

Empty Homes Strategy 2021-26

London Borough of Enfield

Cabinet

July 2021

Subject: Empty Homes Strategy 2021-26
Cabinet Member: Cllr Needs
Executive Director: Sarah Cary, Executive Director Place

Key Decision: KD 5330

Purpose of Report

To approve an Empty Homes Strategy to guide objectives and the workplan over the next five years.

Proposal(s)

1. Approve the Empty Homes Strategy for 2021-26.
2. Delegate to the Director of Housing and Regeneration the investment of up to £200k per annum for the next 5 years on empty homes initiatives as outlined in this strategy at section 8 of the Empty Homes Strategy.
3. Delegate to the Director of Housing and Regeneration the authority to update the payment limits in section 8 of the strategy.

Reason for Proposal(s)

1. Enfield is in the midst of a housing crisis. With record numbers of people living in temporary accommodation, increasing numbers of families in crisis, and the additional pressure brought on by the pandemic we have a large shortage of housing within the borough.
2. We urgently need to increase supply of good quality, private sector housing by bringing as many empty homes as possible back into use. Empty homes are a blight on neighbourhoods and can attract crime and anti-social behaviour but also represent a wasted resource at a time when the need for homes has never been greater.
3. We are seeking external funding to ensure that properties brought back into use can be retrofitted as part of our commitment to an average of EPC B across all properties, which will make a significant positive contribution to our targets of being a net zero organisation by 2030 and a net zero borough by 2040. This also has the potential to assist in reducing the total costs to residents of living in these homes and in creating a consistent approach to our net zero agenda across tenures. Delegated authority for the Director of Housing and Regeneration is sought to amend the maximum grants payable on each property to enable future funding for the retrofit of homes to be allocated.
4. Bringing empty homes back into use will improve the quality of homes (including energy performance and carbon emissions with retrofit initiatives)

and neighbourhoods and contribute to increasing housing supply to meet the needs of local people. This plays a particularly important role for families who are overcrowded, as many homes have three or more bedrooms.

5. Empty properties seriously affect the lives of people in the vicinity and have an adverse impact, driving down values around the problematic property. They attract vandalism and anti-social behaviour and are an unnecessary drain on public services.
6. There are currently about 2000 private sector empty homes in the borough that have been empty for more than six months. Enfield receives around 4,000 homeless approaches a year and has around 3500 households living in temporary accommodation. This strategy aims to bring more empty homes back into use providing good quality housing to meet that need.
7. At a time when local government resources are decreasing it is vital that we make best use of available resources. The strategy and action plan that supports it outline how we propose to do this.
8. Empty homes are not the whole answer to the current housing crisis, but government and local authorities cannot ignore their potential and the need to ensure that owners are both encouraged and, where appropriate, required to unlock the potential of this wasted resource.
9. The success Enfield has had in tackling empty properties to date has been considerable with 55 homes brought back into use last year. We aim to continue this, to ensure the borough has the largest, highest quality stock possible to accommodate both its existing and future residents.
10. The strategy does not cover the Council's own property portfolio. This is because these are covered by other strategies and policies and are being successfully managed. Of the 10,000 homes owned by the Council, 64 have been empty for more than six months and are either awaiting demolition or major works. Turning empty properties (or voids as they are also known as) round for reletting is a key performance indicator for Council Housing as it impacts on rental income as well as residents in need of social housing. The target time for reletting properties is currently 18 days and pre-pandemic performance was achieved around this level.
11. On the Corporate property side there are 9 residential properties that have been empty for more than six months. The current status of these properties is set out below:

Education (Caretakers houses)
3 are awaiting Secretary of State approval for release from educational use
1 is being assessed for SEN provision
Broomfield Park (Parks)
4 properties form part of a coordinated project involving the future of Broomfield House
Eastpole Cottages
1 property is vacant and on a pathway to disposal. Discussions with prospective special purchaser of the neighbouring landowner for sale.

12. The Empty Property Strategy 2021 - 26 supports and helps delivery the wider outcomes and priorities of the Council. These are detailed in the Housing and Growth Strategy.

Relevance to the Council's Corporate Plan

13. Good homes in well-connected neighbourhoods

The strategy will increase the supply of affordable privately rented homes for some of our most vulnerable residents. It will improve the quality of homes being brought back into use by making funding available for improvements.

