

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PROFORMA**

Cabinet Meeting .....7th March 2013

1. Title of Item/Report

Scrutiny Review of Empty / Abandoned Properties

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report that presented the Regeneration and Transport Select Committee findings following the Scrutiny Review of Empty / Abandoned Properties.

The Regeneration and Transport (R&T) Select Committee had concluded a review of empty and abandoned residential properties as part of the Scrutiny Work Programme during 2012/13. The scope of the review included consideration of increased powers to bring non-decent properties back into use; increased Council Tax income and production of savings on temporary accommodation expenditure; and an increase in New Homes Bonus to the Council.

RESOLVED that:-

1. A business case be developed during 2013 exploring an invest to save opportunity to provide additional staff from increases in Council Tax and/or investment reserves to tackle the problem of empty homes through proactive and reactive work across Private Sector Housing and Planning Enforcement. (Business case to be submitted to Cabinet for approval)
2. The reprioritisation of empty properties (empty just over 6 months) to identify those that can be brought back into use sooner.
3. Increased publicity of successes when empty properties are brought back into use to assist tackling this issue.
4. A business case be explored for utilising one off funding allocation, with an annual top up, to cover the costs of works in default. (Business case to be submitted to Cabinet for approval)
5. The use of the Enforced Sale Procedure to take action to recover debts in excess of £1,000 through enforcing the sale of the empty

property and ensuring its return to use.

3. Reasons for the Decision

1. Those service areas involved with returning empty properties to use do so with no funding provision for taking action following the failure or refusal of a property owner to comply with a statutory notice. This creates the situation where either no works are carried out by a service area and the property remains in the same condition or works are carried out and the service area covers the debt until it is repaid, if ever. However, Stockton Council has always been proactive in bidding for additional capital to return long term empty properties back into use.

2. The main focus for the Committee was the availability of funding and staffing for the Council, primarily the Private Sector Housing Division, to best facilitate the return of empty properties back into use. The Committee believe that due diligence should be given to an examination of the business case that invest to save opportunities could provide the Council.

3. With the length of time it can take to reoccupy an empty property the Committee believed that refocusing attention to properties that had not long been unoccupied might achieve a higher occupancy level than the problems encountered with houses empty for some time.

4. The Committee believe that increased publicity of successes when empty properties are returned to use should be sought to assist in tackling this issue. Stockton News can carry articles on empty homes and articles can continue to be submitted for the local press.

5. The Committee understands that to ensure that the Council fully utilises all the legal powers available a one off contingency fund topped up each year would cover costs incurred for carrying out of works in default. Service areas would be able to actively pursue debtors to recover costs and the recovered monies would then be returned to the contingency fund for recycling to cover further actions. Additionally, recourse to prosecution for non-compliance would follow works in default where appropriate.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

N/A

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on Friday, 15th March 2013

Proper Officer  
11 March 2013