Foreword

The purpose of this strategy is to outline the Council’s approach to empty homes within the Borough. In Bournemouth there are currently approximately 830 long term empty properties. This is an important issue for the Council and it is essential we maximise the use of these properties to provide additional accommodation and reduce the negative impact they can often have within the community.

This Empty Homes Strategy sets out a clear direction and action plan, demonstrating our commitment to reducing the number of long term empty homes in Bournemouth.

We will proactively work alongside home owners with a solution-based approach. However, we are also prepared to use enforcement powers if needed to help return their properties back into use.

This document sets out the options available to owners of empty homes and represents the Council’s approach, illustrating key objectives and actions over the next five years to tackle this wasted resource.

The Strategy can be viewed on the Council’s website:
http://bournemouth.gov.uk/emptyhomesstrategy

Councillor Robert Lawton

Cabinet Member for Housing, Bournemouth Borough Council
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1. Introduction

Why do we need an empty home strategy?

With the country in the grip of a housing shortage, the number of empty homes in our communities is a major national issue. The number of households in England is projected to increase by an average of 210,000 per year and, although tackling empty homes will not provide a solution to the need for new build homes, it can contribute by making the best use of the existing housing stock. Government data from October 2014 suggests there are over 610,000 empty homes across England, 2.6% of the total number of dwellings. Of these over 200,000 are recorded as long term empty (over six months). Bringing these properties back into use would meet approximately one year of the government’s estimate of housing need.

Empty properties represent waste and missed opportunities and are proven to have negative social and environmental impacts upon our local communities. Tackling empty homes can help to reduce pressure on the need for new housing, make significant steps in improving housing conditions and reduce their detrimental impact upon the community.

In the context of a borough with a significant housing shortage, tackling empty homes is a priority for Bournemouth. This strategy, which is part of the wider housing initiative contained within the Bournemouth Housing Strategy 2013–2020, sets out how the Council will approach the issue of empty homes and seek to work with the owners of long term empty properties in order to return them to use.

Defining the problem

What is an empty home?

There are a number of different types of empty properties but they broadly fall into two main categories: transactional and long term. Transactional empty periods, such as those between lettings or sale, are usual and necessary for the normal operation of the housing market and rarely require Council intervention. Long term empty properties are those unoccupied for more than six months and inactive on the housing market.

A property does not have to be used all of the time to be classed as occupied. Properties that are used infrequently, such as second or holiday homes, are not defined as ‘empty’ and are therefore not targeted within this Strategy. Other types of empty properties such as those where the occupant may be in prison, living in a care home or giving or receiving care elsewhere will also generally not be included.
However, should any of these types of properties become problematic or cause concerns for local residents, there may be the need for the Council to act.

**Why do properties become empty?**

Homes may become unoccupied for any number of reasons such as:

- lack of funding for repair work
- family/business disputes
- repossessions
- inheritance
- lack of information and advice
- awaiting planning consent
- housing market conditions
- lethargy, indifference and obstruction.

**How are empty properties identified?**

The primary source of data is obtained through Council Tax records requested under the Local Government Act 2003, section 85. This allows the address of the empty property and the liable parties name, address and contact details to be used for the identification of vacant dwellings, and for steps to be taken to bring them back into use. Information is also gained via reports from the public, other local authority departments and agencies such as the police and fire services.

**What are the benefits of bringing them back into use?**

Empty properties are a wasted resource and if not dealt with can create social, economic and environmental consequences.

**Benefits for the owner**

Empty home owners face a number of costs whilst their property is left unoccupied when they could instead be making a profit through regular income if let, or from capital if sold. Leaving a property empty increases the risk of deterioration and can attract criminal activity, making the property costly or difficult to insure. This ultimately leaves the owner vulnerable to depreciation of their asset or losing it all together. On average, an empty property costs over £7,000 a year through lost rent, Council Tax, insurance, depreciation and vandalism. This figure does not take into account other additional costs such as standing charges for utilities and mortgage interest payments.
• Reducing vandalism and anti-social behaviour

Long term empty homes create opportunities for fly-tippers, squatters, drug users and vandals to misuse the property. These are all activities which will increase the blight an empty property has on an area and can result in significant increased costs to an owner. These forms of criminal activity will also likely demand the time and resources of the local police, fire services and local authority enforcement, stretching their limited resources even further at a time of budgetary reductions.

