

# Caerphilly Homes **Private Sector** **Empty Homes Strategy 2023-2028**



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## Foreword



**Cllr Shayne Cook**

Cabinet Member for Housing

Caerphilly County Borough Council understands the wide range of issues empty properties present for local communities; laid against the backdrop of a national housing crisis. As well as becoming a magnet for anti-social behaviour, empty homes are a waste of valuable resources at a time when we're seeing an ever increasing need for housing.

This strategy sets out our commitment to prevent and tackle empty homes, by supporting owners to bring them back into beneficial use. We also recognise, however, that sometimes we must take enforcement action to address some properties. Formal enforcement action is always a last resort and this document sets out when and how this will be taken.

This Empty Homes Strategy has been developed in conjunction with a number of other housing strategies and policies which, together, set out our vision to ensure everyone has access to a safe, secure home in sustainable communities where people choose to live.

**This strategy sets out our commitment to prevent and tackle empty homes...**



## 1. Introduction and Overview

This strategy sets out the Council's plans to tackle the high number of empty homes. It also sets out the range of initiatives available to the Council to help owners bring their empty homes back into use. This strategy only refers to private sector empty homes and does not extend to empty homes within Caerphilly's own housing stock or those owned by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)

Private sector empty homes represent a wasted resource, an ongoing financial expense, and in many cases a missed opportunity to provide much-needed affordable housing. They can also cause blight to communities and distress to residents affected by their unsightly appearance if the property has been left in a poor state of repair.

This can attract vandals, squatters, unauthorised occupiers, and other crime and anti-social behaviour. They can impact on the value of neighbouring properties and incur significant costs to the Council, Police, Fire Authority, and Community Safety Partnerships dealing with the associated problems.

Extensive academic research has shown that poor quality housing is a key determinant of poor health. Tackling empty homes and bringing them up to standard will play an important role in promoting and contributing to positive health and well-being for the residents of Caerphilly County Borough, a key priority of the Council. Caerphilly County Borough Council is committed to working with empty property owners and prospective owners to encourage them to bring their properties back into beneficial use and where possible, prevent properties from becoming empty in the first instance.

According to the CCBC council tax data on the 1st of April 2022, the number of properties that had been empty for 6 months or more was 1,314.

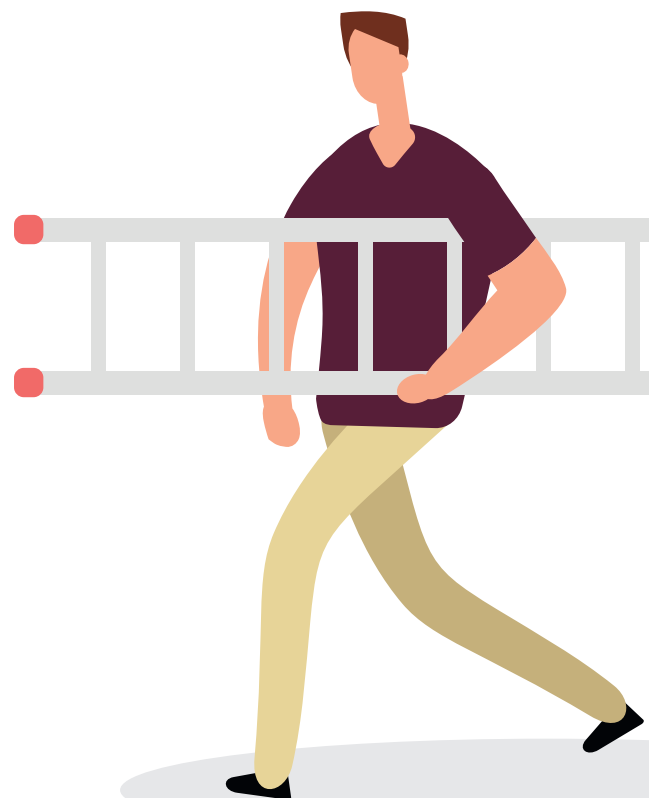
In response to addressing this Welsh Government priority and the high number of empty homes in the county borough, the Council has recently established a specialist team within Private Sector Housing tasked with proactively working with owners of privately owned empty properties.

If an owner is uncooperative or obstructive the Council will consider using the wide range of formal enforcement action available to bring the property back into beneficial use.

Formal enforcement action is always a last resort, but the Council believes that leaving properties stand empty for long periods when there is a shortage of housing in the County Borough to meet the needs of our communities is not acceptable.

The main objective of this strategy is to maximise the number of empty homes brought back into use.

Therefore, doing nothing is not an option.



## 2. National and Local Context

### 2.1. NATIONAL PRIORITIES

Welsh Government acknowledges the benefits of returning empty homes to use. In October 2019, the Welsh Government responded to a report from the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee on Empty Properties, 2019, committing to tackling empty properties. The Empty Property paper contained a number of recommendations. The Paper set a target of bringing 5,000 empty homes back into occupation across Wales during the fifth Assembly term. [Link to Welsh Government website - Empty properties \(senedd.wales\)](https://www.senedd.wales).

The Council supports Welsh Government's focus on returning empty homes back into beneficial use and have developed an action plan. The action plan sets out the aims and objectives of how the Council will implement some of Welsh Government's recommendations and tackle empty properties within the Borough. The action plan has been submitted and approved by Welsh Government. The action plan supports the implementation of this strategy.

The actions set out within this strategy will assist in helping the Council achieve the goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. The seven key goals are as follows:

- **A Prosperous Wales:** bringing empty homes back into use will be financially beneficial to the community as a whole.
- **A Resilient Wales:** bringing empty homes back into use will help promote and support social and economic resilience.
- **A More Equal Wales:** the beneficial use of empty homes can help tackle homelessness issues and provide good quality housing for vulnerable persons.

- **A Healthier Wales:** poor quality housing is a key determinant of poor health. Improving the housing stock will have a positive effect on health and well-being.
- **A Wales of Cohesive Communities:** tackling empty homes will positively impact the community as a whole in terms of helping to reduce anti-social behaviour and improving the general amenity of an area.



- **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language:** tackling empty homes will assist in improving and maintaining the cultural heritage of Caerphilly County Borough. The production of bilingual documentation associated with empty homes will help to promote and further the Welsh language.
- **A Globally Responsible Wales:** Whilst empty homes in Wales don't directly impact on the global scale tackling them and making use of a wasted resource will improve the area as a whole and potentially lead to investment in schemes and projects designed to make a positive contribution to global wellbeing.



## Implementation of the strategy will result in significant visual improvements...

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 also sets out 5 ways of working that should be adhered to.

