

Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan

November 2022 update

This is an update of the October 2021 action plan which sets out Southwark Council's zero tolerance approach to long term empty homes and sets out plans to bring empty homes quickly back into use. We will work closely with our residents and property owners while taking firm action where required.

One page summary of the Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan

This table is a one page summary of the full action plan which is included towards the end of this document.

Taking a zero tolerance approach to long term empty private sector homes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying full council tax to all empty homes and applying the maximum premiums for homes empty over two years • Using compulsory purchase powers and empty dwelling management orders where required, with dedicated funding. • Using enforcement options where an empty property is a statutory nuisance
Working with residents and property owners to quickly bring empty homes back in to use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness and provide advice on the options to bring properties back into use • Providing enhanced grants and loans to bring properties back in to use • Encouraging property owners to let their homes through the council's social lettings agency to homeless families with a clear offer • Contacting developers of newly developed empty homes with the offer of leasing to the council • Making it easier to report empty homes
Improving our understanding of private sector empty homes to better target action and support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacting owners of empty homes on the council tax database to improve our understanding of the reasons for this, and what additional support would help return the property to use.
Campaigning for more resources and more effective powers to tackle empty homes in the private sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demanding flexibility to charge unlimited council tax premiums, a reduction in the initial 2 year period, and flexibility to charge premiums on second homes and furnished homes • Demanding increased resources for grants and loans • Calling for simpler and swifter powers around CPOs and EDMOS • Calling for planning powers to revert property to the local authorities housing supply where vacant
Reducing the number of empty council homes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting ambitious targets for quickly turning around major and minor council empty properties as they become vacant • Where possible, using council homes which are empty due to impending redevelopment as temporary accommodation.

The problem of empty homes and limited powers

London is in the midst of a housing crisis. At a time when tens of thousands of families across the capital are reliant on temporary accommodation or on waiting lists for a suitable home, it has never been more important to tackle the issue of empty homes, with numbers of empty homes rising across London and the country.

Empty housing in Southwark, as across London, is a problem predominantly driven by the private sector. The overwhelming majority of empty homes are privately owned where there are limited powers to tackle this. As a council we recognised the scale of this problem and are committed to clamping down on empty homes which are a needless waste and a lost resource, particularly in an area where there is high demand and significant levels of housing need. Empty homes can also create a serious blight on a neighbourhood by creating environmental problems with pests and as places of anti-social behaviour.

The council is committed to 'Take action to reduce the number of empty homes in our borough, so more local people can move into them', as set out in Southwark's Borough Plan. In February 2021 Cabinet agreed actions to be included in this Empty Homes Action Plan. The full report is available online [here](#). The council will use all powers available, while recognising that these are extremely limited and we need significant changes at a national level to support our ambitions. In March 2022 Cabinet agreed additional funding for Private Sector Empty Homes and changes to loans and grants. The full report is available [here](#).

Part 1 of the following action plan sets out Southwark Council's zero tolerance approach to long term empty homes in the borough. There is simply too high a demand for housing for it to be acceptable that properties are left empty for long periods of time. We plan to use all the powers available to us as cost efficiently as possible to deter landlords from leaving properties empty, while at the same time working proactively with landlords and residents to bring properties back into use as quickly as possible. We know in many cases people may just need advice or some financial support to make the required repairs, or to find a suitable buyer or tenant. We have conducted further research to increase our understanding of the reasons properties are being left empty and what further support may be required to assist landlords to quickly return properties to use.

While we are committed to use all the powers, buttons and levers available to us, our powers are limited. There is more that needs to happen at a national level to give local authorities the powers to truly tackle this problem, and therefore the following action plan sets out how we will lobby for further powers and resources in this area.

However we also recognise there is more as a council we can do to reduce the number of empty homes we manage. While there are valid reasons for many of these being vacant there is more we can do to reduce the number of empty homes, through speeding up re-letting times and reducing the number of homes which are empty as part of regeneration schemes. This is set out in Part 2 of the action plan.

How many empty homes are there?

There are many different definitions of empty homes and a variety of sources of data, which all have some limitations. The simplest way to compare empty homes is to focus on the council tax data. This is the method we have used for the purposes of this report. However, to a large extent this does rely on self-reporting of the relevant council tax status of a property by the tenant or owner.

