South Staffordshire Council

EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY

2006 – 2011

Final Version: July 2006
Updated: May 2007
INTRODUCTION

Empty properties are a wasted resource and are costly to individuals, communities and organisations. There are not only financial costs arising from empty properties, but costs to people who are waiting to be housed and costs to the environment. There are, therefore, corresponding benefits to be gained by bringing empty properties back into use in the following areas:

1. **Provision of housing and prevention of homelessness.**

There is a shortfall in the number of properties available for rent or sale in both the private and social sectors, and the supply could be increased if empty properties were brought back into use. There is also the advantage that this would use existing resources rather than building new housing, particularly on land identified as greenbelt.

When the percentage of empty properties in the District is compared with the number of homeless families in the District, it is clear that bringing empty properties back into use would be an important factor in reducing homelessness.

2. **Environment**

Bringing empty properties back into use brings about improvements to housing stock condition, improvements to the neighbourhood and the quality of life of neighbours, a reduction in crime and vandalism, reduced fire risk, and an increase in the value of neighbouring properties. It contributes to the protection of the greenbelt by making better use of the existing housing stock and potentially in preserving the District’s distinctive and valuable historic buildings.

3. **Economic/financial**

Bringing empty properties back into use contributes to maintaining a sustainable/stable rural economy.

STRATEGIC AIMS

There are four broad aims of this strategy, and the Action Plan towards the rear of the Strategy (pages 11 – 15) sets out ways of achieving these, who will be involved and what resources will be used.

Aim 1: Bring empty properties back into use

Aim 2: Develop a more co-ordinated approach to carrying out empty property work

Aim 3: Promote the benefits of bringing empty properties back into use

Aim 4: Develop a means of measuring proposed outcomes

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The national picture

The need for an increase in the supply of housing was highlighted in the Barker Review of Housing Supply, commissioned by the Government. Recommendations have been set out as to how the shortfall can be addressed, all of which are concerned with new-build.
The recently published Government response to the Barker report however, states that in addition to new provision, it is essential to make better use of the existing housing stock and to address the issue of the number of private sector empty properties vacant for six months or more. This element in the Government’s response has been welcomed by the Empty Homes Agency (EHA), which campaigns to bring empty properties back into use and raise the profile of this issue. Figures from the EHA show that in England in 2006 there were approximately 663,000 empty homes.

Government support has also been demonstrated by the introduction of new legislation, which gives local authorities greater powers when dealing with long-term empty properties.

- New Council Tax legislation has given Councils discretionary powers to stop Council Tax discounts on empty properties. In South Staffordshire we now charge full Council Tax on empty homes unless they are statutorily classed as exempt.
- The Housing Act 2004 introduced Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs), which will enable Councils to take over temporary management of properties. This is a means of allowing Councils to deal with long-term empty properties without taking over ownership.

There is also a national Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) for bringing empty properties back into use. The government introduced BVPIs as a means of monitoring Local Authorities’ performance, and ensuring that they are operating in a cost effective manner. BVPI 64 requires all Councils to meet an annual target for “The number of private sector vacant dwellings that are returned into occupancy or demolished as a direct result of action by the local authority”. These figures are then reported back to the Audit Commission for further scrutiny and assessment.

The Action Plan on pages 11 – 15 indicates how the implementation of the strategy will contribute to meeting the target for BVPI 64. The reporting of BVPI 64 will in turn demonstrate the extent to which the implementation of the strategy is having an impact on reducing the number of empty properties. The actions within this strategy will enable us to improve our monitoring, measuring and performance of empty property work to continue to meet this BVPI, as well as using the BVPI to drive further improvement in the number of properties we bring back into use.

The Regional Picture

The Regional Housing Strategy (RHS) identifies housing need and promotes urban and rural renaissance, whilst taking into account the recommendations of the Regional Spatial Strategy to conserve undeveloped land.

Section 8.36 of the RHS identifies the existing housing stock as a key resource in meeting the changing needs of communities and states “There will be no justification for building new homes when very acceptable existing stock is unused, in whichever sector or tenure.”

