



CABINET: 13th September 2016

Report of: Director of Housing and Inclusion

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor J. Patterson

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SUBJECT: GARAGE STRATEGY 2016-20

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To approve the Garage Strategy 2016-20.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

2.1 That the Garage Strategy 2016-2020 attached at Appendix A be approved.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has 1589 garages, of which 426 are currently void. The majority of the garages are situated in Skelmersdale (95%), with 1.5% in Ormskirk and 3.5% in the more rural areas of the Borough. Currently 96% (383) of our void garages are in Skelmersdale where many of the more deprived wards are situated and where car ownership tends to be low. Additionally, the Council own a number of garage sites (both surfaced and un-surfaced) across the Borough for which an annual charge is applied.
- 3.2 Despite previous intervention activity there continue to be issues with high levels of garages being vacant with a current void rate of 27%.
- 3.3 In 2012 the Tenant Scrutiny Group (TSG) reviewed the garage service and made a number of recommendations including a suggestion that the Council carries out an option appraisal of each of our garage sites to arrive at appropriate recommendations for each area.
- 3.4 The Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) has recommended that in the main, the garage stock within Skelmersdale should be retained in order to allow

for future consideration and possible development of certain sites. The SAMP is due to be completed at the end of the year. In some of the more rural areas, it may make be more appropriate to consider disposal of the land as it would have a potential higher value if developed.

- 3.5 The TSG review of garages also included a customer satisfaction survey. Those currently renting a garage are generally satisfied and feel it offers good value for money. Most of the current tenants have rented their garage for over two years. One of the key drivers for renting a garage is the location, with those on the waiting list stating that they have turned down garage offers because they were not physically close to their homes. This leaves some garages void for long periods of time. Many of those surveyed on the waiting list stated that they had been waiting for a garage for over a year. However it may be that certain garages are void due to a lack of active promotion of them, due to their appearance and general condition, or it could be solely due to their location. Current tenants surveyed told us that they found out about renting a garage through making their own enquiry or by word of mouth. None of them reported that they found out about the service due to marketing. Some tenants were attracted by the option of receiving additional services for an additional fee, and stated that they would like electricity included as an additional rental charge.
- 3.6 A pilot advertising project was conducted in 2015 where three garage sites in Skelmersdale were actively marketed with "To Let" boards, location specific leafleting and advertisements on the Homefinder website to generate a wider awareness of and a higher level of interest in our garage stock. The advertisements were removed after a few weeks when all available void garages on the sites became occupied. This demonstrated a clear and successful link between advertising void stock and the take up although there are costs to this work if taken forward and more widely adopted.
- 3.7 The TSG Review also raised concerns regarding the current physical and aesthetic condition of the garages, the numbers of void garages, and the harmful environmental effect this was felt to have on the perception of surrounding areas. The condition of the garages also detracts from the level of visual estate improvement delivered by the PVCu window and door replacement investment programmes.
- 3.8 The garage survey also highlighted that there was limited interest from garage waiting list applicants to rent a garage specifically for storage purposes. This could be related to the current perception of limited security of the existing garages and their location to where customers live.
- 3.9 Also in 2015 The Housing and Inclusion's Property Services Team undertook a Garage Sustainability Review of all our garage stock. This identified, from a property asset perspective, potential solutions for each of the garage blocks across the Borough. This was a purely physical assessment and did not factor in potential latent demand as a result of more focussed promotion and marketing or consideration of alternative use options.
- 3.10 Current revenue expenditure on garages relates mainly to reactive repair works and there is no defined long term investment strategy specifically for the garage stock. Clearly there has been a continuing priority on the current investment programme in our dwellings and prior to this in relation to achieving the previous decent homes standard.

- 3.11 This will continue to be an area where a balance will need to be considered in the context of the degree of investment needed for garages and the potential to increase garage rental levels without impacting on demand.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Attached at Appendix A is a Garage Strategy for 2016-20 which details the assessment framework that we will apply to our garage stock to rationalise, improve, demolish and dispose of by sale the current level of stock on a site by site basis as appropriate.
- 4.2 The document also provides an analysis of the key issues and outlines how the assessment framework will be applied and to which areas it will focus on during the next two years.
- 4.3 The Strategy contains a two year action plan which will be limited and contained to within budget. Further action beyond 2017/18 will need to be reviewed in the context of the progress made in delivering the Action Plan and the level of resource we can continue to allocate to this area of work.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The HRA Business Plan identifies a sum of £115,000 for 2016/17 that will be applied to delivering the 2016/17 Action Plan priorities.
- 5.2 Further resource requirements will need to be considered for 2017/18 in the context of the effectiveness of the first year of the action plan and other competing resource needs.
- 5.3 It is expected that the impact of the action plan will demonstrate improved income returns from the overall garage stock and rationalise the stock base to ensure a positive return on these assets.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 6.1 Improvements to our garage stock will support the overall attractiveness of our estates, particularly those that have already had investment made in the homes and support our drive to let those garages with long term sustainability.

7.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 There is a risk of continued financial loss to the HRA Business Plan if we do not positively implement the assessment framework outlined in the Strategy.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report.

Appendices

Appendix A - Garage Strategy 2016-20

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix C – Minute of the Landlord Services Committee held on 8 September 2016 (to follow)