Each property is either classed as being an empty home or an empty home with a premium applied for properties which are empty for over 2, 5 or 10 years, provided they are unfurnished. This gives a total of 3,859 empty homes in October 2022. Of these 1,225 had been empty for over 2 years. This total empty homes figure has reduced from 4,416 in October 2021.

A higher figure of 4,452 empty homes is given on MHCLG Live Table 615. This includes an additional 593 homes which were empty but in exempt classes as detailed in a table below.

We are currently prohibited by legislation from applying a council tax premium on properties which are furnished but unoccupied.¹

Property category	October 2020	October 2021	October 2022
Empty with zero council tax discount	2,711	3,185	2,634
Empty for 2-5 years with 100% premium council tax	795	940	896
Empty for between 5 years and 10 years with 200% premium council tax	214	251	282
Empty for over 10 years with 300% premium council tax (introduced in April 2021)	N/A	40	47
(Total with a premium)	1,009	1,231	1,225
Total empty and substantially unfurnished (with or without a premium)	3,720	4,416	3,859
All vacant dwellings from Live Table 615 ² - Includes the exempt classes below	4,218	4,976	4,452

¹ Section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended by the Local Government Finance Act 2012 and Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, states that “For the purposes of this section, a dwelling is a “long-term empty dwelling” on any day if for a continuous period of at least 2 years ending with that day —

(a) It has been unoccupied, and (b) it has been substantially unfurnished (Additional Government Guidance Letter 2014 - A property which is substantially unfurnished is unlikely to be occupied or be capable of occupation. A property which is capable of occupation can reasonably be expected to contain some, if not all, items from both of the following categories: furniture such as bed, chairs, table, wardrobe or sofa, and white goods such as fridge, freezer or cooker.)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/357791/140923-CTIL_on_EHP.pdf

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

Dwellings on the valuation list in exempt classes (included in the empty homes total in Live table 615)	October 2020	October 2021	October 2022
Class B: Unoccupied property owned by a registered charity	63	83	56
Class E: Empty property previously occupied by a person now residing in a care home, hospital or hostel.	35	31	30
Class F: The council tax payer has died	308	363	393
Class G: Occupation prohibited by law	57	54	83
Classes D,H,I,J,K,L,Q covering issues such as prison, hospital, held for minister of religion, personal care, students, mortgagee in possession and bankruptcy	35	29	31
Total in exempt classes	498	559	593

The following table breaks each category down by tenure. It should be noted that this is a snapshot of time which does not exactly match the snapshot above as reported above as the reports were run off at slightly different times. There can be delays for people to notify council tax as they move in to properties. There is also a regular process of reviewing the data on council properties to correct issues and anomalies that arise, such as from the self-reporting of information by residents.

As of September 2022, there were 145,587 homes of all tenure types in Southwark, therefore taking the total figures in the following table, there is an approximate 4.6% vacancy rate in the borough including second homes and empty but substantially furnished properties. Further information by tenure is included in the following sections.

	2021			2022		
Primary liable party as recorded on council tax (right) and empty homes category (below)	Private and registered providers	Council including non-active ³	Overall total	Private and registered providers	Council including non-active ³	Overall total
Empty no premium (less than 2 years)	2,613	637	3,250	1,806	852	2,658
100% premium (empty 2-5 years)	362	570	932	289	602	891
200% premium (empty 5-10 years)	53	194	247	55	223	278
300% premium (empty over 10 years)	16	24	40	15	32	47
Total premium (empty over 2 years)	431	788	1,219	359	857	1,216
<i>Proportions of total premiums by tenure</i>	<i>35%</i>	<i>65%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>100%</i>
Total empty unfurnished	3,044	1,425	4,469	2,165	1,709	3,784
<i>Proportions of total empty unfurnished in each tenure</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>56%</i>	<i>44%</i>	<i>100%</i>
Second homes	476	0	476	445	0	445
Furnished, but unoccupied	2,724	21 ⁴	2,745	2,395	15	2,410
Uninhabitable	10	0	10	14	0	14
Total empty homes including unfurnished and second homes etc.	6,254	1,446	7,700	5,019	1,724	6,743
<i>Proportions of grand total empty in each tenure</i>	<i>81%</i>	<i>19%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>74%</i>	<i>26%</i>	<i>100%</i>

³ This includes properties which are unavailable for letting due to redevelopment, major refurbishment, disposal or non-housing use. This information is split down in the section of this action plan specifically on empty council properties.

