



Shropshire Council
Legal and Democratic Services
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
SY2 6ND

Date: Monday, 1 December
2014
My Ref:
Your Ref:

Committee:
Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee

Date: Tuesday, 9 December 2014
Time: 10.00 am
Venue: Shrewsbury Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, SY2 6ND

You are requested to attend the above meeting.
The Agenda is attached

Claire Porter
Corporate Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer)

Members of Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee

Andrew Bannerman	Charlotte Barnes
Martin Bennett	Dean Carroll
Nicholas Bardsley	John Hurst-Knight
Steve Davenport (Chairman)	Jean Jones
Pauline Dee (Vice Chairman)	William Parr

Your Committee Officer is:

Julie Fildes Scrutiny Committee Officer
Tel: 01743 252893
Email: Julie.fildes@shropshire.gov.uk

AGENDA

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Members are reminded that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter in which they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

3 Public Question Time

To receive any questions, statements or petitions of which Members of the public have given notice. Deadline for notification is 5.00pm on Thursday 4th December 2014.

4 Member Question Time

To receive any questions, statements or petitions of which Members of the Council have given notice. Deadline for notification is 5.00pm on Thursday 4th December 2014.

5 Call-in Empty Homes Strategy 2014/2017 (Pages 1 - 96)

A copy of the Call-In Notice received from the Leader of the Council's Liberal Democrat Group together with relevant appendices, marked as **5a**.

Links to additional background information:

- **LGA Empty Homes – Council action to tackle empty homes:**
http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=5416e10f-218a-4994-811f-0e96ce93227c&groupId=10180
- **House of Commons Library, Council tax: discount on second homes and long-term empty properties:**
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN02857/council-tax-discount-on-second-homes-and-longterm-empty-properties>
- **House of Commons Library, Empty Housing:**
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN03012/empty-housing>

The decision has been called in by the Liberal Democrat Group as detailed in the Call-In Notice. The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider decision taken

by the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Planning, Housing and Commissioning (Central).

Presentation by Jessica Moores and Julia Preston, Empty Homes Officers, on the Empty Homes Strategy. Portfolio Holder Decision report and appendices attached, marked as **5b**. Also, Empty Homes Network Policy Statement, Discussion Draft, marked as **5c**.

If having considered the decision, the Scrutiny Committee is still concerned about it, then it may refer it back to the Portfolio Holder for reconsideration, setting out in writing the nature of its concerns or refer the matter to Council. If the Scrutiny Committee does not refer the matter back to the Portfolio Holder or Council, the decision shall take effect on the date of the Scrutiny meeting.

6 Dates for Future Meetings

Thursday 29th January 2015 at 10am

Thursday 2nd April 2015 at 10am

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Dear Claire

Re Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Commissioning (Central) decision on the "Empty Homes Strategy 2014/2017.

Decision published 10/11/2014

On behalf of the Shropshire Council Liberal Democrat Group I wish to call this decision in.

A strategy to deal with long term Empty Homes in Shropshire was previously adopted in 2011

Background

1. The Council decided to levy a 50% premium in respect of property that had been unoccupied and unfurnished for more than two years, with effect from 1 April 2014. There is an exemption for the first month, followed by a 25% discount for the next 5 months, then full rate for the next 18 months, by which point the property has been empty for two years and a 50% premium is levied.

In the current financial year it is estimated that the premium will generate approximately £314,000. This is for all precepting authorities, the Council alone would likely receive in the order of £240,000. Looking forward to 2015/16 it is likely that similar figures would be generated.

The funding associated with the premium has been included within the Shropshire Council resource estimates and therefore has been factored in prior to the calculation of the current funding gap (£80m). Any change to the current position would, therefore, impact on the level of the funding gap.

2. Since 2010 the raw data from Government public web sites is

All empty homes:

Shropshire %increase since 2010	9.0%
England %increase since 2010	-9.2%

Long term empty homes:

Shropshire %increase since 2010	5.5%
England %increase since 2010	-23.0%

As can be seen Shropshire's number of empty homes is going against the national trend. Shropshire's Long term empty homes is even more out of step with the national figures. This council is failing the people of Shropshire.

3. As at 1 April 2011, there were known to be at least 2412 long term empty dwellings in Shropshire. The implications of this are significant. As stated in the Audit Commission report *Building Better Lives*, if only five per cent of empty homes could be brought back into use, councils could cut their annual homelessness costs by £1½ billion.

With the policy implemented since January 2011 the number of long term empty homes brought back into use are

For year 2011/2012 94 Homes

For year 2012/2013 74 Homes

4. The professed target is to return approximately 100 homes in each of the next two years. At this rate of activity, it will take 24 years to bring all 2412 empty homes back into use. We consider that this is not ambitious enough. We note that this is not due to the fault of staff but due to the resources and policies that have been allocated and adopted by the administration

Consultation

The proposed policy was consulted on, but there were several deficiencies in the consultation questions, for example:

- The consultation did not ask whether Shropshire Council put in more resources so that the number of long term empty homes could be reduced more quickly, and so help more residents to have a home of their own at a rent which is affordable. The target at present is just 100 homes to be returned per year.

Three replies did however pick up this issue stating that the number of empty homes being returned for use was quite low.

The answer given to this comment was as follows:

'The targets set for returning empty properties to use, and creating residential dwellings from empty properties, reflect the current available resources. It is thought that whilst the provision of 100 affordable homes a year may seem quite low in comparison to the total number of empty properties, this is a valuable contribution to housing supply and provides much needed affordable housing for local people.'

- The Empty Homes Scoring sheet was not consulted on. Are the 12 categories listed correct? Is the score shown for each category correct? Is the score of 30 the correct value for identifying houses to be put into a red category?
- No comment was asked for regarding how to tackle long term empty properties outside of the Action Zones.
- Examples given were all of Market Drayton and Oswestry. None were from any other part of Shropshire. No comment was made or asked for about any problems from other parts of Shropshire.
- The proposed policy fails to address long term empty properties outside of the action zones.
- No comment was asked for regarding the reduction in the discount given during the first 6 months of a property becoming vacant.
- No figures were provided showing numbers of long term empty homes in Shropshire.
- No comment was made or asked regarding the high number of properties given exemption from the 50% council tax premium. Only 14 Local authorities have a higher number than Shropshire (out of over 300). For example, Birmingham has granted just 1897 exemptions, whilst Shropshire is shown as granting exemption to 1207 properties. There is a very large difference in the number of total properties in each of these two authorities. No comment or explanation is given.

- Of the returns only one was from a Housing Association and only nine Parish/Town Councils commented. The vast majority are listed as being from individuals. Given the low number of responses, is this a true reflection of views.
- No details or explanation is given as to what enforcement action is to be taken. No policy appears to be in place. No examples of any enforcement action is shown or commented on anywhere in the document.

In Shropshire there are currently 5286 households on the housing register for affordable homes. The proposed actions outlined will not help a significant number of these residents. To quote from the proposed policy:

'In Shropshire there are currently 5,286 households on the housing register for affordable housing (September 2014). Approximately 35% of these households have limited opportunities to access social housing. Increasing the amount of affordable housing available through returning empty property to use can help to start addressing the lack of suitable properties for these grants'

Call In

We wish Scrutiny to look at this policy, to examine how effective the approach is and to examine how more resources and effort could be put into ensuring more long term empty homes are returned to their original intended use. This could include:

- Increased use of the New Homes Bonus. This will increase the amount paid to Shropshire Council in future years.
- Some or most of the money paid in the council tax premium be used to help implement this policy
- Alterations to the discount given to empty homes possible or wanted?
- Examination of the available grants and the bureaucracy involved in applying them
- Examination of the effectiveness of the Empty Homes Action Zones, and whether this approach should be abandoned or applied more widely across the County.

The objective is to help ensure the number of houses available for residents to live in are increased, Shropshire's percentage of long term empty homes is reduced and its position of 263rd out of 326 Local Authorities is improved so that it is in the upper quartile not towards the bottom of the lower quartile

Please also see attachments.

- **A graphical format showing empty housing in Shropshire compared with the national figures.**
- **Copies of press comments made in the Shropshire Star as a result of press releases from Shropshire Council**

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All empty

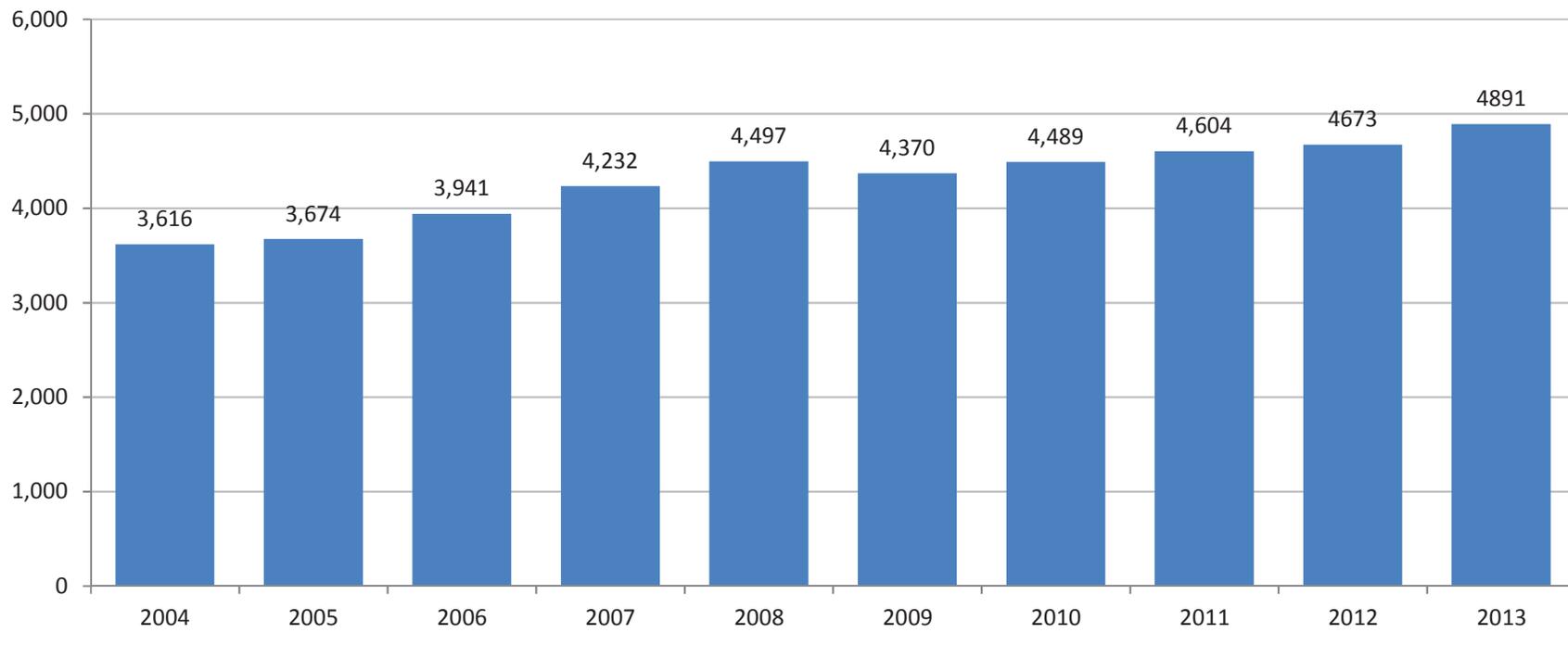
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Shropshire	3,616	3,674	3,941	4,232	4,497	4,370	4,489	4,604	4673	4891
England	296,576	311,311	321,576	327,662	344,066	291,506	282,226	280,634	278,583	256,139
Shropshire %increase since 2004	35.3%									
England %increase since 2004	-13.6%									
Shropshire %increase since 2010	9.0%									
England %increase since 2010	-9.2%									

Long term empty (six months plus)

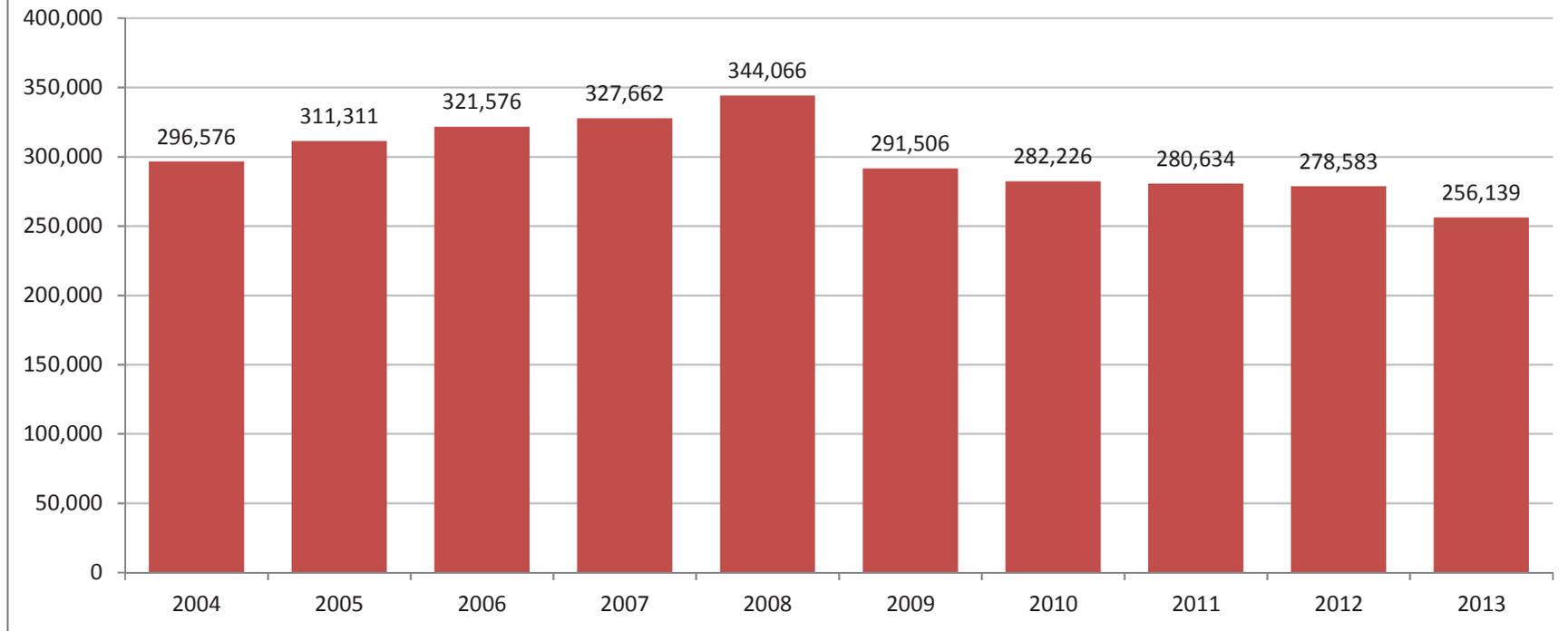
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Shropshire	1,559	1,492	1,504	1,657	1,907	1,940	1,651	1,831	1,709	1,741
England	122,387	126,032	124,690	122,975	134,791	110,355	107,088	102,537	98,369	82,431
Shropshire %increase since 2004	11.7%									
England %increase since 2004	-32.6%									
Shropshire %increase since 2010	5.5%									
England %increase since 2010	-23.0%									

[Source: DCLG Table 615](#)

