

**ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL
CONDITION OF EMPTY SHOPS AND PROPERTIES– ACTION PLAN**

SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION	PROPOSED ACTION	BY WHOM	BUDGET COST	TIMESCALE
<p>1. That the Executive is advised that the approach taken by the Council to addressing environmental issues associated with empty properties has made some progress. In particular, the system of using a points and priority system to take action in respect of dilapidated buildings is endorsed and should continue to be used.</p>	<p>Over 200 properties and sites have already been priority assessed and an additional 20 houses have been improved or re-occupied as a result of the council's interventions. Seven properties are subject to current legal action and at least another 16 will be dealt with in detail by December 2009.</p> <p>A dedicated post was created to tackle empty properties and eyesores in 2007 and will continue to prioritise actions within the resources available</p>	<p>Community Protection Service</p>	<p>Current budget</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>2. That information is shared between the Council and its partner organisations to highlight empty properties where future action may be needed in respect of environmental condition. This should aim to ensure that action can be taken as early as possible in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term empty properties. • Long term empty properties 	<p>This already takes place where major regeneration schemes (Housing Market Renewal) are underway. These areas including Gresham, St Hilda's and Grove Hill have a higher than average level of empty properties.</p> <p>The introduction of 'selected licensing' in Gresham has seen conditions improve in the last year, in particular, reported anti social behaviour has reduced by 26%.</p>	<p>The Regeneration Department leads on housing market renewal.</p>	<p>Existing budgets.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problem empty properties in a dilapidated condition. 	<p>The Council's Technical Officer Group (formerly known as the Asset Management Group) meets regularly to prioritise actions including any interventions needed for council owned properties and land. Mouchel manage the Council's commercial property stock</p> <p>Neighbourhood Safety Officers are available to deal with anti social behaviour associated with vacant land and buildings. Problems requiring a multi agency approach are reported to one of the town's five problem solving groups</p>	<p>Technical Officer Group</p> <p>Neighbourhood Safety team</p>	<p>Existing budget</p> <p>Existing budget</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<p>3. That, in order to avoid resource-intensive enforcement action at a later date, intervention in respect of the condition of empty properties is made as soon as possible, such as:</p> <p>a) By monitoring the position in respect of empty private sector shops. Any potential issues of disrepair, damage, or dilapidation should then be addressed at an early stage by contacting property owners.</p>	<p>Individual properties known to be a problem are priority assessed by the Community Protection Service. This activity will continue to be part of the work of a dedicated officer who deals with empty properties are eyesores.</p> <p>The Regeneration Dept monitor the town centre and district centres each year as part of the LDF Annual</p>	<p>Community Protection Service</p> <p>Regeneration</p>	<p>Existing budgets</p> <p>Existing budgets</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

<p>b) By publicising the issue of owners' obligations in respect of empty properties.</p>	<p>Monitoring Report in terms of occupant, use and vacancy. When in receipt of a planning application within a group of shops it is often the case officer who will make a site visit and take account of the conditions within that centre.</p> <p>Where there are active area based regeneration proposals and development frameworks, improvements to local shopping centres are frequently included. For example Grove Hill will include improvement to the Eastbourne Road Shops. Gresham includes measures to assist local shops, including Parliament Road and local businesses.</p> <p>Higher priority will be given to publicising the importance of owners meeting their legal obligations.</p> <p>The July 2009 Executive member report to full council lists the empty properties which are in the next band of priority sites.</p>	<p>Community Protection Service</p>	<p>Existing budget</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>4. That, in the case of its empty housing properties, Erimus Housing is encouraged to use the more aesthetically pleasing type of</p>	<p>Erimus were advised on this recommendation on 8th July 2009 and responded as follows</p>	<p>Erimus Housing</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>

<p>shutters which have been used in some areas. This would be particularly beneficial in areas of large-scale empty properties.</p>	<p>“Where possible, Erimus will use the clear screens to secure empty properties. However, we do carry out a risk assessment when a property becomes empty and, as you will appreciate, sometimes we do need to use the more robust metal screens (for example in some areas of Grove Hill)”</p>			
<p>5. That the position concerning the use of legal/enforcement powers to address the worst case properties is monitored by the scrutiny panel and that a progress report on this issue is submitted to the panel in approximately six months. The report should also include an update on the points and priority system which is also used to deal with such properties.</p>	<p>A report will be prepared by February 2010, or at a later date subject to receiving a work programme from the scrutiny process.</p>	<p>Community Protection Service</p> <p>Environment Scrutiny Panel</p>	<p>Existing budgets</p>	<p>February 2010</p>