• Enhancing the local environment

Neglected empty properties are unsightly and can have serious detrimental impacts on the local environment. They can reduce the general pride in an area; have depressive effects on neighbouring house prices; and cause a direct impact on adjoining homes through damp and structural problems. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors estimate that an empty home can reduce the market value of neighbouring properties by as much as 18%. Empty homes can be part of a cycle of decline and neglect for a community, and returning them to use can have a positive impact in the regeneration of run down or deprived areas.

• Addressing housing need and demand

Empty homes are a sustainable and economically efficient means of helping to meet housing demand. With the high numbers of households on the housing register and the increasing cost of renting in the private sector, returning otherwise empty properties back into use can make a positive step towards tackling housing need by increasing the number of properties available for occupation. Although Bournemouth is continuing to build new homes, it is challenging in the context of limited land and resources. The most recent Strategic Housing Market Assessment in August 2015 identified the Objectively Assessed Need for Bournemouth as 979 homes per annum for the period 2013–2033 with a projected population growth of 16.3%. Maximising the existing housing stock, in addition to new build, is vital in meeting this demand.

• Increasing Local Authority Funding

Tackling empty homes should not be seen purely as an income generator but nonetheless, reducing the number of empty homes creates an opportunity to bolster reducing council budgets through the Government’s New Homes Bonus (NHB) scheme. With diminishing local government resources, the potential benefits of empty homes related NHB is compelling, as are the potential penalties if the number of long term empties were to increase. Furthermore, there can often be council-owed debt associated with empty homes such as unpaid Council Tax and works in default costs. Maximising empty homes debt recovery is an appropriate means of recovering public money from a wasted resource and redirecting it where it is most needed.

The national context

Nationally we are facing a challenge of growing demand and a reduced ability to construct the number of new homes needed. With the current estimated 610,000 empty homes across England, the problem is a national one and has moved up the political agenda in recent years.

The Governmental strategy for tackling empty homes published in 2011, Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy, recognised the need for commitment in bringing empty homes back into use and as a result, there have been a number of key changes to empty homes legislation. The National
Planning Policy Framework, published in 2012, placed increased expectation upon local authorities to address the empty homes issues locally.

**Council Tax reforms**

Prior to April 2013, Central Government held powers to vary the amount of Council Tax paid on some empty homes. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 devolved these powers to a local level and introduced provisions that allow local authorities the discretion to apply an initial discount for properties empty for up to six months. Additional to this is the option to impose an ‘empty home premium’ of 150% on properties left unoccupied and unfurnished for over two years.

Bournemouth Borough Council have adopted the 150% premium and from April 2015, reduced the initial discount to one month’s exemption for unfurnished unoccupied properties to further incentivise the reoccupation of long term empty homes. Under current revisions going before Cabinet it is expected that the one month’s exemption will be removed.

**The New Homes Bonus**

Introduced in April 2011, the New Homes Bonus is a system in which councils are rewarded for the provision of new homes with the aim of boosting home creation. It encourages the sustainable re-use of existing long term empty properties by rewarding these in the same way as newly built homes. However, as it simply rewards the net increase in homes in the council’s area, if the number of empty homes increases, the council could lose out on rewards it might otherwise have received for newly built homes.

The amount of reward received is calculated on the average Council Tax banding of each property brought into use and payment is currently made for each of the six years after the new home is created. The funds take the form of a grant which is not ring-fenced, giving the council the freedom to reinvest the reward into whatever may be a local priority.

To date, including future payments, the additional New Homes Bonus generated for Bournemouth as a result of the reduction in numbers of long term empty homes is just under £1.9 million. However, changes to the NHB are currently under consultation and payments are highly likely to be reduced in 2018/19 from six years to four under the local government finance settlement. The future outlook for the NHB displays a strong possibility that it will cease altogether in 2021/22.

