

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING
27TH OCTOBER 2005

Wyre Forest Empty Property Strategy

OPEN	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	Improved Health and Wellbeing
CORPORATE PLAN THEME:	Enabling Community Wellbeing
KEY PRIORITY:	Housing and Independent Living
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Mrs. A. T. Hingley
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Head of Planning Health and Environment
CONTACT OFFICER:	Tim Rice - Ext. 2560 Tim.Rice@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDICES	Appendix 1 - Draft Wyre Forest Empty Property Strategy <i>A copy of the Appendix to this report has been placed in Party Group Rooms and a public inspection copy is available on request. (See front cover for details).</i>

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To introduce and seek approval of the Council's updated Empty Property Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND to Council that:

- 2.1 **It approves the updated Wyre Forest Empty Property Strategy.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council developed its first Empty Property Strategy (2003-2006) in February 2003 in response to growing pressure on Local Authorities to consider how best to utilise empty properties for housing, particularly in areas of high housing need, such as Wyre Forest.

- 3.2 Additionally the Government introduced revised Best Value Performance Indicators relating to Local Authority performance on bringing vacant properties into use. The Council has managed to meet these targets (currently to bring 7 properties per year back into use), but it is often a difficult process to achieve even these modest figures.
- 3.3 The Council's Housing Strategy focuses upon meeting housing needs and improving the quality of the housing stock, and the Empty Property Strategy is designed to assist the Council in both of these objectives.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The revised Strategy builds upon the work the Council has done to date, specifically by trying to take a more joined up approach, particularly with other Divisions and Sections within the Council.
- 4.2 The appointment of the Private Sector Initiatives Officer within the Private Sector Housing Team (commencing late October for 2 years) will provide a Member of staff who can dedicate more time to this area of work than current teams with their other duties, have so far been able to do.
- 4.3 The Council is developing its duties and powers under the new Housing Act 2004 (Report to Cabinet 25th August 2005) and will be focusing on empty properties and working with landlords to make more properties available to help meet the local housing shortage.
- 4.4 The Final Draft of the revised Wyre Forest Empty Property Strategy (see *Appendix 1*) has been circulated for comment widely within the Council, to other Worcestershire Local Authorities, Housing Association Partners and the main Landlord Agents operating in the area. Comments received have been taken into account in the final Draft.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 All revenue costs are contained within existing revenue budgets and any potential capital costs for the Council's Housing Single Capital Pot will be highlighted as part of the budget setting process for 2006/07 and beyond.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy issues will be considered on part of the review of Private Sector Housing policy in response to the Housing Act 2004.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 There are no risk management implications at this time.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Empty Property Strategy and its associated Action Plan will be another tool that the Council will use to improve access to housing, housing conditions and the built environment generally.

9. CONSULTEES

- 9.1 All Wyre Forest District Council Divisions
- 9.2 Worcestershire Local Housing Authorities
- 9.3 Partner Housing Associations
- 9.4 Local Lettings Agents

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Wyre Forest Empty Property Strategy 2003-2006 (Wyre Forest District Council website – A-Z Services under “Empty Properties”).

