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For all enquiries relating to this agenda please contact Sharon Hughes  
(Tel: 01443 864281 Email: [hughesj@caerphilly.gov.uk](mailto:hughesj@caerphilly.gov.uk))

**Date: 25th January 2023**

To Whom It May Concern,

A multi-locational meeting of the **Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee** will be held in Penallta House, and via Microsoft Teams on **Tuesday, 31st January, 2023 at 5.30 pm** to consider the matters contained in the following agenda. Councillors and the public wishing to speak on any item can do so by making a request to the Chair. You are also welcome to use Welsh at the meeting, both these requests require a minimum notice period of 3 working days. A simultaneous translation will be provided on request.

Members of the public or Press may attend in person at Penallta House or may view the meeting live via the following link: <https://civico.net/caerphilly>

This meeting will be live-streamed and a recording made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. Therefore the images/audio of those individuals speaking will be publicly available to all via the recording on the Council's website at [www.caerphilly.gov.uk](http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk)

Yours faithfully,

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

**Christina HARRY**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

## AGENDA

- 1 To receive apologies for absence.

Pages

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2 Declarations of Interest.

Councillors and Officers are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and/or prejudicial interest(s) in respect of any item of business on this agenda in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Code of Conduct for both Councillors and Officers.

To approve and sign the following minutes: -

- 3 Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 29th November 2022. 1 - 6
- 4 Consideration of any matter referred to this Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.
- 5 Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme. 7 - 18
- 6 To receive and consider the following Cabinet reports\*: -
1. Corporate Performance Assessment 2021/22 (Joint Scrutiny Committee) – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022;
  2. Draft-Assessment Report for 2021/22 (Joint Scrutiny Committee) – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022;
  3. Low Cost Home Ownership Policy – 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022;
  4. Housing Revenue Account Charges – 2023/2024 – 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022;
  5. Draft Budget Proposals for 2023/24 (Joint Scrutiny Committee) – 18<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

*\*If a member of the Scrutiny Committee wishes for any of the above Cabinet reports to be brought forward for review at the meeting please contact Sharon Hughes, 01443 864281, by 10.00 am on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023.*

To receive and consider the following Scrutiny reports: -

- 7 Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2023-2028. 19 - 60
- 8 Caerphilly Town 2035 - Project Overview and Progress Report. 61 - 72

**Circulation:**

**Councillors** Mrs P. Cook (Vice Chair), D. Cushing, G. Ead, Mrs C. Forehead, A. Hussey, L. Jeremiah, C.P. Mann, A. McConnell, B. Owen, L. Phipps, Mrs D. Price, J.A. Pritchard, A. Whitcombe (Chair), S. Williams, W. Williams and J. Winslade

And Appropriate Officers

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Those individuals that attend committee meetings to speak/give evidence will be named in the minutes of that meeting, sometimes this will include their place of employment or business and opinions expressed. Minutes of Meetings including details

of speakers will be publicly available to all via the Council website at [www.caerphilly.gov.uk](http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk). except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items.

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## HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 29<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2022 AT 5.30 P.M.

#### PRESENT:

Councillor A. Whitcombe – Chair  
Councillor P. Cook – Vice Chair

#### Councillors:

D. Cushing, G. Ead, C. Forehead, A. Hussey, L. Jeremiah, C. Mann, A. McConnell, L. Phipps, Mrs D. Price, J. A. Pritchard, S. Williams, W. Williams and J. Winslade.

#### Cabinet Member:

Councillor S. Cook (Housing).

#### Together with:

N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), M. Jennings (Principal Housing Strategy Officer), L. Allen (Principal Group Accountant - Housing), S. Isaacs (Rents Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) and S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer).

## RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting would be live-streamed and a recording made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items - [Click here to view](#). The Committee was advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor B. Owen.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A. McConnell declared a personal and prejudicial interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 8 – Housing Revenue Account Charges 2023/2024, as a Council tenant, and left the meeting during consideration of this item. Details are also minuted with the respective item.

### **3. MINUTES – 9<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2022**

The Chair addressed the Scrutiny Committee to provide clarification as to why the previous two Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meetings were cancelled.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the special meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2022 be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the special Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2022 (minute nos. 1 - 5) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **4. MINUTES – 21<sup>ST</sup> JUNE 2022**

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 (minute nos. 1 - 7) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **5. CALL-IN PROCEDURE**

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

### **6. HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny Manager presented the report which outlined details of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the period November 2022 to March 2023 and included all reports that were identified at the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website.

A request was made for a report on factory built housing and modern methods of construction.

Following consideration of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme, and subject to the additional report proposed, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 13 votes for, 0 votes against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Councils' website.

## **7. CABINET REPORTS**

None of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had been called forward for discussion at the meeting.

## **REPORTS OF OFFICERS**

Consideration was given to the following reports.

## **8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CHARGES - 2023/2024**

Councillor A. McConnell declared a personal and prejudicial interest, as a Council tenant, and left the meeting during consideration of this item.

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report for Members to consider and take a view on the increased council housing rent charges proposed in the report, prior to consideration by Cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022. Members were informed that the charges predominantly focused on council house rents, but also included garages, and are intended to be effective for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2023/2024 financial year.

A Member commented on the proposed 6.5% property rent increase which would increase the current average rent by £6.10 per week from £93.80 to £99.90 per week over 52 weeks and highlighted a number of points regarding affordability, particularly in relation to the percentage of tenants receiving financial assistance towards their rent and those in receipt of state pension. The Member felt that, on balance, this was an affordable increase and therefore supported the recommendation.

The Scrutiny Committee commented on the importance of building new Council homes. This was supported by the Cabinet Member for Housing who acknowledged the need to not only build new Council homes, but to also maintain them. The Cabinet Member for Housing further commented on the increased level of inflation and the need to ensure tenants are supported.

A Member asked how inflation has impacted the Housing Revenue Account and was advised that inflation rates have caused a sharp increase in costs such as materials and fuel. The Head of Housing explained that the proposed rent increase of 6.5%, which is the maximum permitted by Welsh Government, is well below inflation so the Council will still need to borrow £10m, and service that debt, to remain even and to continue business as usual. It was further explained that if rent is not increased by 6.5%, more money would have to be borrowed. In response to a Members question, the Committee was advised that all local authorities borrow through the Public Works Loan Board. This offers preferential rates in terms of borrowing, which is currently around 1.3% but is projected to significantly increase in the coming weeks and months.

Further information and clarification were sought on garages available for rent. The Head of Housing confirmed that the majority of garages are rented by non-council tenants. The Committee was informed that Officers are looking into a strategy about what could be done with some of the vacant garages, as some have been put out to market with limited success. The Head of Housing suggested that alternative development opportunities could be looked at where they are not attractive to residents.

In response to a Member's query, an explanation was provided on the difference between the Housing Revenue Account budget and the Council budget. The Head of Housing

explained that the Housing Revenue Account is a ring-fenced account funded mainly from rental income and it cannot be used for anything other than affordable housing. The purpose is set out in the Housing Strategy and Business Plan and cannot be used across any other Council services.

It was noted that Caerphilly County Borough Council is ranked the lowest Local Authority in Wales in terms of local authority rent and a request was made for figures on any of the neighbouring authorities. In response, the Cabinet Member for Housing informed the Committee that the latest statistics can be obtained from Data Stat Wales.

The Scrutiny Committee sought clarification on a recent e-mail sent to all Councillors regarding Welsh Water payments. The Rents Manager confirmed that as from April 2023 water rates will not be paid as part of the tenants rent. Welsh Water will contact tenants directly to arrange payment methods.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 11 votes for, 0 votes against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that: -

- (i) Rent is increased per property to the maximum permitted as per the WG rent policy which is 6.5%. This would increase the current average rent by £6.10 per week from £93.80 to £99.90 per week over 52 weeks.
- (ii) The level of rent for garages from April 2023 be increased by 5.5% to £8.85 per week.

## **9. LOW COST HOME OWNERSHIP POLICY**

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report which sought the views of Members prior to the presentation of the Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) Policy to Cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022. The Scrutiny Committee was informed that data from the Office of National Statistics shows that the cost of owning a home is becoming increasingly more expensive, with house price inflation outstripping growth in income. This policy will help people who are unable to afford to purchase 100% of a property on the open market and help to reduce the numbers of people currently on the common housing register.

In response to a Members query, clarification was provided on a number of points in relation to shared equity and shared ownership. It was explained that originally the policy was based on a shared equity approach only, which at the time of development met Welsh Government's criteria for accessing social housing grants. However, changes to Welsh Government funding criteria means that shared equity is no longer eligible for grant funding. Following a review of the consultation responses and recognising that shared ownership still attracts Welsh Government grant funding, a decision was taken by the Head of Housing to expand the range of products in the LCHO policy to include shared ownership. It was further explained that both the shared equity and shared ownership options will be considered when looking at the development programme as the shared equity option might work better for certain sites being brought forward. The Head of Housing provided clarification on the older persons shared ownership option. A Member raised concerns in that once the homebuyer purchases 75% of their home, no rent is payable on the remaining share.

A Member drew particular attention to the report which stated that the policy will help to reduce the numbers of people currently on the common housing register and it was asked if



this would be the case if the properties were for rent rather than shared ownership. The Head of Housing explained the need to utilise as many options as possible to address those that are on the register, including those that are way down the priority order and have been on the register for some time. It was commented that people who are on a lower banding on register may have a bit more disposable income. A share in a property would allow them to move off the register and into some form of ownership and then potentially staircase through to full ownership.

In response to a further query the Head of Housing advised the Committee that the policy contains criteria governing the resale of a property. Homebuyers will be required to initially offer the property to the Council before placing it on the open market. The Council will have 28 calendar days to formally respond to this offer. Where the Council declines the offer to purchase the property or fails to respond with the prescribed timescale, the homeowner may sell the property on the open market without restriction.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report and any amendments or clarifications raised by Members be incorporated into the report prior to presentation to Cabinet.

The meeting closed at 6.09 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2023, they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR

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## HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 31<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2023

**SUBJECT: HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE  
SERVICES**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Forward Work Programmes are essential to ensure that Scrutiny Committee agendas reflect the strategic issues facing the Council and other priorities raised by Members, the public or stakeholder.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members consider any changes and agree the final forward work programme prior to publication.

### 4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To improve the operation of scrutiny.

### 5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee forward work programme includes all reports that were identified at the scrutiny committee meeting on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022. The work programme outlines the reports planned for the period January 2023 to March 2023.
- 5.2 The forward Work Programme is made up of reports identified by officers and members. Members are asked to consider the work programme alongside the

cabinet work programme and suggest any changes before it is published on the council website. Scrutiny committee will review this work programme at every meeting going forward alongside any changes to the cabinet work programme or report requests.

- 5.3 The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme is attached at Appendix 1, which presents the current status as at 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The Cabinet Work Programme is attached at Appendix 2. A copy of the prioritisation flowchart is attached at appendix 3 to assist the scrutiny committee to determine what items should be added to the forward work programme.

#### 5.4 **Conclusion**

The work programme is for consideration and amendment by the scrutiny committee prior to publication on the council website.

### 6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 No assumptions are necessary.

### 7. **SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 As this report is for information only an Integrated Impact Assessment is not necessary.

### 8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising as a result of this report.

### 9. **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no specific personnel implications arising as a result of this report.

### 10. **CONSULTATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been included in this report.

### 11. **STATUTORY POWER**

- 11.1 The Local Government Act 2000.

Author: Mark Jacques, Scrutiny Officer jacqu@carphilly.gov.uk

Consultees: Dave Street, Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing  
Mark S. Williams, Corporate Director for Economy and Environment  
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer

Lisa Lane, Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer,  
Legal Services  
Councillor Andrew Whitcombe, Chair of Housing and Regeneration  
Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor Patricia Cook, Vice Chair of Housing and Regeneration  
Scrutiny Committee

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme
- Appendix 2 Cabinet Forward Work Programme
- Appendix 3 Forward Work Programme Prioritisation Flowchart

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## Forward Work Programme - Housing & Regeneration

Date	Title	Key Issues	Author	Cabinet Member
31/01/2023 17:30	Empty Homes Strategy (Decision)	To seek Cabinet approval of the proposed strategy	Davies, Claire;	Cllr. Cook, Shayne;
31/01/2023 17:30	Caerphilly Town 2035 Update		Kyte, Rhian;	Cllr. Pritchard, James;
31/01/2023 17:30	Information Item - Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring – Period 7		Allen, Lesley;	Cllr. Cook, Shayne;
31/01/2023 17:30	Information Item - Environment & Economy 2022-23 P7 Budget Monitoring Report		Roberts, David;	Cllr. Stenner, Eluned;
14/03/2023 17:30	CHTG - Final Report to Council		Taylor-Williams, Nick;	Cllr. Cook, Shayne;
14/03/2023 17:30	HRA Business Plan 2022/23	To update the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet on the latest Housing Business Plan position in advance of submitting the plan to Welsh Government by 31/3/23, which is a requirement under the terms of the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) grant. The Housing Business Plan is a 30 year plan and will include rental increase assumptions and forecasted borrowing requirements to enable the HRA to maintain viability while meeting its core objectives.	Allen, Lesley;	Cllr. Cook, Shayne;
14/03/2023 17:30	Houses of Multiple Occupation Protocol	To advise Members of the draft protocol with regards to Houses of Multiple Occupation within the County Borough	Street, Dave;	Cllr. Cook, Shayne;
14/03/2023 17:30	Information Item - HRA Budget Monitoring Period 9		Allen, Lesley;	Cllr. Cook, Shayne;
14/03/2023 17:30	Information Item - Environment & Economy 2022-23 P9 Budget Monitoring Report		Roberts, David;	Cllr. Stenner, Eluned;
06/06/2023 17:30	LHMA (Local Housing Market Assessment) and the Welsh Government Prospectus	To discuss and approve the LHMA and the Prospectus. Welsh Government requires all Local Authorities to undertake a Local Housing Market Assessment and a Prospectus. The documents set out the requirement for housing within the county borough and is utilised to inform the LDP, the allocation of Social Housing Grant and the Council's own Caerphilly Homes development programme	Roberts-Waite, Jane;	Cllr. Cook, Shayne;
12/09/2023 17:30	Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy (Sept 23)		Roberts-Waite, Jane;	Cllr. Cook, Shayne;

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**Cabinet Forward Work Programme – 24th January 2023**

**APPENDIX 2**

Meeting date:	Report title:	Key issue:	Report author:	Cabinet Member:
25/01/2023 13:00	Pontllanfraith Indoor Bowls	To provide an update on the management of the Islwyn Indoor Bowls Centre and to recommend a revised approach moving forward.	Mark S Williams;	Cllr. Chris Morgan;/Cllr. Nigel George;
25/01/2023 13:10	Bryn Carno funding update	To provide Cabinet with a funding update regarding the remedial works to address issues associated with failed external wall insulation to both Caerphilly Homes' and private residential properties at Bryn Carno, Rhymney.	Nick Taylor-Williams;	Cllr. Shayne Cook;
25/01/2023 13:20	Extension of Flexible retirement - Exempt Item	To agree a flexible retirement extension for 1 year.	Dave Roberts;	Cllr. Eluned Stenner;
22/02/2023 13:00	Budget Proposals for 2023/24 and Updated Medium -Term Financial Plan (MTFP)	Following the public Consultation, Cabinet to consider the outcome and endorse the 2023/24 budget proposals prior to final determination by Council on the 28th February 2023, and to note the updated MTFP.	Stephen Harris;	Cllr. Eluned Stenner;
22/02/2023 13:10	Private Finance Initiative (PFI)	To receive and consider a report on a review of the council's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts.	Stephen Harris;	Cllr. Eluned Stenner;

