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Our reference:
Your reference:
Date: Monday, 12 November 2018



**Rushcliffe Community
Contact Centre**
Rectory Road
West Bridgford
Nottingham
NG2 6BU

To all Members of the Community Development Group

Dear Councillor

A Meeting of the Community Development Group will be held on Tuesday, 20 November 2018 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber Area B, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West Bridgford to consider the following items of business.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Sull'.

Sanjit Sull
Monitoring Officer

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 September 2018 (Pages 1 - 8)
4. Rural Broadband update (Pages 9 - 12)
The report of the Executive Manager – Communities.
5. Armed Forces Community Covenant (Pages 13 - 16)
Report of the Executive Manager – Communities.
6. Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2018 - 2023 (Pages 17 - 50)
Report of the Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods.
7. Work Programme (Pages 51 - 52)
Report of the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services.

Membership

In person
Monday to Friday
8.30am - 5pm
First Saturday of
each month
9am - 1pm

By telephone
Monday to Friday
8.30am - 5pm

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0115 981 9911

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Postal address
Rushcliffe Borough
Council
Rushcliffe Arena
Rugby Road
West Bridgford
Nottingham
NG2 7YG



Chairman: Councillor T Combellack
Vice-Chairman: Councillor R Inglis
Councillors: B Buschman, B Cooper, J Donoghue, M Edwards, J Greenwood, K Khan, R Mallender and F Purdue-Horan

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**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP
TUESDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 2018**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber Area B, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road,
West Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors T Combellack (Chairman), R Inglis (Vice-Chairman), B Buschman,
B Cooper, M Edwards, J Greenwood, K Khan and F Purdue-Horan

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

G Carpenter
D Hayden

Environmental Health Manager
Principal Community Development
Officer
Health Development Officer
Executive Manager - Communities
Constitutional Services Officer

A Julian
D Mitchell
L Webb

APOLOGIES:

Councillor J Donoghue

8 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

9 Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 June 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 5 June 2018 were accepted as a true record and were signed by the Chairman.

10 Digital by Design

The Executive Manager – Transformation and Operations presented a report which provided the Group with an update on the work that had been undertaken regarding the digitising of various services across the Council and on the future objectives for the digital by design programme.

The Executive Manager advised that prior to 2014 the Council had encouraged residents to move towards online or email to access the Council's services and it was noted that the 'channel shift' from face to face to online services was then rebranded as 'digital by default' from 2014 – 2017. This further initiative had seen the development of e-forms and the implementation of Hybrid Mail which allowed documents to be sent remotely, which in turn released capacity for the Business Support Unit team to complete more complex tasks. It was also noted that although the majority of residents had contacted the Rushcliffe Contact Community Centre through face to face or telephone channels there

had been an increase in email communication and online transactions since the implementation of the digital by default initiative in 2014.

The Executive Manager noted that the digitisation agenda was now referred to as 'digital by design' which aimed to maximise the use of technology designed into the service provision.

The Executive Manager and the ICT Manager delivered a presentation to the Group which outlined:

- Pre 2018 Web Update
- The 2015 – 2017 Customer Access Strategy
- External Validations of the website
- Competitive results from Nottinghamshire Districts
- Statistics about current website usage
- Digital by Design 2018 Onwards

Members of the Group asked several specific questions regarding face to face services and whether the Council was continuing to improve face to face customer services as well as digital accessibility. The Executive Manager noted that services were still available for residents who visited the Rushcliffe Community Contact Centre and contact points and that there were now additional office staff from departments such as licensing, planning, revenues and benefits who were able to assist residents face to face on the more complex enquiries which were more difficult to resolve online.

Members of the Group also asked questions regarding online services available for residents. The Executive Manager confirmed that each resident would have access to an account online which would enable them to access all online services such as council tax, planning applications and benefit claim forms. Members of the Group also raised concerns over the verification of identification documents if residents were given the option to scan and send them online. The ICT Manager assured the Group that the systems in place would require a secondary verification. The Group asked to be provided with additional information regarding fraud prevention and identification verification. The Group were also informed that procedures were in place for business continuity if the Council's online systems were to stop working efficiently.

The Group requested that the grass cutting calendar to be placed online for residents to refer to, as as ward members they received many enquiries about grass cutting. The Executive Manager – Communities noted that it would be difficult for officers to keep this information up to date and that the date of grass cutting was dependant on weather conditions throughout the year.

The Group were pleased to note that savings in printing had been made since the introduction of Hybrid Mail and the move from the Civic Centre to Rushcliffe Arena. The ICT Manager stated that the number of printers had reduced from 18 to 4 and that Hybrid Mail had systems in place which stopped letters duplicating.

It was RESOLVED that:

- a) the report of the Executive Manager – Transformation and Operations be noted.
- b) the Group be provided with additional information regarding fraud prevention and identification verification.

11 **Single Use Plastic Action Plan Update**

The Environmental Health Manager presented the report of the Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods which provided the Group with an update of the work undertaken by the Council and its partners to reduce the use of single use plastics. It was noted that since it was resolved on the 7 December for the Council to tackle its use of single use plastics an updated action plan had been completed which identified the detailed tasks across four theme areas:

- a) Audit of the single use plastic currently used across the Council in normal council activities
- b) Identifying ways of seeking support from key partners and contractors to encourage them to commit to support similar actions
- c) Run relevant communications and campaigns to influence and challenge behaviour of residents and businesses in the Borough on these issues
- d) Identify how we prohibit the use of lanterns and helium balloons in Council assets and parks following good practice from other agencies such as Nottinghamshire County Council

The Environmental Health Manager delivered a presentation to the Group which covered:

- The Council Motion
- The Action Plan
- Refill Rushcliffe
- What's Next

Members of the Group raised concerns as a result of their visit to Veolia Materials Recovery Facility regarding the types of plastic that the facility could process for recycling. Members of the Group advised that while they were aware that the Borough Council was not responsible for the recycling contract it was suggested that Nottinghamshire County Council should look again their recycling contract with Veolia to ensure it was fit for purpose. Members of the Group requested that a letter be sent to Nottinghamshire County Council which expressed their concerns which had arisen during their visit to the Veolia Materials Recovery Facility.

Members of the Group were pleased with the implementation of Refill Rushcliffe scheme which allowed residents to refill their reusable water bottles for free from different businesses and facilities within the Borough. The Group were informed that posters had been placed in windows to inform residents where they would be able to refill their water bottles and that the Council were hoping to target rural areas within the Borough with the initiative.

The Group were informed by the Principal Community Development Officer

that the Council had stopped purchasing balloons for events such as Lark in the Park and that traders were discouraged to use single use plastics. It was suggested that the Council should write to supermarkets to discourage them from selling balloons. The Executive Manager – Communities noted that national supermarkets were taking action on the national agenda to reduce single use plastics and that it was instead the Borough Council's aim to tackle single use plastics by influencing local businesses and residents.

It was RESOLVED that:

- a) the report of the Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods be noted.
- b) a letter be sent to Nottinghamshire County Council expressing the concerns of the Group their regarding the input specification for Veolia Materials Recovery Facility.

