

## REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE



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PORTFOLIO	Housing and Environment
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### The Disposal Policy for Empty Homes Acquired by the Council

#### PURPOSE

1. To adopt a revised Council Disposal of Empty Homes Policy.

#### RECOMMENDATION

2. That the Executive approve the revised Policy for the Disposal of Empty Homes as set out in Appendix 1 to the report

#### REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3. It is important that there is a clear method for reselling the empty homes that will be acquired by the Council through the Empty Homes Programmes. The policy will ensure that residents and key stakeholders are aware of what they can expect during the re-sale of empty homes. It is also important for Officers to refer to it when dealing with re-sales to ensure a consistent approach is adopted across the authority.

#### SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

4. **Background**  
There are 2089 empty properties in Burnley, a quarter (560) of these have been empty for over 2 years and that is 200 000 days of empty property. They cluster to form 20% of the total housing stock in some areas and attract associated problems of anti-social behaviour, crime and fly tipping.
5. Subsequently the Council run the **Vacant Property Initiative** which has been in operation since 2006/07 and which will continue to address problematic long term empty homes in areas of the Borough where demand for housing is relatively high. The empty homes are acquired by agreement with owners or using compulsory purchase powers, renovated and then resold in the first instance to owner-occupiers.
6. In addition the Council will be running to new programmes to tackle long term empty homes;

-The first was a programme of £70,000 for Registered Providers to provide affordable social housing. The main eligibility criteria for this programme being that the properties must end up in a Registered Providers ownership or management. This Programme is known as **Linked Up**. For Burnley this funding means that we will be bring around 68 empty homes back into use. The Council will assist Calico in acquiring and renovating 35 empty homes for them to re-let as social, affordable rents. The remaining 33 empty homes will be brought back into use through a loan and Private Sector Leasing Scheme which will be administered by the Together Housing Group.

-The second is known as **The Empty Homes Clusters Programme**. Broadly the funding will give an opportunity to address particular areas that are visible and problematic due to the concentrations of exceptionally high levels of empty homes. Burnley has a total budget of around £7,102,067 to bring approximately 175 empty homes back into use. There are a number of approaches that we will be taking to ensure programme delivery; we will be looking to offer a number of loans to the owners of empty homes to enable them to bring the properties back in to use. There will be a range of options for refurbishing properties including a number of properties being remodelled (i.e. two in to one), and we will also be looking at the general environment and security of the areas to see if any improvements can be made.

7. **Legal Powers**

When the Council acquire empty homes through these programmes with the purpose of bringing them back into use they do so under Part II of the Housing Act 1985. The power to dispose of the properties therefore also derives from Part II of the Housing Act 1985. Section 32 of the Housing Act 1985 requires a local Authority to seek the consent of the Secretary of State before disposing of a property.

8. Previously the Secretary of State gave consent to all Local Authorities in England through the General Housing Consent 2005. This consent was to dispose of such properties in specific circumstances. The previous policy followed these circumstances which were extremely restrictive and often prevented empty homes from being addressed by the Council.
9. On the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2012 the Secretary of State revoked The General Housing Consents 2005 and replaced it with *The General Consent for the Disposal of Land held for the purposes of Part II of the Housing Act 1985 -2012*.
10. The new General Consents 2012 are flexible and permit local authorities to dispose of empty homes to several parties for a price determined by the local authority.

**Policy**

11. The policy attached to this report as Appendix 1 follows the circumstances set out in the General Consents 2012. The policy will be kept under annual review and changed if necessary.

**Suggested Approach**

12. Although the local authority can sell the empty homes to any party, a condition of the Council's policy is that Landlords acquiring the empty homes for private rented purposes must be a member of The Good Landlord and Agent Scheme (GLAS) or be Licensed by the Council.

13. GLAS was first established in 2001 to work in partnership with the private rented sector in improving the condition of these properties and the way in which they are managed. Licensing ensures that the landlord have satisfactory management standards in place to manage private rented properties. The criterion within the policy will ensure that the subsequent management of the acquired properties are carried out to a good standard as through becoming either a Licensed or accredited landlord, landlords have demonstrated that they have the required procedures, experience and skills to manage their properties to a good standard.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND BUDGET PROVISION**

14. The policy will help to ensure that the Council achieves 'best price' when reselling the properties.

#### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

15. The resale and occupation of the empty homes will help achieve the Council's strategic objective of "Making the Borough a place of choice", a place where people want to live. Occupation of the once empty homes will improve the environment for neighbouring residents and reduce the incidents of crime, fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour associated with empty homes.

#### **DETAILS OF CONSULTATION**

16. None.

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

17. N/A

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

**PLEASE CONTACT:**

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**ALSO:**

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