**Cabinet Forward Work Programme – 24th January 2023**

**APPENDIX 2**

Meeting date:	Report title:	Key issue:	Report author:	Cabinet Member:
22/02/2023 13:20	Welsh Government Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rate Relief Scheme	To provide details of the new 'Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rate Relief Scheme' offered by WG for 2023/24 which the Authority must formally adopt.	John Carpenter;	Cllr. Eluned Stenner;
22/02/2023 13:30	Empty Property Grant Approval	For Cabinet to consider the new Welsh Government National Empty Property Grant Programme.	Nick Taylor-Williams; Claire Davies;	Cllr. Shayne Cook;
08/03/2023 13:00	Biodiversity and Grass Cutting Regimes	To seek Cabinet approval in relation to proposals to enhance and promote biodiversity in our grass cutting regimes across the county borough and following consultation with local members.	Mike Headington;	Cllr. Chris Morgan;
08/03/2023 13:10	Empty Homes Strategy	To seek Cabinet approval of the proposed strategy.	Claire Davies; Mark Jennings;	Cllr. Shayne Cook;
08/03/2023 13:20	Council Participation strategy 2023-2027	To seek approval of the revised participation strategy that captures the new requirements of the local government and elections act.	Hayley Lancaster; Rob Tranter;	Cllr. Nigel George;
22/03/2023 13:00	Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2022/23	To seek Cabinet approval of the Housing Business Plan position in advance of submitting the plan to Welsh Government by 31st March 2023.	Nick Taylor-Williams;/Lesley Allen;	Cllr. Shayne Cook;
22/03/2023 13:10	Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2021-2022	For Cabinet to consider and approve the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2021-2022 prior to publication on the Council's website.	Kath Peters; Anwen Cullinane;	Cllr. Nigel George;

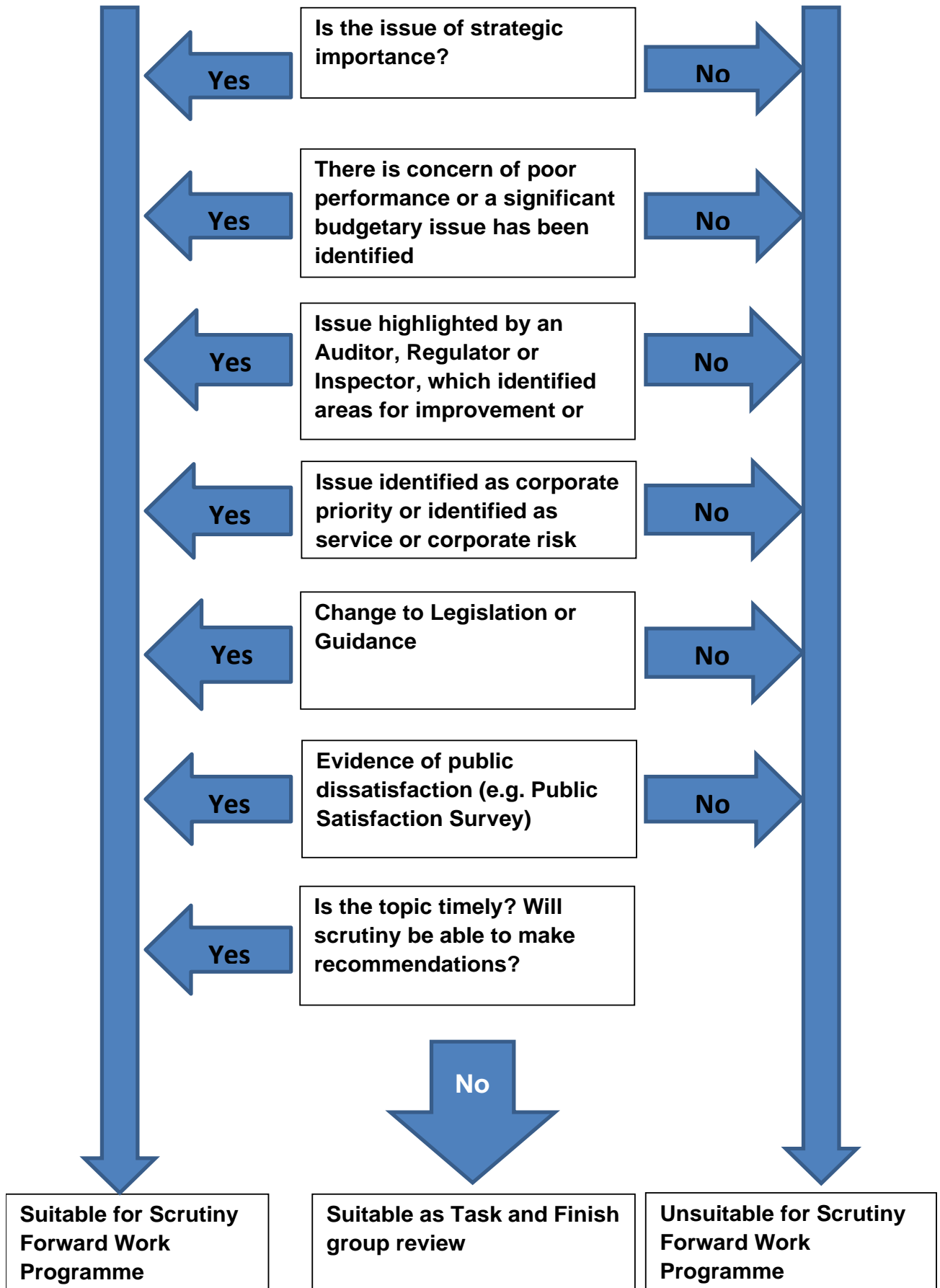
**Cabinet Forward Work Programme – 24th January 2023**

**APPENDIX 2**

Meeting date:	Report title:	Key issue:	Report author:	Cabinet Member:
22/03/2023 13:20	Caerphilly Homes Task Group	To agree that the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) ceases as the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) Programme has been completed.	Nick Taylor-Williams	Cllr. Shayne Cook;
22/03/2023 13:30	Gender Pay Gap	To agree the Gender Pay Gap report which has to be published by 31st March 2023.	Lynne Donovan	Cllr. Nigel George;
05/04/2023 13:00	Draft Waste Strategy	For Cabinet to agree the draft Waste Strategy	Marcus Lloyd; Hayley Jones;	Cllr. Chris Morgan;
19/04/2023 13:10	Workforce Development Strategy 2021-24 - 6 month update	To provide Cabinet with a 6 month update with the progress against the Workforce Development Strategy.	Lynne Donovan;	Cllr. Nigel George;
19/04/2023 13:20	Employee Wellbeing Strategy 2021-24 - 6 monthly update	To provide Cabinet with a 6 month update with the progress against the Employee Wellbeing Strategy.	Lynne Donovan;	Cllr. Nigel George;
19/04/2023 13:00	Review of the Local Public Convenience Strategy	To seek Cabinet approval for the Council's updated Local Public Convenience Strategy following a review and public consultation.	Rob Hartshorn;	Cllr. Philippa Leonard;
03/05/2023 13:00	No items currently scheduled			
17/05/2023 13:00	Waste Strategy	For Cabinet to consider the outcome of the public Consultation and approve the final Waste Strategy.	Marcus Lloyd; Hayley Jones;	Cllr. Nigel George;
31/05/2023 13:00	No items currently scheduled			
14/06/2023 13:00	No items currently scheduled			

Meeting date:	Report title:	Key issue:	Report author:	Cabinet Member:
28/06/2023 13:00	Local Housing Market Assessment and the Welsh Government Prospectus	For Cabinet to discuss and approve the Local Housing Market Assessment and the Welsh Government Prospectus. Welsh Government requires all Local Authorities to undertake a Local Housing Market Assessment and a Prospectus. The documents set out the requirement for housing within the county borough and is utilised to inform the LDP, the allocation of Social Housing Grant and the Council’s own Caerphilly Homes development programme.	Nick Taylor-Williams;/Jane Roberts-Waite;	Cllr. Shayne Cook;
12/07/2023 13:00	No items currently scheduled			
26/07/2023 13:00	Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report plus the Annual Safeguarding Management Information Report.	To seek approval of the Annual Safeguarding reports.	Gareth Jenkins;	Cllr. Elaine Forehead;
26/07/2023 13:10	Day Services	For Cabinet to consider and approve the new proposed Day Services Model.	Jo Williams;	Cllr. Elaine Forehead;

**Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme Prioritisation**



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## **HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 31<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2023**

**SUBJECT: PRIVATE SECTOR EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2023-2028**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek the views and agreement of members regarding the Empty Homes Strategy 2023 - 2028 prior to the presentation to Cabinet on 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2023.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The Private Sector Homes Strategy 2023-2028 hereafter referred to as the strategy, sets out the Council's commitment to prevent and tackle the high number of privately owned empty homes. It has been developed in conjunction with a number of other housing strategies and policies which together, set out the Council's vision to ensure everyone has access to a safe, secure home in sustainable communities where people choose to live. It sets out the Council's plans to tackle the high number of empty homes as well as the range of initiatives available to the Council to help owners bring their empty homes back into beneficial use. Doing nothing is no longer an option. The strategy only relates to private sector empty homes and does not extend to empty homes within Caerphilly County Borough Council's own housing stock or those owned by Registered Social Landlords (RSL's)
- 2.2 The requirement for an Empty Home Strategy, is identified within the wider Empty Property Action Plan which has already been approved by both the Council and Welsh Government.
- 2.3 The Action Plan which is detailed in Annex 1 of the Strategy (appendix 1 of this report) sets out the overarching aims and objectives in tackling empty properties throughout the Borough. The Action Plan provides the detail of all the actions including associated timescales, that need to be undertaken over the period of the Plan, in order to bring empty buildings back into use. The Action Plan therefore details the work required to be progressed by the Empty Property Team. Some of the actions will be delivered directly by the team, other actions involve working in partnership with other departments such as Regeneration to deliver a corporate approach in bringing empty buildings back into use.
- 2.4 The work detailed within the Action Plan is ongoing. Some of the actions have already been achieved by the Team, for example, producing the empty property advice pack as well as undertaking a joint street survey of key town centres to look at mixed use empty properties. Other actions are progressing such as the dedicated website which has currently just completed the design phase. The Action Plan also identifies 8 priority properties that Private

Sector Housing and the Regeneration department are actively working on to bring them back into use using enforcement options if necessary.

- 2.5 The Empty Home Strategy is a specific action identified within the Empty Property Action Plan as a tool to focus on how empty homes will be targeted and bought back into use by the Private Sector Housing, Empty Property Team.
- 2.6 According to the CCBC council tax data on the 1st of April 2022, the number of properties that had been empty for 6 months or more was 1,314. These empty homes represent a wasted resource, an ongoing financial expense, and in many cases a missed opportunity to provide much-needed affordable housing. They can also cause blight to communities, cause anti-social behaviour issues and distress to residents affected by their unsightly appearance if the property has been left in a poor state of repair.
- 2.7 Extensive academic research has shown that poor quality housing is a key determinant of poor health. Tackling empty homes and bringing them up to standard will play an important role in promoting and contributing to positive health and well-being for the residents of Caerphilly County Borough, a key priority of the Council.
- 2.8 The strategy identifies how the authority will prioritise and target empty homes to bring them back into use. Council tax data will be used to identify properties that have been vacant for 6 months or more from the 1st of April each year. The data is cleansed to remove the properties not classed as empty properties by Data Cymru. Using the list ensures a strategic approach to the targeting of empty homes for intervention.
- 2.9 It is vitally important that the Empty Property Team works with owners and stakeholders providing as much help, assistance, and education as possible to encourage owners to bring their properties back into use informally. The team has already developed a strong branding to promote their works in bringing empty homes back into use. 'Caerphilly: No Use Empty' will be used to promote the service and encourage owners to engage.
- 2.10 The Council has various products available to assist empty homeowners and provides financial assistance by offering interest-free loans to the value of £35,000 for up to a maximum of 10 years for owner occupation and 5 years for rent. The Council will also actively seek to maximise any available financial opportunities, such as the provision of grant assistance when available, by working in partnership with external organisations to help owners with repairing and bringing empty properties back into use.
- 2.11 The offer of support and assistance will continue to be promoted and be available for all empty property owners. However, with such high numbers of empty properties the strategy identifies the need for prioritisation for proactive engagement. A two-pronged approach will be used to ensure the most effective use of resources:
  - 1) Support and encourage recently empty homes back into use, preventing them from becoming problematic empty properties:
    - Properties that are recently empty, defined as less than 24 months.
  - 2) Tackle problematic empty properties:
    - Properties that have been empty the longest: 10 years +, 5-10 years, and 2-5 years.
    - Properties that are problematic and subject to complaints.
    - Properties with the largest debt owing to the authority including works in default debt and council tax debt.
    - Properties without ownership details under council tax.



- 2.12 There are still a significant number of empty properties that are identified as problematic empty homes, and it is important to recognise that taking enforcement action is very time-consuming and will require significant resourcing. In 2022, over 457 empty properties would fall into the category 2 above. Therefore, it is important to have a robust system to prioritise and decide on the most problematic properties to take forward for formal action such as enforcement. This will be done by carrying out a risk assessment of all the homes that are identified as problematic empty properties.
- 2.13 The risk assessment form (seen in Appendix 1) provides a scoring of high, medium, and low. The highest priority empty homes will be proactively addressed initially. All properties that have scored high will be escalated to the Housing Environmental Health Officer to see if any enforcement action is appropriate. It is important to recognise that due to the complexity of taking enforcement action the numbers being considered and progressed through enforcement at any one time will be low.
- 2.14 In the first instance, the empty homeowners of high priority properties will be approached and offered advice, encouragement, support, and education on ways to bring their properties back into use. However, this strategy is clear that 'doing nothing is not an option'.
- 2.15 Formal enforcement action is always a last resort, but the Council believes that leaving properties standing empty for long periods when there is a shortage of housing in the County Borough to meet the needs of our communities is not acceptable.
- 2.16 Where owners refuse to cooperate or cannot be traced the Council will not hesitate to use the range of enforcement powers available. This, where appropriate, should include the use of powers to carry out works in default and recover the debt by enforced sale if necessary.
- 2.17 The approach set out in the strategy ensures a fair but firm way of ensuring that problematic empty homes are targeted through enforcement which will always be as a last resort.
- 2.18 The consultation response confirmed that 91.82% of those that responded agreed that returning to use of empty homes should be considered a corporate priority. The majority of the responses also agreed with the proposed approach of the strategy.
- 2.19 Since drafting the strategy there has been significant conversation across peer authorities and within Caerphilly Homes about other incentives that could be used to encourage action by empty property owners in any of the categories referenced.
- 2.20 The introduction of an empty home council tax premium would act to incentivise the owner into action either independently or in partnership with the council. It is proposed and recommend that s separate report is drafted to introduce an empty home premium to work in tandem with this strategy.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To recommend to the Cabinet the 2-pronged strategic approach and associated risk assessment for dealing with private sector empty homes.
- 3.2 That members of the Committee offer any comments or consider alternative(s) to the strategic approach and approve the Empty Homes Strategy.
- 3.3 To recommend to the Cabinet the introduction of an empty homes council tax premium to incentivise private sector empty property owners into action and that a further report is drafted and presented to the necessary committees to agree the detail and bring into force.

#### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 To realise the Council's ambitions of tackling empty homes and increase the housing stock available to occupy and improve property condition.
- 4.2 The Council has supported the Welsh Government's focus on returning empty homes back into beneficial use by creating a dedicated specialist Empty Property Team in 2021, who subsequently drafted the CCBC, 5-year, Empty Property Action Plan.
- 4.3 The Empty Property Action Plan sets out the aims and objectives of how the Council will implement some of Welsh Government's recommendations and tackle empty properties within the Borough on the whole, including non-residential properties. The Action Plan was submitted and formally approved by Welsh Government in autumn 2021. The Action Plan requires the development and implementation of this strategy to progress the return to use of residential properties.
- 4.4 The actions set out within this strategy will assist in helping the Council achieve the goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015.
- 4.5 To realise the Council's ambitions of creating cohesive and sustainable communities, as set out in the 2022-2027 Local Housing Strategy, highlighting the need for an Empty Home Strategy and the benefit of bringing empty homes back into use to increase the supply of housing available to occupy and extend choice, improve housing conditions, and assist with meeting housing need.
- 4.6 The introduction of a council tax premium, up to a maximum 300%, in relation to private sector empty homes, will provide an incentive for more empty property owners to bring their homes back into use.

#### **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 The Council acknowledges the difficulties within the housing market and the struggles residents face when trying to find a good quality, affordable home. There is extreme pressure on the housing market throughout the County Borough from increased demand on the homelessness team, a long waiting list on the Common Housing Register, unaffordable private sector housing, and a shortage of affordable housing, especially for those most in need such as first-time buyers. Increasing the supply of accommodation in the Borough by returning empty homes back into use will help the Council mitigate some of these housing pressures.
- 5.2 The Council supports Welsh Government's focus on returning empty homes back into beneficial use as well as the need to create additional units of accommodation. In response the council resourced a dedicated Empty Property Team. The team has been operational since October 2021 and are currently employed until October 2023 on a fixed term basis.
- 5.3 The team has been integral in developing and delivering on the 5-year action plan required by Welsh Government to tackle empty properties. The Action Plan is detailed in annex 1 of the strategy (appendix 1 of this report). The Action Plan sets out the aims and objectives of how the Council will implement some of Welsh Government's recommendations and tackle empty properties within the Borough, which includes the development of an Empty Homes Strategy.
- 5.4 The Action Plan details the ongoing workstreams to bring empty buildings back into use. The Action plan includes tackling empty commercial, residential and mixed-use properties. The

Empty Property team are working in partnership with other departments such as the Regeneration team to deliver a corporate approach in bring empty buildings back into use.

- 5.5 The work detailed within the Action Plan is ongoing. Some of the actions have already been achieved by the Team, for example, producing the empty property advice pack as well as undertaking a joint street survey of key town centres to look at mixed use empty properties. Other actions are progressing such as the dedicated website which has currently just completed the design phase. The Action Plan also identifies 8 priority properties that Private Sector Housing and the Regeneration department are actively working on, to bring them back into use using enforcement options if necessary. Currently, 3 of the 8 properties identified have already been subject to enforcement action and are progressing and 4 of the empty property owners have engaged informally with the Empty property Team with one empty property seized by the police. There has also been enforcement action on a further 10 empty homes.
- 5.6 The Empty Homes Strategy is one of the actions identified within the Empty Property Action Plan as a tool to focus on how empty homes will be targeted and bought back into use by the Private Sector Housing, Empty Property Team. The strategy addresses the overall aim of the Empty Property Action Plan to maximise the return to beneficial use of empty homes within Caerphilly County Borough, making them available to both rent and own.
- 5.7 The focus of the strategy is to effectively plan the use of resources available to the Council to help the owners of long-term empty residential properties bring their homes back into use. What constitutes an empty home is currently defined by Data Cymru as a private sector residential property that is liable for Council Tax and has been unoccupied for 6 months or more on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April. The data is cleansed to remove the properties that are exempt under the associated Public Accountability Measure definition. Using the list ensures a strategic approach to the targeting of empty homes for intervention.
- 5.8 Going forward the empty homes data will also be 'mapped' making it easier to identify patterns/trends or concentrated areas where more empty properties may be situated. Mapping will allow the team to analyse this data to inform future strategy and further develop the prioritisation system.
- 5.9 The strategy recognises the challenges in tackling empty properties and that it takes a significant amount of time and dedicated resource to return the property back into beneficial use. Although there may be some quick wins, through building rapport, reputation, and momentum in offering incentives, many cases will take a much longer timeframe, especially when requiring enforcement action. Some difficult cases can take several years to resolve.
- 5.10 It is vitally important that the empty property team works with owners and stakeholders providing as much help, assistance, and education as possible to encourage owners to bring their properties back into use informally. The team has already developed a strong branding to promote their works in bringing empty homes back into use. 'Caerphilly: No Use Empty' will be used to promote the service and encourage owners to engage.
- 5.11 The strategy also looks at maximising every opportunity for support, providing initiatives that offer empty homeowners various options to bring their properties back into use. The Council has various products available to assist empty homeowners and provides financial assistance by offering interest-free loans to the value of £35,000 for up to a maximum of 10 years for owner occupation and 5 years for rent. The Council will also actively seek to maximise any available financial opportunities, such as the provision of grant assistance when available, by working in partnership with external organisations to help owners with repairing and bringing empty properties back into use.

5.12 The offer of support and assistance will continue to be promoted and available for all empty property owners. There have been a wide range of incentives and support available to help increase the number of empty homes returned to use, including:

- Empty Property Information Pack to inform and support empty property owners has been developed.
- Created a Caerphilly- No Use Empty dedicated website.
- The Empty Property Team regularly present at Landlord forum meeting to keep landlords updated.
- Social media campaigns to promote the work within the empty property team and raise awareness around empty properties.
- Engagement with stakeholders including local estate agents and auction houses, property investors and landlords.
- Collaborative working with other council departments.
- Technical support and advice to landlords.
- Partnership working with Caerphilly Keys.
- Working with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

5.13 In addition to the wider support the strategy recognises the need for prioritisation of proactive engagement due to the high numbers of empty properties within the borough. A two-pronged approach is proposed and will help to ensure the most effective use of resources with maximum output:

- 1) Support and encourage recently empty homes back into use, preventing them from becoming problematic empty properties.
  - Properties that are recently empty, defined as less than 24 months.
- 2) Tackle problematic empty properties:
  - Properties that have been empty the longest: 10 years +, 5-10 years, and 2-5 years.
  - Properties that are problematic and subject to complaints.
  - Properties with the largest debt owing to the Authority including works in default debt and council tax debt.
  - Properties without ownership details under council tax.

5.14 Over half of the empty homes within CCB have been empty for less than 24 months; therefore, the Strategy recognises the benefit of early intervention to support and encourage owners of properties that have only recently become empty to help get the properties back into use. This will ensure the properties are not left to deteriorate, becoming a problematic empty. Informing these owners of the financial incentives such as loans and offering support and advice in addressing their empty property is often the nudge they need to bring their property back into use.

5.15 The two-prong approach will help prevent recently empty property becoming problematic empty homes through support and assistance. However, there are still a significant number of empty homes that are identified as problematic empty, and it is important to recognise that taking enforcement action is the last resort, it is very time-consuming and will require significant resourcing. In 2022, over 457 empty homes were classified as problematic empty properties, category 2. Therefore, it is important to have a robust system of prioritising these empty homes and deciding on the most problematic properties to take forward for formal action such as enforcement. This will be done by carrying out a risk assessment of all the properties that are identified as problematic empty homes.

- 5.16 The risk assessment (seen in Appendix 1) provides a scoring of high, medium, and low. The highest priority empty homes will be proactively addressed initially. All properties that have scored high will be escalated to the Housing Environmental Health Officer to establish whether enforcement would be appropriate. It is important to recognise that due to the complexity of taking enforcement action the numbers being considered and progressed through enforcement action will be low.
- 5.17 In the first instance, all empty homeowners will be approached and offered advice, encouragement, support, and education on ways to bring their properties back into use. However, this strategy is clear that 'doing nothing is not an option'.
- 5.18 Where owners refuse to cooperate or cannot be traced the Council will not hesitate to use the range of enforcement powers available. This, where appropriate, should include the use of powers to carry out works in default and recover the debt by enforced sale if necessary.
- 5.19 The approach set out in the strategy ensures a fair but firm way of ensuring that only problematic empty homes are targeted through enforcement which will always be a last resort.
- 5.20 Since drafting the strategy there has been significant conversation across peer authorities and within Caerphilly Homes about other incentives that could be used to encourage action by empty property owners in any of the prioritised and risk assessed categories referenced.
- 5.21 The introduction of an empty home council tax premium, could see up to a maximum of 300% applied after a certain length of time empty without any action or valid reason to being empty. It would act to incentivise the owner into action either independently or in partnership with the council.
- 5.22 If agreed this would act as part of the overall tool kit within the strategy and work in tandem with this strategy ultimately impacting on the second categorisation aiming to reduce the time properties lie empty.
- 5.23 A separate report will need to be drafted and agreed at the necessary committee(s) to bring into force this sort of council tax premium and if agreed would enhance the work of the empty homes team and the delivery of the Empty Homes Strategy bringing more private sector homes back into use.

#### **5.24 CONCLUSION**

- 5.25 The adoption of the Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy will improve the standard and availability of Housing Stock within Caerphilly CBC. The strategy aims to improve the local environment in which the empty home is situated and reduce associated incidences of anti-social behaviour. In addition, the strategy will improve housing conditions in the private sector; and assist in the promotion of good health and wellbeing. The Strategy will help deliver the Action Plan and Welsh Government ambition to bring empty homes back into use.
- 5.26 Consideration should be given to the option of introducing an empty homes premium relating to council tax and if supported a further report to be prepared.

## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 The key assumption is that delivery and implementation of this Strategy will be undertaken by the Caerphilly Homes Empty Property Team.

## **7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) suggests that the introduction of the Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy will have a positive impact upon the residents of the County Borough by increasing the housing available to buy or rent and helping meet the housing demand of the county borough by addressing problematic long-term empties, and improving availability of good quality housing.
- 7.2 By providing opportunities for people to have more access to a wider range of housing options and providing financial support initiatives, the IIA shows that the Strategy will have a positive impact on equality, diversity and inclusion, on tackling social disadvantage and on promoting the wellbeing of existing and future generations. Helping people achieve affordable home ownership also contributes to several of the Council's wellbeing objectives. No adverse impact on the promotion of the Welsh language was identified.
- 7.3 [Link to Integrated Impact Assessment](#)

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There is no financial implication associated with the strategy.

## **9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications as it is assumed that the implementation of the strategy will be delivered by the existing Caerphilly Homes Empty Property Team.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

- 10.1 Consultation has been carried out for 6 weeks from the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022 until the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2023.
- 10.2 The consultation received 108 online responses and 2 email responses. Below is a summary of the responses received:
- 100% of the response were received in English.
  - The respondents were asked if they agreed that the return to use of empty homes should be considered a priority - 101 said yes, 5 said no and 4 stated they didn't know.
  - The respondents were asked if they agreed with the two-pronged approach – 85 said yes, 7 Said no and 18 said they didn't know.
  - The respondents were asked if they agreed with the risk assessment approach - 85 said yes, 6 said no and 19 said they didn't know.

- The respondents were asked if they agreed with the carrot and stick approach – 86 said yes, 14 said no and 10 stated they didn't know.
- The respondents were asked would the strategy impact negatively on them because of the protection characteristic - 12 said yes, 76 said no and 22 stated they didn't know.
- The respondents were asked if the strategy would help reduce levels of social-economic disadvantage in the County Borough - 60 said yes, 23 said no and 27 stated they didn't know.
- The respondents were asked if the strategy would have a positive impact on future generations living in the County Borough - 82 said Yes, 6 Said no, 22 stated they didn't know.
- The respondents were asked if the introduction of the strategy will ensure that the Welsh Language is treated no less favourably than the English language -48 said yes, 19 said no and 42 said they didn't know.

10.3 After each question, respondents were asked to explain the reasons for their response. This was not a mandatory requirement and consequently not everyone provided a response. All responses provided were duly considered. Several of the responses were deemed irrelevant to the consultation process and have, therefore, been discounted. Many of the comments have proved helpful in reaffirming inclusion of the two-prong approach and risk assessment to prioritise properties.

10.4 The respondents that answered 'no' to the questions did not provide any alternative suggestions for the Council to consider. One respondent expressed an opinion that the Authority had no business in taking enforcement action against owners of empty properties. However, the majority agreed with the overall aim of the strategy but disagreed with certain elements such as the suggested timeframes and informal approach. Comments included:

- there are bigger issues to be dealt with, if council tax is being paid on the properties, if bills are paid and if the properties are in good order the council should go away and stay out of people's business.
- Properties shouldn't be empty for more than 12 months (unless due to ongoing works)
- It's the owners that have paid for it it's up to them what they do with it
- Council should take action immediately it becomes apparent owner has no concrete plans for property.
- The homes would have been highlighted, & recommended for enforcement, why delay any action.
- The time this would take is unacceptable. The Council have the power to use compulsory purchase and should use these powers.

10.5 The respondents were asked to provide any other comments on the Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2023-2028 not included in the response. Not everyone responded. Comments included:

- Empty property is a problem, not just because of housing shortages, but it impacts neighbours and communities as a whole. Taking a proactive role in getting property back into use benefits our whole county.
- Increased council tax for empty homes could also be implemented in Caerphilly. The prospect of extra outgoing cost seems to motivate landlords to sell or rent out property, so they avoid this extra payment.
- Genuinely hope that this strategy is effectively implemented in a timely manner and puts empty homes to good use rapidly and that it reduces the ridiculously large amount of building of new unaffordable homes.
- Private rents are unaffordable this should also be considered. There is also a lot of CCBC properties empty for too long.
- It is annoying to see a house empty for more than 2 years when accommodation is badly needed. It also raises questions as to why homeowners or landlords leave them empty.

10.6 All comments received from the consultees listed below have been noted and, where appropriate, incorporated within the report.

## 11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Environmental Protection Act 1990  
Prevention Of Damage By Pests Act 1949  
Building Act 1984  
Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982  
Town And Country Planning Act 1990  
Housing Act 2004, Part 1 – The Housing, Health And Safety Rating System (HHSRS)  
The Law Of Property Act 1925 – Enforced Sale  
Housing Act 1985 – Compulsory Purchase Orders  
Housing Act 1985 – Demolition Orders  
Housing Act 2004 – Empty Dwelling Management Orders (Edmo)

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Consultees: Cllr Shayne Cook, Cabinet Member for Housing  
Cllr Andrew Whitcombe, Chair – Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny  
Cllr Patricia Cook, Vice Chair – Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny  
Christina HARRY, Chief Executive  
Dave Street, Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing  
Rob Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer  
Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer  
Lesley Allen, Principal Group Accountant (Housing)



Claire Davies, Private Sector Housing Manager  
Fiona Wilkins, Housing Services Manager  
Kerry Denman, Housing Solutions Manager  
Anwen Cullinan, Senior Policy Officer – Equalities and Welsh Language

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Empty Property Strategy, Action Plan and Risk Assessment.

