date: 26 March 2015

Executive Member: Councillor Gerald P Cooney (Learning, Skills and Economic Growth)

Coordinating Officer: John Hughes, Housing Strategy Officer

Recommendations	Accepted/ Rejected	Executive Response	Officer Responsible	Action By (Date)
1. That engagement work with owners of empty commercial properties is supported with a view to increasing the number of commercial to residential conversions in the borough.	Accepted	The Council is already in the process of supporting owners of empty commercial properties to convert their buildings to affordable housing. The first scheme in Central Ashton will be completed in April, the 2 nd scheme is in Denton town centre and due to start on site in May 2015. We are also in discussions with 3 other owners that will be included in the next empty homes programme.	John Hughes	March 16
2. In order to engage with as many empty home owners as possible, advertisement notices be included on Council Tax letters signposting people to the scheme.	Accepted	The information on our empty homes programme has been included in the CTAX Brochure and the same online version http://www.tameside.gov.uk/counciltax	John Hughes	March 15

Recommendations	Accepted/ Rejected	Executive Response	Officer Responsible	Action By (Date)
3. That the success and best practice from the Knowledge Transfer Partnership project be evaluated and shared with partners.	Accepted	<p>The KTP has now been completed. The project is currently subject to an evaluation by Innovate UK which is the funding body. In the meantime the learning from the KTP has been disseminated across a range of AGMA housing agencies.</p> <p>In April 2015 the University of Salford is presenting a paper on the Council's approach to addressing problems associated with empty homes at the American Geographers http://meridian.aag.org/callforpapers/program/SessionDetail.cfm?SessionID=23256</p> <p>http://staff.salford.ac.uk/newsitem/4210</p>	John Hughes	June 2015
4. That a portfolio of successful case studies be created and promoted through inclusion on the Council website to encourage recruitment.	Accepted	A selection of case studies will be developed and promoted on the website and through other media platforms	John Hughes Chris Anderton	March 2016
5. Joint working is further developed between the Council, the Police and the Fire Service to address and tackle the problems of empty homes.	Accepted	The Fire Service in particular has been supportive of our work in tackling empty homes and has attended our engagement events. This will continue in 15-16. The Fire Service are already engaged as part of the joint working arson reduction project which targets any property at risk of arson attacks.	John Hughes Chris Anderton	April 2015

Recommendations	Accepted/ Rejected	Executive Response	Officer Responsible	Action By (Date)
6. Further development work through joint working with district colleagues on a flexible revolving fund for empty properties.	Accepted	The Empty Homes Grant for 2015 -18 is likely to be confirmed in May 2015. Work is already underway to develop an another grant backed programme as well as an additional flexible revolving fund for empty homes that will enable the recycling of grant funding from the HCA. The principals for this approach have already been accepted by the AGMA wider leadership team.	John Hughes	July 2015
7. That a Greater Manchester consortium approach to Affordable Homes Programme funding for empty homes beyond April 2015 continues to retain the momentum and approach adopted by the Council and its partners.	Accepted	See note above	John Hughes	July 2015

APPENDIX 2

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR OF THE STRENGTHENING THE ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

- 1.1 I am pleased to present this report of a review undertaken by the Strengthening the Economy and Communities Scrutiny Panel which has examined the phenomenon of empty homes in Tameside.
- 1.2 There are approximately 2000 empty homes in the borough. It is important to bring these residential properties back to life to provide families with a place to live; and for our communities and streets to be attractive and safe.
- 1.3 Empty homes are defined as those that have been empty for a minimum of six months. This could be for a variety of reasons including difficulties in selling or renting; lack of funds to renovate and refurbish a house; inheritance; or a resident being admitted into a residential or care home.
- 1.4 Empty homes are a wasted resource and a pro-active approach to solving the problem is needed. Through engagement with empty home owners and providing help and advice we can bring them back into use.
- 1.5 This is in addition to increasing housing capacity across the borough. By providing a more desirable area for people to live and work this will support the work that is being undertaken to boost Tameside's economy.
- 1.6 It is important to prevent residential properties from becoming empty in the first instance; however, when they do become empty the length of time they are empty for needs to be minimised and as many as possible should be brought back into sustainable use.
- 1.7 The Panel were pleased to learn that the Council have been shortlisted for the Local Government Chronicle Awards under the Housing Innovation category for the '*Knowledge Transfer Partnership*' which is a unique collaboration with the University of Salford.
- 1.8 Work is currently underway with two of our Housing Association partners to participate in the current empty homes programme. Effective partnership work with Ashton Pioneer Homes and New Charter have assisted the Council in changing empty homes and obsolete commercial premises into affordable housing use through lease and repair and purchase and repair schemes.
- 1.9 On behalf of the Strengthening the Economy and Communities Scrutiny Panel, I would like to thank all those who have participated in this review.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 It is estimated that there are 2,000 empty homes in Tameside which account for 2.7% of the total housing stock. Bringing empty homes back into use provides much needed affordable housing to residents in addition to improving the physical environment of the borough.
- 2.2 Tameside has high levels of housing need and the lives of many families could be improved if empty homes were returned back to use providing much needed accommodation for residents at affordable rents.
- 2.3 The Council has undertaken an innovative approach with regards to consultation and engagement with owners of empty homes to promote their re-use. Empty homes in the

