

**FROM EMPTY HOUSES TO NEW  
HOMES**

**2012 - 2015**

**DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION**

**13 February 2012**

**From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

**Foreword**

**Councillor Valerie Hobbs, Portfolio Holder for Revenues and Housing**

***TO BE INSERTED***

DRAFT

## From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

# Empty Homes Strategy 2012-2015

## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. Executive summary</b>	1
<b>2. Introduction</b>	3
<b>3. Vision</b>	4
3.1. Key challenges in returning empty homes back to use	4
<b>4. National and Regional context</b>	5
4.1. National	5
4.2. Regional and sub-regional	8
4.3. Guidance documents	8
4.4. Support	9
<b>5. Local</b>	10
5.1. Introduction to the district	10
5.2. Links with other strategies and corporate plans	10
5.3. Property condition in the district	13
5.4. Why do homes remain empty?	13
<b>6. Achievements 2008-2011</b>	15
<b>7. Aims and objectives of the strategy</b>	18
7.1. Aims and objectives	18
7.2. Achieving the objectives	18
<b>8. How will we take action?</b>	27
8.1. Priorities	27
8.2. Digital Mapping	27
8.3. Hotspots	30
8.4. Funding	33
8.5. Enforcement	34
<b>9. Delivering the strategy</b>	40
9.1. Targets 2012-2015	40
9.2. Action Plan for 2012/2013	40
<b>10. Monitoring and feedback</b>	45

---

## **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### **1. Executive Summary**

This is Stratford-on-Avon District Council's third empty homes strategy and is effective for the financial period 2012-2015. The aim of this strategy is to bring empty residential properties in the district back into use to create affordable housing solutions for local people. The work to return empty properties to use is a corporate priority in 'addressing local housing needs.'

There are currently around 900 homes that have been empty for over 6 months across Stratford district<sup>1</sup>. Empty Homes contribute to the housing shortage across the district. As at April 2011, 589 applicants with local connection and in housing need were registered on the Home Choice Plus, choice based lettings scheme.<sup>2</sup>

The strategy has the following objectives to tackle the problem of empty homes:

1. Identify empty homes across Stratford district.
2. Develop effective pathways to bring empty homes back into use.
3. Create good quality, affordable housing for local people in housing need.

Section 7 sets out a detailed analysis of the aims and objectives of this strategy.

The key outcomes are summarised below:

- Have record of location of empty homes in the district
- Through information and publicity raise awareness of empty homes initiatives
- Have a coordinated approach to empty property work
- Provide encouragement and support to empty property owners
- Develop and adopt enforcement procedures
- Through regional and sub-regional working, enhance the approach to empty homes
- Utilise funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing solutions across the district for local people in housing need.

---

<sup>1</sup> Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA) – Data returns for 2010/11

<sup>2</sup> Housing Advisory Panel Information Sheet 1 July 2011

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Delivery of the strategy will be achieved through a variety of actions set out in a detailed plan under section 9 of the strategy.

Consultation on the strategy has taken place and we will review the strategy annually to ensure its continued relevance and publish any revised editions.

DRAFT

## **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### **2. Introduction**

Stratford on Avon is a desirable district to live in and offers a high standard of living for many residents. However there are also significant housing problems which need to be addressed to increase the availability of housing for those who struggle to afford properties available on the market.

Empty homes contribute to a lack of available housing across the district where an annual shortfall of 532 affordable homes was identified in the latest assessment of district-wide housing needs<sup>3</sup>

There are in the region of 900 long-term empty homes across Stratford district<sup>1</sup>. These are privately owned residential properties which have been empty for at least 6 months, however many of these have stood empty for a number of years. Empty Homes are a wasted resource in a time of housing need and as such the District Council has made tackling them a corporate priority.

The District Council produced the empty homes strategy 'From Empty Houses to New Homes' in 2008. This has steered the work of the District Council over the past 3 years facilitating 66 long-term empty homes to be brought back into use with the Council's intervention.

This strategy continues and formalises the Council's commitment to tackling empty homes across the district, building on our achievements over the last three years. It sets out future actions to reduce the problems associated with empty homes to enable us to build on our success and move forwards in line with subsequent government initiatives.

This document is an element of Stratford-on-Avon District Council's approach to private sector housing and is part of the wider housing initiative contained within Stratford-on-Avon District Housing Strategy 2009-2014, available at [www.stratford.gov.uk/housing/community-202.cfm](http://www.stratford.gov.uk/housing/community-202.cfm).

---

<sup>3</sup>Strategic Housing Market Assessment: Market Review 2009;  
[www.stratford.gov.uk/planning/planning-3003.cfm](http://www.stratford.gov.uk/planning/planning-3003.cfm)

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### **3. Vision**

Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

#### **3.1.Key challenges in returning empty homes to use**

One of the main problems for people seeking a home in Stratford-on-Avon district is affordability. Because of the high demand, house prices and monthly rental charges are significantly higher than average, with figures for the district indicating private rents of £701, £886 and £1357 for 2, 3 and 4 bed properties respectively<sup>4</sup>. Some ownership continues to be difficult for many to access despite recent house price falls, the result of difficulties encountered in trying to obtain mortgages. The average home in Stratford-on-Avon District cost £289,351 in 2010, fourteen times the average national income of £19,984.<sup>5</sup>

There is a clear need to provide additional affordable housing within the district. The Stratford-on-Avon District Strategic Housing Market Assessment: Market Review 2009 states that there is an annual shortfall of 532 affordable homes across the district.

The Private Sector Stock Condition Survey identified a higher proportion of empty homes across Stratford District than the National average of 1.5%<sup>6</sup>. The survey estimated that 800 or 1.7%<sup>6</sup> of these dwellings have been empty for 6 months or more.

---

<sup>4</sup>Private sector rents in Stratford-on-Avon District 2011, Summary for District Housing Forum February 2012

<sup>5</sup> Home Truths 2011 Fixing our broken housing market, National Housing Federation November 2011

<sup>6</sup> The Private Sector Stock Condition Survey for Stratford on Avon District November 2009

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

## **4. National and Regional context**

### **4.1. National**

Nationally, there has been increasing acknowledgement of the resource empty properties represent and the problems associated with them. This led to the establishment of the Empty Homes Agency in 1992.

The latest figures show that there are over 285,000<sup>1</sup> domestic properties reported as long term empty in England. This figure compares to 1.8million<sup>1</sup> on the housing waiting list across England. Although the number of empty homes has decreased since last year, this is still a significant number of homes which is contributing towards the national shortage of housing.

The 2007 housing Green Paper, 'Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable' states that action is required to make the most of existing homes and land. It states that local authorities must take a strategic and proactive role in reducing the numbers of empty properties within their district.

The Audit Commissions' publication 'Building Better Lives' identifies the financial advantages of bringing empty homes back into use noting that the cost of bringing 6 empty properties back into use to provide housing for 14 people can cost the same money as building one affordable home for 2 people.

In May 2010 the Coalition Agreement set out central government's commitment to explore a range of measures to bring empty properties back into use. The government recognised the need to harness the potential of empty homes to meet pressing housing need.

In May 2011 the Communities Minister outlined the financial incentives introduced by the government. There was a clear desire in this report for Councils to implement projects that deliver both new homes and opportunities. The success of The Canopy project in Leeds was highlighted: a community housing scheme which renovates derelict and empty houses to create decent homes for homeless.

The coalition government's new housing strategy identifies the importance of returning empty homes stating: "We are committed to bringing empty homes back to use, as a sustainable way of increasing the overall supply of housing and reducing the negative impact that neglected empty homes can have on communities."

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

The government's strategy outlines a number of objectives including "award of the New Homes Bonus to encourage local authorities to increase housing stock; Providing information and advice to deal with empty homes; investing £100million to enable housing associations to support local authorities to bring over 3,000 empty homes back into use as low cost housing; consultation on Council premium for long term empty homes; proposing changes to EDMO's to tackle the worst long-term empty homes."

### **New Homes Bonus**

The New Homes Bonus is a scheme designed to create an effective fiscal incentive to encourage local authorities to facilitate housing growth. The annual scheme will provide local authorities with a New Homes Bonus, based on increases in net housing stock, on each additional property and paid for the following 6 years as an unringfenced grant. Empty Homes returned to use are identified as additional properties alongside new developments. Conversely an increase in empty homes would have a detrimental effect on the net housing stock.

The New Homes Bonus is designed to strengthen the incentive for local authorities to identify empty properties and work with property owners to find innovative solutions that allow these properties to be brought back into use. Pro-active local authorities will see the benefits as the grant is unringfenced, they will be able to decide how to spend the grant to meet the needs of local neighbourhoods and communities. The New Homes Bonus is drawn from central government funding set aside for this purpose. Further funding will be drawn from Formula Grant diminishing the sum of Formula Grant for distribution.

### **HCA Empty Homes Fund**

The HCA Empty Homes Fund is the government's initiative to target £100 million of investment towards empty homes as part of the Affordable Housing Programme. The funding is intended to deliver at least 3,300 affordable homes by March 2015. The Housing Strategy sets out that the funding available will be allocated either through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) or through an intermediary grants giving organisation via formal bidding rounds. This is so that both Registered Providers of Social Housing and smaller not-for-profit community and voluntary groups are able to apply for funding.