In Section 8.40 the strategy states that the re-use of empty properties is an important way of increasing the supply of affordable housing and that this also offers “wider regeneration benefits by reducing the potential for Anti Social Behaviour”
The Local Picture

South Staffordshire is a rural district with a population of approximately 106,000. There is a high demand for housing in South Staffordshire, with an average house price of £210,700 (May 2007) compared with £172,151 for the West Midlands Region.

It is often perceived that in rural areas where there is a high demand for housing, empty properties are not a problem and that the market can take care of empty dwellings without any intervention. However, there are certain circumstances where this is not the case, and some intervention is required to get a property onto the market, or brought into use by some other means.

The presence of just one long-term empty property in a quiet rural location can have an adverse effect on the whole environment, the quality of life of neighbouring residents and on the prices of adjacent properties.

The protection of the greenbelt and its villages’ historical environments is of particular importance to South Staffordshire, and making better use of existing stock is very much in keeping with the Council’s environmental objectives.

There were 677 empty properties in South Staffordshire as at 1st April 2007 (see page 9 for definition of empty home).

South Staffordshire Council have been seeking to bring empty properties back into use for a number of years. Appendix 1 to this strategy updates the action plan from the 2001 Empty Property Strategy and indicates progress made in a number of areas. It also highlights other areas that are either ongoing actions or we need to revisit as part of the future work to deliver this strategy. These tasks are included in the Action Plan, which can be found on pages 11 – 15 of this strategy.

Housing needs

The Housing Needs Survey conducted in 2001 by David Couttie Associates demonstrated that in order to address the shortfall of affordable housing in South Staffordshire, there is a need for an additional 412 units of accommodation to be provided every year over a five-year period.

Table 1 below shows the level of need for housing in the District, particularly from homeless households, many of whom are in temporary accommodation, and indicates a continuing high level of housing need in the District.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Households on register</th>
<th>Households accepted as homeless &amp; in priority need</th>
<th>Households accepted as homeless &amp; in priority need in temporary accommodation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Of which with dependent children or a pregnant woman</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04</td>
<td>1184</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/05</td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/06</td>
<td>2312</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>1052</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Housing Register & Homelessness Data since 2002/03
Resources

South Staffordshire Council has no specific resources identified solely for bringing empty properties back into use but is able to tap into a variety of sources to help us achieve the targets in this strategy, namely:

Partnership Working – In order to achieve our aims and objectives we will work closely with partners to ensure a co-ordinated delivery. These partners include:

- Strategic Housing Unit – Officers will take the over-arching role co-ordinating the work of others and for developing the information systems and processes for working with partners and the public.
- Environmental Health Team – We work closely with our colleagues in Environmental Health to identify properties, assess the physical condition of properties and ensure that statutory standards are adhered to.
- Local Taxation – Officers from our Council Tax Team will provide regular electronic reports listing empty properties, the name of their owner, and the date the property became vacant.
- Development and Building Control – Enforcement Officers have powers to serve Section 215 Notices under the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 to force owners to tidy their gardens and keep properties secure and in a reasonable condition. Co-ordination and timely use of this action may prevent properties falling into serious despair.
- Legal & Licensing Services – Colleagues from Legal Services will be responsible for pursuing legal action and charges against properties and assisting in preparing cases for enforcement action.
- Conservation – Colleagues from our Conservation Team can provide valuable assistance on Conservation Areas, listed buildings and historic properties, as well as potential sources of specialist funding.
- South Staffordshire Housing Association (SSHA) & other Housing Associations – SSHA have already bought a number of empty properties on the open market and we will continue to work with them to identify properties for refurbishment to help address local housing needs. We will also look to other Housing Associations to assist us.
- Private Owners – All private owners have a responsibility to ensure that their property does not adversely affect their neighbours or the wider community. Empty homes can devalue neighbouring properties and cause a nuisance and where possible we will work with owners to ensure this does not occur.