borough have been identified through intelligent use of the Council Tax data which has provided up to date ownership information.

- 2.4 Qualitative research methods have provided vital information on the owners themselves, their experiences of being an empty home owner, their future intentions and sought their views on the various interventions proposed by the Council.
- 2.5 A unique approach and collaborative work with the University of Salford and Registered Providers has maximised the effectiveness of intervention work, helping to bring 70 empty properties in the borough back into use by February 2015.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL – 2014/15

Councillor Whitehead (Chair), Councillor Bailey (Deputy Chair), Councillors D Buckley, Cooper, Drennan, Fowler, A Holland, Kinsey, I Miah, Ryan, T Smith, Sweeton, F Travis, Welsh, A White

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Aim of the Review

- 4.1 To examine the impact of the Council's approach to empty homes in the borough including the effectiveness of initiatives which bring empty homes back into use.

Objectives

- 4.2
 - 1) To examine the Council's strategy to empty homes in the borough
 - 2) To explore the engagement and advice given to empty home owners
 - 3) To identify the impacts empty homes have on Council Tax
 - 4) To understand the role of Registered Social Housing Providers in supporting Tameside Council to return empty homes back into use
 - 5) To produce workable recommendations for the Council and partners

Value for Money/Use of Resources

- 4.3 This review will support the Corporate priority 'Place' through better quality housing choice, creating sustainable communities and improving the physical environment.

Equalities Issues

- 4.4 Tameside has a high number of empty homes compared to neighbouring authorities, totalling 2.7% of total housing stock. Empty homes affect almost every ward in the borough. Empty homes are a wasted resource and a pro-active approach is needed to tackle the issue to improve the physical attractiveness of our borough, provide more houses to those in need whilst boosting the local economy and reducing vandalism and crime.

People and Place Scorecard

- 4.5 The following targets from the People and Place Scorecard relate to the Housing Strategy-Empty Homes review.

Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Total number of homes on the valuation list (i.e. rateable properties) and % ABC
----------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

5. METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The working group met with John Hughes, Housing Strategy Officer and Aisling McCourt, Engagement and Partnerships Manager, Development and Investment, Tameside MBC, to receive an overview of the empty homes issue in Tameside.

- 5.2 The working group met with Professor Philip Brown from the University of Salford, to hear about the Council's innovative partnership with the University to develop research to understand the experiences of empty home owners and how this learning has been used to develop an Empty Home Owner Engagement Strategy.
- 5.3 The working group met with Jim Davies, Housing Renewal Manager, Tameside MBC to hear about the Council's use of enforcement powers to tackle the problem of empty homes in the borough.
- 5.4 The working group met with Chris Anderton, Building Control Team Leader, Planning, Tameside MBC, to hear about the Council's use of enforcement powers to tackle the problem of empty homes in Tameside.
- 5.5 The working group met with Tony Berry, Chief Executive of Ashton Pioneer Homes to hear about the role and the products developed by Registered Providers that have contributed to bringing empty homes back into use.
- 5.6 The working group met with John Ardern, Director of Property Services at New Charter Housing Trust Group, to hear about the role and the products developed by Registered Providers that have contributed to bringing empty homes back into use.

6. BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

- 6.1 The economic downturn has had an impact on the housing market in Tameside. Attractive and vibrant areas are essential to economic performance and those areas with high levels of vacant properties are less likely to perform well and attract new businesses and residents.
- 6.2 Concentrations of empty properties give a sense of dereliction and detract from the amenity of an area. They can attract vandalism, anti-social behaviour, crime and arson and fall quickly into disrepair. This has an effect on public and private sector resources, leaving owners with increasing costs for repairs and maintenance.
- 6.3 The Council has been working closely with the University of Salford to deliver new and creative solutions to areas of housing policy, concentrating on engagement with empty home owners, providing help and advice to address the problem to return empty homes back into use. This joint approach has contributed to Tameside exceeding its targets of delivering 50 empty homes back into use by March 2015, with 70 empty homes actually being completed.
- 6.4 The Council's preferred approach to addressing empty home ownership is through engagement, intelligent use of existing data and behavioural insight. However, for entrenched problems with owners and the worst cases of abandonment, there are a range of powers available to take action against empty home owners.

7. REVIEW FINDINGS

Empty Homes in Tameside

- 7.1 Tameside has high levels of empty homes compared to its Greater Manchester counterparts. Bringing empty homes back into use could provide much needed affordable housing to residents in addition to making neighbourhoods more attractive, vibrant and sustainable.
- 7.2 Records indicate that there are approximately 2,000 empty homes across the borough. The largest numbers of empty homes are located in Ashton, Stalybridge, Droylsden and

Mossley. This is a wasted resource in terms of properties and space which could be occupied to help meet local housing need.

Figure 1: Empty Homes by Ward in Tameside

Ward	No. of Empty Homes	% of Total Empty Homes in Tameside
Ashton St.Michael's	146	7.5%
Stalybridge North	129	6.7%
Droylsden East	128	6.6%
Mossley	128	6.6%
St. Peter's	117	6.0%
Dukinfield	112	5.8%
Hyde Werneth	107	5.5%
Denton North East	106	5.5%
Droylsden West	104	5.4%
Hyde Newton	102	5.3%
Stalybridge South	92	4.7%
Ashton Waterloo	86	4.4%
Longdendale	86	4.4%
Hyde Godley	84	4.3%
Ashton Hurst	82	4.2%
Audenshaw	81	4.2%
Dukinfield Stalybridge	74	3.8%
Denton West	71	3.7%
Denton South	57	2.9%
Unknown	47	2.4%
Total	1,939	100.0%

Source: Tameside Council Tax data 01/04/2014

- 7.3 The table above shows the number and percentage of empty homes by ward in Tameside as at April 2014.
- 7.4 Over 80% of the borough's empty homes are positioned in Council Tax Band A and B. With a social housing waiting list of around 6000 families, bringing these empty homes back into use can help address the housing need in Tameside.

Figure 2: Empty Homes by Council Tax Band

Council Tax Band	No. of Empty Homes	Proportion
Band A	1,307	61.0%
Band B	446	20.8%
Band C	234	10.9%
Band D	83	3.9%
Band E	51	2.4%
Band F	12	0.6%
Band G	10	0.5%
Band H	1	0.0%
Total	2,144	100.0%

Source: Tameside Council Tax data 07/10/2014

- 7.5 The table above shows the number and percentage of empty homes in the borough by Council Tax Band.
- 7.6 Changes in the law have allowed local authorities to charge higher levels of council tax for long term empty homes. By the removal of the discretionary discount previously applied to empty homes and a premium applied to homes that have been empty for more than 24 months it is hoped to incentivise owners to bring their properties back into use.
- 7.7 The number of empty homes account for over 2.7% of the dwellings in the borough. Therefore, addressing the empty homes issue can have a far-reaching and positive impact on the supply of affordable housing across Tameside and help plug the housing need gap at the same time.
- 7.8 Empty homes can also create wider social problems including vandalism, anti-social behaviour, crime and arson, which detract from the amenity of an area. This can increase demand on public services through complaints and required action by the Council, Police and Fire Service.
- 7.9 The Council receives approximately 430 complaints each year with regards to empty properties suggesting that they cause concern to our local communities and problems within our neighbourhoods.
- 7.10 The Affordable Homes Programme 2012-15 provided £100 million to kick start the national Empty Homes Programme. In March 2012 a Greater Manchester consortium bid secured just over £5 million from this programme. To date Tameside Council has received £260,000 investment to deal with empty homes locally.
- 7.11 If successful, the programme will bring 3,300 empty homes back into use nationally by March 2015, 461 residential properties back to life across Greater Manchester with Tameside committed to returning 50 homes back into use as part of the local programme. The programme is anticipated to continue for 2015-18 with Homes and Communities Agency mainstream funding.
- 7.12 The introduction of the New Homes Bonus provides a financial incentive for local authorities to tackle the problem of empty homes. However, information about empty home owners is limited, and the default position for most local authorities is to use enforcement powers to manage the associated problems.
- 7.13 Tameside Council has been working with a number of partners and stakeholders to develop approaches which will help to bring empty homes back into use. Funding secured through the Greater Manchester Combined Authority bid has been matched by Ashton Pioneer Homes and New Charter Housing Trust.
- 7.14 Effective partnership working with Registered Providers has enabled 70 empty homes to date located throughout the borough to be brought back to life through leasing and repair or purchasing and repair schemes.
- 7.15 Housing supply could also be increased by allowing changes to the use of buildings from commercial to residential to take place more easily. In December 2012 a publication acknowledged that empty commercial properties are a significant problem for many town centres. Where there is strong housing demand it is viewed that surplus empty commercial property could be put to better use as housing.
- 7.16 Legislation introduced at the end of May 2013 relaxed the rules on when planning permission is needed for change of use. The new rules are intended to assist regeneration and get empty and under-used buildings back into productive use.