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# Caerphilly Homes **Private Sector** **Empty Homes Strategy 2023-2028**



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## Foreword



### **Cllr Shayne Cook**

Cabinet Member for Housing

Caerphilly County Borough Council understands the wide range of issues empty properties present for local communities; laid against the backdrop of a national housing crisis. As well as becoming a magnet for anti-social behaviour, empty homes are a waste of valuable resources at a time when we're seeing an ever increasing need for housing.

This strategy sets out our commitment to prevent and tackle empty homes, by supporting owners to bring them back into beneficial use. We also recognise, however, that sometimes we must take enforcement action to address some properties. Formal enforcement action is always a last resort and this document sets out when and how this will be taken.

This Empty Homes Strategy has been developed in conjunction with a number of other housing strategies and policies which, together, set out our vision to ensure everyone has access to a safe, secure home in sustainable communities where people choose to live.

**This strategy sets out our commitment to prevent and tackle empty homes...**



## 1. Introduction and Overview

This strategy sets out the Council's plans to tackle the high number of empty homes. It also sets out the range of initiatives available to the Council to help owners bring their empty homes back into use. This strategy only refers to private sector empty homes and does not extend to empty homes within Caerphilly's own housing stock or those owned by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)

Private sector empty homes represent a wasted resource, an ongoing financial expense, and in many cases a missed opportunity to provide much-needed affordable housing. They can also cause blight to communities and distress to residents affected by their unsightly appearance if the property has been left in a poor state of repair.

This can attract vandals, squatters, unauthorised occupiers, and other crime and anti-social behaviour. They can impact on the value of neighbouring properties and incur significant costs to the Council, Police, Fire Authority, and Community Safety Partnerships dealing with the associated problems.

Extensive academic research has shown that poor quality housing is a key determinant of poor health. Tackling empty homes and bringing them up to standard will play an important role in promoting and contributing to positive health and well-being for the residents of Caerphilly County Borough, a key priority of the Council. Caerphilly County Borough Council is committed to working with empty property owners and prospective owners to encourage them to bring their properties back into beneficial use and where possible, prevent properties from becoming empty in the first instance.

According to the CCBC council tax data on the 1st of April 2022, the number of properties that had been empty for 6 months or more was 1,314.

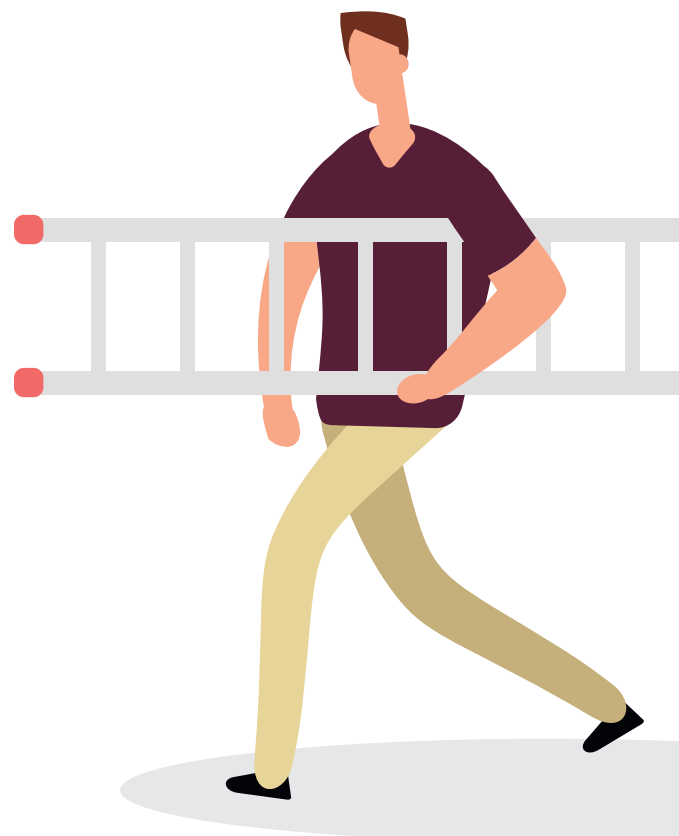
In response to addressing this Welsh Government priority and the high number of empty homes in the county borough, the Council has recently established a specialist team within Private Sector Housing tasked with proactively working with owners of privately owned empty properties.

If an owner is uncooperative or obstructive the Council will consider using the wide range of formal enforcement action available to bring the property back into beneficial use.

Formal enforcement action is always a last resort, but the Council believes that leaving properties stand empty for long periods when there is a shortage of housing in the County Borough to meet the needs of our communities is not acceptable.

The main objective of this strategy is to maximise the number of empty homes brought back into use.

Therefore, doing nothing is not an option.



## 2. National and Local Context

### 2.1. NATIONAL PRIORITIES

Welsh Government acknowledges the benefits of returning empty homes to use. In October 2019, the Welsh Government responded to a report from the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee on Empty Properties, 2019, committing to tackling empty properties. The Empty Property paper contained a number of recommendations. The Paper set a target of bringing 5,000 empty homes back into occupation across Wales during the fifth Assembly term. [Link to Welsh Government website - Empty properties \(senedd.wales\)](#).

The Council supports Welsh Government's focus on returning empty homes back into beneficial use and have developed an action plan. The action plan sets out the aims and objectives of how the Council will implement some of Welsh Government's recommendations and tackle empty properties within the Borough. The action plan has been submitted and approved by Welsh Government. The action plan supports the implementation of this strategy.

The actions set out within this strategy will assist in helping the Council achieve the goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. The seven key goals are as follows:

- **A Prosperous Wales:** bringing empty homes back into use will be financially beneficial to the community as a whole.
- **A Resilient Wales:** bringing empty homes back into use will help promote and support social and economic resilience.
- **A More Equal Wales:** the beneficial use of empty homes can help tackle homelessness issues and provide good quality housing for vulnerable persons.

- **A Healthier Wales:** poor quality housing is a key determinant of poor health. Improving the housing stock will have a positive effect on health and well-being.
- **A Wales of Cohesive Communities:** tackling empty homes will positively impact the community as a whole in terms of helping to reduce anti-social behaviour and improving the general amenity of an area.



- **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language:** tackling empty homes will assist in improving and maintaining the cultural heritage of Caerphilly County Borough. The production of bilingual documentation associated with empty homes will help to promote and further the Welsh language.
- **A Globally Responsible Wales:** Whilst empty homes in Wales don't directly impact on the global scale tackling them and making use of a wasted resource will improve the area as a whole and potentially lead to investment in schemes and projects designed to make a positive contribution to global wellbeing.



## Implementation of the strategy will result in significant visual improvements...

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 also sets out 5 ways of working that should be adhered to.

These are as follows:

- **Long-Term:** Housing is a long-term asset. The return to beneficial use of empty homes will have significant long-term benefits to individuals and communities, safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their long-term needs.
- **Integration:** Empty homes negatively affect economic and social health and wellbeing so tackling this issue will help improve these key issues in a wider context. The strategy looks to integrate property and community improvements that will benefit and transform lives and communities, bringing together a variety of stakeholders to deliver long term sustainable benefits for lives and communities
- **Involvement:** This strategy identifies how the Council will work in unison with stakeholders and members of the community to tackle empty homes and will aim to help meet the needs of specific communities.
- **Collaboration:** This strategy sets out a plan of how the Council will work with stakeholders and other bodies to achieve its aims and objectives.
- **Prevention:** This strategy aims to tackle the current issues associated with empty homes, prevent further issues from developing and make significant improvements for the benefit of the residents of Caerphilly County Borough. Implementation of the strategy will result in significant visual improvements to housing and their surrounding environments (improved the look and feel) helping to prevent anti-social behaviour and enviro-crime.



## 2.2. LOCAL DELIVERY CONTEXT

A detailed action plan has been developed to support the successful delivery of this strategy's priorities (*Annex1, page 17*).

The Council has over £2m funding available for home improvement loans which can be used to support owners to bring empty homes back into use. The number of empty properties bought into use by direct action historically has been relatively low, typically 36 properties per year. However, with a dedicated specialist team in place we expect the number to increase significantly.

The Council wants to explore a range of alternative models for empty property owners who either want to repair, privately rent or sell their property.

By targeting empty homes and bringing them back into use we hope to:

- Improve the environment around the empty homes and reduce associated incidences of anti-social behaviour.
- Increase the supply of housing and the affordability of housing.
- Improve housing conditions in the private sector; and
- Assist in the promotion of the good health and wellbeing of people living in the private sector.

## 2.3. HOUSING NEEDS WITHIN CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH

The Council recognises the difficulties residents face when trying to find a good quality, affordable home. There is extreme pressure on the housing market throughout the Borough from increased demand on the homelessness team, a long waiting list on the Common Housing Register, unaffordable private sector housing, and a shortage of affordable housing, especially for those most in need such as first-time buyers.

This has been exacerbated by the cost of living crisis, changes to the assumed asylum dispersal arrangements and the

war in Ukraine.

We know from analysing key data sources and from monitoring access to Council services that many people continue to struggle to access good quality, affordable accommodation throughout the county borough. The cost of owning or privately renting a home continues to increase year on year, exacerbating the affordability issue further.

There are currently over 6,000 applications on the Council's Common Housing Register from people requiring social housing: a significant increase in the number of applications on the previous year. There has also been an increase in the number of people seeking homelessness assistance from the Council and requiring temporary accommodation to alleviate their situation.

Increasing the supply of accommodation in the Borough by returning empty homes back into use will help the Council mitigate some of these housing pressures.



## 3. Understanding Empty Properties

### 3.1 WHY PROPERTIES BECOME EMPTY

We know from supporting empty property owners that their homes may become empty for a variety of different reasons including:

- The normal process of buying, selling, and letting properties (market churn).
- A property that is difficult to rent or sell due to its physical state, requiring renovation beyond the budget of the owner.
- A property that is difficult to rent or sell due to location, poor facilities, infrastructure, etc.
- When the property has been abandoned by an untraceable owner.
- When 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.
- Property holding, when a property is left empty due to speculative investment, through acquiring property through inheritance, or where partners co-habit leaving the second property empty. Where the property is adjoined to a business and the owner does not wish to sell or let it.
- Due to an aging 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 can result in it remaining empty for the short or long term.

**The main focus of the strategy is to effectively plan the use of resources available...**

### 3.2 DEFINING EMPTY PROPERTIES

The main focus of the strategy is to effectively plan the use of resources available to the Council to help the owners of long-term empty residential properties bring their homes back into use. Long-term empty property is defined as private sector residential properties that are liable for Council Tax and have been unoccupied for 6 months or more on the 1st of April. The definition is taken from the Welsh Local Government Association's revised set of national performance measures known as Public Accountability Measures (PAM). Measuring local authority performance 2018-19 - Data Cymru. Welsh Government is currently working with Data Cymru in reviewing the PAM criteria. The definition of an empty property and monitoring requirement under this strategy will need to adapt in line with any nationally agreed amendments.

### 3.3 MONITORING PERFORMANCE

The Council's performance regarding empty homes is currently measured using two parameters:

- PAM 13 is defined as the percentage of empty private sector properties brought back into use during the financial year through direct action by the local authority.
- PAM 45 is defined as the number of additional dwellings created when a property is sub-divided into additional dwellings to bring it back into use.

Information collected by Data Cymru through the PAMs is very important to enable local authorities to give an account of their performance to the public. It is important to also recognise the value providing additional dwellings through conversion has on increasing the housing stock within the Caerphilly county borough.

### 3.4 PROBLEMATIC EMPTY PROPERTY CLASSED AS SECOND HOMES OR OUT OF VALUATION

Caerphilly Council Tax department classification requires that furnished empty properties are classed as second homes. Therefore, second homes are not defined as empty and are very difficult to target. Some of these 'Second homes' are the most problematic long-term empty properties and negatively impact neighbouring properties and the surrounding community. Should the empty property team believe that the property is a true empty property and causing a significant problem without a willing owner, action could be taken to bring the property back into use.

Some empty properties are considered uninhabitable and taken out of valuation. Therefore, the Council Tax department holds no details of these properties, which are likely to be some of the worst condition properties. Although exempt from the PAM definition the importance of dealing with these homes is recognised. Although not considered to be empty properties bought back into use for performance purposes, they will be classed as additional dwellings.

### 3.5 INCREASING HOUSING SUPPLY

Increasing housing supply is a key priority of the Council. This not only includes bringing an existing property back into use as a home but also maximising the potential of the property in providing additional homes. The empty property team will offer support and work with other relevant departments such as regeneration, planning and building control to support the residential element of any mixed use development or any change of use from commercial to residential to provide additional homes.

### 3.6 CHALLENGES WITH BRINGING EMPTY PROPERTIES BACK TO USE

There are many challenges involved with bringing empty homes back into use including:

- Being unable to cover the cost of making the property habitable or saleable.
- Inheriting the property but the new owner not having the resources, time, or motivation to deal with it.
- Property is up for sale or being repaired.
- Inherited the property but have not decided what to do with it.
- Some empty properties are left completely abandoned by the owner. These properties will remain empty until the authority intervenes.

Tackling empty properties takes time. Although there may be some quick wins, through building rapport, reputation and momentum in offering incentives and taking meaningful enforcement action. Some difficult cases can take several years to resolve.



## 4. Bringing Empty Properties Back Into Use

### 4.1 EMPTY PROPERTY ACTION PLAN

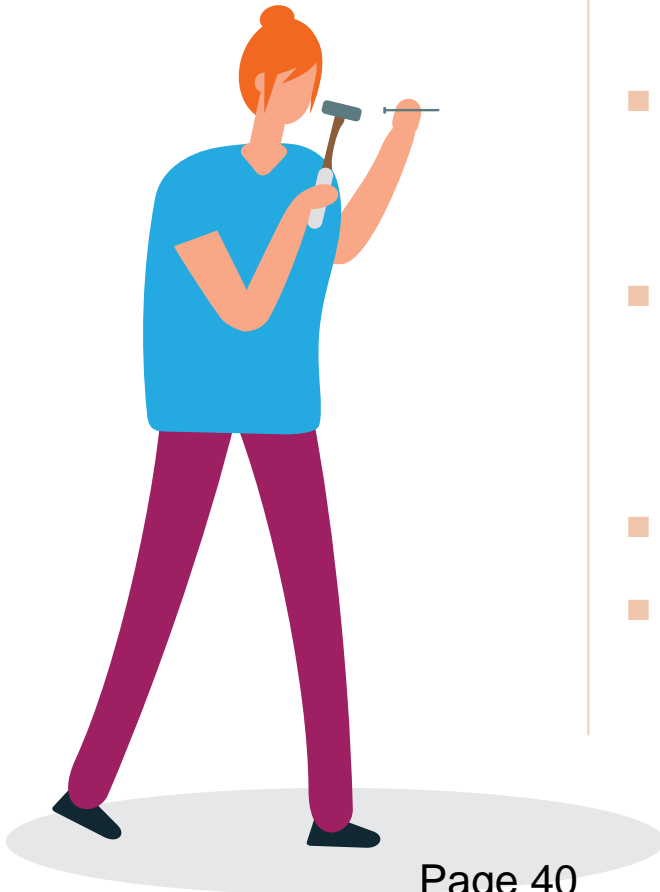
The overall aim of the Empty Property Action Plan (Annex 1) is to maximise the return to beneficial use of empty properties within Caerphilly County Borough thereby increasing the number of homes available to both rent and own, improving the built environment, decreasing the number of both vacant and underutilised sites as well as supporting diversification of town centres.

The Empty Property Action Plan identifies key actions required to meet the 3 objectives to achieve the Council's aim.

