

Washington Area Committee

28th July 2011

Report of the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services

Empty Property Action Plan 2011-12

1. Background

- 1.1 There are six overarching strategic priorities for Sunderland identified within the Sunderland Housing Priorities Plan SHPP; two of which are directly related to bringing empty properties back into residential use, which is:
- to improve the existing housing stock by accelerating housing market renewal including block improvement schemes, demolitions, reducing the numbers of empty properties and effective licensing of landlords
 - working with owners to invest in empty properties and bring them back into use and to consider different models of investment in the private rented sector.

The success of the Empty Property Strategy can be measured as follows:

Date	Reoccupied	Demolished	Total	Target
2007-2008	240	8	248	200
2008 - 2009	329	77	406	369
2009 - 2010	291	49	340	375
2010 - 2011	348	28	376	355

- 1.2 As part of the Government's Affordable Housing Programme £100m has been set aside for tackling empty properties. We are currently looking at involving Registered Providers across the city, which would include bringing back into use a range of properties.
- 1.3 The Government's New Homes Bonus also proposes that it will match fund the additional council tax raised by councils for bringing long term empty properties back into use. The number of empty properties (according to Government and Council Tax definitions) will be measured in October of each year. Any decreases in empty properties from one year to the next will be rewarded through the New Homes Bonus. The definition also includes empty Social Housing Registered Social Landlord properties in the City.
- 1.4 It was announced in January 2011, that the Government will use secondary legislation to introduce new constraints relating to Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs). The constraints allow local authorities to utilise EDMOs only if a property has been empty for two years and is attracting vandalism and anti social behaviour. This will be closely monitored as part of this project.

2. Aims and Objectives:

- 2.1 The Empty Property Service aims to:

'Provide a proactive and innovative approach to the reduction in the number of empty properties in Sunderland to assist in the creation of sustainable communities in all neighbourhoods'.

This will be achieved by:

1. Developing a comprehensive and locality based empty property service which raises awareness of empty homes issues.
2. Using a preventative and innovative approach to reoccupy empty properties.
3. Ensuring reoccupied properties are sustainable within their neighbourhoods.
4. Responding to the needs and requirements of property owners, partners and neighbourhoods.
5. Involving a range of partners and individuals to encourage action and make best use of limited resources.

2.2 Throughout 2011-2012, the Empty Property service will prioritise the following across Sunderland:

1. Strive to reduce the number of empty properties across Sunderland to the city average of 2.47% as at the end of April 2011.
2. Reoccupy 360 empty properties across Sunderland with internal and external partners, focusing on 200 empty properties within wards where empty properties are higher than the city average as at the end of April 2011 and working within the context of the New Homes Bonus.
3. Reduce homelessness across the City.
4. Promote the Landlord accreditation scheme.
5. Look to target the worst hot spot areas as a first priority, especially in wards where empty properties are higher than the city average as at the end of April 2011.
6. To work closely with Officers in Environmental Services to explore the most effective way of bringing empty commercial premises back into use.
7. To work closely with partners to explore the effect and impact of the New Homes Bonus on empty properties.

2.3 Benefits of introducing the Empty Property Action Plan are:

Customer/Community Benefits	Council Benefit
Empty properties returned into occupation	Increase in income to the Council through payment of full Council Tax Attract payment of New Homes Bonus.
Reduction in empty properties being targeted	Reduction in number of requests for service regarding empty properties.
More homes available for homeless people	Reduction in costs of works in default.
More sustainable communities	Reduction in homelessness.

3. Empty Property Action Plan

3.1 The action plan, see Appendix 1, will help contribute towards the Council's values: proud, decent and together in the way we treat our customers and work in partnership to achieve the community's needs. It is also part of a series of Directorate projects and has been monitored by the Directorate Change Team. Currently, the project does not include empty commercial properties but the most effective way to bring commercial empty properties back to use will be explored within the Council and with external partners.