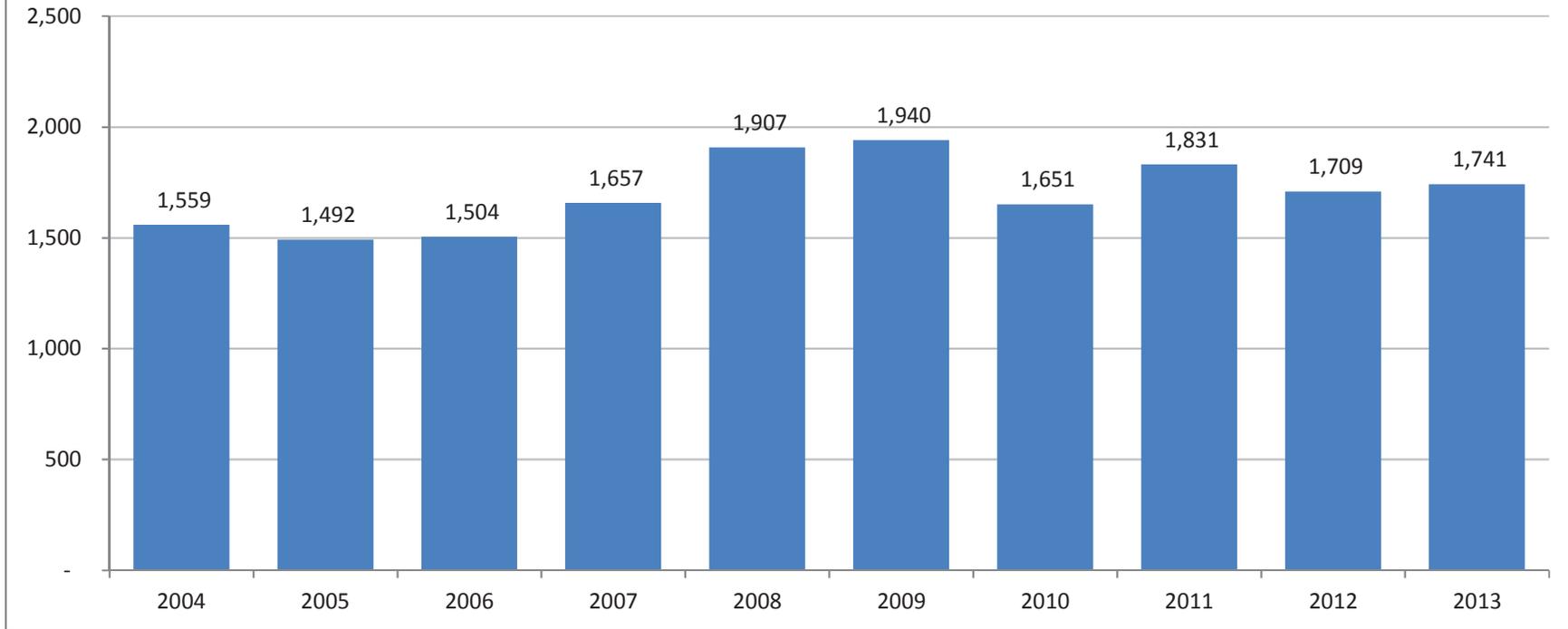
Shropshire: all empty homes



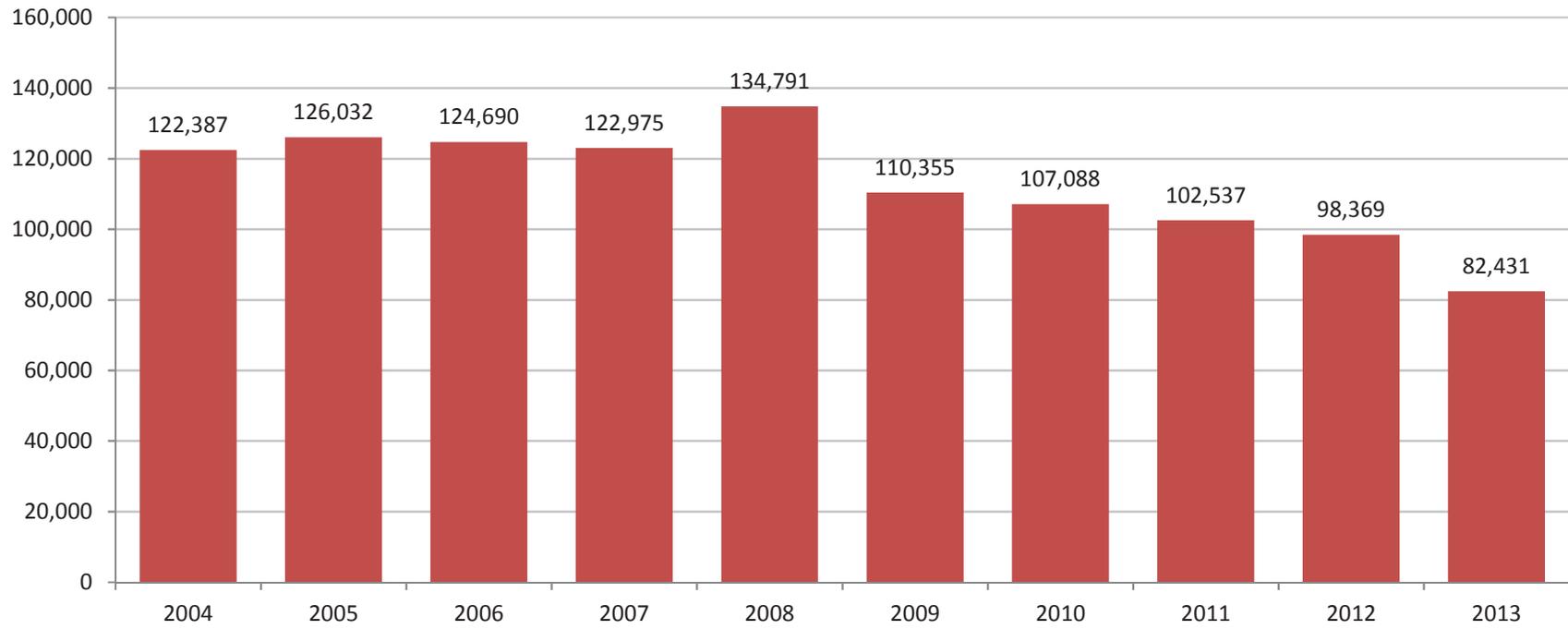
England: all empty homes



Shropshire: long term empty homes



England: long term empty homes



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Council tax Exemptions by Exemption Class LA breakdown



5a

	Class A	Class B	Class C	Class D	Class E	Class F	Class G	Class H	Class I	Class J	Class K	Class L	Class Q	Total
Adur	0	6	0	1	64	97	1	2	5	1	0	4	0	181
Allerdale	0	166	0	0	106	189	22	3	6	1	0	19	4	516
Amber Valley	0	92	0	5	97	228	3	2	6	2	0	19	10	464
Arun	0	23	0	3	200	351	1	4	18	4	0	14	0	618
Ashfield	0	0	0	4	59	169	1	0	10	3	1	30	8	285
Ashford	0	3	0	1	69	137	1	2	5	3	0	14	2	237
Aylesbury Vale	0	117	0	12	67	190	25	7	7	2	0	19	5	451
Babergh	0	17	0	3	51	153	0	2	6	4	1	4	1	242
Barking & Dagenham	0	14	0	10	58	223	395	5	16	1	0	27	0	749
Barnet	0	39	0	10	102	369	22	3	10	2	0	15	0	572
Barnsley	0	3	0	17	133	311	48	6	17	7	0	36	11	589
Barrow-in-Furness	0	0	0	2	89	158	10	5	9	4	2	16	242	537
Basildon	0	0	0	5	71	210	5	2	8	1	0	11	0	313
Basingstoke & Deane	0	14	0	9	63	197	0	3	4	2	0	8	0	300
Bassetlaw	0	20	0	3	78	132	2	1	11	1	1	24	3	276
Bath & North East Somerset	0	178	0	2	127	205	3	1	8	6	1	5	0	536
Bedford UA	0	130	0	8	111	210	14	3	7	2	1	9	35	530
Bexley	0	0	0	6	121	379	40	3	10	2	0	25	0	586
Birmingham	0	86	0	46	347	1217	3	9	21	10	4	148	6	1897
Blaby	0	0	0	1	53	142	1	1	5	0	1	6	2	212
Blackburn with Darwen	0	14	0	12	96	178	75	4	9	3	0	41	11	443
Blackpool Council	0	3	0	11	180	336	32	1	15	5	0	150	16	749
Bolsover	0	13	0	4	57	85	0	3	9	0	0	18	2	191
Bolton	0	452	0	5	195	450	58	11	15	5	0	103	6	1300
Boston	0	2	0	1	40	137	14	1	3	2	0	11	0	211
Bournemouth	0	0	0	6	184	308	4	3	24	2	1	24	6	562
Bracknell Forest	0	74	0	6	42	77	0	0	7	2	1	6	2	217
Bradford	0	905	0	31	299	730	4	4	34	4	0	123	75	2209
Braintree	0	130	0	1	102	194	4	8	10	1	0	15	2	467
Breckland	0	101	0	0	117	195	8	4	4	2	0	10	2	443
Brent	0	122	0	7	66	309	17	1	8	4	2	19	3	558
Brentwood	0	2	0	0	69	107	3	2	5	1	0	1	0	190
Brighton and Hove	0	3	0	10	148	507	5	3	23	6	1	14	16	736
Bristol	0	90	0	13	187	407	12	8	18	1	1	28	17	782
Broadland	0	48	0	3	107	200	4	4	5	2	0	7	0	380

Bromley	0	157	0	8	153	493	12	1	13	9	0	13	10	869
Bromsgrov	0	72	0	3	73	138	6	2	12	0	0	7	3	316
Broxbourne	0	35	0	5	47	127	4	0	2	0	0	7	0	227
Broxtowe	0	9	0	4	78	167	3	0	9	2	1	10	0	283
Burnley	0	108	0	3	72	84	108	0	9	0	0	39	2	425
Bury	0	5	0	11	126	295	4	2	19	3	0	46	6	517
Calderdale	0	12	0	6	132	283	122	3	13	2	0	49	2	624
Cambridge	0	144	0	2	43	71	1	1	6	0	0	0	0	268
Camden	0	0	0	9	30	167	12	0	2	1	0	3	0	224
Cannock C	0	0	0	2	47	146	3	1	6	1	0	21	1	228
Canterbury	0	1	0	7	117	216	8	3	4	1	0	12	0	369
Carlisle	0	152	0	10	93	142	2	3	11	2	0	9	0	424
Castle Poir	0	0	0	2	93	218	1	1	7	4	0	8	0	334
Central Be	0	101	0	4	125	322	8	5	14	3	0	27	0	609
Charnwood	0	6	0	4	105	178	2	4	3	1	0	10	2	315
Chelmsford	0	79	0	4	91	191	4	2	6	3	0	10	2	392
Cheltenham	0	0	0	4	102	173	7	0	5	1	0	18	1	311
Cherwell	0	66	0	1	75	168	10	7	7	2	0	10	0	346
Cheshire E	0	212	0	10	276	650	6	3	28	4	3	51	4	1247
Cheshire V	0	2	0	23	318	487	11	5	31	14	0	43	14	948
Chesterfield	0	13	0	2	97	188	4	2	10	1	0	16	3	336
Chichester	0	102	0	1	127	199	2	6	7	5	0	8	1	458
Chiltern	0	47	0	0	73	142	33	1	7	2	1	1	1	308
Chorley	0	11	0	9	106	135	1	3	8	1	0	27	0	301
Christchurch	0	29	0	0	69	111	0	0	5	0	0	2	0	216
City of Lon	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	9
Colchester	0	33	0	7	116	223	2	6	3	2	1	16	0	409
Copeland	0	146	0	7	70	140	6	6	6	1	0	9	2	393
Corby	0	9	0	3	18	70	3	0	5	1	0	17	0	126
Cornwall U	0	140	0	20	491	993	97	10	90	31	1	147	4	2024
Cotswold	0	86	0	1	78	177	0	2	7	4	2	16	0	373
Coventry	0	278	0	9	159	438	2	4	67	7	0	32	1	997
Craven	0	2	0	2	65	115	59	4	9	2	0	13	3	274
Crawley	0	16	0	1	36	96	0	0	2	0	0	15	0	166
Croydon	0	41	0	5	149	368	20	6	25	7	0	39	4	664
Dacorum	0	2	0	2	73	184	0	4	3	1	0	10	0	279
Darlington	0	22	0	5	104	167	8	2	6	1	1	34	0	350
Dartford	0	2	0	5	33	111	2	1	3	1	0	12	1	171
Daventry	0	51	0	0	37	100	0	1	2	1	0	4	1	197

Derby UA	0	155	0	16	176	415	105	6	13	0	4	32	5	927
Derbyshire	0	5	0	4	77	113	11	3	4	1	0	10	2	230
Doncaster	0	2	0	15	173	428	43	12	25	2	1	71	2	774
Dover	0	3	0	6	88	146	21	4	10	1	0	19	0	298
Dudley	0	63	0	4	231	465	20	6	23	5	0	34	2	853
Durham UA	0	737	0	14	366	651	16	13	48	8	1	148	27	2029
Ealing	0	0	0	11	84	271	518	3	14	9	0	29	1	940
East Camb	0	62	0	2	40	95	5	0	5	1	0	5	0	215
East Devor	0	3	0	6	229	323	5	2	18	6	0	10	0	602
East Dorset	0	27	0	1	111	151	0	3	11	3	0	6	0	313
East Hamp	0	95	0	4	87	165	6	2	2	1	1	6	0	369
East Hertfo	0	16	0	2	68	166	9	3	3	2	1	10	0	280
East Lindsey	0	0	0	5	132	275	88	2	25	4	0	46	5	582
East Northa	0	63	0	4	51	77	1	3	8	2	1	11	3	224
East Riding	0	23	0	6	340	596	2	12	36	7	0	40	1	1063
East Staffo	0	15	0	4	90	155	8	2	17	3	0	21	1	316
Eastbourne	0	15	0	2	117	287	5	3	5	0	1	6	4	445
Eastleigh	0	121	0	2	72	143	5	0	8	4	0	12	0	367
Eder	0	0	0	3	66	124	3	2	7	5	0	11	0	221
Elmbridge	0	74	0	2	75	218	4	1	5	2	0	5	3	389
Enfield	0	3	0	13	108	373	21	4	17	3	0	25	0	567
Epping For	0	7	0	2	67	183	57	6	5	4	0	7	0	338
Epsom and	0	32	0	2	54	128	2	1	3	3	0	1	6	232
Erewash	0	91	0	2	86	200	4	2	12	2	1	21	0	421
Exeter	0	4	0	5	83	107	1	1	8	0	0	3	0	212
Fareham	0	0	0	1	111	154	2	0	8	3	1	4	0	284
Fenland	0	0	0	3	60	158	14	1	2	2	0	15	1	256
Forest Hea	0	60	0	1	27	80	16	1	5	1	0	4	1	196
Forest of D	0	77	0	1	64	122	4	0	9	0	1	21	4	303
Fylde	0	0	0	4	126	213	2	3	7	2	1	24	4	386
Gateshead	0	20	0	2	131	218	7	4	20	4	0	46	1	453
Gedling	0	89	0	3	102	157	0	0	11	2	0	12	0	376
Gloucester	0	10	0	5	78	167	4	1	10	3	0	26	0	304
Gosport	0	11	0	6	67	153	182	4	1	3	0	11	0	438
Gravesham	0	1	0	0	53	113	19	1	4	0	23	8	1	223
Great Yarm	0	8	0	3	64	212	36	3	35	4	1	13	0	379
Greenwich	0	245	0	8	51	264	32	0	7	1	0	34	1	643
Guildford	0	32	0	4	70	182	14	2	5	2	2	5	0	318
Hackney	0	3	0	20	11	155	2	1	3	1	0	14	1	211

Halton UA	0	118	0	4	64	182	6	4	7	0	0	32	4	421
Hambleton	0	57	0	1	71	117	1	2	12	3	2	5	1	272
Hammersm	0	0	0	6	9	99	154	1	3	0	1	9	0	282
Harboroug	0	32	0	2	62	128	7	2	8	1	0	6	0	248
Haringey	0	21	0	19	31	268	2	1	6	7	1	9	1	366
Harlow	0	7	0	4	18	103	1	1	3	1	0	7	1	146
Harrogate	0	12	0	1	162	196	5	10	17	1	0	13	0	417
Harrow	0	27	0	7	66	234	0	2	5	0	4	9	1	355
Hart	0	37	0	0	46	121	0	1	2	2	0	3	0	212
Hartlepool	0	110	0	7	60	96	0	3	8	2	0	44	5	335
Hastings	0	69	0	3	55	132	13	6	1	3	0	14	1	297
Havant	0	6	0	0	95	209	14	1	4	2	0	24	0	355
Havering	0	25	0	5	157	438	1	5	6	2	0	13	0	652
Herefordsh	0	92	0	3	146	264	19	3	17	5	0	14	1	564
Hertsmere	0	74	0	0	52	154	2	1	6	4	1	4	1	299
High Peak	0	1	0	3	83	158	17	2	18	3	0	16	19	320
Hillingdon	0	54	0	10	91	281	5	2	8	0	0	12	0	463
Hinckley &	0	9	0	0	86	201	9	0	7	3	0	22	0	337
Hornham	0	44	0	4	74	182	7	2	10	4	0	4	0	331
Hounslow	0	7	0	8	56	270	13	1	11	3	0	15	3	387
Huntingdor	0	171	0	3	89	188	0	1	8	3	2	20	26	511
Hynburn	0	102	0	2	61	161	182	3	5	3	0	46	11	576
Ipswich	0	68	0	4	75	137	2	1	1	4	1	27	1	321
Isle of Wigh	0	92	0	4	224	287	22	4	19	3	11	34	21	721
Isles of Sci	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8
Islington	0	121	0	15	24	150	8	0	1	2	1	3	0	325
Kensington	0	17	0	5	21	132	17	3	1	1	3	7	1	208
Kettering	0	36	0	8	53	125	1	2	10	0	0	17	4	256
Kings Lynn	0	112	0	4	158	366	7	4	14	3	1	25	1	695
Kingston up	0	75	0	39	131	244	780	2	17	3	0	54	24	1369
Kingston up	0	5	0	3	88	28	0	1	15	0	0	5	1	146
Kirklees	0	0	0	18	305	514	18	11	32	8	0	160	12	1078
Knowsley	0	350	0	10	110	303	1	1	9	2	2	30	2	820
Lambeth	0	26	0	28	38	218	6	2	3	5	0	36	6	368
Lancaster	0	34	0	6	166	198	16	3	12	1	0	45	8	489
Leeds	0	19	0	46	368	877	387	18	43	14	0	110	33	1915
Leicester U	0	2	0	16	138	415	17	1	16	7	0	43	3	658
Lewes	0	12	0	2	85	198	0	0	4	1	0	5	4	311
Lewisham	0	54	0	21	47	272	3	1	6	1	2	16	2	425