⁴ Most of these furnished council voids appear to have been recorded as furnished in error.

What lies behind these numbers?

- Southwark is a leading borough in terms of the delivery of new homes of all types but this does temporarily increase the number of empty properties, however most of these are then let or sold and therefore do not become long term empty properties. If any properties do remain empty the council works with the owner to explore other ways of bringing these into use.
- Some properties may be deliberately left empty as investment opportunities.
- There is an increased churn associated with having a significant private rented sector, larger than many boroughs.
- In figures for previous years, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many students not renting in the private rented sector while their courses moved online. In addition there was some evidence of an initial decline in demand in the private rented sector in London, with many households choosing to move further out given the opportunities presented by home working.
- When a resident passes away, it can take some time for a property to then be brought back to use, especially through probate proceedings.
- There are a high number of empty properties situated within large scale regeneration schemes such as at Aylesbury Estate, and some where fire risk assessment work has identified a need to vacate blocks and take corrective action such as at Ledbury Estate. Some fluctuation in numbers is expected as essential safety work is conducted that will mean that in blocks, such as Marie Curie House, the residents will need to move out.

PART 1 – TACKLING PRIVATE SECTOR EMPTY HOMES

The main focus of the Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan is on the private sector as the overwhelming majority of empty homes are privately owned. In Southwark, privately owned and housing association empty homes account for about 74% of all empty homes including second homes and furnished homes. The vast majority of furnished empty homes are also in the private sector accounting for 2,395 of the total 2,410 in this category across all tenures in 2022. There were 445 second homes in the private sector.⁵

The council has adopted a zero tolerance approach to long term empty properties. While the council's preference is to work constructively with landlords and residents to bring properties back into use, the council is committed to providing disincentives for properties to be left empty, such as applying the maximum permissible council tax premium, and through enforcement action where property owners are unwilling or unable to bring their homes back into use.

There are a number of means to bring empty homes back into use from informal measures to the use of enforcement powers, which includes Enforced Sales, Empty Dwelling Management Orders and Compulsory Purchase Orders. Many of these are extremely complex and time consuming and while we will not shy away from pursuing such measures where necessary, we will also lobby for simplification of the powers, and for further powers and funding to enable further action to be taken.

⁵ Under the rules set by national government, council tax premiums can only be applied on long-term empty *and* unfurnished properties. See footnote 1. The council will be lobbying central government to include furnished properties within this category as part of this action plan.

Taking a zero tolerance approach to long term empty private sector homes

Action	Officer lead	CMT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
Use of council tax powers					
Continue not to offer council tax discounts on empty and unfurnished homes. The full charge is payable unless they are exempt.	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Duncan Whitfield	In operation	As introduced in April 2016	Complete
Continue to apply a 100% additional council tax premium for properties empty for over 2 years (double council tax).	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Duncan Whitfield	In operation	As introduced in April 2019	Complete
Continue to apply a 200% additional council tax premium for those empty for over 5 years (triple council tax)	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Duncan Whitfield	In operation	As introduced in April 2020	Complete
Continue to apply a 300% additional council tax premium for those empty for over 10 years (quadruple council tax)	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Duncan Whitfield	In operation	As introduced in April 2021	Complete
Explore introducing any new powers to tackle empty properties as part of the proposed Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill .	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Duncan Whitfield	Following enactment of the bill	The Bill has progressed through the House of Commons and is currently working its way through the House of Lords. This looks set to give Local Authorities the ability to lower the period of vacancy from 2 years to 1 year before a premium can be applied, and to apply a higher council tax for long-term empty properties which are substantially furnished. If agreed, this could be applied from April 2024.	On track