The HCA Empty Homes Fund is available to local authorities, house-builders and developers, affordable housing providers and local community groups. They can all bid for a share of the funding to bring long-term empty properties which would not come back into use without intervention to become homes once again.

## **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

## **Council Tax and Business Rates**

### **Council Tax**

The Local Government Act 2003 allowed local authorities to change the discount on Council Tax for second homes and empty homes. Stratford-on-Avon District Council now charge 100% Council Tax on properties unoccupied for 6 months or more to discourage owners from leaving properties empty.

The Council do however recognise that some empty properties require renovation works and time to be sold on the housing market. Certain discounts and exemptions exist for properties being renovated and for properties unoccupied for less than 6 months.

The government have recently consulted on Council Tax technical reforms with proposals to give billing authorities greater discretion over the reliefs from Council Tax available in respect of some empty properties. In summary the proposed changes being contemplated affecting empty homes are:

- replacing exemption Classes A and exemption classes C with discounts, the amount of which would be for billing authorities to determine  
(Class A - vacant dwellings where major repair works or structural alterations are required, under way (up to twelve months))  
(Class C - vacant dwelling which has been such for a continuous period of less than six months ending immediately before the day in question)
- abolishing Class L exemption and making mortgagees in possession of empty dwellings liable to Council Tax in respect of them  
(Class L - an unoccupied dwelling where a mortgagee is in possession under the mortgage)
- allowing billing authorities to levy an 'empty homes premium'

### **Business Rates**

The government reformed empty commercial property relief in 2008 in order to provide a strong incentive to bring empty commercial property back into use. Once a commercial property becomes empty, the first three months are exempt from rating (six months in the case of an empty industrial property). Thereafter, the full 100% rates are payable.

## From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### 4.2. Regional and sub-regional

The West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy 2005; Delivering a Housing Vision for the West Midlands in the 21st century: Pathways of Choice, acknowledges the wasted resource that empty homes represent. The document encourages the use of empty properties strategies to increase the supply of affordable homes through the region. Within the West Midlands over 31,000<sup>1</sup> private dwellings are long-term empty.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council withdrew from the South Housing Market area in autumn 2009 and our sub-regional partnership working is now focused on two overlapping combinations of local authority areas; Warwickshire and Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire(CSW). Within these areas there are a total of 4800<sup>1</sup> homes which have been classed as empty for more than 6 months.

### 4.3. Guidance documents

*Empty Property: unlocking the potential* (ODPM, 2003) provides a case for action on empty property and an implementation handbook on how to tackle it.

*A Cure for Empty Homes* (IDeA, 2006) evaluates the methods used in bringing empty homes back into use and suggests improvements to these.

*Building Better Lives* Getting the best from strategic housing, (Audit Commission 2009) presents the findings of research into the strategic housing function of local authorities.

*Guidance note on Empty Dwelling Management Orders* (DCLG, 2006): government guidance on how to use the powers set out in the Housing Act 2004.

*Empty Prospects*: Article by Communities Minister Andrew Stunell (LocalGov.co.uk. 2011)

*Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England* (DCLG, 2011): A radical new strategy launched by the government to reignite the housing market and get the nation building again.

*New Homes Bonus: final scheme design* (CLG February 2011): The New Homes Bonus is a powerful, simple and transparent incentive for housing growth and is a key part of the housing growth focus of the governments national strategy.

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

*Bringing Empty Homes back into use:* Application guidance for community and voluntary groups for the Empty Homes Community Grant (CLG January 2012)

*Technical reforms of Council Tax: Consultation* (CLG October 2011)

#### **4.4.Support**

*Empty Homes Agency:* The Agency are an independent campaigning charity which aims to raise awareness of the potential of empty homes in England to meet housing need and devise and promote, with others, sustainable solutions that will bring empty homes back into use.

*Empty Homes Network:* The Empty Homes Network (EHN) is the successor to the National Association of Empty Property Practitioners (NAEPP). EHN was established in May 2001 to support people involved in delivering empty property strategies and supporting the people who bring empty property back into use for housing.

*Homes & Communities Agency (HCA):* As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010, the government announced their intention to invest £100m through the HCA in supporting housing associations to refurbish over 3,000 empty properties and manage them at an affordable rent for up to 10 years. An Empty Homes Toolkit is available through the HCA website.

*The Great British Property Scandal: Report an empty home:* National campaign to highlight the problem of empty homes across the UK.

## **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### **5. Local**

#### **5.1. Introduction to the district**

Stratford-on-Avon district covers 979km<sup>2</sup> and is predominantly rural. There are around 250 towns and parishes with the majority of the population located within the principal towns and villages. The population of the district is expected to grow by 25% between 2007 and 2031 from 117,000 to 145,600<sup>7</sup>.

#### **5.2. Links with other strategies and local plans**

##### **Warwickshire Sustainable Communities Strategy**

People, Places & Prosperity – A Sustainable Community Strategy for Warwickshire 2009-2026 details the long term vision for the County. One of the nine outcomes within the strategy is “Our housing is appropriate and affordable”. This strategy notes the presence of empty homes across the community “that could be brought back into use to create much needed homes for households struggling to find somewhere to live.”

The Warwickshire Local Area Agreement 2008-2011 (LAA) is the key mechanism for partnership working to deliver the Warwickshire Sustainable Community Strategy. The LAA is an agreement between central government, all the Warwickshire local authorities and other local publicly funded organizations and it will be reviewed every 3 years.

##### **Stratford-on-Avon District Sustainable Community Strategy**

Stratford District Partnership's *Improving the Quality of Life for everyone – a 2026 Vision* for Stratford District is the Sustainable Community Strategy for the district. It sets out a long-term vision for the area and provides the context for the Council's Housing Strategy.

Improving the Quality of Life identifies a number of key challenges relevant to the Empty Homes Strategy:

##### **Stronger Communities**

- Making more accommodation available by bringing more empty homes into use.

##### **Safer Communities**

- Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour

---

<sup>7</sup> Stratford-on-Avon District Housing Strategy 2009-2014

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Given the links between empty and dilapidated properties and anti-social behaviour and crime it is clear that the activity to reduce these will assist in meeting these targets.

#### Economic Development and Enterprise

- Increasing the economic vitality of the main rural centres.

#### Climate Change and Environment

- Supporting and setting standards for home energy efficiency and the supply and use of renewable energy.

### **The District Council's Corporate Strategy 2011-2015**

Returning empty homes back into use is a corporate priority identified within the aims of the corporate strategy:

#### **Corporate Strategy Aim 1 – 'Addressing local housing need'**

##### "More housing is available at a price people can afford"

"we will promote investment in the existing stock of housing that enhances its affordability, seeking in particular to bring empty properties back into use and to reduce the high cost of heating experienced in many existing properties."

Empty homes in our district represent a wasted resource especially where demand for housing is high. By bringing empty homes back into use we will provide much needed housing, throughout the district.

There is a continual high demand for housing as illustrated within the Joint Housing Assessment for South Warwickshire 2006 and our housing register. Empty homes that are rented out or sold will help meet housing needs across tenures.

#### **Corporate Strategy Aim 2 – 'A District where business and enterprise can flourish'**

##### "Increased economic vitality across the District"

Keeping a property empty is expensive. Owners have to pay Council Tax and insurance costs, and at the same time they miss out on potential income from renting the property out. Over £9,000 can be lost annually, based on

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

average rent for a 2 bedroom property in Stratford town of £751 per calendar month.<sup>4</sup>

Empty Homes can be costly to communities, decreasing the value of neighbouring properties by an average of 18%. They also attract crime and anti social behaviour utilising the resources of the police and fire services. Encouraging owners to bring their empty home back into use will save and generate money and contribute to the economic vitality of the district.

### **Corporate Strategy Aim 3 – ‘Minimising the impacts of climate change’**

Bringing empty homes back into use relieves the pressure to build new housing on brownfield and greenfield sites. Building a new home emits almost five times as much carbon as a comprehensive refurbishment of an equivalent size existing property<sup>8</sup>

### **Stratford-on-Avon District Council Housing Strategy 2009-2014**

The Housing Strategy is the overarching plan which describes how the Council will address housing issues within the district over a five year period. As part of its aim to increase the supply of good quality affordable housing for local people, it includes actions to make more accommodation available by bringing empty homes back into use and an action to deliver a well resourced programme of interventions designed to bring empty homes back into use.

### **South Warwickshire Community Safety Partnership (Safer South Warwickshire) Partnership Plan 2011-2014’.**

The South Warwickshire Community Safety Partnership (Safer South Warwickshire) Partnership Plan 2011-2014' notes that Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) accounts for a major proportion of all incidents reported to the police across South Warwickshire.

Where homes are empty and isolated, they attract criminal damage of this nature, including graffiti and broken windows and theft. Clearly links exist between the issues of empty homes and anti-social behaviour. Working in partnership with local police and communities will ensure that the impact of empty homes is recognised.