- 3.2 Officers will work together with owners of empty properties and external agencies to ensure the property is brought back into occupation or to prevent them from becoming empty in the first place. The solution to empty properties lies often in a partnership approach. Officers will also undertake inspections as necessary to ensure that the property meets the Decent Homes Standard. The primary focus will be prevention and early intervention.
- 3.3 At April 2011 the numbers of empty properties across each of the local areas and across the City as a whole are set out in Annex 2. The statistics and analysis below are based on the figures from April 2011. The proportion of Private Sector Stock empty is as a percentage in each ward area.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Empty properties are a priority in each of the local areas and this is reflected in the local work plans. The attached action plan provides a more local examination of the issues and provides an innovative local action plan aimed at specifically addressing those local issues in relation to bringing empty properties back into use and creating a greater housing resource for the City.
- 4.2 Project work is proving to be successful in various areas and it is hoped that this work will be continued and expanded to other wards, particularly those wards that do not meet the city average as at April 2011. This involves officers tackling empty properties, anti social behaviour, landlord accreditation and issues of disrepair in partnership with Housing Providers the police and other local partners. This is in response to concerns from local residents and ward members.
- 4.3 This action plan will be monitored quarterly and reviewed after one year by the Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal Senior Management Team and Area Committee. The information will also be made available to all local partners and the public should they request it.

5. Recommendations

Members are requested to:

- Note the content of the report and draft action plan
- Consider and provide feedback on the locality aims and actions in the Washington Action Plan (draft)
- Identify and feedback information regarding empty properties
- Agree to review the action plan after one year

Appendix 1: Washington Empty Property Action Plan (Draft)

Appendix 2: Empty Properties at a ward level, as at 1 April 2011

Background papers

- The Housing Act 2004
- Empty Property Strategy (2007-2011)
- Local Area Plans (LAPS) (2009-2011)
- The following websites were used as reference and for benchmarking:
 - <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/newhomesbonus/newhomesbonusquestions/>
 - <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk>
 - <http://www.camden.gov.uk>

- <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/>

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Washington

Background information:

The Washington area covers the wards of Washington Central, Washington North, Washington East, Washington South and Washington West.

Empty Properties at April 2011:

Total		Empty for or between 1-2 years		Empty for five years or more	
No.	Proportion of Private Sector Stock Empty (H18)	No.	% Area	No.	% Area
270	1.54%	171	63%	32	11.8%

Top 3 Types of empty properties in the Washington:

Type	No.	% Area
Semi detached	35	12%
Flats or maisonettes	72	26%
Terraced properties	43	15%

Washington North ward has a higher percentage of empty properties than the City Average. Examining the age of empty properties, by far the highest proportion is properties built between 1976 - 1990 (32%) which reflects the fact that Washington is a relatively new development.

Empty Properties per ward:

Ward	No.	% Area	City %
Washington Central	53	20	1.43
Washington North	94	35	2.93
Washington East	31	11	1.02
Washington South	33	12	0.93
Washington West	59	22	1.52

It should be noted that Gentoo has demolished 168 properties to date in Albany, Glebe, Harraton and Sulgrave and it is predicting to demolish a further 30 in Barmston in early 2012. None of these properties are owned under the right to buy scheme.

Project work is currently being undertaken in Washington area in the Wellington and Waterloo complex. This has been ongoing since November 2010. Officers are visiting all properties to tackle issues of empty properties, anti-social behaviour and disrepair.

Population

Washington has 66,721 residents, 24% of the City's population. According to figures and categories used in the Census 2001, the Washington Area has a predominantly White Ethnic Group.

