



# Empty Dwellings



Adrian Chowns

Property Licensing and Housing Enforcement Manager

# Introduction to Empty Dwellings

- Empty dwelling may be a flat, house or multi occupied building
- Become empty through a number of ways
  - Bereavement/ probate/ inheritance
  - Second home
  - Change in occupancy
  - Registered charity use
  - Owner in prison/ care or other temporary absence
  - Prohibited by law
  - Bankruptcy/ trustee / repossession
- Long Term = more than six months



# Long Term Empty Dwellings in Coventry

- Wasted resource and blights on neighbourhoods
- Magnets for fly tipping, anti-social behaviour, vandalism and arson
- 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021 Cabinet approved Empty Dwellings Strategy 2021-26
- ***“Reduce the number of long term empty dwellings to a practical minimum”***



# Empty Dwellings Strategy 2021-26

- Three main Objectives
  - Objective 1 – Promote a range of advice, assistance and support and develop new solutions;
  - Objective 2 – Use enforcement action to bring long term problematic empty dwellings back into use; and
  - Objective 3 – Better understand why dwellings are being left empty and where possible prevent dwellings from becoming empty for long periods of time.



# Our approach

- Three phases leading up to formal action
  - Phase 1 - work with the owner to identify options and find a solution
  - No satisfactory progress - case will progress to Phase 2 (informal warning)
  - Subject to regular environmental crime and ASB - skip stage 2 and move to phase 3 (formal action) /o wner of a property is untraceable or demonstrates an unwillingness to work with the Council
- The Council will seek to recover all costs where possible
- Extent of enforcement determined by the resources available to fund both the revenue and capital elements
- Prior to enforcement look at all options available legally and within available resources to ensure not being subjected to unnecessary risk



# Action Plan

- Action 1 - Secure approval of the revised Empty Dwellings Strategy 2021 – 2026
- Action 2 - Appoint a suitably experienced Empty Dwellings Officer
- Action 3 - Review and revise the advice and assistance available to owners
- Action 4 - Explore opportunities for projects
- Action 5 - Explore opportunities for partnership working
- Action 6 - Develop links with internal and external agencies i.e. lettings agents
- Action 7 - Development of service level agreement and policies and procedures



# What have we done so far...



- Secured the approval of the revised Empty Dwellings Strategy
- Appointed Empty Dwellings Officer
- Developed a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for joint working across internal service areas
- Revised the online reporting form to provide an effective and anonymous system
- Analysed 300+ cases to develop an empty dwellings property database
- Identified 32 priority cases – targeting 4 for potential insolvency action or enforced sale; 6 potential Compulsory Purchase Order action; 22 requiring proactive enforcement
- Targeted one long term problematic case with Demolition Order /CPO action
- During 2022 brought 33 properties back into use



# Enforcement Powers

- General enforcement powers
  - Untidy gardens
  - Pests
  - Nuisance
    - Targeted by using appropriate legislation
  - Service level agreement
  - Powers to carry out works in default
  - Build evidence base for targeted intervention
- Enforced Sale
    - Incur costs to register a charge
    - Recovery debt (charge)
    - Value vs charge
    - Enforce sale at auction
    - Work with new owner
    - Can also be used for Ctax debt





# Enforcement Powers

- Compulsory Purchase Orders
  - Power of last resort and where there is a compelling case
  - Owners refuse to take action
  - Owner cannot be traced
  - Long term empty
  - Negotiations failed
  - Proven housing need
  - Time consuming
  - Redevelop site with partners

- Empty Dwelling Management Orders
  - Conditions
    - Failed negotiations
    - Wholly unoccupied for at least six months
    - No prospect of being reoccupied
  - Temporarily take over management
  - Works to bring property up to standard - cost effective to do so
  - Interim measure – 12 months
    - Limited control as owner has final consent
  - Final EDMO – no more than 7 years
    - Application to Tribunal



# Useful contacts

- Report a problematic Empty Dwellings  
[housingenforcement@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:housingenforcement@coventry.gov.uk)

# Recommendations

- Scrutiny to note current position and funding
- To support the co-ordinated response to managing Empty Dwellings in the city
- To include as a future agenda item to receive an update on progress and outcomes achieved in dealing with long term empty dwellings



Thank you  
for listening

