

UPDATE TO THE EMPTY HOMES POLICY

1 Purpose

Aylesbury Vale District Council is committed to tackling the problems that empty properties cause and is keen to adopt a more proactive approach in supporting owners to help to return their property to use. Empty properties constitute a wasted housing resource, both for individual owners and the local community. Long-term empty properties can fall into a state of disrepair and become dangerous as well as having a negative impact on neighbours and the wider community. A coordinated and sustainable approach to empty properties can contribute towards improving standards as well as reducing the number of empty homes.

2 Recommendations

<p>That the Environment & Living Scrutiny Committee note the contents and make recommendations regarding the report and Cabinet be charged with the approval of the Empty Homes Policy.</p>

3 Supporting Information

- 3.1 It is estimated by the Empty Homes Agency (EHA) that there were over 200,000 long term empty homes in England in 2017. This represents 0.85% of the total number of homes in England and is a substantial wasted resource.
- 3.2 In Aylesbury Vale there were 239 private homes which were unoccupied from a total housing stock of 78,850 (as of April 2017). This represents 0.3% of the housing stock. Although this is below the national and regional average it is still a cause for concern.
- 3.3 Between 2011 and 2017 the number of empty properties in Aylesbury Vale was reduced by 45%. This was achieved through a combination of measures including; Property inspections, provision of help and advice to owners and publicity through mailings and the Vale Times magazine
- 3.4 There are broadly two types of empty residential properties; transactional empty properties and long-term empty properties. Transactional empty properties are generally empty for up to six months, usually due to a change in tenant or ownership and are part of the normal cycle of moving house. The vast majority of all empty properties are empty for less than six months, though they may be empty longer should they be subject to renovation works.
- 3.5 Empty properties can have a negative impact upon the lives of people in the vicinity and can be a magnet for anti-social behaviour. Tackling empty properties not only helps provide additional much-needed homes, but also contributes to the improvement of the local environment and benefits communities. This policy will focus on 'long term empty properties' which are those houses that have been empty for over two years and those that are situated in or close to the larger towns within the Vale.

4 Implications

- 4.1 It is recognised that there are a number of challenges associated with returning empty properties back into use, these can include ownership disputes, personal

circumstances of the owner, disappearance of the owner and properties left intentionally empty.

- 4.2 Enforcement Officers already have the skills required to trace property ownership, inspect houses and identify hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- 4.3 The policy allows flexibility with regard to the criteria used to prioritise empty properties for action and to ensure that any new guidance, legislation or funding that becomes available can be made full use of in future.
- 4.4 The policy describes our 'graduated' approach to enforcement whereby we offer advice and incentives to landlords to assist them in bringing properties back into use prior to considering formal measures.

5 Objectives proposed

- 5.1 Raise awareness of our Empty Homes Policy and publicise the empty homes service.
- 5.2 Build and maintain partnerships within and outside of the council to deliver the empty homes agenda.
- 5.3 Devise and explore innovative solutions to reduce the impact of empty homes on local communities and bring them back in to use.

6 Reasons for Recommendation

- 6.1 To allow the Living and Environment Scrutiny the opportunity to consider the new policy and report their views.

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Background Documents: N/A