Lichfield	0	53	0	1	51	156	7	4	3	2	0	7	2	286
Lincoln	0	5	0	5	61	148	1	2	3	0	7	14	0	246
Liverpool	0	0	0	15	307	1003	722	12	46	4	1	289	0	2399
Luton UA	0	15	0	9	84	288	2	2	12	3	0	41	2	458
Maidstone	0	1	0	4	99	203	0	4	6	3	0	21	1	342
Maldon	0	31	0	1	49	109	6	1	3	0	0	8	0	208
Malvern Hi	0	45	0	2	64	112	1	2	5	2	0	11	0	244
Mancheste	0	425	0	37	201	697	150	13	26	7	0	102	32	1690
Mansfield	0	26	0	3	68	143	3	2	4	3	11	17	2	282
Medway U	0	0	0	5	100	354	0	5	13	4	0	37	3	521
Melton	0	3	0	2	46	100	0	0	3	1	0	5	0	160
Mendip	0	0	0	0	82	180	5	3	2	2	1	15	10	300
Merton	0	81	0	5	72	205	8	0	9	5	1	12	3	401
Mid Devon	0	0	0	3	38	106	8	1	4	4	0	6	1	171
Mid Suffolk	0	16	0	0	64	152	10	2	3	4	0	5	1	257
Mid Susse	0	48	0	0	100	165	5	5	6	0	0	8	0	337
Middlesbro	0	292	0	8	102	264	376	6	12	2	0	35	22	1119
Milton Key	0	145	0	10	56	224	0	4	12	2	0	49	11	513
Mole Valley	0	59	0	1	50	115	5	0	3	1	1	9	0	244
New Fores	0	44	0	3	188	321	3	6	17	3	0	9	6	600
Newark & S	0	1	0	8	62	130	4	3	7	1	0	25	7	248
Newcastle	0	70	0	12	119	316	64	4	16	8	3	71	7	690
Newcastle-	0	143	0	2	105	181	4	2	6	3	0	20	3	469
Newham	0	184	0	14	25	243	19	4	10	2	0	51	189	741
North Devc	0	4	0	1	82	185	8	2	7	1	1	7	0	298
North Dors	0	60	0	0	60	108	1	1	11	0	2	7	6	256
North East	0	1	0	3	92	174	8	1	4	3	2	15	1	304
North East	0	395	0	2	130	331	11	2	0	1	0	35	17	924
North Hertf	0	94	0	5	91	150	2	1	4	1	0	8	1	357
North Kest	0	4	0	2	85	167	3	2	9	2	0	9	0	283
North Lincc	0	207	0	3	118	197	4	2	13	2	0	30	10	586
North Norfo	0	70	0	0	121	233	64	7	11	2	4	13	58	583
North Som	0	69	0	3	177	366	4	5	10	1	2	21	1	659
North Tyne	0	62	0	6	174	269	0	5	10	5	2	43	17	593
North Warw	0	5	0	4	36	98	0	1	3	0	0	9	0	156
North West	0	13	0	4	63	152	6	4	4	4	0	17	1	268
Northampton	0	12	0	16	88	223	2	5	1	1	1	19	1	369
Northumbere	0	180	0	10	268	459	7	5	18	8	1	67	10	1033
Norwich	0	27	0	6	77	171	6	4	7	4	3	8	0	313

Nottingham	0	133	0	22	135	380	6	3	14	1	3	54	10	761
Nuneaton & Stratford	0	35	0	4	60	168	3	1	8	2	0	32	0	313
Oadby & Wigston	0	1	0	3	58	107	2	0	1	2	0	4	0	178
Oldham	0	518	0	10	167	286	123	5	16	5	0	64	4	1198
Oxford	0	32	0	1	47	135	3	0	4	1	0	3	0	226
Pendle	0	58	0	3	85	144	127	4	5	0	0	47	6	479
Peterborough	0	161	0	8	58	186	7	0	5	4	0	25	0	454
Plymouth Upton	0	340	0	14	165	321	6	4	14	11	1	36	7	919
Poole UA	0	26	0	3	133	243	3	0	9	2	0	30	5	454
Portsmouth	0	79	0	14	120	390	14	1	12	1	2	41	13	687
Preston	0	134	0	6	119	159	4	5	11	5	0	32	2	477
Purbeck	0	16	0	0	47	119	2	1	8	1	0	1	0	195
Reading UA	0	15	0	5	73	240	2	5	7	0	1	12	0	360
Redbridge	0	25	0	8	98	309	10	2	8	1	6	164	1	632
Redcar & Cleveland	0	253	0	5	126	208	0	4	10	2	0	23	6	637
Redditch	0	26	0	3	47	102	2	0	5	0	1	8	0	194
Reigate & Banstead	0	13	0	2	88	198	0	4	13	3	1	12	0	334
Ribble Valley	0	0	0	2	60	109	1	0	3	0	0	11	1	187
Richmond	0	0	0	4	85	232	1	0	2	4	1	3	1	333
Richmondshire	0	20	0	5	29	59	0	4	14	3	0	9	0	143
Rochdale	0	446	0	18	112	262	2	6	10	8	0	46	0	910
Roche	0	6	0	1	95	118	3	0	3	1	1	10	0	238
Rossendale	0	1	0	1	55	89	1	2	8	0	0	43	17	217
Rother	0	5	0	1	190	258	27	6	10	6	1	18	1	523
Rotherham	0	9	0	9	125	284	19	9	11	0	0	62	0	528
Rugby	0	32	0	1	57	93	1	3	5	0	0	9	0	201
Runnymede	0	5	0	3	43	112	2	1	4	1	0	3	0	174
Rushcliffe	0	46	0	1	77	154	3	2	7	1	0	10	0	301
Rushmoor	0	0	0	3	45	89	3	0	7	1	0	7	1	156
Rutland UA	0	1	0	0	26	60	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	92
Ryedale	0	43	0	2	56	87	8	7	5	2	0	8	1	219
Salford	0	275	0	19	163	300	505	7	13	1	0	52	9	1344
Sandwell	0	12	0	15	160	443	24	8	30	5	0	53	2	752
Scarborough	0	131	0	5	150	277	20	6	22	3	2	16	7	639
Sedgemoor	0	3	0	4	99	186	4	1	16	3	1	17	12	346
Sefton	0	328	0	14	375	533	354	3	35	7	0	56	42	1747
Selby	0	11	0	2	49	110	10	2	3	1	2	19	0	209
Sevenoaks	0	2	0	4	69	200	7	3	10	0	0	8	0	303
Sheffield	0	227	0	10	238	764	16	10	12	5	2	66	14	1364

Shepway	0	2	0	8	134	225	2	2	4	1	0	14	4	396
Shropshire	0	117	0	9	354	600	21	12	35	12	3	40	4	1207
Slough UA	0	32	0	4	35	164	14	3	17	2	0	24	0	295
Solihull	0	13	0	5	148	333	2	1	15	3	0	30	0	550
South Buck	0	3	0	0	38	122	5	2	3	0	0	5	0	178
South Cam	0	22	0	5	70	172	7	2	8	0	0	6	1	293
South Derb	0	5	0	4	79	133	13	4	3	0	0	17	2	260
South Glou	0	91	0	3	136	329	0	3	7	2	0	16	0	587
South Ham	0	45	0	0	69	199	10	4	6	5	0	14	2	354
South Holla	0	1	0	0	66	131	3	0	12	2	0	18	0	233
South Kest	0	4	0	2	74	168	1	4	9	1	3	14	0	280
South Lake	0	1	0	4	100	183	2	4	12	2	0	10	3	321
South Norf	0	57	0	2	99	170	5	6	19	2	1	9	0	370
South Nort	0	8	0	1	47	143	3	1	4	1	1	4	0	213
South Oxfo	0	0	0	1	77	201	2	6	1	1	0	1	0	290
South Ribb	0	50	0	1	92	169	1	1	17	2	0	14	0	347
South Som	0	82	0	1	134	215	5	5	9	3	14	12	0	480
South Staff	0	8	0	6	71	198	5	2	8	1	0	15	2	316
South Tyne	0	48	0	8	96	220	1	4	8	0	0	33	1	419
South Hampt	0	14	0	8	130	296	140	2	9	1	1	23	9	633
Southend-c	0	29	0	6	172	317	55	3	5	2	1	15	4	609
Southwark	0	1	0	33	20	204	111	2	11	4	4	15	2	407
Spelthorne	0	74	0	1	47	156	4	3	10	4	0	7	0	306
St Albans	0	18	0	1	61	151	1	2	6	2	0	1	1	244
St Edmund	0	121	0	3	69	116	6	1	13	0	0	7	1	337
St Helens	0	349	0	2	145	268	3	5	9	5	0	36	1	823
Stafford	0	0	0	5	145	226	4	3	16	4	0	11	8	422
Staffordshi	0	0	0	2	116	225	4	5	16	3	0	17	6	394
Stevenage	0	6	0	2	23	90	1	0	1	1	0	8	0	132
Stockport	0	56	0	14	244	558	2	9	23	8	0	40	1	955
Stockton-o	0	309	0	8	137	92	98	6	15	4	0	47	4	720
Stoke-on-T	0	135	0	6	178	343	427	8	23	2	2	42	10	1176
Stratford-on	0	94	0	7	96	175	4	4	6	4	0	5	1	396
Stroud	0	0	0	1	77	191	0	0	11	4	0	9	0	293
Suffolk Coa	0	94	0	1	136	272	7	2	6	1	0	2	0	521
Sunderland	0	44	0	8	147	343	6	3	15	1	0	85	20	672
Surrey Hea	0	1	0	1	36	117	2	2	4	0	0	3	0	166
Sutton	0	4	0	8	64	248	1	1	6	3	0	9	0	344
Swale	0	0	0	3	70	164	2	7	4	0	0	101	1	352

Swindon U	0	37	0	3	92	264	1	5	12	2	0	29	7	452
Tameside	0	288	0	7	117	389	16	4	12	5	0	61	1	900
Tamworth	0	0	0	6	30	73	6	0	7	2	0	10	5	139
Tandridge	0	4	0	6	60	110	5	3	6	0	1	5	2	202
Taunton De	0	13	0	4	100	156	2	1	6	1	0	11	7	301
Teignbridge	0	59	0	3	155	242	10	0	17	8	0	17	5	516
Telford & V	0	204	0	2	73	184	140	4	7	7	0	30	0	651
Tendring	0	42	0	12	168	317	10	1	26	2	2	30	16	626
Test Valley	0	37	0	0	59	144	1	1	8	2	0	7	1	260
Tewkesbur	0	2	0	3	74	137	3	2	7	1	0	11	3	243
Thanet	0	2	0	13	136	268	10	1	15	7	0	69	0	521
Three Rive	0	41	0	4	60	153	6	1	7	4	0	3	0	279
Thurrock U	0	20	0	1	67	190	3	3	20	1	1	32	0	338
Tonbridge	0	0	0	2	69	139	0	0	4	1	0	5	0	220
Torbay UA	0	115	0	4	220	425	21	3	15	8	0	37	9	857
Torrige	0	37	0	2	61	105	17	2	10	3	0	7	9	253
Tower Ham	0	285	0	15	17	93	8	1	4	2	0	17	0	442
Trafford	0	182	0	9	136	347	8	4	10	5	1	32	2	736
Tunbridge	0	3	0	2	86	164	10	3	6	1	1	4	0	280
Uttlesford	0	1	0	1	38	95	4	4	6	0	0	11	1	161
Vale of Wh	0	0	0	1	65	193	0	3	6	2	0	2	0	272
Wakefield	0	406	0	4	181	296	2	6	16	2	7	62	17	999
Walsall	0	414	0	9	144	350	2	6	29	9	0	50	3	1016
Waltham F	0	0	0	14	49	237	6	1	6	3	2	20	1	339
Wandsworth	0	30	0	17	31	236	11	2	23	1	0	26	5	382
Warrington	0	0	0	5	150	323	2	0	10	4	0	45	4	543
Warwick	0	20	0	1	78	180	3	2	5	0	0	7	3	299
Watford	0	64	0	1	30	119	1	1	7	2	2	7	2	236
Waveney	0	46	0	8	124	312	51	2	15	4	0	16	0	578
Waverley	0	4	0	2	87	188	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	286
Wealden	0	2	0	1	172	305	14	7	13	4	0	3	1	522
Wellingbor	0	94	0	6	57	89	4	1	4	1	0	14	0	270
Welwyn Ha	0	1	0	1	42	103	0	0	3	2	0	4	0	156
West Berks	0	9	0	4	50	179	26	4	32	1	0	8	0	313
West Devo	0	33	0	1	63	109	5	2	10	3	0	12	0	238
West Dorset	0	39	0	4	120	235	21	5	11	4	0	7	0	446
West Lanc	0	0	0	0	127	235	2	1	5	1	1	17	1	390
West Linds	0	68	0	4	70	131	10	0	13	4	0	27	8	335
West Oxfor	0	55	0	1	63	143	14	2	11	1	0	3	0	293

West Some	0	24	0	0	66	76	4	2	5	1	1	4	0	183
Westminste	0	0	0	10	40	252	12	2	6	3	19	14	3	361
Weymouth	0	35	0	2	41	148	6	1	9	0	0	11	0	253
Wigan	0	4	0	7	209	503	10	5	21	4	0	115	1	879
Wiltshire U	0	15	0	9	340	678	16	16	32	6	2	38	13	1165
Winchester	0	2	0	3	76	147	0	0	8	0	2	5	1	244
Windsor &	0	88	0	1	82	217	4	1	3	1	0	20	0	417
Wirral	0	87	0	14	355	651	11	7	26	9	1	56	12	1229
Woking	0	16	0	0	46	122	2	0	3	0	0	8	0	197
Wokinghan	0	2	0	0	62	193	16	2	8	1	0	1	1	286
Wolverham	0	92	0	8	181	363	11	4	28	5	0	30	3	725
Worcester	0	100	0	2	52	114	2	1	2	1	0	9	4	287
Worthing	0	58	0	1	113	242	1	1	6	0	0	7	0	429
Wychavon	0	77	0	3	85	162	8	5	8	0	0	8	1	357
Wycombe	0	40	0	2	82	249	1	4	7	3	0	2	0	390
Wyre	0	26	0	4	196	249	4	2	18	3	0	30	1	533
Wyre Fores	0	34	0	2	73	148	3	2	2	2	0	20	0	286
York UA	0	18	0	4	153	361	1	5	20	4	1	10	2	579

England	0	20,999	0	1,867	33,450	74,591	8,850	987	3,452	873	242	7,833	1,661	154,805
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- **A recent Government publication included the following statement.**

2013 saw the biggest ever annual decrease in the numbers of empty homes (a drop of 75,000). The decrease saw the numbers of both empty homes and long term empty homes drop to the lowest ever recorded levels. This is clearly to be welcomed. We believe there are a number of factors that have caused the drop.

The improving housing market has made it more viable to renovate derelict properties. The government introduced an empty homes programme, providing grants and incentives for councils, housing associations, community groups and owners to bring empty homes into affordable use. This program is now delivering results.

In our view the major factor is the changes to council tax charging on empty homes introduced by the government in 2013. This has created strong incentives for owners to get their empty properties back into use quickly to avoid incurring additional council tax.

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- **Extract from the Shropshire Star dated August 28 2010**

More than 4,000 homes are currently lying empty across Shropshire, with almost half of those not being lived in for more than six months, new figures showed today.

Residents, property owners and other interested groups are now being invited to comment on a new housing strategy which looks at tackling the issues associated with long-term empty homes in the county.

There are currently 4,362 empty homes across the county, with 1,933 of those properties having been empty for more than six months.

Shropshire Council's Empty Homes Strategy proposes setting up Empty Homes Action Zones to focus on areas where there are significant numbers of empty homes, and the council wants to give communities the opportunity to comment on the proposals being made.

The council will work in partnership with agencies, communities and property owners to take up a range of options for bringing homes into use.

Councillor Malcolm Price, cabinet member for housing, said: "One of Shropshire Council's priorities for improvement is to provide a range of affordable housing options for Shropshire residents.

"A contribution towards this priority will be to increase the number of properties in the housing market and in particular reduce the number of long-term empty homes.

"We hope the community and key stakeholders will actively be involved in the delivery of the strategy through contacting the empty homes officers with any comments or concerns about empty homes in their local areas."

Following a review of council tax discounts for empty homes owners of properties which are vacant for more than six months must pay the full rate of council tax.

This is intended to encourage owners to ensure homes are occupied.

The council will also continue to offer Empty Homes Grants to help owners where a property may need work carried out before it can be lived in, and has allocated additional resources to achieve this

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- **On 23 June 2014 Shropshire council sent out the following press release.**

In 2012 just under 3.5% of homes in Shropshire were empty. The number of registered empty properties was over 4,600 with over 1,700 of these being empty over six months and classified as long term empty properties.[#]

The vast majority of these properties are privately owned and are dispersed throughout the urban, semi-rural and rural areas of the county. The distribution of empty properties within Shropshire can be seen on the area map in Appendix 1.

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- **This story is dated January 20, 2011 again from the Shropshire Star as a result of press release from Shropshire council.**

'New strategy' will put hundreds of empty homes into use

Shirehall leaders have adopted a new strategy to bring hundreds of empty homes across Shropshire back into use and help tackle the growing need for affordable housing.

Shirehall leaders have adopted a new strategy to bring hundreds of empty homes across Shropshire back into use and help tackle the growing need for affordable housing.

Shropshire Council's cabinet approved the Empty Homes Strategy yesterday following a public consultation last year.

A report to members said "significant interest" was shown during the consultation period and a number of callers to the council were "extremely supportive" of the proposals.

They felt the authority should tackle the "unacceptably high" number of empty homes which stands at 4,362, of which 1,933 have been vacant for more than six months.

There are nearly 9,000 households in the council area on waiting lists for a home..

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Portfolio Holder Decision
Making Session and date/time

Portfolio Holder Decision
Making Session

10 November 2014, 10.00am

Item

Public

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2014 - 2017

Responsible Officer

Email: Karen.collier@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 251711

1. Summary

- 1.1 As part of the Council's priority of returning empty homes to use to contribute to the provision of affordable homes in the County, and the regeneration of Shropshire's towns and communities, the Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2017 has been developed as a directive for the work undertaken by the Empty Homes Team.
- 1.2 On the 23rd June 2014, a stakeholder consultation on the Council's draft Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2017 started. The consultation has now been completed and the consultation process and responses received are summarised in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Portfolio Holder approves the Empty Homes Strategy 2014 - 2017 for adoption.
- 2.2 **Reason for decision:** The implementation of this strategy will reduce the number of empty homes and utilise empty space in buildings within the County to assist in increasing the provision of much needed affordable homes. The strategy will also greatly contribute to the regeneration of towns and communities within Shropshire to create better places to live, work and visit.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

(NB This will include the following: Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community, Environmental consequences and other Consultation)

3.1 Human Rights Act Appraisal

The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights act 1998.

3.2 Environmental Appraisal

There are no significant implications directly arising from this report.

3.3 Risk Management Appraisal

Although not a statutory requirement, an Empty Homes Strategy provides a clear basis on which all work in connection with empty homes is pursued.

3.4 Community / Consultations Appraisal

Consultation and appraisal are detailed in the report

3.5 Equality Impact Needs Assessment

An assessment has been carried out for the Strategy and is included in Appendix 4.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications in relation to the implementation of this strategy.

