



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Health & Environmental Services Committee
Subject:	Extension of Vacant Property Rating Project
Date:	5th November, 2008
Reporting Officer:	Mr Donal Rogan, Building Control Manager, Ext 2460
Contact Officer:	Mr Donal Rogan, Building Control Manager, Ext 2460

Relevant Background Information

At your meeting on 8th October, it was agreed that the Building Control Service, using delegated powers from LPS, check on the reported vacant rated premises within the City up until the end of November. It was reported that in a previous project of this nature that 51% of those properties that were reported as vacant were actually occupied. From this project the property details were collated and forwarded to LPS Rating Services in order for them to collect the rates. It was reported that the Council would receive substantial income from the project both this financial year and in the future should these properties remain occupied.

Furthermore the Committee agreed, given that there were in excess of 12,000 properties to be visited and in view of the relatively short time period, that the Service further negotiates with LPS to extend the project past the end of November on a cost recovery basis.

Key Issues

LPS has now agreed that all 26 Councils can participate in the project of inspecting premises reported as being vacant up until the end of this financial year. Confirmation of this is included in the attached email, which shows that terms and conditions which were previously agreed will be extended.

To date the Service has redeployed 14 Building Control personnel both on full time and part time basis to inspect the reported vacancies. Furthermore the Service has just recruited 40 casual staff to inspect domestic properties and interview home owners in the evening time.

To date we have inspected just over 2000 properties including domestic and non domestic which have shown approximately 42% of an occupancy rate. These details will be processed and forwarded to LPS.

The Service aims to process as many of these properties as is possible before the end of November as this date represents for LPS the cut off date for the calculation of the EPP, therefore impacting on the Rates calculations for the Council.

LPS has provided all the requisite guidance on the information to be collected and provided the required delegated authority for the Council's officers to act on its behalf.

As the Members will note this project is in line with the agreement in principle which was reached with LPS at the Special Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 17 October 2008 which was attended by senior members within LPS.

Resource Implications

Financial

LPS has agreed to pay for the carrying out of these surveys at an agreed rate of £7 per survey which will adequately cover the costs of collecting the information. The potential additional rate income will however have strongly positive financial implications for the Council. In the longer term this should give LPS increased accuracy in the calculation of the estimated penny product which should also create increased equity in the rates.

Human Resources

There are no human resource implications in the proposed project, bar the redeployment of staff within the Service who have deferred all non urgent work.

Recommendations

Based on the information presented, the Committee is recommended to grant approval to the Building Control Service to carry out the inspection of premises listed as being vacant on behalf of LPS until the sooner of the following options are realised ;

- The listed is exhausted,
- The end of this financial year, or,
- Difficulties in identifying the premises render it no longer financially viable.

Abbreviations

LPS: Land and Property Services agency
EPP: Estimated Penny Product

Document Attached

Email from Mr. David Beattie