

For General Release

REPORT TO:	CABINET 14 JULY 2014
AGENDA ITEM:	9
SUBJECT:	Targeting Empty Properties
LEAD OFFICER:	Hannah Miller, Executive Director DASHH
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alison Butler, Deputy Leader (Statutory) – Homes and Regeneration
WARDS:	All wards

CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT:

Empty properties affect peoples' lives by preventing them from getting a home, blighting the area they live in, attracting vandalism, fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour. People are also affected psychologically by the negative impact that empty properties have on their neighbourhood. The Council is determined to tackle empty properties and the problems they cause and will use all available enforcement powers to achieve this.

The administration has made a strong policy commitment to clean up Croydon, '**Don't Mess With Croydon: Take Pride**'. Targeting empty properties is a key tool in achieving this outcome of improving our borough and working with our residents to take pride in their environment.

Together with the proposed introduction of selective licensing of private landlords, the campaign 'Targeting Empty Properties' also contributes towards outcome C2, *A Safe Place* by reducing anti-social behaviour and environmental nuisance from vandalism and fly tipping.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

This robust approach to reducing empty properties will require a capital investment of £1m over a two year period 2015/16 and 2016/17 to allow the offer of empty property grants to assist owners in carrying out the required works to bring their properties back into use. Details of the impact are set out in Section 5 below.

KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.: 1295 This is a key decision as defined in the Council's Constitution. The decision may be implemented from 1300 hours on the expiry of 5 working days after it is made, unless the decision is referred to the Scrutiny & Strategic Overview Committee by the requisite number of Councillors

The Leader of the Council has delegated to the Cabinet the power to make the

decisions set out in the recommendations below

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having considered the information set out in the body of the report on introducing a stronger policy approach to tackling empty properties including a vigorous campaign to raise awareness, encourage reporting and publicise strong enforcement action and having considered the requirements of the Council's Public Sector Equalities Duty set out in section 8 of the report, Cabinet is recommended:

- 1.1. To authorise the Cabinet Member for Homes and Regeneration to implement the robust approach set out in Section 3 of the report
- 1.2. To note that the Cabinet Member for Homes and Regeneration will provide a further report to updating Cabinet on progress in implementing the action plan in 2015.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. Empty properties have a negative impact on our residents lives, blighting the area they live in, attracting vandalism, fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour, and are a wasted housing resource that could provide a home to a household in need. The rationale for bringing this report to Cabinet is that taking a tough line on empty properties makes a positive contribution to improving the local environment, tackling the nuisance and blight, and reducing homelessness. At a time when demand for housing far outstrips supply in Croydon and homelessness is on the increase, it is no longer acceptable for empty property owners to deny others a decent home to live in and the Council will not tolerate this. The new campaign includes the proposal to invest £0.5m in this work in 2015/16 and 2016/17 following the cessation of empty homes funding which has been received for a number of years from the Mayor of London. The campaign also contributes to the Council's coordinated approach in dealing with homelessness, anti-social behaviour and proposed licencing of private rented sector landlords.
- 2.2. This report proposes a range of actions to take this work forward including a step change in the programme of enforcement action, increased efforts to identify and encourage owners to bring properties back into use, and a promotion campaign raising awareness of the types of support available to the owners of empty properties. There will be increasing challenges in identifying empty properties going forward as a proportion of owners will seek to avoid liability for council tax by concealing the fact that their property is empty.
- 2.3. There are many benefits in pursuing this course of action for residents and businesses in Croydon. These include tackling environmental nuisance, fly tipping and vandalism, increasing decent housing supply and providing accommodation for homeless households. Not only will this improve the health and quality of life of our residents but it will also attract much needed funding into the borough through New Homes Bonus.

3. BRINGING EMPTY HOMES BACK INTO USE

- 3.1. Housing has risen to the top of the political agenda in recent years with attempts by

the current and previous government to both enable and stimulate housing supply. There is increasing concern about how to meet rising housing need driven by population growth as well as tackling homelessness, and more recently concerns about a possible property led “housing bubble” of accelerating house prices coupled with low productivity which could pose a threat to the country’s economic recovery. Increasing the supply of housing is therefore a key priority nationally, regionally and locally, and a key part of this are effective local plans to reduce the number of empty homes. Tackling empty properties is included as a strategic priority in the most recent London Housing Strategy, and is included in London Plan housing supply targets.

