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Sevenoaks District Empty Homes Action Plan 2009 – review of progress

NO.	OBJECTIVE	TIMESCALE	RESOURCES	PROGRESS UPDATE 2015
1	To increase the annual target for bringing empty homes back into use to 20	Mar 2009	External funding and existing resources	<p>Empty homes back into use:</p> <p>2009/10 - 20</p> <p>2010/11 - 20</p> <p>2011/12 - 17</p> <p>2012/13 - 15</p> <p>2013/14 - 15</p> <p>2014/15 - 12</p> <p>In 2011 the target was reduced to 15 due to reduced officer time a change in housing strategy work plans and associated priorities. The target was removed in 2014/15 to allow for officers to support other strategy work programmes, though outcomes are still reported through the LSP housing sub-group.</p>
2	Liaise with TMBC and TWBC to consider sharing an empty homes officer	Jun 2009	To explore options for funding	<p>Empty Homes function was moved from Private Sector Housing to Housing Policy in 2011. The EHO position now has a much wider remit,</p>

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				helping to deliver wider housing strategy. It is no longer an option, therefore.
3	To improve the Council's housing intelligence by employing methods set out within housing intelligence section of the strategy	Aug 2009	Existing resources	Closer working with Council Tax on the New Homes Bonus has resulted in more accurate empty homes data. Regular press releases/In Shape articles, mail-shots and visits have encouraged the public to identify empty properties.
4	To raise awareness of empty homes issues and to encourage Council members and officers to identify empty homes	Ongoing	Existing resources	Regular press releases and In Shape articles/case studies have helped raise awareness. Publicity through the No Use Empty initiative, including the newsletter. Internal promotion included emails to staff and Councillors during 'Empty Homes Week'.
5	To promote the reportemptyhomes.com website	Ongoing	Officer time	Link was given on the Empty Homes page of the Council website. However, this site no longer exists (under review).

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6	To contact owners of long-term empty homes to establish the reasons for being empty	Ongoing	Officer time	Yearly mail-shot to all long term empty home owners (in conjunction with Council Tax). Owners are also contacted if a complaint is made to the Council about an empty property. An 'Empty Homes Advice Surgery' was held in Sept 2011 with TMBC, for owners to drop in and get advice on their options.
7	To visit long-term empty homes to assess location and condition	Sep 2009	Officer time	Properties visited when complaint received and follow up visits made to monitor condition and check if still empty. Visits also made following reviews of the Council Tax data.
8	To agree priority criteria for empty homes for consideration of assistance or other action	Dec 2009	Existing resources	Red/amber/green priority scoring system used when property first inspected and then reviewed yearly.
9	To extend and improve the Council's empty homes database	Jun 2009	Existing resources	A regular list is provided by Council Tax and data has been improved through the New Homes Bonus work. Properties empty

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				less than 6 months also monitored to try and prevent these becoming long term empties.
10	To work with the National Landlords' Association (NLA) on empty homes issues (e.g. landlord training)	Ongoing	Existing resources	Landlords Forum held three times a year in conjunction with the NLA, TWBC and TMBC.
11	To provide more effective promotion and publicity	Ongoing	Existing resources	Press releases and In Shape articles/case studies have been produced on a rolling basis to build momentum. Promotion also undertaken during 'Empty Homes Week', including Twitter and Facebook. Empty homes work highlighted in the Councils 'Value for Money' campaign. Radio interview also given. Promotion/publicity also provided via No Use Empty initiative.
12	To provide a dedicated telephone line	Aug 2009	Existing resources	Dedicated telephone 'hotline' set up by KCC No Use Empty. Call details emailed to relevant Officer. Dedicated website also set-up.

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13	To maximise KCC No Use Empty scheme funding and provide 3 grants per annum	Up to 2011	KCC funding (interest paid by SDC and recovered annually)	6 loans provided since 2009 at a total value of £304,000. 12 empty homes back to use.
14	To administer the Granting Homes Scheme and provide 3 grants per annum	Up to 2011	RHB funding/officer time	13 grants provided since 2009 (including empty homes, accreditation & energy efficiency grants) at a value of £116,880. 20 empty homes back to use.
15	To consider utilising the Community Payback Scheme	Jun 2009	Officer time and external funding	No suitable cases identified.
16	To work in partnership with housing associations on the management of empty homes	Aug 2009	Officer time and external funding	Potential cases put forward to local provider but did not proceed. Management option set up with Amicus Horizon through the No Use Empty 'Affordable Homes loan scheme'.
17	To work with other Kent local authorities to secure external funding	Ongoing	Officer time	KCC No Use Empty secured HCA funding under the Empty Homes Programme (Affordable Homes loan scheme). Scheme is open to all of the Kent LA's.

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18	To consider purchasing unsold new build open market housing and to secure external funding	Ongoing	External funding (HCA)	No suitable cases identified. Changes in the housing market have reduced the number of long term empty new build properties in the District.
19	To assess other empty properties for residential suitability, e.g. redundant commercial space such as offices or above shop accommodation	Ongoing	Potential for external funding (HCA)	Commercial premises for conversion to residential considered under the No Use Empty loan scheme. Potential cases also identified via planning applications.
20	To consider short life housing for temporary accommodation	Dec 2009	To be agreed	No suitable cases identified.
21	To consider a front funding scheme where the Council funds repairs and gains nomination rights (to deduct repayments from rental income)	Oct 2009	To be agreed	Nomination rights not included in empty homes grant conditions as the main priority is to bring the property back into use. Nomination rights are available through the No Use Empty 'Affordable Homes Loan Scheme'.
22	To consider Mortgage Rescue Scheme for those at most risk of losing their homes	Ongoing	External funding and existing resources	No suitable cases identified.

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23	To compile a list of estate agents and auctioneers willing to market empty homes	Aug 2009	Officer time	Advice leaflet produced on property auctions including contact details for auctioneers in the South East. Discount available with an auctioneer via the No Use Empty scheme. Contact details provided of relevant trade bodies.
24	To review and update the Council website area of empty homes	2009/10	Existing resources	Empty Homes webpage made more concise and includes downloads of advice leaflets. Links provided to external websites, including the No Use Empty website.
Additional information – The ‘New Homes Bonus’ was introduced after this action plan was published. A regular working group was set up with Council Tax to carry out a yearly data cleansing exercise to maximise the potential grant that could be achieved by reducing the number of long term empty homes.		2011 onwards	Existing resources	Amount of New Homes Bonus generated by reducing the number of empty homes between 2010 and 2015: £1,329,090.00 (paid over a 6 year period). (Note: 20% is allocated to KCC as the upper tier authority).

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Abbreviations	
HCA	Home and Communities Agency
KCC	Kent County Council
LA	Local Authority
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NLA	National Landlords Association
RHB	Regional Housing Board
SDC	Sevenoaks District Council
TMBC	Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
TWBC	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council