12 Report on Diversity in Rushcliffe

The Principal Community Development Officer presented the report of the Executive Manager – Communities that provided the Group with an overview of Diversity of Rushcliffe and its impact on service delivery. It was noted that the Equality Act 2010 had challenged Local Government organisations to know how age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion/belief, sex and sexual orientation influenced local communities both individually and collectively. It was also noted that the Equality Framework for Local Government comprised of five performance areas:

- Knowing your communities
- Leadership, partnership and organisation commitment
- Involving your communities
- Responsive services and customer care
- A skilled and committed workforce

The Health Development Officer delivered a presentation to the Group which focused on the 'knowing your communities' section of the equality framework. The presentation also highlighted the Council's actions to address health inequalities within the Borough. The presentation covered:

- Knowing your communities data
- Mosaic Groups in Rushcliffe
- Indices of Multiple Deprivation
- Child Poverty
- Health Determinants
- Health Profile
- Lifestyle Behaviour
- Health inequalities
- Health Priorities
- Health Ambitions
- Dementia
- Recommendations

Following the presentation the Group raised suggestions of subjects for further investigation such as child obesity, dementia and mental health. It was noted that although the diversity of the Council's workforce was scrutinised at Performance Management Board the Group wanted to know about the Borough's local communities and how the Council could engage with isolated communities. The Principal Community Development Officer advised the Group to visit the Nottinghamshire Insight website which helped the Council identify the communities most in need. The Executive Manager – Communities noted that funding was disappearing for small community groups and the Group suggested that they could use funds from their community support scheme grant to support minority groups within the Borough. The Group also asked several specific questions regarding the Rushcliffe Respectful Relations document.

It was RESOLVED that:

- a) the report of the Executive Manager – Communities be noted.
- b) the Group be provided with a further report covering dementia and mental health.

13 Work Programme

The Executive Manager – Communities presented the report of the Executive Manager - Finance and Corporate Services requesting the Group considered it's Work Programme. It was agreed that the Group would receive a report regarding the Council's draft empty property strategy before being considered by Cabinet.

The Group asked questions regarding the funds raised from the disposal of the Borough Art Collection of £15,000. The Executive Manager noted that a sculpture had been considered but that no designs had yet been accepted.

It was RESOLVED that the work programme as detailed below be approved.

20 November 2018

- Rural Broadband Update
- Armed Forces Community Covenant
- Draft Empty Property Strategy
- Work Programme

26 February 2018

- Tree Protection and Promotion in Rushcliffe Update
- Diversity in Rushcliffe
- Work Programme

Action Sheet

Community Development Group – Tuesday 18 September 2018

Minute Item	Action	Officer Responsible
10.	The Group be provided with additional information regarding fraud prevention and identification verification.	Executive Manager – Transformation and Operations.
11.	A letter be sent to Nottinghamshire County Council to explain the Group's findings during their visit to Veolia.	Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods
12.	The Group be provided with a further report covering dementia	Executive Manager – Communities

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm.

CHAIRMAN

Action and Response Sheet
Community Development Group – 18 September 2018

Minute No.	Action	Officer Responsible	Response
10.	The Group to be provided with additional information regarding fraud prevention and identification verification	Executive Manager – Transformation and Operations.	<p>For the vast majority of claimants we are able to verify their id and National Insurance number via our online access to the Department of Work and Pension’s Customer Information Service (CIS) – all claimants in receipt of DWP benefits will have already had their id verified in order to claim from them. We are also able to verify earnings and private/occupational pensions via our new online access to HMRC records, removing the need for claimants to provide their payslips/pension advices and speeding up the claim process – this is a relatively new national service which is working really well.</p> <p>For other claimants, who are not or have never claimed DWP benefits, we ask them to provide proof of the personal identity, passport, birth certificate, driving licence and proof of their address such as recent utility bills.</p> <p>For information there are no exact rules within the benefit regulations regarding id and it is up to each respective local authority to satisfy themselves of the person’s identity and National Insurance number.</p> <p>We also receive a monthly report from the DWP’s Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) to identify any date of birth and National Insurance number discrepancies in both our records – these are reviewed and resolved, usually it is just a typo but sometimes we do need to request additional information if there is a doubt regarding a date of birth or National Insurance numbers.</p> <p>The new scanning module we have purchased recently in order to support our current online benefit claim process allows claimants to submit their evidence at the time they submit their claim (or later if need be) and this is useful for such evidence as proof of rent (tenancy agreements) and proof of capital (bank statements), we will still verify</p>

			their id and National Insurance number using the tools mentioned above.
11.	A letter be sent to Nottinghamshire County Council to explain the Group's findings during their visit to Veolia.	Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods.	Letter and response has been circulated to the Group.
12.	The Group be provided with a further report covering dementia	Executive Manager – Communities	Item added to the work programme for February 2019.



Community Development Group

20 November 2018

Rural Broadband Update

Report of the Executive Manager – Communities

1. Summary

- 1.1. Over the past 5 years, Nottinghamshire County Council has been leading a programme to deliver fibre broadband across Nottinghamshire. This is a multi-million pound programme which will result in 98% of Nottinghamshire premises being able to access a network, capable of delivering superfast broadband by March 2019.
- 1.2. Members will receive a presentation from Ceren Clulow, Broadband Project Manager, Better Broadband For Nottinghamshire Team (BBFN), Growth and Economic Development, Place, Nottinghamshire County Council on:
 - What's already covered (Contract 1 and 2)
 - What's planned for coverage in Contract 3
 - What are the options for the premises within the remaining 2%.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Community Development Group consider and make comments on the presentation from Nottinghamshire County Council Officers particularly on the rollout of fibre broadband to the remaining 2% of properties in the Borough.

3. Supporting Evidence

- 3.1. Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire is a £31m partnership between the County Council and a range of funding partners including Central Government, European Regional Development Fund, D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership, BT and the area's district, borough and City councils. Rushcliffe Borough Council has contributed £245,000 to the programme.
- 3.2. The programme builds on the commercial roll out of fibre based broadband which alone provided superfast access to 86% of properties in Nottinghamshire. However, as a result of the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire programme, over 95% of properties across the county gained superfast access by March 2016.

- 3.3. In May 2015, Nottinghamshire County Council announced a £6.3m deal to extend the reach of fibre even further. This Contract 2 rollout will increase coverage to 98% of homes and businesses across the county by March 2019.
- 3.4. In the first stage of the Better Broadband programme, Rushcliffe's superfast coverage increased from 73% to 92.4%, with almost 9,500 properties gaining superfast broadband access for the first time.
- 3.5. A further 3.6% uplift was originally planned to be delivered through contract 2 rollout. As of 1 November 2018, the current coverage in Rushcliffe is 96.4%. Now following further modelling, the aim is to deliver 98% superfast coverage by March 2019. This modelling utilised underspend and gainshare funds released from Contract 1.
- 3.6. Ahead of the procurement for a third contract, the programme has undertaken an Open Market Review (OMR) which establishes which properties do not currently have access to superfast broadband and are not due to have superfast broadband provided through the commercial delivery of any infrastructure provider.
- 3.7. This differs from previous OMRs the programme has undertaken in that the results are at premises level rather than postcode. This means that we now have a list of addresses which do not have access to superfast Broadband. The list comprises:
 - 1,889 White Premises - properties which cannot currently access superfast speeds and where there are no further plans to provide superfast broadband either through the BBfN programme or the commercial deployment of any infrastructure provider.
 - 1,324 Under review Premises - where premise level broadband coverage has not been clarified. These areas have previously been indicated to have planned commercial coverage for superfast broadband but those plans have been reported through the OMR as being 'at risk' of not being completed. Areas that potentially have superfast premises but where individual premises cannot yet be identified, have also been marked "under review".
- 3.8. Of the 1,889 white premises, approximately 60 of which were identified as built during the last 3 years. This lack of investment is adding to the challenge that the BBfN programme faces and does not meet the expectation of residents and businesses particularly when it is widely accepted that it is more cost effective to install broadband infrastructure as the sites are being developed.
- 3.9. Newly built properties unable to benefit from 21st century connectivity are unacceptable; particularly in light of recent commitments from Openreach (in association with the Government and the Home Builders Federation) which agreed to provide Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) infrastructure - for free - to all new developments of 30 or more dwellings with associated co-funding for

smaller developments. This is alongside similar offers from other infrastructure providers such as Virgin Media.

- 3.10. Contract 3 will initially focus on deployment across Bassetlaw and Newark and Sherwood District Council areas as these areas represent the majority of unserved properties across the County. However the contract will retain the capability to include further deployment across Rushcliffe should further funding be made available.