The Council’s Capital Programme –

- The Council does invest significant resources via Housing Associations in enabling the provision of affordable housing in the District. Over a number of years some of this money has been used to bring empty properties back into use as table 2 below indicates. The table shows a drop of 387 properties between 2003/04 and 2004/05. It was during this period that the Council ended the Council Tax discount on empty homes, the housing market was becoming even more buoyant, and we tightened the definition of empty homes to the BVPI definition rather than all homes exempt from Council Tax.
Table 2, BVPI 64 - Number of empty properties brought back into use 2002– 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number of empty properties</th>
<th>Percentage of total dwelling stock</th>
<th>Number brought back into use</th>
<th>By what means?</th>
<th>BVPI 64 target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>886</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>LASHG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>LASHG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/05</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>1.26%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>LASHG</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/06</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>1.73%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Council Capital Programme</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>1.52%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Negotiations with owners.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Housing Investment Programme Returns

LASHG = Local Authority Social Housing Grant

Housing Corporation Funding –

- The Housing Corporation (HC) is the non-departmental public body that funds and regulates Housing Associations in England. Their grant programme can be used to fund a wide range of affordable housing initiatives including the purchase of existing dwellings.

Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) –

- Housing Associations, now largely referred to as RSLs, have access to private finance to provide affordable housing and South Staffordshire Housing Association have and continue to use their own money to fund purchasing street properties and use it to supplement the money provided by the Council.

Specialist Funding Sources –

- Architectural Heritage Fund can be accessed if an empty property is of architectural value. This fund can assist with setting up Building Preservation Trusts aimed at the restoration and re-use of empty properties.

- The Capital Allowances Scheme can be used on residential reuse of space above shops and the Government has also introduced reduced VAT rates for the refurbishment of properties empty for a certain period of time.

Private Finance –

- Owners may wish to use their own sources of finance to refurbish and bring an empty property back into use.

One of the proposed targets in the Action Plan is to further investigate the possibility of levering in other sources of funding to assist owners and the Council in bringing empty property back into use.

STRATEGIC LINKS

The Council’s Corporate Strategy has five key aims, and bringing empty properties back into use would contribute to achieving some of these aims. The Community Strategy also has aims and objectives that would be met by the re-use of empty properties.

The empty property strategy is a sub-strategy of South Staffordshire Council’s Fit For Purpose Housing Strategy 2003 –2008 and its aims and objectives are linked to those of the Corporate
Strategy and the Community Strategy. One of the Key Priorities identified in the Housing Strategy’s Action Plan is to improve private sector housing conditions in South Staffordshire. Operating an effective Empty Property Strategy is one of the objectives identified to address this.

The diagram on page 7 illustrates these strategic links and demonstrates how bringing empty properties back into use links into the aims of each strategy.

**Why do properties become empty?**

Some properties may be empty whilst awaiting the completion of sales transactions. There will always be a certain percentage of properties that are empty for this reason and these will be resolved fairly quickly. However it is the core of private sector properties standing empty for six months or more which is the real cause for concern and which need to be targeted for action.

Examples of circumstances that lead to properties standing empty may include:

- The owner becoming ill and being unable to return to the property and/or manage their affairs.
- The owner wishing to keep the property as an investment.
- The owner living elsewhere and neglecting the property.
- The owner being unable to afford to carry out necessary work in order to make the property habitable.
- The owner finding it difficult to sell the property.
LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

COMMUNITY STRATEGY

QUALITY OF LIFE GROUP
AIMS:
Provide more affordable housing
Reduce homelessness
Support vulnerable people of all age groups in their own homes
Expand the reablement service

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY GROUP
AIMS:
Minimise the loss of Green Belt in the face of developmental pressure & enhance its attractiveness

CORPORATE STRATEGY

AIM 1
To be a Council which celebrates and improves South Staffordshire’s distinctive environment

AIM 3
To be a prosperous District with thriving communities

FIT FOR PURPOSE HOUSING STRATEGY

PRIORITY:
1. Provision of affordable housing in partnership with other agencies
2. Improving the condition of private sector accommodation
3. Implementing an effective Homelessness Strategy & Housing Advice Service

Bring empty properties back into use

- Provision of housing
- Protection of greenbelt
- Improvement in stock condition
- Reduction in crime & vandalism
- Sustainability of rural economy

South Staffordshire Council Empty Property Strategy 2006 – 2011
- 7 -
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE’S EMPTY HOMES

For the purposes of this strategy an empty property is one which:

• has been unoccupied for six months or more
• has been unoccupied for less than six months but is subject to serious disrepair and is causing a nuisance
• is unoccupied but is capable of more beneficial use (such as redevelopment)
• does not have any reasonable prospect of being brought back into use by the owner alone.

