

## Priority One: Bring empty properties back into use

### Key Issues/background

A small number of empty properties in the West are causing problems in surrounding areas. There are 587 long term (over six months) empty houses across the area, with 410 of these being in the private sector. In 2008/09 78 properties were brought back into use or demolished. Anti Social Behaviour

### Current activities

- Empty Property Officer and Private Sector Housing Officer work across the whole of the city to bring empty properties in the private rented sector back into use through working with owners to renovate and rent out, demolish the most unfit housing in the Council's renewal areas.
- The Housing Renewal Team works with the public and Council Tax Team to identify empty properties.
- At April 2009 there were 410 private sector empty properties in the West area of Sunderland out of a total of 2391 across Sunderland.
- In 2008/09, 406 properties across the City were brought back into use or demolished against a Key PI target of 360 (339 were brought back into use, 77 were demolished).
- 78 of these properties were in the West.
- Gentoo have completed a review of allocations, which will be implemented over the year:
- Working with the Housing Options Team, Officers match people who are homeless with empty properties
- The Council's Empty Properties Strategy is being reviewed this year with each of the five areas of the City having its own section. This will include actions and targets. The review will also recommend the Council consider the use of financial incentives to assist/encourage owners to return their premises to occupation.
- The city wide target for 2009/10 is 375.

### Gaps/Comments/Needs

- Two officers for whole of City, one focuses on renewal areas of Hendon, Castletown and Hetton Downs and the other the rest of the City.
- All private sector empty properties in the area have been mapped. The Council is developing an Empty Property Action Plan which will detail what will be done to bring empty properties back in to use and will set targets for each Local Area.
- The 2009/10 city wide target is a 'stretching' target with limited staff resource.
- There is a major correlation between anti social behaviour (ASB) and empty properties.

### Actions

- Area Committee receive Empty Homes Strategy and targets once complete.
- Area Committee receive a report regarding housing and ASB links.

### Proposal

- **Review:** Area Committee to consider additional resources to enable more work to tackle the 410 properties in the area and carry out more proactive work. (HH&A, SCC)

## Priority Two: Address lack of parking provision in some residential areas

### Key issues/background

Some housing in the West area has a lack of dedicated parking spaces, leading to illegal/inconsiderate parking. This can also cause problems on bus routes.

### Current activities

- Gentoo encourages customers to report parking issues and complaints to Highways section and have carried out quite a few parking schemes.
- 1997 guidelines ensure developers provide parking at a ratio of one per dwelling with additional provision of one visitor space per three dwellings.

### Gaps/Comments/Needs

- Planning permission can be an issue when works have been proposed.
- No central system of logging complaints.
- Big problem on a number of estates with regular tenancy breaches of parking on green spaces and consequent damage to boundary walls.
- Any schemes that were under consideration by Gentoo would need to benefit tenants primarily and not owner occupiers.

### Actions

- Carry out an audit of complaints and problem areas.
- Identify worst areas with a view to providing a multi agency solution (e.g. Gentoo are open to discussion regarding selling/donating land where appropriate)

### Proposal

- **Review:** Highlight hotspots of illegal/inconsiderate parking and develop proposals to tackle the problems. (D & R, SCC; Gentoo, Home Housing)

## Priority Three: Make estates/residential areas more attractive

### Key issues/background

Some estates and residential areas are visually unattractive and need maintenance work to improve appearance. The provision of shrubs, bulb planting etc...provide a more attractive place to live. In relation to their area as a place to live, satisfaction levels of West residents are higher than the City average. Some estates have entrance name signs.

