

Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel

Agenda
Item:
A.2

Meeting Date: 17 October 2019
Portfolio: Economy, Enterprise and Housing
Key Decision: YES: Recorded in the Notice Ref: KD.21/19
Within Policy and Budget Framework No
Public / Private Public

Title: Empty Property Grant Assistance
Report of: Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services
Report Number: GD.54/19

Purpose / Summary:

To set out the detail of an Empty Property Grant to support the work of the City Council in bringing long term empty properties back into use.

Recommendations:

- Consider the proposed Empty Property Grant assistance and provide comments to the Executive for consideration at its meeting on the 18th November 2019.

Tracking

Executive:	18 November 2019
Scrutiny:	17 October 2019
Council:	NA

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Section 3.1 of the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2018 introduced the option to create an Empty Property Grant. The Full Council Report (GD.84/18) for the meeting on the 6th November 2018 stated that the detail of the Empty Property Grant assistance from the City Council will be subject to approval by a future Executive.
- 1.2 The Council's Empty Homes and Grants Officer continues to concentrate on bringing long-term empty homes in the District back into use, these are properties that are classified by Council Tax as being empty for over two years. The Council concentrates its efforts on these longer-term empty properties as a two-year period allows sufficient time for owners to deal with issues; such as any renovation issues, probate issues and the natural turn over in the housing market.
- 1.3 A previous Empty Property Grant scheme was run in 2013 through the former Department of Culture and Local Government's Cluster project. This Grant focused on properties in a particular area of the District to bring down the number of empty properties to less than 10% in those areas. The project offered grants of up to £5,000. The Council received positive feedback from the scheme and the officer running the project received a national award for their work.
- 1.4 An initial funding pot of £23,200 has been moved into the Empty Property Grant fund as a capital grant. These funds were previously within a Minor Works Grant which was no longer used following the introduction of Discretionary Housing Grants in the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy.

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The purpose of the grant funding is to support the work of the Empty Homes and Grants Officer in bringing long term empty properties back into use. The officer's work solely focuses around domestic empty homes, not empty commercial lets.
- 2.2 Any funds available need to be used as efficiently as possible to enable the Council to assist empty home owners. The proposed scheme would be looking to target empty home owners whose properties have been empty for longer than two years. The grant on offer would be up to £3,000 to cover the costs associated with making that property viable for occupation. **Appendix 1** shows the typical types of works required to the longer-term empty homes and the type of assistance requested.
- 2.3 Carlisle City Council's Empty Property Grant would provide a maximum of £3,000 per property, the discretionary grant approvals will be made on a first come first served basis. Eligibility will be judged on a case by case basis; however, it would be expected that the grant resulted in the property being brought back into use and preferable if the owner contributed additional financial resources to achieve re occupation.

- 2.4 Owner's will be required to complete works within six months of the grant being approved and to ensure the home is free from Category 1 hazards. The grant conditions ensure that the property must be reoccupied within six months of claiming the approved grant. All grants will be registered as a local land charge and would be recovered at the point of sale if the property is sold within a five-year period of becoming reoccupied.
- 2.5 All applicants would be required to complete an application form and the approval of the funds would comply with the procedures and the processes in place for the Disabled Facility Grants and other discretionary grants.

3.0 OTHER OPTIONS

- 3.1 Alternative options have been considered for the funding, which are listed below:

Works in Default – works made on the property and costs recovered through the sale of the property. This is time intensive and already an option through the Enforced Sale Policy. The preferred option will operate where there is cooperation with the owner.

Two Year Interest Free Loan. A loan option is high risk and time intensive. Equally the take up and interest in these products in the past has been minimal.

Managed Repair Service. The City Council organises contractors to undertake works and the Council then recover the costs and charges an administration fee (potentially through the sale of the property). The legal and financial risks to the Council are greater than the proposed option, it would also require greater resources from the Council.

Empty Dwelling Management Order. The City Council would pay for repairs to homes and recover costs through rental arrangements (Low cost affordable rental) over 5-7 years (often requires substantial up-front funding which is not currently available). The legal and financial risks to the Council are greater than the proposed option, it would also require greater resources from the Council.