---

<sup>8</sup> New Tricks with Old Bricks: How reusing old buildings can cut carbon emissions (2008)

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

#### **5.3. Property condition in the district**

In 2009, Stratford-on-Avon District Council commissioned a comprehensive house condition survey as a means of maintaining a detailed picture of housing conditions in the private sector. The survey was based on a stratified random sample of addresses in order to gain a representative picture of housing conditions across the district.

The survey indicated 1,360 dwellings<sup>6</sup> or 2.9% of the private sector housing stock as vacant, noting this to be lower than the national average of approximately 4.1%. It was estimated that 800 or 1.7%<sup>6</sup> of these dwellings have been empty for 6 months or more. The figure for long term empty homes is higher than the national average for England of approximately 1.5%.

#### **5.4. Why do homes remain empty?**

The work undertaken since the first empty homes strategy in 2007 has revealed that homes become and remain empty for a wide variety of reasons. Some homes may remain empty due to a change of ownership and this is expected in many circumstances however where homes remain empty for a significant period of time there may be other underlying reasons. Homes may be left empty for longer than six months due to a variety of reasons including the following:

- Lack of funds for refurbishment
- Slow refurbishment
- Awaiting planning decisions
- Reluctance to let out or sell
- Owner in long term care / hospitalised
- Probate, estate or legal ownership issues
- Poor housing market
- Perception that the property is an investment
- Undecided on how to deal with the empty property
- Lack of awareness of available options
- Owner prefers the property empty
- Lack of business acumen to see the potential of the empty home

According to Council Tax data, there are an indicative number of approximately 700 - 900 empty homes in the district in any given month. However, a significant proportion of these are transactional empty properties, i.e. for sale, in probate or undergoing renovations. There are also a number of properties that have been reoccupied but which are still classed as empty.

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Investigations have shown that this is where owners have not immediately communicated their occupation of the property to the District Council.

The projected figure of empty properties that could be targeted by the intervention of the Empty Homes Officer is around 600 properties, or approximately 1% of the total district housing stock.

The cost of bringing empty homes back into use will vary from site to site and is dependent on a number of factors. Some properties may need very little work in order to bring them up to a habitable standard and these will cost comparatively small amounts of money. Larger projects where considerable building work is required are likely to cost significantly more.

There are many benefits to owners of empty homes where intervention results in the property being brought back into use, as follows:

- Council Tax is paid by the occupants
- An income is generated for the owner where the property is let
- Equity is released where a property is sold
- The natural physical deterioration of empty property such as damp, pest ingress and structural dilapidation is negated
- Crime and antisocial behaviour associated with the property remaining empty is prevented
- The psychological burden of owning empty property is removed
- The occupant will contribute towards maintaining the property
- The environmental impact of the property is improved

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

## **6. Achievements 2008-2011**

The Empty Homes Strategy 2008-11 outlined an approach to bringing empty homes in the district back into use in order to create housing for people in housing need. A number of important objectives have been achieved during this period which has facilitated the return to use of 66 empty homes through direct intervention. Achieving the following objectives enabled targets to be achieved.

### **Hotspots**

It was important to prioritise the resources of the Empty Homes Officer across a large geographical district and this was achieved through the identification of hotspot areas where there were a high proportion of empty homes and significant numbers of people registered for affordable housing. Direct intervention in the hotspots resulted in a net reduction of 31% in these areas compared to a 17% net reduction in all other parishes. Further details on this scheme can be found in 8.3.

### **Empty Homes Assistance Grants**

The provision of Empty Homes Assistance Grants has enabled the Council to increase the availability of housing for people in housing need across the district. Seven grants have been facilitated to provide a total eleven units of accommodation suitable for families and individuals. Each unit was subject to a minimum of 3 years at a target rent determined in accordance with the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) guidance and advertised on the Council's Home Choice Plus allocation scheme.

### **Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) Policy**

The adoption of the EDMO Policy in 2010 has enabled the Council to tackle a number of problem empty properties where owners had failed to respond effectively to bring their properties back into use. The guidance and procedure followed prior to implementing an EDMO has facilitated work towards bringing 4 empty homes back to use without the need to proceed with the legislative process.

### **Empty homes promotion**

Presentations at community fora have provided a platform for informing communities throughout the district about the Council's work to reduce the number of empty homes. Through this process, the Council has built relationships with local communities to be able to help them deal effectively with problem empty homes.

### From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### New Homes Bonus

The New Homes Bonus is calculated from an increase in the net housing stock resulting in a net award of revenue for the Council. The net housing figure combines the development of new homes and the reduction in the number of empty homes reported annually. Stratford-on-Avon District Council received £217,738 New Homes Bonus for 2011/12 in addition to the central government funding. The 2012/13 New Homes Bonus has been confirmed as £379,257. There was a slight increase of 3 empty homes for the financial year 2011/12, with figures collated between 2009/10. The number of empty homes reduced dramatically by 116 for 2012/13, with data collated between 2010/11, reflecting the impact of empty homes intervention in hotspots.

It is noted that the above figures differ from those recorded for the targets met, detailed on page 3. To date, the Council have worked under the target description of 'Number of non-local authority-owned vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished during the financial year as a direct result of action by the local authority', aligned to BVPI64 indicators.

The New Homes Bonus is calculated on each additional home, receiving 6 years of grant based on the national average Council Tax for band D property. Currently the amount of grant relating to an additional Council Tax band D property will be about £1,439 per annum or £8,634 over six years, and the grant relating to an additional band E property will be about £1,759 per annum or £10,553 over six years. This would differ if Council Tax rise.

The impact of the New Homes Bonus can be seen in table 1 below assuming a net stock increase of 25 Council Tax Band D properties per annum over 7 years.

**Table 1: New Homes Bonus gained from net stock increase of 25 Council Tax Band D properties per annum over 7 years assuming no national increase in national average Council Tax**

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2019-20	Total
Year 1	35,975	35,975	35,975	35,975	35,975	35,975		251,825
Year 2		35,975	35,975	35,975	35,975	35,975	35,975	215,850
Year 3			35,975	35,975	35,975	35,975	35,975	179,875
Year 4				35,975	35,975	35,975	35,975	143,900
Year 5					35,975	35,975	35,975	107,925
Year 6						35,975	35,975	71,950
Year 7							35,975	35,975
<b>Total</b>	<b>35,975</b>	<b>71,950</b>	<b>107,925</b>	<b>143,900</b>	<b>179,875</b>	<b>215,850</b>	<b>251,825</b>	<b>1,007,300</b>
<b>SDC@80%</b>	<b>28,780</b>	<b>57,560</b>	<b>86,340</b>	<b>115,120</b>	<b>143,900</b>	<b>172,680</b>	<b>201,460</b>	<b>805,840</b>
<b>WCC@20%</b>	<b>7,195</b>	<b>14,390</b>	<b>21,585</b>	<b>28,780</b>	<b>35,975</b>	<b>43,170</b>	<b>50,365</b>	<b>201,460</b>

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

These net stock increases are contributed by the reduction in empty homes which not only provide revenue that can be utilised within the community but have the wider benefit of contributing to the availability of housing across the district. This in turn reduces the number of households facing homelessness and seeking temporary accommodation.

DRAFT

## **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### **7. Aims and objectives of the strategy**

#### **7.1.Aims and objectives**

##### **Aims**

Bring empty properties back into use and create affordable housing solutions

##### **Objectives**

- 1) Identify empty homes across Stratford District.
- 2) Develop effective pathways to bring empty homes back into use.
- 3) Create good quality, affordable housing for local people in housing need

#### **7.2.Achieving the objectives**

The objectives and actions are addressed in the Action Plan where each action contributes to one of the three objectives above (Section 9.2).

#### **Objective 1: Identify empty homes across Stratford District**

##### **A. Outcome sought – Have a record of empty homes in the district**

##### **Methods of achieving outcome A:**

###### **i) Council Tax Data**

The main source of empty homes statistics is the Council Tax register. It is important that the figures here are kept up to date through good communication and proactive visits. The Empty Homes Officer must liaise with the Council Tax department where the original data is determined to be inaccurate.

###### **ii) Referrals**

The Empty Homes Officer will respond to complaints and referrals of empty homes in the district.

These may come from:

- Members of the public e.g. neighbour of the empty property
- Parties interested in purchasing the property
- Police or Fire Service
- District and County Councillors and Parish Councils

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

- Council employees

#### iii) Reasons for the property being empty

An essential factor in tackling empty homes in the district is to determine why each empty property has become empty. This knowledge enables appropriate intervention to be deployed to assess the condition of the property and the circumstances of the owner. This information also enables the development of strategies to prevent properties becoming empty in the first place.

#### iv) Digital mapping location of empty homes

Detailed mapping of the empty properties provides a visual representation on the location of empty homes and identifies any 'hotspots'. This information will inform the approach and where appropriate help focus the activity of the Empty Homes Officer.