4. Risk and Uncertainties

- 4.1. The significant number of under review premises will need to be monitored. For these properties to be provided with access to superfast speeds relies on the infrastructure providers (such as Openreach and Virgin Media) to deliver the broadband infrastructure that they have indicated they will provide through their commercial investment plans. Opportunities should be sought to facilitate this investment within the Borough.
- 4.2. New properties being built without access to superfast broadband is unacceptable, developer obligations should include the installation of broadband infrastructure as new properties are built. As a planning authority Rushcliffe Borough Council is well placed to encourage developers to do this, particularly by raising awareness of the support infrastructure providers are offering.

5. Implications

5.1. Finance

There are no financial implications contained in this report.

5.2. Legal

The Contract will be subject to legal review and the appropriate Procurement process.

5.3 Equalities

There are no Equality implications

5.3. Corporate Priorities

- Supporting economic growth to ensure a sustainable, prosperous and thriving local economy.
- Maintaining and enhancing our resident's quality of life.

5.4. Other Implications

None.

For more information contact:	David Mitchell Executive Manager – Communities 0115 914 8291 dmitchell@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers Available for Inspection:	None
List of appendices (if any):	None



Community Development Group

20 November 2018

Armed Forces Community Covenant

Report of the Executive Manager – Communities.

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report provides members with a summary of delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant, adopted by Rushcliffe Borough Council in 2013 and subsequently re-signed in November 2018.
- 1.2. A presentation will be given by Victoria Coomber (Armed Forces Covenant Officer for Rushcliffe, Charnwood and Melton Borough Councils) which will focus on recent achievements, the findings of a mapping/survey exercise and future work programme priorities. Members are requested to comment on delivery to date and the proposed focus of future work.
- 1.3. This meeting represents the first formal scrutiny of actions undertaken to honour the Armed Forces Covenant since it was signed at Full Council in June 2013.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that The Group notes the delivery to date of the Armed Forces Covenant within Rushcliffe and comment on future planned activities.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. This is the first scrutiny by members on delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant within Rushcliffe. It therefore provides an opportunity to strengthen future work by identifying potential new stakeholders/communities or questioning proposed actions.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation to ensure that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly. The covenant encourages local communities to support the armed forces community in their area and promote public understanding and awareness.

- 4.2. The Council formally signed an Armed Forces Covenant in 2013. This resulted in production of an action plan which contained the following four objectives;
- Promote access to services for the armed forces community living in Rushcliffe and provide support as appropriate
 - Promote awareness and understanding of issues affecting the Armed forces Community within the wider community
 - Support military personnel and their families re-settling or re-locating in Rushcliffe
 - Encourage the local community to support the armed forces and personnel, providing opportunities for the public to show their support
- 4.3. Activities delivered against these initial objectives include;
- Creation of a dedicated armed forces page on the Council web-site, with signposting to key partner organisations
 - The Council's housing allocations policy was amended to give an additional 9 months waiting time for armed forces personnel – since 2014 this has rehoused 10 applicants/families with a further 3 currently in the system
 - Establishment of an Armed Forces Member Champion and Officer lead
 - Regular features in the Rushcliffe Reports residents magazine
 - Promoting armed forces funding opportunities to Town and Parish Councils
 - Organising an annual Armed Forces Proms in the Park event, Armed Forces Day Flag Raising, Armistice commemorative service and promotion of the RBL poppy appeal
 - During 2018 there have been further commemorative displays to mark the 100 year centenary of the end of WW1
- 4.4. Similar to many local authorities an information gap regarding the local armed forced population was identified. In 2016, in order to address this challenge and in anticipation of the development of Stanford Hall rehabilitation centre, a partnership was formed with Charnwood and Melton Borough Councils.
- 4.5. A successful partnership bid was submitted to the Ministry of Defence Armed Forces Covenant Fund. This resulted in an award of £97k enabling the appointment of a development worker for a 2-year period from mid-2017. Subsequently, in early 2018 the partnership was successful in securing further funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund to establish veterans hubs and support across the area.
- 4.6. The governance structure covers both project 1 and project 2. There are quarterly project team meetings with officers from the three councils to review delivery and shape future priorities. Above this operational group, there is a Project Board which meets six-monthly and is attended by Armed Forces member champions and Executive Manager/Directors to scrutinise progress against milestones prior to formal reporting to funding bodies.

- 4.7. In November 2018, all Nottinghamshire districts, Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham City Council re-signed an Armed Forces Covenant to re-enforce the commitment within the County to supporting our armed forces community. This forms the basis of an update of recent and planned actions within Rushcliffe which will be presented to members by Victoria Coomber.

5. Risks and Uncertainties

- 5.1. The main risk associated with this report relates to future sustainability of work following the end of external funding. In mitigation, the project aims to create a network of trained agencies and community champions capable of continuing the support as appropriate.

6. Implications

6.1. Financial Implications

The Armed Forces Covenant Officer and Outreach Officer are both fully funded by external grant funding. The Council provides a resource in-kind in the form of management support and office accommodation.

6.2. Legal Implications

A partnership agreement between Rushcliffe, Charnwood and Melton Borough Councils establishes the principles of collaboration to deliver the Project and sets out the governance structures in place to deliver the Project. The 2018 Armed forces Covenant requires the Council to offer support and guidance to the local Armed Forces community and make it easier for them to access help and support from statutory providers.

6.3. Equalities Implications

The Armed Forces Covenant is based upon two key principles:

- No member of the Armed forces Community should face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to other citizens
- In some circumstances, special treatment may be appropriate for the injured or bereaved.

6.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no Section 17 implications in this report.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

- 7.1 The Armed Forces Covenant contributes to maintaining and enhancing our residents' quality of life.

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Group notes the delivery to date of the Armed Forces Covenant within Rushcliffe and comment on future planned activities.

For more information contact:	Dave Mitchell Executive Manager – Communities 0115 9148267 dmitchell@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None.
List of appendices:	None.



Community Development Group

20 November 2018

Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2018 – 2023

Report of the Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 It is proposed to introduce an Empty Homes Strategy in-line with the majority of other Local Authorities.
- 1.2 A draft strategy has been produced in Appendix 1 which highlights how resources can best be targeted to address empty homes in Rushcliffe, and to tap into the rewards and positive outcomes, both financial and community based, that this approach brings.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Community Development Group consider and make comment upon the draft strategy.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

To identify, shape and support the development of the strategy.

4. Supporting Evidence

- 4.1. There are around 900 empty properties in Rushcliffe, around 375 of these have been empty for more than six months, while nearly 100 of these have been empty for more than two years. It is these longer term empty homes which cause most concern as they are more likely to remain empty for longer without intervention, and are also more likely to be an increasing source of blight and complaint.
- 4.2. Empty properties can be detrimental to the lives of local residents and communities. Even a single empty property can blight a whole street or community, reducing the values of surrounding properties and causing nuisance to local residents. Empty homes can also attract vandalism, fly-tipping and other criminal activity, ranging from the minor to the extremely serious, but in addition to increasing crime and the fear of crime there is also potential for a wider detrimental impact on the local community. They also represent a risk for the emergency services and put added pressure on various council services such as Environmental Health.

- 4.3. Although the Environmental Health service have over recent years attempted to tackle empty properties with variable success it is clear that to deliver successful outcomes an agreed strategy is necessary to identify the problem, to determine what action is required, and to identify the resource required to successfully deliver the strategy objectives. This will be supported by enhanced cross-departmental working and the formation of external partnerships which are necessary to bring complex properties back into use. Empty Homes are an increasing feature of Central Government policy, which can be seen through both the New Homes Bonus and recent changes to the Council Tax regime. Leaving homes empty for several years or in some cases decades should not be considered acceptable and a robust and comprehensive strategy will help to bring such properties back into use.
- 4.4. The benefits of a strategy to deal with empty properties can be identified as social, regenerative, financial and strategic. A strategy can:
- assist in meeting housing need;
 - improve housing conditions;
 - assist with a reduction in crime and the fear of crime;
 - regenerate blighted areas;
 - increase Council Tax collection rates and empty home premiums;
 - generate additional income through the New Homes Bonus (NHB).