4.2 The Empty Homes Incentive Grants are funded from New Homes Bonus monies and are bid for on a two-yearly basis. These grants will be provided whilst there is funding, but the approach in the strategy will continue, even if such a bid was unsuccessful and no funding was available.

5. Background

5.1 Council Tax for empty residential properties was revised in April 2014 to encourage the re-occupation of long-term empty homes. Homes in Shropshire which have been empty for two or more year now attract a Council Tax premium of 50% meaning 150% Council Tax is payable on these properties.

5.2 Since the 2010-2013 Strategy, an Empty Homes & Regeneration Officer post has been appointed alongside the existing Empty Homes Officer post to enable the implementation of the Empty Homes Strategy across Shropshire. In addition, capital funding for the popular Empty Property Incentive Grants has been agreed for 2014/15 and 2015/16.

5.3 The Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2017 has been produced to build on the initiatives started through the 2010-2013 Empty Homes Strategy. It details the basis on which work to return empty properties to use will be undertaken and in particular work with local communities to continue the Empty Home Action Zones initiative, where resources and the Empty Property Incentive Grants will be concentrated.

5.4 In June 2014, a 12 week consultation process on the draft Strategy began.

5.5 Consultation: Current Position

1. Consultation on the draft Empty Homes Strategy 2014 – 2017 was completed on 20th September 2014.

2. Details of the consultation process are outlined in Appendix 1.

3. Significant interest was demonstrated during the consultation period from a wide range of stakeholders. The majority of respondents were extremely supportive of the Strategy's approach, and felt the Council should prioritise resourcing and addressing the issue of empty property in Shropshire.
4. In total 79 formal responses were received, 72 via the online consultation portal and 7 via email; a summary of feedback is given in Appendix 2. The feedback received was predominantly in support of the approach proposed by the Strategy, on average 86% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the survey questions. The Strategy consequently remains largely unchanged. On average only 4% of respondents disagreed with the approach, the concerns they raised have been responded to in Appendix 2, and where necessary changes and amendments have been made which are documented in Appendix 3.

6. Additional Information

Empty Homes Development Work: Summary of Progress

- 6.1 In addition to the existing Empty Homes Officer appointed in 2010, an Empty Homes & Regeneration Officer was appointed in 2012 to enable further development of the aims and objectives of the empty homes work countywide.
- 6.2 Increasing the capacity of the Empty Homes Team has allowed the successful progression of Empty Homes Action Zones (EHAZ) in two of Shropshire's Market Towns and the implementation of Empty Property Incentive Grants, which have proved popular and useful tool for encouraging the return to use of long term empty properties.
- 6.3 Work has progressed well in the two existing EHAZ of Market Drayton and Oswestry. Provision of Empty Property Incentive Grants has integrated well with existing regeneration and revitalisation programmes administered by the Town Councils and the communities. A number of properties have already been returned to use and there is significant on-going work in both towns to return further prominent long term empty properties to use.
- 6.4 The Empty Homes Action Zone for 2014/15 has been identified as Whitchurch and this has received a very positive reaction in the town. Significant preparation work has been undertaken in recent months, working alongside the Town Council, local members, community groups, residents and owners of empty property to identify projects ahead of receiving the grant funding.
- 6.5 The Empty Homes Team work in close partnership with the Council's Planning, Historic Environment, Housing Enabling and Community Enablement Teams as well as the Parish and Town Councils, local members, community groups and organisations and other stakeholders to ensure that priority and problematic properties are tackled in the most effective way. Registered provider partners also play a key role, particularly in larger more complicated projects. The Empty Homes Team has developed a good working relationship with these organisations in order to make the best use of properties being returned to use in the Action Zones.

Further amendments to the Strategy

6.6 These are detailed in Appendix 3.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Council's aim is to encourage owners of empty property to bring them back into use voluntarily. The initial approach of the strategy is therefore focused on working with owners, offering support, advice and assistance where appropriate.

7.2 Returning an empty property to use brings considerable benefits to the owner (reducing the likelihood of crime and vandalism, reducing the likelihood of deterioration, and providing rental income or capital.)

7.3 In turn this increases the availability of homes for rent or sale in the county, including affordable homes for local people, as well as bringing benefits to the wider community as neglected empty homes can become a blight on their local area, attracting unwanted attention and having a negative visual impact.

7.4 However, where an owner is unwilling to bring the home back into use, and it is either causing a specific problem within its neighbourhood, or would meet a particular housing need, the Council will consider the use of its legal enforcement powers.

7.5 The Empty Homes Strategy is intended to provide a 'toolkit' of options for bringing empty homes back into use, in collaboration with a range of partners, including owners and communities. Successful implementation of the Strategy is expected to contribute to the supply of affordable housing in the County as well as bringing homes back into use with respect to the open market.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information):
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Empty Homes Strategy 2010-13

Key Decision: Yes

Included within Forward Plan: Yes
--

Name and Portfolio of Executive Member responsible for this area of responsibility:
--

Cllr Malcolm Price

Local Member: All areas

Appendices:

1. Consultation
2. Consultation Summary Feedback
3. Changes and Amendments
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment

Declaration of Interest

- I have no interest to declare in respect of this report

Signed Date

NAME:

PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR:

- I have to declare an interest in respect of this report

Signed Date

NAME:

PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR:

(Note: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter.)

For the reasons set out in the report, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled

Signed

Portfolio Holder for

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and pro-forma is returned to Democratic Services for processing.

Additional comment :

.....

.....

Note: If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Chief Executive and the Head of Finance, Governance and Assurance (S151 Officer) and, if there are staffing implications the Head of Human Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Portfolio Holder: Your decision will now be published and communicated to all Members of Council. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication.

APPENDIX 1

Empty Homes Strategy 2014 – 2017 – Consultation Plan

External

Audience	Method	Date	Response
Parish & Town Councils	Email with link to consultation portal or letter with copy of strategy and feedback survey	24/06/14	<p>Noted as included on meeting agendas for following PC/TCs: Whittington PC Much Wenlock TC Acton Burnell PC Cockshutt cum Petton PC Welshampton & Lyneal PC</p> <p>Email responses from: Church Stretton Town Council Montford Parish Council Munslow Parish Council Broseley Town Council Bridgnorth Town Council</p> <p>Portal responses from: Clun Parish Council Ford Parish Council Diddlesbury Parish Council</p>
Local Joint Committees	Via Community Enablement Officers. Email to all CEOs asking them to share consultation with LJsCs and other community groups/meetings they attend and request feedback	24/06/14	Email from Nicki Young (CEO) to Whitchurch Joint Commissioning & Economic Board and Whitchurch PIC (24/06/14 & 26/06/14)

Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Spotlight on...' section of Shropshire Council website and twitter & Facebook • Press release via Newsroom • Tweeted • Consultation portal 	20/06/14 - 27/06/14 & 25/08/14 - 31/08/14 20/06/14 18/07/14, 20/06/14 & 25/08/14 23/06/14 - 20/09/14	Press release printed in Shropshire Star (28/08/14)
Shropshire NLA Members	Email to Secretary of Shropshire NLA requesting consultation link is shared with all Shropshire NLA Members.	23/06/14	Email from Secretary - has asked NLA HQ to forward to members and has also sent to the NLA policy department for comments (26/06/14)
Shropshire Fire & Rescue	Email	23/06/14	
West Mercia Police	Email	23/06/14	Confirmation received email has been forwarded to Chief Inspector of Shrewsbury Police (23/06/14)
Shropshire Housing Alliance	Email to Mark Thompson, Director	23/06/14	Confirmation email from Mark that SHA will respond (24/06/14)
West Midlands Empty Property Officer Group	Email to group	24/06/14	
Local Government Association	Email	23/06/14	Email from Hilary Tanner – LGA do not have the capacity or expertise to comment (25/06/14)
Marches Energy Agency	Email to Simon Ross	23/06/14	
Mears Home Improvement Agency	Email to John Simcox	23/06/14	Confirmation from Managing Director that Mears will respond (23/06/14)
Empty Homes Agency	Email	23/06/14	
Empty Homes Network	Email	23/06/14	
Department for Communities and Local Government	Email to Sally Turner in the Empty Homes Department	23/06/14	Confirmation she has received email and will consider strategy, has also forwarded to Localities

			Lead in the Department for their consideration (23/06/14)
Citizens Advice Shropshire	Letter w/copy of strategy and feedback survey	20/06/14	

Internal

Audience	Method	Date	Response
Housing Options Seniors	Email	23/06/14	
Senior Housing Policy Officer	Email	23/06/14	Email (01/07/14)
Housing Enabling & Implementation manager/Team	Email	23/06/14	
Benefits Managers	Email	23/06/14	
Private Sector Housing Team	Email	23/06/14	
Public Protection Managers	Email	23/06/14	
Head of Building Control	Email	23/06/14	
Head of Planning	Email	23/06/14	
Head of Planning Policy	Email	23/06/14	
Head of Business & Enterprise	Email	23/06/14	
Revenues & Customer Contact Manager and Recovery & Court Team Leader	Email	23/06/14	
Members	Group Email	23/06/14	No. of responses via portal

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Empty Homes Strategy 2014 – 2017: Consultation Summary Feedback

Total responses: 79

Method of feedback	Number of responses
Online consultation portal	72
Email	7

Feedback provided from	Number of responses
Parish/Town Councils	9
Shropshire Council Officers	2
Housing Association	1
Individuals	67

Within the feedback survey, consultees were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the following standard questions:-

Comments	Response
<p>Question 1) The Strategy clearly explains why time and money should be spent on bringing empty houses back into use</p>	
<p>In relation to this question only two respondents (2%) disagreed, no respondents strongly disagreed. 63 respondents (88%) either agreed or strongly agreed.</p> <p>One respondent said they didn't notice an explanation in the strategy for why properties become empty.</p> <p>One respondent was concerned that deeming a dwelling empty after a period of 6 months was questionable, but also acknowledged that properties detrimental to the local area need to be dealt with.</p> <p>One respondent could not find mention of what types of property are included in the strategy.</p> <p>One respondent commented that tied agricultural properties may be become empty due to reduction in agricultural workers and these properties may present access and rural character preservation issues.</p> <p>One respondent commented that the strategy does not mention what the scheme costs and questioned the value of the time and effort in relation to the outcomes.</p>	<p>There is a 'Why are homes empty?' paragraph in Section 2 of the strategy. It is thought this is sufficient for the purposes of this document.</p> <p>6 months is the nationally recognised trigger point for determining a long term empty property, it is felt appropriate to maintain a consistent approach.</p> <p>Section 2 states that the strategy's focus is privately owned properties; however properties owned by registered providers, the local authority or other organisations will also be dealt with as necessary.</p> <p>Empty Homes Officers work in close partnership with Conservation and Historic Environment colleagues to ensure that where possible the historic and rural character of properties and the areas they occupy are preserved, whilst also making them as accessible as possible.</p> <p>Empty Homes work is funded through New Homes Bonus (NHB) funding, a central government grant paid to the Council each year for increasing the number of homes in the county. Empty Homes work contributes to this. In 2012/13 £300,000 of NHB was made</p>

	<p>available for Empty Property Incentive Grants (EPIGs) in Market Drayton, and in 2013/14 £250,000 for grants in Oswestry. This funding was applied for internally, and will continue to be applied for every two years to allow the Empty Homes Action Zones and EPIGs to be delivered in more areas. If this funding should cease to be available, this would not alter the approach of the strategy, although EPIGs would no longer be available.</p> <p>The current and future targets in the strategy reflect resources presently available for Empty Homes work.</p>
<p>Question 2) Efforts should be focused on bringing houses back into use that have been empty for six months or more, with special focus on those that are assessed as Red in the RAG pointing system</p>	
<p>Only two respondents (2%) disagreed with this, no respondents strongly disagreed. 63 respondents (90%) agreed or strongly agreed with the approach in this question.</p> <p>One felt that the RAG system is a complicated admin system, the other felt that the strategy did not explain how a property would be assessed as 'red'.</p> <p>One respondent commented that demolition of properties can sometimes allow for better infrastructure.</p> <p>One respondent asked if properties which are likely to become long term empty could be identified sooner.</p>	<p>It is necessary to have a transparent and consistent way of assessing and prioritising properties in order to target resources at the most problematic cases. The RAG system is felt to be the most effective and appropriate way of achieving this. The criteria which would cause a property to fall into the Red, Amber or Green categories are clearly defined in Appendix 6 of the strategy.</p> <p>In returning empty properties to use the most appropriate action is not always to reinstate the existing structure. It is a key aim of this strategy that housing provision is increased, however where demolition and rebuilding is the most appropriate course of action this would be supported.</p> <p>Properties may stand empty for short periods of time for many reasons including renovation, the probate process or whilst they are being sold. In general this will not exceed a period of 6 months and intervening in cases such as this would not be considered an appropriate use of resources. For properties which are not long term empty the Empty Homes Officers are still able to offer advice and assistance with returning the property to use as quickly as possible.</p>
<p>Question 3) The approach, of beginning by providing information and advice, then looking at enforcement options should this not be successful in returning a property to use, is a good approach to take</p>	
<p>60 respondents (86%) agreed or strongly agreed with this approach. In general they felt that advice and assistance is an important first step but that enforcement options should be utilised where necessary. Some commented that enforcement options should be clearly outlined to owners from the</p>	<p>It is strongly felt that offering empty property owners the opportunity to return their property to use voluntarily, with the advice and assistance of the Empty Homes Officers is the most effective first step. Where owners decline this offer of assistance or do not respond, alternative options, including</p>

<p>outset.</p> <p>Several respondents felt that enforcement must be seen as a real threat and not just a 'paper tiger' that owners feel will never happen.</p> <p>Two (2%) respondents strongly disagreed with this approach but did not make any comment about why.</p>	<p>enforcement, are made clear to them.</p> <p>The Council is currently developing its approach to the use of various enforcement options in relation to empty property. Whilst enforcement is never a first port of call it is recognised that it is an important tool in empty property work, and we are currently developing a consistent approach to how these powers are used to ensure they are effective and taken seriously.</p>
<p>Question 4) A multi-agency and locality based initiative through Empty Homes Action Zones is a good approach</p>	
<p>56 respondents (80%) either agreed or strongly agreed with this approach. Five respondents (7%) disagreed, no respondents strongly disagreed.</p> <p>In general respondents felt that this was a positive approach, particularly where local jobs can be created and local organisations and groups are actively involved and supportive.</p> <p>The majority of comments expressing concern about the Action Zone approach raised concern that Action Zones will have resources focused on them at the expense of other areas in the county, and that there shouldn't be an over-focus on market towns at the expense of smaller communities and more rural areas.</p>	<p>Input and involvement from local residents, community groups and other bodies is recognised as crucial to the success of the Action Zones. The Empty Homes Officers work very closely with local members, community groups, residents and other local stakeholders whilst setting up the Action Zones and whilst they are active to ensure local needs and priorities are recognised and addressed.</p> <p>Action Zones are chosen based on level of housing need in an area and the prevalence of empty properties. For the first few Action Zones towns which have very high levels of these issues have been targeted. The importance of empty homes work in rural areas is recognised, and it is not the case that Action Zones will always be based in towns and more urban areas. As the approach progresses more rural areas may be considered. For areas which are not designated Action Zones focused work is still possible, and they are not overlooked by the Empty Homes Officers. Owners in all areas of the county will always be informed about external sources of funding which may become available.</p>
<p>Question 5) It is important to use the Empty Homes Strategy to maximise the number of affordable homes in the County</p>	

<p>65 of respondents (90%) either agreed or strongly agreed with this. The majority felt that affordable housing in Shropshire is important and much needed and that empty homes are a good way of providing it.</p> <p>Three respondents (4%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. They commented that the number of empty homes being returned to use for affordable housing is quite low in comparison to the number of empty homes in Shropshire.</p>	<p>The targets set for returning empty properties to use, and creating residential dwellings from empty properties, reflect the current available resources. It is thought that whilst the provision of 100 affordable homes a year may seem quite low in comparison to the total number of empty properties, this is a valuable contribution to housing supply and provides much needed affordable housing for local people.</p>
<p>Question 6) The approach stated in the Strategy in regards to Monitoring and Reviewing of Shropshire Councils Empty Homes work, is a good approach.</p>	
<p>57 respondents (87%) agreed or strongly agreed with the monitoring and reviewing approach. They felt regularly reviewing the situation was a positive approach, and that the targets are a sound starting point and not too aggressive.</p> <p>2 respondents (2%) disagreed, no respondents strongly disagreed.</p> <p>The majority of comments from respondents highlighted a concern that monitoring and reviewing the strategy added a layer of bureaucracy which may detract from carrying out the actual work of the strategy. Although some acknowledged the need to demonstrate responsible use of public funding.</p> <p>One respondent commented that the question didn't need a response as it is rhetorical.</p>	<p>Monitoring and reviewing the strategy is necessary to ensure that it is realistic and in line with current resources and available funding.</p> <p>Return to use and creation of dwelling figures need to be continuously monitored in order to ensure that on-going work is meeting the expectations set out in the strategy and the best possible use is being made of public funding. Realistically this is not a lengthy or particularly time consuming process and should not detract from carrying out the work outlined in the strategy.</p> <p>All the feedback comments were posed in the form of statements rather than direct questions. They are not rhetorical, rather offered respondents a wider range of responses relating to the extent to which they agreed with the statement, rather than being limited to a yes or no answer.</p>

In addition, consultees were invited to give any additional comments on the Strategy.

