

# Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan

## October 2021

This action plan 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.

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

# 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 the Borough Plan 2018-2022. 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.

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 also started 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 4,469 empty homes in October 2021. Of these 1,219 had been empty for over 2 years.<sup>1</sup>

In October 2020 (the data used in the February 2021 Empty Homes Report) there were 3,720 empty homes. Of these, 1,009 had been empty for over 2 years. A higher figure of 4,218 empty homes was given on MHCLG Live Table 615. This included an additional 498 homes which were empty but in exempt classes as detailed in a table below.

We are prohibited by legislation from applying a council tax premium on properties which are furnished but unoccupied.<sup>2</sup>

Property category	October 2020	October 2021 <sup>3</sup>
Empty with zero council tax discount	2,711	3,250
Empty for 2-5 years with 100% premium council tax	795	932
Empty for over 5 years with 200% premium council tax	214	247
Empty for over 10 years with 300% premium council tax (introduced in April 2021)	N/A	40
(Total with a premium)	1,009	1,219
<b>Total empty and substantially unfurnished (with or without a premium)</b>	<b>3,720</b>	<b>4,469</b>

<sup>1</sup> The October 2021 data is provisional data and may differ slightly from the final submission to Government for Table 615

<sup>2</sup> 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](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/357791/140923-CTIL_on_EHP.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1.

<b>Dwellings on the valuation list in exempt classes (included in the empty homes total in Live table 615)</b>	<b>October 2020</b>	<b>October 2021</b>
Class F: The council tax payer has died	308	363
Class B: Unoccupied property owned by a registered charity	63	81
Class G: Occupation prohibited by law	57	54
Class E: Empty property previously occupied by a person now residing in a care home, hospital or hostel.	35	30
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

As of September 2020, there were nearly 143,000 homes of all tenure types in Southwark, therefore taking the total figures in the following table, there is an approximate 5% vacancy rate in the borough. Further information by tenure is included in the following sections.

The following table breaks each category down by types of owner recorded as the primary liable party for paying the council tax.

It should be noted that this is a snapshot of time at the beginning of October and a best estimate using the information available at the time. 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. Therefore some of the data is still subject to this review process.

Primary liable party as recorded on council tax (right) and empty homes category (below)	Private and other	Registered providers	Council not available for use (redevelopment, major refurbishment, disposal <sup>4</sup> or non-housing use)	Council available for use following minor or major repair works <sup>5</sup>	Overall total
Empty no premium (less than 2 years)	2,358	255	309	328	3,250
100% premium (empty 2-5 years)	239	123	535	35	932
200% premium (empty 5-10 years)	42	11	192	2 <sup>6</sup>	247
300% premium (empty over 10 years)	15	1	24	0	40
<b>Total premium (empty over 2 years)</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>751</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>1,219</b>
<i>Proportions of total premiums by tenure</i>	24%	11%	62%	3%	100%
<b>Total empty unfurnished</b>	<b>2,654</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>1,060</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>4,469</b>
<i>Proportions of total empty unfurnished in each tenure</i>	59%	9%	24%	9%	100%
Second homes	475	1	0	0	476
Furnished, but unoccupied	2,647	77	15 <sup>7</sup>	6 <sup>8</sup>	2,745
Uninhabitable	10	0	0	0	10
<b>Total empty homes</b> <i>including unfurnished and second homes etc.</i>	<b>5,786</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>1,075</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>7,700</b>
<i>Proportions of grand total empty in each tenure</i>	75%	6%	14%	5%	100%

<sup>4</sup> In a few exceptional circumstances, certain high value void properties are sold to raise capital receipts for the housing investment programme to increase the supply of new homes and improve the quality of existing accommodation. The council also occasionally disposes of individual properties where there are major structural issues, and repair is deemed not to provide value for taxpayer money. All disposals of council property are made following the council's void disposal strategy which was updated in December 2020. There were also some private homes built for sale to help cross subsidise the new homes programme.

<https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s92409/Report%20Review%20of%20Void%20Disposal%20Strategy.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> This includes 83 properties recorded as vacant by council tax but recorded as occupied by the housing department which will be reviewed with council tax. It includes some properties which are being used as temporary accommodation and going through the process of being relet.

<sup>6</sup> The two 200% premium council tax empty council properties appear to be an error. From housing department data, one looks to be occupied (to be confirmed with the TMO), and one has recently become void again but has been occupied since the council tax recorded void date. Therefore the 200% premium should probably not apply. This will be reviewed with the council tax section.

<sup>7</sup> Most of these furnished council voids appear to have been recorded as furnished in error. Three of these appear to be occupied rather than empty so should probably not be included at all. One belongs to a leaseholder. Three are not housing department units. The Council is currently reviewing these cases and the council tax records will then be updated as required.

<sup>8</sup> Please see footnote 7.