14. Sustain strong and healthy communities

The strategy will increase the quality of housing being brought back into use. All properties will meet the minimum standards approved by Cabinet as part of the Placement Policy agreed in July 2020.

15. Build our local economy to create a thriving place

The private rented sector is a key part of Enfield's local economy. Increasing the supply of affordable privately rented homes will help to support the local economy as well as reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation.

Background

16. There is a severe shortage of affordable homes in Enfield. Bringing empty homes back into use makes an important and vital contribution to local, affordable housing supply. In addition, tackling empty homes provides an opportunity to significantly improve neighbourhoods and the lives of local people.

17. There are 124,000 homes in Enfield. Of these 34,000 are in the private rented sector. At any one point there are around 3000 empty properties in the borough.

18. In its approach to dealing with empty homes in Enfield, the Council will seek to:

- Bring as many privately-owned empty homes as possible back into full and continuous residential occupation
- Minimise the length of time a privately-owned home stands empty
- Reduce blight and nuisance caused by empty privately-owned homes
- Meet local housing need in Enfield

Main Considerations for the Council

19. The council is committed to bringing empty properties back into use, in order to increase housing supply, improve standards and regenerate communities. Most local authorities have an Empty Homes Strategy setting out their approach to bringing properties back into use.

20. The purpose of the strategy is to set out how Enfield Council goes about bringing back into occupation private residential homes in the borough which have become empty.

21. Enfield's Empty Homes Strategy covers:

- the context in which the strategy operates as well as the aims and objectives of the Council's activities in bringing empty residential homes in the borough back into use
- the approach and tools Enfield Council uses in bringing empty homes back into use,

- locating where empty homes are located in the borough,
 - liaison with and support for owners and the range of enforcement actions available to the Council
 - options available for owners and the Council to assist with bringing empty homes back into use improving their quality
22. The Council's Capital Programme set aside £1M over the next five years to assist in bringing empty homes back into use. This represents a significant change in approach and a corresponding step change in delivery is required. The strategy sets out how the money will be used to bring properties back into use.
23. In 2020-21 the Council brought 55 properties back into use despite the pandemic. These homes were let on the open market. In previous years the number of properties brought back into use has been lower. In 2019-20, 42 homes were brought back into use with none being grant funded.
24. It is not sufficient to bring homes back into use. We need to ensure that where the Council is working with a homeowner to bring a property back into use it is available to meet the housing needs of our residents. This is a vital part of our Homelessness Prevention Strategy whereby we maximise the availability of accessible private rented homes. The launch of Enfield Let, the Council's ethical lettings agency operating through Housing Gateway, provides the opportunity to ensure that both residents who are at risk of homelessness and the Council can benefit from an increased supply of privately rented homes.
25. Working with a homeowner to bring a property back into use is cheaper and more effective than the range of enforcement measures available to the Council. The focus of the strategy is therefore, where required, on the use of grants and incentives to bring properties back into use. In exchange for the Council's assistance, financial or otherwise, the homeowner will be expected to lease their property to Enfield Let. This will ensure that we can maximise the benefit to both the Council and residents.
26. The range of options for homeowners has been expanded. The Council has a long-standing grants programme that has funded the repair of properties to bring them back into use. The programme be extended and will have targeted workstreams aimed at maximising the number of properties that are made available to Enfield Let at submarket rent levels. These include:
- Keeping House – aimed at older residents moving into a care home who need a reliable source of income
 - Adaptation Grants - aimed at owners who agree to their property being adapted for residents with disabilities. The grant may include an incentive payment to cover the cost of removing the adaptations at the end of the lease to make it suitable for general needs lettings.
 - Improvement Grants – aimed at owners who cannot afford the cost of repairing their property to bring it back into use.
 - Incentive payments – aimed at owners whose property does not require substantial work but who agree to lease their property to Enfield Let. Incentives paid will be capped at the level agreed with London Housing Directors.

27. Where an owner refuses to bring a property back into use we will turn to enforcement measures. Properties will be targeted for enforcement action based on:

- How long the property has been empty
- The impact this has on the local neighbourhood
- The potential impact of bringing the property back into use

Housing Delivery Test

28. The Housing delivery Test compares the total number of new homes that Enfield is required to deliver against actual delivery. For 2019-20 Enfield achieved 429 homes against a target of 732. Increasing the supply of homes within the borough is therefore a significant challenge for the Council. Bringing empty homes back into use contributes towards these targets and is a quicker route to delivery than building new homes.

