

Proposal to Consult on the Empty Property Strategy 2019-2023

Consultation document

Date of issue: 1 February 2019

Action required: Responses by 28 April 2019

Tel: (01656) 643 664

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Overview

This consultation is to invite views on the proposal to implement the Empty Property Strategy 2019-2023

How to respond

This consultation period will begin on the **1 February 2019** and close the **28 April 2019**.

You can respond or ask further questions in the following ways;

Tel: (01656) 643 643

Email:
emptyproperties@bridgend.gov.uk

Online:
www.bridgend.gov.uk/services/consultation.aspx

Post: Housing Strategy, Bridgend County Borough Council, Sunnyside, Bridgend, CF31 4AR.

Alternative formats are also available upon request.

Data protection

Information provided by you on this form will be used to inform the Empty Property Strategy 2019-2023.

The council will take all reasonable precautions to ensure confidentiality and to comply with data protection legislation. Your information may be shared with the Housing Team for the purposes of informing the Empty Property Strategy 2019-2023. Your information will be retained in accordance with the council's Data Retention Policy.

You have a number of rights under data protection legislation. You may also withdraw your consent and ask us to delete your personal information at any time by contacting us. Further information about this is available on our website or you may contact the Data Protection Officer.

If you are dissatisfied with the manner in which we process your personal data then you have the option to make a complaint to the Data Protection Officer and the Information Commissioner's Office.

Related documents

For more information on consultations in Bridgend county borough or how to join our Citizens' Panel.

Visit:

www.bridgend.gov.uk/consultation

Background and information

On average there are around 1400 long-term empty (empty for 6 months or longer) private residential properties in the county borough. Whilst it is acknowledged that flexibility and churn is a healthy and normal part of the housing market and there will be empty homes for sale or let, it is the long-term empty properties that are a particular concern, especially where there is no plan in place to bring them back into use.

There is corporate responsibility and commitment to bringing empty properties back into use and an 'Empty Properties Working Group' has been in place since January 2018 which brings together departments from across the authority that work with empty properties; to work in partnership to bring long term empty properties back into use as residential dwellings. The following departments have contributed to the development of an Empty Property Strategy 2019-2023:

- Housing
- Legal
- Project Officer
- Sustainable Renewal
- Council Tax
- Planning
- Conservation and Design
- Building Control
- Shared Regulatory Services

The working group has implemented an Empty Properties Database to centrally hold information on empty properties in the county borough using council tax data and other sources of information.

An Empty Properties Co-ordinator has been appointed to maintain the above database and focus on implementing the Empty Property Strategy.

The proposal

Building upon the existing approach and acknowledging the importance of working cooperatively with partners and owners, the council has developed an Empty Property Strategy which identifies the following aims and objectives in order to reinforce its commitment to seek to reduce empty properties across the County Borough.

1. Identify and prioritise empty properties.
2. Provide help and assistance to owners.
3. Ensure effective communication is undertaken.
4. Work closely with internal and external partners.
5. Consider the use of enforcement action.

The council is committed to tackling the blight of empty properties and adopts a proactive approach by working with owners to bring their empty properties back into use. However, where properties continue to remain empty and are in a state of disrepair, are detrimental or a nuisance to the community, the council will consider using its legislative powers to remedy the adverse impact on the community and bring the property back into use.

The strategy outlines the council's approach to prioritising and bringing empty properties back into use and help contribute towards increasing the availability of housing for sale or for rent.

The strategy will be reported on and updated annually to take into account any new information available, any legislative changes or any new aims and objectives identified which may require a further public consultation.

Why has this proposal been brought forward?

Empty properties are a wasted resource. Whilst they may not always be left in a state of disrepair, there are always consequences and through implementing the strategy the council are looking to bring back into use empty homes and also reduce the associated factors that are detrimental or a nuisance to the community:

- ▶ Social factors, such as crime including arson, graffiti, squatting, as well as reduced public confidence in the area or the council
- ▶ Environmental factors, including rodent infestation, fly tipping, dangerous structures, and a poor impression of the area
- ▶ Economic factors, such as repair costs, increased burdens on councils' resources, property devaluation, deterred investment

The success in bringing empty private sector residential properties back into use is measured using the following Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Public Accountability Measures (PAMs) and performance will be compared to other council's in Wales:

- ▶ PAM/013 – Percentage of empty private sector properties brought back into use during the year through direct action by the local authority.
- ▶ PAM014 – Number of new homes created as a result of bringing empty properties back into use

What are the advantages if the proposal goes ahead?

- ▶ Increased engagement with owners of empty properties with a view to bringing empty properties back into use and increasing the supply of housing for rent and for sale.

What are the potential disadvantages if the proposal goes ahead?

- ▶ Financial implications for the council when enforcing Empty Dwelling Management Orders, Enforced Sales and Compulsory Purchase Orders.
- ▶ Potential increase in council tax premium for owners of properties that have been empty for two years or longer.
- ▶ Negative press coverage

Impact of the proposals

Impact of the proposals on outcomes (standards & wellbeing).

Impact of the proposals on equalities.

Bringing an empty property back into use can contribute to:

- ▶ Creating rental or sale income, rather than properties being wasted assets
- ▶ Increasing property values
- ▶ Reducing vandalism, arson or squatting, and the fear of crime
- ▶ Enhancing town centres' viability and vitality
- ▶ Creating an increased sense of community
- ▶ Boosting the supply of good quality affordable housing
- ▶ Supporting strong, balanced housing markets and community sustainability
- ▶ Improving the local environment
- ▶ Creating training and job opportunities e.g. local builders carrying out the works
- ▶ Increasing council tax revenues so the council can provide a better service

Risks

- ▶ The risks of implementing the proposal are as follows:
 - Unrealistic expectations from citizens e.g. expecting the council to bring an empty property back into use following a complaint or expecting that all long-term empty properties are a priority. Managing expectations on social media e.g. the web page and during conversations with citizens will help to manage this risk.

- Negative response to the objective “explore options for increasing the council tax premium on properties empty for two years or longer” from owners of these properties. Clear communication with owners as to the reasons why will help to manage this risk.
- Insufficient resources to deliver the strategy, both financial and physical.
- Negative responses from owners who do not wish to be engaged with to bring their properties back into use
- Negative responses from owners and possible resultant negative press from owners who end up having enforcement action taken against them

Alternatives

- ▶ The only alternative is to do nothing which cannot be considered as bringing empty properties back into use is high on the political agenda.

Land and buildings

- ▶ There will be no transfer/disposal of land/buildings owned by the Local Authority that may occur due to the proposal.

Finance

- ▶ The financial cost of the proposal cannot be determined at this stage. This Strategy is to encourage and support landlords into bringing properties into use therefore reducing where possible the last resort of enforcement action.
- ▶ Money has been aligned to resourcing staff (£37,000) and to fund housing renewal and deal with empty property issues across the county borough (£100,000).

The consultation process

- ▶ Deadline 28 April 2019

Next steps

- ▶ Projected timetable for statutory procedure and proposal implementation (include any proposed interim arrangements)

Activity	Date
Response deadline	28 April 2019
Final report published available at: www.bridgend.gov.uk/consultation	June 2019
Report to Cabinet on the outcomes of the consultation.	June 2019

The outcomes of the consultation (which will be incorporated into the proposal where possible) will be reported to the Cabinet of Bridgend County Borough Council.

How to make your views known?

- ▶ How people can make their views known (include postal address).
- ▶ How people can ask further questions
- ▶ Pro forma available to complete online. This is only possible given that a seven-day notice be issues to the consultation team (translation time must also be considered).