



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**



Cabinet

Tuesday, 9 July 2024

Report of Councillor Virginia Moran,
Cabinet Member for Housing

Empty Homes Strategy

Report Author

Ayeisha Kirkham, Head of Public Protection
Mieke Alcock, National Management Trainee

✉ ayeisha.kirkham@southkesteven.gov.uk, mieke.alcock@southkesteven.gov.uk

Purpose of Report

This report presents the updated Empty Homes Strategy. The Strategy was initially implemented in 2022. The revised version has been updated to reflect changes in the national and local context, providing a framework for the Council's approach to reducing the number of Empty Homes within the district and mitigating their impacts.

This report seeks approval of the updated Empty Homes Strategy, as recommended by Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 1. Approves the updated Empty Homes Strategy for adoption and publication.**
- 2. Delegates authority to the Head of Service for Public Protection to make minor amendments to the strategy to ensure continued accuracy.**

Decision Information	
Is this a Key Decision?	No
Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Connecting communities Housing
Which wards are impacted?	All Wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance

1.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Completed by: Paul Sutton, Interim Head of Finance (Deputy 151)

Legal and Governance

1.2 There are no significant legal or governance implications arising from this report.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Monitoring Officer

Diversity and Inclusion

1.3 This policy provides an outline of the Council's priorities for dealing with empty homes. The need for equality impact analysis should be determined on a case-by-case throughout its implementation.

Completed by: Carol Drury, Community Engagement Manager

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 In 2022, South Kesteven District Council published an Empty Homes Strategy, outlining the approach of the Council to bring empty homes back into use and address the impacts that they may have on our communities. In the latter part of the last financial year, responsibility for Empty Homes transferred from the Housing Directorate to the Public Protection Service.
- 2.2 An Empty Homes Working Group has now been established, containing a range of officers with a role or interest in empty homes, for example Officers from the Planning team. This operational working group has met twice, in March 2024 and May 2024, and reviewed the previous strategy, identifying that an update was required to reflect recent changes in the national and local context, and to review the approach that SKDC will take to tackling empty homes. The revised strategy is intended to replace the existing strategy.
- 2.3 The Council does not have a statutory responsibility to implement an Empty Homes Strategy, however this is regarded as good practice and aims to provide transparency and consistency in our approach to Empty Homes.
- 2.4 The strategy primarily concerns long term empty homes (LTEH), defined as properties that have been vacant for over two years. There are a variety of risks associated with LTEH, including the attraction of anti-social behaviour, fly tipping and vandalism, visual degradation, and the reduction of housing supply within an area.
- 2.5 Nationally, just over 1% of the UK's housing stock is defined as long term empty, and in England the number of LTEH has increased by nearly ten per cent over the past five years according to a report by the Local Government Association.
- 2.6 Currently the rate of Empty Homes in South Kesteven is in line with the national picture. As of 31 March 2024, there were 661 empty homes within the district. Of these, 497 properties have been empty for between six months and two years, and 164 have been empty for over two years.
- 2.7 While the majority of empty homes reported are privately owned, a small number of these properties are owned by South Kesteven District Council. As of 28 May 2024, there were 15 properties owned by SKDC that had been recorded as empty for over 2 years. As further investigation into Empty Homes takes place, this number may be updated. These properties are not within the scope of the strategy, and may be reviewed and reported on separately by the Voids Team.
- 2.8 The Empty Homes Strategy sets out the Council's response to LTEH, including how properties will be prioritised. It also sets out the tools and powers held by the Council to take enforcement action when deemed necessary.

- 2.9 The updated version of the strategy retains the same focus and core objectives as the previous strategy published in 2022. The priorities listed within the strategy remain the same. The order in which these priorities are listed does not reflect the value of the activities.
- 2.8.1 Priority 1: The Council will identify and work with owners of long term empty properties to bring them back into use for re-occupation
 - 2.8.2 Priority 2: Develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders to bring empty properties back into use.
 - 2.8.3 Priority 3: Improve our neighbourhoods by addressing long term empty homes that have become the focus of anti-social behaviour and neglect.
 - 2.8.4 Priority 4: Provide advice and information to help raise awareness around empty homes.
- 2.10 The Empty Homes Working Group is developing operational guidance to work alongside this strategy and further clarify the process undertaken in response to Empty Homes to ensure a consistent and proportionate approach.
- 2.11 The proposed Empty Homes Strategy was reviewed by Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 June 2024. The Committee recommended that Cabinet approve the Empty Homes Strategy.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 South Kesteven District Council does not have a statutory duty to have an Empty Homes Strategy, however it is regarded as good practice to do so. The strategy aims to provide transparency and consistency in the way SKDC deals with empty homes.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 Cabinet could recommend that the Empty Homes Strategy is not updated, and that the existing version of the strategy remains in place.
- 4.2 The implementation of an Empty Homes Strategy is not a statutory duty of the Council, and therefore it could be decided not to implement an Empty Homes Strategy.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 Empty Homes can be a cause of concern for communities. In order to effectively tackle Empty Homes, respond to concerns from residents, and support property owners in bringing their property back into use, it is important that SKDC implements a clear and consistent approach, with teams across the Council working together and sharing knowledge.

- 5.2 This strategy provides a framework for the approach to Empty Homes and aims to lead to a reduction in the number of Empty Homes across the district, as well as mitigate their impacts.
- 5.3 The updates proposed to the strategy ensure that figures and cited information are recent, and that the strategy is updated following changes to the teams holding responsibility for dealing with Empty Homes.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 There is no statutory requirement to undertake consultation for this update to the Empty Homes Strategy. As a result, no consultation is proposed. The strategy provides a guide for the process undertaken when properties have been vacant for over six months, and any legislative action resulting from information contained in the strategy will be undertaken in accordance with the legislative requirements.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 Local Government Association – Article containing information about Empty Homes, available online at: [Empty homes in England rise by nearly 10 per cent in five years | Local Government Association](https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/empty-homes-england-rise-nearly-10-cent-five-years) (<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/empty-homes-england-rise-nearly-10-cent-five-years>)
- 7.2 Empty Homes Strategy 2022, available online at: [Empty Homes Strategy FINAL.pdf \(southkesteven.gov.uk\)](#)
- 7.3 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee 6th June 2024, webcast link available: [Agenda for Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 6th June, 2024, 2.00 pm | South Kesteven District Council](#)

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A: Updated Empty Homes Strategy – Draft
- 8.2 Appendix B: Updated Empty Homes Strategy Appendix 1 – Legislation Table