**The local context**

Bournemouth is the most densely populated local authority in the south-west with a population of approximately 191,400 and a predicted growth of around 16% over the next 20 years. There are currently in the region of 88,000 dwellings across the Borough with the most recent report generated in May 2016 showing 836 long term (over six months) substantially unfurnished empty properties. This equates to 0.95% of the total housing stock.

| 6–12 mnths | 1–2 yrs | 2–5 yrs | 5–10 yrs | 10+ yrs |
| 35% | 37% | 17% | 6% | 5% |

97.61% of these long term empty properties are privately owned with the remaining 2.39% being from within the social housing stock (either Council or Registered Social Landlord owned). This is relatively low considering that the social housing stock compromises approximately 10% of the total housing in Bournemouth. These social housing stock empty properties are cyclical, generally undergoing refurbishment or being renovated for alternative client groups. Although this number of void dwellings may remain fairly constant, they are not always the same properties and as such do not present an issue in the context of empty homes in Bournemouth. The primary focus clearly needs to be on the private sector.
In May 2016 there were 4,356 households in need on the Housing Register for Bournemouth. With housing demand continuing to substantially exceed the housing supply, there is a pressing need to maximise the Borough’s current housing stock across all tenures by bringing as many empty properties back into use as possible.
2. Aims of the Strategy

The overarching objective of the Empty Homes Strategy is to increase the housing supply by reducing the number of empty homes. The following sets out the Council’s key aims and what it is hoping to achieve when tackling empty homes. The action plan set out on page 17 demonstrates how we intend to meet these aims.

1. **To maintain a database of empty homes and improve the accuracy of data**
   
   A database of identified and referred empty homes needs to be maintained to clearly document casework and record outcomes. Improving the accuracy of Council Tax data is also vital to ensure that the figure of empty homes in the Borough is a true reflection. This is of particular importance since the introduction of the New Homes Bonus.

2. **To assist and encourage empty home owners to bring their properties back into use**
   
   The Council will always seek to encourage owners to take voluntary action in bringing their homes back into use in the first instance. To assist in achieving this, an effective toolkit and a comprehensive advice and assistance service is required, as well as proactive contact to engage with owners and establish positive relationships.

3. **To improve the condition of empty homes and target the most problematic with enforcement action**
   
   Where the condition of empty properties impacts negatively upon the community, action will be taken where possible to ensure these problems are reduced. Where properties are particularly problematic, owners are either unwilling to engage or cannot be traced, and where there is little prospect of them being bought back into use voluntarily, they will be prioritised for further enforcement action. Factors such as the length of time empty, condition of the property and its impact on the community will be considered.

4. **To raise awareness of empty homes**
   
   Publicising the issue of empty homes as a wasted resource can help to reduce the acceptability of properties being left empty, encourage owners to engage with the Council in returning them to use, and increase reporting of problematic properties by general members of the public.
3. Actions to bring empty homes back into use

Empty homes work is not a ‘one fits all’ delivery and needs to be both case specific and owner led. The Council will always seek to work with the owners in the first instance, focusing on giving advice and assistance in returning their property to use. Should such an approach be refused, particularly with problematic empty properties, owners will be made aware that inaction is not an option and the Council may adopt enforcement action.

In order to tackle empty homes, a three stage approach has been implemented:

1. identification and engagement

The most useful methods of identifying empty homes is by using Council Tax records, direct contact from owners or reports of specific problematic properties. Where direct engagement is not possible, a three stage letter approach has been adopted to achieve contact with the owners and establish the issues that are keeping the property empty. The initial letter will include information and encourage contact. If there is no response or engagement resulting from the first letter, the following letters will again offer advice and assistance but with increasing emphasis on enforcement options if there is no co-operation.

2. encouragement and incentive

The primary aim will always be to resolve the issue of an empty home in the most co-operative way possible.