Comments and officer responses to the numbered questions are detailed below:-

General Comments

Comment	Response
<p>The scoring system for categorisation under the RAG scheme does not yet give any bandings indicating which category a particular property might fall into. This suggests that the bands are subjective rather than prescriptive. The strategy also falls short of stating when enforcement action will be employed where</p>	<p>At the time the draft strategy was put out for consultation the exact number of points a property would need to score to fall into each of the RAG bands had not been fully established. This is because it was felt important to test a number of cases through the RAG system to ensure that the</p>

<p>incentives have demonstrably failed. The Council needs to commit to enforcement action in some cases and allocate funds as necessary.</p>	<p>points for each band were fair and representative of the type of action required for the properties in each band. This was to ensure that the system is consistent rather than subjective. The points have now been decided and the ranges for each band included in Appendix 6 of the strategy. None of the scoring criteria or types of action to be taken for properties in each category were changed as part of this.</p> <p>Stating a single approach or threshold for when enforcement action will be taken is not possible due to the varying and individual nature of each property and situation. It is recognised that enforcement action is a necessary and important tool in some cases and where other incentives have demonstrably failed appropriate alternative action will be considered, including enforcement.</p>
<p>The strategy mentioned the use of funding from the National Empty Homes loans fund, but this seems to be withdrawn as far as I can see, I found this a bit disconcerting.</p>	<p>At the time the draft strategy was put out for consultation the National Empty Homes Loan Fund (NEHLF) was active. However shortly after this on 30th June 2014 we received notification that the scheme had been withdrawn. Reference to the NEHLF has now been removed from the strategy.</p>
<p>Concerns that financial assistance available is too little in a large number of cases. Time too is of the essence - a much quicker process would be desirable.</p>	<p>The Council aim to make the best possible use of the funding made available for this work. In the Empty Homes Action Zones there are two types of grant available. £5000 grants for properties which require lower levels of work to bring them up to a good standard, and £negotiable grant, which do not have a funding limit on them, to assist in larger scale projects where properties may be in a poorer state of repair and require more work to return them to use.</p> <p>Applications for funding and the process to get projects underway is a fast and efficient process. Empty Homes Officers are very aware that time is of the essence and make every effort to work with owners to ensure that projects are not delayed through unnecessary processes.</p>
<p>A refreshing approach and the document is very clear to read.</p>	<p>Every effort was made to ensure that the strategy is clear, concise and easy to navigate, providing necessary information in a direct and easily understandable way.</p>
<p>How is it funded?</p>	<p>Empty Homes work is funded through New Homes Bonus, a central government grant paid to the Council each year for the provision of new and returned to use housing in the county.</p> <p>The New Homes Bonus is paid each year for 6 years. It is based on the amount of extra Council Tax revenue raised for new-build homes, conversions and long-term empty homes brought</p>

	back into use. There is also an extra payment for providing affordable homes.
<p>Waiting until 6 months seems a long time before offering any sort of help at all. Also I could not find any mention directly of any policy about Council Tax on empty properties. I understand there are concessions that a rented property that stays empty for a short time (one month?) does not attract council tax and then attracts a reduced rate if still empty. I was expecting to find something in the document about this but it is not mentioned. Could there be some sort of incentive linked to taking action to get a property rented - maybe a period of a couple of months council tax free if property being renovated for rental.?</p>	<p>Nationally a long term empty property is defined as one which has been empty for 6 months or longer. It is felt appropriate to maintain this definition for Empty Homes work in Shropshire to remain consistent. Whilst financial assistance is aimed at long term empty properties, in the interest of targeting those likely to be most problematic, this does not mean that no assistance is available to owners of property empty for fewer than 6 months. Officers are very willing to offer advice and assistance on a range of issues to any owner of empty property.</p> <p>Ultimately Council Tax policy and therefore discounts are determined by Council Tax and empty homes work does not specifically influence this. Officers do however have a good working relationship with Council Tax colleagues and aim to work together to target empty property in the most appropriate way.</p> <p>Council Tax incentives to return properties to use are already in place. At present unoccupied and unfurnished properties receive a 1 month exemption and then a 25% discount for the next 5 months. This allows some time for renovation and improvement works to be carried out when full Council Tax is not payable. Since April 2014 new charging policies have been applied in respect of unoccupied and unfurnished properties. Where a property has been unoccupied and unfurnished for more than two years a Council Tax premium of 50% will be charged. (Effectively this means that properties that have been unoccupied and unfurnished for more than two years will pay 150% Council Tax).</p>
<p>This survey is not really going to give you any real info.... It seems to be confirming what you have already decided.</p>	<p>The survey questions were posed in the form of statements and respondents asked to what extent they agreed with them. The questions were posed in this way as it is felt they offer a wider range of responses, based on respondents opinions, rather than limited yes or no answers. The questions did not confirm any pre-determined decisions as respondents had options to disagree with the statements and provide comments and suggestions.</p> <p>The draft strategy put out for consultation was the Council's proposed approach to dealing with empty property; it was not a final or adopted version. All of the feedback and comments provided by respondents has been analysed and taken into consideration. Changes and amendments have been made to the strategy accordingly (details of which can be found in the appendices of this report). It is this amended version which will be put forward</p>

	for formal adoption.
The broad principles of the strategy are good but will be irrelevant if SC is not prepared to invest resources enforcing actions where no positive cooperation or response is received. They must realise that in rural areas one long term empty property can cause as much distress and waste of resources as those in the action zones. Indeed in small rural communities it can be much more acute regarding residents fears and blight on the community. Comments made by officers of the council that its not cost effective to pursue properties in small rural communities and the compulsory purchase or investment in one off affordable house are not efficient as they require extra infrastructure support such as school transport should be weighed against the distress these properties cause the community.	It is recognised that in certain situations enforcement action will be necessary, and resources will be invested in this where appropriate. Officers are very aware that in smaller and more rural communities a single empty property can be as much a blight as higher volumes in more built up areas. For this reason each case is considered individually, with consideration for its specific set of circumstances, including its setting and surroundings. No options are immediately ruled out for any property, and Officers will follow the process described in the strategy in order to direct an appropriate amount of resources to the case and find the most suitable solution.
The strategy of bringing empty homes into use is worthwhile. However, I hope that the money spent is cost-effective in these difficult financial times and that there is not unnecessary money spent on personnel in offices making reports and 'pushing paper' etc. rather being out in the field making a difference! Too often, it seems to me these days, too much time is spent on the paperwork rather than actually working out in the field. You must be careful that the demands of the necessary recording of the situation, does not financially outweigh the gain at the end.	By its nature empty homes work demands that Officers are familiar with the areas they work in, and spend a suitable amount of time in the field. The processes managed by Empty Homes Officers are designed to be effective and efficient, therefore minimising the amount of time taken up by paper work, allowing for time to be dedicated to the practical elements of the work.
I have read the report and found the principal aims to be reasonable, helpful to contribute to housing needs, supportive towards people living near empty property and financially supportive via grants. The document provides a positive approach to bringing empty properties back into more constructive use.	Noted
Every effort is needed to increase the number of affordable homes available. Comparing the need with the rate of provision shows that some people will have to wait a very long time.	Demand for affordable housing in Shropshire is high, and in some areas the wait can be longer than others. The Empty Homes Strategy sets out how empty homes work can target resources at those areas with the highest demand for affordable housing, and also high levels of empty property, so that the homes returned to use through this work can have the biggest possible impact on provision of affordable housing in Shropshire.
A good report. All aspects taken into consideration. It seems to me that the whole idea and plan is really important. But it is going to be very difficult to have many successful outcomes. Public money well spent on a project such as this. Good luck.	As outlined in the strategy, empty homes work is challenging for a variety of reasons. However we are achieving many successful outcomes across the county and hope that this strategy will support the achievement of many more.
I believe that the interest rate for the loan is too high. It's probable that the owner of an empty home has already looked into the costs of renovation and possibly cannot afford to do it. A reduction in the loan rate should be considered to around 2.5% max.	The National Empty Homes Loan Fund (NEHLF) was a national scheme developed by central government, administered by the Empty Homes Agency and Ecology Building Society. Shropshire Council chose to participate in the scheme in order to offer the widest possible range of options for bringing empty homes back into use; however the

	<p>Council had no input into setting the terms or interest rate for the loans.</p> <p>At the time the draft strategy was put out for consultation the NEHLF was active. However shortly after this on 30th June 2014 we received notification that the scheme had been withdrawn. Reference to the NEHLF has now been removed from the strategy.</p>
<p>I welcome the strategy, but would like to see more action in my ward where there are long term empty properties that have not been returned to use for 10 or so years. It's very frustrating for neighbours to live next to a property that's going to wrack and ruin, and no one can understand why these homes aren't being put to good use. I worry that the zoning concept will deprioritise action in areas that are not included within a zone. Affordable housing is needed everywhere in the county, and I'm not sure what is gained through the zoning scheme.</p>	<p>The Council welcome reports of empty properties directly to the Empty Homes Team, who will deal with the case following the process set out in the strategy. Available funding is limited, and the decision to introduce Empty Homes Action Zones was taken in order to allow targeted use of resources in areas which are currently worst affected by empty property, and also have high demand for affordable housing. As long as funding continues to be available a new zone will be chosen on an annual basis and funding will be available in different areas of the county in line with this. This does not mean that other areas of the county are deprioritised. The strategy sets out how all empty property will be dealt with, and the RAG system provides a system of prioritising action dependent on a variety of criteria, as set out in Appendix 6 of the strategy.</p>
<p>Seems to be an excellent policy</p>	<p>Noted</p>
<p>There should be protection for tenants so it cannot be used for private landlords to bring properties up to standard who then evict tenants to get a profit from council money.</p>	<p>Tenanted properties are not empty and therefore would not be eligible for funding dedicated to returning properties which have been empty for 6 months or longer. In addition, Empty Property Incentive Grants are provided with certain conditions attached, one of which is that once renovated the property must remain occupied as per the individual terms of the agreed grant, or the grant may become repayable. Grants are lodged as a land charge on the property in order to help monitor this, and tenants of grant funded properties are asked to register with Shropshire HomePoint so the Council will be made aware if a tenancy ends and the property is potentially empty.</p>
<p>While well meant it does seem to be a tortuous and costly way of going about achieving something which is being sold as a benefit to the customer - the people of Shropshire. The amount of time and internal cost overhead incurred in getting to the point of actually doing something is remarkable in its longevity.</p>	<p>The processes involved in dealing with empty property have been designed to be as streamlined and efficient as possible. Empty property work can be challenging, and in certain circumstances it can take some time to establish all the facts, locate owners and see the appropriate action being taken. The benefit to the customer is that problematic, unsightly and wasteful empty properties are brought back into use in a way which benefits local people in need of affordable housing. As with any area of work overheads are unavoidable, however it is thought that these are kept to a minimum with empty homes work and maximum possible resources are</p>

	directed at funding to return properties to use.
Empty homes are a waste when there is a huge waiting list. However preference should be given to local people when filling them with residents, not those who just turn up in this county	There is a local lettings policy incorporated in the conditions of Empty Property Incentive Grants (EPIGs), amongst other criteria this policy stipulates that priority will be given in the first instance to applicants with a strong local connection to the area the property is in, either through current or past residence and/or current employment (paid/unpaid) or training. This lettings policy is in place to ensure that priority for accommodation brought forward through the EPIGs is given to local people in need of affordable housing.
All cases should be seen as individual.	As the strategy outlines, properties can be empty for a wide range of reasons and have various complications. For this reason all cases are treated as individual and their specific circumstances taken into account. The RAG rating system provides consistency in the way properties are assessed and prioritised, but this does not mean that there is necessarily the same solution to each case.
Much seems to depend on trained and knowledgeable council officers, and it is literally a waste of everybody's time if this is affected by the current policy of staff reduction.	At present there are two dedicated and experienced Empty Homes Officers carrying out empty property work in Shropshire. There are no plans at present to reduce these resources.
Important to take account of complexities around changes of use, changing family size, affordability, rural and urban character, provision of adequate services including public transport, internet, care of elderly/disabled, sewerage and water supply etc. While not confining all development to larger existing settlements.	The Empty Homes Officers are experienced in managing the complexities of empty homes cases and their different requirements. The team works closely with other Council departments and external organisations to ensure these issues are taken into account.
Getting empty housing back into use should be a top priority. Increasing Council tax on these properties is a good way of helping to bring them back into use. If these are brought back into use then less new housing needs to be built.	Shropshire Council prioritises empty homes work, as the contribution it is able to make to the provision of housing and regeneration of communities in the county is fully recognised. Following changes in legislation, from April 2014 Council Tax for properties empty for 2 years or longer was increased to 150% across Shropshire, to incentivise their return to use.
Empty homes are a waste of services that Shropshire provide, as streets are cleaned and lights used but no income is generated by way of rates, they also demoralise an area and encourage vandalism which in turn cost the community in so many ways.	Empty property is a wasted resource in many ways, as Section 3 of the strategy outlines. The strategy is designed to help tackle this.
Spend time changing the minds and concepts of local agents and landlords	Officers aim to work closely with all stakeholders in empty property cases, including property agents and landlords. As part of this we are currently developing a relationship with the Shropshire Branch of the National Landlords Association to better understand how empty homes work can effectively

	support landlords.
I would just like to point out that there may also be nature conservation, heritage issues, etc. that may need to be taken into account. Therefore any remedial works that are encouraged or undertaken need to ensure they do not compromise a historic asset or affect priority species or habitats. Empty homes and surrounding land may have been colonised by legally protected species. While it may be laudable to provide additional housing it would still be an offence if these species were disturbed or killed.	The Empty Homes Officers are always mindful of the setting and situation of an empty property. We work closely with colleagues in the Council including Conservation and Natural Environment Officers to ensure these issues are managed and the relevant legislation is adhered to.
I can't stress how important I feel this area of work is. People who own multiple properties and let them sit empty to rot are simply selfish morons who deserve to lose those properties.	As outlined in Section 3 of the strategy, properties can become empty for a multitude of reasons, and sometimes these are very complex. The Empty Homes Officers aim to support and enable owners of empty properties to address any problems and return their properties to use voluntarily. Where this does not appear to be happening there are other options open to the Council, including enforcement.
It is hard to find somewhere reasonable to live that I can afford so if this helps young people like me to rent or buy a house that would be good	A key aim of the strategy is to increase the provision of good quality affordable housing across the county.
I was a Steering Group member which produced the Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan, the current empty homes strategy was used as part of our evidence base to produce development targets for Much Wenlock. There is a high profile empty home with possible affordable homes development land attached. the council has shilly shallied a little too long on this one especially as the community is now embarking on a community led affordable housing scheme.	Officers are very aware of this case and are currently working with the owner of the property to reach a solution. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the community in Much Wenlock on the community led affordable housing scheme.
Encourage each Town and Parish Council to bring to their Agenda once a year all the properties they know of that have been empty for over a year and forward this to the Empty Homes Team. Not a formal survey just from local knowledge. As I found by telephoning the team one in my central small town location has been empty for over 10 years but not recently recorded. Well maintained externally and presumably all taxes paid it has fallen under the radar but its vacant state is well known to local people. As a good size two/three bedroom terrace property it could have been looked after by a housing association and let to a local family for all this time whilst the owner decided what to do with it. (There are a number of older properties in the street already looked after by a housing association)	Local knowledge and reporting of empty properties is an important source of information for the Empty Homes Team. The Empty Homes Officers already work in this way with some Town and Parish Councils, and would welcome the opportunity to extend this to others. The majority of information held on empty properties is gained from Council Tax records and reporting. If the owner of the property has the property registered as something other than unoccupied with Council Tax and is maintaining the property to a level which doesn't cause people to report it, empty properties can go unnoticed. We would encourage anyone who is aware of an empty property to report it to the Empty Homes Team. Once properties have been reported the Empty Homes Officers can make contact with the owners and explore options for bringing them back into use, including possible management by a housing association.
For a successful implementation of this strategy, there will be a need for the LA to work closer with the local parish and town councils. Shropshire remains highly	See above response

diverse county and local knowledge will be vital to its success.	
Page 5, data on housing register is out of date (December 2013) Page 11, should refer to registered providers rather than housing associations (as on page 4). There appears to be concentrations of empty homes in Oswestry and Bridgnorth, which is where ST&R Housing manage over 4,000 properties on behalf of Shropshire Council so we would very much like to be involved with this.	This data has now been updated and the suggested amendments made on Page 11. (The term Housing Association was originally used due to it being widely understood in layman's terms and the Strategy is aimed at all, including those outside the area of knowledge.) The Empty Homes Team will contact ST&R Housing to discuss how we can work together in the areas ST&R operate.
Broseley Town Council heartily commend this well-written, multi-strand strategy and section 3 admirably sets out why having such a strategy is so important. We in Broseley know too well how an unoccupied home can have various damaging effects on a neighbourhood causing a great deal of frustration and resentment in a time of housing shortage. Appendix 1 shows the extent to which empty homes are a problem in this area. We urge Shropshire Council to ensure that this strategy is adequately resourced (particularly officer time) and does not become another paper aspiration.	Some of the work outlined in the strategy is already underway and there is every intention to ensure that it continues in further Empty Homes Action Zones and across the rest of the County. At present there are two dedicated and experienced Empty Homes Officers carrying out empty property work in Shropshire. There are no plans at present to reduce these resources.
Bridgnorth Town Council support the idea of bringing empty homes into use.	Noted
On behalf of Munslow Parish Council I have read the strategy and discussed it at a parish meeting. Briefly, we welcome the strategy and its intentions and hope that it will provide the basis for bringing into use empty property throughout the county.	Noted
Montford Parish Council fully SUPPORTS this sensible initiative in principle	Noted

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Empty Homes Strategy Changes and Amendments

A small number of amendments have been made to reflect the feedback provided from respondents through consultations. Some details and information have also changed through the passage of time since the draft strategy was released; these have been amended and updated to ensure accuracy.