These are as follows:

- **Long-Term:** Housing is a long-term asset. The return to beneficial use of empty homes will have significant long-term benefits to individuals and communities, safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their long-term needs.
- **Integration:** Empty homes negatively affect economic and social health and wellbeing so tackling this issue will help improve these key issues in a wider context. The strategy looks to integrate property and community improvements that will benefit and transform lives and communities, bringing together a variety of stakeholders to deliver long term sustainable benefits for lives and communities
- **Involvement:** This strategy identifies how the Council will work in unison with stakeholders and members of the community to tackle empty homes and will aim to help meet the needs of specific communities.
- **Collaboration:** This strategy sets out a plan of how the Council will work with stakeholders and other bodies to achieve its aims and objectives.
- **Prevention:** This strategy aims to tackle the current issues associated with empty homes, prevent further issues from developing and make significant improvements for the benefit of the residents of Caerphilly County Borough. Implementation of the strategy will result in significant visual improvements to housing and their surrounding environments (improved the look and feel) helping to prevent anti-social behaviour and enviro-crime.

## 2.2. LOCAL DELIVERY CONTEXT

A detailed action plan has been developed to support the successful delivery of this strategy's priorities (*Annex1, page 17*).

The Council has over £2m funding available for home improvement loans which can be used to support owners to bring empty homes back into use. The number of empty properties bought into use by direct action historically has been relatively low, typically 36 properties per year. However, with a dedicated specialist team in place we expect the number to increase significantly.

The Council wants to explore a range of alternative models for empty property owners who either want to repair, privately rent or sell their property.

By targeting empty homes and bringing them back into use we hope to:

- Improve the environment around the empty homes and reduce associated incidences of anti-social behaviour.
- Increase the supply of housing and the affordability of housing.
- Improve housing conditions in the private sector; and
- Assist in the promotion of the good health and wellbeing of people living in the private sector.

## 2.3. HOUSING NEEDS WITHIN CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH

The Council recognises the difficulties residents face when trying to find a good quality, affordable home. There is extreme pressure on the housing market throughout the Borough from increased demand on the homelessness team, a long waiting list on the Common Housing Register, unaffordable private sector housing, and a shortage of affordable housing, especially for those most in need such as first-time buyers.

This has been exacerbated by the cost of living crisis, changes to the assumed asylum dispersal arrangements and the

war in Ukraine.

We know from analysing key data sources and from monitoring access to Council services that many people continue to struggle to access good quality, affordable accommodation throughout the county borough. The cost of owning or privately renting a home continues to increase year on year, exacerbating the affordability issue further.

There are currently over 6,000 applications on the Council's Common Housing Register from people requiring social housing: a significant increase in the number of applications on the previous year. There has also been an increase in the number of people seeking homelessness assistance from the Council and requiring temporary accommodation to alleviate their situation.

Increasing the supply of accommodation in the Borough by returning empty homes back into use will help the Council mitigate some of these housing pressures.



## 3. Understanding Empty Properties

### 3.1 WHY PROPERTIES BECOME EMPTY

We know from supporting empty property owners that their homes may become empty for a variety of different reasons including:

- The normal process of buying, selling, and letting properties (market churn).
- A property that is difficult to rent or sell due to its physical state, requiring renovation beyond the budget of the owner.
- A property that is difficult to rent or sell due to location, poor facilities, infrastructure, etc.
- When the property has been abandoned by an untraceable owner.
- When there is an issue of unresolved ownership, often as a result of the previous owners' death. Resolving ownership can be a lengthy legal process, during which time the property may remain empty.
- Property holding, when a property is left empty due to speculative investment, through acquiring property through inheritance, or where partners co-habit leaving the second property empty. Where the property is adjoined to a business and the owner does not wish to sell or let it.
- Due to an aging population, older property owners may move into alternative older person's accommodation for care or support needs. They may choose not to sell the property which can result in it remaining empty for the short or long term.

**The main focus of the strategy is to effectively plan the use of resources available...**

### 3.2 DEFINING EMPTY PROPERTIES

The main focus of the strategy is to effectively plan the use of resources available to the Council to help the owners of long-term empty residential properties bring their homes back into use. Long-term empty property is defined as private sector residential properties that are liable for Council Tax and have been unoccupied for 6 months or more on the 1st of April. The definition is taken from the Welsh Local Government Association's revised set of national performance measures known as Public Accountability Measures (PAM). Measuring local authority performance 2018-19 - Data Cymru. Welsh Government is currently working with Data Cymru in reviewing the PAM criteria. The definition of an empty property and monitoring requirement under this strategy will need to adapt in line with any nationally agreed amendments.

### 3.3 MONITORING PERFORMANCE

The Council's performance regarding empty homes is currently measured using two parameters:

- PAM 13 is defined as the percentage of empty private sector properties brought back into use during the financial year through direct action by the local authority.
- PAM 45 is defined as the number of additional dwellings created when a property is sub-divided into additional dwellings to bring it back into use.

Information collected by Data Cymru through the PAMs is very important to enable local authorities to give an account of their performance to the public. It is important to also recognise the value providing additional dwellings through conversion has on increasing the housing stock within the Caerphilly county borough.



### 3.4 PROBLEMATIC EMPTY PROPERTY CLASSED AS SECOND HOMES OR OUT OF VALUATION

Caerphilly Council Tax department classification requires that furnished empty properties are classed as second homes. Therefore, second homes are not defined as empty and are very difficult to target. Some of these 'Second homes' are the most problematic long-term empty properties and negatively impact neighbouring properties and the surrounding community. Should the empty property team believe that the property is a true empty property and causing a significant problem without a willing owner, action could be taken to bring the property back into use.

Some empty properties are considered uninhabitable and taken out of valuation. Therefore, the Council Tax department holds no details of these properties, which are likely to be some of the worst condition properties. Although exempt from the PAM definition the importance of dealing with these homes is recognised. Although not considered to be empty properties bought back into use for performance purposes, they will be classed as additional dwellings.

### 3.5 INCREASING HOUSING SUPPLY

Increasing housing supply is a key priority of the Council. This not only includes bringing an existing property back into use as a home but also maximising the potential of the property in providing additional homes. The empty property team will offer support and work with other relevant departments such as regeneration, planning and building control to support the residential element of any mixed use development or any change of use from commercial to residential to provide additional homes.

### 3.6 CHALLENGES WITH BRINGING EMPTY PROPERTIES BACK TO USE

There are many challenges involved with bringing empty homes back into use including:

- Being unable to cover the cost of making the property habitable or saleable.
- Inheriting the property but the new owner not having the resources, time, or motivation to deal with it.
- Property is up for sale or being repaired.
- Inherited the property but have not decided what to do with it.
- Some empty properties are left completely abandoned by the owner. These properties will remain empty until the authority intervenes.