5. Risks and Uncertainties

- 5.1. Resources - It is considered that an additional resource would be required to fully implement the action plan provided within the strategy. It is considered that initially this could be delivered with a part-time role working 2 to 3 days a week and work is underway to explore if there are existing internal resources that can be redirected to this area of work in the first instance.
- 5.2. Enforcement - When dealing with empty property owners, a voluntary way forward is always preferred. Advice, assistance and incentives reduce demand on Council resources and the need for enforcement action at a later date. In the vast majority of cases this is sufficient, but there are occasions where owners cannot be traced or are unwilling to enter into a voluntary dialogue. In these circumstances, the use of enforcement action needs to be considered. Though used as a last resort, the Council has significant powers, particularly compulsory purchase, but also enforced sale. There is therefore a reputational risk.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial Implications

- 6.1.1 There are costs arising from enforcement action including compulsory purchase (CPOs), enforced sale and works in default however any such costs incurred can be reclaimed through the appropriate legal process. The Council currently has a 'work in default budget' which would be utilised to support this area of work subject to the strategy being adopted.

- 6.1.2 Where the CPO process is used, the ex-owners will be entitled to compensation once the council becomes the owner of the property. If a claim is not settled, or a reference made to the Upper Tribunal (Lands Chamber), within six years, the claim for compensation will be statute barred.
- 6.1.3 However there are also opportunities to maximise income via New Homes Bonus (NHB), debt recovery and unclaimed sales income from CPO's or Enforced Sales.
- 6.1.4 In order to maximise NHB, it is planned to develop a programme of property visits which, when combined with a close working relationship with colleagues in the council tax team, allows the data that is used to calculate NHB award to be as accurate as possible at the time of the data snapshot – usually early October. This ensures that NHB income to the council is maximised each year.
- 6.1.5. There are several types of debt that can be associated with empty homes, the most common being unpaid council tax, works in default costs and residential care charges for previous occupiers. This strategy will consider utilising the powers of enforced sale to recover unpaid council tax debt and works in default monies associated with empty homes.
- 6.1.6 Subject to the outcome of the work detailed in paragraph 4.1 any additional part-time role to implement the action plan would cost a maximum of £21k (22.5 hours) which would be an additional cost to the budget.

6.2 Legal Implications

As identified in 4 and 5 above.

6.3 Equalities Implications

The Council has undertaken an Equalities Impact Assessment. The assessment confirms that this strategy has a neutral impact and no further action is required.

6.4 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

As identified in 3.4 an effective empty property strategy can assist with a reduction in crime and the fear of crime.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

This report links to the following corporate priorities:

Corporate Themes	Empty Homes Strategy Objectives
Deliver economic growth to ensure a sustainable, prosperous and thriving local economy	Objective 5 – Provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owners
Maintain and enhance our residents' quality of life	Objective 1 – To collect and record relevant, accurate and current information of empty homes in the Borough Objective 2 – To raise awareness of the Empty Homes and promote the Strategy Objective 3 – Reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back in to use Objective 5 – Provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owners
Transform the Council to enable the delivery of efficient high quality services	Objective 1 – To collect and record relevant, accurate and current information of empty homes in the Borough Objective 3 – Reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back in to use Objective 4 – To maximise income opportunities including New Homes Bonus and debt recovery

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Community Development Group consider and make comment upon the draft strategy.

For more information contact:	Dave Banks Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods 0115 914 8438 dbanks@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None.
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Draft Empty Homes Strategy Appendix 2 – Equalities Impact Assessment

Rushcliffe Borough Council Empty Homes Strategy 2018 - 2023



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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This is Rushcliffe Borough Council's first Empty Homes Strategy. This document aims to give an understanding of the issues of empty properties and how it impacts on local communities. It looks at why properties become empty, what advice and assistance is available to empty property owners, and how the Council will use the range of powers available to it to return empty properties to use. Tackling empty homes and bringing them back into use will impact positively on our residents, including people in housing need and the wider community for whom empty homes often cause problems.
- 1.2. In Rushcliffe, according to Council Tax records there are currently around 900 empty homes, of which 375 have been empty for six months or more and around 100 of these have been empty for 2 years or more. However, this information is limited as it is recognised that there are a number of empty homes where full Council Tax is being paid and the property has not been registered as being empty.
- 1.3. Empty properties can be detrimental to the lives of local residents and communities. Even a single empty property can blight a whole street or community, reducing the values of surrounding properties and causing nuisance to local residents. Empty homes can also attract vandalism, fly-tipping and other criminal activity, ranging from the minor to the extremely serious, but all increasing crime and the fear of crime as well as having a detrimental impact on the local community. They also represent a risk for the emergency services and put added pressure on various council departments such as Environmental Health.
- 1.4. The benefits of a strategy to deal with empty properties can be identified as social, regenerative, financial and strategic. A strategy can:
 - assist in meeting housing need;
 - improve housing conditions;
 - assist with a reduction in crime and the fear of crime;
 - regenerate blighted areas;
 - increase Council Tax collection rates and empty home premiums;
 - generate additional income through the New Homes Bonus (NHB).
- 1.5. The case for dealing with empty properties is therefore compelling from a community and housing perspective, but there are also strong financial incentives to not only return existing empty homes to use, but to try to ensure that the number of vacant homes does not then increase.

2. The National Context

2.1. The Government has placed considerable emphasis on the importance of returning empty homes to use since 2010. Statistics published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) put the number of empty homes in England in October 2017 at 605,891. Of these, 205,293 were classed as long-term empty properties (empty for longer than six months).

2.2. In 2018 'Empty Homes' a national campaigning charity published a report entitled 'Empty Homes in England'. This report identified an upward trend nationally for empty homes in 2018 after 10 years of a downward trend. It made several recommendations that have also been published in the House of Commons Briefing Paper No. 3012 June 2018, Empty Housing:

- Local authorities should have an empty homes strategy for their area, with the aspiration to reduce the number of long-term empty homes.
- Local authorities and social housing providers should seek funding and allocate resources to buy and refurbish empty properties for people in housing need.
- Local authorities should take a casework approach with owners of long-term empty properties to encourage, advise and support them to bring homes back into housing use. Employing dedicated empty homes staff can ensure that the council is able to act on information about homes, and build up expertise in working with owners, including taking enforcement action where necessary.
- Local authorities with concentrations of long-term empty homes should look at how they can support community-based neighbourhood regeneration approaches.
- Local authorities, particularly in high value areas, should conduct studies to understand the extent and impact of 'buy-to-leave' empty or hardly ever used. Where it is an issue, they should review the measures they could adopt to incentivise people to sell or rent those properties, or not to buy properties in the first place with the intention of leaving them empty or hardly ever used.

2.3. In 2011, the Government confirmed that councils could attract additional funding under the New Homes Bonus scheme for bringing empty properties back into use. Under the scheme, the Government matched the Council Tax raised for each property brought back into use for a period of six years. The number of years over which payments are made was reduced from six to five in 2017/18 and further reduced to four years from 2018/19.

- 2.4. Since April 2013, powers previously held by central government to vary the amount of council tax paid on some empty homes has been devolved to the local level. The aim of this policy is to further incentivise the reoccupation of long term empty homes by increasing council tax payable or by removing reductions or exemptions that were previously in place. Local authorities are now able to decide whether to apply a discount for properties empty for up to six months and those properties empty and in need of considerable renovation. There is also the option of imposing an 'empty homes premium' whereby council tax levels for most properties empty for two years or longer are set at 200%.