Advice and information

Some owners may not know how to move forward and the Council’s Empty Homes Officer can assist in outlining the options and provide tailored advice and information. This can include advice on refurbishment, sales, legal issues and letting. Advising owners of the issues and concerns that empty properties can create and informing them of their legal obligations is a key aspect, as is engaging with those in the wider community who may be specifically affected by a problematic empty property.

Sale options

As well as providing general advice and guidance on selling a property, there may be the potential for the Council to purchase properties which would then be let through Seascape Housing & Property Ltd. This company has been set up to take advantage of the flexibilities of a private landlord and grant Assured Shorthold Tenancies, including to those for whom the Council has a statutory homeless duty.
Renting opportunities

Advice can be provided on all aspects of becoming a landlord and what responsibilities this entails. We can also assist owners in finding tenants from people in need on the Housing Register which can often be linked with rent deposit or rent in advance assistance.

Homes 4 Let

Homes 4 Let is a local social letting agent owned by East Boro Housing Trust. They work with landlords to provide a professional letting service which is unique in the local market; working with local councils to provide homes for families in need of good quality, affordable accommodation. Homes4Let’s charges for property management are usually lower than mainstream agents and they operate on a flat rate management fee.

Empty homes grants

Previously, the Council offered grants for improvement works to long term empty properties which allowed occupation linked to nomination rights. These grants were funded from within the Council’s overall annual grant funding allocations. Due to a significant reduction in capital receipts and a low take up of grants, the Council are no longer able to commit large resources to owners in this way. However, in some circumstances there may still be the ability to assist with specific problems which may be preventing the property moving forward. Any such assistance will be discretionary and require consultation with the service manager.

Pre-planning advice

Where improvements to the site layout, size or use of the property are sought, the Council’s planning department can offer pre-planning advice to owners. This may be an option where an alteration to the property would mean a greater demand for occupation, such as converting bedsits into self contained flats or change of use from commercial to residential. There is a charge for this service but the Empty Homes Officer can provide initial information to assess the feasibility of any such applications.

VAT relief

Properties that have been empty for two years or more qualify for a reduced VAT rate of 5% on the majority of renovation costs. If a property has been empty for 10 years or more, a full VAT refund may be available. To be eligible, the owner is required to provide documentary evidence to confirm the length of time the property has been vacant and the Empty Homes Officer is usually capable of providing this.

Inspections

The Council can provide inspections of the empty property under the Housing Act’s 2004 Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to identify any defects which pose a significant hazard and identify what works are required to bring the property up to a safe standard for occupation.
This can assist owners with a starting point for refurbishment and ensures that the properties bought back into use are safe, healthy and energy efficient.

Building works
Seascape South Ltd is a subsidiary of Bournemouth Council Group Ltd, established to provide a comprehensive range of building services to the private and commercial sector. This includes design, build, refurbishments and property maintenance. The team delivering the services for Seascape is drawn from a large Council resource of over 120 qualified trade staff or proven sub-contractors, ensuring they are accountable and trustworthy traders.

3. Enforcement

Unfortunately, not all empty home owners respond to positive encouragement or offers of assistance and may fail to take responsibility for their properties and the issues they create. When owners are not willing to engage or negotiations have failed, and where there is little prospect of the property being brought back into use voluntarily, enforcement action will be taken where appropriate.

Before progressing to enforcement action the Council will, where possible, ensure that the empty property owners are fully advised and given the opportunity and sufficient time to take action to improve conditions and bring their properties back into use. In accordance with the Council’s enforcement policy, our approach will be consistent, risk-based, targeted and proportionate.

There are a number of legislative tools available to the Council to ensure that the condition of a property is improved, particularly where there are health and safety concerns or negative impacts upon the community. Appendix One provides a more detailed list of the enforcement powers available to the local authority, but the key enforcement options available to ultimately bring properties back into use are summarised below.

Enforced sale
The Law of Property Act 1925 allows the recovery of debt secured by a registered charge by forcing the sale of a property. In situations where the Council has served notices requiring the owner to ensure that an empty property is not unsafe or having a negative impact, but they have failed to take action, the Council may be forced to carry out the works in default. If the costs incurred are not paid by the owner the Council will register a charge against the property and, should the owner still not pay this debt, the Council can commence legal proceedings to sell the property in order to recover the costs. An enforced sale under a different procedure can also be used to recover Council Tax arrears. An enforced sale results in a change of ownership, which is often one of the most effective ways of bringing an empty property back into use.

Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)
If a property has been left empty for over two years, is attracting anti-social behaviour and the owner makes no effort or cannot demonstrate a plan to return the property to use, the Council may seek an EDMO, the provisions for which are contained in the Housing Act 2004. An EDMO allows the Council to take over full management of the property for up seven years, carry out necessary renovations to bring it up the Decent Home Standard, and rent it out at an affordable rate. Management and refurbishment costs are reclaimed from the rental income.

Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)
CPOs can be made under Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985, or Section 226 (amended by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) of the Town & County Planning Act 1990. They allow local authorities to purchase property in specific circumstances without the owner’s consent. This is perhaps the most powerful measure available to the Council and can be a useful demonstration of a zero tolerance approach to problematic empty homes.

Further information on the Council’s enforcement policy in regards to Empty Homes can be found in the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy: www.bournemouth.gov.uk/privatesectorhousingenforcementpolicy
4. Publicity and raising awareness

A key element to the Council’s approach in bringing empty homes back into use is publicity and raising awareness among residents and property owners. The following sets out the methods used to achieve this:

- a rolling programme of proactive contact with the owners will continue in an effort to actively engage and raise awareness of the unacceptability of homes remaining empty
- work will be ongoing to improve the information available on the Council’s website which already includes useful links and a facility to report an empty home online
- empty homes information leaflets are available and will be regularly reviewed and updated
- good news stories can be promoted through local media when empty homes are brought back into use. Not only will this assist in raising awareness of the opportunities available and the issues involved, but can also encourage the public and other agencies to get involved and identify any empty properties where targeted action may be necessary
- promotion of the issues through sources of social media can be facilitated by the Council’s Media and Communications team
- regular engagement with other agencies encourages multi-agency working and the referral of problematic properties.
5. Resources

Staffing resources

The Council has employed a full time Empty Homes Officer since July 2014. The post is situated within the Strategic Housing Team and has increased the Council’s capacity to deal effectively with empty homes across the Borough. This is demonstrated by a continuing reduction in the number of long term empties, specifically some of the longer term properties.

The post will continue to be funded from the base budget under a ‘spend to save’ rationale evidenced by the additional revenue generated through the Empty Homes element of the New Homes Bonus. The reward paid through the New Homes Bonus is not ring-fenced allowing the Council the freedom to reinvest into local priorities. With Central Government’s long term aspiration to cease grant funding, this additional income gains even greater significance whilst it continues to exist.

Enforcement/other costs

The Council’s revenue budget allows for enforcement action where properties have become an eyesore or fallen into severe disrepair and relevant legislation applies. The Council may undertake works in default if the owner does not comply with the relevant enforcement notice. These costs are recoverable ensuring a renewable fund, but should the owner not repay the monies owed, a legal charge will be placed on the property.

A flexible generic pot of £50k revenue funding, generated from a review of Council Tax discounts for empty homes, is available for owner assistance and further enforcement action. It will also be used to support promotion, advertising and additional administrative costs. This is partially revolving in regards to Enforced Sale/Compulsory Purchase Order costs, and will be annually reviewed in consultation with the Service Director and Cabinet Member for Housing to ensure it is both spent and renewed efficiently. This budget will additionally provide the finances to fund any specialist external services which may be required to support enforcement action.

Should there be a situation where additional borrowing capacity is required, for example to fund the purchase of a property under a CPO, approval will be required from the Corporate Property Officer. Any enforcement action under the Enforced Sale Procedure would be cost neutral with any necessary expenditure recovered from the proceeds of sale.