## 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 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.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that many students have not chosen to rent in the private rented sector while their courses have been mainly 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. These changes in the market are likely to be temporary.
- When a resident passes away, it can take some time for a property to then be brought back to use, especially through probate proceedings. Sadly the pandemic has also increased the number of such deaths.
- 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 blocks, such as Marie Curie House, will need to be decanted.

# 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 empty homes account for about 75% of all empty homes including second homes and furnished homes (5,786) and around 59% of the unfurnished empty total (at 2,654). The vast majority of furnished empty homes are also in the private sector accounting for 2,647 of the total 2,745 in this category across all tenures. There were 475 second homes in the private sector.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, other registered providers (including housing associations and other local authorities) had 390 of the unfurnished empty properties. 135 had been empty for over two years. 76 of these were linked to a block which was required to be demolished. There were a further 77 furnished empty homes.

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.

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<sup>9</sup> 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	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
<b>Use of council tax powers</b>					
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
<b>Further consider use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs)</b>					
Explore use of EDMOs for properties which are empty for over two years	Mike Scarlett, PSH & Adaptations Manager	Michael Scorer	April 2022	Mike Scarlett and Emma Trott 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

Action	Officer lead	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
<b>Use of compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers where other options have failed</b>					
Use of CPO for longer-term empty homes that are having a significant environmental impact	Mike Scarlett PSH & Adaptations Manager	Michael Scorer	Ongoing		On target
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	A proposal on CPO will to go to the Housing Investment Board in the autumn.		On target
<b>Use of enforcement powers</b>					
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 they are taking responsibility for any nuisance caused to neighbouring properties. To fall within the definition of statutory nuisance, an issue needs to be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a nuisance</li> <li>• posing a threat to health</li> </ul>	On target

## Working with residents and property owners to quickly bring empty private sector homes back in to use

Action	Officer lead	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
<b>Explore offering enhanced grants tied to long-term leasing</b>					
Review levels of grant and loans offered to property owners to help bring homes back in to use	Mike Scarlett, PSH & Adaptations Manager Dave Hodgson, Director of Asset Management	Michael Scorer	October 2021	Review completed. The outcome of the review is that individual grants & loans need to increase to take account of the increase in building costs and to incentivise landlords/property owners to complete repairs/improvements. A summary of the proposed grants & loans is being prepared and will go to Cabinet.	On target
Review funding for grants and loans as required	Mike Scarlett, PSH & Adaptations Manager	Michael Scorer	October 2021	In progress. Current annual budget will be reviewed following the proposal to increase the individual grants & loans.	On target
To publish an enhanced offer for grants and loans by the end of the year.	Mike Scarlett, PSH & Adaptations Manager	Michael Scorer	December 2021	In progress.	On target

Action	Officer lead	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
<b>Incentivise property owners to let their homes through the council's social lettings agency to homeless families<sup>10</sup></b>					
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.	Ricky Bellot, Interim Head of Housing Supply Mitzi Myrie, Housing Supply Manager	Michael Scorer	November 2021	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 social lettings agency, the properties will be 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.	Emma Trott, Housing Enforcement & Licensing Manager	Caroline Bruce	March 2022	Cabinet will need to agree the final proposals following consultation, with a view to the licensing scheme starting in March 2022.	On target

<sup>10</sup> 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>

Action	Officer lead	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
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.	On target
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.	On target

Action	Officer lead	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
<b>Raise awareness and provide advice on options to bring properties back in to use</b>					
Organise an empty homes publicity drive, as part of the housing crisis campaign	Louise Neilan, Head of External Affairs	Eleanor Kelly	October 2021	We will use all appropriate and effective council channels to ensure the public are aware of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to report empty homes,</li> <li>• the costs of leaving homes empty, both to owners and the wider community</li> </ul> incentives to bring properties back into use	
Improve the <a href="#">council's web pages</a> 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	Mike Scarlett, 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.	On target
Ensure the council's council tax webpages about <a href="#">empty properties and second home discounts</a> 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.	On target

Action	Officer lead	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
<b>Making it easier to report empty homes</b>					
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.	On target
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.	On target

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

Action	Officer lead	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
<b>Improve the data on empty homes</b>					
Contact 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.	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Duncan Whitfield	December 2021	An empty homes audit is planned. Owners of empty homes will be contacted to ensure the property is still empty, why, and what additional assistance may be required to bring the property back into use. The approach to the review has been agreed and that specifications for the data and use of API's is being finalised	On target
<b>A new empty homes board</b>					
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	COT 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"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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 the premium on homes empty for</li> </ul>	On target

Action	Officer lead	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
				<p>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"> <li>• Increased resources for grants and loans</li> </ul>	
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, 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. This accounts for at least 74% of the vacant council properties.

The figures below are all records on the council tax database where the council is recorded as the principal account holder. It includes properties which have been purchased as part of regeneration schemes and some other long term non HRA council owned properties like school houses, park keeper houses etc. It also includes some private units which were built to help subsidise the new homes programme which are awaiting sale.