Although a property is unoccupied and classed as empty, there may be a very good reason, and thus a reasonable prospect of it being brought back into use. The Council will assess each case on its merits when investigating an empty property to establish the reasons for it being empty.

It is essential to link with all of the relevant District-wide Council strategies in order to maximise the impact of resources and effectively plan for the future. Many of the issues surrounding long term empty properties affects the work of other Sections of the Council, such as Environmental Health, Planning and Local Taxation. We can achieve maximum impact by understanding the roles of these service groups and where we can link in to compliment each other’s work to achieve the best results in the public interests.

We may be notified of an empty property by the public or other stakeholders and this may be in the form of a verbal report, a letter or e-mail via a link on the Council’s website.

On notification of an empty property we will establish the following:

• **Ownership** - Is the property privately or Housing Association owned? If the property is Housing Association owned we will inform the appropriate organisation immediately. If the property is privately owned we will then complete a number of checks against existing records. We will establish the owner’s details and any previous history relating to the property.

• **Visit** - We will arrange a visit and complete a report on the condition of the property. At this stage photographs and notes may be taken, and at all subsequent visits, to enable the relevant Officer to produce accurate records of the property’s condition if required as evidence for enforcement action. If the property is in a poor condition an Environmental Health Officer will be asked to visit to carry out a survey, detailing any structural defect, and providing an estimate of the costs required to bring the property back into use.

• **Advice & Assistance** - The relevant Officer from the Strategic Housing Team will write to the owner to clarify if they wish to retain the property, and what their intentions are. If the owner does not wish to retain the property, advice and assistance can be provided, and the situation will continue to be monitored until the property is sold on. If the owner wants to retain the property options will be discussed and advice and assistance offered wherever practicable. The level of advice and assistance will be developed over the next twelve months. The Strategic Housing Team will continue to work with the owner and monitor progress until the property is brought back into use.

• **Enforcement Action** - When owners will not work with the Council, and if their properties are causing a nuisance to the public by their appearance and condition, the Council has a range of enforcement options available. These options will only be taken as a last resort, and only in the public interest. If a property is causing a nuisance to neighbours
and the owners refuse to co-operate to remedy the situation the Council will consider one of the following three options:

- **Empty Dwelling Management Orders** - Under the Housing Act 2004 the Government announced their intention to introduce Empty Dwelling Management Orders as a third option for Authorities to consider when dealing with long-term empty properties. This is a less final option than either Compulsory Purchase or Enforced Sale, as the ownership of the property does not transfer. The Authority has the power to take over the management of a nuisance property to refurbish it and potentially re-let to somebody in housing need and use the rent to recover its costs. At the end of the Management Order period (for example up to five years), the Order would end and the property would be returned to the original owner in a much improved re-lettable condition.

There are likely to be a number of Local Authorities interested in trying out this option, and it is recommended that South Staffordshire waits to evaluate the success or otherwise of this option before considering its use as an effective tool for tackling empty properties in our District.

- **Compulsory Purchase** - This is an option whereby the Council acquires the property to re-develop in partnership with a Registered Social Landlord. This could be the refurbishment of the existing property or the demolition and rebuild of a scheme for use as social housing for example. In either case the Authority may acquire the property from the owner through a legal process to solve the issue of a nuisance property and address the need for additional units of social housing. The owner is compensated for the loss at market value and the Council meets the legal costs. In most cases the property will be sold on fairly quickly to its chosen partner for re-development. Any Compulsory Purchase action that may be taken would need to be agreed by the Executive as a last resort when all other options had been exhausted. The Compulsory Purchase Order option can be a lengthy process and take up to 24 months to complete.