### **B. Outcome sought – through information and publicity raise awareness of empty homes initiatives**

#### **Benefits of raising awareness using information and publicity:**

- Owners of empty homes aware of the problems associated with their empty property and the opportunities missed.
- Owners become more aware of the assistance available through promotion of the Council's role and the enforcement actions available for dealing with uncooperative owners.
- Neighbours and members of the community affected by empty homes are more informed and are more amenable to assisting the Council to deal with these properties.
- Corporately, the engagement of Councillors and other departments is essential for a coordinated approach to tackling empty properties.

#### **Methods of achieving outcome B:**

##### i) Champion successes

Where successful interventions enabled by the District Council have turned empty homes into new homes these should be promoted through the local media, the Private Landlords Forum and ongoing empty homes publicity material.

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

#### ii) Community meetings

Presentations and question and answer sessions at Parish and Town Council, Community Fora and similar meetings should take place in order to both raise awareness in the community and to build valuable information-sharing relationships.

#### iii) Media coverage

Publicity materials to raise awareness of empty property work in the district and the Empty Homes Strategy will be produced. Press releases will be submitted to local newspapers and media. Publicity materials will be reviewed and updated to ensure continued relevance.

#### iv) Empty Homes Webpage

The Stratford-on-Avon District Council Empty Homes Webpage is a useful communication point for residents across the district. The website provides information for owners of empty homes and a facility to report empty homes.

### **Objective 2: Develop effective pathways to bring empty homes back into use**

#### **C. Outcome sought – Have a Coordinated Approach to Empty Property Work**

##### **Methods of achieving outcome C:**

#### i) Meetings with Internal Departments

Successful interrelationships between Building Control, Environmental Services, Council Tax, Street Scene and Planning colleagues are important to the success of the role. Presenting details of the progress achieved to date, outlining the revised strategy objectives and obstacles to overcome will help to gain ideas from these departments on the best ways to achieve these aims by working alongside them.

#### ii) Engage External Agencies

Refer cases to the Police as necessary in the instance of criminal activity, and share local knowledge regarding empty properties within their area.

A number of organisations have submitted bids for The HCA Empty Homes Fund as part of the Affordable Housing Programme. Successful applicants will be required to work with local authorities to deliver empty homes back to

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

use. As part of this the Council will need to investigate the possibility of a Private Sector Leasing scheme or alternatives and promote the chosen scheme across the district.

#### iii) Maintain database of developers

Identify any property developers who wish to purchase and develop empty properties in any given condition. Maintain database of contacts to pass on to empty home owners.

#### iv) Hotspots

Where hotspots are identified; target these areas for comprehensive Empty Homes Officer interventions.

### **D. Outcome sought - Provide Encouragement and Support to Empty Property Owners**

#### **Methods of achieving outcome D:**

##### i) Initiate written contact with empty property owners

Raising awareness of empty properties has generated referrals from members of the community, Councillors, Warwickshire Police and Fire & Rescue Service and other Council Officers. Empty property owners have also come forward.

When an empty property is identified, the name of the legal owner will be sought from the Land Registry. Where the property is not registered, the Council will utilise its information-sharing powers under section 16 of the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976 to acquire the name and address of the property owner.

As permitted by the Local Government Act 2003, section 85, the Council Tax register will be referred to in order to identify empty homes in the district and for taking steps to bring these back into use.

Once the reason for an empty property is established, empty homes procedures tailored to assist each individual case are followed to provide the most appropriate solution to bring the property back into use.

##### ii) Targeting properties empty for less than 12 months

Properties which have been empty for less than 12 months predominantly require less time and investment to return them back to use. By making owners aware of the help and support available the Council aims to facilitate

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

the return of these homes back into use before the properties deteriorate and become a problem for owners and the community.

By targeting for early intervention, those properties which have been empty for less than 12 months, the cost for owners to return these properties back to use can be reduced and homes can be prevented from remaining empty for long periods.

#### iii) Empty flats and spaces above shops

Assistance can be given to businesses to increase their economic viability by identifying empty flats and spaces above shops in 'hotspots'. By promoting schemes available to owners including VAT relief to utilise these spaces the availability of housing in town and village centres can be increased.

#### iv) Maintain Empty Homes Officer toolkit

When the reason for the property remaining empty has been established, the following options are available for dealing with it:

- Selling on the open market or housing auction
- Selling to a third party e.g. property developer
- Letting through the Council's Rent Express Scheme
- Leasing to a Registered Provider or other organisation
- Private letting
- Renovating and / or converting with the aid of the empty homes assistance grants or loans
- Demolishing.

These options are discussed between the Empty Homes Officer, the owner and third parties that may include Planning and/or Building Control. The most suitable option is promoted to the owner.

The Empty Homes Officer has developed and utilises a toolkit for helping owners to achieve the agreed decision on how to bring the empty property back into use.

#### v) Publish Empty Homes Information Pack.

The Empty Homes officer will develop and publish an Empty Homes Information Pack, to be sent out to all empty home owners on initial contact. This will enable the owner to make an informed choice on the options available to bring their property back into use.

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

#### vi) Landlords forum for owners of empty homes

Owners of homes empty for less than 12 months will be invited to Stratford District Council Landlords forum to enable owners to realise the benefit of returning their property back into use as soon as possible. This forum will provide advice and support for owners to avoid prolonged vacancy and escalating costs associated with long term empty homes.

### **E. Outcome - Develop and adopt Enforcement Procedures**

In exceptional circumstances, where the owner of an empty home refuses to work with the Council towards bringing the property back into use or is untraceable, enforcement action will be considered.

The Empty Homes Officer has several enforcement options available to deal with the empty property.

#### **Methods of achieving outcome E:**

##### i) Enforced Sale

Where there is a local land charge or another debt owed to the Council by the empty property owner, the Council can force the sale of the property to a third party.

##### ii) Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)

Where a property has been empty for 6 months or more and the owner has refused all reasonable offers of assistance, the Council can apply for an interim EDMO. If the empty property is not bought back into use within the 12 months of an interim EDMO then a final EDMO can be made whereby the Council takes over management of the property for up to 7 years. Cabinet approval was obtained for the use of EDMOs as a means to bring empty properties back into use in September 2010.

As the Council no longer manages housing stock, management agreements need to be in place with local Housing Associations and/or managing/letting agents before an EDMO is made.

Draft amendments to the EDMO legislation were detailed in January 2011 with proposals that EDMOs are to be restricted to empty properties that have stood empty for at least two years and have become a magnet for vandalism, squatters and other forms of anti-social behavior. The Council must therefore ensure the support of the surrounding community prior to implementing an EDMO and amend the EDMO policy accordingly.

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

#### iii) Compulsory Purchase

When no other enforcement measures are suitable, the Council may consider the threat and use of its compulsory purchase powers. Alternative and prompter enforcement action may be necessary depending on the circumstances of each individual case. These are displayed and explained in section 8.5.

#### iv) Other local authority enforcement

Procedures are maintained to utilise enforcement available within other Council departments. The Empty Homes Officer must liaise with other Council departments should any other enforcement matters arise ensuring a corporate approach to finding the most appropriate course of action to take for problem empty homes.

#### v) Funding for EDMOs

Where an interim EDMO is served funding would be required to insure the property. Should this proceed to a Final EDMO funding to renovate the property would be required. Funding will be identified for implementing EDMOs where necessary.

### **F. Outcome – Through Regional and Sub-Regional working, enhance the approach to Empty Homes**

#### **Methods of achieving outcome F:**

##### i) West Midlands Empty Property Officers' Group

The West Midlands Empty Property Officers' Group is a well-established bi-annual meeting between many local authorities in the Region. The group enables networking, support, discussion of common issues, and development of action plans to take place. The group is a valuable resource of information and support for the Empty Homes Officer.

##### ii) Web based forums

Current resources for empty homes working are available on web-based specialist networks. These resources are referred to regularly with participation in national debates, where appropriate.

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### **Objective 3: Create good quality, affordable housing for those in housing need**

**G. Outcome sought** – Utilise funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing solutions across the district for those in housing need.

#### **Methods of achieving outcome G**

i) Revise financial support scheme to consider amendments or alternatives and additional loan scheme.

Many applicants for the Empty Homes Assistance Grant / loan scheme will be unsure about the process of bringing their property back into use and any support the District Council are able to give them will be welcome. It is important that the Council are able to demonstrate to customers how we will interact with them and the production of a range of leaflets provide owners with detailed information on the scheme, service standards that we guarantee to perform to and owners obligations.

An element of the grant / loan scheme will be to provide affordable housing for local people in housing need, the terms of the scheme will therefore note nomination rights required to include links to the Rent Express Scheme.

ii) Identify further funding as grant use and targets necessitate

To ensure that we meet Corporate Strategy targets the Council will need to continually identify funding for the grants.

iii) Research, develop and implement loans scheme for renovation of empty homes

Current financial constraints on available funding necessitate the Council to implement a loans scheme for the renovation of empty homes, following similar objectives to the current Empty Homes Assistance Grant scheme.

iv) Research the viability of a self-help housing approach.

This will enable local communities to become involved in the regeneration of their communities.

Self-help housing is a term applied to a variety of schemes that involve groups of local people renovating and bringing empty homes back into use for affordable rented housing. Many schemes use volunteers to carry out building works, offering experience and sometimes formal construction skills

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

training. In some schemes the volunteers go on to become tenants of the completed homes.