New Homes Bonus

29. The New Homes Bonus rewards local authorities for net additional homes added to the Council Tax Base, thereby seeking to incentivise authorities to encourage housing growth in their areas. Introduced in 2011, the Bonus applies in respect of additional new builds and conversions delivered above a baseline of housing growth, using the national average band D council tax rate. It also applies in respect of long-term empty properties brought back into use, and there is a premium for affordable homes. In 2019-20, Enfield received £1.594m under the scheme.

30. The government is currently reviewing the New Homes Bonus. The options under consideration are:

- raising the baseline percentage
- rewarding improvement on average past housing growth
- rewarding improvement or high housing growth
- support infrastructure investment in areas with low land values
- introducing a premium for modern methods of construction (MMC)
- introducing an MMC condition on receipt of funding
- requiring an up-to-date local plan

31. We will continue to lobby to ensure that we can maximise the benefit of any proposal for change.

Town Centres Strategy

32. The Council is developing a new strategy aimed at revitalising our town centres in the wake of the pandemic. Empty homes have an important role to play in regenerating the local communities within and around our town centres. We are working with the Economic Development Team to explore the potential impact of bringing flats over shops back into residential use. This would provide a boost to local trade and bring greater vibrancy to the locality.

Delivery of the programme

33. Unlike more traditional capital programmes, the Empty Homes Strategy is driven by circumstance and the identification of need. The Strategy is therefore data driven and targets resources at those properties most difficult to bring back into use due to an owner's financial circumstances.
34. The primary costs of the programme are therefore the funding needed to carry out repairs, the costs of taking enforcement action and the cost of staffing the Empty Homes Team.
35. In order to accelerate the delivery of the programme we propose that properties are prioritised differently. The aim here is twofold:
 - To quickly address those properties that cause the most difficulties for neighbourhoods
 - To bring about a step change in the number of properties brought back into use by targeting those properties that can be most easily resolved.
36. To achieve this, we will refocus resources across a wider number of properties rather than focusing on the most intractable cases. At any one time there are around 2000 properties that have been empty for more than six months. The majority of properties do not require significant investment to bring them back into use. Maximising the number of properties brought back into use will also contribute towards both the New Homes Bonus and Housing Delivery Test.
37. A small number of empty homes that cause blight in local neighbourhoods will also be prioritised.
38. In order to ensure that homes brought back into use are available to low income households, this strategy provides for a new range of options for owners are being developed.

Safeguarding Implications

39. None.

Public Health Implications

40. Empty properties can blight neighbourhoods and lead to increases in crime and anti-social behaviour. Poor housing is a determinant of health inequality. Bring good quality homes back into use addresses two key priorities for the Council.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

41. People from BAME communities are significantly more likely to be living in temporary accommodation. Increasing the supply of privately rented accommodation at local housing allowance levels will therefore disproportionately benefit people from BAME communities.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

42. Housing accounts for around 38% of carbon emissions arising from energy consumption across Enfield. The retrofit of all housing types will be key to delivering against a target of being a net zero borough by 2040.

43. In line with the Climate Action Plan, the Council will be able to increase retrofit opportunities for different tenures and house types and work towards an average SAP score of 86 by 2030.

44. Alongside reducing carbon emissions, retrofit measures can make homes warmer and lower in use costs for residents.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

45. The alternative options would be:

- To carry on the current approach of grant funding a small number of properties to bring them back into use. This would not significantly increase the supply of homes available to vulnerable residents and poorer households.
- To close the grants programme. This would save the Council £200,000 pa but the lost opportunity costs would be significantly higher than this.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

46. The key risk is that the government closes the New Homes Bonus scheme. We are lobbying the Government to ensure that the Council continues to benefit from the scheme.

Financial Implications

47. The Council benefits financially from the Empty Homes Strategy both directly and indirectly. The New Homes Bonus (assuming the same arrangements continue) is applied to properties that have been empty for more than six months. Each property brought back into use generates between £6000 and £6500 in additional income to the Council dependent on the size of the property.

48. The Capital Programme includes £200,000 pa for empty homes. To offset this cost the Council needs to bring back into use a minimum of 34 properties per year to generate the equivalent income through the New Homes Bonus.

49. Each household moving into the private rented sector from temporary accommodation saves the Council £2500 per year. By ensuring that properties brought back into use are available to residents in need the Council therefore generates additional savings.

