

MINUTES

MINUTE EXTRACT

Present:

Councillor Sharon Harvey (Chair), Councillor Jane Spilsbury (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, Bill Hartnett, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall

Officers:

Toni Ainscough, Maria Bailey, Ruth Bamford, Matthew Bough, Mark Cox, Amanda Delahunty, Matthew Eccles, Rachel Egan, Claire Felton, Rebecca Green, Georgina Harris, John Leach, Julie Lorraine, Katie Sharp-Fisher and Judith Willis

Democratic Services Officers:

Eve Davies

109. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

The Senior Housing Strategy Officer presented a report on the Empty Homes Strategy.

Members were informed that in October 2025 there were 542,276 empty homes recorded across England, representing 2.1 per cent of all homes. At the same point in time, Redditch Borough had 660 empty homes, of which 320 had been empty for more than six months.

The strategy set out the Council's commitment to identifying empty homes and developing options to bring them back into use as quickly as possible. It outlined the priorities and actions for tackling empty homes across the Borough and for applying the most effective interventions available.

Officers highlighted that a contribution of £7,681 from Redditch Borough Council's Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant (2026/27) had been agreed to support the funding of a part-time Empty Homes Officer.

The aims of the strategy were to:

- help alleviate housing need

Chair

- improve housing conditions
- offer a wider choice of housing to residents
- minimise the blight that could result where properties were left empty and neglected

It was explained that there were two main types of empty homes. Short-term empty homes were those unoccupied for under six months and typically occurred as part of property sales or routine changes in personal circumstances. Long-term empty homes were dwellings unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for six months or longer. Bringing long-term, privately owned empty homes back into use was the primary focus of the strategy, as these properties often remained empty due to additional underlying factors.

Officers reported that residential properties could remain empty for various reasons, including unresolved inheritance or ownership issues, new homes awaiting sale, abandonment, lack of funds for repairs, awaiting planning decisions, repossession, or perceived difficulties in renting. In some cases, owners also retained sentimental attachment to a property.

The Committee was advised that there was no Act of Parliament that placed a statutory duty on Local Housing Authorities to tackle empty homes. However, Councils had a general duty under the Housing Act 1985 to review housing conditions and housing needs. National policy empowered Local Authorities to bring vacant dwellings back into use, guided by a local strategy.

Local Authorities also had discretionary powers to charge Council tax premiums and a range of legislative tools to address empty homes.

The strategy focused on supporting homeowners to bring empty properties back into use and utilising enforcement measures where necessary. It centred around three priority areas:

1. Developing systems, processes and multi-agency working
2. Improving intervention pathways, resources and performance
3. Strengthening early intervention, engagement and monitoring

Officers advised that the action plan had been developed in line with the Local Government Association's Empty Homes Toolkit, which promoted a staged approach focused on accurate data, early engagement, proportionate enforcement and strong partnership working.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing asked Members to note that Redditch was in the lower bracket nationally for the proportion of empty homes, with 8.43 long-term empty homes per 1,000 dwellings. The Portfolio Holder welcomed the strategy and commented that the Council continually sought to improve its approach.

Members also made the raised the following points:

- Thanks were expressed to officers for their work in producing the report.
- The action plan provided clarity about when Members and the public could expect to see empty homes being brought back into use.
- Members welcomed the alignment of the strategy with Local Government Association good practice guidance.
- It was noted that the strategy represented a positive step towards bringing homes back into use at a time when many residents were in need of housing.

RECOMMENDED that

The Redditch Borough Council Empty Homes Strategy 2026 – 29 be adopted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.27 pm