

<b>Subject:</b>	Empty Homes Improvement Plan	<b>Status:</b>	For Publication
<b>Report to:</b>	Audit & Accounts Committee	<b>Date:</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> March 2016
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Finance	<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment:</b>	Required:	<del>Yes</del> /No	Attached: <del>Yes</del> /No
<b>Biodiversity Impact Assessment</b>	Required:	<del>Yes</del> /No	Attached: <del>Yes</del> /No
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1.	<b>RECOMMENDATION(S)</b>
1.1	That members note the contents of the report and progress being made.

**2. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

2.1 The purpose of the report is to bring to the attention of Members the Council's latest action update and response to Empty Homes Internal Audit report.

**3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

- 3.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:
- **Regenerating Rossendale:** This priority focuses on regeneration in its broadest sense, so it means supporting communities that get on well together, attracting sustainable investment, promoting Rossendale, as well as working as an enabler to promote the physical regeneration of Rossendale.
  - **Responsive Value for Money Services:** This priority is about the Council working collaboratively, being a provider, procurer and a commissioner of services that are efficient and that meet the needs of local people.
  - **Clean Green Rossendale:** This priority focuses on clean streets and town centres and well managed open spaces, whilst recognising that the Council has to work with communities and as a partner to deliver this ambition.

**4. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- The Improvement Plan is specifically designed to assist in identifying, managing and mitigating future risk exposure to the Council.

**5. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS**

5.1 The management response to the Internal Audit report on Empty Homes was presented to Members in December 2015. Following on from that initial response offices have been forming a more in-depth response to, in particular, the anticipated controls expected of an efficient and effective council when dealing with any generic project, risk exposure or opportunities.

## 5.2 Final Response Report

Officers have been working on a format and framework for a final response report. This report to be used as a future aid for both officers and Members, and which officers see as including the following potential examples of themes and content:

1. Front Page
  - Imagery
  - Narrative / Headings – management, governance, etc.
2. Introduction Page
  - “Managing the Situation”
  - Couple of short paragraphs on the situation, the seriousness, steps taken in recovery, positive plan/outcomes already achieved.
  - Signed by, amongst other: Leader and Chief Executive.
3. Contents Page

### Sections

4. What is the Plan For?
5. The Context
  - How did we get these homes?
  - How did we become the lead LA?
  - Intentions of the project before it went wrong
  - How did it go wrong? – “What Went Wrong?”
  - This would include extracts from the Internal audit report
  - Timeline of events following the internal audit report
6. The Future Vision of Rossendale Borough Council
  - Getting back to where we were (journey over past 10 years)
  - Commitment to our residents
  - Key priorities for the Council
7. Essentials of an Effective Council
  - Core elements
  - Measures we’ve put in place to be more effective
  - How will these measures address the failings?
8. What Does Success Look Like for Rossendale Borough Council?
  - Listing the factors that will demonstrate success (we will articulate what success is)
  - List success for different audiences / partners (e.g. residents. authority neighbours, staff, HCS, audit, businesses, service users, media, property owners/residents in the scheme, Councillors, etc.).
  - Headlines with examples underneath them;
    - a. A well run Council with strong management and inspirational leadership
    - b. A Council that its residents trust and are confident in how it makes and takes decisions
    - c. Delivering a successful housing scheme that will benefit not only Rossendale but the wider East Lancashire footprint, with strong social

- benefits.
  - d. Better internal controls in terms of project management, risk management and wider governance.
  - e. A positive and open culture throughout the Council
9. Whole Council Support for the Improvement Action Plan
- Examples of whole Council support/work on the project.
  - Not all officers of Council have previously exhibit the behaviours and lack of project management expected
  - Many officers were shocked and understood the short comings (which is encouraging going forward) and saw that this was an isolated incident
- 10.Improvement Plan Actions
- From the date we inherited this problem (Feb 2015)
  - The plan will be a live document and will regularly be updated as residents want to know the key achievements of the project
  - Reported on as part of our governance and project management
- 11.Improvement Journey Diagram
- Journey / path imagery
  - Links to the 4/5 key points for an effective Council
- 12.Action Plan
- Fully detailed out based on the audit report and the corporate action and improvement plan
  - Simple language and plain english
- 13.If possible a view from the Homes and Communities Agency “Steps So Far”.
- 14.Milestone
- Managerial Milestones
  - Behavioural Milestone
  - Partnership Milestone
- 15.Governance and Communication Strategy
- Full communications plan required for this document – highlighting the key points/achievements Members, the public and others will be interested in.
- 16.Conclusion and Thanks.

### 5.3 Corporate Action Plan and Timescales

Appendix 1 details the stages planned to develop and complete a corporate action plan together with the timescales.

#### COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

##### 6. SECTION 151 OFFICER

6.1 The financial implications arising have been articulated in the Council’s financial monitoring to Members via Cabinet. Most recent reports being October and November 2015.

##### 7. MONITORING OFFICER

7.1 No further comments.

**8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT**

8.1 No further comments.

**9. CONCLUSION**

9.1 The report is meant to articulate further the management and Council's response to the Empty Homes project and the learning which the council seeks to embed in the organisation.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Internal Audit Report	Council Website

## Appendix 1

### Developing the Audit Assessment Framework into a Corporate Improvement Action plan.

#### Stage 1:

- a) Start with the original Audit Assessment report as presented to Members in the current draft action plan format

#### Stage 2:

- a) Take each individual expected control and confirm the action taken and actual progress (Head of Finance, Monitoring Officer, Executive Support to complete)
- b) Highlight the individual expected controls with no action taken and no progress for Management Team to complete.
- c) Internal Audit Service to assist in undertaking a first stage verification to confirm all controls have been considered and have action taken / to be taken in place

#### Stage 3:

- a) Consolidate actions against the expected controls to remove duplications and develop into a Consolidated Improvement Action Plan, adopting the themes from the original audit assessment (Head of Finance, Monitoring Officer, Executive Support)
- b) Internal Audit Services to verify consolidated improvement plan.

#### Stage 4:

- a) Management Team to agree the planned organisational improvement activity / development not covered by the audit assessment report and the essential ingredients of the future vision for Rossendale Borough Council.

#### Stage 5:

- a) Combine the consolidated improvement action plan details and the organisational improvement activity into a single 'Rossendale Improvement Plan'.

## Timescales

#### Stage 1

- a) *Completed*

#### Stage 2

- a) Head of Finance, Monitoring Officer, Executive Support to complete by 19th Feb - *Completed*
- b) Management team to complete by Friday 4th March (two sessions)
- c) Audit to complete first stage verification by 8th March

#### Stage 3

- a) Head of Finance, Monitoring Officer, Executive Support to complete by Wednesday 9th March (in parallel with first stage verification)
- b) Audit to complete final verification by Friday 11th March
- c) Audit and Accounts committee Tuesday 15th March – present Progress Report to date at the meeting

#### Stage 4

- a) Management team to complete between Monday 7<sup>th</sup> and Friday 18<sup>th</sup> (two sessions)

#### Stage 5

- a) Head of Finance, Monitoring Officer, Executive Support to complete by Friday 25<sup>th</sup> March
- b) Staff briefings to follow sign-off, in April / May
- c) Quarter 1, Monitoring Report to Audit and Accounts Committee 28<sup>th</sup> June.