50. Salaries for the Empty Homes Team will be capitalised against the Empty Homes Programme budget.

Legal Implications

51. Whilst there is no specific legal requirement to adopt an empty homes strategy, a coherent approach is desirable in order to support the Council's wider objectives.

52. The Council's powers and duties in relation to enforcement are contained within various statutes including the Housing Act 1985, the Housing Act 2004, the Law of Property Act 1925 and the Acquisition of Land Act 1981. In cases where enforcement action is required, advice and input from Legal Services is always sought.

53. If Housing and Regeneration Services wishes to progress partnership arrangements with private sector agencies or other potential partners, this will be referred for legal advice.

Options Considered

54. The alternative options would be:
55. To carry on the current approach of grant funding a small number of properties to bring them back into use. This would not significantly increase the supply of homes available to vulnerable residents and poorer households.
56. To close the grants programme. This would save the Council £200,000 pa but the lost opportunity costs would be significantly higher than this.

Conclusions

57. Cabinet is requested to approve the Empty Homes Strategy.
-

Report Author: Joanne Drew
Director of Housing and Regeneration
Joanne.drew@enfield.gov.uk

Date of report 29/06/21

Appendices

Empty Homes Strategy

Background Papers

None

Empty Homes Strategy 2021-26

1. INTRODUCTION

Enfield is in the midst of a housing crisis. With record numbers of people living in temporary accommodation, increasing numbers of families in crisis, and the additional pressure brought on by the pandemic we have a large shortage of housing within the borough.

We urgently need to increase supply of good quality, private sector housing by bringing as many empty homes as possible back into use. Empty homes are a blight on neighbourhoods and can attract crime and anti-social behaviour but also represent a wasted resource at a time when the need for homes has never been greater.

Bringing empty homes back into use will improve the quality of homes and neighbourhoods and contribute to increasing housing supply to meet the needs of local people. This plays a particularly important role for families who are overcrowded, as many homes have three or more bedrooms.

Empty properties seriously affect the lives of people in the vicinity and have an adverse impact, driving down values around the problematic property. They attract vandalism and anti-social behaviour and are an unnecessary drain on public services.

There are currently about 2000 private sector empty homes in the borough that have been empty for more than six months. Enfield receives around 4,000 homeless approaches a year and has around 3500 households living in temporary accommodation. This strategy aims to bring more empty homes back into use providing good quality housing to meet that need.

At a time when local government resources are decreasing it is vital that we make best use of available resources. The strategy and action plan that supports it outline how we propose to do this.

Empty homes are not the whole answer to the current housing crisis, but government and local authorities cannot ignore their potential and the need to ensure that owners are both encouraged and, where appropriate, required to unlock the potential of this wasted resource.

The success Enfield has had in tackling empty properties to date has been considerable. We aim to continue this, to ensure the borough has the largest, highest quality stock possible to accommodate both its existing and future residents.

The Empty Property Strategy 2021 - 26 supports and helps delivery the wider outcomes and priorities of the Council. These are detailed in the Housing and Growth Strategy.

2. OBJECTIVES

In its approach to dealing with empty homes in Enfield, the Council will seek to:

- Bring as many privately-owned empty homes as possible back into full and continuous residential occupation
- Minimise the length of time a privately-owned home stands empty
- Ensure that properties brought back into use are available to Enfield residents to meet housing need
- Reduce blight and nuisance caused by empty privately-owned homes
- Enhance our approach to returning empty homes to use by continuing to work and share experiences with other local authorities
- Utilise funding available to bring empty homes back into use and provide affordable housing solutions across the borough for people in housing need.

3. WHAT IS AN EMPTY HOME?

There are two main types of empty home: Short-term empty homes are those homes that have been unoccupied for up to six months. They are often in the process of being sold or between lettings, are being renovated and improved prior to occupation or awaiting probate following the death of the occupier. Short-term empty homes are a natural part of the housing market. Within Enfield, a third of all empty homes fall within this category, and whilst they do not normally require any intervention, we will carefully monitor this group of empty properties as naturally some of them transition to become long-term empty homes.

Long-term empty homes are those homes that have been empty for six months or longer. It is these properties that this Strategy will focus on. We will continue to focus our resources on bringing these long-term empty homes back into use, particularly those homes that have been empty for longer e.g. two years or more, as these homes often cause our residents the most problems.