Washington Empty Property Action Plan 2011/12

Appendix 1

LOCALITY AIM	ACTIONS	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	TIMESCALES	RESPONSIBILITY
Reduce the number of empty properties in Washington to the city average of 2.47% (As at April 2011).	To inspect and liaise with all empty property owners in the Wellington and Waterloo areas to return back into use.	10% of Empty Properties at Wellington and Waterloo re-occupied	February 2012	EPA, ASB officer. Owners.
	Match empty properties with residents on the homeless register.	Reduce Homelessness by 5% citywide	March 2012	EPA and HOT
Return 30 empty properties in Washington back into use of which 9 will be in Washington North.				
To work proactively and preventively to ensure that the number of potential future empty properties is minimised. New homes are not registered at empty; providing greater housing choice.	Undertake proactive visits and external inspections to all properties empty for over one year, with particular focus on the Washington North ward.	Daily/monthly inspections completed by officer. Reduce all wards to the current city average.	March 2012	EPA
	Develop a tool to risk assess, identify and prioritise problematic empty properties.	Tool established and implemented. Problematic empty properties identified.	June 2011	EPA Council Tax Section Planning Enforcement Team
	Prioritise identified problematic empty properties to ensure re-occupation, and where appropriate use the additional tools provided by the Housing Act 2004 to tackle problems within the private sector, with particular focus on Washington North.	50% of empty problematic properties brought back to use	March 2012	EPO, EPA, Adult Services (Care)
	Get breakdown of empty properties by New Homes Bonus definition and identify location and any trends. Prioritise which properties to focus resources on.	Monthly locality report Increased New Homes Bonus returns	June 2011	HAO, EPO and EPA,

As at April 2011

Appendix 2

Long Term Empty Properties by Period Empty

ARF	Ward	Period Empty							Grand Total	Proportion of Private Sector Stock Empty (H18)
		6 Months - under 1 year	1 Year - under 2 years	2 Years - under 3 years	3 Years - under 4 years	4 Years - under 5 years	Over 5 years			
Sunderland North	Castle	12	15	7	3	1	7	45	1.53%	
	Fulwell	23	23	13	7	6	14	86	1.77%	
	Redhill	13	19	4	1	3	5	45	1.67%	
	Southwick	35	20	11	8	7	14	95	2.90%	
	St Peter's	61	41	17	9	6	22	156	3.45%	
Sunderland North Total		144	118	52	28	23	62	427	2.33%	
Sunderland East	Doxford	16	12	7	3	2	7	47	1.43%	
	Hendon	86	79	67	19	14	23	288	6.74%	
	Millfield	64	47	21	12	9	28	181	4.25%	
	Ryhope	22	22	13	10	3	12	82	2.40%	
	St Michael's	46	45	13	25	7	30	166	3.47%	
Sunderland East Total		234	205	121	69	35	100	764	3.82%	
Sunderland West	Barnes	32	27	4	9	3	14	89	2.02%	
	Pallion	27	30	14	4	4	9	88	2.97%	
	Sandhill	22	16	7	8		6	59	2.12%	
	Silksworth	20	33	7	3	2	5	70	2.01%	
	St Anne's	16	12	4	2	2	8	44	1.50%	
	St Chad's	27	18	9	2	2	7	65	2.11%	
Sunderland West Total		144	136	45	28	13	49	415	2.11%	
Coalfield	Copt Hill	27	40	24	14	8	19	132	3.37%	
	Hetton	25	31	10	8	7	20	101	2.78%	
	Houghton	14	23	9	6	3	7	62	1.56%	
	Shiney Row	23	21	12	4	6	18	84	1.94%	
Coalfield Total		89	115	55	32	24	64	379	2.39%	
Washington	Washington Central	22	17	8	2	1	3	53	1.46%	
	Washington North	28	24	8	13	4	17	94	2.75%	
	Washington East	12	8	6	2	1	2	31	0.93%	
	Washington South	12	12	1	2	2	4	33	0.96%	
	Washington West	19	17	8	5	4	6	59	1.60%	

Washington Total	93	78	31	24	12	32	270	1.54%
Grand Total	704	652	304	181	107	307	2,255	2.47%

Appendix 3: Reference

The HCA Homes and Communities Agency are developing an Empty Property toolkit which will be available from June 2011. This will be incorporated into the Empty Property Strategy Area Approach.

The following websites were used as reference and for benchmarking:

- <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/newhomesbonus/newhomesbonusquestions/>
- <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk>
- <http://www.camden.gov.uk>
- <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/>
- The Housing Act 2004
- Empty Property Strategy (2007-2011)
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