### Vacant council stock by best estimate of type October 2021 (note this includes non HRA stock)<sup>11</sup>

Vacant home type	Number	Percentage
Disposal and private homes built for sale <sup>12</sup>	58	4%
Redevelopment and major refurbishment	978	68%
Non housing use, gypsy and traveller plots and leaseholders <sup>13</sup>	39	3%
<b>Total empty homes not available for use</b>	<b>1,075</b>	<b>74%</b>
Homes being made ready for re-letting (including temporary accommodation and TMO properties)	371 <sup>14</sup>	26%
<b>TOTAL COUNCIL VOIDS</b>	<b>1,446</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>11</sup> Non-HRA properties include homes built on our estates that are for shared ownership or outright sale as part of our new homes programme. It also can include residential properties belonging to other departments such as former schoolhouses.

<sup>12</sup> In a few exceptional circumstances, certain high value void properties are sold to raise capital receipts for the housing investment programme to increase the supply of new homes and improve the quality of existing accommodation. We also occasionally dispose of individual properties where there are major structural issues and repair is deemed not to provide value for taxpayer money. All disposals of council property are made following the council's void disposal strategy which was updated in December 2020. There are also some private homes built for sale to help cross subsidise the new homes programme.

<https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s92409/Report%20Review%20of%20Void%20Disposal%20Strategy.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> This figure includes where properties are being used for other purposes such as offices, a few gypsy and traveller plots, some non-housing department properties, and 11 properties owned by council leaseholders where the council may have been recorded as the primary liable party in error. These cases will be reviewed with council tax.

<sup>14</sup> This figure includes 83 properties where the housing department records the property as being occupied. Some of these will be where the new occupant has not yet registered their details with council tax. This may also include some units which have become vacant where the housing department has not yet been notified. These cases will be reviewed with council tax for accuracy.

Of the total 1,446 empty properties, 1,036 were council properties related to ongoing estate redevelopments, major refurbishments or disposals, of which 736 had been empty for over two years accounting for 93% of all long term empty council properties, and 60% of all long term empty properties in all tenures.

The vast majority of these long term empty properties are linked to the Aylesbury Estate regeneration. There were 611 void properties on the Aylesbury Estate of which 400 had been vacant for over 2 years. There were also 98 empty properties on the Ledbury Estate of which 84 had been vacant for over two years. There are also blocks that have been emptied, and residents re-housed, to allow for repair works to take place. Maydew accounted for 135 voids of which 133 were void for over 2 years.

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.<sup>15</sup>

Active empty council homes (known as 'voids') vary in number day by day as a result of the usual churn of residents moving in and out of our 37,000 council homes. Once a tenant leaves a property, we cannot simply re-let this home immediately. We have high standards for our council homes and many need to be re-decorated or have improvements made to bring them back up to a high standard. As of October 2021 this number stood at 371, though this includes 83 properties which the housing department records as occupied, so many of these may not actually be vacant. These cases will be reviewed with council tax. Therefore of the total available council rented stock, roughly 1% were empty, consistent with other social landlords.

We have specific targets to turn around these voids and bring them back in to use as soon as possible. Those homes that need significant works after being vacated are known as 'major voids' and our target is bring them back into use in no more than 100 days. Homes which only need some repairs or upkeep work are 'minor voids' and we aim to bring these back into use and re-let within 28 days. These targets are reflected in the Action Plan tables below.

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<sup>15</sup> A property's only considered derelict if it is not possible to live in it, for example because it's been damaged by weather, rot or vandalism or would need major structural works to make it 'wind and watertight' again

## Reducing the number of empty council homes

Action	Officer lead	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
<b>Setting targets for returning empty council homes ('voids') to use</b>					
Major voids turnaround (average) <100 days	Cheryl Russell, Director of Resident Services	Michael Scorer	2021/22	As included as a key measure in the Borough Plan	On target
Minor voids turnaround in days (average) <28 days	Cheryl Russell, Director of Resident Services	Michael Scorer	2021/22	As included as a key measure in the Borough Plan. COVID-19 and its impacts have hit our ability to let properties as quickly as we can. It is anticipated that the impact of the pandemic will continue to be reflected in performance and higher than normal turnaround times due to the continuation of the challenges presented by COVID-19 and the need to comply with strict social distancing measures and guidance. The team are working closely with Asset Management to continue to turn properties around as quickly as possible. The outturn figure reflects that we are broadly comparable with the average London re-let times during the past year.	Red – This is currently off target due to the impacts of the covid19 pandemic – See comment

Action	Officer lead	COT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
<b>Maximise use of empty homes designated for redevelopment</b>					
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	October 2021	Following a review of the phasing in phase 2 of the Aylesbury Estate, it was agreed that 80 decommissioned properties in Wolverton and Brockley will be brought back into use. Work is ongoing on site to bring these properties back into use as Temporary Accommodation. 103 properties are currently being used for temporary accommodation in Ledbury. All properties on regenerations schemes will be reviewed on an ongoing basis responding to any potential changes in phasing.	On target