

Report To: Education & Communities Committee

Date: 19 January 2016

Report By: Head of Safer & Inclusive Communities

Report No:

EDUCOM/07/16/DH

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Subject: Empty Homes Initiative

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with an update on the development of an Inverclyde Empty Homes Initiative

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 At its meeting of 22nd September the Policy and Resources Committee approved a proposal to amend the Council's Council Tax Policy in relation to long term empty (LTE) homes .This follows on from the a previous policy to reduce the level of Council Tax discounts for LTE homes.

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The policy amendment increased the Council Tax charge for LTE properties to encourage owners to return those properties to available units within Inverclyde's housing stock

- 2.2 The additional income resulting from the removal of discounted Council Tax charge on LTE will be used in an initiative to support owners and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to return LTE properties to Inverclyde's affordable housing stock.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Committee:

- a) Note the development of an Inverclyde Empty Homes Initiative and approve the proposed scheme set out at Para 5.0.

John Arthur
Head of Safer & Inclusive Communities

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 A long term empty (LTE) property is a property which has been empty for over 12 months and is not subject to current or appropriate marketing activities for sale or let. There are estimated to be 27,000 LTE private sector properties in Scotland, 600 of which are in Inverclyde.
- 4.2 Bringing LTE properties back into use is an established method for increasing affordable housing supply and it also has an additional benefit of reducing the negative impact on the amenity of a neighbourhood caused by empty properties.
- 4.3 Officers of Safer & Inclusive Communities have met with the Scottish Empty Home Partnership to identify areas of good practice and success in other Local Authority areas and have subsequently developed a proposal which takes cognisance of local issues and opportunities.

5.0 PROPOSAL

- 5.1 The income resulting from the removal of previous LTE discount of the Council Tax charge will be used to support and encourage owners and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to bring LTE homes back into use within Inverclyde's affordable housing stock.
- 5.2 Officers of Safer & Inclusive Communities will work in partnership with colleagues in Revenues & Benefits and with locally operating RSLs to identify LTE properties and to deliver the most appropriate engagement method for bringing them back into use.
- 5.3 There will be 3 core areas of delivery –
 - Information and advice;
 - Support to rent
 - Support to sell
- 5.4 Information and advice will be targeted and tailored by the known circumstances of the owner and the age, location and condition of the LTE home. The aim of information and advice is to ensure that the owner is aware of the negative financial and social impacts of owning an LTE home, whilst being made aware of the significant financial advantages of bringing an LTE home back into use.
- 5.5 Support to rent will encourage owners to rent their properties on the open market or participate in a lead tenancy scheme through a local RSL in return for financial assistance to repair or improve the property. A pilot lead tenancy scheme was developed in 2012/13 with a local RSL which saw a small number of LTE homes brought back into use. It is intended to replicate this successful model.
- 5.6 Support to sell will encourage owners to sell their property on the open market and will provide basic information and signposting to the market.
- 5.7 Support to sell will also include a matching service which is aimed at identifying LTE properties which RSLs may be interested in purchasing to meet their housing needs and demands in particular geographies and/or regain a strong factoring position to facilitate improvements in housing management and maintenance. Support in the form of a purchase subsidy will be available to the RSLs from the Council.
- 5.8 The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership has confirmed ongoing support for the initiative and Inverclyde Council is represented on the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network. The Partnership has invited Inverclyde Council to submit a proposal for a part-funded shared service in 2016/17 and this is currently being considered to assess the potential benefits.

5.9 The Housing Supply Division of the Scottish Government has been asked to consider match funding our budget to allow for expansion of the initiative and we await a response.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Strategic

The development of an Empty Homes Initiative will make a valuable contribution to several strategic aims and objectives as set out in the:

- Inverclyde Alliance Single Outcome Agreement;
- Community Plan; and
- Inverclyde Local Housing Strategy 2011-2016.

6.2 Financial

The Council's financial commitment to the Empty Homes Initiative is as follows:

Financial Implications - One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Year	Proposed Spend	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Financial Implications - Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (if applicable)	Other Comments
Scheme of Assistance	Empty Homes Fund	April 2016	100,000	£80K from 2015/16 - additional receipts from LTE Council Tax charges	

6.3 Human Resources

The Initiative will be delivered by existing staffing resource.

6.4 Legal

The development of lead tenancy based initiative will be progressed by a partner RSL and will not incur any legal responsibilities on Inverclyde Council outwith the legal commitment of the budget(s) outlined in para 6.2

6.5 Equalities

When delivering services to our customers, full cognisance is taken of equality and diversity processes and procedures.

6.6 Repopulation

This plan is intended to increase the supply of housing in Inverclyde and therefore create additional opportunities to meet housing needs and demands.

7.0 CONSULTIONS

7.1 Officers from Finance Services are regularly consulted on the issue of empty homes.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1
- 2016/17 Saving – Long Term Empty Council Tax – P&R, September 2015.
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