

Individual Executive Member Decision

Title of Report:	Request to go out for Consultation on Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2014-18
Report to be considered by:	Individual Executive Member Decision
Date on which Decision is to be taken:	30 th June 2014
Forward Plan Ref:	ID2851

Purpose of Report: To request permission to go out for consultation for the draft Empty Homes Strategy 2014-18.

Recommended Action: That the Portfolio Holder to give consent to go out for consultation on the draft Empty Homes Strategy 2014-18.

Reason for decision to be taken: Request to consult on draft Empty Homes Strategy 2014-18 prior to adoption

Other options considered: None

Key background documentation: None

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Roger Croft - Tel (01635) 868638
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Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Karen Felgate
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Implications

Policy:	The Empty Homes Strategy sets out the Council's strategic direction in relation to tackling long term empty properties in West Berkshire
Financial:	None
Personnel:	None
Legal/Procurement:	None
Property:	None
Risk Management:	None

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes		Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:				
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)				
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality				<input type="checkbox"/>

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council: N/A

Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman: N/A

Ward Members: N/A However the Housing Policy Reference Group (Member led) have reviewed and commented on the draft strategy

Opposition Spokesperson: N/A

Local Stakeholders: .N/A

Officers Consulted: June Graves Head of Care Commissioning Housing and Safeguarding
Mel Brain Service Manager Housing Strategy and Operations

Maureen Sheridan Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer
Aimee Connor Private Sector Housing Officer
Cathy Dodson Housing Options Team Leader

Trade Union: N/A

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Report is to note only	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that suitable empty homes are returned to use to increase the supply of housing stock.
- 1.2 The Empty Homes Strategy 2014-18 will replace the Empty Homes Strategy 2008-11 which set out the Council's strategic direction regarding tackling empty homes.
- 1.3 This report requests permission to consult upon the new Strategy in preparation for adoption.

2. Purpose of Report

- 2.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that suitable empty homes are returned to use to increase the supply of housing stock.
- 2.2 The main focus of West Berkshire's Empty Homes Strategy is on empty homes which have stood empty for six months or more and, in some cases, may have been abandoned for years.
- 2.3 For the purposes of this policy, the definition of an empty home is '*a dwelling that has been vacant for more than 6 months*'
- 2.4 The strategy identifies the benefits of bringing empty homes back into use to include:
 - Promoting the use of empty homes to assist West Berkshire Council in meeting its strategic housing objectives
 - Facilitating the provision of good quality low-cost housing by the private sector
 - Minimising the development of green-field land
 - Reduction in the number of complaints about empty homes
- 2.5 The strategy sets out the successes of the Empty Homes Strategy 2008-11 and then builds upon this to set out the strategic direction for the next four years.
- 2.6 The Empty Homes Strategy has four key aims:

Aim 1 Reduce the number of long term empty homes in the district.

Aim 2 Raise awareness of how to bring empty homes back into use and provide a range of incentives to owners to help bring empty homes back into use

The Council can offer a number of options to landlords to help bring their properties back into use.

Aim 3 Improve partnership working

Working closely with our partners will help to bring empty homes back.

- 2.7 The strategy has been reviewed by key officers and the Housing Policy Reference Group. Comments have been taken on board. We are now in a position to go out for wider consultation prior to adoption.

3. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 3.1 Vulnerability linked with age and disability could be a barrier to having the capacity to deal with an empty property. The strategy is focused towards advice, assistance and support. It is anticipated that through the process, vulnerable people will be identified and the appropriate support put in place to enable them to deal appropriately with their empty property.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Portfolio Holder agrees for the draft Empty Homes Strategy 2014-18 to be sent out for consultation.

Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report