- **Enforced Sale** – Section 103 of The Law of Property Act 1925 enables Local Authorities to acquire properties to enable them to carry out their public service duties. This option is recommended for properties that are a nuisance and where the Council has had to use its resources, e.g. securing a property. Charges are raised against the property by the Council for carrying out the works in default and must be paid by the owner. If the charges are not paid the Council can force the property’s sale to recover its costs. The Council’s charge will take precedence over any other outstanding loans or debts secured against the property with the owner receiving whatever is left when the debtors have recovered their costs. The Council will then seek to ensure that the property is swiftly re-occupied.
**Glossary of abbreviations:**

- **ESD** – Existing Satisfactory Dwelling. As well as building new houses, Housing Associations often buy existing properties and refurbish them. The properties are then rented out and become part of the social rented housing stock. The dwellings must be in a reasonable state of repair already; otherwise the cost of the refurbishment would be too high.
- **HC** – Housing Corporation (explanation on page 5).
- **RSL** – Registered Social Landlord/Housing Association.
- **SSHA** – South Staffordshire Housing Association. The organisation that took over ownership and management of the Council’s housing stock in 1997. The main provider of social housing in South Staffordshire.
- **RTB** – Right To Buy. The Housing Act 1980 gave Council tenants the right to buy their property at a discounted rate. Most of the ESDs purchased by SSHA are properties that were bought by former council tenants.

