

**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

**AGENDA ITEM 7**

**QUESTION 1 – from Cllr Roger Evans**

- a) In December 2014 an Empty Homes task and finish group was set up and its report considered in July 2015. This report was then forwarded to the Shropshire Council Cabinet. It showed that in November 2014 there were just under 1600 long term empty homes in Shropshire. It also showed an alarming trend of homes that now classed as being exempt from paying council tax, a 900% increase in just 12 months.
- b) Can an update be provided on what has happened since, how many empty homes have been brought back into use, where they are and how much extra New Homes Bonus was brought in by returning these homes into use during 2015/16.
- c) How many empty homes are the empty homes team aware of at present?
- d) Was the total approved budget in 2015/16 fully spent and how much is there allocated for this current year 2016/17
- e) Do staff now have access to all the information needed in order for them to carry out their roles efficiently and without undue delay?

**Response:**

- a) In December 2014 an Empty Homes task and finish group was set up and its report considered in July 2015. This report was then forwarded to the Shropshire Council Cabinet. It showed that in November 2014 there were just under 1600 long term empty homes in Shropshire. It also showed an alarming trend of homes that now classed as being exempt from paying council tax, a 900% increase in just 12 months.

*A redesign of Public Protection services in 2016 was primarily carried out to deliver the financial savings set out in the Council's financial strategy 2016/17-2018/19 and this resulted in a change in role for the two officers involved in the Empty Property function. One of the officers has moved to the Transactional Management team and will no longer deliver this function. The other officer will continue to have some involvement with empty properties. The extent of the service which can be delivered is dependent on the NHB allocation to the service. 2016/17 New Homes Bonus allocations will be recommended to Cabinet in July and will include an allocation for the empty homes function, in order to support the continuation of the work. The value of the allocation is likely to be determined in early July.*

- b) Can an update be provided on what has happened since, how many empty homes have been brought back into use, where they are and how much extra New Homes Bonus was brought in by returning these homes into use during 2015/16.

*The work of officers in the Community Protection team resulted in 135 empty properties returned to use and 2 new developments in 2015/16. It is estimated that this would generate £163,485 New Homes Bonus per annum for four years based on a council tax band D property of £1211.*

- c) How many empty homes are the empty homes team aware of at present?

*The figures we obtained on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016 identify that there are 1615 Long Term Empty & 463 Exempt Properties.*

- d) Was the total approved budget in 2015/16 fully spent and how much is there allocated for this current year 2016/17

*£521,226 was allocated to the function in 2015/16, of which £324,874 was spent. The remaining £196,352 is scheduled to be carried forward for use in 2016/17 and will be added to the new allocation for 2016/17.*

- e) Do staff now have access to all the information needed in order for them to carry out their roles efficiently and without undue delay?

*Officers have read only access to the relevant parts of the Council Tax database which has improved access to information.*

## **QUESTION 2 – from Cllr Roger Evans**

“SAMDev has now of course been adopted. What plans are there and what is the time scale for updating this plan.”

### **Response:**

“We have already begun the process of reviewing the SAMDev and are progressing work towards calculating the housing and employment requirements for the period 2016 – 2036 to be covered by the next Local Plan. Late receipt of the SAMDev Inspector’s Report and adoption in December 2015 alongside the amount of planning appeals delayed the start of work by 4-6 months over the published timetable (known as the Local Development Scheme <http://shropshire.gov.uk/media/2043044/Draft-LDS-2015-2018-October-2014.pdf>) . However new requirements set down by government in the Housing and Planning Act require Councils to have an appropriate Local Plan prepared and submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by March 2018. A new timetable will be published shortly showing the relevant dates for the different stages of Local Plan leading to submission in March 2018.