4. NATIONAL CONTEXT

High levels of empty properties have an adverse impact on communities and the environment. Returning empty homes to use assists in reducing homelessness and overcrowding pressures. It also tackles blight, the fear of crime and in the post Grenfell Tower era, fire safety.

In addition to the direct benefits to families and communities, bringing empty homes back into use plays an important role in meeting the need for new homes and the government's target of delivering 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s.

Alongside measures to increase council tax costs for owners allowing their property to stand empty, the Government has updated local planning policies to ensure they support the development of under-utilised land and buildings.

New Homes Bonus

New Homes Bonus is a grant paid by central government to local authorities for increasing the level of housing. The bonus is based on extra Council Tax revenue raised from new build homes, properties converted into homes and long-term empty properties brought back into use. There is also an additional payment if the property is an affordable home.

The scheme is intended to act as an incentive for local authorities to have effective empty homes strategies. Rewards will only be paid for a net increase in housing, meaning local authorities could miss out on rewards for new homes built if empty property levels are allowed to increase.

Enfield's New Homes Bonus payments for 2019/20 totalled £1.594m. It's clear that at a time when local government resources are diminishing the benefits Enfield can accrue from the New Homes Bonus remain significant. It is imperative therefore we seek to maximise the value of the bonus payment.

The government has announced a review of the New Homes Bonus. We will lobby to ensure that the borough maximises benefits from the scheme.

5. LOCAL CONTEXT

Enfield has a shortage of homes across all tenures and demand outstrips supply. At any one point there are 3000 empty homes in the borough with around 2000 being empty for more than 6 months. To put this in context there are around 26,000 homes in the private rented sector. Bringing 2000 homes back into use would therefore represent a significant increase in the supply of homes.

Simply bringing homes back into use is not enough to meet the needs of residents. For this strategy to be successful, the homes brought back into use must be both accessible and affordable.

Housing and Growth Strategy

Making best use of our existing stock is a key priority within the Housing and Growth Strategy. This states that *'As well as new developments, we will increase supply of good quality, private sector housing by bringing as many empty homes as possible back into use. Empty homes are a blight on neighbourhoods and can attract crime and anti-social behaviour. Bringing empty homes back into use will improve the quality of homes and neighbourhoods and contribute to increasing housing supply to meet the needs of local people. This also plays a particularly important role for families who are overcrowded, as many homes have three or more bedrooms.'*

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy

Enfield's 5-year Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy plays an essential part in delivering aspects of our Housing and Growth Strategy. This aims to end the use of long-term temporary accommodation by ensuring that the private rented sector is accessible to residents. One of the strategy's ambitions is to secure adequate

accommodation to meet the needs of homeless households. Bringing empty homes back into use has been identified as being a key resource in meeting this ambition.

Enfield's Homelessness Strategy supports the use of Enfield's New Homes Bonus to increase the number of empty homes brought back into use in the borough and use the Council's Grants Scheme to bring empty homes back into use for homeless households in need of somewhere to live.

Market Shaping & Enfield Let

The Council's homelessness strategy is founded on reshaping our housing market to more closely meet the needs of residents. This recognised that in providing temporary accommodation, the Council has in effect become the largest lettings agency in the borough. The Council's procurement activity is therefore a key driver in the local housing market. To facilitate change, we have established Enfield Let as an ethical lettings agency that will harness our procurement activity to actively shape the local housing market.

Our intention is that wherever possible, homes brought back into use will be let to residents in need through Enfield Let.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS

In the last twelve months we have brought 55 empty properties back into use, despite the pandemic.

In previous years the Council has brought around 46 properties back in to use each year through a combination of different approaches.

Partnership Working

The value of partnership working in effective local government is critical to success. The team have developed strong links with community groups, the Police and emergency services.

Empty Property Council Tax Restructuring

The Council introduced changes in the way its council tax charges operate in relation to empty properties. Discounts relating to unfurnished properties or properties in need of structural repair have been abolished. Where a property has been empty and unfurnished for two years a council tax charge of 150 per cent is now applied and this rises to 300% when a property has been empty for more than five years.