**Objective 1:** Promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers/ developers.

**Objective 2:** Prioritisation and target approach in addressing empty properties.

**Objective 3:** Take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties.



### 4.2 SPECIALIST TEAM APPROACH

Having a specialist team focusing on bringing empty properties back into use is an essential aspect of achieving the Action Plan's ambitious aim and meet the Council's priorities, as outlined in section 1.

The benefits of a specialist team approach include:

- Maximisation of the return of empty properties back into beneficial use thereby increasing the supply and quality of accommodation within the county borough.
- Dedicated staff resources to progress empty homes work programme - including both proactive and reactive work.
- Increasing opportunities to address unmet housing need, including homelessness and demand.
- Addressing the strategic objectives identified in the Council's Local Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing Renewal policy in so far as they relate to empty properties.
- Delivering financial support to empty homeowners in relation to local grants/ loans as well as national products, such as VTF - links to supporting employment regarding contractors etc.
- Delivering on WG 5 year Empty Property Enforcement Agenda. Financial benefit to the authority in recovering existing debt already owned through unpaid council taxes, social service intervention and/or works in default.
- Ensuring rates are payable for the property going forward.
- Assisting council tax department to keep accurate data and find liable persons ensuring they maximise their revenue.

## ...bringing empty properties back into use is an essential aspect of achieving the Action Plan's ambitious aim

- Assisting other departments with empty property engagement and finding ownership details, carry out works in default and ensure a long-term solution to avoid the need for their long-term involvement.
- Helping economic growth of an area by increasing population spending in local shops, attending education and as such helping regenerate areas.
- Reducing waste of resources and cost to the authority when officers from various departments attending site to deal with antisocial behaviours and problematic empties.
- Improving community cohesion, and general visual amenity.
- Co-production, co-ordination and joint implementation of strategies and initiatives, with internal and external partners, for the return to beneficial use of empty homes and non-residential properties.
- Development of relevant partnerships and initiatives to enable sustainable solutions for empty property owners, including working proactively with internal departments such as Council tax, Legal and Planning as well as external organisation such as the Police and Registered Social landlords working closely with regeneration officers to enable empty residential and non-residential properties to be brought back into use, as part of strategic town centre improvements and for other key regeneration initiatives.
- Full utilisation of grant and loan funding streams. Maximising financial investment opportunities in the County Borough.
- Provision of centralised support, advice, and assistance to anyone involved with empty properties.



## 5. Promote and Educate Empty Home Owners and Stakeholders

### 5.1 MAXIMISING EVERY OPPORTUNITY FOR SUPPORT

Providing initiatives that offer empty homeowners various options to bring their properties back into use is vital. The team will work closely and assist where necessary to ensure every initiative and funding opportunity provided by Welsh Government, the Council and third-party organisations is maximised. The team will also signpost owners effectively to access any funding or opportunities available.

### 5.2 PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

It is vitally important that the empty property team works with owners and stakeholders providing as much help, assistance, and education as possible to encourage owners to bring their properties back into use informally. The team has already developed a strong branding to promote their works in bringing empty back into use. 'Caerphilly: No Use Empty' will be used to promote the service and encourage owners to engage.

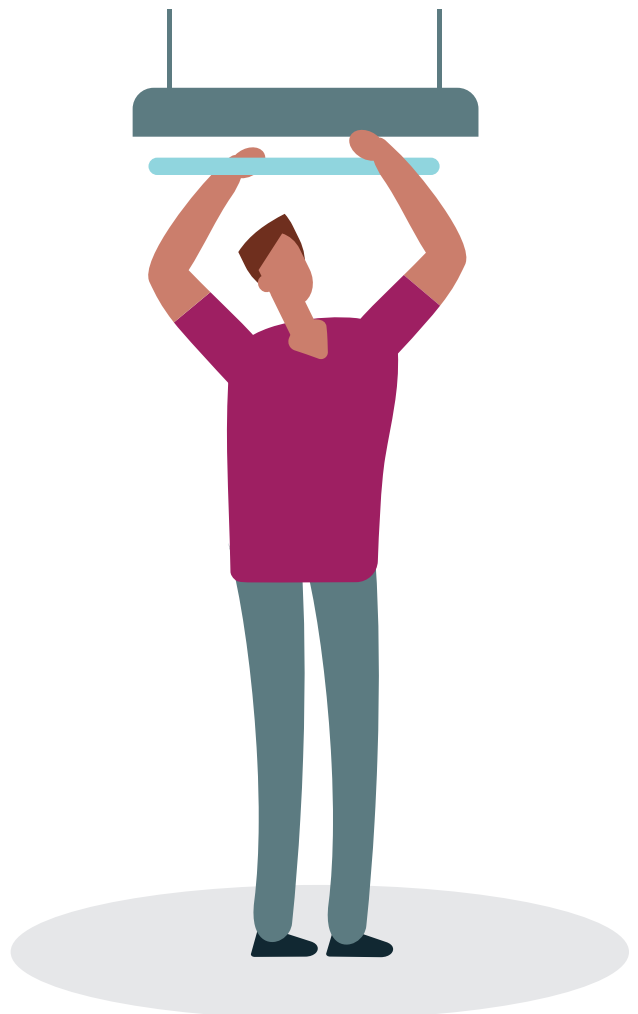
Other actions the Council are undertaken to help increase the number of empty homes returned to use include:

- Empty Property Information Pack to inform and support empty property owners has been developed.
- Created a Caerphilly- No Use Empty dedicated website.
- The Empty Property Team will regularly present at Landlord forum meeting to keep landlord updated.
- Social media campaigns to promote the work within the empty property team and raise awareness around empty properties.
- Engage with stakeholders including local estate agents and auction houses property investors and landlords.
- Collaborative working with other council departments.

- Technical support and advice to landlords.
- Partnership working with Caerphilly Keys.
- Working with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

### 5.3 INCENTIVISING OWNERS

The Council has various products available to assist empty homeowners and provides financial assistance by offering interest-free loans to the value of £35,000 for up to a maximum of 10 years for owner occupation and 5 years for rent. The Council will also actively seek to maximise any available financial opportunities, such as the provision of grant assistance when available, by working in partnership with external organisations to help owners with repairing and bringing empty properties back into use.



## 6. Prioritisation and Targeted Approach to Tackling Empty Properties

### 6.1 EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH

The team uses Council Tax data to identify properties that have been vacant for 6 months or more from the 1st of April each year. The data is cleansed to remove the properties that are exempt under the PAM definition. Using the list ensures a strategic approach to the targeting of empty homes for intervention.

### 6.2 EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES

A two-pronged approach is used by the team to ensure the most effective use of resources:

1. Support and encourage recently empty homes back into use, preventing them from becoming problematic empty properties:

- Properties that are recently empty, less than 24 months.

2. Tackle problematic empty properties:

- Properties that have been empty the longest: 10 years +, 5-10 years, and 2-5 years.
- Properties that are problematic and subject to complaints.
- Properties with the largest debt owing to the authority including works in default debt and council tax debt.
- Properties without ownership details under council tax.

The Council is mindful of fluctuations in the housing market and the need for the prioritisation criteria to be flexible to adapt over the life of the strategy to address changes in priorities, local needs, and Welsh Government financial products.

### 6.3 MAPPING EMPTY PROPERTIES

Going forward the empty homes data will be 'mapped' making it easier to identify patterns/trends or concentrated areas

where more empty properties may be situated. Mapping will allow the team to analyse this data to further develop the prioritisation system.

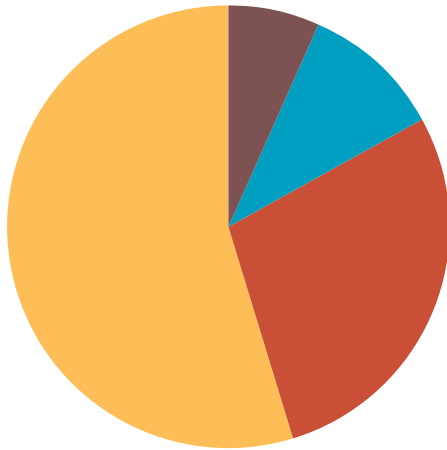
### 6.4 CURRENT BREAKDOWN OF EMPTY HOMES WITHIN CCBC

Understanding the empty home data is vital when deciding the prioritisation criteria for targeting properties. As shown below over half of our empties have been empty for 2 years or less. Therefore, it is vital that these are considered swiftly to establish whether they are being actively addressed through the market and to prevent them from becoming long-term, problematic empties. Some properties within the 10+ year category have been empty for several decades. It is very unlikely that these empty properties will be returned to use without intervention from the Council and will therefore likely require enforcement action.



## NUMBER OF YEARS AN EMPTY HOME HAS BEEN EMPTY

### Breakdown of the Length of Time Empty



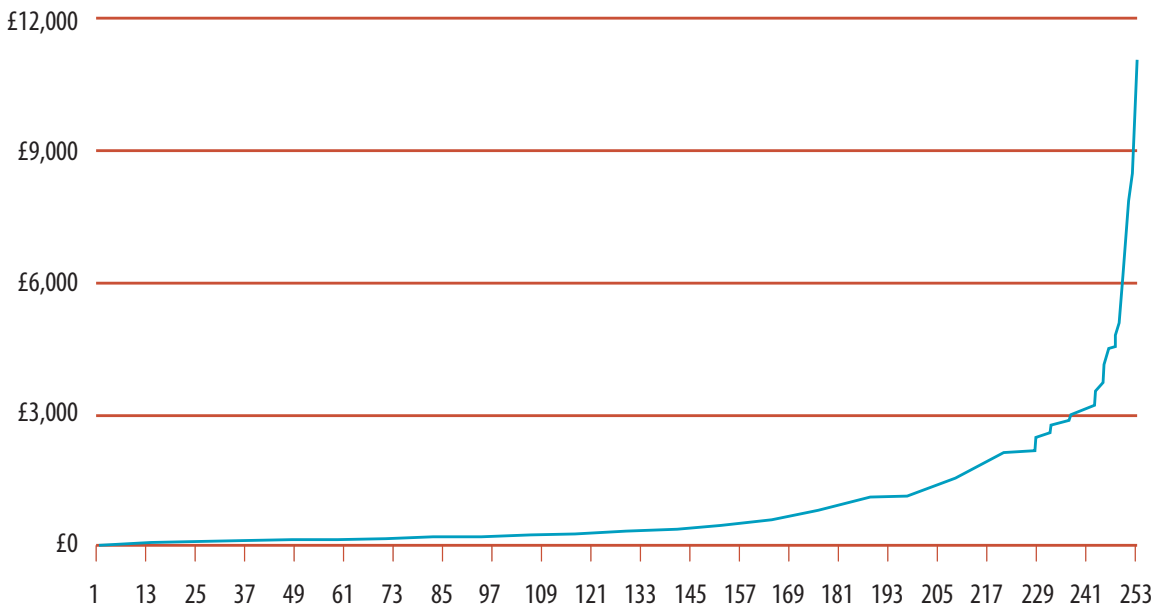
10+ years    5-10 years  
2-10 years    2 years or less

10+ years	89
5-10 years	136
2-10 years	370
2 years or less	719
<b>Total</b>	<b>1314</b>

(Caerphilly council tax data 2022)

April 2022, Council Tax data shows that 261 empty homes owe a total of £223,364 in Council Tax payments to the Council. Bringing these properties back into use

will not only provide more revenue going forward to help fund essential council services but also help to reduce the level of debt already owed.



**Council Tax data shows that 261 empty homes owe a total of £223,364...**

Council Tax has no contact details for 72 empty home owners. Therefore, tracing these owners is paramount to ensure the owners pay the relevant council tax debts and bring the property back into use.





## 6.5 EMPTY PROPERTY COMPLAINTS

The Council must encourage the community and neighbours of empty homes to report any concerns or problems any empty home is causing. The aim is to make it easy to report concerns using a 'complaint about empties' enquiry form on the dedicated website

In addition to receiving direct complaints, the empty property team carry out joint investigations with Private Sector Housing (PSH) Environmental Health Officers to investigate complaints from neighbours of empty homes who are experiencing issues such as dampness, mould, defecting guttering, or overgrown gardens. From April 2021 to September 2022 there have been 35 empty property complaints regarding empty properties that have

been received and investigated. The team also offers support to other departments dealing with an empty properties such as the Environmental Health and Building Control. When investigating a complaint, the team will not only address the immediate issue subject to the complaint but also use the service request as an opportunity to engage with the owners to find a long-term solution to bring the property back into use. Any owners unwilling to work informally to resolve issues will be subject to enforcement action where applicable.

The team will also support another department to overcome any issues with carrying out works in default where necessary and recover the debt on their behalf.

## 7. A Two Prong Approach to Tackling Empty Homes

### 7.1 PREVENTING PROPERTIES FROM BECOMING PROBLEMATIC EMPTY HOMES

Over half of the empty homes within Caerphilly county borough have been empty for less than 24 months; therefore, the empty property team recognises the benefit of early intervention to support and encourage owners of properties that has only recently become empty. This will help ensure the property is not left to deteriorate, becoming a problematic empty. The owners of these properties will be contacted by the empty property team, giving them the advice pack and asking them to contact the team to confirm their intentions in bringing the property back into use. The team will take the opportunity to discuss the support and options available to help the owner. The team will also agree a reasonable timeframe with the owner for action to be taken.

### 7.2 TACKLING PROBLEMATIC EMPTY PROPERTIES

It is important to recognise that taking enforcement action is very time-consuming and will require significant resourcing. Therefore, it is important to choose the most problematic properties to take forward for formal action such as enforcement. This will be done by carrying out a risk assessment of all priority properties.

### 7.3 RISK ASSESSMENTS

A Risk Assessment Inspection Form (annex 2) has been developed by the empty property team to prioritise which properties are escalated for enforcement consideration. For example, all homes empty for 10+ years have already been assessed and the impact the property is having on the local and wider community identified. The Risk assessment form provides a scoring of high, medium, and low. The highest priority empty homes

will be proactively addressed initially. All properties that have scored high will be escalated to the Housing Environmental Health Officer to see if any enforcement action can be taken. It is important to recognise that due to the complexity of taking enforcement action the numbers will be low.

### 7.4 INITIAL ENGAGEMENT

In the first instance, the empty homeowner will be approached and offered advice, encouragement, support, and education on ways to bring their properties back into use. However, this strategy is clear that 'doing nothing is not an option'.

Where owners refuse to cooperate or cannot be traced the Council will not hesitate to use the range of enforcement powers available, as detailed below. This, where appropriate, should include the use of powers to carry out works in default and recover the debt.

### 7.5 TRACING OWNERS

One of the main problems encountered when dealing with empty properties is property ownership. In cases where the property owner cannot be traced there are various options available to attempt to trace the owner for example:

- Checking various data sources such as council tax data, Land Registry search and Probate search.
- Engaging with neighbours, councillors, and local community.
- Placing posters on the empty property and in local newspapers asking for contact.

The team will carry out all reasonable enquires to trace the owner or the person responsible for the property such as the next of kin. However, when the owner is untraceable all correspondence will be served on the empty property.

## 8. Potential Legal Remedies

### 8.1 DECIDING ON THE BEST CAUSE OF ACTION

When deciding to act against an empty home, it is important to consider the wider context of bringing the property back into use and the mechanisms in place to recover the debt. Certain legislation is more appropriate when considering enforced sales proceedings under the Law of Property Act 1925. Details of the Enforcement Action available is listed in Annex 3.

