

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 21st November 2016

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WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Councillor Zaffar Ajaib, Commissioner for Housing & Urban Renewal

PART I **NON-KEY DECISION**

TACKLING EMPTY PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks the Cabinet's approval to take proactive and effective enforcement actions to deal with the long term empty/ derelict properties This is to improve conditions in the private rented sector and thereby improving residential neighbourhoods in Slough.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Cabinet is requested to resolve:

- (a) That the Council's Housing Regulation Team will use all available powers including, but not limited to, Compulsory Purchase Powers, Part 4 of the Housing Act 2004 and the Relevant Town & Planning Act 1990 to bring long term empty derelict properties back into use .
- (b) That The CPO report in Part II of this agenda, which is seeking approval to use Compulsory Purchase Power to deal with seven long term empty properties, be noted.

3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

- 3.1 The importance of an increase in supply of Decent Homes is linked to improved communities, reducing crime, improving employment opportunities and educational achievement¹.
- 3.2 The Public Health Outcome Framework has established a wider deterrent of health under 4 domains. Three out the four domains are linked to housing and the impact of poor housing on the society considering its effect on the occupiers. Any steps that improve housing conditions would directly benefit the health and wellbeing of individuals, thus society as a whole. By bringing these long term empty properties back into residential use, not only will we increase the supply of good quality housing, through regeneration of derelict / abandoned sites, but we will remove the blight, deprivation and, neglect from the effected neighbourhoods. This will in turn help to

¹ Department of Health : Improving outcomes and supporting transparency. Part1A: A public health outcomes frame for England , 2013- 2016

improve community cohesion, bring a feel good factor and overall will create healthier community.

3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

3a.1 Increasingly, housing and physical environment have been recognised as the key determinant of health and wellbeing, educational attainment and social mobility. The British Research Establishment (BRE) had developed a costs calculator^[1] which clearly and accurately calculates financial savings to health by improving housing conditions. This is in addition to the overall benefits to social care, community cohesion through social mobility and environmental improvements.

3b Five Year Plan Outcomes

3b.1 This approach is in line with the objectives set out in the Slough Borough's 5 Year Plan which sets out a clear direction and action plan to improve Slough as a place to work and live, these include:.

- Changing, retaining and growing
- Enabling and preventing
- Using resources wisely

By tackling long term empty properties we will:

- improve the local environment and neighbourhood
- maximise existing housing resources
- improve the existing built environment
- reduce vandalism and associated anti-social behaviour
- tackle growing housing need by increasing housing provision and expanding the housing options available
- regenerate affected areas and reduce the detrimental effect these properties have on the housing market and neighboring properties..
- deal with residents' concerns and the impact of an empty property on local residents

3b.2 Improving conditions of the private rented sector is in line with objective two and four of Slough's Five Year Plan

- **Outcome 2:** *There will be more homes in the Borough, with quality improving across all tenures to support our ambition for Slough*
Key Action- *Higher quality private rented sector housing will be a valued housing option and will reduce long term health problems*
Key Action- Prevent *homelessness where possible through early Intervention and using a range of housing options*
- **Outcome 4:** *Slough will be one of the safest places in the Thames Valley area*
Key Action - *Build on success in tackling anti-social behaviour*

^[1] Housing Health Cost Calculator

Quantifying and demonstrating the health-cost benefits of housing improvements

4. Other Implications

a) Financial

4a.1 The staff resource costs in relation to dealing with the current batch of CPOs and carrying out the proposed feasibility study for introducing a Registration Scheme has been secured from the Capital Transformation Fund.

5.0 Risk Management

Risk	Mitigating action	Opportunities
Legal: There are always risks associated with any enforcement action but the benefits of sending a strong message of “zero tolerance” in respect of empty properties far out weights any potential risk	We will be using the right expertise. Knowledge and experience staff to minimise any risks.	To bring these long term properties back into occupation.
Property: Reduction in risks of damage to the neighbouring properties improving the overall quality of housing	This will be done in accordance with regulation and use of experts	As above
Human Rights: Minimum risks. We ensure compliance with Article 1 of EU see details below.	As above row 1	As above
Health and Safety: N/A	None	As above
Employment Issues; None	None	None
Equalities Issues: Minimum risks	Use of expert to ensure compliance	As above
Community Support: Communities are in full support and have been asking the Council to take these actions	Ensure the Council follow the process to completion	
Communications: We need to reassure communities we are taking action and send a message to Landlords not to keep homes empty.	To work with Customer Service or Corporate Comms to develop an effective communication strategy	To reach owners of empty properties and inform them of the Council’s initiatives.

Community Safety: Taking action will improve community safety	Ensure we follow the process until satisfactory resolution.	As above
Financial		
Timetable for delivery: This is a complex and protracted process and depends on a number of factors	Use of experts and dedicated staff resources to ensure satisfactory and timely conclusion	
Project Capacity: N/A		
Other: None	None	

6. Legal Implications

a) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

6a The Regulations will be enforced in line with the code of guidance, Council's Enforcement Policy and the code of conduct which conforms to the Human Rights Act.

(b) Equalities Impact Assessment

6b.1 The Council has had and will have due regard to its Equalities Duties and in particular with respect to its duties arising pursuant to the Equality Act 2010, section 149. As such, the Council considers that there is no need for an Equalities Impact Assessment to be carried out and that in approving this proposal/policy the Council will be acting in compliance with its duties.

7. Supporting Information

7.1 As detailed in Slough's draft Housing Strategy; the private sector is the most important source of housing for our residents in Slough Borough. Improving the condition of Private Rented Sector is therefore one of the Council's key priorities

We aim to adopt a zero tolerance approach to empty residential properties that are left empty and abandoned in a derelict state. The negative impact of such properties is well documented as well as being a waste of valuable housing resources. According to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors an empty property will reduce the value of neighbouring properties by more than 18%. The Housing Regulation Team are currently dealing with 14 sites, seven of which are at an advanced stage of a Compulsory Purchase Order. A proposal to initiate 7 CPOs for an item on the confidential part of this agenda. This will demonstrate that the council is determined to use all available powers to improve the housing in Slough across all tenures. The draft Housing Strategy sets out a number of ways in which it is intended to do this:

- using all available powers to bring empty properties back into residential use
- undertaking a feasibility study for introducing a borough wide Landlord Registration Scheme. This is to protect good landlords and drive out Rogue/Criminal Landlords from Slough
- undertaking rigorous and robust enforcement action against known rogue landlords who have a history of breaking the law.

- working pro-actively to tackle all forms of anti-social behaviour using all available legislations, working with landlords, tenants and partners
- supporting responsible landlords who take their responsibility seriously and work with them to become professional and grow their business to help the Council to achieve its objective of “provision for good quality and affordable housing”.
- encouraging residents to report empty or rented properties that have a negative impact on the neighbourhood and take a timely and effective action.
- working with all partner agencies to tackle the problem of illegally-occupied outbuildings through a range of approaches.

8. Comments of Other Committees

None

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The proposals in this report to bring empty properties back into use are fully in line with Slough’s Five Year Plan and the new draft Housing Strategy. They will contribute to ensuring that Slough has good quality, affordable private sector housing which meets the needs of our residents, improving health, wellbeing, social mobility and makes Slough a thriving place to live and work.

10. Appendices Attached

None

11. Background Papers

None