Volunteers are normally drawn from groups of people who can't afford to buy their own housing and whose housing needs are such that they will not be offered a permanent tenancy by the local authority or a housing association. The empty properties are effectively "borrowed" from the owner on the basis of a license or sometimes a lease, for a specified period of time. On occasion, future plans change and the buildings may even become available on a permanent basis.

v) Work with Registered providers and the HCA to enable their programs to return empty homes to use

Where organizations have submitted a bid for funding through the The HCA Empty Homes Fund as part of the Affordable Housing Programme, relationships will need to be developed to facilitate the success of these programs.

vi) Work with community groups to return empty homes back to use.

The Empty Homes Community Grant fund enables communities to bid for funding to return empty homes to use. The Council need to identify suitable communities and support them in their bid for funding.

## **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### **8. How will we take action?**

#### **8.1.Priorities**

Properties which remain empty for long periods can be significantly more difficult to return to use. The escalating cost of repair after so many years and the inertia of owners to deal with their empty home compound the problem.

Accordingly to Council Tax data, February 2012 there are 181 or 23% of empty homes which have been empty from 6 to 12 months. Early intervention from the Empty Homes Officer of these homes should result in prompt action by the owners to return them back to use before they become a financial and psychological burden. The intention here is to work towards stopping properties becoming long term empty in the first case, prevention rather than cure.

A focus on these empty homes in hotspot areas will enable the Council to return greater numbers of empty homes back into use.

#### **8.2.Digital mapping**

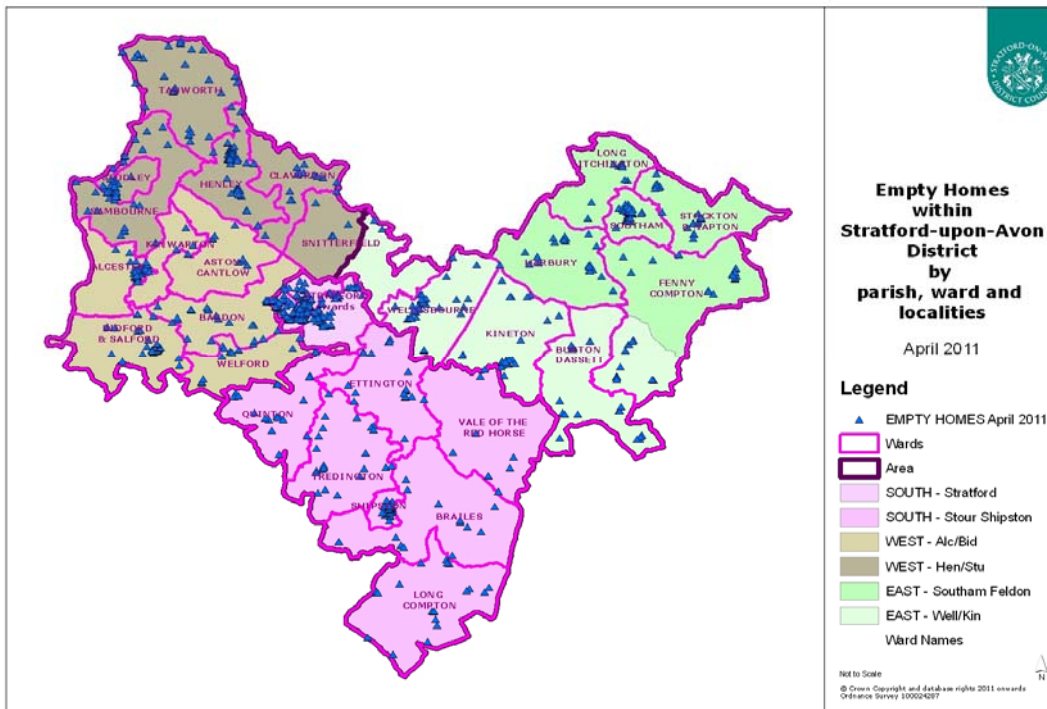
Empty homes digital maps have been produced annually since April 2009 to provide a visual interpretation of the location of empty homes across the district. These maps have enabled the Council to see where there are proportionally higher numbers of empty properties.

Map 1 details the position as at April 2011 for the total number of empty homes across the district.

## From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### Map1



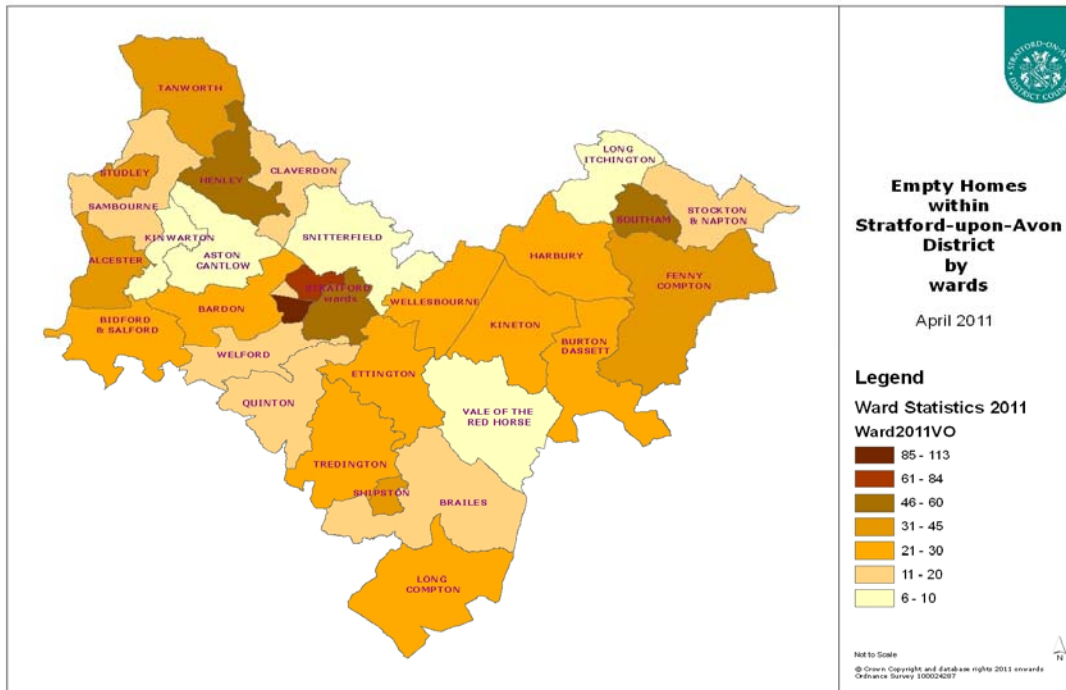
Map 2 shows the location of empty homes by ward and map 3 shows the location of empty homes by parish for April 2011.

Maps to monitor the progress of the empty homes intervention and the location of empty homes returned to use have also been produced.

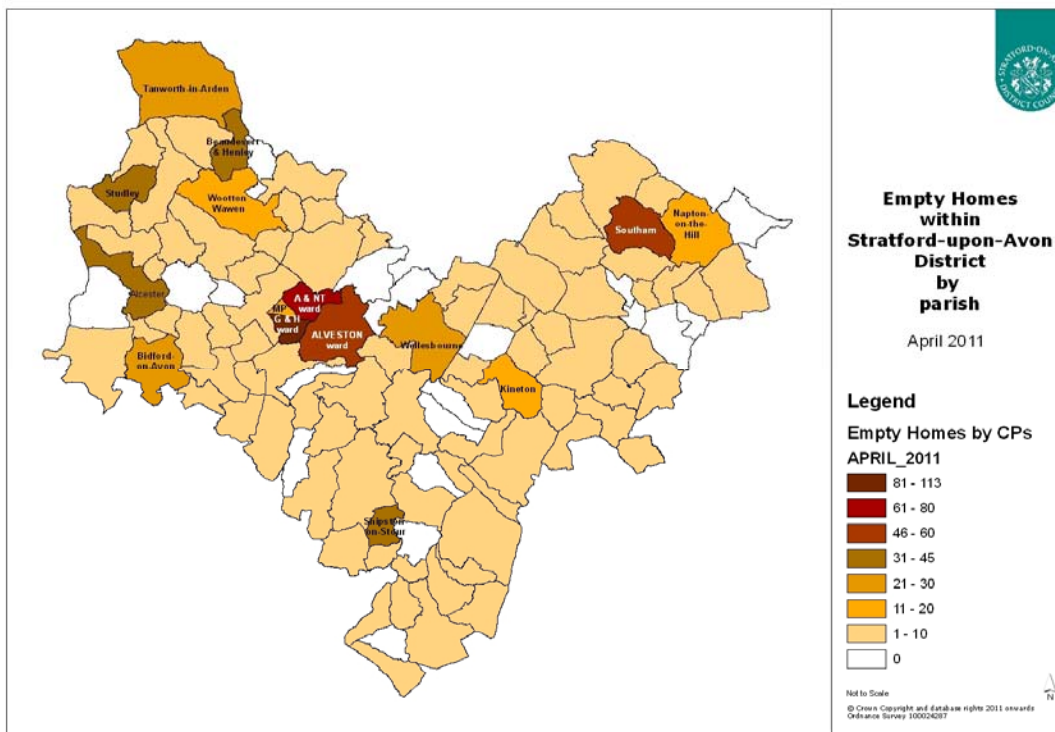
## From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