Debt recovery

With increasing pressure on local government finances, the need to make the best use of existing resources is paramount. The most commonly associated debt with empty homes is Council Tax arrears, works in default costs and residential care charges for previous occupants. A number of unpaid debts have already been recovered by the Empty Homes Officer actively engaging with owners and progressing cases in partnership with other Council departments. Tracing and working with owners as well as the option to utilise powers of enforced sale and compulsory purchase orders provide a means of recovering public money back into the Council and redirecting it where most needed.
6. Action Plan

**Aim One:** to maintain a database of empty homes and improve the accuracy of data

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<th>Detail</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utilise existing case management system to maintain accurate records of empty homes, document casework and record outcomes</td>
<td>Up to date, comprehensive information and accurate statistics</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annually survey status of all empty homes</td>
<td>Ensures accuracy of data to maximise New Homes Bonus and builds comprehensive picture of empty homes across the Borough</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer, Council Tax staff</td>
<td>Annually</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective cross departmental working with Council Tax</td>
<td>Collaborative working to ensure that all empty homes brought back into use are correctly recorded to provide accurate data and maximise income from New Homes Bonus</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer, Council Tax staff</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Aim Two:** to assist and encourage empty home owners to bring them back into use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Detail</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop process to proactively engage with owners</td>
<td>3 stage letter process. Frequent &amp; regular contact</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact all long term empty home owners</td>
<td>Info gathered from Council Tax records – ongoing programme, advise and inform of options</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to develop the toolkit to assist and encourage owners to bring their properties back into use</td>
<td>Improve and expand advice and information, continue to develop links with external organisations and partners</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
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### Aim Three: to improve the condition of empty homes and their impact upon the area and prioritise the most problematic empty homes for enforcement action