Section of the Strategy	Amendment
Page 5 Section 3, Para. 2	DELETE: “7,574” and “December 2013” INSERT: “5,286” and “September 2014”
Page 7 Section 4, Para. 3	DELETE: “Owners can also be signposted to funding schemes which are not directly run by the Council such as the National Empty Homes Loans Fund which was launched in September 2013. (Appendix 5)” INSERT: “Owners will also be signposted to external funding schemes which are not directly run by the Council where they are available.”
Page 11 Section 5, Para. 24	DELETE: “Housing Associations” INSERT: “Registered Providers”
Page 20 Information on the National Empty Homes Loan Fund (NEHLF)	DELETE: This appendix has been deleted as since the draft strategy was made available for consultation in May 2014, the NEHLF has been withdrawn and the loans are no longer available.
Page 22 Appendix 6	INSERT: Points bands for RAG rating added
Page 23 Appendix 6	INSERT: Finalised scoring sheet for RAG rating assessment

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Shropshire Council – Equality Impact Needs Assessment (EINA)

Part 1 EINA – (Screening)

Name of policy, procedure, function, project, etc: Empty Homes Strategy	Reference number:
--	-------------------

Name (list those involved in completing)	Role	Contact details
Julia Preston	Empty Homes Officer	01743 251811
Jessica Moores	Empty Homes & Regeneration Officer	01743 255923

Date Commenced –

<p>Aims of the policy and description</p> <p>To provide information on how Shropshire Council intends to tackle empty homes within the County. To explain some of the processes and legislation involved in the work.</p>

<p>Stakeholders, people concerned, interested parties</p> <p>Members, Housing Associations, Property Owners, Parish Councils, Town Councils, Resident groups, members of the public, Developers</p>

Summary of EINA progress		Date
Date signed by Head of Service Signature 	Part 1	4/6/14
	Part 2 (Full)	

<p>Potential Impact on Target Groups (see page 2)</p> <p>Assess each of the following areas separately and consider how the policy may affect people's human rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Will the policy create any problems or barriers to any community or group? ● Will any group be excluded because of the policy? ● Will the policy have a negative impact on community relations? <p>If the answer to any of these is yes to any High impact criteria, you must prepare a Full EINA. Preliminary consultation will be required to help identify the impact.</p>

Target group	Significant (High) negative impact <i>Full EINA required</i>	Significant (High) positive impact <i>Full EINA required</i>	Medium or Low (see definitions below) <i>Part 1 only</i> (with some preliminary consultation evidence)
Race (also ethnicity, nationality, culture, language, gypsy, traveller)			X
Disability (mental & physical impairments: mobility, manual dexterity, speech, hearing, learning, understanding, visual, MS, cancer, HIV)			X
Sex (also associated aspects: safety, single-parenting, caring responsibility, potential for bullying & harassment)			X
Gender-reassignment (also associated aspects: safety, single-parenting, caring responsibility, potential for bullying & harassment)			X
Sexual orientation (heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual)			X
Age (children, young people, working age, elderly)			X
Religion & belief (Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Shinto, Non-conformists)			X
Rural issues			X
Pregnancy & Maternity			X
Other (other target groups relevant to your service, for example, family carers, marital status)			X
<p>High Significant potential impact, risk of challenge, history of complaints, no mitigating measures in place or no evidence available, urgent need for consultation with customers, general public, employees Medium Some potential impact, some mitigating measures in place but no evidence available how effective they are, would be beneficial to consult with customers, general public, etc but not urgent Low Almost bordering with non relevance to the EINA process (heavily legislation led, very little discretion exercised, limited public facing aspect, national policy)</p>			

What is the evidence for your answers to the above questions?

Consider qualitative and quantitative data. Customer equality monitoring data/Consultation process/Research data.

There will be a 90 day public consultation period where the proposed strategy will be available for any person to comment on.

(use additional paper if necessary)

Important: Only policies/procedures/functions rated as **high** need a Full EINA. Full assessment requires more in-depth and detailed consultation with members from the target groups highlighted as being at the receiving end of any potential High Impact.

Go to Full EINA part of form now



Empty Homes Strategy

2014 - 2017

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Empty Homes Strategy

2014 – 2017

Foreword by Cllr Mal Price – Portfolio Holder for Housing



Welcome to Shropshire Council’s 2014 - 2017 Empty Homes Strategy. This Strategy sets out how the Council will tackle issues surrounding empty properties over the next three years and maximise the re-use of empty homes throughout the County.

Shropshire Council continues to be committed to reducing the number of empty homes within the County, and to facilitating and assisting the creation of good quality and affordable accommodation for local people.

Shropshire is fortunate in that it does not have streets of derelict and boarded up empty properties, as can be found in other areas of the country. However, there is a shortage of housing and as such it is necessary to make the best use of the County’s existing housing stock, ensuring a supply of good quality homes for people to rent or buy.

The aims and objectives of the Strategy can only be achieved by working closely with internal and external partners and other key

stakeholders, such as property owners and local communities. Attracting a mixed source of further finances to drive forward our empty homes agenda is essential.

The reasons properties become or stay empty are varied and plentiful, and the skills required to resolve the issues are significant and diverse. Much of the work outlined in the strategy is already underway and producing tangible results, and I am sure that the Strategy will prove to be an investment to be proud of.

We hope this Strategy will support others to work with us to deliver our objective of creating new homes for people. Communities, owners of empty property and other stakeholders are strongly encouraged to contact the Empty Homes Team for help or advice, and with any information about empty property in their area. Together we can help to make Shropshire a better place to live, work and visit.

1. Introduction

This Strategy aims to give an understanding of the issues of empty property and how it impacts on local areas. It looks at why properties become empty, what advice and assistance is available to empty property owners, and how the Council uses the range of powers available to it to return empty properties to use.

Shropshire Council aims to enable better use of all properties in the county, both residential and commercial, that may be underutilised and able to contribute to the supply of housing in the county.

It is anticipated that the employment of this Strategy will help to build and develop the level of skill and expertise needed to effectively bring empty properties back into use, using a linked approach throughout the Council and other organisations.

National Context

Empty Homes are a national issue and, according to the Empty Homes Agency, there were around 710,000 empty homes recorded in England in 2012. Of these almost 260,000 had been empty for over six months and were classified as long term empty properties. #

Over recent years the government has recognised and prioritised the issue of empty properties, and is committed to getting empty homes back into use to contribute towards meeting housing need.

Local Context

In 2012 just under 3.5% of homes in Shropshire were empty. The number of registered empty properties was over 4,600 with over 1,700 of these being empty over six months and classified as long term empty properties. #

The vast majority of these properties are privately owned and are dispersed throughout the urban, semi-rural and rural areas of the county. The distribution of empty properties within Shropshire can be seen on the area map in Appendix 1.

Statistics taken from the Empty Homes website [Empty Homes Statistics](#)

During the period of the 2010 – 2013 Empty Homes Strategy the figures for returning empty homes to use through Shropshire Council involvement were:

Year 1 (2010/11) – 65
Year 2 (2011/12) – 94
Year 3 (2012/13) – 74

Priorities & Objectives

- Maximise the re-use of empty homes
- Reduce the number of long term empty homes in Shropshire
- Provide good quality affordable housing for local people and reduce homelessness

- Support economic growth within the County
- Support area regeneration programmes
- Assist in meeting Housing Need
- Support other Strategies within Shropshire Council (see Section 7)
- Increase public and organisational understanding of empty homes across Shropshire

2. What is an empty home?

A property is considered to be Long Term Empty if it has been unoccupied for 6 months or longer. Privately owned long term empty properties are the focus of this strategy, but concerns will be highlighted to Public Bodies and Housing Associations (Registered Providers) where an empty property they own requires attention.

A True Empty Home: Not all empty properties are located in run-down

areas, nor are they necessarily semi-derelict, boarded up or causing a problem. There are a large number of properties which naturally become empty for periods of time, perhaps due to the buying and selling process, being between tenants or when an owner passes away and the probate process delays moving the property on.

When a property remains empty for a significant period of time, or is attracting unwanted attention, then it would be considered a “problematic empty property”.

Unused non-residential space:

There are a number of non-residential buildings which have the potential to provide residential accommodation. Sometimes it can be a whole building which is no longer feasible for its previous use, or most often, under-utilised upper floors of buildings where the ground/lower floors are used as shops.

Why are homes empty?

There are a number of reasons why properties become empty, including:

- the property is difficult to sell or let
- it is being renovated
- the owner does not have the finances/time/skills to manage the property
- the property has been repossessed
- probate issues
- the owner is being cared for elsewhere/is in hospital

It is important that the Council understand why individual properties become and/or remain empty so we can work with the owners in the most appropriate way.

Challenges Presented by Empty Property

Dealing with an empty property is not always straightforward. A property may be used as a second home, and so not occupied on a permanent basis, but is in use. It may be that non-residential space such as that often found above

shops is being used for storage or other business related matters and although not immediately obvious it is in use.

There may be properties awaiting planning permissions and work is unable to commence whilst this is being sought. A number of these may include specialist permissions if they are a Listed Building or located in a Conservation Area.

Ownership Issues: A property may be owned by a number of different people or companies. The property may be subject to legal proceedings such as probate, divorce settlements or proceeds of crime restrictions.

Land Registry Issues: Although it is now compulsory in England to register any property which changes ownership or has a mortgage taken out against it for the first time, this was not the case in Shropshire until 1 January 1990 (1 April 1986 for the former district of Bridgnorth) [#]. Properties which have not changed ownership since that time may not be registered with the Land

Registry and information regarding the property will not be available from this source.

[#] Information gained from [Land Registry Figures](#)
Absentee Owner: It may not be immediately evident who the owner of a property is or where they are, as they may have moved away with little information available to trace them.

Intentional Empties: Some properties are deliberately kept empty by the owner for specific reasons such as for their children when they leave home or elderly relatives who are in care.

Some are kept empty until the owner feels the housing market is suitable to sell the property at the price they want.

Some owners are reluctant to engage with the Council and believe that as the property is privately owned the Council do not have the right to require action to return it to use. They may be unaware, or have no concern for, the affect the property has on the local area and surrounding properties. These are properties which are likely to

be left empty for many years and fall into disrepair.

3. Why do Empty Homes Matter?

Returning empty homes to use can have a number of positive effects, addressing social, economic and wider public health issues.

In Shropshire there are currently 5,286 households on the housing register for affordable housing (September 2014). Approximately 35% of these households have limited opportunities to access social housing. Increasing the amount of affordable housing available through returning empty property to use can help to start addressing the lack of suitable properties for these households.

For Owners

Leaving a property standing empty can become costly and be a source of unnecessary anxiety.

There is an increased risk of vandalism and crime and the property can be difficult to insure, which could result in high repair costs or even mean a complete loss of asset.

Even the general deterioration of an unlive in property will result in costs, due to works necessary to enable the property to be brought back up to current Housing Standards (See Appendix 2).

By renting or selling the property not only are the above issues resolved but there is the added advantage of gaining regular rental income or the capital from the sale of the property.

For the Local Community

Empty properties can have a direct impact on adjoining properties through

issues such as damp and structural problems.

Alongside this, unsightly properties can have a detrimental effect on neighbouring house prices and can also result in a lack of pride in the area.

The possibility of empty properties attracting unwanted attention can also cause anxiety and concern for local residents.

Returning empty properties to use can help eliminate these issues and ensure that house prices in the neighbourhood are protected from preventable reductions.

Improving an area can also encourage investment in the local economy and a return of any lost pride in the community created by empty properties.

Shropshire Council's work in our Empty Homes Action Zones (EHAZ) is intended to assist in regenerating local areas by complementing other work in each community, such as town centre

regeneration and economic development projects.

By returning empty properties to use homes can be provided for local people enabling them to remain close to schools, employment and support networks.

Creating new housing in town centres from under-utilised space provides additional accommodation to help reduce the number of those in housing need, whilst improving the visual aspect of the town centre.

A number of housing units have been created and returned to use through Empty Property Incentive Grants in the town centres of the Empty Home Action Zones already in place in Market Drayton and Oswestry. See Appendix 3 for case studies of these grants.

For the Wider Community

Empty properties returned to use as domestic dwellings increase the

availability of homes in the county, including potentially affordable homes.

Instead of being a source of concern these homes can be transformed from a wasted resource into a home for an individual or family in housing need. There are many individuals and families across the county in housing need and the utilisation of empty properties could prevent some of these people from facing issues such as homelessness and overcrowding, or provide a first home for a local person.

4. Options for Owners

Empty homes can be brought back into residential use through a wide range of approaches, each being tailored to the specifics of each case.

These may include selling the property, either privately or to a Housing

Association, letting the property at open market or affordable rent, or leasing the property to a Housing Association.

Information, Advice & Guidance

Shropshire Council provides information and advice to owners of empty properties to help identify the best options for them and their property. We can also give guidance on how to proceed with the different options to ensure the best outcome. For example, advice on how to present an empty property to prospective purchasers, information on VAT relief for renovating an empty property (Appendix 4) or assistance with finding tenants.

Financial Assistance

There is some financial assistance available to owners of empty properties through the Council in our Empty Homes Action Zones (details of current schemes are given in Section 5).

Owners will also be signposted to external funding schemes which are not directly run by the Council where they are available.

Enforcement Action

There is a range of legislative powers available to the Council to deal with immediate and specific issues such as vermin, nuisance, fly tipping and insecure or dangerous buildings (Appendix 6). There are also further powers which can be used to deal with empty properties in the longer term.

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 Section 215: In certain circumstances an owner can be required to take steps to ensure the condition of their property and/or land does not adversely affect the amenity of an area.

Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO): Powers introduced in the Housing Act 2004 allow Local Authorities to apply for an Interim Management Order where the owner cannot demonstrate efforts or plans to

return the property to use. This Interim Order gives the Council management of the property for a period of one year, although the Council cannot let the property during that time without the consent of the owner.

During this time other measures to return the property to use should still be explored with the owner, but should these be unsuccessful a Final Empty Dwelling Management Order can be applied for.

A Final EDMO enables the Council to carry out any works to the property necessary to make it habitable and let the property, using the rent to pay for the works carried out and any management costs. This Order can last up to seven years.

There are certain exemptions from EDMOs where the above would not be applicable.

Enforced Sale: Under the Law of Property Act 1925, the Local Authority can force the sale of a property where there is an outstanding debt owed to

the Council which has been registered against the title of a property. This debt may have arisen as a result of works in default, where a Statutory Notice has not been complied with, or a Court imposed charging order has been placed on the property for Council Tax debt. This process can only be halted by the debt being paid to the Council before the forced sale is completed.

Compulsory Purchase Order: Under Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 the Local Authority has the power to serve a Compulsory Purchase Order on an empty property where the owner has made little or no effort to return the property to use.

It must be demonstrated that steps have been taken to encourage the owner to bring the property back into occupation and that there is no other chance of the property being occupied.

This power allows the Council to purchase the property from the owner to dispose of as they see fit.

A CPO can be costly and take a long time and consideration needs to be given to the pros and cons before its use.

5. Shropshire Council's Approach

Empty properties are identified through various methods, primarily using Council Tax data and via reports to the Empty Homes Officers regarding individual properties.

Investigation

All empty properties identified will be investigated. Owners will be traced and contacted with the intention of gaining an understanding of the circumstances surrounding the property being empty. The process followed after this will vary depending on whether the property is a reported case or identified as part of work in one of our Empty Homes Action Zones.

Reported Cases

Our intention is to work with owners and encourage them to return their empty properties to use. We will provide information and offer advice and support to enable them to progress to an outcome satisfactory to themselves, the Council and the community.

Where available we will offer financial assistance directly from the Council and in other instances signpost owners to other schemes that may be running through other organisations, primarily the National Empty Homes Loans Fund (Appendix 5) of which Shropshire Council is a Scheme Member.

Shropshire Council aims to bring all empty homes back into use with the cooperation of the owners, but where they are unwilling and the property is either creating a specific problem within its locality, or would meet a particular housing need, the use of enforcement powers will be considered (see section 4 and Appendix 6).

Empty Home Action Zones (EHAZ)

Our EHAZs are designated areas chosen for their high concentration of empty property in conjunction with a high level of housing need.

In the Empty Home Action Zones we proactively contact owners of empty property to encourage and support them to return it to use. We provide advice and support to help owners find the best way of bringing their property back into use.

The Council also offers financial assistance in EHAZs by way of Empty Property Incentive Grants to help towards the cost of bringing empty properties up to the current Housing Standard, and create dwellings in underutilised spaces such those above shops and in other commercial premises.

The aim of our EHAZs is to not only return empty properties to use and create further dwellings but to also

support work to bring about the regeneration of the area.

The Council is making provisions to provide opportunities for training and employment through the work in the EHAZs. Through the funded projects we are facilitating apprenticeships and work placements as well as employment opportunities for local people.

To ensure our work is successful in the EHAZs, should negotiation with owners not result in a positive outcome, enforcement options will be considered.

RAG (Red, Amber, Green) Rating System

Each empty property case, whether situated in an EHAZ or not, will be assessed using a scoring sheet which considers various criteria. The result of this assessment is that the property is placed into a category which defines its priority level (Red being the most urgent and Green the least) and the subsequent action to be taken.

Properties will be reassessed when necessary to ensure they are in the most appropriate category and the correct level of priority is given.

A property will be prioritised under the following two criteria:

- Does it fall within an Empty Homes Action Zone (EHAZ)?
- How it is rated within our Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating system (Appendix 7)

Achievements

Since April 2013 there have been two EHAZs, one in Market Drayton and one in Oswestry, with work still underway in both areas. Appendix 8 gives details of the number of grants approved and the number of dwellings created in the areas.

Empty Property Incentive Grants are funded using a proportion of the Council's New Homes Bonus, and the Council aims to secure additional funding to support and rollout further EHAZs across the County.

The New Homes Bonus funding has so far been utilised to help create four units of affordable accommodation with a further 13 expected to be created in 2014.

In addition Shropshire Council have supported successful community bids for funding to return prominent Town Centre empty properties to use.

Although public funds have been reduced, and are expected to be limited further over the coming years, efforts will continue to be made to attract funds to enable and support the continuity of empty property work throughout Shropshire.

Joint Working

It is the intention to further develop a collaborative approach to dealing with empty properties, raising awareness both within the Council and with external partners.

Within the Council: Our aim is to impart an understanding of how empty homes work impacts on other issues

dealt with by the Council and vice-versa.

