

Empty Property Policy

Bath and North East Somerset Council's policy to bring empty properties back into use

July 2013



This document explains how Bath and North East Somerset Council will bring empty properties back into use.

Empty Property Policy

Bringing empty properties back into use

2013

This policy sets out how Housing Services will work to bring empty properties back into use. This policy contributes to the Housing and Wellbeing Strategy.

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Complaints, comments and compliments

Bath and North East Somerset Council is committed to providing a quality service. To help us we welcome comments, suggestions, feedback, complaints and compliments from anyone to whom we provide a service.

We want to provide good quality services but sometimes things can go wrong. If this happens we need to know so that we can put it right and learn from the experience. In the first instance please speak to a Housing Standards and Improvement Team Leader who will try to resolve the concern. Alternatively or if a person is not satisfied with the response, Housing Services have a complaints policy available through our website www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/housing/strategy-and-performance

By phone: 01225 396444 or by email: Housing@bathnes.gov.uk or online: www.bathnes.gov.uk or writing to us at:

Housing Services

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Introduction

This policy sets out how Housing Services will work to bring empty properties back into use. This policy contributes to the Housing and Wellbeing Strategy.

Bringing empty properties back into use can achieve a number of benefits including:



Housing Services will use the following twin track approach to bring empty properties back into use:



Housing Services will respond to complaints about empty properties as detailed on page - 8 - Complaints about empty properties

It should be noted that since the introduction of the original Empty Property Policy, approved in 2011, over 100 properties have been brought back into use, as recorded by Council Tax records. To date this has generated the following New Homes Bonus funding for the Council:

Financial Year	New Homes Bonus
2011/12	£193,979
2012/13	£333,104

From 2013/14 this historic activity will continue to contribute to at least £527,083 p.a. of New Homes Bonus funding during the life of the scheme.

Prioritising resources

Experience shows that most properties are empty less than 2 years are re-occupied with minimal intervention from the Council. As such, and also to allow for alignment with the council tax scheme, this policy focuses on properties that have been empty for 2 years or more.

This policy defines an “actionable empty property” as a residential property which has been unoccupied for 2 years. It does not include properties occupied as second homes. It should however be noted, as that even non-actionable empty property owners will be provided with general advice, assistance and incentives

As of July 2013 there were around 700 properties which had been empty ranging from a single day up to 2 years and 250 empty properties unoccupied for 2 or more years within the district.

To ensure that resources are used appropriately and effectively all actionable empty properties will be prioritised using a points based system. Appendix 1 provides further details on the scoring system used; however, it uses the following criteria to prioritise empty properties:

Length of time empty <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The longer a property is empty, the higher the priority	Condition of property <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The worse the condition, the higher the priority	Impact of property on neighbours and local community <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The bigger the impact on neighbours and community, the higher the priority
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Once prioritised, Housing Services will concentrate case action on the high priority properties.

Action on empty properties

There are a range of options available to Housing Services to help bring the property back into use. These options fall into three broad categories.



General advice for all owners

Housing Services will provide advice on a regular basis for all empty property owners to assist them to bring their property back into use, including website information and regular newsletters (assuming contact details available).

Informal advice, assistance and incentives

We will work with owners of actionable empty properties to provide them with a tailored package of advice, assistance and incentives specific to their needs. The following list provide examples of the advice, assistance and incentives made available to owners (this list is not exhaustive)

- Information on selling the property
- Information on renting the property
- Information on renovating the property
- Financial incentives will be provided subject to budget availability.

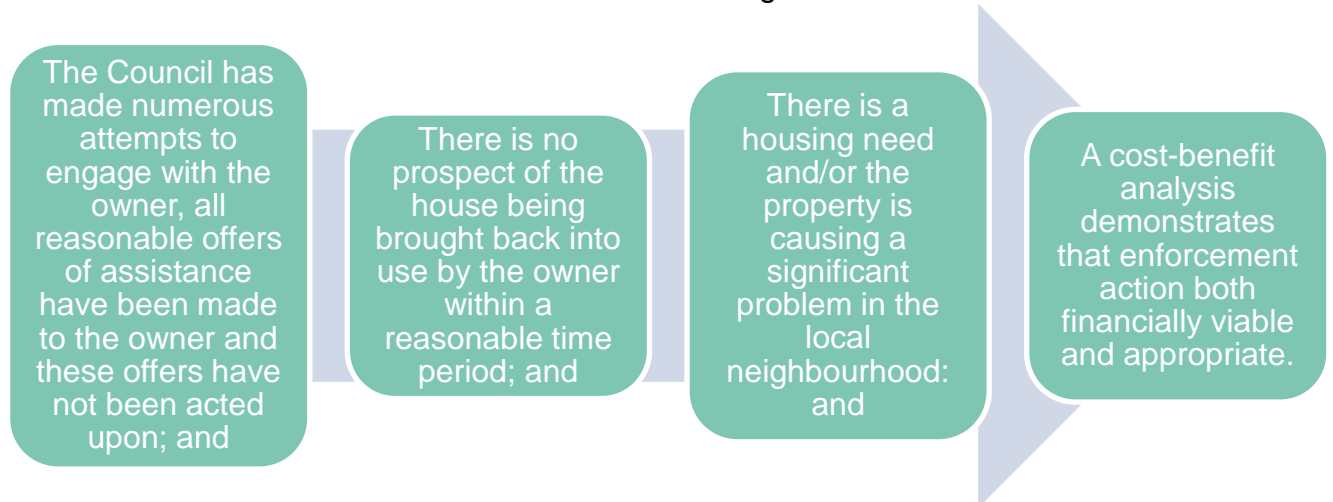
Low level enforcement action

Where actionable empty properties are in such a condition to cause problems to neighbours, for example overgrown gardens or disrepair, in the first instance Housing Services will try to engage with the owner to persuade them to undertake works to remedy the problem. Where this fails, Housing Services may take low level enforcement action and serve a notice to require remedial works under the Housing Services Enforcement and Licensing Policy.