- 7.17 Tameside Council is working with two owners whose commercial buildings have been empty for significant periods of time. Grant applications have been submitted that if successful will yield approximately £300,000 of investment that will help convert the two sites into 18 units of affordable housing.

Conclusions

1. Tameside has high levels of empty properties compared to its Greater Manchester counterparts.
2. Homes and Communities Agency grants and other financial incentives such as New Homes Bonus mean that it is now in the Council's financial interest to take this matter seriously.

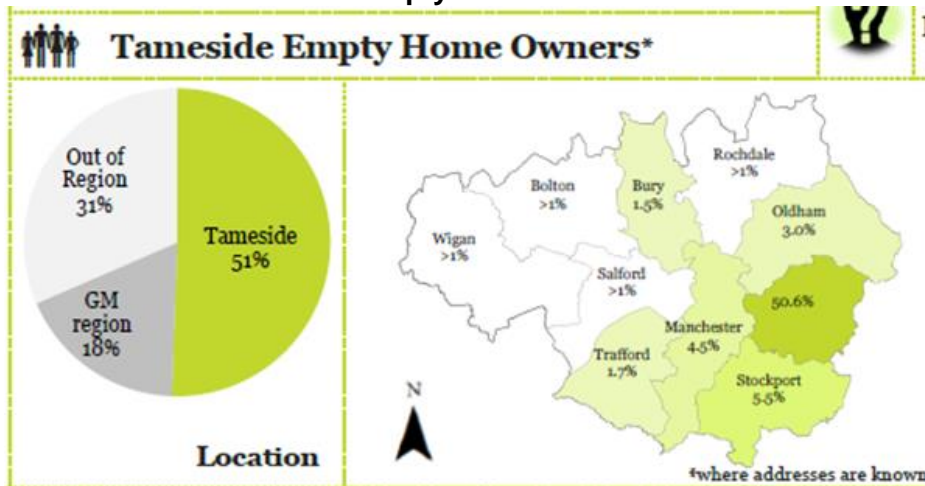
Recommendations

1. That engagement work with owners of empty commercial properties is supported with a view to increasing the number of commercial to residential conversions in the borough.
2. In order to engage with as many empty home owners as possible, advertisement notices be included on Council Tax letters signposting people to the scheme.

University of Salford

- 7.18 A unique partnership between Tameside Council and the University of Salford has provided the opportunity for the Council to develop innovation around engagement with support for owners to bring their homes back into use. This can be achieved by intelligent use of data and behavioural insight.
- 7.19 The Knowledge Transfer Partnership is funded by Innovate UK and AGMA's Homelessness Prevention Fund, with close partnership work between the University of Salford and AGMA, to explore new routes of engagement and deliver services differently.
- 7.20 The aim is to understand the barriers preventing empty home owners returning their properties back into use and looking at owners from a community perspective, understanding their behaviours, characteristics and service needs. Applying psychological insights into human behaviour to help explain decision-making, understanding how owners behave in order to tailor the engagement and use effective communication to nudge owners into action.
- 7.21 Previous engagement practices have been reactive and formal with untargeted communication and driven by enforcement which has alienated owners and proved ineffective.
- 7.22 A database of empty home owners has been created via the Knowledge Transfer Partnership with the University of Salford to develop an academic understanding of the needs of the owners and the reasons preventing them from returning their properties back into habitable use.
- 7.23 This has helped to identify that there are clusters of empty homes around town centres and develop a picture of the greatest density of empty homes. It has helped to identify that 15% of empty home owners are on low incomes and 70% live within Greater Manchester.

