

## **Annex Two:**

### **City of York Council Empty Homes Policy Statement**

#### **Introduction**

The Council recognises that empty homes are a waste of a valuable resource in a city of high housing need. Empty homes can blight a street and are a cause, symptom and symbol of neighbourhood decline.

The council works cross-departmentally and in partnership with other agencies including private landlords and local housing associations to enable owners to bring empty homes back into use. The council has assisted in bringing an average of 7 homes per year without the use of grants or other public subsidy. From 2006/09 the council has established a York Landlord Grant worth up to £20,000 as an incentive for the owners of empty homes to lease their properties to housing associations. The grant is used towards the cost of any necessary refurbishment and repair works. Details of the eligibility conditions of this grant are attached.

This Empty Homes Policy Statement explains the procedures and policies the council has in place to assist in bringing empty homes back into use. The statement will be reviewed in three years time or sooner if changes in legislation or in the number of empty homes warrant this.

#### **How does the council find out about empty homes?**

From time to time we will use our council tax records to provide information on the number of homes that have been empty for over six months. We will use this information to contact the owners of these properties and encourage them to bring them back into use

When contact with the council about empty homes comes from the owners of the properties themselves or from other sources including concerned neighbours or councillors, we will investigate the circumstances of the property including visiting it if appropriate.

#### **What does the council do when it is notified of an empty home?**

Notification of an empty property may come through several routes. Most commonly these are:

- Concerned neighbours
- Councillors
- Owners of the empty homes

Initial enquiries may be made to different departments of the council including Environmental Protection, Street Environment Services, Community Services (Housing Development) or directly through councillors.

Irrespective of where the enquiry originates, Housing Standards & Adaptations Officers should be the first point of contact and will give advice on the options for bringing a property back into use. Where appropriate, they will also refer enquiries to other areas of the council (for example Development Control or Housing Development) for more detailed information.

If a property is causing a statutory nuisance (through disrepair or vandalism for example) Housing Standards & Adaptations Officers will investigate the circumstances and where appropriate contact the owner of the property.

At this stage the emphasis is focused on finding a solution to the problem through negotiation and agreement. This may include:

- Discussing the options and possibilities of leasing the home to a housing association.
- Giving advice on how to apply for a York Landlord Grant and the rules and procedures that need to be followed.
- Giving advice on the repair and modernisation works needed to bring the property up to a satisfactory standard

Where attempts to reach a negotiated agreement are unsuccessful consideration will be given to enforcement measures using appropriate legislation to ensure the problem ceases.

### **What solutions are available?**

A flow chart showing the possible solutions available to bring empty homes back into use is attached.

Currently a York Landlord Grant is available to assist in bringing empty homes back into. The terms and conditions of the grant are outlined below.

### **York Landlord Grant: Qualifying Terms and Conditions**

- ✓ The grant is to help landlords bring empty properties back into use as dwellings
- ✓ The grant is for work that will make the empty dwelling meet the decency standard as determined by the council.
- ✓ To qualify for assistance the landlord must be the freeholder of the property or have a lease with at least five years unexpired term at the time of application. The landlord must enter into a leasehold agreement with a partner housing association for a minimum of five years from the completion of the works.
- ✓ The grant limit is 75% of the cost of the eligible works up to a maximum of £20,000 of which £2,000 is payable to the housing association for initial set-up costs
- ✓ Additional capital finance for the improvement works necessary to meet the decent homes standard will either be met by the owner or by the housing association through negotiation with the owner. Evidence of this additional funding must be in place before the grant is paid
- ✓ The grant application will be made by the housing association but the council will determine the eligibility of the proposed schedule of works.
- ✓ Only one grant approval per property will normally be available
- ✓ These grants are repayable should the property be sold or no longer used for letting within five years of completion of the works.
- ✓ Lettings as holiday lets or to family members are not eligible.
- ✓ The Council has the right to nominate tenants to the homes from the housing waiting list