



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

30 JUNE 2009

SUMMARY OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINAL REPORT RE. THE CONDITION OF EMPTY SHOPS AND PROPERTIES

Purpose of the scrutiny investigation:

Empty properties, whether residential or commercial, can detract from the local environment and cause problems in communities. The scrutiny panel's main aims were to investigate the responsibilities of the Council in this area, to examine the effectiveness of its involvement and to identify any associated issues.

Terms of reference:

The terms of reference of the scrutiny investigation were to examine the Council's involvement in relation to the environmental condition of empty shops and properties, including:

- the authority's general powers and responsibilities in respect of empty commercial/residential properties, including enforcement powers.
- the risk assessment process for empty properties and eyesores.
- the authority's responsibilities and actions in respect of any empty shops which it manages.
- the role of other agencies, such as social landlords.
- links with regeneration services (insofar as they relate to environmental issues).

Findings:

The scrutiny panel found that the Council is actively involved in addressing the environmental problems associated with empty properties. This is principally through Environmental Services' use of relevant enforcement legislation and by using a points system to address the worst properties in priority order. The panel also heard from the Council's Regeneration Service concerning its involvement in this issue and Erimus Housing in respect of how that organisation is dealing with empty properties.

Conclusions:

Based on the evidence considered during its investigation, the panel made six conclusions. These are shown in full in the final report and relate to:

- 1) The need for action by all relevant parties to minimise the environmental problems associated with empty properties.
- 2) The Council's key role in this issue.
- 3) The use of legislation and a points/priority system to address environmental problems in respect of the worst properties.
- 4) The provision of advice by the Council to assist in addressing potential problems concerning problem properties as soon as possible.
- 5) Erimus Housing's role in this issue.
- 6) The current position concerning empty shop units owned by the authority.

Recommendations:

The scrutiny panel's final report contains five recommendations. These are shown in full in the report and relate to the following:

- 1) The scrutiny panel's endorsement of the points/priority system to address environmental problems in respect of the worst properties.
- 2) The need to share information between all relevant organisations to ensure that action can be taken as soon as possible.
- 3) Monitoring the position in respect of empty private sector shops in particular and also publicising owners' obligations in terms of those properties and residential properties.
- 4) Encouraging Erimus Housing to use aesthetically pleasing types of shutters in areas of large-scale demolition.
- 5) Reporting back to the scrutiny panel on the effectiveness of the use of legal powers and the points/priority system.

The Environment Scrutiny Panel's full report on this topic is attached for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

COUNCILLOR BOB KERR
CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

22 June 2009