

Working Together

Empty Homes Forums
&
Cross Boundary Initiatives

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The Empty Homes Network

- Formed in 2001 as the *National Association of Empty Property Practitioners*
- A “Community of Practice” – mutual support
- About 130 paying memberships, mostly LAs
- About 350 individual members
- Democratic – Constitution, Elected Officers, participation in policy
- Building its advisory role eg *National Commitment, Local Action*



My Background

- **Exeter Empty Homes Officer, 1996**
- **Set up and Chaired of SW Empty Homes Forum 1996-2009**
- **Subsequently Housing Enabling Manager, Exeter City Council**
 - **Housing Strategy, Housing enabling and partnership, Empty Homes team**
- **EHN Secretary, p/t organiser lead on policy**



What we'll cover

- **Empty Homes forums**
 - What are the models?
 - What works and what doesn't?
- **Cross Boundary Working**
 - What are the drivers?
 - What are the issues?
 - What are the solutions?



Forums – what are they for

- **To win friends and influence people:**
 - GO's, HCA, RDA, WA, Members?
- **To keep the flame alive**
- **To build respect for empty homes work**
- **To build self-respect**
- **To provide a springboard for lobbying**
- **For mutual support - networking**



Types of Forum

- **Regional**
 - Co-terminous with GO regions
 - Eg South West, West Midlands, East Midlands
- **Sub-Regional**
 - Greater Manchester, Hampshire and IOW
- **Area**
 - Lincolnshire (5 authorities)



The Hall of Fame

Cumbria

East London

East Midlands

Greater Manchester

**Hampshire and Isle of
Wight**

Herts, Beds and Bucks

Kent

Lancashire

Merseyside

North East

North-East London

South-East London

South West

Surrey and Hampshire??

Sussex

West Midlands

Wiltshire

**Yorkshire and
Humberside**

3 Welsh forums



Formats – Mini conference

- **Big, 2-3 times a year**
- **Day-long events**
- **May be proper conference venue**
- **Typically regional eg**
 - **East Midlands**
 - **South West**



Sub-regional: half-days

- **Often free**
- **May revolve around key people or LAs**
- **Many different formats**
- **Capable of long-term success eg**
 - **Hants and IoW**
 - **Herts Beds and Bucks**
 - **Sussex**
- **can be ephemeral**
 - **London Commuter Belt, Cheshire?**



Payment options

- **Lump sum in advance**
 - West Midlands
- **Annual subscription eg East Midlands**
 - Annual subscription £120, attendance free
 - 36 out of 42 authorities subscribe, 1 place per authority
- **Pay as you go eg South West**
 - £60ish per place a forum,
 - 40-50 attending including speakers
 - Means more admin



Who Goes There!

- **Local authorities always form the core**
- **RSLs attend in some cases**
 - **BUT some explicitly restricted to LAs**
- **Esprit de corps important – people you can relate to**
 - **Why not experiment?**
- **Housing enablers and environmental health officers**
- **Technicians to managers**



Factors Leading to Success

- **A good day out – quality venue and catering**
- **Good speakers and material**
- **Good networking opportunities**
- **Reps from GOs, Housing Corp, Empty Homes (Agency) etc**
- **Consistency? – known format, venue**
- **Straddle the Enabling / EnvHealth divide**



Risk Factors

- **Rotating venues and hosts**
 - amateurism?
 - Loss of impetus
- **Insufficiently interesting meetings**
- **No core membership or strong leader**
- **BUT horses for courses – many strong sub-regional groups**



Sharing the Load

- **Some forums rotate chair and hosting role**
 - **Some from meeting to meeting**
 - **Some for a year at a time (eg. Greater Manchester)**
- **If it gets shaky it is good to get someone to take a lead**
- **In exchange – you can get kudos**



Being realistic

- **People will travel**
- **People will pay**
- **But it has to be worth it**
- **You have to match ambition with scale of attendance – so geography matters**
- **Recommendation – aim high**



Forums and EHN

- **The network is semi-federal**
 - Each forum has a rep on the Executive
- **We aim to support forums eg by advertising meetings**
- **Forums get discounted fees (normally £75)**
 - £45 per district, £67.50 per unitary



Cross-boundary working

- **Means Shared services**
- **Across a couple of boroughs (eg Brighton and Hove/Horsham)**
- **Can be across a sub-region (eg East London Regeneration Partnership)**
- **Might not be a shared Empty Homes officer (eg kent)**



Hall of Fame

- **Brighton and Hove (2)**
- **Lincolnshire (5)**
- **East London (8?)**
- **Devon (3.5)**
- **Kent (10)**
- **Greater Norwich (3)**



Catalysts

- **Funding**
 - Oops, how do we spend the money?
- **Performance**
 - Poor performance a catalyst
- **Convenience**
 - Saves us the bother if we can get someone else to do it
- **The vision thing**
 - Giving communities the best



Potential Issues

- **Different practices in different areas**
 - makes consistency harder
- **Decision making**
 - multiple approval processes
 - lack of ownership?
- **Bureaucracy**
 - Mileage claims
- **Short-term contracts**



Potential Solutions

- **Wider integration of services eg**
 - **Private Sector Env. Health (Somerset)**
 - **Housing Enabling**
- **Effective preparation**
 - **Designing the model**
 - **Publicity**
 - **Getting people on board**

For further information

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To join Empty Homes Network:

- go to website**
- click on “create account”**



Over to you....

- **Any questions?**
- **What is the potential for SHIP?**