- 3.2. Taking action to bring empty properties back into use not only increases housing supply but also tackles the blight that often accompanies properties being empty for a long period. Long term empty properties can become the focus of vandalism, anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping and the administration has made a strong policy commitment to clean up Croydon, including the campaign ‘**Don’t Mess With Croydon: Take Pride**’. An effective campaign to bring empty properties back into use plays an important part in achieving this commitment.
- 3.3. The pictures below show before and after photographs of two typical empty properties in Croydon:

Before



After action from Empty Properties Officers



The refurbishment of this single long-term empty property was completed by an owner who purchased the property at auction and then applied for an Empty Property grant. The work was completed in three months and resulted in a family property being available for tenants nominated by Croydon Council for a period of three years.

Before



After action from Empty Properties Officers



This block of six flats had stood empty for many years whilst the owner managed other properties elsewhere. When contacted by the Empty Property Service the owner accepted the offer of Grant assistance to complete the remodelling and refurbishment of this dilapidated building. Eight flats of various sizes were created of which three received financial assistance. All flats were managed by a Housing Association and tenants were nominated by Croydon Council for three years.

- 3.4. Empty homes brought back into use also attract New Homes Bonus which will contribute not only to the delivery of this strategy but also will assist in bringing government funding into the borough.
- 3.5. Properties may be empty for a number of reasons. In most cases the home owner is in the process of carrying out repairs or refurbishing the property before selling, or having purchased the property, before moving in. If the property has been rented previously it is usually undergoing repair and refurbishment before being re-let. Housing markets need a certain number of empty properties in order to work efficiently and most homes are empty only for a short period of time. Although this group of empty properties needs to be monitored, this is not the group of empty properties the Council will be focusing its efforts on.

Figure : Empty Properties in Croydon 31 March 2014 by length of time empty

- 3.6. The Empty Homes Agency estimates there were 710,140 empty properties in England in 2012 and only 635,127 in 2013 – This represents 2.79% of all homes¹ and is the largest ever annual reduction in the number of empty properties nationally and the lowest level of empty properties ever recorded. The sudden reduction is partly due to an upturn in the housing market, but mainly due to changes in the way council tax was charged on empty properties. The main changes introduced in 2013 were:
- ◆ The statutory exemptions were reduced. The automatic exemption from council tax for the first six months a property was empty was withdrawn;
 - ◆ Councils were given the flexibility to introduce local council tax discounts on empty properties and did not have to follow the national policy;
 - ◆ Council tax premium was introduced allowing local authorities to charge a higher level of council tax on properties that had been empty for more than two years - up to 150% of the standard rate of council tax due.
- 3.7. In line with these changes the Council withdrew Class A (uninhabitable exemptions) and Class C (empty and unfurnished exemptions) council tax exemptions in April 2013, it also withdrew the 10% discount for properties that are empty and furnished and it introduced the full 50% council tax premium for properties empty and unfurnished for more than two years. These changes are the toughest course of action the Council can take to increase the liability for Council Tax for empty property owners.
- 3.8. The number of council and housing association homes that are empty is very small in comparison to the number of empty private homes. The Council works hard to ensure that council properties that become vacant are relet as quickly as possible – the current target is 23 days.
- 3.9. Table 1 in **Appendix 1** provides a breakdown of empty properties in England by region. The London region has the smallest proportion of empty properties in England and the third smallest actual number of empty properties.
- 3.10. The Empty Homes Agency also provides figures at a local authority level for empty properties which are provided in **Appendix 1**, Table 2. Croydon has the highest actual number of empty properties of all London boroughs which is unsurprising considering it has the largest dwelling stock in the capital. Croydon, however, has just above the London average proportion of empty properties at 1.94%,

¹ 2013 figures

where the London average is 1.76%².

Long-term empty properties (over 6 months)

- 3.11. There are a smaller number of properties, however, that remain empty for much longer than average and where the local authority is required to intervene to help the owner to bring their property back into use. This could be, for example, where the owner:
- ◆ is experiencing financial hardship and cannot afford the repairs required;
 - ◆ cannot cope or does not want the responsibility of looking after a property;
 - ◆ has inherited the property and has not or does not want to consider selling or letting it, or is waiting to sell it once probate has been settled;
 - ◆ is elderly and has moved into care and they or their family either do not want to or cannot cope with disposing of or renting out the property; or
 - ◆ has purchased the property as an investment and they feel it is not in their financial interest to dispose of or rent out the property.

² This data is also published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on the government's www.gov.uk website under the heading *Live tables on dwelling stock* (Table 615: vacant dwellings by local authority district: England, from 2004 – All Vacants).

3.12. A case study setting out the type of support and encouragement provided by Empty Property Officers is provided below:

Case Study 1: encouragement and support action

The councils' empty property officer was alerted by a neighbour to a house that had apparently stood empty for around 5 years. It had been purchased to provide an income in retirement for a couple fast approaching that age. Unfortunately while refurbishing the property the owner died suddenly. After some time the widow engaged a local contractor to complete the refurbishment, however he abandoned the property and left it in a worse state as he lacked the necessary skills to complete the works.

This property was always intended for rental, so many of the sentimental issues Empty Property Officers face were not present in this case – the owner needed and was given support and professional guidance to understand the works necessary, to find reputable contractors, and encouragement to take the financial risk of starting the refurbishment again. This house was quickly refurbished with a small empty property grant and rented through the Council's housing initiatives team to a homeless family.

3.13. According to Empty Homes Agency figures there are 232,600 long term empty properties in England that have been empty for 6 months or more. London has the largest actual number of long term empty properties and the highest proportion of long term empty properties among the housing stock as set out in **Appendix 1**, Table 3³.

3.14. Croydon has the fifth lowest actual number of long term empty properties in London at 323 and the lowest proportion of long term empty properties among its overall dwelling stock with 0.22%. Table 4 in **Appendix 1** sets out the Empty Homes Agency breakdown of long term empty properties in London by borough.

Empty homes requiring enforcement action

3.15. There are an even smaller number of cases where an owner refuses any help or assistance from the local authority and where legal action is required to force the issue. This may be where:

- ◆ The property is in a dangerous condition and action needs to be taken to force the owner to rectify hazards;
- ◆ The new owner has failed to declare grant of probate and action needs to be taken to recover council tax due;

³ Data on long term empty homes published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on the government's www.gov.uk website under the heading *Live tables on dwelling stock* (Isee Table 615: vacant dwellings by local authority district: England, from 2004 – All Long Term Vacants). The DCLG's data records slightly fewer long term empty homes than the Empty Homes Agency (see column 4 of Table 4 in Appendix 1)

- ◆ The owner has large debts and bankruptcy proceedings are required to force the sale of the property;
- ◆ The owner has failed to respond to the Council's offers of assistance and compulsory purchase of the property is the most appropriate action.

3.16. A further case study setting out the investigation and enforcement action carried out by Empty Property Officers is provided below:

Case study 2: enforcement action

Mr & Mrs S have owned a 4 bedroom detached property since 1985 but have never lived there. They visited occasionally to bring items for a proposed refurbishment that has never been completed. Due to its' deteriorating condition, the property began to attract complaints. The council's empty property officer negotiated with Mr S and many promises were made regarding a date for occupation. A strict enforcement schedule was followed and Cabinet approval was obtained to seek a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). Mr S continued to receive encouragement to voluntarily refurbish and occupy his property whilst the CPO was prepared and served. Mr S appealed to the Secretary of State but a Public Enquiry was avoided when the Council entered a formal agreement with Mr S to complete the works by an agreed deadline or the CPO would be enforced. Despite further promises from Mr S, the property remains unoccupied and as the formal agreement has now lapsed, the property title will be vested in the council. It will then be sold on at auction with the condition that it is brought back in to use within a reasonable timeframe.

