

## Briefing Report: Empty Homes in South Holland Update

### 1. Report purpose

This briefing report provides an update on South Holland District Council's approach to returning long term empty homes to use. It sets out the activity that it undertakes to return dwellings to use, and the progress made in accordance with the South Holland Empty Homes Strategy 2014-16.

### 2. Performance in returning empty homes back into use

In October 2016, SHDC had 232 empty properties; this was a reduction of 258 from the previous year.

Currently; SHDC has 249 properties empty.

175 properties have been empty for between 6 months and 2 years and 74 properties have been empty for over 2 years.

From 1st October to 22nd December 2016; 103 properties have been bought back into use: of these, 28 were only bought back into use following the direct intervention of the team

### 3. Empty Homes and the New Homes Bonus scheme

SHDC will receive about £180745.76 in new homes bonus this year directly because of the above work

### 4. South Holland Empty Homes Strategy 2014-16

The strategy sets out our general approach to returning empty homes to use. It is structured along the lines of four 'priorities for action', those being:

- To understand the extent of empty homes in the district, including their location and reason for being vacant
- To raise awareness of empty dwellings in the district, and develop partnerships that can assist the authority in addressing the issues
- Develop a range of options, incentives and measures designed to assist, encourage and where necessary compel owners to return their property back to use
- Ensuring adequate resources to undertake empty homes work, and develop a systematic approach to dealing with empty homes in the future

The document makes a commitment to seek to return 75 dwelling back into use per annum for the lifespan of the strategy.

### 5. The progress made against actions

Below is a summary of the progress made against the actions within the strategy

Planned Action	Action Status	Comments
To undertake an annual data cleanse of council tax records. This is in order to ensure that properties listed on council tax records as empty are indeed vacant, and not occupied.	GREEN	This is completed with support from CPBS.
To undertake a rolling programme of postal surveys to owners of properties which have been empty for greater than six months. This is in order to establish the reasons for the property	GREEN	The programme is established and in operation.

becoming vacant, the reasons why it remains empty, and the barriers to bringing the dwelling back into use.		
Establish a Long Term Empty Homes Task Group, consisting of teams across the authority with both an interest in addressing the problems associated with individual long term empty homes, along with teams who hold statutory powers that may assist the authority in achieving its desired aims.	GREEN	This group is established and meets to discuss cross-departmental approaches to address individual long-term empty homes
To engage key organisations in the council's empty homes work. To ensure that an ongoing dialogue takes place between the council and partner agencies to ensure that all opportunities to draw upon the resources, skills and expertise of other organisations is explored.	AMBER	SHDC has engaged with private landlords, agents and investors for joint work around empty homes. Work still needs to be undertaken to involve and engage the police, parish councils and fire and rescue services.
Establish a dedicated 'Advice and Assistance on Empty Homes' space on SHDC's webpage, along with a mechanism to allow member of the public to report details of empty homes directly to the authority. To look to use social media and other outlets to publicise the authority's work in this area.	AMBER	The space on the website is yet to be developed (pending a wider review of SHDC's website). Social media has been used extensively to promote our work around empty homes.
Establish a 'South Holland Empty Homes Advice Scheme' for use by owners of empty dwellings.	GREEN	The advice scheme has been established, led by the authority's Private Sector Housing team in conjunction with Building Control, Planning and the wider Housing team.
Develop access to public and privately-led Empty Homes 'lease and repair' schemes	AMBER	The authority is working with a number of housing associations to facilitate access to 'lease and repair schemes'. South Holland was a partner of the government-backed national Empty Homes Loan Scheme, but that scheme folded in October 2014.
Establish an Empty Homes Property Matching Service	GREEN	The Empty Homes Property Matching Scheme is now established, with 37 property investors as part of the scheme.
Where it is considered appropriate to do so, and on a case-by-case basis, the council will utilise enforcement powers to bring about the re-use of long term vacant dwellings.	GREEN	The authority is presently initiating enforcement action for a small number of properties where prolonged attempts to support owners to return their dwellings to use have failed.
Increase officer resource by 0.6FTE, thus providing the authority with a full time officer resource with which to address empty homes and delivery the Empty Homes Strategy.	GREEN	Completed in April 2014
Produce an Empty Homes Delivery Plan that sets out how officer resources will be allocated in order to achieve the council's empty homes target.	GREEN	Completed

In addition, SHDC is in the process of working on 3 priority cases, which could shortly end in legal action; for example: two of these cases may result in SHDC using its powers to compulsory purchase the empty home.

Resources will be directed towards the 74 properties that have been empty for over 2 years and to publicise and encourage owners and other stakeholders to engage positively with SHDC.