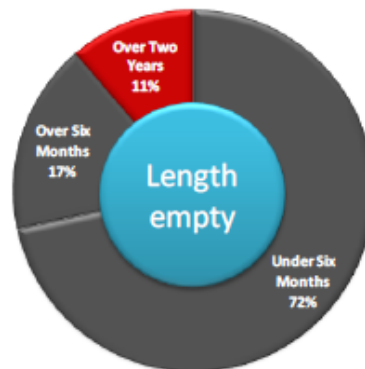
Figure 3: Location of Tameside Empty Home Owners



- 7.24 The figure above shows a map and pie chart detailing where Tameside empty home owners live. Over 50% of Tameside empty home owners reside within the borough which indicates there is no apparent geographical reason preventing the properties coming back into use.
- 7.25 It has also identified that 11% of empty homes have been vacant for over two years, which are classed as long-term empty. Data also shows that 17% have been empty for over six months and 72% have been empty for less than six months.

Figure 4: Length of Time Homes Have Been Empty

Only 11% of empty homes are long-term empty
89% potential 'quick wins' - owners needing advice, signposting to support



Apr-14

- 7.26 The figure above shows the percentage of empty homes that have been empty for over two years, over six months and under six months.
- 7.27 It is important to target the 89% of owners whose properties have been empty for less than two years as the property may not have fallen into a bad state of disrepair and could be brought back into use in a relatively short space of time.
- 7.28 The research gathered has been used to develop and frame an empty home engagement strategy consisting of four stages: initiate, engage, support and assist. This process has helped to build better relationships leading to improved engagement with empty home owners.
- 7.29 A Tameside website was launched in September 2013 which has proved very effective with over 1,600 hits and empty home events have been attended by 120 of the owners. Social media has been utilised via a twitter account #emptytoplenty and 83 owners have sought advice from the team.

Conclusions

3. Working with the University of Salford has enabled Tameside Council to develop an innovative and sustainable approach towards support, consultation and engagement with empty home owners.
4. Evidence led research undertaken by the Council has been used to develop and frame the empty homes engagement strategy locally and across Greater Manchester.

Recommendations

3. That the success and best practice from the Knowledge Transfer Partnership project be evaluated and shared with partners.
4. That a portfolio of successful case studies be created and promoted through inclusion on the Council website to encourage recruitment.

Enforcement

- 7.30 Over the last 18 months the Council's preferred approach to addressing empty home ownership has been through engagement, intelligent use of existing data and behavioural insight. This approach is linked to choices and options available to empty home owners where their homes are in danger of becoming long term problems.
- 7.31 It is important to try to discover the deep rooted reasons why homes are empty in order to help or signpost individuals. Enforcement action is used as a last resort after all other possible options have been explored and utilised.
- 7.32 The Council has engaged and consulted with the owners of empty homes in an attempt to understand why they are empty and the barriers that prevent them from coming back into use. On-line surveys and events with key stakeholders and partners about empty homes have also been held.
- 7.33 Proactive work to understand why homes are empty and attempts to reach agreements have taken place across Tameside, with targeted work in areas where there are clusters of empty homes.
- 7.34 Over half of empty home owners have indicated that their properties are empty as they require renovation with two thirds not actively trying to sell or let. Affordability of renovation works and waiting for the right time to sell were other reasons cited for properties remaining empty.
- 7.35 Where agreement cannot be reached and for more entrenched problems and behaviours there are a range of powers available to local authorities to take action against owners. Options include service of Notice under a range of powers to require the owner to carry out repairs or improvements to address the poor condition or amenity of the property.
- 7.36 Potential powers include: the Housing Act 2004, if there are hazards that present a risk to neighbours or those who may be expected to visit the property; the Environmental Protection Act 1990, if the condition of the property is such that it is causing a statutory nuisance; and the Building Act 1984, if the building is dangerous or seriously detrimental to the safety or amenity of the area.
- 7.37 Other powers include the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, if the property is unsightly and an Empty Dwelling Management Order to work in agreement with the owner to bring a property back to use, which may involve taking over the management of the property for up to seven years.