Tackling empty properties takes time. Although there may be some quick wins, through building rapport, reputation and momentum in offering incentives and taking meaningful enforcement action. Some difficult cases can take several years to resolve.



## 4. Bringing Empty Properties Back Into Use

### 4.1 EMPTY PROPERTY ACTION PLAN

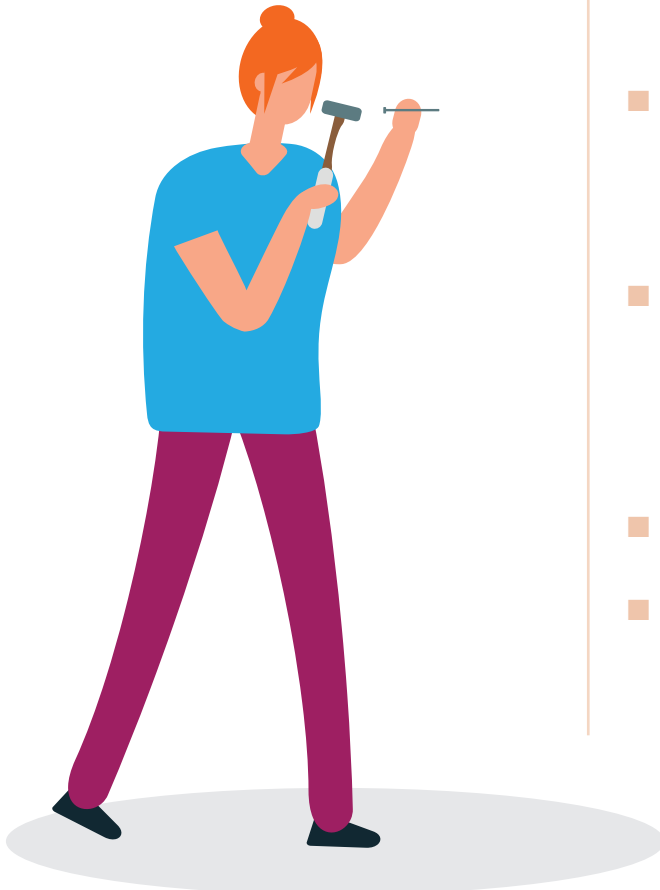
The overall aim of the Empty Property Action Plan (Annex 1) is to maximise the return to beneficial use of empty properties within Caerphilly County Borough thereby increasing the number of homes available to both rent and own, improving the built environment, decreasing the number of both vacant and underutilised sites as well as supporting diversification of town centres.

The Empty Property Action Plan identifies key actions required to meet the 3 objectives to achieve the Council's aim.

**Objective 1:** Promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers/ developers.

**Objective 2:** Prioritisation and target approach in addressing empty properties.

**Objective 3:** Take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties.



### 4.2 SPECIALIST TEAM APPROACH

Having a specialist team focusing on bringing empty properties back into use is an essential aspect of achieving the Action Plan's ambitious aim and meet the Council's priorities, as outlined in section 1.

The benefits of a specialist team approach include:

- Maximisation of the return of empty properties back into beneficial use thereby increasing the supply and quality of accommodation within the county borough.
- Dedicated staff resources to progress empty homes work programme - including both proactive and reactive work.
- Increasing opportunities to address unmet housing need, including homelessness and demand.
- Addressing the strategic objectives identified in the Council's Local Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing Renewal policy in so far as they relate to empty properties.
- Delivering financial support to empty homeowners in relation to local grants/ loans as well as national products, such as VTF - links to supporting employment regarding contractors etc.
- Delivering on WG 5 year Empty Property Enforcement Agenda. Financial benefit to the authority in recovering existing debt already owned through unpaid council taxes, social service intervention and/or works in default.
- Ensuring rates are payable for the property going forward.
- Assisting council tax department to keep accurate data and find liable persons ensuring they maximise their revenue.

## ...bringing empty properties back into use is an essential aspect of achieving the Action Plan's ambitious aim

- Assisting other departments with empty property engagement and finding ownership details, carry out works in default and ensure a long-term solution to avoid the need for their long-term involvement.
- Helping economic growth of an area by increasing population spending in local shops, attending education and as such helping regenerate areas.
- Reducing waste of resources and cost to the authority when officers from various departments attending site to deal with antisocial behaviours and problematic empties.
- Improving community cohesion, and general visual amenity.
- Co-production, co-ordination and joint implementation of strategies and initiatives, with internal and external partners, for the return to beneficial use of empty homes and non-residential properties.
- Development of relevant partnerships and initiatives to enable sustainable solutions for empty property owners, including working proactively with internal departments such as Council tax, Legal and Planning as well as external organisation such as the Police and Registered Social landlords working closely with regeneration officers to enable empty residential and non-residential properties to be brought back into use, as part of strategic town centre improvements and for other key regeneration initiatives.
- Full utilisation of grant and loan funding streams. Maximising financial investment opportunities in the County Borough.
- Provision of centralised support, advice, and assistance to anyone involved with empty properties.



## 5. Promote and Educate Empty Home Owners and Stakeholders

### 5.1 MAXIMISING EVERY OPPORTUNITY FOR SUPPORT

Providing initiatives that offer empty homeowners various options to bring their properties back into use is vital. The team will work closely and assist where necessary to ensure every initiative and funding opportunity provided by Welsh Government, the Council and third-party organisations is maximised. The team will also signpost owners effectively to access any funding or opportunities available.

### 5.2 PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

It is vitally important that the empty property team works with owners and stakeholders providing as much help, assistance, and education as possible to encourage owners to bring their properties back into use informally. The team has already developed a strong branding to promote their works in bringing empty back into use. 'Caerphilly: No Use Empty' will be used to promote the service and encourage owners to engage.