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<th>Target</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reactive investigation and response to reports of problematic empty homes</td>
<td>Improve customer satisfaction and reduce impact of empty homes on the community</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer, Community Enforcement Team</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritise most problematic properties for enforcement action</td>
<td>Identify properties causing the most problems and which require Council intervention to bring back into use</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer, Community Enforcement Team, Legal Services</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective cross departmental working</td>
<td>To take appropriate and effective enforcement action against prioritised properties</td>
<td>Strategic Housing, Empty Homes Officer, Community Enforcement Team, Anti-Social Behaviour Team, Private Sector Enforcement Team, Planning Enforcement, Building Control, Legal Services, Council Tax</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine resources for enforcement action</td>
<td>Specific ‘pot’ for empty home enforcement action</td>
<td>Strategic Housing Manager, Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>September 2016</td>
<td>To be determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus resources on priority cases</td>
<td>Engage in intensive casework with the most problematic cases. Use negotiation, assistance or enforcement</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources/to be determined (as above)</td>
</tr>
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**Aim Four:** to raise awareness of empty homes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Detail</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review and update publicity material, including leaflets and letters to empty home owners</td>
<td>Improve the information available, ensure it is up to date and encourage contact</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Bi-annually</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update web-based functions and reinstate reporting tool</td>
<td>Improve information available and simplify method of reporting</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicise good news stories and the unacceptability of empty properties through local media, web based functions and face to face contact</td>
<td>Use of media resources to promote the issues, raise awareness and encourage reporting</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer, Corporate Communications</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend public meetings, community groups and engage with other agencies</td>
<td>Promote and highlight the advice &amp; support available as well as enforcement options</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Within existing staffing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase enforcement action against problematic empty properties</td>
<td>Demonstrates unacceptability of leaving properties empty and neglected and publicly promotes the issue</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer, Community Enforcement Team, Legal Services</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>To be determined</td>
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**General**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Detail</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review and update the Empty Homes Strategy</td>
<td>Annual review of strategy, action plan and resources</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Annually</td>
<td>Staff time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend regional and national empty home forums</td>
<td>To keep up to date with latest developments, networking, information sharing and identify best practice</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Staff time/within existing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify new funding and partnership working opportunities</td>
<td>To improve and develop means of reducing numbers of long term empty properties</td>
<td>Empty Homes Officer</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Staff time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 1 – Statutory Enforcement Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Enforcement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Dangerous building or structure | Building Act 1984, Sections 77 and 88 | Section 77 – to require the owner to make the property safe  
Section 78 – to enable the Local Authority to take emergency action to make the property safe |
| | Housing Act 2004, Sections 11 and 12 | To require owner to make the property safe  
Section 11 applies if the property has a category 1 (serious) hazard(s)  
Section 12 applies if the property has category 2 (less serious) hazard(s) |
| Unsecured properties – where there is a risk that it may be entered or suffer vandalism, arson or similar | Building Act 1984, Section 78 | Allows the Local Authority to fence off the property  
Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, Section 29 | To require the owner to take steps to secure the property or to allow the Local Authority to board it up in an emergency |
| Vermin – either where present or where there is a risk that they will be attracted | Public Health Act 1961, Section 34 | To require the owner to remove waste so that vermin is not attracted to the site, destroy any infestation and remove any accumulations prejudicial to health  
Prevention of Damage by Pests Act, Section 4  
Public Health Act 1936, Section 83  
Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 80  
Building Act 1984, Section 76 |
| Unsightly land and property affecting the amenity of the area | Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Section 215  
Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, Part 4 | To require the owner to address unsightly land or the external appearance of a property adversely affecting the amenity of an area or causing a nuisance  
Building Act 1984, Section 79 | To require the owner to repair ruinous or dilapidated buildings seriously detrimental to an area  
Public Health Act 1961, Section 34 | To require the owner to remove waste from the property  
Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 | Allows the Local Authority to undertake works to preserve empty listed buildings or building in conservation areas that are falling into disrepair |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Enforcement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defective or blocked drainage and private sewers</td>
<td>Building Act 1984, Section 59</td>
<td>To require the owner to address blocked or defective drainage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Health Act 1961, Section 17</td>
<td>To require the owner to address defective drainage or private sewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, Section 35</td>
<td>To require the owner to address obstructed private sewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties that have been vacant in excess of 6 months where negotiation has been unsuccessful in returning the property back into use</td>
<td>Housing Act 2004, Section 134</td>
<td>To grant the Local Authority the powers to take over the management of a property initially under an interim Empty Dwelling Management order then under a final Empty Dwelling Management Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term empty property that is detrimental to the area, no identifiable owners or no efforts to return it to use</td>
<td>Housing Act 1985, Section 17</td>
<td>To grant the Local Authority the power of compulsory purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery of debt secured by a legal charge on the property incurred by the service of a statutory notice and work(s) undertaken in default</td>
<td>Law of Property Act 1925, Sections 101 and 103</td>
<td>Enables the Local Authority to apply for an order of sale of the property to recover outstanding debts owed including Council Tax arrears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requiring information from an owner</td>
<td>Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976, Section 16</td>
<td>Legal requirement of information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 – Contact Details

Empty Homes Officer
Housing & Communities
Town Hall
Bourne Avenue
Bournemouth BH2 6DY
T. 01202 454893
E. empty.homes@bournemouth.gov.uk
www.bournemouth.gov.uk/Housing/Landlords/EmptyHomes

Are you the owner of an empty property?
Please contact the Empty Homes Officer to discuss your circumstances and if there may be any advice or assistance available to help get your property back into use.

Are you concerned about an empty property?
If you are aware of a property which is causing a nuisance or you have concerns about the owner being able to bring it back into use unaided, please contact the Empty Homes Officer to discuss or you can report it (anonymously if you wish) through the online facility: www.bournemouth.gov.uk/emptyhomes

Other useful contacts:

Homes From Empty Homes
T. 020 3135 0674
E. info@emptyhomes.co.uk
www.emptyhomes.com

National Landlords Association
T. 020 7840 8900
E. info@landlords.org.uk
www.landlords.org.uk

Homes 4 Let
T. 01202 739973
E. enquiries@homes4let.org.uk
www.homes4let.org.uk
Alternative format requests

A summary of this policy can be provided in large print, audio format or alternative languages.

To request an alternative format:
T. 01202 454893   |   E. emptyhomes@bournemouth.gov.uk

Or write to:
Empty Homes Officer
Housing & Communities
Town Hall
Bourne Avenue
Bournemouth BH2 6DY