Some high-priority empty homes are in poor repair but may have an owner that ensures the property does not cause ongoing public health issues or pays off any small to medium debt registered

against the property. This type of situation makes it very difficult to find a long-term solution. It's important that this doesn't discourage the Council from dealing proactively with this type of property, but the risk of challenge and complexity involved should be acknowledged. If the owner is unwilling to engage or is untraceable, a legal warrant might be required to facilitate a housing inspection and to allow access for works in default if permitted via the legislation.

Please note this Action Plan has already been approved by Welsh Government. Therefore, does not form part of the consultation.

*Version 1: 17.9.21*



## Annex 1: Action Plan

### 1. OVERALL AIM OF PLAN

To maximise the return to beneficial use of empty properties within Caerphilly County Borough thereby increasing the number of homes available to both rent and owner occupy,

improving the built environment, decreasing the number of both vacant and underutilised sites as well as supporting diversification of town centres.

### 2. OBJECTIVES OF PLAN AND ASSOCIATED ACTIONS

**Objective 1: Promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers/developers**

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
<p>Funding will need to be secured to progress this action:</p> <p>Ensure up to date advice and information relating to empty properties is readily available.</p>	<p>Website development to form a 'mini empty properties website' to provide comprehensive information on the authorities stand on empty properties including the products available to assist in bringing empty properties back into beneficial use. The website will have links to signpost interested parties to relevant services. A 'contact me' function will also be built into the web page to encourage engagement.</p> <p>Information regarding the rules for Listed Building repair, maintenance, renovation and regeneration are different from those of non-listed depending on the listing Grade. Links to CADW will be included to provide online information to anyone interested in a Listed Building. Often Listed Building Consent is required if change to the building is more than repair and maintenance.</p>	<p>Empty Property Officer</p> <p>Caerphilly Keys Officer</p> <p>CCBC IT web specialist</p> <p>Placemaking &amp; Building Conservation Officer</p>	<p>Initial scoping exercise to understand web site and online form development to be held by October 2021.</p> <p>Forward work programme to be provided thereafter.</p>	<p>Scoping exercise to fully understand web site and online form development.</p> <p>Translation of web site content into Welsh language.</p> <p>Creation of live mini website.</p> <p>The number of visits to the website per month.</p> <p>The number of enquires received via the contact us function.</p>
<p>Funding will need to be secured to progress this action:</p> <p>Empty Residential Property Information Pack.</p>	<p>Production of an 'Empty Residential Property Information Pack' with key information on the products available to assist empty home owners/prospective purchasers including VAT information, loans, grants, renting, Caerphilly Keys and selling advice.</p> <p>This information will include access to grant information for the Heritage Lottery Fund and associated Heritage Grant websites for the renovation and regeneration of Listed Buildings. Cadw's information for residential property owners would be included here as they have information specific to renovating residential properties.</p>	<p>Empty Property Officer</p> <p>Placemaking &amp; Building Conservation Officer</p>	<p>November 2021</p> <p>October 2021</p>	<p>Production of Empty residential Property Information Pack.</p> <p>Number of Empty Residential Property Packs issued.</p> <p>Number of Packs downloaded from the website.</p>
<p>Media releases engagements and promotion.</p>	<p>Regular media releases such as news articles, tweets and Facebook post to promote the empty properties work including the support available and the empty property pack.</p>	<p>Empty Property Officer</p> <p>Principal Officer - Town Centres &amp; Business Support</p> <p>Communications Officer</p>	<p>Regular intervals</p>	

<b>Action</b> What are we going to do?	<b>What we will do</b> How are we going to do it?	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Monitoring Measure Target</b>
Maximise financial investment opportunities and utilise all available capital funding streams.	Continue to offer, deliver and promote financial assistance to owners in respect of the interest-free loans and conversion grants. Explore and regularly review any other available funding streams such as external grant programmes when offered by Welsh Government. Publish all information relating to the availability of financial assistance on the 'mini empty properties website'. Regeneration and Planning will continue to bid for WG funding (such as Transforming Towns) to administer grant schemes and other interventions to bring long-term empty town centre properties back into beneficial use. Funding has been secured in the 2021/22 financial year for a town centre grant scheme that is due to launch in Q3. This will be aimed at town centre property improvements. The Regeneration team will also use CCBC's core-funded Caerphilly Enterprise Fund grant scheme to assist with town centre property improvements, although the scheme is very popular and is accessible to businesses/properties across the County Borough. Consider use of other capital funding such as Social Housing Grant to assist with the return to beneficial use of empties properties. Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer to check on funding streams available as heritage grants and update relevant officer with information for the website.	Principal Housing Officer - Communities Private Sector Housing Manager  Principal Officer - Town Centres & Business Support  Principal Housing Strategy Officer  Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	Regular reviews throughout the timeframe	Number of enquiries for financial assistance annually. Number of formal completions relating to financial assistance annually.  Number of properties returned to beneficial use annually.
To certify all Valley Taskforce (VTF) empty home grants.	Complete Phase 2 of the VTF programme. Ensure all associated properties are bought back into beneficial use.	Empty Property Technical Officer	Sept 2022	Number of completed VTF empty home grants. Number of properties that received VTF funding that are returned to beneficial use.
Developers list people who are interested in buying empty properties.	Invite all developers, landlords and investors who are interested in purchasing empty properties to be added onto a developers list. The list will then be provided to empty property owners interested in selling their properties privately.	Empty Property Officer	November 2021	Creation of developers list. Number of requests for list.
Work with local estate agencies and auction houses to offer discount products.	Engage with local auction houses and estate agents to negotiate a discount fee and favourable conditions for empty properties owner referred via LA.	Empty Property Officer	November 2021	Number of referrals made.
Offer technical support and advice on bringing an empty residential property back into use, including producing schedules of works, estimate costings and general technical advice.	Appoint Technical Officer. Visit to give property specific advice on the work required to bring the property to a reasonable standard and the estimated cost of the works. As Listed Buildings have different criteria the Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer should offer advice on Listed Buildings and establish if LBC is required.	Principal Housing Officer - Communities Technical Officer Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	Ongoing	Appointment of Technical Officer. Number of advice visits made.
Engage with Social Housing Stakeholders to discuss potential joint working schemes	Meet with all social housing providers working in Caerphilly County Borough to discuss ways to work together on projects to bring empty properties back into use. This will include Listed Buildings (where applicable).	Principal Housing Officer - Communities Empty Property Officer Business Enterprise Reviewal Team Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	Initial meeting by December 2021 Ongoing	Ongoing meeting programme.

**Objective 2: Prioritisation and target approach in addressing empty properties**

<b>Action</b> What are we going to do?	<b>What we will do</b> How are we going to do it?	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Monitoring Measure Target</b>
Partnership working with Caerphilly Keys to offer tenant/ owner matching scheme	Caerphilly Keys aims are to develop a pool of accessible quality, affordable private rented accommodation and to provide a long-term housing solution for homeless applicants. This should enable the Council to meet its obligations under part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to discharge the homeless duty by offering this accommodation to homeless or potentially homeless people.  To develop a user-friendly website for landlords.  To continue to work alongside Caerphilly Private Landlord Forum, and to provide a platform between PRS and CCBC.  To continue to develop positive working relationships with supporting people, DWP and other external agencies.	Housing Solutions Manager Caerphilly Keys Officer	On going	Target 2 properties per month. September 2021 ongoing.
Principal Town Centre Empty Property List	A survey will be undertaken across the principal town centres to identify long-term vacant properties along with details of the owners or agents. A history of each property will be compiled to try and target appropriate interventions going forward. Any listed Empty Buildings identified will be referred to the relevant officer.	Regeneration Officers Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	October 2021	Regular monitoring of the town centres will take place, with properties added or removed from the list as required.
Submit a Report to CMT and Cabinet for a decision to be made on how to take forward the Private Sector accommodation Pathway to meet the needs of those presenting to the Housing Solution Team.	Produce a report outlining the WG lease scheme proposal in comparison to Caerphilly Keys current PRS model and obtain a decision from CCBC on which model we will take forward and then incorporate this into our Rapid Rehousing transition plan.	Housing Solutions Manager	March 2022	Decision regarding the outcome of the report
Produce and implement an Empty Homes strategy.	Produce a comprehensive empty homes strategy linking in with all relevant existing strategies including the Local Housing Strategy and Regeneration Strategies. Including an Integrated Impact Assessment.  Information will be included regarding Empty Listed Residential Building.	Private Sector Housing Manager Principal Housing Officer - Communities Empty properties Officer Principal Officer - Town Centres & Business Support Business Enterprise Reviewal Team Principal Housing Strategy Officer Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	October 2022	Approved Empty homes Strategy.
Principal Town Centre Vacancy Action Plan	A survey has been undertaken across all principal town centres of long-term vacant properties. Officers in Regeneration & Planning will work with owners and/or agents of these properties to bring the properties back into beneficial use through grant schemes (where possible) or by assisting in identifying a tenant or meanwhile use.  Where applicable, notices may be served when the building is in an extremely poor or dangerous condition.	Planning & Building Control Officers Regeneration Officers	Owners will be contacted/ notices served in Q3 21/22	Number of grants administered to long-term vacant property owners.  Number of properties brought back into beneficial use through targeted intervention.

<b>Action</b> What are we going to do?	<b>What we will do</b> How are we going to do it?	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Monitoring Measure Target</b>
Analyse the council tax data to fully understand the extent of the empty homes problem within the borough.	Develop a comprehensive list of all empty homes within the Borough looking at several categorisations such as location, level of relevant debts, housing need and number of years home has been empty.  Spatially map the data to assist with a strategic targeted approach moving forward.  Visual street survey of key town centres to improve intelligence .	Council tax officer Empty Property Officer Empty Property Admin Officer Principal Housing Strategy Officer	December 2021	Development of comprehensive list of empty homes within the Borough.  Spatially mapping of data  Identification of properties having negative impact.  Identification of properties that offer opportunities for mixed tenure schemes.
Agree prioritisation criteria of empty properties.	Agree on the criteria used to prioritise empty properties.	Principal Housing Officer - Communities Empty Property Officer Principal Officer - Town Centres & Business Support	December 2021	Agreed Prioritisation tool.
Use the data to identify a priority list of properties to target proactively	Prioritisation of the data to identify high priority empties to target to bring back to beneficial use properties in relation to housing need and council tax revenue.  Colleagues in Strategic Planning undertake an annual town centre vacancy survey that will be used to monitor/identify/assess long-term vacant commercial properties.  The Regeneration team also keep a list of vacant properties through regular visits to the town centres as part of the town centre management function. This list is discussed in meetings with local agents, which are intended to minimise vacancies and attract tenants to suitable properties.	Empty Property Officer   Principal Officer - Town Centres & Business Support	Ongoing from January 2022.	Identification / list of target properties
Commercial and residential - Key town centre joint street view surveys to highlight target mix	Identify key empty properties having negative impact on town centres and street scene.  Listed Buildings to be included (where applicable).	Empty Property Officer Principal Officer - Town Centres & Business Support Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	Commencing November 2021	List of key empty properties having negative impact on town centres and street scene.
Proactively target the priority empty properties identified in action 5.	Use the information collected to send initial letters, questionnaires and empty property packs. Target a manageable number of 20-30 per month working down the priority list. Follow up letters to be sent to any that don't respond before escalating to the officer for further intervention.	Admin + Empty Property Officer	Ongoing from January 2022	Response to questionnaire. Engagement and number of properties returned back to use.
Target properties that have recently fallen into the empty property criteria to prevent them becoming long term empties.	Soft approach mail drop with Empty Property Pack to all empty property owners within in the 6-12-month empty bracket to prevent them becoming long term empty Information and advice action only.	Admin Empty Property Officer Empty Property Officer Empty Technical Officer	May 2022	Number of letters sent.  Number of engagements.
Vacant Property Projects - Bargoed	Funding is being identified via Welsh Government for 2021/22 to develop meanwhile uses or make strategic property acquisitions in Bargoed town centre. These schemes will not only look to reduce the number of long-term vacancies in Bargoed, but also assess suitability of potential schemes for other town centres. CCBC will be contributing £100k to this programme to carry out works in default if owners do not comply with enforcement notices.	Regeneration Officers	2021/22	Number of properties brought back into beneficial use.  Interventions and processes used in Bargoed targeted approach will be developed/refined for repetition in other town centres as required.

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
Ensure a corporate approach to bring empties back into use. Co-ordinate the activity of the Local Authority across all departments to ensure that there is a unified and effective approach to deal with the empty properties.	Meet all relevant departments within the authority to highlight the work ongoing in the empty property team. Promoting what the team can do to assist them, highlighting the benefits of bringing an empty property back into use on the whole community including how it can help their specific area of work.  Establish a Caerphilly Empty Property Group with all internal stakeholder to ensure continual engagement.	Principal Housing Officer - Communities to Chair  Empty Property Officer	Oct 2021 -Continually every 3 months	Establishment of corporate Empty Property working group.
Ensure engagement and input from external stakeholders.	Establish an external working group with relevant third sector stakeholders such as police and fire authority.	Principal Housing officer - Communities Empty Property Officer	Date of initial meeting Jan 2022 Continually - every 4 months	Establishment of external working group.

**Objective 3: Take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties**

<p>Carrot and stick approach with any owners that fail to engage informally with the proactive contact are escalated to a more direct action.</p> <p>Targeted intervention on long-term vacant commercial properties, especially in Bargoed town centre.</p>	<p>Ensure that all owners that fail to respond to the initial contact letters are escalated for further intervention such as site visits to assess any action that can be taken under the relevant legislation.</p> <p>Case conference approach with colleagues to identify most appropriate type of enforcement intervention.</p> <p>Take a risk assessment approach to prioritise enforcement action.</p> <p>A Placemaking or Heritage Award may be considered for Listed Empty Buildings that are regenerated and repurposed successfully.</p> <p>A list has been compiled of long-term vacant commercial properties in our town centres. Officers will now work with the owners/agents of the properties to bring them back into beneficial use through:</p> <p>Grant funding to increase the viability of potential development schemes.</p> <p>Identifying potential tenants.</p> <p>Identifying potential meanwhile uses.</p> <p>Serving enforcement notices where properties in a particularly bad or dangerous condition.</p>	<p>Empty Property officer</p> <p>Technical Officer</p> <p>EHO</p> <p>Planning Officers</p> <p>Building Control Officers</p> <p>Regeneration Officers</p> <p>Placemaking &amp; Building Conservation Officer</p>	<p>As required/ necessary</p>	<p>Number of site visits completed.</p> <p>Number of notices served.</p> <p>Enforcement Action taken.</p>
<p>Investigate all reactive complaints received regarding empty properties.</p>	<p>Investigate all complaints received regarding empty properties and take every opportunity to work with the owner to address the ongoing concerns and agree a way of bringing the property back into use where appropriate on a case conference approach. Identify the most appropriate type of intervention.</p> <p>Complaints in relation to commercial properties are assessed initially as to whether the building is dangerous and if notices should be served or emergency work done in default. Officers will attempt to work with the owners to bring them back into beneficial use.</p>	<p>Empty Property Officer</p> <p>EHO</p> <p>Planning &amp; Regeneration officers</p> <p>Building Control Officers</p> <p>Environmental Health Officers</p> <p>Technical Officers</p>	<p>As required</p>	<p>No of complaints received regarding empty homes.</p>
<p>Engage with all departments to ensure all enforcement action on empty properties is highlighted and debts recovered.</p>	<p>Ensure that any engagement or work in default taken on an empty property is reported to the empty property team to ensure the debt recovery. Consider enforce sale for any that fail to pay.</p>	<p>Principal Housing Officer - Communities</p> <p>Empty Property Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Meet with all relevant department to discuss working practice.</p> <p>All WID highlighted to Empty Property Office.</p> <p>Request information on empty properties with outstanding debts every four months.</p> <p>Number of cases where debts are recovered informally.</p>



<b>Action</b> What are we going to do?	<b>What we will do</b> How are we going to do it?	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Monitoring Measure Target</b>
Ensure effective debt recovering mechanism for all work in default via Enforce Sale route.	Implement the Enforce Sale policy and procedure to recover outstanding debt via the enforce sale.	Principal Housing Officer Planning Officers Legal Officers	As required	Identification of properties with relevant debt to move forward with enforced sale procedure. Number of successful enforce sales. Amount of debt recovered.
Promote all successful enforcement action to highlight the authority position on empty properties.	Work with the authority's communication department to ensure that success stories are highlighted through various media outlet.	Principal Housing officer - Communities Empty Property Officer EHO Communication Officer	Regular intervals	Number of articles and cases to promote.