4.0 RISKS

- 4.1 The Proposed Grant Assistance is discretionary and subject to funding being available. It is only after works are completed that the owner can claim the previously approved grant. The Grant Assistance requires a commitment from the owners. Risks are further mitigated by placing the Council's grant contribution as a charge on the property, recoverable if the planned improvements and re occupation of the property does not progress. In this way the Grants Assistance is aligned with the Enforced Sale Policy.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The proposed Grant Assistance follows consultation within the Housing and Pollution Group.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The proposed Empty Property Grant Assistance provides owners of long-term empty homes with an option to progress improvements, that would allow re occupation of the properties as an alternative to the Council's formal options through the Enforced Sales Policy.

7.0 CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES

- 7.1 Address current and future housing needs to protect and improve residents' quality of life.

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**Appendices attached
to report:**

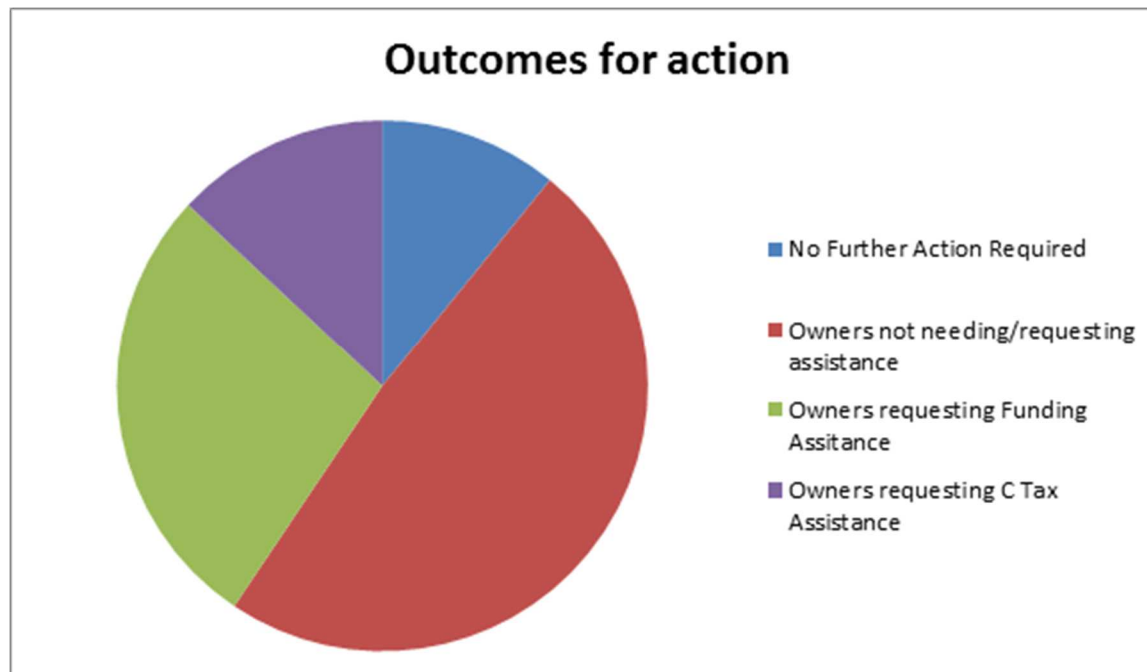
Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- None

Appendix 1

Figures taken 2018- 2019

For reference, this information was gathered from information sent to 360 'long term' empty home owners which resulted in a return of 118 responses.



Type of work	Amount of requests	Comments
Plastering	12	Including re-instatement of complete ceilings
Electrics	6	Rewire or installation condition check
Central Heating	4	
Plumbing	1	
Mains water connection	1	
Garden Clearance	5	In some cases clearing overgrown gardens
Windows	2	
Kitchens	17	
Bathrooms	14	
Damp issues	1	
Roof repair	2	
Pointing	1	
Decoration	5	
Skips	2	
Deep clean	4	
Repair to chimney	1	
Carpets	2	
Road cordon	1	
Hard standing	1	To provide parking area off main road (A69)

Type of Works