Further consider use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs)					
Explore use of EDMOs for properties which are empty for over two years	Sajda Munshi, PSH & Adaptations Manager	Michael Scorer	April 2023	Sajda Munshi and Emma Trott to continue to explore joint work for options for procuring a management contract for any properties with EDMOs and/or management orders on occupied HMOs.	On track
Use of compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers where other options have failed					
Use of CPO for longer-term empty homes that are having a significant environmental impact	Sajda Munshi PSH & Adaptations Manager	Michael Scorer	Ongoing		Ongoing
Creation of an 'Empty Homes CPO Fund' dedicated to deployment where all other options have failed to bring empty homes back into use		Michael Scorer / Duncan Whitfield	April 2022	A capital allocation of £2m was agreed by Cabinet in March 2022 to provide funding to compulsory purchase (CPO) long-term empty homes. This will be a revolving fund as costs will be recouped from the sale of the properties. Further details in paragraphs 29-33 of the report .	Complete
Use of enforcement powers					
Using enforcement powers as appropriate where an empty property is a statutory nuisance – linking landlords to other support and options available to bring properties back into use.	Emma Trott, Housing Enforcement & Licensing Manager	Caroline Bruce	Ongoing	Where an empty property is causing a statutory nuisance to a neighbouring property the Housing Enforcement service can take formal action to require the owner to resolve the problem causing the nuisance. For example this could be a leaking roof near a party wall which is making the wall damp within the neighbouring property. This action cannot require the owner to bring their property back into use but will ensure	Ongoing

				<p>they are taking responsibility for any nuisance caused to neighbouring properties. To fall within the definition of statutory nuisance, an issue needs to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a nuisance • posing a threat to health 	
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Working with residents and property owners to quickly bring empty private sector homes back in to use

Action	Officer lead	CMT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
Explore offering enhanced grants tied to long-term leasing					
Review levels of grant and loans offered to property owners to help bring homes back in to use	Sajda Munshi, PSH & Adaptations Manager Dave Hodgson, Director of Asset Management	Michael Scorer	October 2021	The review completed. The outcome of the review was that individual grants & loans needed to increase to take account of the increase in building costs and to incentivise landlords/property owners to complete repairs/ improvements.	Complete
Review funding for grants and loans as required	Sajda Munshi, PSH & Adaptations Manager	Michael Scorer	March 2022	The review completed and these changes and additional funding were agreed by Cabinet in March 2022. Cabinet agreed to increase the annual capital funding available for grants to refurbish empty homes from £95k to £400k, and to increase the annual capital funding available for loans to refurbish empty homes from £62k to £700k. To support	Complete

				the expanded programme two additional officers will be recruited. Further details are in paragraphs 22-26 of the report .	
To publish an enhanced offer for grants and loans by the end of the year.	Sajda Munshi, PSH & Adaptations Manager	Michael Scorer	December 2022	Complete	Complete
Incentivise property owners to let their homes through the council's social lettings agency to homeless families⁶					
Develop a standard maximum offer of how much we will pay for renting empty properties, expectations of rents, letting terms etc. and publicise all the benefits that are available as part of the offer, through a variety of media channels.	Karen Shaw, Head of Housing Solutions	Michael Scorer	December 2022	The team are finalising a draft with the offer. The team has also been exploring ways to promote the offer.	On target
Consult on a new zero cost private rented sector license fee as part of the refreshed Private Rented Sector Licensing Scheme. The Gold Standard Charter includes a 'Gold Standard Charter Plus' which gives an additional discount to any Gold Standard Charter Landlord who has signed up to the Council's Finder's Fee Scheme. Where landlords have signed up to the private sector leasing scheme the properties will be	Emma Trott, Housing Enforcement & Licensing Manager	Caroline Bruce	March 2022	Cabinet agreed changes to mandatory licensing for HMOs, additional licensing for HMOs, selective licensing in many wards, and the final proposals for the council's Gold Standard Charter for Landlords as set out in Appendix 9 and 10 of the report .	Complete

⁶ The social lettings agency offers a guaranteed rent paid even if the property is empty, regular property visits to ensure the tenant is looking after it, a lease of up to five years, full management of all tenant issues including day to day repairs, guaranteed vacant possession at the end of the lease, and no fees or charge for the service. Please see this webpage for more information about the social lettings agency. <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/home-owners-services/private-home-owners-and-landlords/earn-money-from-your-property>

managed by the Council so become exempt from licensing, preventing the need to apply or pay for a license which is an additional; incentive for a landlord to choose this option.					
Use council tax empty homes information to identify newly developed homes which are sitting empty	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Duncan Whitfield	Quarterly, starting with a new formal process from October 2021	A new process will be formalised where council tax will run the reports and the data will be used to identify newly developed properties which are vacant and potentially available for let. This will then be shared with council officers in the regeneration team.	Ongoing
Contact developers of newly developed empty homes with the offer of leasing to the council to let to homeless households.	Jon Abbott, Head of Regeneration North Neil Kirby, Head of Regeneration South, Colin Wilson, Head of Regeneration - Old Kent Road Ricky Bellot, Interim Head of Housing Supply Mitzi Myrie, Housing Supply Manager	Steve Platts and Eleanor Kelly Michael Scorer	Quarterly	On receipt of the council tax information, regeneration officers will contact the developers of new units to understand the reasons for any vacancies and to suggest leasing to the council on standard terms and rents.	Ongoing

