

HDC Due Regard (Equality Analysis)

Due Regard (Equality Analysis) is an on-going proactive process which requires us to consider the effect our decisions are likely to have on local communities, service users and employees, particularly those most vulnerable and at risk of disadvantage.

This template has been designed to assist in the collation of information and evidence required to support the 'Due Regard' process when introducing new policies/procedures/functions and services or reviewing existing ones.

For help with this template please view the guidance document, which contains advice to assist you when you are considering the impact (both positive and negative) of the proposed actions on each of the protected equality characteristics.

Name of policy/procedure/function/service being analysed: Empty Property Strategy

Department and section: Regulatory Services

Name of lead officer: Elaine Bird

Other people involved (assisting or reviewing – including any service users or stakeholder groups etc.): Equality Officer

Date assessment completed: 1/10/14

Step 1: Defining the policy/procedure/function/service

Is this a new, amended or reviewed policy? What are the aims, objectives and purpose and how will they be achieved? What are the main activities and which communities are likely to be affected by these activities? What are the expected outcomes?

The Empty Property Strategy sets out the Council's approach for tackling long term empty properties. The expected outcome of the strategy would be to reduce the impact vacant properties have on the local community and to provide much needed housing accommodation.

Step 2: Data collection & evidence

What relevant evidence, research, data and other information do you have and is there any further research, data or evidence you need to fill any gaps in your understanding of the potential or known affects of the policy on different communities? Include quantitative data as well as qualitative intelligence such as community input and advice.

The Council's Local Development Framework Core strategy sets out the local housing need across the district. The strategy identifies that between 2006 and 2026 a further 7000 new homes are required to meet local need. Empty homes are a wasted resource and when brought back into use can go some way to meet the local housing need identified in the core strategy. There are currently 818 people on the housing register and since January 2014 to date 31 people have presented themselves as homeless to the Council.

Vacant dwelling can attract anti-social behaviour which can have a negative impact on a local community. Increased crime or the fear of crime can have a particular detrimental impact on the elderly community and by reducing the number of empty properties in an area the risk of anti social behaviour associated with the property is reduced. However the Harborough Community Safety Strategic Assessment recorded that between 85.7 to 100% of residents feel safe in their local area after dark with an increasing trend. Almost all responders said that they feel safe in their local area during the day

As of September 2014 there are approximately 632 empty properties in Harborough district. Many of these properties are "transitional vacancies" and are part of the normal housing market operations. However of this number 389 have been empty for more than 6 months and 243 for 12 months or more. During 2013 the Council carried out a review of the empty property database which identified a number of properties with the incorrect classification resulting in approximately 80 properties being taken off the empty property list.

The number of complaints received regarding empty properties is low with the Environmental Health Team with 9 complaints of empty properties in the past 4 years.

Empty properties can be associated with arson attacks however the Harborough Community Safety Strategic Assessment 2013 identified a reduction in deliberate fires across the district by 1.5% however there are areas within the district that have a

significantly higher incident of deliberate fires when compared to the County average

Step 3: Consultation and involvement

Have you consulted and if so outline what you did and who you consulted with and why.

The draft strategy will go out for public consultation prior to being approved by the Executive. The consultation would include private sector landlords and letting agents and the general public.

The Equality and Diversity Officer has been consulted on the strategy.

Step 4: Potential impact

Considering the evidence from the data collection and feedback from consultation, which communities will be affected and what barriers may these individuals or groups face in relation to Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Other groups e.g. rural isolation, deprivation, health inequality, carers, asylum seeker and refugee communities, looked after children, deprived or disadvantaged communities and also the potential impact on Community Cohesion. Remember people have multiple characteristics so the impact of a policy on a particular community may impact people within the community differently. Where possible include numbers likely to be affected.

The strategy would have a positive impact on the local community especially within the deprived or disadvantaged communities where the housing need is greatest. Bringing empty properties back into use may increase the supply of affordable housing within the district which will generally have a positive impact on younger people who can have problems identifying this type of accommodation in Harborough.

Bringing empty properties back into use may improve the local area and reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour and crime.

Impact on protected characteristics:

Age: there is currently no research on the age profiles of owners of empty homes. The housing legislation provides specific protection and priority for the very young and older applicants who are homeless and looking for social housing.

Disability & careers - when assessing the most appropriate course of action for dealing with an empty property, consideration will be given to the particular circumstances of the owner of the property and each case will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Gender: There are no barriers to access the service and there are no perceived gender issues.

Trans Gender/Gender Reassignment There are no barriers to access the service and there are no perceived issues

Race: There are no barriers to access the service and there are no perceived issues

Religion Some religions do not believe in lending money with interest which may result in barriers for securing funding to renovate empty properties - the provision of grant assistance may help to reduce this barrier.

Sexual Orientation - There are no barriers to access the service and there are no perceived issues

There is currently little information available regarding the social profile of owners of empty properties. During the implementation of the strategy data will be collated regarding the profile of empty home owners which may result in an amendment to the way the service is delivered.

Step 5: Mitigating and assessing the impact

If you consider there to be actual or potential adverse impact or discrimination, please outline this below. State whether it is justifiable or legitimate and give reasons. If you have identified adverse impact or discrimination that is illegal, you are required to take action to remedy this immediately. If you have identified adverse impact or discrimination that is justifiable or legitimate, you will need to consider what actions can be taken to mitigate its effect on those groups of people. Consider what barriers you can remove, whether reasonable adjustments may be necessary and how any unmet needs have identified can be addressed.

The main aspect of this strategy is to assist owners of empty properties to bring their properties back into occupation. Any enforcement action we may take will be subject to due legal proceedings which will take into account Human Rights and all equality legislations

Our officers have completed training related to Equality and Diversity and will provide assistance to owners of properties on a

case by case basis to ensure adequate understanding of the process and support as required.

All documents can be made available in alternative formats and languages as necessary.

Step 6: Making a decision

Summarise your findings and give an overview of whether the policy will meet Harborough District Council's responsibilities in relation to equality, diversity and human rights. Does it contribute to the achievement of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations?

Bringing empty properties back into use will provide much needed housing accommodation for the local community as well as removing the issues of blight and anti social behaviour in a local community.

The policy recognises that enforcement action will only be considered as a last resort and in the event of such action due consideration will be given to human rights and equality legislation throughout the process.

Step 7: Monitoring, evaluation & review of your policy/procedure/service change

What monitoring systems will you put in place to promote equality of opportunity, monitor impact and effectiveness and make positive improvements? How frequently will monitoring take place and who will be responsible?

The prioritised list of properties will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Environment Team Leader.

Analysis will be completed to see if people with a particular protected characteristic are disproportionately represented to see if further work is needed to be done to raise awareness of the strategy to specific communities.

Equality Improvement Plan

Equality Objective :

Action: To review the equality and diversity issues arising from customers contacting the council in relation to empty homes including the collection of data.

Officer Responsible: Environment Team Leader

By when: on going.

Equality Objective :

Action:

Officer Responsible:

By when:

Equality Objective :

Action:

Officer Responsible:

By when:

Equality Objective :

Action:

Officer Responsible:

By when:

Signed off by:

Date:

Once signed off, please forward a copy for publication to Julie Clarke, Equality and Diversity Officer
e-mail: j.clarke@harborough.gov.uk , telephone: 01858 821070.