

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2015/16**

**HEALTH & WELLBEING SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

20TH JANUARY 2016

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR,
COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN
CONSULTATION WITH THE CABINET
MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR
TACKLING POVERTY, ENGAGEMENT &
HOUSING**

Agenda Item No: 3

**RESPONSE FROM CABINET TO THE
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP IN
RELATION TO EMPTY PROPERTIES**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee with information in the form of an action plan that shows how the recommendations the Scrutiny Working Group made in relation to Empty properties will be taken forward and monitored.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Consider the actions proposed to meet the recommendations made and agree that the progress of this action plan be monitored by the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee.

3. BACKGROUND AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 During 2014, the former Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee agreed to form a working group in respect of issues relating to empty properties within the private sector in RCT. Members of the Scrutiny Committee were concerned at the increasing numbers of empty properties in RCT by April 2014 when there were approximately 3,375 properties that had been empty for 6 months or longer, an increase of 9.5% on the previous year. A working group was formed to look at the detail, not only recognising the current work of the Council in tackling the issue but to consider the external factors that can influence the numbers of empty properties and the extent to which these could be addressed.

- 3.2 Due to the changes in the Council's scrutiny framework, the working group report was presented to the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny committee on the 2nd September 2015 when the findings and recommendations of the report was endorsed and it was agreed that they be passed to the Executive for consideration.
- 3.3 This resulted in nine recommendations needing to be considered. The Scrutiny report was formally considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on the 15th December 2015 when all recommendations were agreed in principle.
- 3.4 To ensure that there is an outcome for each of the recommendations, the Head of Community Housing, in discussion with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Tackling Poverty, Engagement & Housing, has developed an action plan which sets out the actions needed to address the recommendations made and also sets timescales and names of those who will be responsible for the actions.
- 3.5 The action plan is attached at Appendix 1 to this report for consideration by Members.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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**RESPONSE FROM CABINET TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY
WORKING GROUP IN RELATION TO EMPTY PROPERTIES**

Background papers:

Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee - 2nd September 2015

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Appendix 1: Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee

Empty Property Action Plan

<p>Recommendation 1: The Council should develop a strategic vision for the future shape and identity of communities characterised by low housing demand and high concentrations of empty properties to determine how the Council can most effectively contribute to their future sustainability. This vision should consider the proactive re-shaping of these communities and action to build on their unique identities and assets.</p>				
ACTION	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	PROGRESS	STATUS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the Single Integrated Plan, the Council has committed to taking a targeted geographical approach to regeneration. • Tylorstown is the first area that is being targeted for housing led regeneration as part of this approach, under a pilot project called a Housing and Health Action Area • There are 146 empty properties in Tylorstown. These properties will be proactively targeted during the life of the Housing and Health Action Area in order to find a sustainable solution for each one. 	<p>End of March 2017</p>	<p>Housing Strategy and Standards Team</p>	<p>Empty Properties have been identified in Tylorstown and a database established.</p> <p>An audit of each property has begun to establish current condition, impact on community, ownership, intentions of owner etc.</p>	

Recommendation 2: That the Council revises the 2013 Cwm Taf Empty Homes Strategy to reflect the findings of this review, and in particular to make appropriate reference to the importance of using enforcement tools where appropriate, and the viability of innovative, new models based on those executed successfully in other local authorities such as Chimney Pot park in Salford.

ACTION	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	PROGRESS	STATUS
<p>Undertake research to ensure all opportunities and approaches to bringing empty properties back into use have been identified</p> <p>Produce an updated Empty Homes Strategy</p>	September 2016	Housing Strategy and Standards Team		

Recommendation 3: That the Council examines the funding stream at its disposal to tackle empty properties and considers every opportunity to generate private sector funding and develop private sector partnership with a view to increasing financial resources to tackle the issue of empty properties within RCT.

ACTION	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	PROGRESS	STATUS
<p>Research potential finance models and available funding opportunities</p> <p>Ensure that the updated Empty Homes Strategy clearly identifies funding opportunities and provides a framework for investigating the viability a potential of each option.</p>	September 2016	Housing Strategy and Standards Team		

Recommendation 4: That the Service Director, Public Health & Protection is required to complete a review which links to the recommendation taken forward by the HMO scrutiny Working group in 2013 to consider the introduction of selective licensing schemes in defined wards that are experiencing high numbers of empty properties.

ACTION	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	PROGRESS	STATUS
Prepare a business case for Selective Licensing in Tylorstown as part of the overarching Housing and Health Action Area, for decision by Cabinet Member for Housing	March 2016	Housing Strategy and Standards Team		

Recommendation 5: That the Service Director, Public Health & Protection is required to develop an engagement strategy to strengthen the relationship between the Council, the private rented sector and other stakeholders such as Housing Associations to ensure all parties collaborative effectively to bring back into use empty homes.

ACTION	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	PROGRESS	STATUS
Ensure that the revised Empty Property Strategy identifies opportunities for improving engagement with owners and other stakeholders and that it includes a plan for how this will be implemented	September 2016	Housing Strategy and Standards Team		

Recommendation 6: That the profile of the Councils Empty Property Officer is raised and their work is further promoted amongst key partners and Council departments involved in tackling the issue of empty properties in RCT.				
ACTION	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	PROGRESS	STATUS
<p>To launch a specific and targeted campaign to raise awareness of the issues caused by empty properties and the benefits of bringing them back into use. To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a brand • Use of various media e.g website, radio, posters • Improve Council's website and reporting mechanisms • Improve and update the Council's empty property pack 	<p>By December 2016</p>			

Recommendation 7: That a targeted, time limited media campaign with effective branding is undertaken to highlight the issue of empty properties amongst key stakeholders, empty property home owners and the residents of RCT.

ACTION	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	PROGRESS	STATUS
As per Recommendation 6	By December 2016			

Recommendation 8: That the Council does everything at its disposal to ensure that advice and information aimed at bringing back empty properties into use is easily and readily available to all via the Council website.

ACTION	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	PROGRESS	STATUS
As per Recommendation 6	By December 2016			

Recommendation 9: That the Council reviews the current arrangements for Council Tax discounts allowed for empty properties and consideration is given to changing the level of discount (currently 50%) to 25% or less applicable to those properties falling within Class C of the prescribed Classes of Dwellings Order in order to raise the additional revenue (to be ring fenced for housing issues including empty properties).

ACTION	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	PROGRESS	STATUS
Undertake an impact assessment to understand what the implications of changing the Council Tax discount would be both in relation to the Council's income and owners of empty properties.	December 2016	Director of Finance		