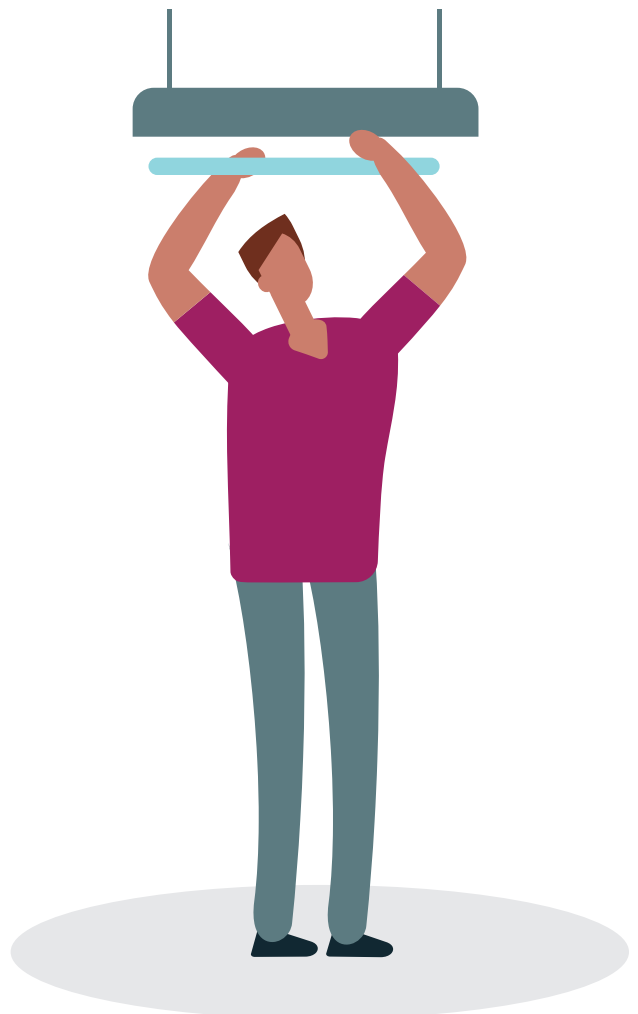
Other actions the Council are undertaken to help increase the number of empty homes returned to use include:

- Empty Property Information Pack to inform and support empty property owners has been developed.
- Created a Caerphilly- No Use Empty dedicated website.
- The Empty Property Team will regularly present at Landlord forum meeting to keep landlord updated.
- Social media campaigns to promote the work within the empty property team and raise awareness around empty properties.
- Engage with stakeholders including local estate agents and auction houses property investors and landlords.
- Collaborative working with other council departments.

- Technical support and advice to landlords.
- Partnership working with Caerphilly Keys.
- Working with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

### 5.3 INCENTIVISING OWNERS

The Council has various products available to assist empty homeowners and provides financial assistance by offering interest-free loans to the value of £35,000 for up to a maximum of 10 years for owner occupation and 5 years for rent. The Council will also actively seek to maximise any available financial opportunities, such as the provision of grant assistance when available, by working in partnership with external organisations to help owners with repairing and bringing empty properties back into use.



## 6. Prioritisation and Targeted Approach to Tackling Empty Properties

### 6.1 EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH

The team uses Council Tax data to identify properties that have been vacant for 6 months or more from the 1st of April each year. The data is cleansed to remove the properties that are exempt under the PAM definition. Using the list ensures a strategic approach to the targeting of empty homes for intervention.

### 6.2 EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES

A two-pronged approach is used by the team to ensure the most effective use of resources:

1. Support and encourage recently empty homes back into use, preventing them from becoming problematic empty properties:

- Properties that are recently empty, less than 24 months.

2. Tackle problematic empty properties:

- Properties that have been empty the longest: 10 years +, 5-10 years, and 2-5 years.
- Properties that are problematic and subject to complaints.
- Properties with the largest debt owing to the authority including works in default debt and council tax debt.
- Properties without ownership details under council tax.

The Council is mindful of fluctuations in the housing market and the need for the prioritisation criteria to be flexible to adapt over the life of the strategy to address changes in priorities, local needs, and Welsh Government financial products.

### 6.3 MAPPING EMPTY PROPERTIES

Going forward the empty homes data will be 'mapped' making it easier to identify patterns/trends or concentrated areas

where more empty properties may be situated. Mapping will allow the team to analyse this data to further develop the prioritisation system.

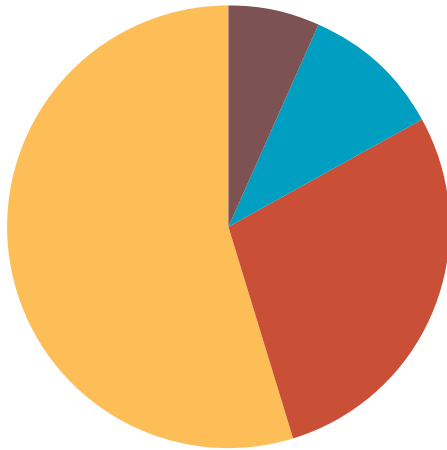
### 6.4 CURRENT BREAKDOWN OF EMPTY HOMES WITHIN CCBC

Understanding the empty home data is vital when deciding the prioritisation criteria for targeting properties. As shown below over half of our empties have been empty for 2 years or less. Therefore, it is vital that these are considered swiftly to establish whether they are being actively addressed through the market and to prevent them from becoming long-term, problematic empties. Some properties within the 10+ year category have been empty for several decades. It is very unlikely that these empty properties will be returned to use without intervention from the Council and will therefore likely require enforcement action.



## NUMBER OF YEARS AN EMPTY HOME HAS BEEN EMPTY

### Breakdown of the Length of Time Empty



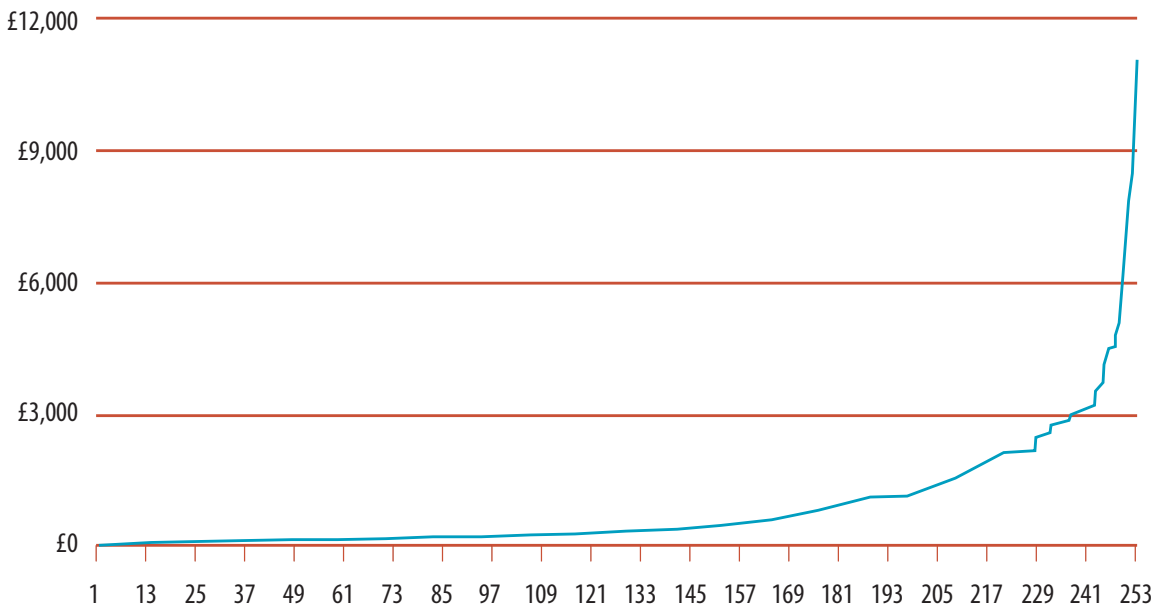
- 10+ years
- 5-10 years
- 2-10 years
- 2 years or less

10+ years	89
5-10 years	136
2-10 years	370
2 years or less	719
<b>Total</b>	<b>1314</b>

(Caerphilly council tax data 2022)

April 2022, Council Tax data shows that 261 empty homes owe a total of £223,364 in Council Tax payments to the Council. Bringing these properties back into use

will not only provide more revenue going forward to help fund essential council services but also help to reduce the level of debt already owed.