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3. The Local and Corporate Context

- 3.1. This strategy highlights how resources can best be targeted to address empty homes in Rushcliffe, and to tap into the rewards and positive outcomes, both financial and community based, that this approach brings.
- 3.2. There are around 900 empty properties in Rushcliffe. Many of these are 'transactional vacancies' and are necessary for the normal operation of the housing market, so when used as a headline figure, it needs to be treated with some caution.
- 3.3. However, in Rushcliffe, around 375 properties have been empty for more than six months, while nearly 100 of these have been empty for more than two years. It is these longer term empty homes which cause most concern as they are more likely to remain empty for longer without intervention, and are also more likely to be an increasing source of blight and complaint.
- 3.4. To date the Council Tax database is the only available method to determine the number of empty properties in Rushcliffe. It is, however accepted that this method does not provide a full and accurate account of the number of empty properties in the Borough. The initial phase of the action plan that supports this strategy sets out to deliver a dedicated empty property live database that will take data from all available council sources including, Council Tax records, Environmental Health databases, Planning records and from customer complaints.
- 3.5. Returning empty properties to use can be the quickest and most cost effective way to increase the supply of housing. While it will not solve the housing problem, it can nevertheless play an important part in maximising existing housing stock for the benefit of the people of Rushcliffe.
- 3.6. This strategy links with a variety of council documents, strategies and plans, as outlined below.

[Rushcliffe's Corporate Strategy 2016 -2020](#)

[Rushcliffe's Housing Delivery Plan 2016 - 2021](#)

[South Nottinghamshire Homelessness Strategy 2017 – 2021](#)

[Rushcliffe Borough Council's Corporate Enforcement Policy](#)

[Rushcliffe Community Strategy: 2009 – 2026](#)

[Rushcliffe 2020 Vision](#)

[Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy](#)

Table 1 – Empty Homes Strategy Objectives matched to the Councils Corporate

Corporate Themes	Empty Homes Strategy Objectives
Deliver economic growth to ensure a sustainable, prosperous and thriving local economy	Objective 5 - Provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owners
Maintain and enhance our residents' quality of life	Objective 1 - To collect and record relevant, accurate and current information of empty homes in the Borough Objective 2 - To raise awareness of the Empty Homes and promote the Strategy Objective 3 - Reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back in to use Objective 5 - Provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owners
Transform the Council to enable the delivery of efficient high quality services	Objective 1 - To collect and record relevant, accurate and current information of empty homes in the Borough Objective 3 - Reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back in to use Objective 4 - To maximise income opportunities including New Homes Bonus and debt recovery

Table 2 - Links to the Housing Delivery Plan 2016-21

Supply: delivering housing growth including affordable housing to meet the needs of our diverse communities	
Strategic tasks	Reduce the number of long term empty homes
Community outcomes	Effective working with property owners to bring long term empty homes back into use
Responsible officer	Sarah Cairns, Protection and Safety Manager
Key partners	Private Landlords; Empty Property Forum
Linkages to other policies/strategies	N/A
Measure and targets	A continued reduction in the number of properties with are vacant and unfurnished over 6 months (Baseline 1 April 2015 = 474)

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4. Background to Empty Homes

4.1 What is an Empty Home?

- 4.1.1. A property is considered to be a long term empty home if it has been unoccupied for 6 months or longer. Privately owned long term empty homes are the focus of this strategy, but concerns will be highlighted to Public Bodies and Housing Associations (Registered Providers) where an empty property they own requires attention.
- 4.1.2. Not all empty homes are located in run-down areas, nor are they necessarily semi-derelict, boarded up or causing a problem. There are a large number of properties which naturally become empty for periods of time, perhaps due to the buying and selling process, being between tenants or when an owner passes away and the probate process delays moving the property on.
- 4.1.3. When a property remains empty for a significant period of time, or is attracting unwanted attention, then it would be considered a “problematic empty home”.

4.2 Why are homes empty?

- 4.2.1. There are a number of reasons why properties become empty, including:

- The property is difficult to sell or let due to its physical state;
- It is being renovated;
- The owner does not have the capacity/finances/time/skills to manage the property;
- The property has been or is being repossessed;
- Probate issues - Where there is an issue of unresolved ownership, often as a result of the previous owners' death;
- Resolving ownership can be a lengthy legal process, during which time the property may remain empty;
- The owner is being cared for elsewhere/is in hospital;
- The property has been abandoned by the owner and the owner is untraceable;
- Property holding, when a property is left empty due to speculative investment, through acquiring a property through inheritance or where partners co-habit leaving the second property empty. Or where the property is adjoined to a business and the owner does not wish to let or sell it;
- Due to an ageing population, older property owners may move into alternative older person's accommodation for care or support needs. They may choose not to sell the property which result in it remaining empty for the short or long term.

It is important that the Council understands why individual properties become and/or remain empty so we can work with the owners in the most appropriate way.

4.3 Challenges Presented by Empty Homes

- 4.3.1. Dealing with an empty property is not always straightforward. A property may be used as a second home, and so not occupied on a permanent basis, but is in use. It may be that non-residential space such as that often found above shops is being used for storage or other business related matters and although not immediately obvious it is in use.
- 4.3.2. There may be properties awaiting planning permissions and work is unable to commence whilst this is being sought. A number of these may include specialist permissions if they are a Listed Building or located in a Conservation Area.
- 4.3.3. Ownership Issues: A property may be owned by a number of different people or companies. The property may be subject to legal proceedings such as probate, divorce settlements or proceeds of crime restrictions.
- 4.3.4. Land Registry Issues: Although it is now compulsory in England to register any property which changes ownership or has a mortgage taken out against it for the first time, properties which have not changed ownership since that time may not be registered with the Land Registry and information regarding the property will not be available from this source.
- 4.3.5. Absentee Owner: It may not be immediately evident who the owner of a property is or where they are, as they may have moved away with little information available to trace them.
- 4.3.6. Intentional Empties: Some properties are deliberately kept empty by the owner for specific reasons such as for their children when they leave home or elderly relatives who are in care. Some are kept empty until the owner feels the housing market is suitable to sell the property at the price they want. Some owners are reluctant to engage with the Council and believe that as the property is privately owned the Council do not have the right to require action to return it to use. They may be unaware, or have no concern for, the affect the property has on the local area and surrounding properties. These are properties which are likely to be left empty for many years and fall into disrepair.

4.4 Why do Empty Homes Matter?

- 4.4.1. The council has to deal with complaints about empty homes from local people who rightly object to unsightly disused properties. There are implications for the Council's Environmental Health team that have to use staff time and resources to intervene to deal with pests, dilapidation, overgrown gardens, damage to neighbouring properties, anti-social behaviour and other issues.
- 4.4.2. For owners leaving a property standing empty can become costly and be a source of unnecessary anxiety.
- 4.4.3. There is an increased risk of vandalism and crime and the property can be difficult to insure, which could result in high repair costs or even mean a complete loss of asset.

- 4.4.4. Even the general deterioration of an unlive in property will result in costs, due to works necessary to enable the property to be brought back up to current Housing Standards.
- 4.4.5. By renting or selling the property not only are the above issues resolved but there is the added advantage of gaining regular rental income or the capital from the sale of the property.
- 4.4.6. For the local community empty homes can have a direct impact on adjoining properties through issues such as damp and structural problems. Alongside this, unsightly properties can have a detrimental effect on neighbouring house prices and can also result in a lack of pride in the area. The possibility of empty properties attracting unwanted attention can also cause anxiety and concern for local residents. The Neighbours and those people living nearby find empty properties unsightly; deteriorating empty homes can be a real blight on a street or area. They undermine the communities' confidence in the area; they attract crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Empty properties may also be vandalised and broken into, resulting in problems for neighbouring properties.
- 4.4.7. There is an environmental impact of leaving homes empty: It has been estimated that it would take the equivalent of 12 football pitches of land to build 800 homes. This could be greenfield sites of open land that local people value. It would be much more efficient and sustainable to make best use of the homes that we already have.
- 4.4.8. The emergency services, the police and fire service deal with complaints and call outs to empty homes, wasting the finite time and money of these vital services.
- 4.4.9. Returning empty properties to use can help eliminate these issues and ensure that house prices in the neighbourhood are protected from preventable reductions. Improving an area can also encourage investment in the local economy and a return of any lost pride in the community created by empty properties.
- 4.4.10. Empty properties returned to use as domestic dwellings increase the availability of homes, including potentially affordable homes. Instead of being a source of concern these homes can be transformed from a wasted resource into a home for an individual or family in housing need. There are many individuals and families in housing need and the utilisation of empty properties could prevent some of these people from facing issues such as homelessness and overcrowding, or provide a first home for a local person.

5. Aims and Objectives Including our Approach to Tackle Empty Homes

5.0.1. The starting point of action on an empty home will be to work with the property owner where possible. Each empty property is different and there are many reasons why they become empty. These reasons can be sensitive and it is important to be understanding of all different situations. However, it is also important to be committed to the principles of the strategy and recognise that an empty property is a blight on the community and a wasted resource. Owners should know that whilst the Council would prefer to work with them, non-action is not an option. By owning a property they have a responsibility for it and must act accordingly.

5.0.2. The Action Plan for working towards the overall aims is included at Appendix A. This identifies 5 key aims and objectives:

- To collect and record relevant, accurate and current information of empty homes in the Borough;
- To raise awareness of empty homes and promote the strategy;
- Reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back in to use;
- To maximise income opportunities including NHB and debt recovery;
- Provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owners.

5.1 Gathering relevant, accurate and current information

5.1.1. Although the Borough holds records of properties considered 'vacant' through Council Tax information it does not currently have any form of dedicated empty homes database. The implementation of this strategy will commence with the development of a new database that will hold the key information on all empty properties in the Borough including its 'risk rating' and prioritisation in terms of action. (See section 1.1 and 1.2 of Appendix A and Appendix B).

5.1.2. The current Council Tax database will assist in identifying the bulk of empty properties in the Borough. As well as these properties we will also add those empty properties that are a source of complaint that have been reported to us. Other properties may also come to light when identified by other departments, key partners or ourselves as being of imminent danger or concern.

5.1.3. The Empty Homes pages of the Council's website provide an overview of our activities and give the public the opportunity to report an empty home. This can be submitted anonymously.

- 5.1.4. Once the database is built and the addresses added they will be prioritised for further investigation and action, based on a scoring matrix (Appendix B) taking into account such factors as length of time empty, nuisance caused, condition of the building and land. (Although the matrix score will be the principal guide to the order in which properties are dealt with, there may be exceptions based on local circumstances).
- 5.1.5. We will explore further opportunities to work more closely with council tax colleagues. This may include 'empty homes' verification visits and information gathering throughout the year to ensure data accuracy. This will occur at the time of the CTB1 snapshot, usually taken in early October, which dictates NHB award.

5.2 Raising Awareness of the Empty Homes Issue

- 5.2.1. Empty homes have been high on the national political agenda for some while now; recent television programmes highlighting the waste and blight associated with empty homes have proven popular. In a time of high housing demand, the issue is even more emotive.
- 5.2.2. The Council will raise the profile of the issue by participating in the National Empty Homes week of action each year and using this as a platform to increase awareness both internally and the residents of Rushcliffe. Social media, local press and the Council's Rushcliffe Reports publication will publish information on the progress of this strategy and also highlight good news stories when available.
- 5.2.3. The public and our partners will be encouraged to report all empty properties and will be given advice on the tell-tale signs to look out for.
- 5.2.4. The Council will update and enhance its web-presence in relation to empty homes and publish statistics news updates.

5.3 Specific measures for bringing empty properties back into use

Support

- 5.3.1. In the first instance, we aim to provide help and advice to the owners of empty homes. Advice may be given with refurbishment, sales, legal and other aspects of lettings, finding tenants, health and safety and energy efficiency.
- 5.3.2. Template letters will be developed to encourage owners of empty homes to return their properties to use and to inform them of the benefits. These communications escalate in seriousness from letters one to three, with the third communication actively presenting the possibility of an appropriate enforcement action being undertaken to ensure the property is returned to use.

- 5.3.3. Template letters are quick to print and send, allowing us to deal with a large volume of empty home owners. In many cases they are anticipated they will be successful, prompting a response from the property owner that leads to assistance that is tailored to suit their requirements. The investigating Officer will organise this aspect of the work and builds solid relationships with the empty home owners to secure voluntary reoccupation.
- 5.3.4. If template letters are unsuccessful then visits will be carried out in an attempt to engage with property owners and provide bespoke support. Due to its nature, this work is detailed and can be time consuming, but its successes reduce the need for further enforcement action. If this approach fails to produce the desired outcome, it provides the groundwork and justification for the enforcement options.

Council Tax Premiums on Empty Homes

- 5.3.5. Since April 2018 the Council has implemented the Council Tax 'Empty Homes Premium' of 150% of the normal rate for properties that have been left empty for 2 years or longer. From April 2019 it is intended to increase this premium to 200% in line with central government policy.

Enforcement

- 5.3.6. When dealing with empty property owners, a voluntary way forward is always preferred. Advice, assistance and incentives reduce demand on Council resources and the need for enforcement action at a later date. In the vast majority of cases this is sufficient, but there are occasions where owners cannot be traced or are unwilling to enter into a voluntary dialogue. In these circumstances, the use of enforcement action needs to be considered. Though used as a last resort, the Council has significant powers, particularly compulsory purchase, but also enforced sale.
- 5.3.7. A voluntary way forward to renovation and re-occupation is always the preferred option, and officers will endeavour to encourage and persuade such progress. However, there remains instances where owners cannot be traced, or where the exhaustive attempts to encourage and promote progress from known owners prove unproductive.
- 5.3.8. Where all other approaches fail, or if there is a risk to health and safety, or a there is a detrimental effect on the community, the Council will consider proceeding with statutory action. By closely following the approaches above and recording all actions taken, a detailed record and evidence base is available at the time of enforcement that demonstrates all reasonable attempts have been made to return the property to use voluntarily. This then accelerates the enforcement process as outlined below and increases the chance of success if the owner was to appeal.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)

- 5.3.9. Available since 2006, an EDMO can be made where an owner leaves a property empty and has no intention of securing its voluntary reoccupation. The Council and a partner Housing Association or ALMO undertake the management of a property for a set period of time, up to seven years, with the EDMO reviewed after that time.
- 5.3.10. There are currently only very limited EDMO's in the country, with only 17 reported to have been secured in 2014. EDMO's are open to appeal at any stage and can be administratively burdensome. The end result is the likely return of the property into the same ownership as that which left it vacant and neglected in the first instance.

Enforced Sale

- 5.3.11. The Law & Property Act 1925 allows local authorities to recover charges through the sale of the property. This option can only be utilised where there is a debt to the local authority registered as a charge on the property. Council tax debts or works in default can be charged to the property in many cases, allowing the enforced sale process to begin.

Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)

- 5.3.12. Nationally compulsory purchase actions on empty homes have been successful, and the outcomes have proven popular with the general public - not least because in addition to enhancing housing availability, the anti-social and criminal activities which empty buildings can so often attract are also addressed as a consequence of the enforcement.
- 5.3.13. CPO's can play a pivotal role in bringing properties back into use, providing the final sanction to ultimately facilitate the renovation and reoccupation of the most problematic empty homes. CPO's provide the 'teeth' to the empty homes process and strengthens every aspect our work.
- 5.3.14. CPO's can be made under S17 of the Housing Act 1985 or under S226 (as amended by Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, for the provision of housing accommodation or to make a quantitative or qualitative improvement to existing housing.

Additional Statutory Powers

- 5.3.15. Where an empty property is causing a specific problem to a neighbourhood or is dangerous or ruinous for example, we have a range of enforcement powers that can be used. The timing and extent of the action taken will be dependent upon the individual circumstances encountered at the property. For a detailed list of these measures, please see Appendix C of this strategy.

5.4. Maximise income opportunities

- 5.4.1. There are three key income streams associated with empty homes: New Homes Bonus, debt recovery and unclaimed sales income from CPO's or Enforced Sales.

New Homes Bonus (NHB)

- 5.4.2. In order to maximise NHB, it is planned to develop a programme of property visits which, when combined with a close working relationship with colleagues in the council tax team, allows the data that is used to calculate NHB award to be as accurate as possible at the time of the data snapshot – usually early October. This ensures that NHB income to the council is maximised each year.
- 5.4.3. New Homes Bonus can overshadow other positive outcomes associated with dealing with empty homes. However, it is important to ensure that strategies and policies do not become overly reliant on this initiative to the detriment of other positive outcomes.

Debt Recovery

- 5.4.4. There are several types of debt that can be associated with empty homes, the most common being unpaid council tax, works in default costs and residential care charges for previous occupiers. The pressures on local government finances since 2010 continue and we therefore seek to maximise all debt recovery opportunities. Rushcliffe will consider utilising the powers of enforced sale to recover unpaid council tax debt and works in default monies associated with empty homes.
- 5.4.5. It is appropriate that all efforts to recover debt associated with empty property are undertaken to recover public money from this wasted resource and redirect it to the services that the council provides for the people of Rushcliffe.

Unclaimed CPO / Enforced Sale Money

5.4.6. When the property has been sold using the enforced sale process you can deduct from the sale proceeds:

- the original works in default costs,
- the legal costs in undertaking the enforced sale procedure,
- conveyancing costs in connection with the sale,
- auctioneer's or other marketing costs,
- other officer time in relation to the enforced sale process,
- any other debts owed to the council.

The balance is then paid over the ex-owner of the property or, if there is another mortgage on the property, you will pay them off first before handing the balance over. If you do not know the identity of the owner, the money will be retained by the council.

5.4.7. Where the CPO process is used, the ex-owners will be entitled to compensation once the council becomes the owner of the property. If a claim is not settled, or a reference made to the Upper Tribunal (Lands Chamber), within six years, the claim for compensation will be statute barred.

5.5 Provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owners

- 5.5.1. Whatever the situation, the Council will contact the owner, talking to them directly where possible, and outline the options for their empty property, providing information that may assist them in deciding what to do.
- 5.5.2. The options for owners are to rent the property out, sell the property or to live in it themselves. How quickly they are able to do any of this will generally depend on the condition of the property, as well as the desire on their part. The Council will advise and forward relevant information.

Certain questions may need to be answered at this stage:

- Does the property require any building work to make it habitable? If so, does the owner intend to fund it direct or are they seeking finance privately?
- If the owner wants to rent the property out, do they intend to do so privately or through a Leasing Scheme? What schemes are available?
- Would they be interested in letting to students?
- Are they aware of the current VAT rates for developing empty property? The Council will send a VAT information sheet outlining reduced VAT rates for works to empty property and provide a statement that the property has been empty to Customs & Excise if needed.
- Is the property a flat over a shop? The Council will send details of the Flat Conversion Allowance – a tax allowance introduced by the Inland Revenue in 2001 and designed to encourage people to develop empty space above shops to rent out.
- Do they want to sell the property? The Council can offer guidance on looking for estate and letting agents locally, details of auctions and dealing with any legal matters.
- Has the property been the subject of any complaints? It may be necessary to take action against an owner if there are issues such as build-up of rubbish, vermin, 'nuisance' to adjoining properties or if the condition of the property is affecting local amenity.
- Is the owner an established landlord? Are they interested in joining the East Midlands Landlord Accreditation Scheme?

6.0 Performance Monitoring and Review

6.1. The purpose of this strategy is to explain the current situation with regard to empty homes both on a national and local basis and to set out the Council's future plans. It is essential that the effectiveness of action delivered by the implementation of the strategy is closely monitored and reviewed. In order to develop a good system of performance management it is proposed to undertake the following actions: -

- Monitor the number of empty homes back into use
- Develop up to date knowledge of best practice through research and liaison
- Monitor and review delivery of actions within the Implementation Plan

6.2. It is proposed to review and update the Implementation Plan on an annual basis.

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Appendix A – Action Plan

Objective 1 - To collect and record relevant, accurate and current information of empty homes in the Borough						
Sub Reference	Action	Success Criteria & Outcomes	High, Medium or Low Priority	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource implications
1.1	Develop and maintain an empty property database containing information provided by Council Tax and collected through investigations, complaints and surveys	A managed database providing a prioritised list of empty properties for action	High	Jan 2019	Database available and populated by Jan 2019 and then on-going to maintain	Low: Initial officer time to set up and populate (3 days) then within existing caseload to maintain
1.2	To risk assess known empty properties and identify properties for proactive enforcement	A managed, risk assessed empty property database that generates a prioritised list of empty properties for action	High	Mar 2019	Prioritised list available by Mar 2019 and then maintained on-going	Low-Medium: 1 day to complete this task for known active cases, and 3-5 days for all long term empty properties (>2yrs) on the Council Tax database

Objective 2 - To raise awareness of the Empty Homes and promote the Strategy						
Sub Reference	Action	Success Criteria & Outcomes	High, Medium or Low Priority	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource implications
2.1	To promote the strategy within the Authority to other departments and elected members	Presentation / distribution of information to elected members and managers	M	Jan 2019	Feb 2019	Low: Within existing resources (1 day)
2.2	To promote the strategy within the community	One publicity event or local press article publicising action on empty homes each year (to coincide with the national Empty Homes Action Week)	M	Jan 2019	On-going each year	Low: within existing resources (1/2 day)
2.3	To develop a web page specific to empty homes and publish this strategy	Members of the public are able to obtain information on the empty homes strategy and report problem empty homes on-line	M	Feb 2019	Mar 2019	Low: within existing resources (1/2 day)

Objective 3 - Reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back in to use						
Sub Reference	Action	Success Criteria & Outcomes	High, Medium or Low Priority	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource implications
3.1	Investigate the use of and agree a procedure for the enforced sale of empty homes	Enforced sale action is able to be taken in relation to problem empty homes	M	Mar 2019	Apr 2019	Low: within existing resources (1-2 days)
3.2	Investigate the use of and Agree a procedure for Compulsory Purchase Orders and Empty Dwelling Management Orders	Able to use CPO or management orders to return problem empty homes back to occupation	M	Mar 2019	May 2019	Low: within existing resources (1-2 days)
3.3	Develop agreements with local housing associations with a view to them leasing / purchasing empty properties for use as social housing	Agreement in place with at least one RSL to lease or purchase empty houses	M	April 2019	June 2019	Low: within existing resources (1-3 days)
3.4	Implement this strategy to tackle individual empty homes	Full enforcement action, including works in default, taken by all relevant Service areas within the Council Bring XX empty homes back into use annually	H	Jan 2019	On-going	TBC

Objective 4 - To maximise income opportunities including New Homes Bonus and debt recovery

Sub Reference	Action	Success Criteria & Outcomes	High, Medium or Low Priority	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource implications
4.1	Maximise debt recovery opportunities through both enforcement and informal methods	Identify all opportunities for debt recovery Pursue all suitable cases in conjunction with colleagues in legal services Further expand the use of Enforced Sale powers	M	April 2019	On-going	TBC
4.2	Maximise income through New Homes Bonus through focused visits to all qualifying empty homes	Develop and refine existing best practice. Ensure all cases are accurately recorded by council tax prior to closing Complete all necessary visits to allow accuracy in CTB1 return that dictates NHB Further develop and refine already strong relationship with Council Tax colleagues to ensure information is suitably recorded	M	April 2019	On-going	TBC

Objective 5 - Provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owners						
Sub Reference	Action	Success Criteria & Outcomes	High, Medium or Low Priority	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource implications
5.1	To produce an empty property guide for owners of empty properties and members of the public	Empty Home guide sent to owners of empty homes	L	June 2019	August 2019	Low: within existing resources
5.2	To develop specific web pages for owners of empty properties and assistance available	Full information for the owners/landlords on options for addressing empty homes on the Council's website	L	April 2019	June 2019	Low: within existing resources

Appendix B Empty Property Scoring and Rating System

Each empty property identified will be assessed using a scoring sheet which considers various criteria. The result of this assessment is that the property will be placed in a category which determines the priority level it is given and the subsequent course of action taken.

Properties will be reassessed when necessary / new information is obtained to ensure they remain situated in the correct categories and the correct level of priority is given.

The categories will be classified as follows:

RED – (scores 40 or over)

Cases which fall into this category will be prioritised. All avenues will be explored with the owner to return their property to use in a way that suits their own needs, the needs of the Community and the Council. Where assistance is refused and the owner is unwilling to cooperate, all enforcement options will be considered to establish the most appropriate course of action.

AMBER - (scores 20 - 39)

Cases which fall into this category will be considered a lower priority than those in the Red category. Resources will still be invested in these cases and officers will work with owners in an attempt to prevent property from deteriorating and being reassessed to a higher category. Where necessary, enforcement options will be employed if considered the most appropriate course of action. Cases in this category will be monitored on a more frequent basis than those properties which fall within the Green category and will be reassessed where necessary.

GREEN - (scores less than 20)

Cases which fall into this category will be given a lower priority for action, but owners will be contacted and offered any assistance they may need to return their property back into use. These properties will be monitored for any change and reassessed where necessary.

Empty Homes Assessment Scoring Sheet

Criteria	Classification	Score
Time Empty	< 1 year 1-2 years 2-5 years 5-10 years > 10 years	0 5 10 15 20
Location	Extremely isolated with no access Isolated property with access Rural residential area Urban residential neighbourhood Prominent position	0 5 10 15 20
Special Interest	Listed Building Located in a Conservation Area	10 5
General Condition	Well maintained Acceptable for surrounding area Noticeably empty/unattractive Extremely unsightly/detrimental to the area	0 5 10 20
Unwanted attention	Attracting criminal activity such as graffiti, fly tipping, vandalism, anti-social behaviour	20
Debts Owed to Rushcliffe Borough Council	No outstanding monies owed < £500 £500 - £2000 £2000 - £5000 >£5000	0 5 10 15 20
Owner Interaction	High level of cooperation Average level of contact & efforts made Minimal contact & little efforts made No contact/untraceable/no efforts made	0 5 10 20
Total Score		

Appendix C Main Statutory Enforcement Options

Town & Country Planning Act 1990, Section 215: Where the condition of an empty home is detrimental to the amenity of the area.

Building Act 1984, Sections 77-79: Where an empty home is in such a condition to be dangerous or is seriously detrimental to the amenity or of the neighbourhood.

Building Act 1984, Section 59: Where the condition of the drainage to a building is prejudicial to health or a nuisance.

Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 80: Where a statutory nuisance exists, is likely to occur or recur at the property.

Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, Section 4: Applied where the condition of the property is such that it is providing or likely to provide harbourage to rodents.

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, Section 29: Allows the council to act if a property is open to unauthorised access and is a risk to public health.

Housing and Planning Act 2016, Part 7: Allows authorisation to be given for officers to enter land (and property on that land) in connection with a proposal to acquire a compulsory interest in that land (and property on that land).

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, Section 16; and Town & Country Planning Act 1990, section 330 – A notice may be served to establish information regarding property ownership or interests in land.

Housing Act 1985 Section 17 and the Acquisition of Land Act 1981: Forms the basis for the compulsory purchase of land/buildings for the provision of housing accommodation.

Housing Act 2004 Part 4: Grants powers to take over the management of a property using Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO).

Law of Property Act 1925, Part III: The basis for enforced sale where certain debts are owed to the Local Authority.

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, Part 4: Allows for enforcement of matters considered to be detrimental to the quality of life to those in the locality.

Public Health Act 1961 Section 34: Deals with the removal of waste from property or land.

Public Health Act 1936 Section 83: Deals with the cleansing of filthy or verminous premises.

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EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM

Name and brief description of proposal/project / policy / service being assessed: **Draft Empty homes Strategy 2018- 2023**

Information used to analyse the effects of equality: Formal consultation with the following:
Parish Councils, Housing Associations, Police and Crime Commissioner, variety of landlord and tenant based consultees also including the Residential Landlords Association.

	Could particular benefit (X)	May adversely impact (X)	How different groups could be affected: Summary of impacts	Details of actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact (or why action not possible)
People from different ethnic groups			Neutral impact. All property owners will be assessed by the same criteria standard for empty homes with no predicted adverse impact upon the protected characteristic of race	All property owners will be assessed by the same criteria standard for empty homes with no predicted adverse impact upon the protected characteristic of race
Men, women (including maternity/pregnancy impact), transgender people			Neutral impact. All property owners will be assessed by the same criteria standard for empty homes with no predicted adverse impact upon the protected characteristic of sex.	None identified
Disabled people or carers		x	Generally a neutral impact. All property owners will be assessed by the same criteria standard for empty homes with no predicted adverse impact upon the protected characteristic of disability	Mitigating circumstances may potentially need to be managed in the case of a bereavement where someone may be suffering from mental health issues and require signposting to additional support. However, there is seen to be no adverse impact in administering the premium.
People from different faith groups			Neutral impact. All property owners will be assessed by the same criteria standard for	None identified.

			empty homes with no predicted adverse impact upon the protected characteristic of religion or belief	
Lesbian, gay or bisexual			Neutral impact. All property owners will be assessed by the same criteria standard for empty homes with no predicted adverse impact upon the protected characteristic of sexual orientation.	None identified
Older or younger people			Neutral impact. All property owners will be assessed by the same criteria standard for empty homes with no predicted adverse impact upon the protected characteristic of age.	None identified
Other (marriage/civil partnership. Looked after children, cohesion/good relations, vulnerable children/adults)			Neutral impact. All property owners will be assessed by the same criteria standard for empty homes.	None identified

OUTCOME(S) OF EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT: *(delete as appropriate)*

No major change need

Names of officers who conducted EIA and date

Geoff Carpenter 29/10/18

Approved by:
(manager signature)



Date: 31/10/18

 <p>Rushcliffe Borough Council</p>	Community Development Group
	20 November 2018
	Work Programme

Report of the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services

1. Summary

1.1. Members are asked to propose future topics to be considered by the Group, in line with the Council's priorities which are:

- *Delivering economic growth to ensure a sustainable, prosperous and thriving local economy;*
- *Maintaining and enhancing our residents' quality of life;*
- *Transforming the Council to enable the delivery of efficient high quality services.*

2. Recommendation

2.1. It is RECOMMENDED that the Group notes the report and considers any future topics.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

Date of Meeting	Item
26 February 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree Protection and Promotion in Rushcliffe Update • Diversity In Rushcliffe (Health – Dementia) • Work Programme

For more information contact:	Peter Linfield Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services 0115 914 8439 plinfield@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers Available for Inspection:	None.
List of appendices (if any):	None.

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