

## **STUNELL: MORE POWER FOR COMMUNITIES TO BRING EMPTY HOMES BACK INTO USE**

Communities Minister Andrew Stunell today announced that community groups will be able to apply for Government cash to bring empty homes that blight neighbourhoods back into use.

Community and voluntary organisations will now be able to bid for part of £100m Government funding for pioneering housing schemes that will ensure empty properties that ruin neighbourhoods are lived in once again, and at the same time provide affordable housing. Many of these schemes will also have wider benefits such as providing excellent training opportunities for local people.

Mr Stunell said that tackling the 700,000 empty homes across the country was a top priority for the Government, and would be a key feature in the drive to increase the provision of affordable housing.

The Government will also consult in due course on plans to allow councils local discretion to introduce a council tax premium on homes in their area that have been empty for more than two years, to provide a stronger incentive to get the homes back into productive use and remove the blight from such properties on local neighbourhoods.

Communities Minister Andrew Stunell said:

“There is a desperate need in this country for affordable housing, and yet for every two families that need a home, there is one property standing empty. This is a national scandal, and after years of inaction and inertia, this Government is determined to get to grips with the problem.

“That’s why I am today announcing that community and voluntary organisations will now be able to apply for a slice of £100m to tackle empty homes. With the new homes bonus applying to empty homes as well as new ones, councils can also receive six years worth of funding for every home they bring back into use. And I will continue to explore all options so it is always in the interest of councils to tackle empty homes.”

Community and self help groups will now have the opportunity of applying for financial backing to tackle empty homes, with formal bidding guidance to be published shortly. Previously only conventional housing providers could apply. Community-led schemes are already doing excellent work in this area, as well as providing valuable skills for local people, helping them get a job and a roof over their heads. Examples include:

- **Youthbuild in Harrogate** - the charity purchases empty homes for refurbishment by trainees under the guidance of a mentor. The refurbished properties are rented out to the trainees. This provides

employment, training and affordable housing, while also giving young people a long term stake in the local area.

- **Housing Action in Suffolk and Norfolk** - the thriving social enterprise works with the owners of empty properties – offering them a competitive lettings service while bringing empty homes back into use for vulnerable tenants.

By including empty homes brought back into use within the New Homes Bonus, the Government is also giving councils the same financial rewards for bringing an empty home back into use as building a new one – nearly £9,000 for a band D property. Already in year one of the New Homes Bonus, just under 16,000 long term empty homes were brought back into use, equating to a reward for councils of around £19m.

Formal bidding guidance for community groups who want to apply for Government funding will be published shortly. In the Autumn the Government will also publish its approach to tackling empty homes, as part of the wider Housing Strategy.