**Council Tax data shows that 261 empty homes owe a total of £223,364...**

Council Tax has no contact details for 72 empty home owners. Therefore, tracing these owners is paramount to ensure the owners pay the relevant council tax debts and bring the property back into use.



## 6.5 EMPTY PROPERTY COMPLAINTS

The Council must encourage the community and neighbours of empty homes to report any concerns or problems any empty home is causing. The aim is to make it easy to report concerns using a 'complaint about empties' enquiry form on the dedicated website

In addition to receiving direct complaints, the empty property team carry out joint investigations with Private Sector Housing (PSH) Environmental Health Officers to investigate complaints from neighbours of empty homes who are experiencing issues such as dampness, mould, defecting guttering, or overgrown gardens. From April 2021 to September 2022 there have been 35 empty property complaints regarding empty properties that have

been received and investigated. The team also offers support to other departments dealing with an empty properties such as the Environmental Health and Building Control. When investigating a complaint, the team will not only address the immediate issue subject to the complaint but also use the service request as an opportunity to engage with the owners to find a long-term solution to bring the property back into use. Any owners unwilling to work informally to resolve issues will be subject to enforcement action where applicable.

The team will also support another department to overcome any issues with carrying out works in default where necessary and recover the debt on their behalf.

## 7. A Two Prong Approach to Tackling Empty Homes

### 7.1 PREVENTING PROPERTIES FROM BECOMING PROBLEMATIC EMPTY HOMES

Over half of the empty homes within Caerphilly county borough have been empty for less than 24 months; therefore, the empty property team recognises the benefit of early intervention to support and encourage owners of properties that has only recently become empty. This will help ensure the property is not left to deteriorate, becoming a problematic empty. The owners of these properties will be contacted by the empty property team, giving them the advice pack and asking them to contact the team to confirm their intentions in bringing the property back into use. The team will take the opportunity to discuss the support and options available to help the owner. The team will also agree a reasonable timeframe with the owner for action to be taken.

### 7.2 TACKLING PROBLEMATIC EMPTY PROPERTIES

It is important to recognise that taking enforcement action is very time-consuming and will require significant resourcing. Therefore, it is important to choose the most problematic properties to take forward for formal action such as enforcement. This will be done by carrying out a risk assessment of all priority properties.

### 7.3 RISK ASSESSMENTS

A Risk Assessment Inspection Form (annex 2) has been developed by the empty property team to prioritise which properties are escalated for enforcement consideration. For example, all homes empty for 10+ years have already been assessed and the impact the property is having on the local and wider community identified. The Risk assessment form provides a scoring of high, medium, and low. The highest priority empty homes

will be proactively addressed initially. All properties that have scored high will be escalated to the Housing Environmental Health Officer to see if any enforcement action can be taken. It is important to recognise that due to the complexity of taking enforcement action the numbers will be low.

### 7.4 INITIAL ENGAGEMENT

In the first instance, the empty homeowner will be approached and offered advice, encouragement, support, and education on ways to bring their properties back into use. However, this strategy is clear that 'doing nothing is not an option'.

Where owners refuse to cooperate or cannot be traced the Council will not hesitate to use the range of enforcement powers available, as detailed below. This, where appropriate, should include the use of powers to carry out works in default and recover the debt.

### 7.5 TRACING OWNERS

One of the main problems encountered when dealing with empty properties is property ownership. In cases where the property owner cannot be traced there are various options available to attempt to trace the owner for example:

- Checking various data sources such as council tax data, Land Registry search and Probate search.
- Engaging with neighbours, councillors, and local community.
- Placing posters on the empty property and in local newspapers asking for contact.

The team will carry out all reasonable enquires to trace the owner or the person responsible for the property such as the next of kin. However, when the owner is untraceable all correspondence will be served on the empty property.



## 8. Potential Legal Remedies

### 8.1 DECIDING ON THE BEST CAUSE OF ACTION

When deciding to act against an empty home, it is important to consider the wider context of bringing the property back into use and the mechanisms in place to recover the debt. Certain legislation is more appropriate when considering enforced sales proceedings under the Law of Property Act 1925. Details of the Enforcement Action available is listed in Annex 3.

Some high-priority empty homes are in poor repair but may have an owner that ensures the property does not cause ongoing public health issues or pays off any small to medium debt registered

against the property. This type of situation makes it very difficult to find a long-term solution. It's important that this doesn't discourage the Council from dealing proactively with this type of property, but the risk of challenge and complexity involved should be acknowledged. If the owner is unwilling to engage or is untraceable, a legal warrant might be required to facilitate a housing inspection and to allow access for works in default if permitted via the legislation.

Please note this Action Plan has already been approved by Welsh Government. Therefore, does not form part of the consultation.

*Version 1: 17.9.21*



## Annex 1: Action Plan

### 1. OVERALL AIM OF PLAN

To maximise the return to beneficial use of empty properties within Caerphilly County Borough thereby increasing the number of homes available to both rent and owner occupy,

improving the built environment, decreasing the number of both vacant and underutilised sites as well as supporting diversification of town centres.

