



**AGENDA ITEM: 10**  
**SUMMARY**

<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>17<sup>th</sup> September 2013</b>
<b>PART:</b>	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY</b>
Contact:	Councillor Neil Harden - Portfolio Holder for Residents and Regulatory Services Nicholas Egerton - Team Leader Environmental Protection & Housing Steven Baker - Assistant Director (Legal, Democratic & Regulatory)
Purpose of report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide an opportunity for Members to provide comments on the Draft Environmental Health – Empty Homes Strategy.(Appendix A).</li> <li>• To consider the approach this authority proposes to take to reduce the number of private sector empty homes within the borough</li> </ul>
Recommendations	To consider and comment on the Regulatory Service, Environmental Health - Empty Homes Strategy as detailed in Appendix A of this report and recommend its approval
Corporate objectives:	<p>To produce a robust and sustainable Empty Homes Strategy in line with current best practice and one that provides value for money and most economical use of resources.</p> <p><b>Affordable Housing</b> Action will be targeted at those properties in the worse condition and also in areas of highest housing need. There is a possibility of linking the work under this strategy with a private sector leasing scheme which would enable additional affordable housing.</p> <p><b>Safe and Clean Environment.</b> Empty properties left vacant for a long period of time are wasteful as well as being a potential problem for residents in</p>

	<p>nearby properties, either from possible vandalism, the property falling in to disrepair, gardens becoming overgrown or used for dumping rubbish, etc. This strategy, together with the Environmental Health - Housing Assistance Policy, will help remove these properties and therefore improve and maintain a clean and safe environment.</p> <p><b>Building Community Capacity</b> To work with local communities, partnerships and other agencies to improve the standard of private sector housing within the borough. Reducing the number of Empty Properties should lead to improvements in all wards and particularly wards in the lowest quartile of the indices of deprivation. To support the local economy by providing employment opportunities from improvement measures carried out within the Borough.</p> <p><b>Regeneration</b> Financial assistance for empty properties (under the Environmental Health - Housing Assistance Policy) and Private Sector Leasing Schemes will help improve the standard of housing within the borough and remove unused buildings attracting investment into the borough.</p>
<p>Implications:</p> <p><b>‘Value For Money Implications’</b></p>	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>All officer costs would be met within existing budgets. This however will limit the amount of action this authority is able to take.</p> <p>If an Empty Dwelling Management Order is put in place the local authority becomes responsible for the management of the property, including outstanding debts etc. However this power is discretionary and therefore it is not proposed that this action is taken where there may be significant cost implications for this authority.</p> <p><u>Value for Money</u></p> <p>It is anticipated that a reduction in empty homes in the borough will lead to an increase in the amount of money received by this authority in the way of New Homes Bonus. This strategy should therefore have a positive financial benefit and offer value for money.</p>
<p>Risk Implications</p>	<p>The most significant risk is identified above in the financial implications.</p>
<p>Equalities Implications</p>	<p>This Strategy is aiming to resolve issues relating to Empty Properties and is therefore believed unlikely to discriminate on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, marital status, sexuality, disability or age. An equalities impact assessment had been carried out (Appendix B)</p>
<p>Health And Safety Implications</p>	<p>There are no additional health and safety implications associated with this report.</p>

<p>Monitoring Officer/S.151 Officer Comments</p>	<p><b>Deputy Monitoring Officer:</b></p> <p>No further comments to add to this report.</p> <p><b>Deputy S.151 Officer</b></p> <p>No further comments to add to this report.</p>
<p>Consultees:</p>	<p>Councillor Neil Harden, Portfolio Holder for Residents and Regulatory Services</p> <p>Mark Gaynor, Corporate Director (Housing and Regeneration)</p> <p>Sally Marshall, Corporate Director (Finance and Governance)</p> <p>James Doe, Assistant Director (Planning, Development and Regeneration)</p>
<p>Background papers:</p>	<p>HM Government – Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England (November 2011)</p>
<p>Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:</p>	

## 1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Long term empty homes in the private sector are a wasted resource and can present challenges to the local community and cause problems for their owners. Generally empty properties have a negative impact on the neighbourhood.
- 1.2 Not only is an empty property detrimental to an area but can also be detrimental for the owners of the properties. Empty homes cost their owners money in maintenance, insurance, council tax (which will be increased to 150% for long term empty properties) and loss of rental income. In some cases this can badly affect vulnerable owners, who may be aware they need to renovate a property but are unable to afford the cost of renovation, yet are paying simply to leave the property empty.
- 1.3 In Dacorum it is difficult for key workers, young people leaving home and single persons to access suitable housing. The opportunities for new affordable housing developments are limited. Bringing more long-term empty homes back into use is a sustainable way to meet housing demand and helps to reduce the need to build new houses.
- 1.4 The national and regional trend over the last three years have been a reduction in the number of empty properties. This trend however is not apparent within Dacorum which is experiencing a growth in the number of empty properties over the same period.

**2. What Actions Can We Take:**

- 2.1 The Government, through the Department for Communities and Local Government, are encouraging local authorities to tackle the problem of empty homes in their districts. This policy therefore is clearly aligned with current government priorities & key objectives.
- 2.2 We would hope to encourage the owners of empty homes to bring them back into use voluntarily. Our approach is focused initially on engaging with the owners offering support, advice and, where appropriate, offering loans, or the opportunity to make use of leasing schemes. However, where an owner is unwilling to bring the home back into use, and it is either causing a specific problem within its neighbourhood, or would meet a particular housing need, we will consider the use of the enforcement powers available to us.