Map 2



Map 3



### From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

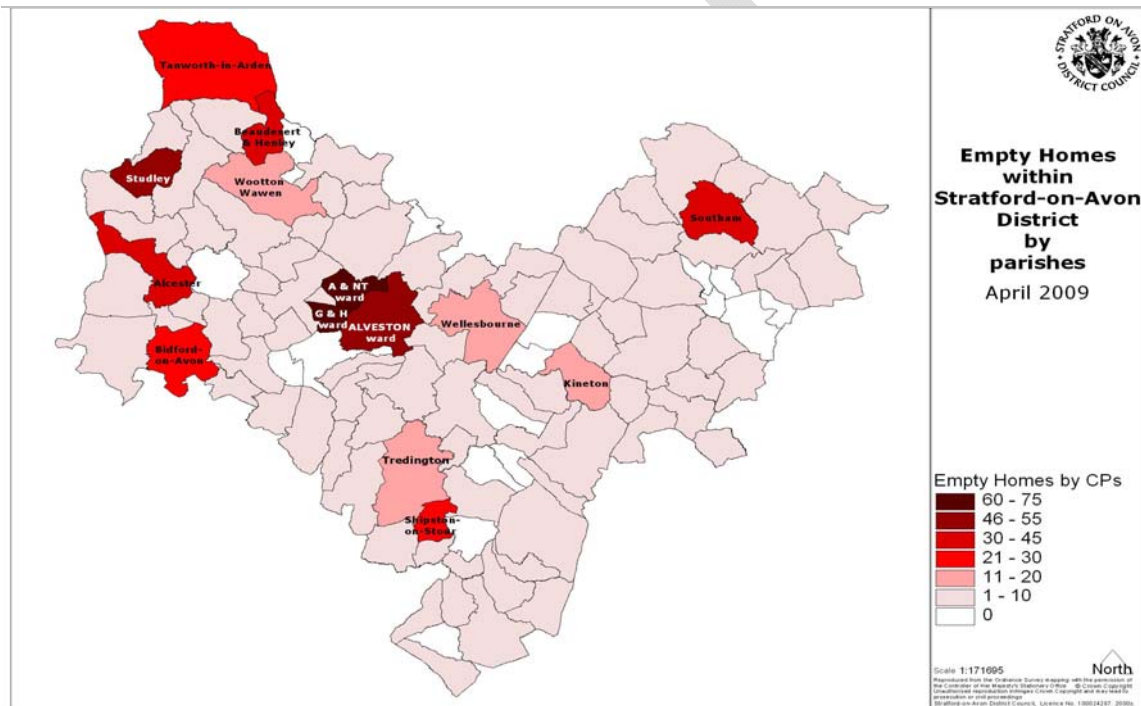
### 8.3.Hotspots

The production of maps indicating distribution of empty homes within the district has informed the work of empty homes.

Initial analysis for hotspots took place using Council Tax data from April 2009. Map 3 highlights the parishes containing the highest proportion of empty homes, shown in the darker shades. The data from the parishes with the highest number of empty homes was compared with data on housing need in these areas. This assessment enabled identification of housing needs across the district in comparison to the number of empty homes in these areas as hotspots.

The total number of empty homes identified within the digital mapping exercise as at April 2009 was 754 of which 365 were located within the hotspots. Table 1 provides details of empty homes in the hotspots compared with housing needs in these areas.

Map 3



### From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

**Table 1**

Wards	Empty Homes in hotspots 1 April 2009		Total number of households on waiting list 31 October 2008	
	Total Number	% of the district	With a local connection to this place	With a local connection and in need of 2+ bedrooms
<b>Alcester</b>	35	5%	256	131
<b>Beaudesert and Henley</b>	39	5%	90	45
<b>Shipston-on-Stour</b>	24	3%	146	68
<b>Southam</b>	33	4%	169	100
<b>Stratford-upon-Avon (3 wards)</b>	188	25%	915	446
<b>Studley</b>	46	6%	141	85
<b>Totals</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>1717</b>	<b>875</b>

The hotspots identified sit within the districts principle settlements and understandably this is where we see a significant level of housing need. This approach has enabled the Empty Homes Officer to focus the most effective use of resources for empty homes in areas with the greatest need of intervention.

#### Hotspot intervention

Hotspot intervention commenced in April 2010, targeting Studley, 3 wards in Stratford-upon-Avon, Southam and Alcester. Table 2 details comparison at the beginning of the project in April 2010 to date, February 2012 where there has been a net reduction of 31% of empty homes in the hotspot areas. This compares favourably against the areas not subject to targeted intervention which have reduced by 17%. There is a trend of the number of empty homes reducing district wide but it can be demonstrated that intervention has been more successful in the hotspots with the reduction of long term empty homes now totalling 756<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Council Tax data February 2012

### From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

**Table 2**

	Parish	April 2010	February 2012	Net reduction of empty homes	Net % reduction of empty homes
<b>Hotspots targeted for intervention</b>	Studley	59	37	22	37%
	Stratford-upon-Avon (3 wards)	280	193	87	31%
	Southam	62	46	16	26%
	Alcester	39	26	13	33%
<b>Totals in hotspots targeted for intervention</b>		<b>440</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>31%</b>
All other parishes		547	454	93	17%
<b>Total of all empty homes</b>		<b>987</b>	<b>756</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>23%</b>

A reassessment of the data collated for the hotspots ensures future intervention is directed to the areas with the highest number of empty homes. Table 3 details the latest Council Tax figures, February 2012 with the areas of highest concentration of empty homes, 3% or higher, which can be targeted for future hotspot intervention.

**Table 3**

Wards	Empty Homes as at 1 February 2012	
	Total Number	% of the district
Alcester	26	3%
Beaudesert and Henley	41	5%
Shipston-on-Stour	25	3%
Southam	46	6%
Stratford-upon-Avon (3 wards)	193	26%
Studley	37	5%
Tanworth in Arden	25	3%
<b>Totals over 3%</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>51%</b>
Totals for district	<b>756</b>	

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

## **8.4.Funding**

### **Regional Housing Pot**

In order to improve the standards of accommodation in the private sector central government provided capital funding through the Regional Housing Pot, with an allocation made each year to local authorities. This allocation ceased in 2011 and there is no further provision for ring-fenced funding for local authorities.

The Council allocated £299,000 of this private sector renewal funding towards projects to renovate empty homes with £171,000 remaining as at April 2012. A review of the Empty Homes Assistance Grants programme is to be undertaken with a view to implement a loans based renovation scheme. This reflects the uncertainty of continuity of funding for empty homes schemes.

### **HCA empty homes fund**

Within the 2011-2015 Affordable Homes Programme the government have allocated £100million to tackle long-term empty properties. Bids for the funding can be made by not-for-profit voluntary and community groups and Registered Providers.

The Community Grants Programme is part of the Coalition's £100m Empty Homes Programme, which runs from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2015. This will be accessible to community-led-organisations and as part of this funding programme they will not be required to become a registered provider (such as a registered housing association).

The Council will need to liaise closely with successful bidders and identify suitable empty homes which may benefit from this scheme.

### **New Homes Bonus**

A reduction of empty homes resulting in a net increase in housing stock will provide increased revenue for the Council as illustrated in section 6. The government notes that proactive authorities will see the benefits of the grant so it is important to harness the opportunities available from this funding stream.

By targeting intervention in hotspots and prioritising the return to use of homes left vacant for less than 12 months the Council aims to return to use a greater number of empty homes. Early intervention will predominantly enable owners to return their homes back to use with minimal costs and reduce the inertia associated with properties left empty for long periods of

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

time. The longer a property remains empty the greater the need for renovation works to return to use. By providing owners with a range of solutions and support at an early stage will equip them with the tools to deal with their empty property.

#### **8.5.Enforcement**

A number of tools are available to support and encourage owners to bring their properties back into use. However many owners are reluctant to take advantage of this opportunity, preferring to progress works very slowly or simply ignoring the Council's offers of advice and assistance or grant funding.

As previously noted, owners can be slow to progress with renovation works due to a lack of funds or time. As a result properties can be undergoing renovation for several years with no immediate prospect of being returned to use.