### 2. OBJECTIVES OF PLAN AND ASSOCIATED ACTIONS

**Objective 1: Promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers/developers**

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
<p>Funding will need to be secured to progress this action:</p> <p>Ensure up to date advice and information relating to empty properties is readily available.</p>	<p>Website development to form a 'mini empty properties website' to provide comprehensive information on the authorities stand on empty properties including the products available to assist in bringing empty properties back into beneficial use. The website will have links to signpost interested parties to relevant services. A 'contact me' function will also be built into the web page to encourage engagement.</p> <p>Information regarding the rules for Listed Building repair, maintenance, renovation and regeneration are different from those of non-listed depending on the listing Grade. Links to CADW will be included to provide online information to anyone interested in a Listed Building. Often Listed Building Consent is required if change to the building is more than repair and maintenance.</p>	<p>Empty Property Officer</p> <p>Caerphilly Keys Officer</p> <p>CCBC IT web specialist</p> <p>Placemaking &amp; Building Conservation Officer</p>	<p>Initial scoping exercise to understand web site and online form development to be held by October 2021.</p> <p>Forward work programme to be provided thereafter.</p>	<p>Scoping exercise to fully understand web site and online form development.</p> <p>Translation of web site content into Welsh language.</p> <p>Creation of live mini website.</p> <p>The number of visits to the website per month.</p> <p>The number of enquires received via the contact us function.</p>
<p>Funding will need to be secured to progress this action:</p> <p>Empty Residential Property Information Pack.</p>	<p>Production of an 'Empty Residential Property Information Pack' with key information on the products available to assist empty home owners/prospective purchasers including VAT information, loans, grants, renting, Caerphilly Keys and selling advice.</p> <p>This information will include access to grant information for the Heritage Lottery Fund and associated Heritage Grant websites for the renovation and regeneration of Listed Buildings. Cadw's information for residential property owners would be included here as they have information specific to renovating residential properties.</p>	<p>Empty Property Officer</p> <p>Placemaking &amp; Building Conservation Officer</p>	<p>November 2021</p> <p>October 2021</p>	<p>Production of Empty residential Property Information Pack.</p> <p>Number of Empty Residential Property Packs issued.</p> <p>Number of Packs downloaded from the website.</p>
<p>Media releases engagements and promotion.</p>	<p>Regular media releases such as news articles, tweets and Facebook post to promote the empty properties work including the support available and the empty property pack.</p>	<p>Empty Property Officer</p> <p>Principal Officer - Town Centres &amp; Business Support</p> <p>Communications Officer</p>	<p>Regular intervals</p>	

<b>Action</b> What are we going to do?	<b>What we will do</b> How are we going to do it?	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Monitoring Measure Target</b>
Maximise financial investment opportunities and utilise all available capital funding streams.	<p>Continue to offer, deliver and promote financial assistance to owners in respect of the interest-free loans and conversion grants.</p> <p>Explore and regularly review any other available funding streams such as external grant programmes when offered by Welsh Government.</p> <p>Publish all information relating to the availability of financial assistance on the 'mini empty properties website'.</p> <p>Regeneration and Planning will continue to bid for WG funding (such as Transforming Towns) to administer grant schemes and other interventions to bring long-term empty town centre properties back into beneficial use.</p> <p>Funding has been secured in the 2021/22 financial year for a town centre grant scheme that is due to launch in Q3. This will be aimed at town centre property improvements.</p> <p>The Regeneration team will also use CCBC's core-funded Caerphilly Enterprise Fund grant scheme to assist with town centre property improvements, although the scheme is very popular and is accessible to businesses/properties across the County Borough.</p> <p>Consider use of other capital funding such as Social Housing Grant to assist with the return to beneficial use of empties properties.</p> <p>Placemaking &amp; Building Conservation Officer to check on funding streams available as heritage grants and update relevant officer with information for the website.</p>	Principal Housing Officer - Communities Private Sector Housing Manager  Principal Officer - Town Centres & Business Support  Principal Housing Strategy Officer  Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	Regular reviews throughout the timeframe	Number of enquiries for financial assistance annually. Number of formal completions relating to financial assistance annually.  Number of properties returned to beneficial use annually.
To certify all Valley Taskforce (VTF) empty home grants.	Complete Phase 2 of the VTF programme. Ensure all associated properties are bought back into beneficial use.	Empty Property Technical Officer	Sept 2022	Number of completed VTF empty home grants. Number of properties that received VTF funding that are returned to beneficial use.
Developers list people who are interested in buying empty properties.	Invite all developers, landlords and investors who are interested in purchasing empty properties to be added onto a developers list. The list will then be provided to empty property owners interested in selling their properties privately.	Empty Property Officer	November 2021	Creation of developers list. Number of requests for list.
Work with local estate agencies and auction houses to offer discount products.	Engage with local auction houses and estate agents to negotiate a discount fee and favourable conditions for empty properties owner referred via LA.	Empty Property Officer	November 2021	Number of referrals made.
Offer technical support and advice on bringing an empty residential property back into use, including producing schedules of works, estimate costings and general technical advice.	Appoint Technical Officer. Visit to give property specific advice on the work required to bring the property to a reasonable standard and the estimated cost of the works. As Listed Buildings have different criteria the Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer should offer advice on Listed Buildings and establish if LBC is required.	Principal Housing Officer - Communities Technical Officer Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	Ongoing	Appointment of Technical Officer. Number of advice visits made.
Engage with Social Housing Stakeholders to discuss potential joint working schemes	Meet with all social housing providers working in Caerphilly County Borough to discuss ways to work together on projects to bring empty properties back into use. This will include Listed Buildings (where applicable).	Principal Housing Officer - Communities Empty Property Officer Business Enterprise Reviewal Team Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	Initial meeting by December 2021 Ongoing	Ongoing meeting programme.

**Objective 2: Prioritisation and target approach in addressing empty properties**

<b>Action</b> What are we going to do?	<b>What we will do</b> How are we going to do it?	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Monitoring Measure Target</b>
Partnership working with Caerphilly Keys to offer tenant/ owner matching scheme	Caerphilly Keys aims are to develop a pool of accessible quality, affordable private rented accommodation and to provide a long-term housing solution for homeless applicants. This should enable the Council to meet its obligations under part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to discharge the homeless duty by offering this accommodation to homeless or potentially homeless people.  To develop a user-friendly website for landlords.  To continue to work alongside Caerphilly Private Landlord Forum, and to provide a platform between PRS and CCBC.  To continue to develop positive working relationships with supporting people, DWP and other external agencies.	Housing Solutions Manager Caerphilly Keys Officer	On going	Target 2 properties per month. September 2021 ongoing.
Principal Town Centre Empty Property List	A survey will be undertaken across the principal town centres to identify long-term vacant properties along with details of the owners or agents. A history of each property will be compiled to try and target appropriate interventions going forward. Any listed Empty Buildings identified will be referred to the relevant officer.	Regeneration Officers Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	October 2021	Regular monitoring of the town centres will take place, with properties added or removed from the list as required.
Submit a Report to CMT and Cabinet for a decision to be made on how to take forward the Private Sector accommodation Pathway to meet the needs of those presenting to the Housing Solution Team.	Produce a report outlining the WG lease scheme proposal in comparison to Caerphilly Keys current PRS model and obtain a decision from CCBC on which model we will take forward and then incorporate this into our Rapid Rehousing transition plan.	Housing Solutions Manager	March 2022	Decision regarding the outcome of the report
Produce and implement an Empty Homes strategy.	Produce a comprehensive empty homes strategy linking in with all relevant existing strategies including the Local Housing Strategy and Regeneration Strategies. Including an Integrated Impact Assessment.  Information will be included regarding Empty Listed Residential Building.	Private Sector Housing Manager Principal Housing Officer - Communities Empty properties Officer Principal Officer - Town Centres & Business Support Business Enterprise Reviewal Team Principal Housing Strategy Officer Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	October 2022	Approved Empty homes Strategy.
Principal Town Centre Vacancy Action Plan	A survey has been undertaken across all principal town centres of long-term vacant properties. Officers in Regeneration & Planning will work with owners and/or agents of these properties to bring the properties back into beneficial use through grant schemes (where possible) or by assisting in identifying a tenant or meanwhile use.  Where applicable, notices may be served when the building is in an extremely poor or dangerous condition.	Planning & Building Control Officers Regeneration Officers	Owners will be contacted/ notices served in Q3 21/22	Number of grants administered to long-term vacant property owners.  Number of properties brought back into beneficial use through targeted intervention.