## Annex 2: Empty Property Risk Assessment Form

1. Date of Inspection \_\_\_\_\_

2. Inspecting Officer \_\_\_\_\_

3. Address of Empty Property \_\_\_\_\_

4. Owner's Name and Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Property Type:  House  Bungalow  Flat  HMO  
 End Terrace  Mid-Terrace  Detached  Semi Detached

7. Construction:  Brick  Stone  Concrete  Metal  Timber  Other  
 (if non-traditional, please specify type of construction)

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Date of Construction:  Pre 1919  1920-1945  1946-1979  Post 1980

9. Property Condition: (please specify construction material)

Score: Satisfactory: 0 Minor Repairs: 5 Major Repairs: 10 Renew: 15

	Front Elevation	Left Elevation	Right Elevation	Rear Elevation
Main Roof				
Addition Roof				
Lean to Roof				
Bay Roof				
Walls				
Addition Walls				
Lean to Walls				
Doors				
Windows (specify number)				
RWG				
Fascia/Barge				
Boundary Wall/Path				
Retaining Wall/Yard				

Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Condition of outbuildings (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

<b>11. Garden condition</b>	
Satisfactory	0
Some overgrowth	10
Very overgrown	30

<b>12. Waste present</b>	
No	0
Yes	40

<b>13. Length of time vacant</b>	
Less than 1 year	0
1-3 years	5
3-6 years	10
Over 6 years	20

<b>14. Structural condition</b>	
Good	0
Average with minor defects	5
Poor with several defects	15
Very poor with major defects	30
Dangerous and potentially unstable	40

<b>15. Property appearance / visual impact on area</b>	
Good, no impact	0
Average, no major impact	5
Poor, Some impact	15
Very poor, Detrimental to area	30
Extremely poor, eyesore and blight on area	40

**16. Security and anti-social impact**

Secure, no anti-social behaviour	0
Secure with evidence of some anti-social behaviour	5
Insecure, no anti-social behaviour	10
Insecure with evidence of some anti-social behaviour	15
Evidence of criminal and serious anti-social behaviour	40

**17. Enforcement history**

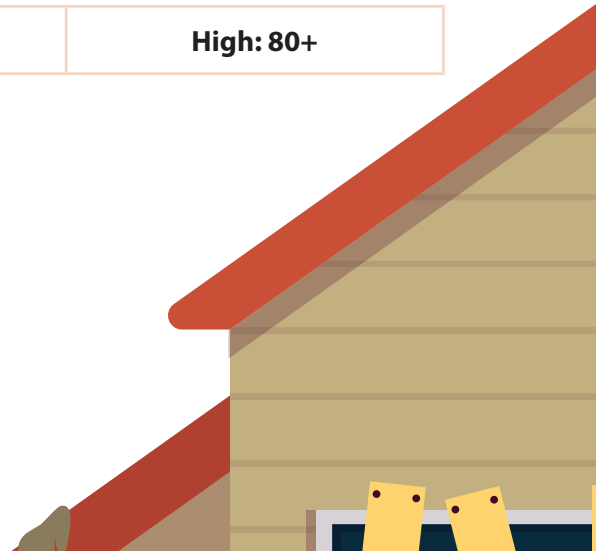
None	0
Complaints received	5
Numerous complaints received	10
LA action but no WID	15
LA enforcement action WID/prosecution	80

**18. Property type**

Detached	0
Semi-detached	5
End terrace	5
Mid terrace	10
Flat	15

**Total score**

<b>Low: 0-50</b>	<b>Medium: 55-75</b>	<b>High: 80+</b>
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### 11. Garden Condition

1. **Satisfactory:** Garden maintained in a reasonable condition.
2. **Some overgrowth:** Garden showing some overgrowth but appeared to be maintained intermittently. Not effecting neighbouring property.
3. **Very Overgrown:** Garden left to grow wild with no or little maintenance. Overgrowth effecting neighbourhood properties. Providing Harbours for pest. Present of invasive plants such as Japanese Knotweed. **Referral needed to district environmental health officers (EHO) for further action.**

### 12. Waste Present

1. **No:** No evidence of waste present at the property excluding building material.
2. **Yes:** Presence of waste such as household waste, soft furniture, sofas, mattresses, food waste, littering and general rubbish etc. **Referral needed to the housing EHO for further action.**

### 14. Structural Condition

1. **Good:** Property in good condition.
2. **Average with Minor Defects:** Minor issues such as rotten windows/doors etc.
3. **Poor with several notable defects:** Defect such as leaking/ damaged rainwater goods, cracked and damaged render etc. **Referral needed to district EHO if affecting neighbouring properties.**
4. **Very Poor with major defects:** Broken windows, damaged roof, falling elements etc. **Possible referral needed to Building Control Department, if significant, or Housing Environmental Health Officer if effecting neighbouring properties.**
5. **Dangerous and potentially structurally unstable:** Collapsing elements, signs of movement etc. **Urgent Referral needed to the building control department.**

### 15. Property Appearance/ Visual Impact on Area

1. **Good, No Impact:** Property looks acceptable, struggling to identify as empty.
2. **Average no major Impact:** Property can be identified as empty upon close inspection.
3. **Poor, some impact:** Property is clearly empty with issues such unkempt/untidy front or rear yard/gardens.
4. **Very poor, detrimental to area:** Property is having a visual impact on the area as a whole due to a number of severe issues.
5. **Extremely poor:** Property is derelict and is in such a poor condition it is a focal point for the area. **Referral to Planning Department.**



**16. Security and Anti-Social impact**

1. **Secure, no anti-social behaviour:** Not open to access, no signs of anti-social behaviour.
2. **Secure with evidence of some anti-social behaviour:** Not open to access but evidence of some minor anti-social activities e.g. some graffiti, empty bottles, cans etc.
3. **Insecure, no anti-social behaviour:** Open to access but no evidence of anti-social behaviour. **Urgent referral to General EH team to get the property secured.**
4. **Insecure with evidence of some anti-social actives:** Graffiti, empty bottles and cans. **Urgent referral to General EH team to get the property secured.**
5. **Evidence of criminal and serious anti-social behaviour:** Arson, break-in, theft, large groups congregating in and around the property. **Urgent discussion needed with PSH principal officer.**

**17. Complaint History**

1. **None:** No complaints received.
2. **Complaints received:** The occasional complaint received. Usually non-specific and only relating to the fact it is empty.
3. **Numerous complaint:** Regular complaints about the conditions of the property.
4. **LA Action but no Works in default (WID):** Either informal or formal action taken in response to complaint with owner carrying out required works.
5. **LA Enforcement action WID/ Prosecution: All empty property subject to LA enforcement action will automatically be High Priority.**

**All empty property subject to LA enforcement action will automatically be High Priority.**

**Notes**

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## Annex 3: Enforcement Options Available to Tackle Empty Properties

The main legislation used to deal with empty homes through enforcement action is as follows:

### **Environmental Protection Act 1990**

Abatement Notices can be served under section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in respect of statutory nuisances caused by a property's structure or associated land.

### **Prevention Of Damage By Pests Act 1949**

Section 4 of the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 enables the Council to serve Notices on the owner or occupier of the land to ensure the premises are free from rodents.

### **Building Act 1984**

The Building Act 1984 can be used to deal with several different situations where there is a building defect.

### **Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982**

Section 29 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 enables the Council to undertake works on an unoccupied property to secure it against unauthorised entry.

### **Town And Country Planning Act 1990**

Where an owner fails to maintain their property and its condition is considered to be detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood, the Local Authority can serve a Notice on the owner requiring work to be carried out to improve its appearance.

### **Housing Act 2004, Part 1: The Housing, Health And Safety Rating System (HHSRS)**

The Housing Act 2004 stipulates the requirement of a housing inspection and completing an HHSRS which is a risk assessment of 29 defined hazards that may be found in a property.

### **The Law Of Property Act 1925: Enforced Sale**

Where there is a financial charge of over £500 owed for works in default of certain legal notices detailed above and recorded on the Local Land Charges Register; the Local Authority can take action under the Law of Property Act 1925 to enforce the sale to recover our debts.

### **Housing Act 1985: Compulsory Purchase Orders**

Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 enables Local Authorities to compulsorily purchase a property for the provision of a housing accommodation.

### **Housing Act 1985: Demolition Orders**

Section 265 of the Housing Act 1985 allows the Local Authority to make a demolition order.

### **Housing Act 2004: Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)**

Part 4, Chapter 2 of the Housing Act 2004 allows the Local Authority, on approval by an Independent Residential Property Tribunal, to take over the day-to-day management of a property with the view to taking steps to ensure the property becomes, and continues to be, occupied. An Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) gives the Local Authority possession of the property without taking ownership.

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg, ac mewn ieithoedd a fformatau eraill ar gais.  
This document is available in Welsh, and in other languages and formats on request.







## HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 31ST JANUARY 2023

**SUBJECT: CAERPHILLY TOWN 2035 – PROJECT OVERVIEW AND  
PROGRESS REPORT**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMY AND  
ENVIRONMENT**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide the Scrutiny Committee with information in the form of a detailed update on the progress of the projects and initiatives contained in the Caerphilly Town 2035 placemaking plan.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Caerphilly town centre is an established tourism destination, has excellent connectivity to Cardiff and the wider region and is a gateway to the County Borough from the south. Cadw and Transport for Wales (TfW) have plans to invest significantly in the town, specifically: Cadw are implementing plans to promote the castle into a tier One destination; whilst investment in the South Wales Metro by TfW will enhance the town's connectivity to Cardiff, the Valleys and the wider region. The town is designated by Welsh Government (WG) as a town of strategic importance and in 2019 in recognition of this CCBC identified a need for a placemaking plan to harness and focus this investment in a coherent manner.
- 2.2 This placemaking plan, branded "Caerphilly Town 2035", provides a bold vision for the town centre and identifies a series of projects/interventions that will help to achieve its goals over a 15-year period. The vision is ambitious and long term and includes a number of "corner stone" projects that have the potential to transform Caerphilly town centre and the role it performs in the Cardiff Capital Region. Caerphilly Town 2035 has identified up to 62 projects that will provide a comprehensive regeneration and development platform to encourage growth, improve the social, economic and environmental performance of the town centre and support the health and wellbeing of its residents and businesses.
- 2.3 The purpose of this report is to update Scrutiny Committee on the significant progress made in the delivery of Caerphilly Town 2035 to date.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of this report and the work being undertaken in delivering key interventions to deliver on the ambitious vision for Caerphilly Town.

### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 To acknowledge the positive impact that the work the Council and its Partners has had to date in delivering the Council's Strategic Regeneration Priorities.

### **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 Caerphilly Town Centre has the potential to become a modern and culturally significant sub regional centre through the intensification of commercial, leisure and tourism uses. Its proximity to Cardiff and its location on an arterial railway/road route connecting Cardiff with the Valleys means that the town is ideally located to act as a focus for economic growth and regeneration.
- 5.2 In 2017 the Valleys Taskforce published *Our Valleys, Our Future*, the Taskforce's high-level plan which identified Caerphilly as one of 7 Strategic Hubs which would be prioritised for investment by Welsh Government, the Cardiff Capital Region and the Valleys Taskforce. In light of this recognition, the Council has concentrated much of its regeneration activity in the town of Caerphilly to exploit these funding opportunities.
- 5.3 The Council adopted the Caerphilly Basin Masterplan in 2018 as Supplementary Planning Guidance. A Placemaking Plan for Caerphilly Town Centre was then prepared in partnership with the Valleys Taskforce, Transport for Wales, Welsh Government and key stakeholders to target appropriate regional investment opportunities to achieve maximum impact and take forward the next phases of physical regeneration and placemaking activity in order to deliver on the objectives of the Caerphilly Basin Masterplan related to the town centre.
- 5.4 The town centre projects fit into a tight geographical area that could see growth of regional significance if all schemes are brought to fruition up to 2035. The objectives of Caerphilly Town 2035 are outlined below:
- To focus investment on a number of large regeneration projects in a coherent and co-ordinated manner.
  - To minimise impact on the town centre during development activity.
  - To bring key stakeholders on board as early as possible.
  - To create a dynamic environment that stimulates further economic prosperity.
  - To create a plan that would help towards unlocking external funding sources
  - To re-image the town so it becomes a more attractive and inviting destination
  - To reduce traffic flows through the town centre
  - To ensure that local deprived areas directly benefit
- 5.5 Caerphilly Town 2035 identifies 6 core ambitions for the town to focus these

objectives into. These are set out below:

- A RENOWNED TOURISM DESTINATION .... that fully exploits the presence of Caerphilly Castle to provide a unique visitor experience that people want to revisit.
- A CONNECTED TOWN .... with a modern transport interchange that provides a landmark entrance to the town, connects the town to the wider region and provides a base from which to actively explore the surrounding landscape
- A BUSINESS DESTINATION .... with a landmark hub at the transport interchange, a bespoke development corridor that connects the interchange with a consolidated Caerphilly Business Park, and a series of flexible workspaces in the town centre.
- A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE .... with an excellent environment for existing and new residents that is based on a choice of new homes, accessible workspaces, and diverse leisure choices.
- A LEISURE TOWN... that provides a varied retail and leisure offer that satisfies everyday requirements, but also includes bespoke products and great food and refreshments day and night.
- INCLUSIVE AND ENGAGING PUBLIC PLACES .... a town with a network of unique green streets and spaces that optimise views of the Castle, provide space for outdoor activity and are safe and accessible.

- 5.6 In 2021 it was agreed with Welsh Government that a renewed focus was required to deliver the aspirations of the Plan and a new Placemaking Programme Manager (PPM) post was created in July 2021 by the Council to prioritise the delivery of the aspirations of the Plan.
- 5.7 Since the appointment of the PPM, a multi-disciplinary consultant team has been appointed by the Council (with funding support from WG) to provide the resources and specialist advice to facilitate further engagement, explore options and provide detailed design to deliver the key projects identified within the Plan.
- 5.8 This has given Caerphilly Town 2035 real traction and many of the projects are developing at pace. This report is being presented to the Scrutiny Committee to outline the progress being made with these major key projects.
- 5.9 It is important to note that a sufficiently robust Governance structure has been prepared to support the delivery of the Plan. The current version can be seen in Appendix 1. This governance structure has been introduced to ensure effective management of the plan with its massively complex component parts. The Governance structure includes key stakeholders from a range of internal departments and external agencies who are able to positively impact on delivery. It is recognised that this Governance structure will evolve over time as projects, initiatives and organisations involved with the delivery of the Plan will change.
- 5.10 As outlined, Caerphilly Town 2035 proposes an extensive range of projects and initiatives. The principal interventions being progressed at present are identified in the

next section.