7. TACKLING EMPTY HOMES

Key Principles have been developed to inform Enfield's policy and approach to bringing private sector empty homes back into use:

- Compliant legally and with government guidance and other accepted protocols
- Fair and consistent
- Cost effective
- Clear and straightforward
- Flexible and responsive

Enfield's approach to bringing private sector empty homes back into use comprises three strands of activity:

- Finding empty homes in Enfield and finding out who owns them

- Advice and support to owners of empty homes to bring them back into use
- Enforcement action as a last resort, when voluntary processes have been exhausted

Finding empty homes in Enfield and who owns them

This Council will always seek new and innovative ways of locating empty properties. New methods will be assessed and may be adopted if they are found to improve the current procedure.

Enfield's Empty Property Team maintains a database of empty homes in the borough. The database which is primarily sourced from Council Tax data is extremely useful in targeting resources for tackling empty homes effectively. Sources of information for finding empty homes and establishing ownership include the following:

- Council Tax records
- Other Council records
- Land Registry
- Utility companies
- Contacting neighbours
- Contacting other external partners
- Use of a tracing agency
- Investigating who has an interest in an empty home

Enfield Town Centre regeneration plans are currently being developed. As part of the recovery effort, bringing empty homes back into use in our town centres can have a significant impact in revitalising both the town centre and its surrounds. We will develop a partnership approach with the Economic Development Team to maximise the benefits, focusing on flats over shops and properties that had previously been converted from residential to commercial use.

Targeted Approach

While an empty property is the responsibility of the owner, the Council aims to engage with and support empty homeowners wherever possible. As a Council there are a range of ways in which we can intervene with empty homes from an informal approach, such as telephone calls and sending out information, to offering repayable grants to eligible empty homeowners, escalating to enforcement action where necessary.

Two years has been identified as a useful marker in time as homes are often empty to allow renovation works to be completed or for legal issues such as probate to be resolved and this was deemed an appropriate length of time before active intervention was required. This Strategy will look to tackle empty homes based on the length of time they have been empty. We will also establish the reason why a property became empty. This proactive approach will also be flexible in that it will not prevent problematic homes from being tackled should they cause a nuisance to communities irrespective of how long they have been empty.

There is a range of possible reasons why empty homes remain unoccupied and this engagement process aims to understand those reasons which then informs what tailored support the Council may be able to offer. A key issue for empty homeowners is a lack of funding to complete necessary works to their property and many owners state this as their reason why the buildings remain empty. Other potential reasons include:

- time for renovation works to take place;
- issues with Probate;
- owner waiting for the right time to sell;
- difficulty sourcing tenants;
- legal issues;
- owners expectations of the property's value;

- owner not living locally and having inadequate management arrangements in place.

A range of legislation exists for those owners who will not engage to help tackle empty homes including:

- Improvement Notices under the Housing Act 2004
- Repairs required to dangerous buildings under the Building Act 1984;
- Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 215) – A notice can be served on the homeowner where a home is considered to be ‘detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood’.
- Local Government (Miscellaneous provision) Act 1982 – Under Section 29 the Council has the power to secure empty homes against access, where there is considered to be a danger to public health.
- Enforced Sale (Law of Property Act 1925) – The use of enforcement actions on empty properties can result in the gradual build up of debt if the work is carried out in default of the owner failing to comply with the enforcement notice. Where a reasonable charge has been registered against the property it is possible to force the sale of the property to recover that debt.
- Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) S17 Housing Act 1985 – where owners cannot be traced, or are unwilling to bring their property back into use, the Council can seek to compulsory purchase a property and then sell it on the open market.
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) – The Housing Act 2006 gives local authorities power to apply to the Residential Property Tribunal for an interim management order which may lead to compulsory leasing of the property for a fixed period of time.

The Empty Property Team will always try and establish the circumstances which have led to a property becoming empty. This will enable appropriate solutions to be offered to owners. Where empty properties are provided with assistance via any Council led scheme, it is expected that the property will conform to the Decent Homes Standard before it is re-occupied. The Decent Homes Assessment Criteria stipulates that a dwelling should be free from unnecessary and avoidable hazards, in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities and services and provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

As part of our commitment to the Zero Carbon agenda we will seek to retrofit homes being brought back into use to

8. OPTIONS FOR HOMEOWNERS

We offer a range of options for homeowners to bring empty homes back into use and to improve the quality of accommodation available. As part of our Climate Change Action Plan our aim is to ensure all homes in the Borough reach EPC B standard (or zero carbon) by 2030. The service available for landlords will incorporate advice on how to secure funding and deliver improvements to reduce energy costs for residents and carbon emissions.