<b>Action</b> What are we going to do?	<b>What we will do</b> How are we going to do it?	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Monitoring Measure Target</b>
Analyse the council tax data to fully understand the extent of the empty homes problem within the borough.	Develop a comprehensive list of all empty homes within the Borough looking at several categorisations such as location, level of relevant debts, housing need and number of years home has been empty.  Spatially map the data to assist with a strategic targeted approach moving forward.  Visual street survey of key town centres to improve intelligence .	Council tax officer Empty Property Officer Empty Property Admin Officer Principal Housing Strategy Officer	December 2021	Development of comprehensive list of empty homes within the Borough.  Spatially mapping of data  Identification of properties having negative impact.  Identification of properties that offer opportunities for mixed tenure schemes.
Agree prioritisation criteria of empty properties.	Agree on the criteria used to prioritise empty properties.	Principal Housing Officer - Communities Empty Property Officer Principal Officer - Town Centres & Business Support	December 2021	Agreed Prioritisation tool.
Use the data to identify a priority list of properties to target proactively	Prioritisation of the data to identify high priority empties to target to bring back to beneficial use properties in relation to housing need and council tax revenue.  Colleagues in Strategic Planning undertake an annual town centre vacancy survey that will be used to monitor/identify/assess long-term vacant commercial properties.  The Regeneration team also keep a list of vacant properties through regular visits to the town centres as part of the town centre management function. This list is discussed in meetings with local agents, which are intended to minimise vacancies and attract tenants to suitable properties.	Empty Property Officer   Principal Officer - Town Centres & Business Support	Ongoing from January 2022.	Identification / list of target properties
Commercial and residential - Key town centre joint street view surveys to highlight target mix	Identify key empty properties having negative impact on town centres and street scene.  Listed Buildings to be included (where applicable).	Empty Property Officer Principal Officer - Town Centres & Business Support Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	Commencing November 2021	List of key empty properties having negative impact on town centres and street scene.
Proactively target the priority empty properties identified in action 5.	Use the information collected to send initial letters, questionnaires and empty property packs. Target a manageable number of 20-30 per month working down the priority list. Follow up letters to be sent to any that don't respond before escalating to the officer for further intervention.	Admin + Empty Property Officer	Ongoing from January 2022	Response to questionnaire. Engagement and number of properties returned back to use.
Target properties that have recently fallen into the empty property criteria to prevent them becoming long term empties.	Soft approach mail drop with Empty Property Pack to all empty property owners within in the 6–12-month empty bracket to prevent them becoming long term empty Information and advice action only.	Admin Empty Property Officer Empty Property Officer Empty Technical Officer	May 2022	Number of letters sent.  Number of engagements.
Vacant Property Projects - Bargoed	Funding is being identified via Welsh Government for 2021/22 to develop meanwhile uses or make strategic property acquisitions in Bargoed town centre. These schemes will not only look to reduce the number of long-term vacancies in Bargoed, but also assess suitability of potential schemes for other town centres. CCBC will be contributing £100k to this programme to carry out works in default if owners do not comply with enforcement notices.	Regeneration Officers	2021/22	Number of properties brought back into beneficial use.  Interventions and processes used in Bargoed targeted approach will be developed/refined for repetition in other town centres as required.

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
Ensure a corporate approach to bring empties back into use. Co-ordinate the activity of the Local Authority across all departments to ensure that there is a unified and effective approach to deal with the empty properties.	Meet all relevant departments within the authority to highlight the work ongoing in the empty property team. Promoting what the team can do to assist them, highlighting the benefits of bringing an empty property back into use on the whole community including how it can help their specific area of work.  Establish a Caerphilly Empty Property Group with all internal stakeholder to ensure continual engagement.	Principal Housing Officer - Communities to Chair  Empty Property Officer	Oct 2021 -Continually every 3 months	Establishment of corporate Empty Property working group.
Ensure engagement and input from external stakeholders.	Establish an external working group with relevant third sector stakeholders such as police and fire authority.	Principal Housing officer - Communities Empty Property Officer	Date of initial meeting Jan 2022 Continually - every 4 months	Establishment of external working group.

**Objective 3: Take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties**

Carrot and stick approach with any owners that fail to engage informally with the proactive contact are escalated to a more direct action.  Targeted intervention on long-term vacant commercial properties, especially in Bargoed town centre.	Ensure that all owners that fail to respond to the initial contact letters are escalated for further intervention such as site visits to assess any action that can be taken under the relevant legislation.  Case conference approach with colleagues to identify most appropriate type of enforcement intervention.  Take a risk assessment approach to prioritise enforcement action.  A Placemaking or Heritage Award may be considered for Listed Empty Buildings that are regenerated and repurposed successfully.  A list has been compiled of long-term vacant commercial properties in our town centres. Officers will now work with the owners/agents of the properties to bring them back into beneficial use through:  Grant funding to increase the viability of potential development schemes.  Identifying potential tenants.  Identifying potential meanwhile uses.  Serving enforcement notices where properties in a particularly bad or dangerous condition.	Empty Property officer Technical Officer EHO Planning Officers Building Control Officers Regeneration Officers Placemaking & Building Conservation Officer	As required/ necessary	Number of site visits completed. Number of notices served. Enforcement Action taken.
Investigate all reactive complaints received regarding empty properties.	Investigate all complaints received regarding empty properties and take every opportunity to work with the owner to address the ongoing concerns and agree a way of bringing the property back into use where appropriate on a case conference approach. Identify the most appropriate type of intervention.  Complaints in relation to commercial properties are assessed initially as to whether the building is dangerous and if notices should be served or emergency work done in default. Officers will attempt to work with the owners to bring them back into beneficial use.	Empty Property Officer EHO Planning & Regeneration officers Building Control Officers Environmental Health Officers Technical Officers	As required	No of complaints received regarding empty homes.
Engage with all departments to ensure all enforcement action on empty properties is highlighted and debts recovered.	Ensure that any engagement or work in default taken on an empty property is reported to the empty property team to ensure the debt recovery. Consider enforce sale for any that fail to pay.	Principal Housing Officer - Communities  Empty Property Officer	Ongoing	Meet with all relevant department to discuss working practice.  All WID highlighted to Empty Property Office.  Request information on empty properties with outstanding debts every four months.  Number of cases where debts are recovered informally.

