

Item

REVIEW OF EMPTY HOMES POLICY



To:

Councillor Mike Todd-Jones, Executive Councillor for Housing

Report by:

Simonetta Macellari, Empty Homes Officer

Tel: 01223 - 457900 Email: Simonetta.macellari@cambridge.gov.uk

Wards affected:

Abbey, Arbury, Castle, Cherry Hinton, Coleridge, East Chesterton, King's Hedges, Market, Newnham, Petersfield, Queen Edith's, Romsey, Trumpington, West Chesterton

Not a Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Empty Homes Policy is due for review every three years. The review of the Empty Homes Policy 2017 was delayed due to the Covid19 pandemic. The Policy also requires revision following operational changes and the removal of the Empty Homes Loan (2020).
- 1.2 The Empty Homes Policy 2021 remains largely unchanged from the previous policy, it also remains in line with local and national legislation. The revised Policy reflects operational changes at Cambridge City Council, mainly the removal of the Empty Homes Loan and the inclusion of partnership working with Town Hall Lettings, the Council's social lettings agency.
- 1.3 The amendments have not affected the application or principals of the policy.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Executive Councilor is recommended to: consider the proposed changes and adopt the revised Empty Homes Policy 2021 attached as Appendix1

3. Background

- 3.1 The Empty Homes policy was adopted by members in 2012; it forms the basis of the City Council's procedure in relation to empty homes in the City. Following the introduction of the policy, a full-time Empty Homes Officer was recruited in 2015. Cambridge City Council has continually met its targets in bringing empty properties back into use each year. In 2020 26 properties were brought back into use.
- 3.2 The Empty Homes Officer has worked with owners of empty properties and the Town Hall Lettings service to facilitate once empty homes being re-occupied by tenants. Two previously empty properties have been let through Town Hall Lettings at an affordable rent level.
- 3.3 The policy is essential to provide clarity to residents in the way we act, as well as providing clarity around both formal and informal options the City Council may pursue to bring the properties back into occupation. It is important the policy is kept up to date to ensure that it both follows operational changes within the Council and legislative changes that may have come into force. The policy must remain robust and able to stand up to scrutiny if a member of the public or business makes a complaint relating to the way we have handled their case.
- 3.4 Section 10 of the previous policy included information about the 2017 Empty Homes Loan. This loan is no longer available and the section referring to it has been removed from the revised Policy. There was little interest and no uptake of the Empty Homes Loan despite our efforts not only to provide property owners with information about the loan, but also to offer the loan in cases where it was evident funding was needed to return their property to occupation. The money which was set aside for funding the loan was not fulfilling its purpose, and for this reason the loan has been discontinued.
- 3.5 Sections 10 and 11 have been revised to ensure that there is clear distinction between the assistance and enforcement options available to Cambridge City Council.

- 3.6 Partnership work with Town Hall Lettings has been included in the Policy. THL may offer grants and loans or a combination of both to bring the empty accommodation up to a good lettable standard, with any amount awarded decided on a case-by-case basis.
- 3.7 Section 10 lists the various ways in which the Council will identify and locate property owners. It includes using tracing agents. This service is to be used in a small number of cases where, despite thorough research, identifying and locating the property owner has not been possible.

4. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

This policy revision has no financial implications to the City Council. The 200K which was set aside for the Empty Homes Loan has now been returned to the Capital Program Fund.

(b) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications other than communicating the policy review changes and ensuring any work with the owners of empty homes is done in accordance with the policy.

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

An Equality impact assessment has been completed (Appendix2)

(d) Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental Implications

The Climate Change Tool has been completed and the implications of the updated Empty Homes Policy, which primarily involves the removal of the Empty Homes Loan from the policy, has nil implications on the Net Zero Carbon aims of the City Council.

(e) Procurement Implications

There will be no procurement implications.

(f) Community Safety Implications

The Policy is used to guide the way we enforce appropriate legislation that regulates the environment

5. Consultation and communication considerations

We have consulted with Council Tax & Leasehold Services as well as Housing Services. Housing Strategy and the Housing Development Agency (HAD).

We will communicate using the Council website.

6. Background papers

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

Empty Homes Policy 2017 <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/.../empty-homes-policy-2012.pdf>

7. Appendices

Appendix One - Empty Homes Policy 2021

Appendix Two - EQIA

8. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact

Simonetta Macellari, Empty Homes Officer,

Tel: 01223 - 457900,

email: Simonetta.macellari@cambridge.gov.uk.