Privately Rented

There is a huge demand for housing and letting an empty property can provide owners with a significant income stream. We are able to offer advice and support to owners who are considering letting their empty properties and what is involved. Enfield Let (an ethical lettings agency run through the Housing Gateway) offers a suite of options for landlords

including incentives for letting homes at LHA levels and a tiered range of management options.

Leased

This is a scheme where Enfield Let takes a lease on a privately-owned property. Enfield Let then offers the home as an assured shorthold tenancy for families in housing need. Leases are for a minimum of three years and will provide a guaranteed rent and a full property management service to the homeowner.

Renovation Grants

Renovation grants are available for owners who require assistance in repairing or upgrading dilapidated empty properties. A condition of the grant ensures that owners must agree to lease their property to Enfield Let for a minimum period of 5 years.

Incentives

Where a property does not need significant work before being brought back into use, the Council may offer an incentive to the landlord in exchange for gaining a lease on the property for Enfield Let or for letting the property at LHA level.

Keeping House

This scheme benefits homeowners in long term care, enabling people to lease their house and receive a guaranteed rent, for a fixed period of time. Owners can also take advantage of renovation grants to ensure their property meets the decent home standard. The scheme therefore prevents a home remaining empty whilst the owner is in care and at the same time creates a rental stream which helps towards any care fees.

Voluntary Sale

As part of the CPO process it is accepted that wherever possible it is necessary to explore the option of acquiring a property by negotiation. It is also possible that the Council may be able to offer to purchase an empty property on a voluntary basis via the Housing Gateway.

Incentive Payments

Incentives for properties let directly by an owner, at or below Local Housing Allowance levels, through Enfield Let are capped at the following levels:

Size	Maximum Incentive
Studio	£2000
1 Bedrooms	£2000
2 Bedrooms	£3500
3 Bedrooms	£3500
4 Bedrooms	£3500

The minimum term of the tenancy is two years. Incentive rates will be reviewed annually.

Grant Payments

Grant payments are available under both the Renovation Grants and Keeping House schemes. Grant payments will be made where the owner cannot afford the costs of the work needed to bring a property back into use. Payments may be made up to £20,000 and are conditional on the property being leased to Enfield Let (Housing Gateway) or the Council at below Local Housing Allowance level. The length of the lease is determined by the size of grant with a minimum term of 5 years.

To qualify for a grant, owners must demonstrate that they lack the financial capacity to fund the required works, based on a schedule of works produced by the Council. In

most cases, owners will be expected to contribute at least in part to the cost of the works.

9. RESOURCING

Enfield is committed to bringing empty homes back into use and has set aside £1m over the five years of this strategy to address this. This equates to £200,000 per annum which will support which will fund the delivery of this strategy. Staffing costs will be capitalised to support the delivery of the strategy

Empty Homes Strategy 2021-26

Ongoing communication and engagement					
Task	Milestones	Outcomes	Target	Lead	Timescale
Programme of engagement with private sector owners of empty homes	Raise awareness through press and targeted communications	All owners aware of advice and assistance available	All owners of properties that have been empty for more than six months receive signposting information	Empty Homes Team	Annual process
	Update empty homes database and develop process to maintain	Identification of all residential properties that have been empty for more than six months		Empty Homes Team	Ongoing
	Create database of commercial empty property suitable for conversion to residential use in town centres (flats over shops)	Identification of empty commercial properties that have the potential for conversion to residential use in town centres	Targeted communication Conversion of 10 units pa	Empty Homes Team/ Economic Regeneration Team	Ongoing
	Tailored letters to all empty home owners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deceased owner after 12 months empty • Company owner after 6 months empty • Individual owner after 6 months empty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of why properties have become empty and the owners intentions • Provide advice, encouragement and identify solutions to overcome barriers • Monitor progress of owners and escalate case for action as appropriate 	Owners of empty homes that have been empty for more than 6 months are actively engaged.	Empty Homes Team	Monthly process
	Empty homes that are subject to a complaint irrespective of the length of time empty are communicated with				As required