- 7.38 The Enforced Sales Procedure can be used if there are outstanding debts, to recover the debts and to force the sale of the property or making a Compulsory Purchase Order to acquire the property and ensure its reuse or redevelopment.
- 7.39 The effective use of enforcement for entrenched empty homes has been utilised by the Council to address problems with residential properties. There are cases where action has been taken by using a joined up enforcement approach between Planning, Building Control and Housing Standards.

Figure 5: Before and After Photographs



- 7.40 The images above show the improvements that can be achieved through Council action.
- 7.41 Section 215 Notices can be issued and served on the owner and legal deputy requiring improvements to be made to the house and grounds. The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 can also be used if the condition of the property is considered to be adversely affecting the area.

Conclusions

5. Enforcement action is used as a last resort after all other possible options have been explored and utilised.
6. The Council has a range of options when action is needed against owners of unoccupied properties.

Recommendations

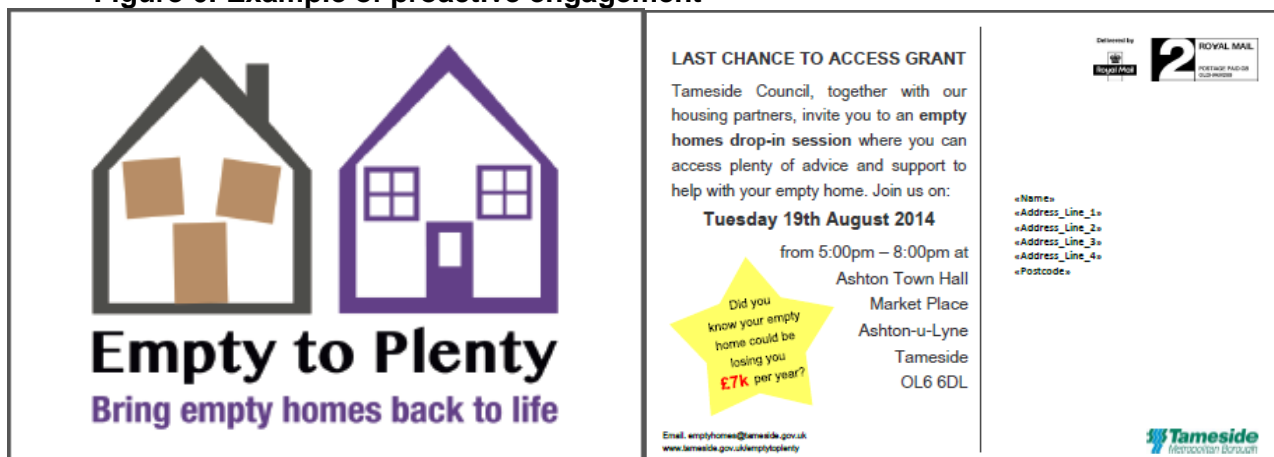
5. Joint working is further developed between the Council, the Police and the Fire Service to address and tackle the problems of empty homes.

Registered Providers

- 7.42 The Council has been working in close partnership with Ashton Pioneer Homes and New Charter Housing Trust via the Empty Homes programme to increase provision of affordable homes and reduce the number of empty homes.
- 7.43 Housing Associations entering the private rented sector introduce an element of competition, which has the ability to drive up management standards and performance. This can minimise the poor practices of the minority of non-compliant landlords operating in the borough.
- 7.44 The partnership has been further enhanced through the provision of the New Homes' Bonus. Based on the numbers the partnership has completed to date and before the end of the year, an approximate £400k for New Homes' Bonus will be generated over the next six years.

