

Press Cutting

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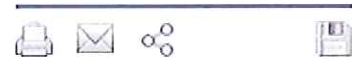
Bristol adopts innovative empty homes scheme

23 March, 2011 | By Allister Hayman

Bristol City Council adopted a flagship scheme, pioneered by Kent CC, to provide interest-free loans to the owners of empty properties to fund the repairs needed to bring the homes back into use.



Bristol City Council said it would adopt Kent CC's pioneering No Use Empty scheme, which was launched in Kent in 2005 as a means of tackling the worsening housing shortage across the county.



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Bristol City Council said it would adopt Kent's No Use Empty brand with the aim of returning 2000 empty homes to use by 2015.

The scheme in Kent was launched with a £6m capital fund and allows owners of empty homes to access secured interest-free loans to fund the repairs needed to return them to use. Loans of up to £25,000 per unit are available, with the average loan being £18,700.

Since 2005, the Kent scheme has seen around 1,627 empty properties brought back into use, with Kent CC administering £4.1m of secured loans, which has drawn a further £8m of funding, giving a total investment of £12.1m. All loans are repaid in full and recycled back into the scheme, meaning that no ongoing investment is required.

Cllr Anthony Negus, Bristol cabinet member for strategic housing and regeneration, said: "Tackling the shortage of housing in Bristol is one of the most important challenges facing us and in order to reduce the gap we need to use every means at our disposal.

"Targeting empty homes is one of them. Partnership with Kent's well-established and successful campaign will enable us to make use of their skills and resources at a saving to local taxpayers."

This month the Institute of Public Policy Research, a thinktank, warned that the UK's housing shortfall could reach 750,000 by 2025.

David Ireland, chief executive at national charity the Empty Homes Agency, urged other local authorities to follow the example of Kent and Bristol and make empty homes part of the solution to the housing shortage.

He said: "The fact is that there are enough empty homes in the UK to house half of the families on housing waiting lists. Returning empty homes to use is crucial in addressing the UK's housing shortage, and we fully support the work being done in Kent, and now in Bristol."

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