The Council is committed to better integration and targeting of its services to achieve a joined up and efficient approach to empty property.

As part of this approach, joint working between the Private Sector Housing and Planning Teams will be piloted during 2013/14.

It is intended that successful pilot projects will be extended to priority cases throughout the County, concentrating efforts from all areas into progressing complex cases to positive outcomes.

Externally: The Council's Empty Homes Officers are members of the West Midlands Empty Property Officer Group and this ensures officers working in the field can share best practice ideas, develop knowledge and explore new ways of working with other professionals in the field.

Shropshire Council is also a Scheme Member of the National Empty Homes Loans Fund which provides financial assistance for works to empty properties in order for them to be let at an affordable rent.

Additionally, the Council works with Registered Providers on joint projects to return empty properties to occupation, from providing information and research through to partnership funding and practical involvement.

6. Monitoring & Review

Monitoring Targets

The Council have developed new ways of working in relation to empty properties. To complement this we have reviewed how our targets are determined and assessed.

Homes which have been occupied through local authority involvement, and will therefore count towards our targets, will include those achieved through:

- Financial assistance
- Providing advice and guidance
- Enforcement action
- Creation of new dwellings from unutilised space
- Creating links with tenants
- Creating links with purchasers

This provides a robust means of monitoring progress with respect to targets.

The targets for properties returned to use (RTU) and the creation of new dwellings (ND) from underutilised space, over the period of this Strategy are as follows:

- 2014/15 RTU - 75 & ND - 10
- 2015/16 RTU - 85 & ND - 12
- 2016/17 RTU - 95 & ND - 15

Reviewing the Strategy

The strategy will be reviewed periodically taking into account the findings of pilot projects, and as and when there is a change in funding availability or National Policy.

7. Further Information

This Strategy is intended to not only tackle the problems posed by empty property, but to also support and complement the aims and objectives of other Council strategies. To view these strategies please use the relevant links below.

- Hereford & Shropshire Housing Strategy
- Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme

- Crime Reduction Community Safety Strategy
- Shropshire Core Strategy
- Better Regulation and Enforcement Policy
- Public Protection and Enforcement Group Service Strategy
- Economic Growth Strategy
- Visitor Economy Strategies

Where to Find Additional Information on Empty Property

There are a number of organisations and sources of information that are of great use to both Empty Homes Officers and empty property owners. Some of the most useful are:

- Empty Homes Website
- Homes and Communities Agency
- Empty Homes Network
- National Empty Homes Loans Fund
- Land Registry
- Gov.UK
- Shelter

- Communities and Local Government

8. How you can help

Owners

If you are an owner of an empty property within the Shropshire Council area please contact the Empty Homes Team. We are very keen to discuss with you the options available for returning your property to use, and to offer you any assistance and support required.

Members of the Public

If you live near an empty property which is creating a problem in the local area, or where the owner may need some help to return the property to use please report it to us.

We can be contacted through the following methods:

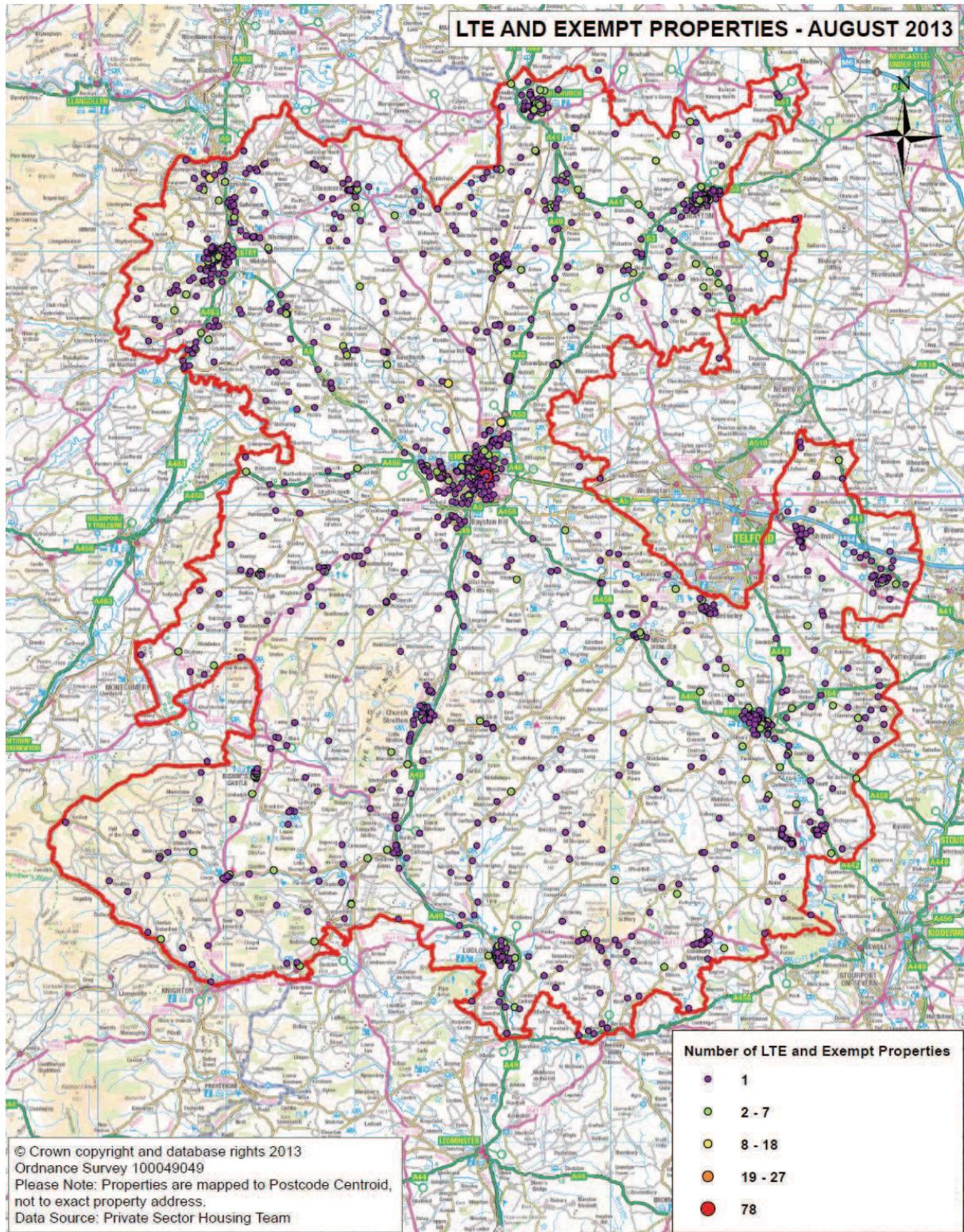
- Online: www.shropshire.gov.uk
- Email: emptyhomes@shropshire.gov.uk
- Telephone: **0345 678 9005**
- In writing:

**Empty Homes Team
Shropshire Council
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY2 6ND**

If you require this document in an alternative format or language, this can be requested using the contact details above.

Appendix 1

Distribution of Empty Homes across the County



Intelligence and Research team
The Shirehall, Abbey Foregate,
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND
Scale : 1:266,500

Appendix 2

Housing Standards

Properties are assessed under the Housing Act 2004 using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. The below 29 Hazards cover the all areas assessed under this system.

Physiological Requirements

- 1) Damp and Mould Growth
- 2) Excess Cold
- 3) Excess Heat
- 4) Asbestos and Manufactured Mineral Fibre
- 5) Biocides
- 6) Carbon Monoxide and Fuel Combustion Products
- 7) Lead
- 8) Radiation
- 9) Uncombusted Fuel Gas
- 10) Volatile Organic Compounds

Psychological Requirements

- 11) Crowding and Space
- 12) Entry by Intruders
- 13) Lighting
- 14) Noise

Protection against Infection

- 15) Domestic Hygiene, Pest and Refuse
- 16) Food Safety
- 17) Personal Hygiene, Sanitation and Drainage
- 18) Water Supply for Domestic Purposes

Protection against Accidents

- 19) Falls associated with baths
- 20) Falling on level surfaces
- 21) Falls associated with stairs and steps
- 22) Falling between levels
- 23) Electrical Hazards
- 24) Fire
- 25) Flames and Hot Surfaces
- 26) Collision and Entrapment
- 27) Explosions
- 28) Position and operability of amenities
- 29) Structural collapse and falling elements

Properties are also assessed under the Decent Homes Standard, the elements of which are outlined below:

Decent Homes Standard

For a property to meet the Decent Homes Standard, the minimum requirements are they must:

- 1) Meet the current legal minimum standard for housing

To meet this standard a home must not have a Category 1 hazard as assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System

- 2) Be in a reasonable state of repair

A home would satisfy this element of the standard unless:

- One or more key building components are old and in poor condition
- Two or more non-key building components are old and in poor condition

- 3) Have reasonably modern facilities and services:

A home would fail this element of the standard if it lacks three or more of the following:

- A reasonably modern kitchen – 20 years or less
- A kitchen with adequate space and layout
- A reasonably modern bathroom – 30 years or less
- An appropriately located bathroom and toilet
- Adequate noise insulation

- 4) Have a reasonably degree of thermal comfort:

A home should have both efficient heating and effective insulation.

Appendix 3

Empty Property Incentive Grant Case Studies

Oswestry Empty Property Incentive Grant



Before works



Living area of new flat

The owner had bought an empty commercial premise to provide a larger business space for themselves and they were very keen on creating, from the space above the shop, a one bedroom residential unit to provide a much needed home for a local person.

The owner had already arranged to have schedules of works and building plans drawn up for the property and after initial discussions they decided to apply for a “£s negotiable” grant under our Oswestry Empty Property Incentive Grant scheme.

Grant Officers visited the property to assess the works required and to ensure they would be eligible to be covered by the grant, and the owner gained quotations for the works.

An amount of grant was negotiated along with the conditions that would be attached to payment. In this instance it was agreed that on completion of the grant works that the property would be made available to let to individuals on the housing register who meet the criteria of the Local Lettings Plan.

Once all paperwork had been supplied and all terms agreed between the owner and the Council, the grant was approved and the owner was able to employ one of the quoting contractors to undertake the works.

Officers kept in contact with the owner for updates on progress of the works and anticipated completion date to enable timely advertising of the property and allocation of a tenant as soon as possible after completion of the works.

Upon completion the property was advertised through the Shropshire Homepoint Choice Based Lettings Scheme to start the process of identifying potential tenants for the owner to interview.

Following completion of the works the Grants Officer revisited the property to check everything had been completed to the correct standard and the grant money was released to the owner, which on this occasion was paid in one final payment.

The tenant who had been allocated the property was then able to move into their new home.



Installed kitchen in new flat



Newly created shower room

Market Drayton Empty Property Incentive Grant



Before



After

The property is located in a prominent position in Market Drayton Town Centre. The building comprises two ground floor retail units and two further floors above; the first and second floor space has been empty for at least ten years and was in an extremely poor state of repair. Its renovation, in combination with that of the surrounding buildings, has made a substantial contribution to the overall improvement of the Town Centre street scene.

The building has needed a lot of external improvement, including a roof replacement. As the building is listed this was an expensive project and the owners had struggled to find funds to address the significant amount of work required to bring the top two floors back into residential use. Following discussions with the Empty Homes Team they made an application to the Market Drayton Empty Property Incentive Grant for a negotiable grant to create three new units of residential accommodation in the upstairs space. Following negotiation between the owners and the Negotiable Grant Panel, a grant was awarded with the condition that the units be made available for residential letting, through Shropshire HomePoint, for a period of 30 years at an affordable rate.

Without the grant this would not have been a viable project for the owners and the top two floors would have continued to deteriorate, with the building having a continuing negative impact on the surrounding area and town centre. Work is now well underway on the renovation and it is hoped it will be completed in early 2014. It is also hoped improving the look of the overall building, and the work going on in the vicinity to improve several other buildings, will make surrounding empty retail units a more attractive prospect for local businesses looking to move into the town centre.



Before Works



After Works



Appendix 4

VAT discounts for renovating empty properties

There are VAT discounts currently available for the renovation of empty properties. It is advisable to apply for these discounts before work commences to ensure the discount is successfully claimed.

There are currently two levels of discount each with differing eligibility criteria.

2 Year Discount

If the property has been empty for two years immediately before works commence, and will only be used for residential purposes once renovated, you may be eligible for a reduced rate of VAT at 5%. The requirements and eligibility criteria for this discount are detailed at [HMRC](#). It is important to ensure that your builders understand the concession and the details involved to make certain you are invoiced correctly.

10 Year Discount

If the property has been empty for more than ten years immediately before works commence, and will only be used for residential purposes by yourself or your family, once renovated, you may be eligible for zero rated VAT. The requirements and eligibility criteria for this discount are detailed at [HMRC](#). It is advised that your builder applies the 5% VAT rate in the first instance, as in the above 2 year discount, and then you complete a Conversion Claim Form through the above link to recoup the 5% VAT you have paid.

NB It may be necessary to provide all information and paperwork to evidence your eligibility for these discounts. Your claim can be assisted by a letter from our Empty Homes Officers confirming the length of time the property has been empty to the best of our knowledge.

If you are using a paper version of this document and are unable to follow the above links, the relevant information can be found by using the following web address:

www.hmrc.gov.uk/vat/sectors/builders/construction.htm

Appendix 5

Available Legislative Powers

The below table outlines a number of legislative powers available to Local Authorities to deal with specific situations which may arise when dealing with empty properties.

Statutory Powers Available in Relation to Empty Homes	
Section 16 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 Section 330 Town & Country Planning Act 1990	Requesting information relating to a property from any person who has an interest in the property
Section 29 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982	Where a property is unoccupied and it is not effectively secured against unauthorised entry or is likely to become a danger to public health
Section 215 Town & Country Planning Act 1990	Unightly land and/or property affecting the amenity of an area
Section 11 & 12 Housing Act 2004 Section 40-41 Housing Act 2004 Section 46	Where one or more Category 1 and/or Category 2 hazards are likely to cause harm in the following 12 month period See Appendix 6 for a full list of hazards assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System
Section 76 Building Act 1984	Where a premises is in such a state to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance
Section 77 & 78 Building Act 1984	To deal with dangerous buildings
Section 79 Building Act 1984	To deal with ruinous and dilapidated buildings and neglected sites in the affecting the amenity of an area
Section 79 - 81 Environmental Protection Act 1990	Where there is a requirement to abate a statutory nuisance
Section 4 Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949	To keep land free from rats and mice
Section 34 Public Health Act 1961	Deals with the removal of waste from a property/land
Section 48 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990	Where there are necessary work required for the proper preservation of a listed building
Section 54 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990	Where urgent works are required for the preservation of a listed building

Section 59 Building Act 1984	Deals with the provision of drainage and rainwater goods
Section 133 – 136 Housing Act 2004	Grants powers to take over the management of a property using Interim Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) and Final EDMOs
Section 103 Law of Property Act 1925	The Local Authority can force the sale of a property to retrieve an outstanding debt owed to them
Section 17 Housing Act 1985 Section 226 Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) Section 47 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990	Grants powers for the Local Authority to pursue a Compulsory Purchase Order

Appendix 6

Empty Property Scoring and Rating System

Each empty property case, whether situated in an EHAZ or not, will be assessed using a scoring sheet which considers various criteria. The result of this assessment is that the property will be placed in a category which determines the priority level it is given and the subsequent course of action taken.

Properties will be reassessed when necessary to ensure they remain situated in the correct categories and the correct level of priority is given.

The categories will be classified as follows:

RED – 30+ points

Cases which fall into this category will be prioritised for the highest use of resources and level of interaction with the owner. All avenues will be explored with the owner to return their property to use in a way that suits their own needs, the needs of the Community and the Council. Where all forms of assistance are refused and the owner is unwilling to cooperate, all enforcement options will be considered to establish the most appropriate course of action.

AMBER – 19-29 points

Cases which fall into this category will be considered a lower priority than those in the Red category. Resources will still be invested in these cases and officers will work with owners in an attempt to prevent property from deteriorating and being reassessed to a higher category. Where necessary, enforcement options will be employed if considered the most appropriate course of action. Cases in this category will be monitored on a more frequent basis than those properties which fall within the Green category and will be reassessed where necessary.

GREEN – 0-18 points

Cases which fall into this category will be given a lower priority for action, but owners will be contacted and offered any assistance they may need to return their property back into use. These properties will be monitored for any change and reassessed where necessary.

Empty Homes Assessment Scoring Sheet

Criteria	Classification	Score
1) Time Empty	< 6 mth	1
	6m -2 yrs	2
	2-5 yrs	3
	5yrs +	4
2) Location	Extremely isolated with no access	1
	Isolated property with access	2
	Residential area	3
	Prominent position in area	4
3) Special Interest	None	1
	Listed property	2
	Located in Conservation area	3
	Listed property and in Conservation area	4
4) Regeneration	Located in an EHAZ or area of interest to SC	3
5) Condition of Dwelling	Habitable and well maintained	1
	Just at acceptable housing standard	2
	Hazards need addressing to reach housing standard	3
	Seriously defective/uninhabitable	4
6) General Condition	Well maintained	1
	Acceptable for surrounding area	2
	Noticeably empty/unattractive	3
	Extremely unsightly/detrimental to the area	4
7) Unwanted attention	None	1
	Minimal	2
	Frequent	3
	Persistent	4
8) Council Tax	Correctly registered	1
	Not registered	2
	Removed from banding	3
	Registered incorrectly/fraudulently	4
9) Debts Owed to Shropshire Council	< £500	1
	£500 - £2000	2
	£2000 - £5000	3
	£5000 >	4
10) Multiple properties	Other empty properties owned/managed by this owner (score per additional empty property owned)	3
11) Owner Interaction	High level of cooperation	1
	Average level of contact & efforts made	2
	Minimal contact & little efforts made	3
	No contact/untraceable/no efforts made	4
12) Potential of returning to occupation	Owner already taking action	1
	Minimal help/intervention required	2

unassisted	Some help/intervention required	3
	Much help/serious intervention required	4
	Total Score	
	RAG Category	

Appendix 7

Empty Homes Actions Zones (EHAZ)

The aim of our EHAZs is to not only return empty properties to use and create further dwellings, but to also support work to bring about the regeneration of the areas.