**Aim 1 – Bring empty properties back into use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Priorities</th>
<th>Targets/Actions</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
<th>Lead Officer/Partners</th>
<th>Outcomes/Benefits</th>
<th>Links to Corporate Aims</th>
<th>Targets Met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pursue other means of bringing private sector properties (other than former RTB s) back into use | • Obtain a new list of empty properties from Council Tax.  
• Draw up a list of private sector properties empty for more than six months.  
• Carry out investigations into circumstances.  
• Make owners of empty properties aware of their options  
• Make owners aware of the benefits of re-using empty properties and encourage them to do so | June 2006 | Housing Strategy Assistant.  
Housing Strategy Assistant.  
Housing Strategy Assistant.  
Housing Strategy Assistant.  
Housing Strategy Assistant. | • Properties brought back into use that may otherwise have stood empty.  
• An increase in the supply of social rented housing.  
• Meeting local housing needs  
• Properties brought back into use that may otherwise have stood empty. | Corporate Ambition 3 & BVPI 64 | New list obtained every 3 months.  
Database produced to record, monitor and analyse.  
Flyer posted upon visits, followed up by letter if required. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Priorities</th>
<th>Targets/Actions</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
<th>Lead Officer/Partners</th>
<th>Outcomes/Benefits</th>
<th>Links to Corporate Aims</th>
<th>Targets Met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Assist owners in overcoming any obstacles they may be experiencing with selling or renting their property. • Investigate the possibility of other sources of funding available e.g. grants</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Housing Strategy Manager, Housing Strategy Assistant</td>
<td>• An increase in the supply of social rented housing. • Meeting local housing needs</td>
<td>Corporate Ambition 3 &amp; BVPI 64</td>
<td>Assist owners in providing details of estate agents and lettings agents and general information on selling/renting. Bid made for Empty Property grants via Regional Allocations Strategy 2008-2011.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research the issue of empty commercial properties</td>
<td>• Establish the number of empty commercial properties in the District, both flats above shops and empty commercial premises. • If appropriate, take actions similar to those outlined above for residential empty properties</td>
<td>June 2007</td>
<td>Housing Strategy Assistant</td>
<td>• Possibility of further increasing housing stock</td>
<td>Corporate Ambition 3</td>
<td>Work in progress, database will be set up to cover Commercial properties as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aim 2: Develop a more co-ordinated approach to empty property work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Priorities</th>
<th>Targets/Actions</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
<th>Lead Officer/Partners</th>
<th>Outcomes/Benefits</th>
<th>Links to Corporate Aims</th>
<th>Targets Met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Improve communication amongst relevant Service Units & partners | • Establish systems for sharing information about ownership, state of repair, length of time empty, circumstances, and any action being taken or considered by any relevant Service Units  
• Investigate the possibility of an electronic link-up  
• Establish a protocol for sharing information under Data Protection Act  
• Relevant services to meet annually to review the strategy  
• Ensure empty property updates are established as an agenda item in the regular development meetings with SSHA, to assist in carrying out the actions proposed in Aim 1 above  
• Attend the West Midlands Empty Property Officers Forum | Dec 2006  
Dec 2006  
Dec 2006  
Ongoing  
Quarterly | All Partners  
Housing Strategy Assistant & Snr Corporate Policy Officer  
Housing Strategy Assistant  
Housing Strategy Manager & Development Director (SSHA)  
Housing Strategy Assistant | • Will be able to report more accurate data & direct resources accordingly  
• Prevent duplication of work  
• More co-ordinated & efficient, better use of time, pooling of resources, better informed about what action to take.  
• Learn good practice from other organisations  
• Feed back information on wider empty property issues – help maintain a regional & national perspective | Corporate Ambition 3 & BVPI 64  
Corporate Ambition 3 & BVPI 64 | Database in place for sharing information.  
Regular feedback to Local Taxation with regards properties not being empty.  
Empty properties referred to SSHA when appropriate.  
Also refer to other RSL partners when appropriate. |
### Aim 3 – Raise awareness of empty property issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Priorities</th>
<th>Targets/Actions</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
<th>Lead Office/Partners</th>
<th>Outcomes/Benefits</th>
<th>Links to Corporate Aims</th>
<th>Targets Met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Raise the profile of the problem of empty properties and promote the benefits of bringing them back into use. | • Promote at Private Landlords Forum  
• Publicise the Empty Property Strategy  
• Place the Empty Property Strategy on the Council’s website  
• Place contact details for reporting empty properties or any enquiries on Council’s website  
• Place an article in the Council’s “Review” newspaper every six months  
• Place a message about empty properties in the booklet which goes out with annual Council Tax bills  
• Produce an information pack which can be sent out to anyone seeking advice about empty properties | October 2006  
October 2006  
October 2006  
Ongoing  
March 2007  
March 2007 | Housing Strategy Manager  
Housing Strategy Assistant  
Housing Strategy Assistant  
Housing Strategy Assistant  
Housing Strategy Assistant  
Housing Strategy Assistant | • People will have a point of contact to report an empty property or to seek advice about their own empty property.  
• People will have a point of contact to report an empty property or to seek advice about their own empty property |
|  |  |  |  | Corporate Ambition 3 & BVPI 64 | Empty Dwellings discussed at November 2006 Forum.  
Strategy available on Council website  
Empty Property web page under Housing Strategy section.  
Information on estate agents and letting agents available for owners if required.  
Further promotion of empty properties to be carried out. |
## Aim 4 – Monitor the progress of empty property work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key priorities</th>
<th>Targets/Proposed actions</th>
<th>Target date</th>
<th>Lead Officer &amp; Partners</th>
<th>Outcomes/Benefits</th>
<th>Links to Corporate Aims</th>
<th>Targets Met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Improve the system for collecting data for, and reporting BVPI 64 | • Clarify which Service Unit will collect this data and report on the indicator  
• Clarify with SSHA which ESD’s are empty properties for 05/06 return  
• Meeting target for BVPI 64 | March 2006  
Annually  
April 2006 | Housing Strategy Manager  
Housing Strategy Manager  
All Partners. | ▪ Will be able to report more accurate data and direct resources accordingly  
▪ Properties brought back into use that may otherwise have stood empty.  
▪ An increase in the supply of social rented housing.  
▪ Meeting local housing needs | Corporate Ambition 3 & BVPI 64  
Corporate Ambition 3 & BVPI 64 | Housing Strategy Team to collect and report indicator.  
Database in place allows for easy data manipulation.  
2006/07 target of 3 empty properties brought back into use was met. |
| Monitor & update the strategy | • Review the Action Plan on an annual basis | Annually | Housing Strategy Manager | ▪ Monitor progress  
▪ Highlight where intervention is necessary  
▪ Assess impact of potential changes in policy | Corporate Ambition 3 & BVPI 64 | Update May 2007. |
## UPDATE ON ACTION PLAN FROM EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Actions</th>
<th>To be carried out by?</th>
<th>What has been achieved to date?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obtain addresses of homes recorded as vacant on Electoral Registration records from Administrative Services. In consultation with Environmental Health Services, draw up a list of addresses in priority order of those empty for the longest period.</td>
<td>Housing Strategy Manager Senior Environmental Health Officer (General)</td>
<td>• A list is regularly drawn up from Council Tax records. • A comprehensive database has been produced for monitoring and recording empty properties and the actions carried out. • Visits are carried out, and some investigations made into ownership or attempts made to encourage owners to sell. In most cases properties are about to go on the market or are undergoing improvement work for sale or let. However, some investigations have led owners to sell/rent their properties. Some cases are referred to our RSL partners for their own involvement in empty property work. • In 2005 a flier was produced and distributed by Council Tax along with their letters regarding the changes to exemptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compile a timetable of visits and carry out visits to properties to establish their status.</td>
<td>Housing Strategy Manager, Senior Environmental Health Officer Housing Strategy Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliver an information pack &amp; letter, urging owners to contact the Council to discuss options for bringing the property back into use.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry out investigations to establish property ownership, by asking neighbours and contacting Land Registry.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore potential for LASHG to be used for purchase &amp; repair of empty properties by a Housing Association.</td>
<td>Housing Strategy Manager Development Director, SSHA.</td>
<td>• Several properties purchased by SSHA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote the strategy at the quarterly Housing Association Liaison meetings to encourage partnership working and monitor and address the levels of empty homes owned by Housing Associations.</td>
<td>Housing Strategy Manager Housing Strategy Assistant</td>
<td>• Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Actions</td>
<td>To be carried out by?</td>
<td>What has been achieved to date?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If owner does not wish to sell, give advice about private renting and/or a schedule of required repairs.</td>
<td>Housing Strategy Manager Housing Strategy Assistant</td>
<td>• Contact details of private lettings agents can be provided to owners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer owner to the National Federation of Residential Landlords, local Lettings &amp; Estate Agents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the property is not currently suitable for residential use, liaise with the Planning Officers with regard to conversion.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Empty property strategy and contact details now available through the Council's website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicise the strategy through an advert in the local press, with a hotline number for residents to report empty properties.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce and distribute an information leaflet and add an item to the website.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify additional external resources of funding to develop the aim to bring empty properties back into use, and co-ordinate bids as appropriate.</td>
<td>Housing Strategy Manager Senior Environmental Health Officer (General)</td>
<td>• Included in Action Plan for the Strategy Update</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Draft Empty Property Strategy – Consultation Feedback

