

Committee: Community

Agenda Item

Date: September 14, 2006

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Title: EMPTY HOMES OFFICER INITIATIVE

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Item for decision

Summary

1. A proposal to jointly finance a post of Empty Homes Officer has been made by Environmental Health colleagues at Epping Forest and Brentwood District Councils.

Recommendations

2. Members are asked to consider the initiative and to advise officers on whether to take the idea further.

Background Papers

3. Draft proposal from Brentwood DC

Impact

- 4.

Communication/Consultation	Close consultation will be needed with partners
Community Safety	Will help in reducing the number of long term empty properties
Equalities	None
Finance	Two year commitment to jointly finance the post
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	Will involve an agreement between the parties
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	Management of any appointee would require special attention

Situation

5. New powers to deal more effectively with long term empty properties have recently come in to force. These powers enable Housing Authorities to apply to the Residential Property Tribunal for an interim Empty Dwelling Management Order if a property has been empty for more than 6 months and does not benefit from one of the exemptions to this action, for instance if the owner is in a long term care home or is actively marketing the property for sale or letting. If the owner still leaves the premises vacant the Council can then issue a final EDMO and take over the active management of the property for up to 7 years, although the ownership of the property is not affected.
6. Colleagues at Brentwood DC and Epping Forest DC have suggested that the three authorities could enter in to an agreement to jointly finance an Empty Homes Officer to work equally on behalf of each partner on empty homes issues.
7. The benefits of such an approach are that the LAs are similar in character, the scale of the problem is roughly the same, about 400 to 500 properties in each District and that neither of the Councils could justify a full time post on their own.
8. Costs would be in the range £15 000 to £20 000 per authority depending on experience and on costs.

Risk Analysis

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Existing staff resources are insufficient to effectively deal with long term empty homes	Medium	Medium	An additional part time member of staff be recruited to carry out this task