

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20th JULY 2016

Community Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish review of Empty Properties in Carmarthenshire

Action Plan Monitoring

To consider and comment on the following issues:

- To consider the progress made in relation to the recommendations made by the Committee's Task & Finish Group following the review of empty properties during 2014/15.

Reasons:

- All recommendations were formulated by members of the Task & Finish Group following consideration of the evidence received during the course of the review.
- Scrutiny committees have a key role to play in monitoring the implementation of the recommendations.

To be referred to the Executive Board for decision: NO

Executive Board Member Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Linda Evans (Housing)

Directorate: Communities	Designations:	Tel Nos. / E-Mail Addresses:
Name of Head of Service: Robin Staines	Head of Housing & Public Protection	01267 228960 rstaines@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
Report Author: Jonathan Willis	Housing Services Manager (Housing Options & Advice)	01554 899232 jnwillis@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 20th JULY 2016

Community Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish review of Empty Properties in Carmarthenshire

Action Plan Monitoring

Review Background

There are approximately 25,000 empty properties in Wales (WG - 2013/14). There are over 78,000 private sector homes in Carmarthenshire, 9,000 of which are privately rented. As at 1st April 2014 2,479 private sector properties have been empty for 6 months or more. The demand for affordable housing in Carmarthenshire continues to increase while supply is falling at a rate that means we can no longer meet housing needs effectively.

At its Forward Work Programme Planning Session in April 2014, Committee members suggested reviewing empty properties across the county in light of housing need and the high volume of empty properties. At its meeting on the 1st August 2014, the Committee agreed to establish a task and finish group to undertake this review.

Approach

A total of 7 meetings were held between November 2014 and June 2015, which were used to consider evidence and information from a wide variety of sources. The Group also undertook a series of site visits to view a selection of empty properties within the county. The main aims of the review were to:

- To identify and evaluate the current activities undertaken by the Housing & Public Protection Division.
- To identify potential improvements and alternative delivery models.
- To identify cost effective best practice by other authorities, agencies and providers.
- To formulate recommendations for consideration by the Executive Board.

The Group consisted of six elected members from the Community Scrutiny Committee:

- Cllr. Deryk Cundy
- Cllr. Sharen Davies
- Cllr. Ken Howell

- Cllr. Irfon Jones
- Cllr. Edward Thomas
- Cllr. Jeff Thomas

The following officers from the Housing & Public Protection Division provided specialist support to the Group during the review:

- Jonathan Willis - Housing Services Manager (Advice & Options)
- Robert Evans - Principal Officer (Home Improvement)
- Leighton Evans - Empty Property Co-ordinator

The former Scrutiny & Consultancy Team which was based in the People Management & Performance Division of the Chief Executive's Department, provided research, co-ordination and general support to the Group.

Final Report and Recommendations

The Community Scrutiny Committee received and endorsed the Group's final report and the recommendations at its meeting on the 22nd June 2015.

The report was duly endorsed by the Executive Board at its meeting on the 27th July 2015.

Following every task and finish review, an action plan is developed in order to assist members of the relevant scrutiny committee in monitoring progress in relation to the implementation of the recommendations.

The attached action plan has been completed by the relevant officers in order to provide an update on progress to date in relation to this review.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?	YES
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IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Signed: **Robin Staines** Head of Housing & Public Protection

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
YES	NONE	YES	NONE	NONE	YES	NONE

1. Policy Crime & Disorder and Equalities

Tackling private sector empty homes is an important part of our approach to creating more affordable homes. Our Affordable Homes Action Plan has set a target of turning 280 empty private sector homes into affordable homes to rent.

Human Resources

3. Finance

As part of the Affordable Homes Action Plan £3,675,000 HRA capital has been allocated to support bringing empty back into use.

The Council will enter into long term lease arrangements with empty home owners and manage properties as we would our own stock. The aim is that capital monies we outlay is recovered through income from the rent.

As part of our existing approach we have accessed £1,600,000 Welsh Government funding which is administered in accordance with their Houses to Homes loan scheme.

6. Staffing Implications

A new Empty Homes Advisors post has been agreed and advertised to deal with the additional work relating to increasing the supply of affordable homes.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below:

Signed: Robin Staines Head of Housing & Public Protection

1. Local Member(s) – All elected members were consulted during the review and asked to complete a short questionnaire. In all, 46 members (62%) responded.

2. Community / Town Council – All Town & Community Councils were also consulted as part of the review and sent a short questionnaire. In all, 29 councils (40%) responded.

3. Relevant Partners – Owners of empty properties in the areas of Carmarthen and Llanelli were consulted with during the review. 139 owners responded. Ongoing analysis of the results will inform the revision of the Empty Properties Action Plan.

The public consultation for the development of an Affordable Housing Plan gathered views about bringing empty properties back into use. In all, 781 responses were received and 84% thought bringing empty properties back into use was the best way to increase the number of affordable housing.

4. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations – Officers from the Housing & Public Protection, Economic Development, Administration & Law, Financial Services and Planning Divisions attended Task & Finish Group meetings to give evidence. A housing consultant also attended a Group meeting to discuss best practice in relation to empty properties.

Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

THESE ARE DETAILED BELOW:

Title of Document	File Ref No. / Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
Community Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Final Report 2014/15: Empty Properties in Carmarthenshire – Executive Board (27th July 2015)	<p>Agenda http://online.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/agendas/eng/EXEB20150727/index.asp</p> <p>Minutes http://online.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/agendas/eng/EXEB20150727/MINUTES.HTM</p>
Community Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Final Report 2014/15: Empty Properties in Carmarthenshire – Community Scrutiny Committee (22nd June 2015)	<p>Agenda http://online.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/agendas/eng/COMM20150622/index.asp</p> <p>Minutes http://online.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/agendas/eng/COMM20150622/MINUTES.HTM</p>

Title of Document	File Ref No. / Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
Draft Task & Finish Group Planning and Scoping Document – Community Scrutiny Committee (16th January 2015)	<p>Planning and Scoping Document: http://online.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/agendas/eng/COMM20150116/REP06.HTM</p> <p>Minutes: http://online.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/agendas/eng/COMM20150116/MINUTES.HTM</p>
Community Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme 2013/14 Report – Community Scrutiny Committee (24th June 2014 – Reconvened)	<p>Report: http://online.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/agendas/eng/COMM20140624/REP10.HTM</p> <p>Minutes: http://online.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/agendas/eng/COMM20140624/MINUTES.HTM</p>