

Background to our proposed approach to bringing empty homes back into use

The Newark & Sherwood District Council Community Plan (2020 - 2023) has a key objective of creating more and better-quality homes through our roles as landlord, developer and planning authority. In addition, there is also an objective of reducing crime and anti-social behaviour within our communities. These objectives can be directly influenced by a robust and committed empty home strategy.

As of 2022 Council Tax records show that there were 234 long term empty homes within the district. Whilst this trend broadly less than other authorities locally, it nevertheless represents a significant number of wasted empty properties within the district.

The majority of long-term empty properties within Newark & Sherwood are hidden amongst occupied residential dwellings and are often not generally considered empty or vacant until the condition and external appearance are considered to be below the standards expected by the surrounding community. Many, if not given the appropriate attention and encouragement to the owner, can become longer-term empty, eyesores, and negatively impact their neighbourhoods significantly.

Empty homes can have a significant negative impact on neighbouring properties and wider community because of poor maintenance of the home's physical structure, boundaries and garden areas. This often results in the homes becoming magnets for vandalism and anti-social behaviour which can also create high costs for local authority service providers.

Returning empty homes to use can be the quickest and most cost-effective way to increase the supply of housing. While it will not solve the housing problem, it can nevertheless play an important part in maximising existing housing stock for the benefit of the people of Newark & Sherwood.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The following aims and objectives have been identified to create an approach that the Council can present to owners who have empty homes that could be brought back into use, and to those communities that are affected by what can be a blight of a long-term empty home.

- To reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back into use;
- To collect and record relevant, accurate and current information of empty homes within the District;
- To raise awareness of empty homes and promote our approach;
- To maximise income opportunities, including Council Tax Empty Homes Premium NHB and debt recovery;
- To provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owners around the options and consequences relating to the empty home.

## Action Plan

Based on agreement to the objectives above, it is proposed that the following initial tasks be instigated with the aim of tackling what is a highly complex, and not always straightforward, problem. Following the introduction of these initial measures it is proposed to bring a further report to Cabinet setting out further details of the Councils strategy for dealing with empty homes based upon initial impact and responses the Council Tax Empty Homes Premium and guidance which will be sent out concurrently.

Activity	When	Lead BU
Implement the Council Tax Empty Homes Premium.	April 2023	Finance
Collect and record relevant information, including the address of all empty homes within the district and identify those properties that would be most effective from an enforcement standpoint, with the purpose of creating an empty homes' register.	April – Oct 2023	Planning Development/ Public Protection
Prepare an implementation plan which will identify the range of measures open to the Council to tackle empty homes. The implementation plan will also identify criteria for deciding which action should be taken and monitoring criteria to measure the impact and effectiveness of the strategy. This will include prioritising those most having negative impact, including heritage assets.	July – Dec 2023	Corporate Empty Homes Group
Provide support, guidance and information on returning empty homes back into use through the relevant Council departments including housing, revenues, finance, public protection and planning.	April 2023	Corporate Empty Homes Group