Our work in the EHAZs is intended to assist in regenerating local areas by complimenting other work in each community.

By returning empty properties to use, homes can be provided for local people enabling them to remain close to schools, employment and support networks.

Creating new units in town centres from under-utilised spaces provides additional accommodation to help reduce the number of those in housing need, whilst also improving the visual aspect of the town centre

As part of this work in these areas we have provided offers of financial assistance by way of Empty Property Incentive Grants. The grants are intended to help towards the cost of bringing empty properties up to the current Housing Standard and also to create dwellings in underutilised units such as space above shops and other commercial premises.

So far, EHAZs have been created in Market Drayton and Oswestry with three Empty Property Incentive Grants being approved and another five at the pre-approval stage. On completion these grants would provide up to 13 units of accommodation from properties returned to use and/or created from unused space.

Further funding has been allocated to larger projects in the town centres, in partnership with a Housing Association, with each project planned to convert empty and underutilised space into a further six units of affordable accommodation.

Through the work in the EHAZs the Council has made provisions to provide opportunities for training and employment. The funded projects facilitate apprenticeship and work placement opportunities, alongside employment for local people via links with local colleges and jobcentre plus.

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*Filling the empties:
National commitment, local action*

Empty Homes Network Policy Statement
DISCUSSION DRAFT

Version 1 November 2014

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Filling the empties: five point plan

At national level

1. A commitment from government to implement a sustainable, evidence-based, cost-effective national Empty Homes Initiative.
2. A national Empty Homes Loans Fund, administered by local authorities.
3. Dedicated capital funding streams for organisations of all sizes that create social housing from empty property.
4. An Empty Homes Act to bring coherence to the hotchpotch of legislation affecting empty homes.

At local level

5. A sustainable, effective empty homes initiative in every local authority supported by a cost-effective delivery partnership.

Introduction

About this document

The Empty Homes Network has produced this document to help policy-makers and political parties develop effective approaches to tackling the problem of empty homes. It builds on the experience and insight of the Network's practitioners, who work across the public, private and voluntary sectors. For each of our five proposed policy strands we suggest practical measures that can make a difference.

Why empty homes matter

Empty homes make headlines because they matter to lots of people, people who

- are offended by the sight of wasted homes when so many families still do not have a decent roof over their heads¹; and/or
- worry about empty homes blighting their neighbourhoods; and/or
- find the condition and/or value of their home affected by an empty property next door²; and/or
- suffer from anti-social behaviour associated with an empty property; and/or
- oppose the building of much-needed new housing on open space when existing homes are not being put to good use; and/or
- care about climate change and the carbon cost of building new homes compared with upgrading and re-using existing ones³.

These issues concern large numbers of people in **every** community in Britain. That's why empty homes are a national concern as well as a local one and why we need a **national initiative** to address the problem.

But a national initiative is no use unless it can deliver at local level, street by street, property by property: that's where we need councils to take the lead by building effective programmes in their local area.

Empty homes can't solve Britain's housing problem. But unless there is a coherent, strenuous, visible programme to do something about the empties, attempts to build the new homes we need will continue to meet local opposition.

1. A national empty homes initiative

A commitment from government to implement a sustainable, cost-effective, evidence-based national Empty Homes Initiative

“A commitment”

means

producing and publicising SMART action plans to underpin the initiative

Specific	Setting aims and objectives
Measureable	Ensuring objectives have outcome measures such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• number of long-term empties brought back to use• homes created from redundant commercial space• number of social homes delivered
Achievable	Making sure the outcomes are realistic, based on evidence of what works
Resourced	Allocating to the initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none">• identifiable persons responsible for delivery• capital and revenue funding where needed
Time-bound	Planning for the short, medium and long term - what will happen when?

“sustainable”

means

recognising that property will continue to fall empty: creating frameworks that conserve investments in skills and knowledge and permit long-term planning

“cost-effective”

means

balancing costs and benefits based on the evidence, leveraging private sector finance and exploiting the hidden value lying fallow in empty homes.

1. A national empty homes initiative (continued)

“evidence-based”

means

evaluating schemes and approaches to identify what works.

Evaluation

- Approaches to funding
 - loan schemes (Wales, Kent, NEHLF, councils)
 - private sector grant schemes (councils)
 - funding for affordable housing via HCA, Community Grants Programme
 - “Clusters of Empties”, homesteading
 - prudential borrowing by councils
- Fiscal measures
 - Council tax discounts, exemptions and premiums
 - VAT
- Incentives to local authorities - New Homes Bonus and alternatives
- Frameworks for delivery
 - national initiatives (eg Wales, Scotland)
 - regional partnerships (eg Wales, Kent)
 - community-led housing
- Effectiveness of enforcement legislation
- Data issues
 - accuracy of council tax
 - quantifying social benefits
 - hidden costs of empties
 - social and economic benefits of returning them to re-use

“national”

means

recognising the national dimension of the solutions we need and acting accordingly

National Dimension

- improving the law
- improving taxation measures
- a national funding programmes to support local responses and avoid a postcode lottery
- creating and disseminating templates and models that can be replicated locally
- promoting best practice at local level

2. An empty homes loan fund

A national Empty Homes Loans Fund, administered by local authorities

“national”

means

recognising the advantages of a **national framework** to support the Loans Fund

National Framework

- national publicity for the scheme
- using Homes and Communities Agency investment expertise to manage distribution of funding to councils
- standard templates and models for procedures, documents etc
- skill and knowledge sharing across the country

“Loans Fund”

means

an initial pot of money is made available for councils to lend but, being a loan, becomes available for re-use when repaid by owners – a “revolving fund”

“administered by local authorities”

means

taking advantage of local commitment, skills and infrastructure:

Local Infrastructure

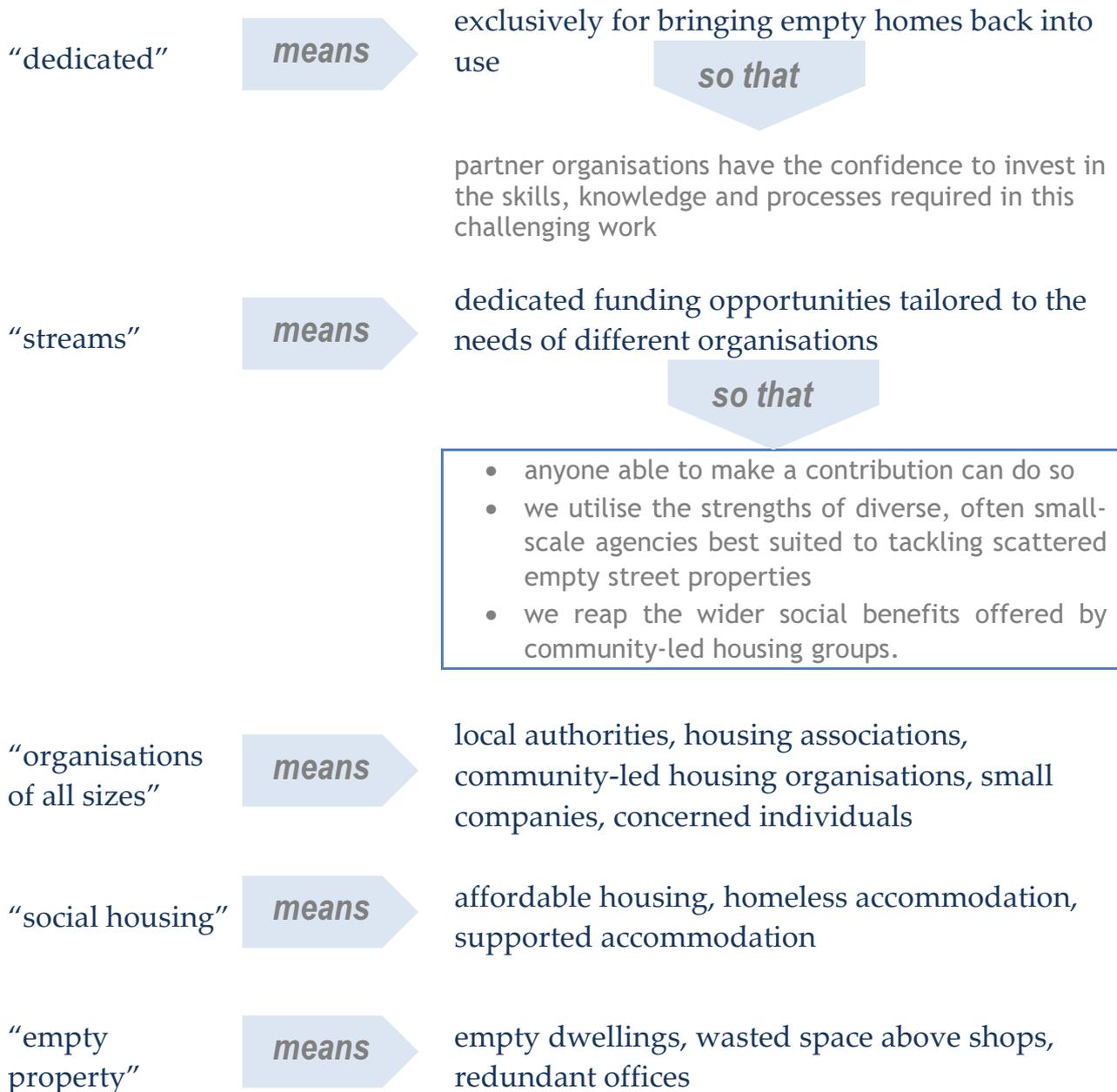
- the commitment of local councils to tackling empties in their areas
- the existing legal powers of councils to offer loans
- the existing procedures and partnerships available in most areas for providing loans to the private sector
- specific experience in loans to bring empties back into use

IN WALES: The Welsh Government introduced its national *Houses to Homes* loan scheme in 2012, working in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association. Together, they joined with local authorities to build a successful Welsh empty homes initiative around the loans scheme, with well-documented benefits described in the [evaluation reports](#) produced by Sheffield Hallam University.



3. Funding for social housing

Dedicated capital funding streams for organisations of all sizes, that create social housing from empty property



4. An Empty Homes Act

An Empty Homes Act to bring coherence to the hotchpotch of legislation affecting empty homes

“coherence” **means** making the law consistent, proportionate and able to address the issues particular to empty homes compared with occupied homes

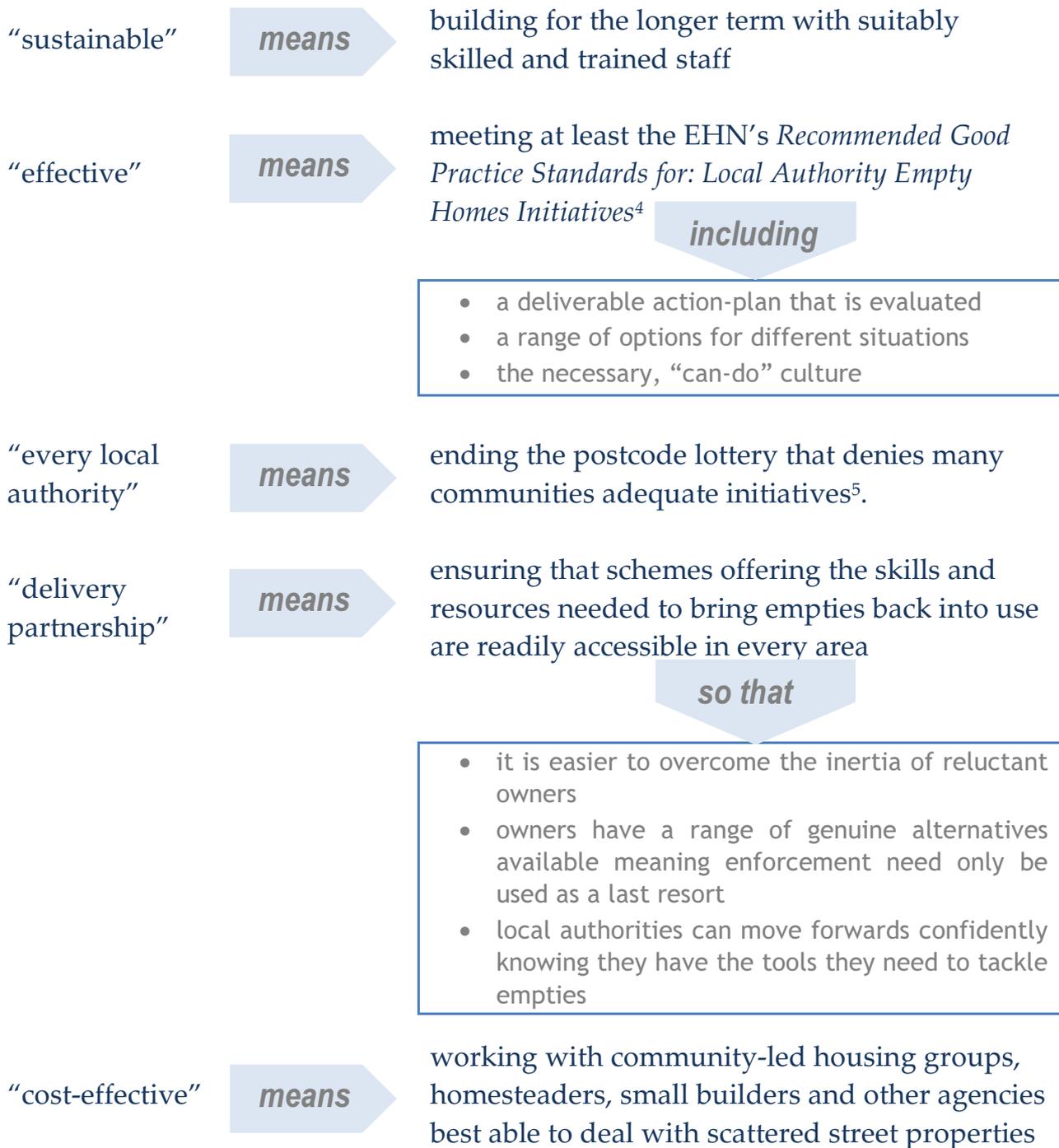
“hotchpotch of legislation” **means** cutting through the red-tape to produce new sensible rules that work

including

<i>Definitions</i>	Give consistent definitions of second and empty homes that make sense across council tax /housing statute. Treat second homes broadly the same as empty homes for council tax purposes.
<i>Antisocial property</i>	The law should recognise that some property, like abandoned cars, creates problems for communities and should be categorised and dealt with accordingly.
<i>Compulsory Purchase</i>	End the loophole whereby owners of problem properties can get a £75,000 bonus if councils have to compulsorily purchase them
<i>Empty Dwelling Management Orders</i>	End the rules that prevent owners voluntarily agreeing an EDMO with a council. Bring in a simpler process of application and appeal the same as for other Housing Act measures.
<i>Cost recovery</i>	Rationalise the law to give councils simple, consistent rules that provide an unqualified right to recover the taxpayer money they spend if enforcement action is upheld eg the up-front costs associated with EDMOs.
<i>Valuation Office Agency</i>	Revise the definitions that allow the worst empty homes to be removed from council tax altogether.
<i>Council tax exemptions</i>	Time-limit to two years council-tax exemptions for people inheriting homes.
<i>Council tax data</i>	Clarify rules around access to council tax data for empty homes purposes
<i>VAT</i>	Reduce the costs of repairs by harmonising VAT on repairs with new-build; remove current perverse VAT incentives to keep homes empty. Make Works-in-Default subject to VAT to avoid tax avoidance

5. Local empty homes initiatives

A sustainable, effective empty homes initiative in every local authority, supported by a cost-effective delivery partnership



NOTES

¹ There were 57,910 households in temporary accommodation in England, 2nd quarter 2014; those households included 84,930 children (CLG Live Tables on Homelessness *Table 775 Statutory homelessness: households in temporary accommodation1, by type of accommodation, at the end of each quarter*). There were 1,688,892 households on council waiting lists in England, 1st April 2013 (CLG Live tables on rents, lettings and tenancies *Table 600 Rents, lettings and tenancies: numbers of households on local authorities' housing waiting lists, by district*)

² Hometrack estimated that a home next door to an empty property would lose an average 18% of its value (2003 report)

³ See *New Tricks from Old Bricks* published by Empty Homes and the Building and Social Housing Foundation and available for download from the [BSHF website](#).

⁴ Downloadable from the EHN website [here](#).

⁵ "...authorities vary significantly in the level of resources devoted to tackling LTE and while those with relatively high LTE are more likely to devote more resources to tackling the problem and vice versa, there are exceptions to this pattern". *Application of Discretionary Council Tax Powers for Empty Homes*, CLG, 2008.

About the Empty Homes Network

We are a national network with approximately 500 individual members, launched in 2001 as the **National Association of Empty Property Practitioners** with the support of the government. Then-Minister Sally Keeble wrote

“NAEPP[=EHN] will provide a national voice for local authority and RSL staff in their work to bring empty homes back into use. The Government is keen to see its membership grow into a national network of empty property practitioners. So I would urge all local authorities to take out membership of NAEPP[EHN]. This will ensure that all relevant officers in the authority benefit from the good practice and training opportunities developed by, and for, empty property practitioners”.

Since then we have expanded our membership to include those working in regeneration companies, in self-help and community groups, and in private sector firms involved in helping bring empty homes back into use.

We are a not-for-profit membership organisation that is separate from and completely independent of the charity Empty Homes Agency.

Our main role is to support all practitioners and organisations involved in addressing the issue of empty homes to help them work as effectively as possible. We do this by facilitating the sharing of information and experience, by organising training events and conferences, by promoting best practice amongst delivery partners and by promoting sound policy at national level.

For further information

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