- 7.45 Ashton Pioneer Homes operate a lease and repair scheme which offers an easy and accessible way to secure the improvement of empty dwellings and achieve a guaranteed rental income from an empty home. The scheme enables eligible owners of empty homes to retain ownership whilst entering into an agreement to lease their property to Ashton Pioneer Homes for an initial six year period.
- 7.46 Once confirmed Ashton Pioneer Homes will make the necessary repairs to bring it back to a habitable standard, source suitable tenants, let the property and manage the tenancy. Future repairs and management costs are deducted from the rental income.
- 7.47 Eligibility for this scheme depends upon the condition of the property and estimated rental income. The property must have been empty for more than six months. Properties suitable for the scheme have been identified via collaborative work with the Council. These include homes that are of a size and type necessary to meet the housing needs of the area.
- 7.48 Other benefits include a full property management service including gas and electricity checks; buildings insurance; repairs service; no responsibility for Council Tax charges; free from Empty Property enforcement proceedings; and the property being returned to the owner at the end of the lease term in a good condition.
- 7.49 New Charter Housing Trust may be willing to purchase empty homes direct from owners and carry out the necessary repairs in order to bring them back into use, if the property has been empty for six or more months and they wish to sell. The price New Charter may pay will take into account the cost of any repairs required.
- 7.50 New Charter does not have to access mortgage finance and there is no chain involved in the purchase. Owners do not have to worry about renovating their empty home or incur estate agents fees, unless the house is already on the market with an agent.
- 7.51 This type of scheme can help tackle the problem of empty homes in the borough and support local housing needs. It is equally important to make the best possible use of the borough's social stock by continuing to address under occupation and overcrowding wherever possible.
- 7.52 A pro-active approach to engagement work with empty home owners has taken place via public events involving the Council, Registered Providers, the Fire and Rescue Service and energy providers with future events planned.

Figure 6: Example of proactive engagement



- 7.53 The images above show a postcard sent to over 2,000 empty home owners inviting them to attend a public event in August 2014. The consultation events have been very effective with over 60 home owners supported to bring their homes back into use.

- 7.54 The current funding programmes for Greater Manchester empty homes work ends on 31 March 2015. It is important that a Greater Manchester consortium approach to Affordable Homes Programme funding for empty homes continues.
- 7.55 A consortium approach reduces risk to individual partners by managing resources across a broad programme and connecting them to advice and support; enables shared capacity and expertise on issues such as enforcement options; and opens up possibilities around simplified procurement processes on a collective basis.
- 7.56 The consortium approach will also enable work with partners to maximise the collective capacity available to engage with owners and work with them to secure their commitment, share and explore alternative sources of investment linked with town centre regeneration and local neighbourhood approaches.

Conclusions

7. An increased partnership approach with our Registered Providers has contributed to the ongoing success of the Empty Homes Programme in Tameside.
8. There has been an increased provision of affordable homes and a reduction in the number of empty homes in the borough.

Recommendations

6. Further development work through joint working with district colleagues on a flexible revolving fund for empty properties.
7. That a Greater Manchester consortium approach to Affordable Homes Programme funding for empty homes beyond April 2015 continues to retain the momentum and approach adopted by the Council and its partners.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 Tameside has high levels of empty properties compared to its Greater Manchester counterparts.
- 8.2 Homes and Communities Agency grants and other financial incentives such as New Homes Bonus mean that it is now in the Council's financial interest to take this matter seriously.
- 8.3 Working with the University of Salford has enabled Tameside Council to develop an innovative and sustainable approach towards support, consultation and engagement with empty home owners.
- 8.4 Evidence led research undertaken by the Council has been used to develop and frame the empty homes engagement strategy locally and across Greater Manchester.
- 8.5 Enforcement action is used as a last resort after all other possible options have been explored and utilised.
- 8.6 The Council has a range of options when action is needed against owners of unoccupied properties.
- 8.7 An increased partnership approach with our Registered Providers has contributed to the ongoing success of the Empty Homes Programme in Tameside
- 8.8 There has been an increased provision of affordable homes and a reduction in the number of empty homes in the borough.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That engagement work with owners of empty commercial properties is supported with a view to increasing the number of commercial to residential conversions in the borough.
- 9.2 In order to engage with as many empty home owners as possible, advertisement notices be included on Council Tax letters signposting people to the scheme.
- 9.3 That the success and best practice from the Knowledge Transfer Partnership project be evaluated and shared with partners.
- 9.4 That a portfolio of successful case studies be created and promoted through inclusion on the Council website to encourage recruitment.
- 9.5 Joint working is further developed between the Council, the Police and the Fire Service to address and tackle the problems of empty homes.
- 9.6 Further development work through joint working with district colleagues on a flexible revolving fund for empty properties.
- 9.7 That a Greater Manchester consortium approach to Affordable Homes Programme funding for empty homes beyond April 2015 continues to retain the momentum and approach adopted by the Council and its partners.