

**Report to Newport Town Council on Pembrokeshire County Council's Empty Homes Initiative**

by Cllr. S. Bayes 30th July 2007

The County Council's Senior Environmental Health Officer has written to NTC seeking our co-operation and assistance in this initiative. (Apparently, there are about 1000 empty homes in Pembrokeshire)).

PCC is aiming to reduce this number and provide much needed housing. PCC is currently compiling a list of empty properties and preparing a plan prioritising action, targetting the the worst properties

Councils have powers of compulsory purchase and enforced sales but nowadays they prefer to use "Empty Dwelling Management Orders" (EDMO) which give them the right to possess a property but not to own it, so that they can take over management of a property with a view to getting it back into occupation.

When I brought the Town Council's attention to the existence of these powers some months ago, councillors expressed concern about the short period (6 months) that a property needs to be empty before a council can take action and also about empty properties as a result of death of the owner. A government pamphlet for owners states that "*most cases involve properties empty for many years*" and sets out special rules that apply in cases of bereavement. (*EDMO's: Guidance for Residential Property Owners, Dept. for Communities and Local Government*)

The pamphlet describes that there are 2 types of EDMO. The interim EDMO lasts for no more than 12 months during which time the Council works with the owner advising on the availability of grants and tax incentives to try to bring the property back into use, asking the owner's permission if the council lets the property. If no agreement is reached a "final" EDMO can last up to 7 years when the council takes whatever steps are needed to get the property occupied and without seeking the owner's consent. The Council seeks to recover any costs it incurs out of rental income, paying any money left over to its owner. (If there is a shortfall the Council would probably seek for the EDMO to be entered into the register of title and only remove this once the debt has been paid.)

EDMO's introduce a number of important protections for property owners including the need for approval by an independant property tribunal and the opportunity to end the EDMO at any time if the owner wishes to sell or to live in the property.

In my judgement, the Town Council's previous concerns are allayed by these government statements.

I therefore propose that we reply to the County Council;

1. Asking that in setting priorities they take into account the degree of local affordable housing need (as well as targetting the worst properties).
2. Naming any appropriate empty properties of which councillors are currently aware for consideraion for application of an EDMO.