We are builders looking for opportunities to purchase & redevelop empty / run down homes. These properties may either be sold or put on the rental market. Bringing back to life some of these empty properties will reduce the strain & pressure to use precious green belt land. Redevelopment is key. Perhaps an incentive can be given to current empty property owners to actually carry out the work. Another alternative could be to offer the owners a service where the property is refurbished / redeveloped at no initial cost but a portion of the proceeds of the sale / rental income are used to repay the works undertaken. Similar to PFI.

A letter was sent to Mr Round on 28th April thanking him for his suggestions & explaining that although we recognise that these are positive suggestions, the Council is not in a position to implement financial incentive schemes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. As a result of the strategy is there an overall performance indicator to demonstrate the impact of the strategy i.e. the reduction of empty properties as a result of implementing the strategy? I apologise if there is I may have missed it.</th>
<th>The strategy has been revised to include an explanation of how the implementation of the Action Plan will contribute to meeting the target for BVPI64 &amp; how the reporting of this indicator will in turn demonstrate the impact of the strategy. There is now a glossary of abbreviations at the beginning of the Action Plan, &amp; we have ensured that other abbreviations throughout the document have been explained.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. To a non-housing specialist it would really help if there were a glossary of terms so you understand what all the abbreviations are within the document.</td>
<td>The Action Plan has now been revised to say that we will put a message in the booklet that goes out with the bill and that we will contact Council Tax later in the year to arrange this. Council Tax has been added to the “partners” column. There is now a glossary of abbreviations at the beginning of the Action Plan, and we have ensured that other abbreviations throughout the document have been explained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. In your Action Plan (pg12) you have an action to &quot;send out flier with Council Tax letters....&quot;, with a target date of March 2006. Apart from the annual billing exercise, we do not send a bulk posting to the owners of unoccupied properties. If it is the annual billing run you mean, we would not be able to enclose a &quot;flier&quot;, but could give you some space to put a message in the booklet that goes with the bill. We could plan this in for the run next year (2007). The content planning for the booklet usually starts in Nov/Dec each year, for the following March. You will need to add Local Taxation in to the &quot;partners&quot; column.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In the Action Plan there are some abbreviations that may need de-coding (depending on who will read this document). These are the ones I didn't understand: ESD, HC, RTBs, LASHG, NFRL.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>