

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

9th MARCH 2017

UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE COUNCIL'S EMPTY PROPERTY GRANT

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, PUBLIC HEALTH AND PROTECTION IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR J ROSSER

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on the progress made, and the uptake of, the Council's empty property grant.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the progress made in respect of the empty property grant (EPG), in particular the number of applications received and their projected financial commitment.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members are updated on the progress community housing are making with one of the Council's key investment priorities.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Members will recall a report to Council on the 10th March 2016 that highlighted a number of key investment priorities for the financial year's 16/17 and 17/18.
- 4.2 The provision of an empty property grant available throughout RCTCBC was considered at that meeting and subsequently approved, with a total capital allocation of £1.5m over a 2 years period, with the principal purpose of the grant being to bring back into use long term empty properties.

- 4.3 A further report detailing the grant conditions, process and eligibility criteria was then presented to cabinet on 19th April 2016 which again received member approval.
- 4.4 The eligibility criteria attached to the grant being:-
- a) The property receiving grant must be within RCTCBC and must have been empty for more than 6 months prior to grant approval.
 - b) The grant will only be available to potential owner occupiers and they must live in the property for a period of 5 years after the grant has been paid.
 - c) Applicants are required to make a contribution of 15% up to a maximum of £3k

Progress to Date (up to 2/2/2017)

- 4.5 To date the Council has received 143 applications for the EPG. 17 of the applications have been cancelled or refused (due to the properties not having been empty for more than 6 months), 18 grants have been formally approved – value £274k, 47 properties have been surveyed and are awaiting approval – projected value £771k. So to date the total number of grants approved and surveyed is 65 with a projected financial commitment of £1M.

Added Value

- 4.6 Whilst the principal objective of the EPG is to renovate individual empty properties, there are a number of “spin off” positive consequences as a result of this investment.
- 4.7 There is the real potential that by renovating individual empty properties confidence is restored in the housing market of the street where the long term empty property was considered a blight.
- 4.8 This investment presents the opportunity for first time buyers to get a foothold onto the property ladder.
- 4.9 This investment acts as a lever for additional private sector investment over and above the grant currently estimated at £280k, with an anticipated additional council tax revenue income of £73k (based on council tax band “A”) when the properties are fully renovated and occupied.

Resources and Marketing Activity.

- 4.10 To administer this new grant community housing has appointed 2 new officers, a dedicated surveyor who forms part of the empty property team and a dedicated administrative assistant.

- 4.11 To date the team have used a number of marketing options to promote the grant with a section on the Council's website, adverts via social media, visits and leaflet drops to all the estate agents in RCT and maintaining a presence to provide advice at property auction events.

Links to the Wider Empty Property Strategy

- 4.12 As at 1st April 2016 there were 2780 empty properties within RCT the effects of which are multi factorial in that they are a blight on local communities and the street scene and they are a wasted resource in terms of council tax revenue. In many of our communities when renovated they provide much needed accommodation and homes for local people.
- 4.13 The EPG in RCT compliments other approaches and products available within the county borough including targeted housing enforcement, the housing into homes loans scheme and the day to day general advice offices provide to our clients.
- 4.14 In 2014/15 114 empty properties within RCT were brought back into use this was improved upon during 15/16 whereby 144 were brought back into use and the target for 16/17 is 170.
- 4.15 Our approach and commitment to try and tackle the issue of long term empty properties within RCT is consistent with the Welsh governments target of bringing back into use 5000 empty properties nationally during the current administration.

Pre Scrutiny

- 4.16 The Council's approach and progress to date on this investment priority was subject to a pre scrutiny session by the Health and Well Being Scrutiny committee on the 8th February 2017 during which the committee received a presentation on progress to date.
- 4.17 During the pre scrutiny session members were supportive of the scheme and its objectives and endorsed the progress made to date.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report is for information only. There are no equality or diversity implications.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 This report is for information purposes only. There are no consultation requirements.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 Based on progress made to date it is envisaged that the capital earmarked for this scheme will be maximised during the agreed 2 year project period

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 8.1 This report is for information purposes only. There are no legal implications.

9. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ SIP.

- 9.1 This project supports the delivery of the Council's Local Housing Delivery Plan and Single Integrated Plan priority that "people in Rhondda Cynon Taf live in safe, appropriate housing in sustainable vibrant communities".

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Since the approval from cabinet on 16th April 2016 steady progress has been made in marketing and attracting interest and applications for the EPG. To date approximately 70 properties are either in the process of renovation or in the grants administrative system.
- 10.2 Based on the current interest and the value of grants in the system currently, it is envisaged that the capital made available for this scheme will be maximised over the 2 years of the project.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Health & Well-being Scrutiny Committee

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background Papers

Proposal to deliver a discretionary empty property grant across Rhondda Cynon Taf – Cabinet: 19th April 2016

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