Effective Enforcement					
Task	Milestones	Outcomes	Target	Lead	Timescale
Prioritise empty homes	All properties escalated are scored against the matrix and set in rank order for action	Prioritisation of empty homes for action	All empty homes that have been empty for more than two years or subject to complaints are prioritised for action	Empty Homes Team	Annual process
Utilise the most appropriate enforcement approaches to bring them back into use	Top 20 empty homes prioritised for action. Consideration to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDMOs • Enforced sale • Compulsory purchase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most problematic empty homes tackled first • Focus resources where will have the maximum impact • Impact of empty homes is reduced 	Enforcement action taken against the owner	Empty Homes Team/Legal	Ongoing
	Develop an SLA with Property Services	Enforcement works delivered in a timely and efficient manner	SLA in place by 2022/23	Empty Homes Team / Property Services	2022/23
Utilise the most appropriate enforcement	Provide a coordinated response to tackle the immediate problems	Prevent empty homes causing a statutory nuisance	All complaints responded to within X days	Empty Homes Team	As required

approaches to minimise the impact of an empty home		Minimise the visual impact	All complaints acknowledged within X days		As required
		Ensure properties are safe and secure	All complaints regarding dangerous structures responded to on the same day		As required
Assess the feasibility of delivering a targeted area-based approach	Complete a feasibility assessment of taking an area-based approach to empty homes	Feasibility assessment completed	Complete during 2021/22	Empty Homes Team	2021/22

Enhanced advice and support to owners and residents					
Task	Milestones	Outcomes	Target	Lead	Timescale
Develop an information and advice pack for empty home owners	Review best practice material	Owners of empty homes have access to up to date advice to assist them in bring properties back into use	Produce the pack	Empty Homes Team	2021/22
	Produce Enfield Empty Homes Pack		Review the pack	Empty Homes Team	Annually
	Refresh website area for empty homes			Empty Homes Team	2022
Provide advice to owners wishing to let their property	Owners receive advice on letting their property from the Landlord Advice Line	Increased number of properties let through Enfield Let		Market Management Team	Ongoing
Clear process for reporting empty homes	Update website area	Increase reporting of empty homes		Empty Homes Team	Ongoing
Develop a range of options for owners unable to afford works to bring properties back into use	Materials on: Enfield Let Grants programme Incentive payments			Empty Homes Team	2021/22
	Revitalise Keeping House scheme	Residents moving into care homes are able to have a secure income stream		Empty Homes Team	2022/23

Enhanced knowledge and information					
Task	Milestones	Outcomes	Target	Lead	Timescale
Develop and implement standardised Empty Homes monitoring	Standardised Empty Homes monitoring	Improvements in the number and % of total stock across the borough and localities	Quarterly Performance reports	Empty Homes Team	Quarterly
Review case	Evaluate whether a new recording	Improvements in processes,		Market	2022

management system	system is required	speed and outcomes		Management	
Attend regional and sub regional forums	Share best practice and intelligence. Explore options for collaborative working		Attend forums	Empty Homes	As required
Develop an understanding of the actual cost of bringing properties back into use	Gather data on time spent per property Cost annual processes Compare cost of different approaches	Develop a full understanding of the costs/benefits of bring empty homes back into use	Department Report	Market Management	2021/22

Strengthen partnerships					
Task	Milestones	Outcomes	Target	Lead	Timescale
Develop and facilitate Empty Home Forum	Develop membership Terms of reference	Forum to meet to share information, agree priorities and shared solutions	Quarterly meetings	Empty Homes Team	2022
Develop a coordinated approach to the regeneration of town centres	Create database of commercial empty property suitable for conversion to residential use in town centres (flats over shops)	Identification of empty commercial properties that have the potential for conversion to residential use in town centres	Complete during 2021/22	Empty Homes Team/ Economic Regeneration Team	2021/22
Programme of engagement with private sector owners of commercial property	Raise awareness through press and targeted communications	All owners aware of advice and assistance available	Targeted communication Conversion of 10 units pa	Empty Homes Team/ Economic Regeneration Team	2022 and ongoing

Scoring Matrix

	Score
Property Condition	
Property disrepair	5
Windows/doors boarded up	5
Overgrown garden	5
Vermin	5
Other	5
Anti-Social Behaviour	
Arson	5
Graffiti	5

Fly tipping	5
Youths congregating and entering onto property	5
Other	5
Property background	
Length of time vacant	2 per year
No. of Complaints	2 per complaint
Petition (30+ signatories)	50
Referrals from: Police, Fire Service, Councillors, or MP	2 per complaint
No. of enforcement actions	5 per action
Property actively being marketed	-10
Property currently being renovated	-10
Location	
Property either side empty	5 for one side, 15 for both sides
Additional empty properties in the road	5 per property
Property located in top 6 wards for empty homes	5
Property located on main arterial road	5