## **PROJECTS**

### **Pentrebane Street Redevelopment**

- 5.11 The scheme proposes the construction by Linc Cymru Housing Association of up to 74 new apartments and new ground floor commercial and retail space. The new accommodation will be Net Zero Carbon, EPCA and will comply to current high level space requirements (DQR).
- 5.12 CCBC have received significant funding from WG to acquire Numbers 1-15 Pentrebane Street (Including the Market Hall) with advanced negotiations in place with the current owners. Once the site assembly is concluded, the Council will transfer the site to Linc to enable demolition and construction works to start. The Council will also have a requirement to process payments from WG to cover the commercial ground floor construction element of the development. A legal charge over the development will be taken in favour of the Council to protect the investments made in the scheme.
- 5.13 Linc are considering a Development Options Appraisal to clarify the most efficient use of the site, with three development options currently being considered. Progress on additional required acquisitions and a Compulsory Purchase Order process will continue following conclusion of the Options appraisal work and confirmation from Linc of the final boundary for the proposed development. Further approvals from CCBC and WG will be required following this process.
- 5.14 Linc have prepared a draft programme that identifies Quarter 1 2024 as a potential start of demolition and construction work with a construction period of 18-24 months. The proposed closure of the Market and the impact on existing Traders has created some negative press coverage but CCBC has been proactive in providing the Traders with a package of support and funding to facilitate the traders relocating in the town centre, where possible and where desired by the individual traders.

### **Transport Interchange**

- 5.15 A fundamental component of Caerphilly Town 2035 and a key Council Place shaping priority is the development of a new public transport interchange at the site of the co-existing train and bus stations in Caerphilly Town Centre.
- 5.16 Caerphilly Interchange is one of the Cardiff Capital Region's Metro Plus Phase 1 projects. Caerphilly is served by an existing rail and bus station which is the only current example of an integrated multi-modal station in South-East Wales. Both the stations appearance and public realm are however poor, which creates an uninviting impression when arriving at the town.
- 5.17 The Caerphilly Interchange project will redevelop the existing joint stations into an exemplar mixed-use transport hub. The council's ambition is for the new interchange to become a best practice 'demonstrator' for future transport interchanges in Wales/UK. The project is an integral part of the wider regeneration programme of Caerphilly Town 2035, that will create an environment that can meet the aspirations of the people of Caerphilly. The new Transport Interchange will replace the current bus and train facilities to provide a new net zero carbon facility that will complement the improvements from the South Wales Metro and encourage greater use of public

transport, cycling and walking both to, from and within the town.

- 5.18 A design team has been appointed in partnership with WG and Transport for Wales (TFW) and a funding application was submitted to UK Government for Levelling Up Funding (LUF). On the 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2023 the Council were informed that the Levelling Up submission was unsuccessful. Officers will now pursue a number of other external funding opportunities including the next round of Levelling Up. It is important to note that other external funding has been secured to take the transport interchange through RIBA Stage 3 and that officers are pursuing the same funding source to complete RIBA Stage 4 (detailed design). This effectively means that design work will continue on the project.
- 5.19 In anticipation of securing future external funding support, design work is continuing with an expectation of submitting a future planning application. Key stakeholder and wider community engagement has been undertaken as the design process continues through RIBA Stage 3.

### **Wellbeing Centre**

- 5.20 The need for a new contemporary Wellbeing Centre that encompasses some of the traditional facilities offered by a leisure centre along with added value facilities for the community are well documented and remain a priority for the Council under its Place shaping agenda and are acknowledged and recognised within the Sports and Active Recreation Strategy 2019-2029 (SARS) adopted by Cabinet in November 2018. The existing Caerphilly Leisure Centre opened in the early 70's and is no longer fit for purpose. It is now in need of major investment and is difficult to access by much of the community. A new contemporary facility at a location at the heart of the town centre in line with Welsh Government's Town Centre First Principle will drive footfall in Caerphilly Town. Located within easy walking and cycling distance of both rail and train services the siting of the Centre will improve the accessibility of such a facility and also extend its reach to a much wider catchment. The site is also ideally located to benefit from excellent road access arrangements that will keep user traffic away from the town centre itself.
- 5.21 The development will also add value to the visitor economy following principles set out in the Welsh Government's "Facilities for Future Generations" framework. It will have facilities that will be attractive to visitors to the area (innovative splash swimming and activity pool) supported by a high-end state of the art Fitness Suite provision and will be designed in a manner that allows it to accommodate alternative and broader uses in collaboration with a range of partners.
- 5.22 A design team (Alliance Leisure) has been appointed by the Sports and Leisure Service and following Cabinet approval, a funding application has been submitted to UK Government for Levelling Up Funding (LUF). On the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023, the Council were informed that their £20m submission under this programme had been successful. This decision that was no doubt influenced by the fact that the Council will be investing £13m of its own monies into the scheme. Work will now continue at a pace to implement this project.

### **Park & Ride Development**

- 5.23 The Council secured funding from WG to consider the viability of creating new business space on the site of the current Park & Ride site adjoining the proposed new

Transport Interchange. The site is in joint ownership with the Council and TFW and the viability study demonstrated that development would be possible, although very limited parking would be available for any scheme.

- 5.24 The site is being considered by WG in the context of their 'Town Centres First' initiative which encourages public sector accommodation requirements to consider town and city centre options for regeneration and public transport benefits rather than remote locations that require access via use of a car.
- 5.25 Further work on this site has been put on hold as officers conduct further research on the overall car parking requirements of the town and the impact that the transport hub would have on it.

### **Market, Park Lane**

- 5.26 Following a site options appraisal, the Council-owned Park Lane site has been identified as the most appropriate location for the new Market, which will replace the current Market Hall in Pentrebanne Street. The new market will provide modified shipping containers in a high-quality environment for up to 28 new traders, including food and beverage, and additional space for some managed workspace. PV panels will be provided along with grass rooves and two electric vehicle charging points in the traders' car park.
- 5.27 A planning application has been submitted, with construction of the project due to start in March 2023 and a planned opening of the market in September 2023. Match-funding for the Council's contribution has been secured from WG Transforming Towns Initiative.
- 5.28 The new Market was originally intended to be a 'meanwhile-use' for Park Lane, as the site had previously been identified as a location for the construction of a new hotel. However, following the appointment of specialist Hotel agents, the council have been advised that the site is not the most suitable location for a hotel and that it wouldn't be big enough to accommodate the size of hotel envisaged, i.e. a quality life-style hotel of 60-80 Bedrooms. Hence it has been agreed that a new modern containerised market should make best use of the Park Lane site.

### **Hotel Quarter, Cardiff Road**

- 5.29 The preferred Hotel location identified by the specialist hotel agents is now on Cardiff Road, opposite the Castle. The views of the Castle from this location are considered by the agent to be a considerable advantage for any potential developer/operator and they have identified this site as being the most suitable to attract investment and accommodate a 60-80 bed life-style hotel.
- 5.30 Loan funding to facilitate site assembly ('The Acquisition Fund') has been secured from WG, along with Council funding, and a site options appraisal is being undertaken to better understand how the site could be redeveloped and the extent of any future mixed-use development requirements including the provision of additional retail, leisure, office space and residential uses.

### **Llys Ifor Site, Crescent Road**

- 5.31 The Acquisition Fund also makes provision for the proposed purchase of Llys Ifor, a prominent building located at the entrance to the Council-owned Crescent Road Car Park. The owners have obtained planning consent for the construction of 29 new apartments with a ground floor café, although the owners have struggled for some time to agree terms with various developers to construct the scheme. A small area of the council owned Crescent Road car park would be required to deliver the approved scheme.
- 5.32 Heads of Terms have been agreed with the site owners for the Council to acquire the site following demolition of the buildings and site clearance.
- 5.33 Once in Council ownership, it is proposed to market the site with a development brief seeking an improved design linked to public realm improvements to the park and town centre.

### **Castle Quarter**

- 5.34 The space between the Castle and town centre is generally under-utilised and provides a fantastic opportunity to create a unique space to encourage both residents and visitors to the town to dwell longer and enjoy the experience this location offers.
- 5.35 The land is in the ownership of both the Council and Cadw and discussions have started to assess how best the space can be managed jointly with greater opportunities to generate revenue streams between the two organisations to support the ongoing management costs of the area.

### **Ness Tar & Pesci Scrapyard Site**

- 5.36 The Council, in partnership with WG, has undertaken a due diligence process to assess how these two contaminated sites could be brought forward for a new high quality residential development of up to 225 new homes.
- 5.37 The due diligence process has potentially identified solutions to bringing forward the site for redevelopment and discussions are in progress with the site owners to assess how best the delivery of the site can be progressed.

### **Engagement Strategy**

- 5.38 Caerphilly Town 2035 was produced just prior to the Pandemic in March 2020 and therefore whilst a series of stakeholder sessions were held on the proposals in 2019 the further planned engagement which was due to be undertaken on the emerging proposals in 2020 was impacted by the pandemic.
- 5.39 It is recognised that there is a need to further test the proposals contained within the plan and therefore expert consultants Cowshed, have been appointed to support the engagement, marketing, branding and communications activities to ensure that local residents, businesses and key stakeholders have an opportunity to comment and help formulate any future projects, initiatives and priorities associated with the Plan going

forward.

### **Socio-Economic Benchmarking**

- 5.40 The recent challenges in global economics and societal changes following the Pandemic have required the need for a new socio-economic review of the town to be prepared to fully understand the current performance of the town and clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses.
- 5.41 This 'Baseline' will provide the basis for future evaluation and monitoring of the Plan to ensure that appropriate targets and core ambitions are set for the town and that progress is made in the delivery of these targets and aspirations.
- 5.42 Consultants have been appointed to progress this baseline review with initial findings to be reported in February 2023.

### **Town Centre Housing Opportunities**

- 5.43 A number of the projects identified above will deliver new housing in the town centre and its peripheral area. The Council acknowledge that the diversification of the town centre is key to its long-term prosperity and the delivery of housing to strengthen the mix and act as a catalyst to deliver economic activity is seen as a core element. In order to maximise the opportunities for residential development, Caerphilly Homes have commissioned consultants to identify further opportunities to bring additional homes into the heart of the town.

### **Conclusion**

- 5.44 The excellent progress being made on Caerphilly Town 2035 Plan and its constituent projects is very encouraging, however there are a number of complex projects that are interwoven which will require the same level of energy and resources expended to date to continue throughout the life of the plan.

## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 This report assumes that the projects outlined above have been/will be developed further and where applicable implemented, with assistance from appropriate sourced and secured external funding.

## **7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 This report is an update on Caerphilly Town 2035 and outlines which projects have been identified to progress. Each scheme supported through the Plan will have varying impacts, mostly positive, and will be the subject of individual full IIA's as they progress.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The plan has over 60 projects identified for implementation. The Council in conjunction with Welsh Government has prioritised key projects that have been outlined and



summarised within the body of this report. If these projects come to fruition, then the town will benefit from multi-million pounds worth of investment. This figure is hard to quantify at present but will ensure the economic prosperity of the town and will cement its role as a key sub regional centre.

- 8.2 In order to deliver the projects identified in the report along with a number of others within the Plan, there will not only be a requirement to establish project specific budgets but there will be a need to continue to resource the multi-disciplinary team to aid delivery.
- 8.3 Welsh Government have shown their commitment to the Plan by allocating Transforming Towns funding to the development of a number of projects and towards match funding the work of the multi-disciplinary team. Officers will continue to look to Welsh Government for support as the projects progress and will also investigate other funding options as appropriate. UK Government funding has already been targeted for key projects as outlined above with £20m being secured from the Levelling Up Programme to date.

## **9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There has been and will continue to be a requirement for officers from a variety of internal departments within the Authority to dedicate time and energy to the projects identified in Caerphilly Town 2035 plan in order to progress them, the level of which depends on the status of each project. In addition, the plan's progress to date is also assisted by the fact that the PPM can call upon the resources from an external multi-disciplinary team.
- 9.2 The PPM is crucial to delivering the various component parts of the Caerphilly 2035 plan. The post is currently a fixed term appointment and work is being undertaken to identify funding for making the post permanent given the long- term nature of the delivery of projects set out within the plan.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

- 10.1 All comments received from consultees have been incorporated into the report.

## **11.0 STATUTORY POWER**

- 11.1 The Local Government Acts 1998 and 2003.
- 11.2 Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Author: Hamish Munro, Placemaking Programme Manager

Consultees:

Cllr Jamie Pritchard, Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change  
Christina Harray, Chief Executive  
Mark S. Williams, Corporate Director for Economy and Environment  
Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer  
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer

Robert Hartshorn, Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services  
Marcus Lloyd, Head of Infrastructure  
Ben Winstanley, Head of Land and Property Services  
Nick Taylor Williams, Head of Housing  
Rhian Kyte, Head of Regeneration and Planning  
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services  
Clive Campbell, Transportation Engineering Manager  
Jeff Reynolds, Sports and Leisure Facilities Manager  
Anwen Cullinane, Senior Policy Officer  
Allan Dallimore, Regeneration Services Manager  
Paul Hudson, Business, Enterprise and Renewal Team Manager  
Councillor Andrew Whitcombe Chair of Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny  
Committee  
Councillor Patricia Cook Vice Chair of Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny  
Committee

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Governance Structure

# Appendix 1 – Governance Structure

Group	Meeting Frequency	Caerphilly CBC													WG																																
		Mark S Williams	Rhian Kyte	Allan Dallimore	Hamish Munro	Paul Hudson	Ryan Thomas	Marcus Lloyd	Clive Campbell	Stephen Harris	Nick Taylor-Williams	Jane Roberts-Waite	Maria Godfrey	Stephen Pugh	Ben Winstanley	Vickie Julian	Robert Hartshorn	Paul Cooke	Hayley Lancaster	Jeff Reynolds	Stuart Fitzgerald	Clair Stonelake	Kath Nicholls	Alice Woolley	Richard Baker	Richard Wilson	Campbell Lammie	Robert Kent-Smith	Deb Harding	Gareth Potter (TfW)	Gwilym Hughes	Kate Roberts	Gwydion Griffiths	Stride Treglown Multi-Disc Team	Linc Cymru	Grimshaws	Alliance Leisure										
Programme Board	Quarterly	x	x	x	x																	x	x																								
Programme Executive Group	Six Weeks		x	x	x						x											x	x																								
Ness Tar Project Group	As Required		x	x	x						x											x	x																								
Transport Group	Monthly			x	x						x												x	x																							
Pentrebane Street Project Group	As Required			x	x																	x	x																								
Caerphilly Market, Park Lane	As Required			x	x																	x	x																								
Hotel Quarter	Monthly			x	x																	x	x																								
Castle Quarter	Monthly			x	x																	x	x																								
Park & Ride Site Project Group	As Required			x	x																	x	x																								
Llys Ifor Project Group	As Required			x	x																		x	x																							
Wellbeing Hub Project Group	As Required			x	x																		x	x																							
Sustainability and Decarbonisation Project Group	Quarterly			x	x																	x																									
Engagement, Comms, Marketing & Branding Project Group	Monthly			x	x																		x																								

Caerphilly Placemaking Plan 2035: Governance Structure