Raise awareness and provide advice on options to bring properties back in to use					
Organise an empty homes publicity drive, as part of the housing crisis campaign	Louise Neilan, Head of External Affairs	Eleanor Kelly	October 2021	<p>We will use all appropriate and effective council channels to ensure the public are aware of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to report empty homes, • the costs of leaving homes empty, both to owners and the wider community • incentives to bring properties back into use 	Ongoing
Improve the council's web pages on the support and assistance for bringing empty homes back into use including better linking to the information about council tax premiums which will be charged as per the next action	Sajda Munshi, PSH & Adaptations Manager, Richard Selley, Director of Customer Experience	Michael Scorer	October 2021	Review of accessibility, readability and functionality of the web page. This will include the layout and display of the pages. Confirming if the content is in line with current guidelines and branding. Content will need to be updated as and when any agreed policy changes take place.	Complete
Ensure the council's council tax webpages about empty properties and second home discounts links to the webpage above about bringing empty properties back into use.	Laurence Fleming Service Development Officer Richard Selley, Director of Customer Experience	Duncan Whitfield	October 2021	A web link will be inserted to ensure a joined up approach.	Complete
Making it easier to report empty homes					

Establish an empty homes reporting telephone line through the council' switchboard	Dominic Cain Director of Exchequer	Duncan Whitfield	October 2021	There is an existing empty homes reporting telephone number. A new flowchart has been provided to help the call centre better assign calls to the appropriate team. We will continue to explore methods to make reporting of empty homes easier.	Complete
Improve options for the reporting of empty homes online and via email	Richard Selley, Director of Customer Experience	Michael Scorer	November 2021	The existing web form is in place and receives hits daily. The Digital team will work with Resident Services to review the web form. Amendments to the page and appropriate automatic routing will be constructed where appropriate. The review will explore automatic filtering to the correct team. A process map and scoping is required to explore other options. Longer term actions could include an online app for reporting empty homes. There are currently similar apps on the market so the council will explore whether it is beneficial to purchase an app or develop a new app.	Ongoing

Improving our understanding of private sector empty homes to better target action and support

Action	Officer lead	CMT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
Improve the data on empty homes					
Contact owners of empty homes on the council tax database to improve	Norman Lockie, Head	Duncan Whitfield	December 2021	An empty homes audit was completed. Owners of empty homes were contacted	Complete

our understanding of the reasons for this, and what additional support would help return the property to use.	of Income Operations			to check if the property was still empty, why, and what additional assistance may be required to bring the property back into use. The council has received the final report. More than 2,000 owners of empty properties were surveyed to find out why homes were empty, future intentions concerning the property, and support required from the council. There were 290 responses received to the survey - a 14% response rate, which is positive in terms of this type of survey. 54% indicated that the home was not empty or being used as a second home. Of the owners that said the home was empty 34% indicated that they will be selling the property. 48% of owners indicated that work was needed before selling or letting the home.	
Conducting pilots exercise to improve the reporting of empty homes.	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Duncan Whitfield	TBC	<p>This action was agreed in response to the survey above. Following this the council has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run a targeted campaign against 450 properties empty for longer than 6 months. 103 responses have been received so far and the results are being analysed. This has been in conjunction with the empty property team • Begun looking to create a report to identify when an empty property owner stops making payments so it triggers a contact from ourselves to see if there has been a change of circumstance, which could also potentially also use credit reference data. 	Ongoing

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begun investigating if we can tap into the temporary accommodation income database to understand which LBS property is being used for this purpose and whether or not it ties in with Council Tax data • Arranged for a Demo of Ascendant Solution AIM product which utilises data from various sources in real time to show changes at previously empty property. 	
A new empty homes board					
Introduce a cross council empty homes board to meet bi-annually to agree and review the action plan	Robert Weallans, Housing Strategy Manager	Michael Scorer	May 2021	The board has been set up and has met a number of times to agree this action plan and to coordinate workstreams across the council. The board will continue to meet to review the action plan as required and to monitor progress towards delivery of the actions, and to track the number of empty homes.	Complete

Campaigning for more resources and more effective powers to tackle empty homes in the private sector

In recognition of the limited powers the council has to tackle empty homes, the council will campaign for the following changes to legislation and national policy, working with the Mayor of London and London Councils.