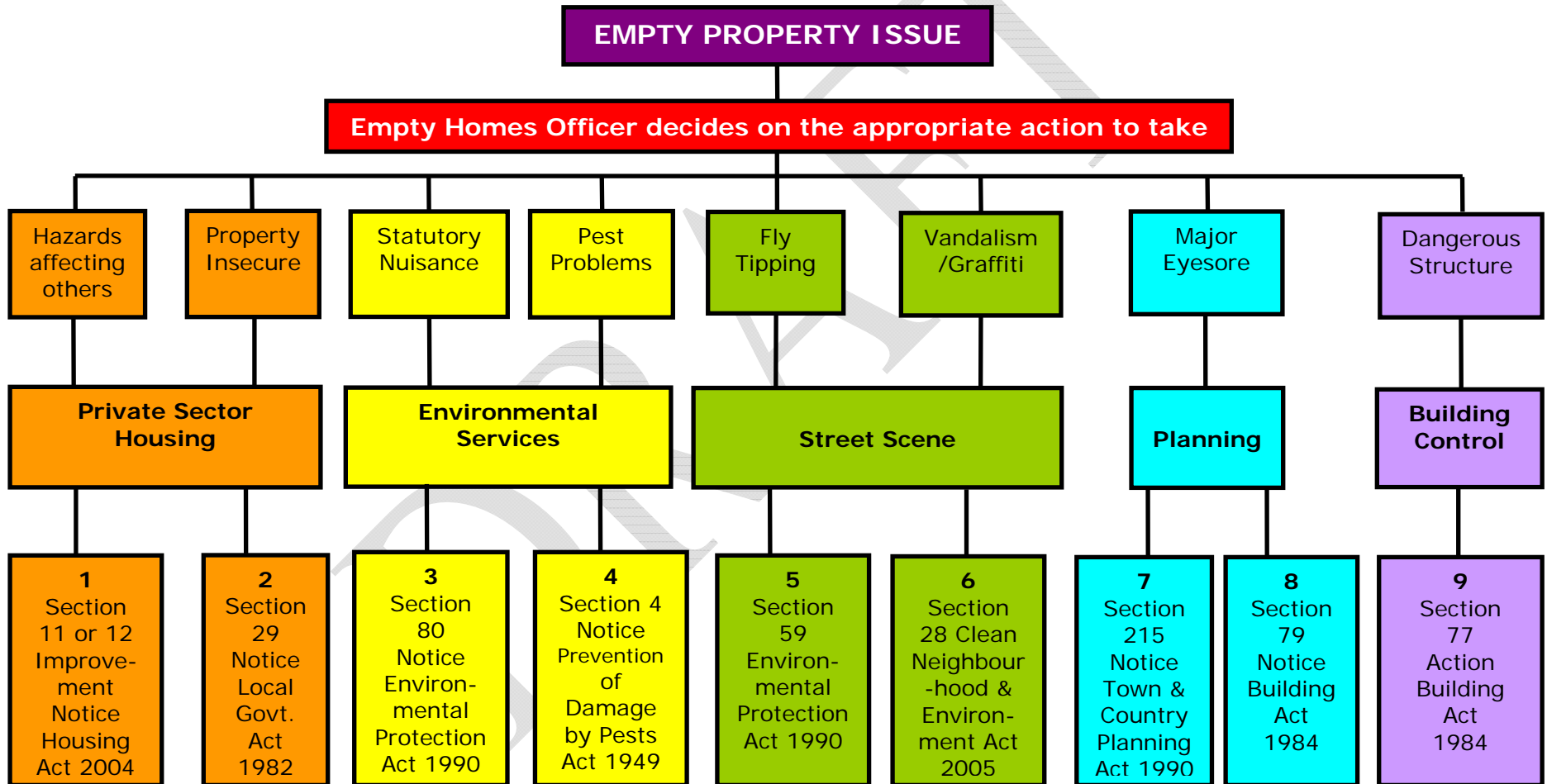
Diagram 1 illustrates how many Council service areas are involved in dealing with empty properties in the district followed by a definition of each enforcement option.

## From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

**Diagram 1**

### Enforcement options available with the Council



### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

#### **1. Housing Act 2004 – Section 11 or 12 Improvement Notice**

If a Housing Health and Safety Rating System assessment reveals that one or more Category 1 or 2 hazards exist within the dwelling, the local authority may serve an improvement notice requiring the owner to undertake works to remove, or reduce these hazards.

#### **2. Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 – Section 29 Notice**

If a building is unoccupied and not effectively secured against unauthorised entry, or is likely to become a danger to public health, the local authority may serve notice on the owner to secure the building within 48 hours.

#### **3. Environmental Protection Act 1990 – Section 80 Notice**

Where a local authority is satisfied that a statutory nuisance exists, or is likely to occur or recur, in the area of the authority, the local authority shall serve a notice imposing all or any of the following requirements:

- a) requiring the abatement of the nuisance or prohibiting or restricting its occurrence or recurrence.
- b) requiring the execution of such works, and the taking of such other steps, as may be necessary for any of those purposes.

Any of the following problems regarding empty properties may amount to a statutory nuisance:

- any premises in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance
- any accumulation or deposit which is prejudicial to health or a nuisance
- any other matter declared by any enactment to be a statutory nuisance.

#### **4. Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 - Section 4 Notice**

If in the case of any land it appears to the local authority that steps should be taken for the destruction of rats or mice on the land or otherwise for keeping the land free from rats and mice, they may serve on the owner or occupier of the land a notice requiring him to take these steps.

#### **5. Environmental Protection Act 1990 – Section 59 Action**

If any controlled waste is deposited in or on any land, the local authority may, by notice, require the occupier to do either or both of the following:

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

- a) to remove the waste from the land within a specified period not less than a period of 21 days beginning with the service of the notice
- b) to take within such a period specified steps with a view to eliminating or reducing the consequences of the deposit of the waste.

#### **6. Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act 2005 – Section 28 Notice**

Local authorities have powers to serve fixed penalty notices on individuals who graffiti private property.

#### **7. Town and Country Planning Act 1990 – Section 215 Notice**

If it appears to the local planning authority that the amenity of a part of their area, or of an adjoining area, is adversely affected by the condition of land in their area, they may require the owner and occupier of the land to take such steps for remedying the condition of the land as may be specified in the notice.

#### **8. Building Act 1984 - Section 79 Notice**

If it appears to a local authority that a building or structure is by reason of its ruinous or dilapidated condition seriously detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood, the local authority may by notice:

- a) require the owner to undertake works to restore or repair the structure
- b) take steps to demolish the structure or part of the structure

#### **9. Building Act 1984 – Section 77 Action**

If it appears to a local authority that a building or structure, or part of a building or structure, is in such a condition as to be dangerous, the authority may apply to a magistrates' court, and the court may, where danger arises from the condition of the building or structure, make an order requiring the owner thereof:

- a) to execute such work as may be necessary to obviate the danger or
- b) if he so elects, to demolish the building or structure, or any dangerous part of it.

The actions detailed above would be the initial approach the Council would follow when dealing with problematic empty homes however, where owners remain unresponsive or uncooperative, further enforcement options are available to local authorities as follows:

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### **Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)**

Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) were introduced in the Housing Act 2004. The intention was to provide a legal tool which could be used by local authorities to bring properties back into use where they had become empty and the owners either had no intention of doing this, or the resources.

The fundamental principle behind the EDMO is that the Council should not take on ownership of a property; the emphasis is on helping the owner manage the property in a way that is beneficial to both the owner and the community, or in the final event managing the property directly and without the consent of the owner to ensure its occupation.

The legislation and guidance encourages local authorities to engage closely with the owner and work with them to bring the property back into use. Only when the approach fails does the EDMO become accessible to the authority. The process is policed by the independent Residential Property Tribunal (RPT) to ensure that local authorities keep within the parameters prescribed within the legislation and subsequent guidance.

The Council's Cabinet approval was obtained for the use of EDMOs as a means to bring empty properties back into use in September 2010.

Draft amendments to the EDMO legislation were detailed in January 2011 with proposals that EDMOs would be restricted to empty properties that have stood empty for at least two years and have become a magnet for vandalism, squatters and other forms of anti-social behaviour. The indication is for the Council to have the support of the surrounding community prior to implementing an EDMO.

### **Enforced Sales (ESP)**

The Enforced Sales procedure uses powers under Section 13 of the Law and Properties Act 1925. Where there is a local land charge or another debt owed to the Council by the empty property owner, the Council can force the sale of the property to a third party, if the debt cannot be settled.

The Enforced Sales Procedure (ESP) is a process by which the Council brings about the sale of a privately owned house. It is used as a means to "sell on" a long-term vacant house to a new owner, in circumstances where the present owner is either unwilling or unable to deal with the house and its associated problems.

By bringing about a change in ownership, it is hoped that a new owner would be more willing and able to invest in the property, and ensure its likely re-occupation, upkeep, and proper use.

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

#### **Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO)**

The Housing Act 1985, section 17 allows the local authority to acquire underused, or ineffectively used, property for residential purposes if there is a general housing need in the area. In addition, section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by section 99 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) allows local authorities to acquire land or buildings if their acquisition will allow improvements or redevelopment to take place. CPO can be a lengthy process and the possibility of a CPO is intended to prompt the owner to enter into constructive dialogue with the local authority and to avoid the need to resort to such a measure.

DRAFT

## From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

### 9. Delivering the Strategy

#### 9.1. Targets 2012-2015

##### Corporate Strategy Target

Bring 75 empty properties back into use by 2015.

