

Cabinet

31st August 2021

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities – Councillor A S Khan
Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities – Councillor D Welsh

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Streetscene and Regulatory Services

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Empty Dwellings Strategy 2021-2026

Is this a key decision?

No – although this matter affects all wards in the City, the impact is not expected to be significant.

Executive Summary:

The provision of good quality housing for Coventry residents is a priority for the City Council. The report proposes a new Empty Dwellings Strategy for 2021 -2026 (Appendix 1 to the report) and sets out the housing scene in Coventry and how the Council will target long term empty dwellings in the city, which can be a magnet for vandalism, anti-social behaviour and a wasted housing resource.

The new strategy will replace the current Council policy on empty dwellings and will take into account changes in legislation and the housing market in Coventry.

The new strategy will also tie together the adopted Coventry Local Plan 2017 which details how Coventry City Council will meet the future house building needs up to 2031 and the need to consider the city's existing housing stock and in particular the quality of homes provided via the Private Rented Sector (PRS).

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is requested to:

- 1) Consider and approve the amended "Empty Dwellings Strategy 2021 - 2026" attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 – Empty Dwellings Strategy 2021 to 2026

Appendix 2 – Equality and Consultation Analysis

Background papers:

None

Other useful documents:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Empty Dwellings Strategy 2021-2026

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1. Most local authorities have an Empty Dwellings Strategy, setting out how they intend to minimise the number of long-term empty dwellings in their area. With a national housing shortage, leaving properties empty for long periods wastes a valuable housing resource and represents an environmental blight on the local neighbourhood.
- 1.2. A policy to address empty dwellings in the city was approved in 2014, however it is considered that this now requires updating to reflect changes in legislation and the housing market in Coventry.
- 1.3. Long term empty dwellings are the main focus of the new strategy. Coventry currently has around 1,661 long term empty dwellings recorded with Council Tax with some of these properties being empty for a considerable length of time. This represents 57% of the total number of empty dwellings. The strategy will have three main objectives 1) Advice/Assistance, 2) Enforcement and 3) Prevention, and presents a framework for coordinated work moving forward.
- 1.4. A copy of the new Empty Dwellings Strategy 2021 – 2026 is attached as Appendix 1 to this report and provides the detail of how the Council will work closely with all departments within the Council coordinating activities around vacant dwellings focusing on the three main objectives.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1. **Do nothing** - This option is not recommended because the Council has already adopted a policy to deal with empty dwellings which has now been reviewed to take into account changes in legislation and the housing market. Adopting this option would prevent the ability for the Council to address the growing problem of empty dwellings.
- 2.2. **Approve the policy** – This is the preferred option.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1. The new range of measures set out in the Strategy have been subject to national consultation by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the results of this have been taken into consideration by Government when developing guidance provided to Local Authorities for implementing these powers. There is no statutory requirement to consult further on the measures set out in the policy.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1. The policy must be published first to allow the Council to implement civil penalties. The implementation can commence once the report has been approved and the Strategy is published.

5. Comments from the Director of Finance and the Director of Law and Governance

5.1. Financial implications

The financial implications associated with the recommendation are limited to the employee costs associated with implementing the Strategy and any costs involved in publishing the document.

In cases where there is a financial burden the matter will be subject of a separate report that will be submitted to Cabinet for approval.

5.2. Legal implications

The Council has a duty to assess and plan for housing needs and takes the view that empty dwellings are a wasted resource that could be used as an opportunity to reduce the pressures on the housing market in Coventry.

The Coventry & Warwickshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) (2013) acknowledged that each Council should plan to meet the need for affordable housing in its area.

There are a number of powers which the Council can use to try to bring empty residential properties back into use to provide affordable housing.

Compulsory Purchase Orders under the Acquisition of Land Act 1981, as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; Empty Dwelling Management Orders made under the Housing Act 2004 and the enforced sales procedure which is a power available in the civil courts where, for example in the County Court can make an order for sale on a property in proceedings relating to land under Part 40 of the Civil Procedure Rules.