Action	Officer lead	CMT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
Establish a thorough, consistent and long term public affairs plan, engaging both the Mayor of London, Greater London Assembly and London Councils in order to influence government policy towards empty homes and relevant local authority powers	Joseph Brown Cabinet & Public Affairs Manager	Eleanor Kelly	Ongoing	<p>This plan's asks will include as a starting point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simpler, swifter and more cost effective enforcement powers, such as simplifying EDMO and CPO procedures, such as allowing for community impact and housing need to be accepted reasons to seek enforcement actions. • New planning powers to allow Local Authorities to revert property to local authority's affordable housing supply where it remains empty following completion. Current planning powers do not allow for planning consent to require homes to be occupied. If new powers are introduced the council will quickly implement these new powers. • Greater flexibility over council tax premiums on empty homes - Government should allow unlimited council tax premiums on empty homes and greater flexibility to enable local authorities to charge 	Ongoing

				<p>the premium on homes empty for less than 2 years. We will also seek further flexibilities to charge premiums on second homes and other furnished empty properties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased resources for grants and loans 	
Work with partners from across the third sector to support and develop policy, campaigns and relevant other work streams, including organisations such as Action on Empty Homes	Joseph Brown Cabinet & Public Affairs Manager	Eleanor Kelly	Ongoing	The council is currently in dialogue with Action on Empty Homes and work will continue following the agreement of the action plan.	Ongoing
Ensure any related government consultation responses set out our clear asks	Perry Singh, Strategy and Business Support Manager	Michael Scorer	As required	The council has met with MHCLG and DWP to discuss the issues with powers such as CPOs and EDMOs and remains in dialogue on these issues. The lobbying points will be used in all housing consultations as appropriate.	On target

PART 2 – REDUCING THE NUMBER OF EMPTY COUNCIL HOMES

While the issue of empty homes is concentrated in the private sector, about a quarter of empty homes are owned by the council. The vast majority of these are related to ongoing estate redevelopment, major refurbishment, disposal or non-housing use.

According to the September 2022 council tax records there were 1,709 empty properties where the council was recorded as responsible for the council tax (not just council rented). The vast majority of these are not active voids. According to the Voids Team records in September 2022 there were 1,144 non active voids broken down as follows:

Demolition	Refurbishment and FRA type 4 safety works	Other	Total
778	306	60	1,144

Most of the non-active voids are involved with major regeneration schemes or where major investment or fire safety work is required. With the regeneration voids, some of the properties are effectively uninhabitable but there are strict rules about what can be removed from the council tax property list on which these figures are based. Many of these are expected to be removed from the figures shortly once demolition gets underway. Some of the key examples of these regeneration or structural issue voids are:

- Aylesbury Estate – The vast majority of the long term empty properties are linked to the Aylesbury Estate regeneration. In September 2022 this accounted for 623 voids of which 543 were vacant for over two years. This regeneration has run in phases which has resulted in many homes needing to be vacated and sitting vacant prior to demolition. To reduce the number of vacant homes some of these homes have been used as temporary accommodation. At Wendover a new phase of emptying properties has started.
- Ledbury – In 2021 due to structural issues, in consultation with residents a decision was made to demolish the four tower blocks at Ledbury Estate, consisting of 224 homes. Residents are being required to leave their homes while blocks are demolished and new homes are built. In September 2022 this accounted for 79 voids of which 72 were vacant over 2 years.
- Tustin and Hillbeck Close Estates - In March 2021, residents voted in favour of demolishing and rebuilding the low-rise buildings in a residents' ballot. The programme comprises of the demolition of 249 homes (200 council rented and 49 leasehold)
- Maydew House – This comprises of 144 units which were vacated by the Council between 2010 and 2015 in order to facilitate a programme of asbestos removal, heating works and replacement of bathrooms and kitchens which was determined too intrusive to carry out with residents in situ. Following an options appraisal in 2011, further consultation led

to a decision in 2012 to undertake a major refurbishment. In 2018 planning permission was granted to refurbish the building and add 5 storeys of accommodation on the roof. Following procurement, a contractor was appointed to finalise the costings and design in 2020. During this period, further surveys identified additional structural and fire prevention issues which needed to be addressed in the works contract. A revised costing was submitted earlier this year. Following consideration of this cost and consultation, a report is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet in February 2023 to agree a way forward for the block.

