

**Classification:** Public

**Key Decision:** No

### Gravesham Borough Council

**Report to:** Housing Services Cabinet Committee  
**Date:** 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
**Reporting officer:** Vicky May, Head of Housing Solutions  
Clare Reynold, Private Sector Housing Manager  
**Subject:** Introduction of Empty Homes Strategy 2023-2028

**Purpose and summary of report:**

To provide Housing Services Cabinet Committee an introduction to the Empty Homes Strategy 2023-2028, along with action plan for implementation of the service.

**Recommendations:**

1. For Members to discuss and provide feedback on the Empty Homes Strategy 2023-2028 prior to being ratified by the Cabinet Members for Housing Services.

<b>Key Implications:</b>	
<b>Item</b>	<b>Implications</b>
<b>Legal</b>	To ensure compliance, Legal Services are an active member of a Corporate Working Group for the Empty Homes service.
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	There is a small budget identified of £30,000 for 2023/24 which could enable Gravesham Council to complete works on behalf of owners and this will be recharged to them.
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	“Policy Commitment: #1 People Enforce a high quality of Private Housing, reporting quarterly on the total number of private sector homes brought back into occupation.”The corporate plan outlines in priority 1 that the council wants to ‘enforce a high quality of private housing’ and ‘work with landlords to tackle property standards, empty homes and homes in multiple occupation. This is measured via performance indicator 16 which reports ‘total number of empty private sector homes brought back into occupation’  Another outcome through working with partners would be to deliver more homes in the borough and would support the Kent County Council Strategy Kent & Medway Housing Strategy 2020-2025 ‘A Place People want to call Home’

<b>Climate Change</b>	As outlined in the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2022-2030, a programme of investment is being delivered to reduce carbon emissions and improve the energy performance our own housing stock. The Empty Homes Strategy, with the Officers input will address upgrading measures to achieve increased thermal comfort, whilst looking to reduce/remove hazards and nuisance.
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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Gravesham Borough Councils existing Empty Homes Strategy was due to be renewed during 2020. The pandemic hindered the renewal. Since the service function has moved directorates as of January 2023. A new strategy has been devised by the new service area.
- 1.2 The 2023-2028 strategy sets out how the Council is committed to bringing long-term empty homes back into use. It will seek to reduce the number of empty homes within the borough, whilst promoting options available to bring empty homes back into use as residential dwellings.
- 1.3 With around 1,060 households on the Councils housing register and limited social housing available, there continues to be a significant demand for housing within the borough and across Kent. Many people cannot access good quality housing, yet many homes stand vacant. Every empty home within the borough is an identified wasted resource.
- 1.4 In adopting this Strategy, the Council will improve the supply of homes across the borough and reduce the number of empty properties. This will potentially increase the choice of housing available and could assist in providing additional housing options to households in the borough looking to secure a new home. This will lead to improved environmental conditions, and a reduction in nuisance to neighbouring properties. Whilst making an economic benefit to the local economy.
- 1.5 An Empty Homes Corporate Working Group has been approved by Management Team and implemented. The working group having now met in Q1, Q2 and Q3.

## 2. Strategy Aims

- 2.1 The council is committed to reducing empty homes across the borough and has at its disposal several statutory powers to take action as necessary. Intervention will be targeted to raise awareness, identify empty homes, provide advice and assistance and, as a last resort, undertake enforcement action. A collaborative approach will be adopted in partnership with all agencies to tackle empty homes
- 2.2 The council has defined three key strategic aims for dealing with empty homes:
  - 2.2.1 Aim 1: Maintain a proactive approach towards the identification and prevention of empty homes.
  - 2.2.2 Aim 2: Bring properties that have been vacant for six months or more back into use and use a range of tools to bring about reoccupation.
  - 2.2.3 Aim 3: Work with our partners to raise awareness of the issues around empty homes.

### 3. Our strategic priorities

- 3.1 The strategy sets out the routes by which the Council aims to bring empty properties back into use so that owners and residents are fully aware of the council’s aims and objectives in order that successes can be monitored against agreed targets.
- 3.2 In order to achieve our aims, our strategy focuses on four key priorities:
  - 3.2.1 Priority 1 – Identification
  - 3.2.2 Priority 2 – Support and advice
  - 3.2.3 Priority 3 - Partnership working
  - 3.2.4 Priority 4 – Enforcement
- 3.3 In adopting this strategy, the council will improve the supply of homes across the borough and reduce the number of empty properties. This will increase the choice of housing available and help to reduce homelessness. In turn, this will lead to improved environmental conditions and a reduction in nuisance to neighbouring properties and communities whilst making an economic benefit to the local economy.

### 4. Appendices

4.1 Empty Homes Strategy 2023/2024

**Lead Officer: Vicky May, Service Manager (Housing Options)**

Email: [victoria.may@gravesham.gov.uk](mailto:victoria.may@gravesham.gov.uk)

Secondary Implications	
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Failure of pro-actively dealing with this piece of work will provide the public with a message that Gravesham Council do not care about empty homes and are not considering the wider housing objectives.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	<p><b>a.</b> Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>?</p> <p>A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner’s Office website via the above links. Yes</p>
	<p><b>b.</b> If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? Yes</p>
	<p><b>c.</b> If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at <a href="mailto:gdpr@medway.gov.uk">gdpr@medway.gov.uk</a>. N/A</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<p><b>a.</b> Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No</p>
	<p><b>b.</b> Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer.</p>

	No <i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	N/A
<b>Digital and website implications</b>	The accessible document will be made available on the Gravesham Borough Council website. Information data taken from Council Tax system is shared with the Private Sector Housing Team via IT methods, feeding directly into Uniform. This is a new way of working, IT have access to the information provided by Council Tax.
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	N/A