Further details relating to these powers can be found in Appendix 3 of the Empty Dwellings Strategy.

6. Other implications

6.1. How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's Plan?

The Council Plan takes forward the main themes agreed by the Council in recent years. It reaffirms the Council's ambition – developed with the Strategic Partnership and partners to make Coventry: A Top Ten City.

This ambition is driven through three corporate priorities which directly address the needs of the City and include, in particular:

- Promoting the growth of a sustainable Coventry economy by:
 - Increasing the supply, choice and quality of housing.
- Improving the quality of life for Coventry people by:
 - Improving the health and wellbeing of local residents

- Protecting our most vulnerable people
- Reducing health inequalities

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-23 recognises that creating health, wealth and happiness requires more than simply managing people`s health problems.

The health and wealth being of people can be improved if people have jobs, good housing, and are connected to families and communities.

The Councils Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024 affirms the Council`s view that housing plays a crucial role in the economic growth of the city. The ambition for Coventry is “*to ensure decent homes, housing choice and support for Coventry citizens*” through various themes including:

- Preventing Homelessness and Supporting Homeless Households:
- Support for people and communities;
- Improving the use of existing homes; and
- Housing development

The Housing Strategy links into the Council Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy by contributing to the delivery of the key corporate priorities but also in supporting the local economy through ensuring communities have stable and safe places to live.

6.2. How is risk being managed?

The Strategy will inform decisions taken by Regulatory Services that will have an impact on the interests of all residents. The Strategy has been developed to take into account the need to respect the relevant rights under the Human Rights Act and relevant guidance provided by Government.

Decisions of Regulatory Services are open to challenge through the First Tier Property Tribunal and the Planning Inspectorate and in certain cases the Magistrates Court and beyond. The Strategy is designed to ensure our compliance with legislation and statutory guidance, minimising the risk of legal challenge.

When deciding on the most appropriate course of action the Council will have regard to relevant guidance provided by Government. In the case of compulsory purchase powers, the Council will ensure that a separate report is considered by Cabinet in each case and that the public benefit of using such powers greatly outweighs the interference with a person`s property.

6.3. What is the impact on the organisation?

The adoption of the policy should have limited impact on the organisation. There is a post allocated as human resource. The financial implications will be considered on a case by case basis through a separate report. There is a potential positive impact, in that any income received from civil penalties associated with enforcing standards in empty dwellings provides an opportunity to undertake further proactive

work and statutory functions in relation to the Council's enforcement activities covering the PRS and empty dwellings.

6.4. Equalities / EIA

The Empty Dwellings Strategy makes links to the Council's Equality and Diversity Policies and an Equalities Assessment exists for regulatory activities. A specific Equalities Assessment has been completed for this report and is attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

6.5. Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment?

6.6. There are no implications for climate change and the environment.

6.7. Implications for partner organisations?

The Empty Dwellings Strategy contributes towards the work of the Community Safety Partnership.

The effective operation of the Strategy by regulatory services has an impact on the quality of properties in the City and on the co-existence of empty dwellings with local residents and communities.

Report author(s):**Name and job title:**

Adrian Chowns
Property Licensing and Housing Enforcement Manager

Service:

Streetscene and Regulatory Services

Tel and email contact:

Tel: 024 7697 2222
Email: adrian.chowns@coventry.gov.uk

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Davina Blackburn	Strategic Lead of Regulation	Streetscene and Regulatory Services	14/06/2021	18/06/2021
Michelle Salmon	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	09/07/2021	09/07/2021
Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Cathy Crosby	Finance Officer	Finance	21/06/2021	22/06/2021
Gill Carter	Legal Officer	Law and Governance	21/06/2021	08/07/2021
Andrew Walster	Director of Streetscene and Regulatory Services	-	09/07/2021	12/07/2021
Councillor A S Khan	Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities	-	12/07/2021	27/07/2021
Councillor D Welsh	Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities	-	12/07/2021	28/07/2021

This report is published on the council's website: www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings