

Report to:

LEVELLING-UP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Relevant Officer:

Carl Carrington, Head of Planning Quality and Control

Date of meeting:

24 January 2024

EMPTY PROPERTY DATA

1.0 Purpose of the report

1.1 This report provides an update on how the service are actively reducing the number of empty properties across Blackpool. There will always be a number of short-term empty properties which will be empty in void periods between tenancies, especially in coastal communities such as Blackpool with high levels of transience. The service focus on long-term empty properties (those which have been empty for at least six months, including both residential and commercial)

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 To consider the report, identifying any issues for further scrutiny and challenging service performance.

3.0 Reason for recommendation(s)

3.1 To note the report

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered

4.1 N/A

5.0 Council priority

5.1 The relevant Council priority is:

- 'The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool'
- 'Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience'

6.0 Background and key information

6.1 Empty properties blight communities and it is important to do everything we can to

create more sustainable options for housing and better overall quality of living for local residents. Whilst our approach is to work with property owners wherever possible, we will also consider enforcement action where necessary. Through efficient and effective partnership working we have reduced the number of problematic empty properties across Blackpool.

- 6.2 Local authorities across England have called on the Government to give them more powers to deal with empty properties. It comes as a log jam in the social rental sector, high costs in the private rental sector and the chronic undersupply of housing nationwide have forced councils to find temporary accommodation for record numbers of people.
- 6.3 The Empty Property Officer has been in post since June 2021, and the responsibility for the service is in the process of being transferred to Planning as part of the Planning Enforcement team. This will not change the priorities or dilute the responsibilities of the Empty Property Officer.
- 6.4 The Council Tax list of all empty properties in Blackpool (of around 1500 properties) is a fluid list (updated daily) and is sent to the Empty Property Officer on a quarterly basis. He uses this to cross-check the properties he is dealing with. Not all the 1500 are problematic, we estimate about 50 of them are at any one time. The Empty Property Officer deals with the most problematic empty properties on a risk and threat basis.
- 6.5 The Empty Property Officer updates the working group (who meet every 6-8 weeks) about these “top 50” and where in the process the priority properties are and it also allows for the involvement of other specialist officers within the group.
- 6.6 To date, the Empty Properties Officer on partnership with other members of the Planning Enforcement and Public Protection teams have achieved:
 - Community Protection Warnings issued – 24
 - Community Protection Notices issued – 15
 - S215 Notices – 7
 - Prosecutions – 10 (8 successful, 1 withdrawn and 1 ongoing)
 - Enforced sales - 7 (2 successful, 5 ongoing)
 - No. properties removed from list – 24
- 6.7 The above figures may seem low in relation to the size of the overall list, but it should be remembered that all of the cases dealt with involve legal or court processes which can take in excess of 18 months to complete. These properties are also usually the worst cases with the most complex background and every case we win through the courts strengthens case law for appeals and encourages owners to deal with issues at an earlier stage.

6.8 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7 List of appendices

7.1 None

8 Financial considerations

8.1 All activity is in line with and covered by existing budgets.

9 Legal considerations

9.1 None

10 Risk management considerations

10.1 None

11 Equalities considerations and the impact of this decision for our children and young people

11.1 None

12 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations

12.1 None

13 Internal/external consultation undertaken

13.1 None

14 Background papers

14.1 None