- Marie Curie – In May 2021, the council informed residents in Marie Curie that they needed to move out to carry out major essential works, including fire safety improvements to their homes and block. Marie Curie is a 16 storey block of 98 two bedroomed maisonettes. In September 2022 this accounted for 54 voids.

The council is keen to make best use of these empty properties. It conducts frequent review of empty homes on regeneration schemes to ensure empty properties are used as temporary accommodation for as long as possible. Where there are delays to the programme, the temporary accommodation strategy for the scheme is reviewed and additional homes brought back into use. Following a review of the Aylesbury regeneration empty homes, 80 additional units on the Aylesbury estate have been brought back into use as temporary accommodation for homeless households.

The action plan contains targets to return council homes to use. The performance on these are still being affected by the impacts of the covid pandemic. This resulted in restrictions on contractors which delayed repair work, and prevented being able to offer multiple household viewings once the property was available to let. For minor works voids, the target in the plan was to turn the void around within 28 days. Letting some of the long standing major voids will affect turnaround time. As of December 2022, this was running at 77 days. There had been 148 minor lets since 01 April 2022. For major void, the target was 100 days but running at 147 days as at December 2022, there were 346 major void lets for the same period. The letting of some of the long standing major voids is impacting on the average turnaround time. Looking at just new voids the year to date performance as running at 66 days for minor voids and 95 for new major voids. Looking at the active voids, the majority of these continue to be major voids.

Between April 2022 and December 2022, 968 void properties were completed and relet – 577 as permanent accommodation and 391 estate voids for use as temporary accommodation.

There is increased scrutiny and monitoring of council empty homes, the team are working with contractors to ensure all empty homes are brought back into use. Two additional contractors have been brought in to focus on complex long standing and Temporary Accommodation voids. A new KPI for Contractor's performance monitoring has been developed to ensure targets are met.

As part of the repairs improvement plan, a new IT system is being rolled out for the voids team. This will allow for enhanced functions for monitoring works from specifications through to completions, including detailed monitoring on financial completions.

Reducing the number of empty council homes

Action	Officer lead	CMT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
Setting targets for returning empty council homes ('voids') to use					
Major voids turnaround (average) <100 days	Cheryl Russell, Director of Resident Services	Michael Scorer	2021/22	<p>The performance on these are still being affected by the impacts of the covid pandemic. This resulted in restrictions on contractors which delayed repair work, and prevented being able to offer multiple household viewings once the property was available to let. Letting some of the long standing major voids affect turnaround time. 3 new contractors have been brought in to deal with backlog.</p> <p>This was running at 147 days as at December 2022, there were 346 major void lets for the same period. Voids remain a priority and works are monitored closely to ensure properties are turned around as quickly as possible.</p>	<p>Red – This is currently off target due to the impacts of the covid19 pandemic</p> <p>See comment</p>
Minor voids turnaround in days (average) <28 days	Cheryl Russell, Director of Resident Services	Michael Scorer	2021/22	As of December 2022, this was running at 78 days. There had been 148 minor lets since 01 April 2022.	<p>Red – This is currently off target due to the impacts of the covid19</p>

					pandemic See comment
Maximise use of empty homes designated for redevelopment					
Review use of lettings on the Aylesbury Estates and Ledbury redevelopment as part of the empty homes awaiting redevelopment in the Temporary Accommodation Supply Action Plan	Abi Oguntokun, Area Manager	Michael Scorer	Ongoing	<p>Following a review of the phasing in phase 2 of the Aylesbury Estate, it was agreed that 80 decommissioned properties in Wolverton and Brockley would be brought back into use. Work was completed to bring these properties back into use as Temporary Accommodation and tenants are now moving into the refurbished properties.</p> <p>Over 100 properties were used for temporary accommodation in Ledbury.</p> <p>All properties on regenerations schemes will be reviewed on an ongoing basis responding to any potential changes in phasing.</p>	Ongoing