#### 9.2. Action Plan for 2012/2013

	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Capital Cost	Timescale	Outputs	Progress
<b>Objective 1: IDENTIFY EMPTY HOMES ACROSS STRATFORD DISTRICT.</b>						
<b>A. Have a record of empty homes in the district</b>	i) Maintain accurate database using and updating Council Tax database of properties empty for 6 months or more ii) Incorporate referrals and intelligence from the community regarding empty homes iii) Identify why properties are empty iv) Provide a record of the location of empty homes from digital mapping	Empty Homes Officer with assistance of Council Tax team leader and Change and Performance digital mapping staff	Officer time	Monthly  In the event of information referral  Ongoing  To be completed annually in April	Accurate, regularly updated database  Information to assist the identification and targeting of 'hot spots'	
<b>B. Through information and publicity raise awareness of empty homes initiatives</b>	i) Publicise by press release and website three empty homes awards or returns ii) Attend Town and Parish Council meetings, Neighbourhood Watch groups and Community in hotspot areas iii) Publicise by press release the Empty Homes Strategy in local media	Empty Homes Officer  Empty Homes Officer  Empty Homes Officer	Officer time  Officer time  Officer time	To be completed annually  3 Town Councils, 1 Chamber of Commerce and 3 community forums within hotspot areas. By March 2013  By June 2012	Engaging owners of empty homes  To provide information to engage with owners of empty homes	

### From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Capital Cost</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Progress</b>
	Review and update publicity materials	Empty Homes Officer	Officer time	Ongoing		
	iv) Update webpage to include service standards and performance data	Empty Homes Officer	Officer time	Annually in December		
<b>OBJECTIVE 2: Develop effective pathways to bring empty homes back into use</b>						
<b>C.</b> <b>Have a coordinated approach to empty property work</b>	i) Present new strategy to Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health with progress so far and revised strategy objectives	Empty Homes Officer	Officer time	By June 2012	Increased public and corporate awareness of empty homes and the associated issues	
	ii) Engage external partners such as local Police, Housing Associations and Estate Agents	Empty Homes Officer	Officer time	Attend 4 town police stations within hotspot areas by March 2013.	Establishment of partnerships for the purposes of information sharing, and the possibility of EDMO management agreements and Private Sector Leasing scheme	
	Liaise with local Housing Associations and investigate the possibility of a Private Sector Leasing scheme or alternatives and promote proposed scheme across the district	Private Sector Housing Team and Housing Services Manager	Officer time	By July 2012		
	Maintain relationship with local estate agents	Empty Homes Officer	Officer time	Ongoing		
	iii) Identify any property developers who wish to purchase and develop empty properties in any given condition. Maintain database of contacts to pass on to empty home owners	Empty Homes Officer	Officer time	Ongoing	To ensure cohesive approach to be able to deliver planned numbers of empty homes back into use on 'hotspots'	
	iv) Update hotspots action plan to engage with 100% of empty property owners in 'hotspots' as priority areas of intervention. Implement timescales for intervention of each hotspot	Empty Homes Officer	Officer time	Ongoing	To create housing within local community and support the vitality and continuation of local businesses	

### From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Capital Cost</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Progress</b>
		Empty Homes Officer	Officer time	By June 2012		
<b>D. Provide encouragement and support to empty property owners</b>	<p>i) Initiate contact with 100% of empty property owners by letter within 14 days of notification of a complaint of empty property</p> <p>Provide advice and support by letter to owners of all empty homes when they become empty for longer 6 months, or on termination of Council Tax exemption 'A'</p> <p>ii) Target properties for early intervention by contacting owners of all properties in hotspot areas empty for less than 12 months</p> <p>iii) Research empty flats and spaces above shops in 'hotspots' and promote empty homes initiative to create housing in town and village centres. Implement timescales within hotspot action plan to coincide with promotion to communities.</p> <p>iv) Maintain a toolkit of contacts, information and options to help owners bring their empty properties back into use</p> <p>v) Publish Empty Homes information pack</p> <p>vi) Set up a presentation at the Council's landlords forum to provide advice and support for owners of empty homes whose properties have recently become empty for less than 12 months. Promote Landlord Accreditation scheme.</p>	<p>Empty Homes Officer</p> <p>Empty Homes Officer and Revenues Officer</p> <p>Empty Homes Officer</p> <p>Empty Homes Officer</p> <p>Empty Homes Officer</p> <p>Empty Homes Officer</p> <p>Empty Homes Officer with Housing Standards Officer</p>	<p>Officer time</p> <p>Officer time</p> <p>Officer time</p> <p>Officer time</p> <p>Officer time</p> <p>Officer time</p> <p>Officer time</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>By August 2012</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Complete by May 2012</p> <p>Complete by August 2012</p>	<p>Maintain paper trail of contact with EP owners and record on Flare</p> <p>Build working relationships with EP owners</p> <p>Tailored advice for each individual case</p> <p>Empty homes bought back into use informally</p> <p>Advice and support for owners of empty homes</p>	

### From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Capital Cost</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<b>E. Develop and adopt enforcement procedures</b>	i) An Enforced Sales policy and procedure has been prepared. A proposal to adopt this will be investigated as part of the revised loan arrangements	Empty Homes Officer in partnership with Legal.	Officer time.	Complete by July 2012	Should informal action not be successful, enforcement actions should commence to secure the re-use of the empty property	
	ii) Agree individual management agreements with partners identified in Priority 3 for Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) and develop policy and procedures as necessary	Empty Homes Officer in partnership with Legal and managing/letting agents and/or a local Housing Association	Officer time Legal fees (if applicable)	Complete by September 2012		
	Review EDMO Policy in line with revised EDMO legislation		Officer time	Complete by June 2012		
	iii) Review effectiveness of Compulsory Purchase Orders in this area	Empty Homes Officer	Officer time	Complete by March 2014	Policies and procedures in place for all viable enforcement measures	
	iv) Maintain procedures to utilise enforcement available within other Council departments	Private Sector Housing, Planning, Street Scene Building Control, Environmental Health	Officer Time	Ongoing  Complete by October 2012	Shorter term enforcement measures take action on present issues such as: unsafe buildings, insecure buildings, major eyesores, pest harborage, hazards to others statutory nuisances	
	v) Identify funding for EDMOs where necessary	Private Sector Team and Housing Services Manager	To be determined in EDMO policy	Complete by September 2012	Funding to be identified to enable Stratford District Council to carry out EDMO enforcement activity if and when required	

### From Empty Houses to New Homes

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Capital Cost</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<b>F.</b> <b>Through Regional and Sub-Regional working, enhance the approach to Empty Homes</b>	i) Attend West Midlands Empty Property Officers Group ii) Utilise and participate in web based forums	Empty Homes Officer Empty Homes Officer	Officer time Officer time	Bi-monthly Ongoing	Discussion of current issues	
<b>OBJECTIVE 3: Create good quality, affordable housing for local people in housing need</b>						
<b>G.</b> <b>Utilise funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing solutions across the district for those in housing need</b>	i) Revise financial support scheme to consider amendments or alternatives and additional loan scheme. ii) Identify further funding as grant use and targets necessitate iii) Research, develop and implement loans scheme for renovation of empty homes iv) Research the viability of a self-help housing approach v) Work with Registered providers and the HCA to enable their programs to return empty homes to use vi) Identify community groups to work with to be able to return empty homes back to use.	Empty Homes Officer Private Sector Team and Housing Services Manager Empty Homes Officer and Housing Services Manager Empty Homes Officer Empty Homes Officer Empty Homes Officer	Officer time To be determined by grant take up Officer time Officer time Officer time Officer time	Complete by August 2012 Annually in line with budget setting process Complete by August 2012 Complete by March 2013 Ongoing from June 2012 Complete by April 2012	Provide financial assistance to empty property owners to bring their properties up to the Decent Homes standard in return for nomination rights and provision of affordable housing to those on the Housing waiting list Provide housing from empty properties, create work and training opportunities, build local communities and support neighbourhood regeneration	

### **From Empty Houses to New Homes**

Vision: Reduce the number of empty homes across the district, utilising funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing for those in housing need.

## **10. Monitoring and Feedback**

### **Measuring Performance**

Performance management is important to ensure the successful delivery of our Empty Homes Strategy.

The Best Value Performance Indicator for bringing empty properties back into use (BVPI64) measured “the number of non local authority owned dwellings returned to occupation or demolished during the year as a result of action by the local authority”.

Although this no longer exists as a national performance indicator, it will still be employed by Stratford-on-Avon District Council for benchmarking and to assess performance.

### **Monitoring the implementation of this strategy**

The success of this strategy will be in the timely completion of the actions contained within the action plan. An annual report to the Council’s Housing Advisory Panel, an executive committee of the Cabinet, will provide information on the implementation of the measures included.

### **Service Standards**

We aim to respond to general requests for service within 5 days and will prepare further standards in accordance with the strategy action plan.

### **Consultation and Review**

We will review the strategy and action plan annually to ensure its continued relevance publish any revised editions. Consultation on this strategy has taken place with owners of empty homes in receipt of grant funding, West Midlands Empty Property Officers Forum, Homestamp, Empty Homes Agency, Empty Homes Network, Stratford District Council Private Sector Housing, Housing Policy, Planning, Building Control and Revenues and Council Members.