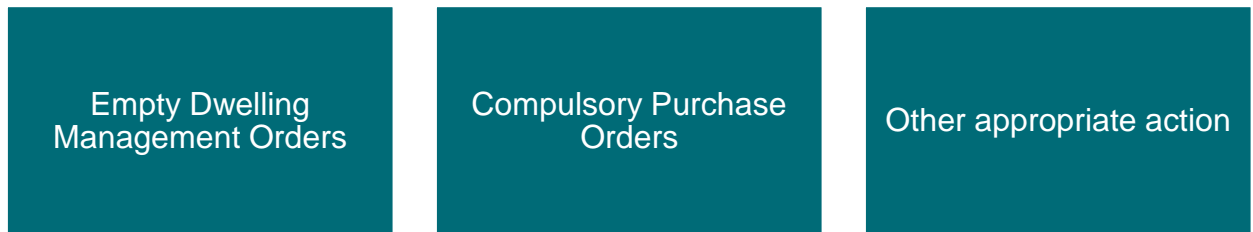
Where appropriate, cases will be referred to another Council department such as Building Control, Planning Enforcement, or Environmental Health.

High level enforcement action

For priority properties Housing Services aim to engage with the owner and work with the owner to bring the property back into use. Housing Services will then consider the use of enforcement action when all of the following criteria have been met.



High level enforcement action to bring the property back into use may include:



Should the case for enforcement action not be demonstrated then no enforcement action will be taken. In addition enforcement action with significant financial implications will only be taken following a single member decision by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing & Planning.

Complaints about empty properties

Housing Services will respond to complaints received about empty properties. Housing Services will:

- Investigate the complaint, including a visit the property, and establish if the Council needs to take further action;
- Where appropriate, prioritise the property;
- Contact the owner to inform them a complaint has been made, advise of any actions recommended to remedy the problem and where necessary ensure action is taken to resolve the problem;
- Inform the complainant whether the property is classified as empty or not and update them on action taken.

Financial assistance

Housing Services will, subject to budget availability, provide financial assistance to owners to help bring empty properties back into use. Financial assistance, where available, will be detailed under the Home Health and Safety (Adaptations and Assistance) Policy.

Financial assistance may be available for renovation of a property or for works which help make the property saleable or rentable. As a condition of the financial assistance, the owner must undertake to bring the property back into use within a given period of time.

Partnership working

Housing Services will work in partnership with other services and organisations to further the aims of this policy where appropriate.

Exceptional circumstances and appeals

Where a property has been empty less than two years and it is in poor condition and complaints have been made, in exceptional circumstances the property will be classed as an actionable empty. This will be decided by the Housing Standards and Improvement Team Manager.

To appeal against a decision made under this policy, please contact the Housing Standards and Improvement Team Manager. An appeal must be made in writing within 28 days of the decision and set out the reasons why the person wants the decision changed and provide supporting evidence.

Appendix 1: Empty property prioritisation sheet

Empty Property Prioritisation Sheet					
Address		Description of property			
Date of assessment		Visited	Yes / No	Flat over shop	
Officer		Listed	Yes / No	Flat	
				Residential	

Property condition	tick		Description – factors to consider
Good condition/no disrepair		0	No visible signs of disrepair or neglect
Visibly neglected/minor disrepair		10	Overgrown garden/damaged fencing, blocked guttering, internal damp or condensation due to it being unheated & vacant. (i.e. individual empty flat)
Poor condition/major disrepair		20	Significant disrepair affecting neighbouring property, major refurbishment needed before habitable to amenities and/or structure
Very poor condition/derelict		40	Uninhabitable, major structural repairs required, demolition a possible option. No services (gas, water, electricity) connected. Devalued and removed from council tax register

Social impact on immediate neighbours and local neighbourhoods			
Factors to consider	tick		tick
Front and/or gardens overgrown	10	Incidents of fire/arson at property	10
Evidence/likelihood of vandalism	10	Reports of vermin (check uniform)	10
Evidence/likelihood of squatting	10	Complaints received (check uniform)	15
Rubbish or Fly tipping occurring	10	Other;	
Property Terraced/Semi-Detached	10		
Located on main road/ housing estate	10	Total	

To be completed in office – check council records

Time empty	Over 2 yr - Under 5 yrs	15	Over 5 yrs - Under 10 yrs	35	10 + yrs	50
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Empty Property Priority: High / medium / low (delete)				Priority score	
P1 100 +	P2 80 - 99	P3 60 - 79	P4 40 - 59	P5 0 - 39	
HIGH	MEDIUM		LOW		

**Bath & North East
Somerset Council**
