

LGB(4)-02-12 : Paper 4 : Paper to Note

Following the meeting on the 9 November CHC Cymru agreed to provide some examples of Housing Associations who are working in partnership with Local Authorities to bring empty private sector homes back into use. Please find attached two examples that they have provided, one from Wrexham County Borough Council and the other from United Welsh Housing Association.

UW recognised the growing importance of the Empty Homes Agenda about 2 1/2 years ago. We were concerned that our LA partners were not utilising their statutory powers and also saw an opportunity to develop a partnership with the LA's around this agenda.

We hosted a conference which was hosted by a chap by the name of Chris Skinner. Chris is a legal expert in empty homes and presented to a wide audience the various legal mechanisms to bring the homes back into use. He commended UW of taking the initiative and suggested that in England the RSL sector did not operate in this way.

2 years on we haven't delivered a single unit..... solo..... about 6 months ago we grabbed the bull by the horns. We have commissioned Andrew Lavender (No Use Empty) and Chris Skinner. We have established an internal Empty Homes Team. We have set up a partnership with Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen to tackle this issue head on (including the cynics within the LA themselves). This is not about strategies and policy. It is about getting the job done.

Immediately we have:

- Agreed to underwrite the enforcement process (one of the common excuses was cost in relation to enforcement – although we have found that there is little experience of individual enforcement across our areas).
- Held detailed workshops with our partners and Andrew looking at specific cases and setting programmes to deal with the individual units.
- We are acting as an information bureau for all partners – what is working and what isn't.
- We are taking LA officers to appropriate events (Empty Homes conferences and training programmes).
- We are committing to receive the properties – regardless of condition (although the condition is reflected in the valuation).

In the medium term:

- We intend to undertake the improvements using a Social enterprise with an emphasis on practical skills / training and employment.

We are on the cusp of receiving our 1st units with a further 10 or so in the pipeline. The trick is by negotiation where possible, but be real and diligent if enforcement is necessary. There is "easy low lying" fruit so to speak and we are tackling them 1st.

My aim is to set up a team in April of 2 officers covering the 3 areas dedicated to delivering units – we will be applying to the WG to match fund the posts over 2 years; following which we feel the programme will be self funding.

The outcome is to get homes occupied again (not necessarily in the ownership of the RSL). We have discussed with our partners what this means; for example it is probable that the 1st one will be renovated and then sold; any surplus being recycled back into the programme; general needs; LCHO and intermediate rents are also options. The key addition to our service is the project management of properties that some owners wish to retain (this may also include a rental management option); whatever it takes to bring the property back.

Obviously we are excited about the prospect of some funding coming forward, we have a lot of knowledge in this field and would welcome the opportunity to discuss what we are doing with other partners.

NEWS RELEASE /

Wrexham County Borough Council and The Pennaf Housing Group



For Immediate Release: December 7

Area: Wrexham

Partnership takes on Empty Homes opportunity

Wrexham County Borough Council are working in partnership with a local housing association to provide an innovative scheme helping owners of empty homes in the County bring their properties back into use.

As part of the Local Authority's Empty Homes Strategy officers from Wrexham Council have identified empty homes in the County which have the potential to be rented out to local people.

The Council has now teamed up with Clwyd Alyn Housing Association, a member of the Pennaf Housing Group, which has offered to assist with necessary renovations for each property up a maximum of £5,000 under a Leasehold and Management Scheme.

The property owner would in turn agree to a three year lease contract with Clwyd Alyn, allowing them to recoup the repair costs as the properties are rented out by Offa, a separate part of the Pennaf Housing Group which specialises in property management and lettings in the private sector.

During the initial lease period the property would be let at rent below current market value. Following the deduction of renovation, management and letting costs the remainder of the rental income will provide a regular income for the house owner.

“For some people who own empty properties, the prospect of letting can seem quite daunting, particularly if they are faced with financing renovations to meet the necessary statutory requirements,” said Mr Deiniol Evans, Director of Development and Technical Services for the Pennaf Housing Group

This new initiative provides a really excellent opportunity for property owners to access professional help at the same time as turning an empty property into regular income.”

Wrexham Council has identified more than 150 properties across the County that have been empty for 6 months or more and has set a target of seeing 35 of these properties returned into use by the end of the current financial year.

Quote to come from Cllr Mark Pritchard, Lead Member for Housing and Planning,

“As a Local Authority we are aware of the impact many empty properties can have on local communities in terms of anti social behaviour or loss of a much needed home, and also how difficult it can be for owners of empty properties to bring them back into use.

“We also appreciate the impact it may have on neighbours who may live next door to an empty property through no fault of their own. We are therefore eager to assist in any way we can in collaboration with our partner organisations by providing practical support and advice.”

If you are an owner of an empty home that wishes to work with Wrexham County Borough Council and Pennaf Housing Group, or wish to report an empty property in the County please contact Siôn Wynne, Housing Partnership Officer on 01978 315 587 or sion.wynne@wrexham.gov.uk; or Carla Hewitt, Leasehold and Marketing at Offa on 0845 111 0309 or carla.hewitt@offaltd.co.uk

ENDS

Note to Editors:

For More information about Empty Homes Week from 5 December 2011 Please see The Empty Homes Website : www.emptyhomes.com or click below

<http://emptyhomes.com/what-we-do-2/campaign-demands-2/campaign-demands/1765-2/>

About the Pennaf Housing Group

The Pennaf Housing Group's agreed Primary Purpose is **Opening Doors – Enhancing Lives.**

Our five Core Principles continue to underpin all our operations, committing our staff and Board Members to undertake their duties within this framework. These are:

Integrity – Honesty and trust in all that we do

Care – Looking after yourself, others and communities

Accountable – Taking responsibility for our actions

Respect – Respect yourself and others

Equality – Accepting differences and treating everyone fairly

As portrayed within the Group's corporate identity, Pennaf provides a nucleus for the Group, with each entity having its own unique individual identity and role, whilst at the same time benefitting from the mutual support of other Group members.

Pennaf Ltd is a Registered Social Landlord, and serves as an umbrella organisation for subsidiaries, offering a range of high quality corporate services to each of the Group Members – including Housing with Care & Support,

Leasehold & Marketing, Financial Management, Development, Planned Maintenance, Human Resources, Administrations and Information Systems.

Clwyd Alyn is a Registered Social Landlord and a charitable subsidiary of Pennaf. The Association manages the Group's housing services functions including general needs accommodation, supported living schemes, care homes, extra care schemes, housing with care and support and a wide variety of home ownership options.

Tŷ Glas Housing Society is a Registered Social Landlord and a charitable subsidiary of Pennaf. The Society directly manages the Wrexham Care & Repair Agency which provides advice and assistance to people aged over 60 and persons with disabilities to enable them to remain in their homes.

Offa is a non-charitable subsidiary of Pennaf. Its role is to undertake projects that fall outside of Clwyd Alyn's charitable rules and to develop projects that are not dependent upon the receipt of Social Housing Grant from the Welsh Government. Offa's main role to date has involved delivering a lettings and property management service for private sector landlords who own houses in multiple occupation and offering specialist advice on licensing criteria.

Tir Tai is a subsidiary of Pennaf, established as an unregistered company limited by guarantee. It acts as the development arm, undertaking all development activities on behalf of Group Members with the facility to 'gift aid' and surpluses generated to other Members of the Group.

For further details, please contact:

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