<b>Action</b> What are we going to do?	<b>What we will do</b> How are we going to do it?	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Monitoring Measure Target</b>
Ensure effective debt recovering mechanism for all work in default via Enforce Sale route.	Implement the Enforce Sale policy and procedure to recover outstanding debt via the enforce sale.	Principal Housing Officer Planning Officers Legal Officers	As required	Identification of properties with relevant debt to move forward with enforced sale procedure. Number of successful enforce sales. Amount of debt recovered.
Promote all successful enforcement action to highlight the authority position on empty properties.	Work with the authority's communication department to ensure that success stories are highlighted through various media outlet.	Principal Housing officer - Communities Empty Property Officer EHO Communication Officer	Regular intervals	Number of articles and cases to promote.







<b>11. Garden condition</b>	
Satisfactory	0
Some overgrowth	10
Very overgrown	30

<b>12. Waste present</b>	
No	0
Yes	40

<b>13. Length of time vacant</b>	
Less than 1 year	0
1-3 years	5
3-6 years	10
Over 6 years	20

<b>14. Structural condition</b>	
Good	0
Average with minor defects	5
Poor with several defects	15
Very poor with major defects	30
Dangerous and potentially unstable	40

<b>15. Property appearance / visual impact on area</b>	
Good, no impact	0
Average, no major impact	5
Poor, Some impact	15
Very poor, Detrimental to area	30
Extremely poor, eyesore and blight on area	40

<b>16. Security and anti-social impact</b>	
Secure, no anti-social behaviour	0
Secure with evidence of some anti-social behaviour	5
Insecure, no anti-social behaviour	10
Insecure with evidence of some anti-social behaviour	15
Evidence of criminal and serious anti-social behaviour	40

<b>17. Enforcement history</b>	
None	0
Complaints received	5
Numerous complaints received	10
LA action but no WID	15
LA enforcement action WID/prosecution	80

<b>18. Property type</b>	
Detached	0
Semi-detached	5
End terrace	5
Mid terrace	10
Flat	15

<b>Total score</b>	
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<b>Low: 0-50</b>	<b>Medium: 55-75</b>	<b>High: 80+</b>
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## APPENDIX 2: GUIDANCE NOTES ON RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

### 11. Garden Condition

1. **Satisfactory:** Garden maintained in a reasonable condition.
2. **Some overgrowth:** Garden showing some overgrowth but appeared to be maintained intermittently. Not effecting neighbouring property.
3. **Very Overgrown:** Garden left to grow wild with no or little maintenance. Overgrowth effecting neighbourhood properties. Providing Harbours for pest. Present of invasive plants such as Japanese Knotweed. **Referral needed to district environmental health officers (EHO) for further action.**

### 12. Waste Present

1. **No:** No evidence of waste present at the property excluding building material.
2. **Yes:** Presence of waste such as household waste, soft furniture, sofas, mattresses, food waste, littering and general rubbish etc. **Referral needed to the housing EHO for further action.**

### 14. Structural Condition

1. **Good:** Property in good condition.
2. **Average with Minor Defects:** Minor issues such as rotten windows/doors etc.
3. **Poor with several notable defects:** Defect such as leaking/ damaged rainwater goods, cracked and damaged render etc. **Referral needed to district EHO if affecting neighbouring properties.**
4. **Very Poor with major defects:** Broken windows, damaged roof, falling elements etc. **Possible referral needed to Building Control Department, if significant, or Housing Environmental Health Officer if effecting neighbouring properties.**
5. **Dangerous and potentially structurally unstable:** Collapsing elements, signs of movement etc. **Urgent Referral needed to the building control department.**

### 15. Property Appearance/ Visual Impact on Area

1. **Good, No Impact:** Property looks acceptable, struggling to identify as empty.
2. **Average no major Impact:** Property can be identified as empty upon close inspection.
3. **Poor, some impact:** Property is clearly empty with issues such unkempt/untidy front or rear yard/gardens.
4. **Very poor, detrimental to area:** Property is having a visual impact on the area as a whole due to a number of severe issues.
5. **Extremely poor:** Property is derelict and is in such a poor condition it is a focal point for the area. **Referral to Planning Department.**





## Annex 3: Enforcement Options Available to Tackle Empty Properties

The main legislation used to deal with empty homes through enforcement action is as follows:

### **Environmental Protection Act 1990**

Abatement Notices can be served under section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in respect of statutory nuisances caused by a property's structure or associated land.

### **Prevention Of Damage By Pests Act 1949**

Section 4 of the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 enables the Council to serve Notices on the owner or occupier of the land to ensure the premises are free from rodents.

### **Building Act 1984**

The Building Act 1984 can be used to deal with several different situations where there is a building defect.

### **Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982**

Section 29 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 enables the Council to undertake works on an unoccupied property to secure it against unauthorised entry.

### **Town And Country Planning Act 1990**

Where an owner fails to maintain their property and its condition is considered to be detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood, the Local Authority can serve a Notice on the owner requiring work to be carried out to improve its appearance.

### **Housing Act 2004, Part 1: The Housing, Health And Safety Rating System (HHSRS)**

The Housing Act 2004 stipulates the requirement of a housing inspection and completing an HHSRS which is a risk assessment of 29 defined hazards that may be found in a property.

### **The Law Of Property Act 1925: Enforced Sale**

Where there is a financial charge of over £500 owed for works in default of certain legal notices detailed above and recorded on the Local Land Charges Register; the Local Authority can take action under the Law of Property Act 1925 to enforce the sale to recover our debts.

### **Housing Act 1985: Compulsory Purchase Orders**

Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 enables Local Authorities to compulsorily purchase a property for the provision of a housing accommodation.

### **Housing Act 1985: Demolition Orders**

Section 265 of the Housing Act 1985 allows the Local Authority to make a demolition order.

### **Housing Act 2004: Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)**

Part 4, Chapter 2 of the Housing Act 2004 allows the Local Authority, on approval by an Independent Residential Property Tribunal, to take over the day-to-day management of a property with the view to taking steps to ensure the property becomes, and continues to be, occupied. An Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) gives the Local Authority possession of the property without taking ownership.

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg, ac mewn ieithoedd a fformatau eraill ar gais.  
This document is available in Welsh, and in other languages and formats on request.