### Current activities

- Green Space Audit Is to be undertaken. Will highlight the quality and quantity of green space across the city and will be broken down into areas. The strategy will show deficiencies in open space – parks, allotments, play areas, recreational space.
- The City Council currently runs a maintenance programme for streets and grounds.
- Gentoo have a maintenance programme and work with residents to improve residential areas. This includes environmental schemes, such as planting, painting etc.
- Work is ongoing within the City Council to finalise a strategy to promote affordable housing and develop a Local Housing Company within the Economic Regeneration Strategy for the City.
- Gentoo have a number of renewal areas. Those subject to delays, due to economic reasons, will be 'greened'. Pennywell Phase 2 is on going.
- Gentoo have introduced Neighbourhood Action Plans for all estates. Estates are inspected by Housing Managers and Grounds Maintenance Teams to ensure they are kept clean and tidy
- Gentoo ask customers for feedback about their estates and try to implement changes requested. This is often in partnership with other organisations
- Gentoo Housing Managers carry out estate walks with residents, can include Councillors.
- Groundwork have developed a proposal for a Green Team ILM to enhance neighbourhood works and provide employment opportunities for 18 -24 year olds.
- Audit of community facilities on going.

### Gaps/Comments/Needs

- Requests for highway maintenance services are in addition to the routine and planned programmes of work which are funded from existing mainstream budgets
- Need to engage with communities effectively to encourage involvement and reduce negative perceptions of area. Wellness activities have suffered from not being able to access many community facilities.
- Need to link with developing areas of work e.g. Community Cohesion Strategy, Child Poverty Strategy and Legible City.
- Limited access to formal parks, particularly in Pallion, South Hylton and Grindon and lack of neighbourhood open space in Pennywell, Hastings Hill and Ford.

### Actions

- Highway Service keep Area Committee informed of outstanding/completed work.
- Identify capacity in community facilities to enhance wellness provision.

### Proposal

- **Allocation of SIB/SIP:** Area Committee to consider receiving an application to enable all current outstanding highway and carriageway requests etc... to be completed (approx £65,000 required to match mainstream budget of approx £41,000 ) (D&R, SCC)
- **Review:** Develop a programme of neighbourhood improvements, with full community engagement, and report back (D&R, CCS, SCC; Gentoo).
- **Review:** Develop 'Green Team' proposal and report back (D&R, CCS, CX, SCC; Gentoo; Groundwork).

## Priority Four: Improve landlord's licensing and take measures to prevent disrepair

### Key issues/background

There are a number of run down properties, which are privately owned. The state of some of the properties is having a detrimental effect on the surrounding areas.

### Current activities

- When complaints are received, an inspection is undertaken and the state of the property is assessed using elements of the Housing Act 2004 and where appropriate legal notices are served on landlords and owners to remedy disrepair
- The Council also operates a Voluntary Private Landlord Accreditation Scheme to improve the quality of the private rented sector. The aims of the scheme are to encourage, acknowledge and actively promote good standards of privately rented accommodation and to assist landlords and tenants to undertake their respective responsibilities to each other.
- There are five Environmental Health Officers (Health, Housing and Adult Services) for the City.
- Gentoos work closely with the Council and Police to report issues and have them dealt with. This can also include partnership working to address issues raised by private tenants, which the Council's Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal Team Tackles.
- Collaborative work between Health, Housing and Adult Services and City Services has resulted in Environmental Enforcement Officers assisting the Housing Team in tackling dumped rubbish in empty properties. This enables the Empty Property Officer to concentrate on working with owners to bring empty premises back into occupation.

### Gaps/Comments/Needs

- The service provided by the Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) is largely reactive to complaints received, due to limited staff resources
- Little proactive marketing of the services provided by the EHOs.

### Actions

- Explore the provision of a more pro-active enforcement service in a small pilot area to determine the impact proactive work would have on the education of the community with regard to housing conditions and the decent home standard and its subsequent impact on the level and nature of complaints received (this will include housing standards and management and anti social behaviour). The work will also include informing private landlords about the citywide accreditation scheme and inviting them to join it.
- Market the accreditation scheme aimed at landlords with regard to their responsibilities.
- Engage the Private Landlords Forum.

### Proposal

- **Review:** Investigate the scope for further collaborative working to increase the effective use of the Empty property Officer (HH&A, CCS).

### NOTE

SCC: Sunderland City Council

D&R: Development and Regeneration

HH&A: Health, Housing and Adult Services

CCS: Community and Cultural Services

CX: Office of the Chief Executive