



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Vacant Properties
Date:	9 October 2009
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement
Contact Officers:	Ronan Cregan, Improvement Manager and Donal Rogan, Building Control

Relevant Background Information
<p>Members are aware that during these difficult financial times it is vital for the organisation to ensure that its rates income is maximised within the context of rating policy. Over the past number of years the Council has suffered significant losses from vacant properties. Under current rating policy, vacant domestic properties are not charged rates and non-domestic vacant properties are only charged 50% rates. In order to manage the losses arising from vacant properties, the Council has used its Building Control Service to verify the actual status of all vacant properties included on Land and Property Services (LPS) database. To date, this work has resulted in additional rates bills being issued totalling £7.8m.</p>
Key Issues
<p>Since the last vacant property exercise 3,000 vacant properties have been added on to the LPS database and a large number of rates bills have been returned to LPS by Royal Mail as unopened. Members are therefore requested to agree to use the Building Control Service to verify the status of the new vacant properties and to investigate the returned rates bills. The exercise will need to start immediately so that the information on the properties can be passed to LPS in time for inclusion in the calculation of the Estimated Penny Product which is used to set the rate.</p> <p>The exercise will cost approximately £40,000 and will be paid for using existing budgets.</p>

Recommendations
<p>The Committee is requested:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To agree to use the Building Control Service to verify the status of the new vacant properties and to investigate the returned rates bills.2. To agree to start the exercise on approval from the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

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