- 3.17. The information provided above shows that the council has performed well in bringing empty properties back into use in recent years. It has performed particularly well in reducing the number of long term empty properties and, according to the Empty Homes Agency, currently has the lowest proportion of long-term empty properties in the capital. However, despite this performance there is the challenge to maintain this performance as well as to further reduce the number of long-term empty properties. The actions set out below explains how the Council will launch a campaign to raise awareness of its work to bring empty homes back into use, redouble its efforts in engaging owners of empty homes through investing £0.5m in empty property grants in 2015/16 and 2016/17, and take enforcement action where required including applying for a compulsory purchase order (CPO) where appropriate.
- 3.18. The Empty Properties Service maintains its own records on empty properties based on Council Tax records and it's own investigations. These records will support and inform the campaign action plan and a summary of the information is set out in **APPENDIX 2**. This shows that there are potentially around 600 empty properties that can be targeted by the new campaign.

Future challenges

- 3.19. Funding from the Greater London Authority through the Targeted Funding Stream and more recently from the Affordable Housing Programme 2011-14 has enabled much of the work to bring empty properties back into use in recent years. However, this funding

comes to an end in March 2015. The Mayor has just launched the funding prospectus for the 2015-18 Mayor's housing covenant programme but there is no mention of funding for empty properties despite the commitment in the London Housing Strategy to maintain a low level of empty properties. In the absence of this funding the Council proposes to allocate a total of £1m from its capital programme to enable this work to continue for the two financial years 2015/16 and 2016/17 (£0.5m per year).

- 3.20. The changes in the way council tax is charged introduced in 2013 may result in more owners of empty properties attempting to conceal the fact to avoid additional liability. This is likely to require a greater degree of joined up working and information sharing between council departments particularly between Revenues and Benefits, Housing and Corporate Debt Recovery.
- 3.21. A proportion of the current long term empty properties in Croydon are likely to be those where owners are less likely to engage and more likely to resist attempts to bring them back into use. It is probable that a great deal more effort will be required to achieve a successful outcome and this will need to be built into the campaign. The campaign action plan is broken down into three types of action:
- ◆ Promotion and engagement
 - ◆ Encouragement and support
 - ◆ Enforcement

Targeting Empty Properties Campaign

- 3.22. **Promotion and engagement includes** ensuring empty property owners are aware of the Council's support package, of their responsibilities to pay council tax, and of the range of offers the Council has to use their property as temporary accommodation for homeless households. Priority actions will include:
- ◆ Improving information for owners of empty properties on the council's website;
 - ◆ Launching a promotion campaign to ensure owners of empty properties are aware of their responsibilities and the support and assistance available from the Council, through high visibility marketing on the Council's web site, advertising in local papers, on local bill boards and at relevant events and meetings ;
 - ◆ Using routine council communications (e.g. council tax letters and bills) to signpost owners to the empty property service;
 - ◆ Producing banners and signs to be attached to empty properties promoting the council's services and reassuring residents that action is being taken
 - ◆ Additional promotion of the Council's dedicated empty properties telephone hotline (including an annual prize draw for people that report an empty property), the Council's website "Report It" option, and developing an empty properties reporting

option via the My Croydon App.

- 3.23. **Encouragement and support includes** investigating reports of empty properties, identifying and contacting owners of empty properties, providing advice on refurbishing and renting their property, talking over the options and their financial implications, offering financial assistance in the form of a loan or grant where the owner is eligible, and liaising with planning and council tax staff as required.

The council already uses the powers available to charge a 50% premium for properties that have been empty and unfurnished for more than two years, and has withdrawn Council Tax exemptions and discounts.

As part of the Housing Renewal Policy 2014 the Council currently has an empty property grant and loan programme. However, the majority of the funding, provided by the Greater London Authority, ends in March 2015. This leaves a small recycled loan fund of £200,000 per annum as the only assistance available. The proposal is to supplement the current loans fund through additional capital expenditure on empty homes grants of £0.5m per year for 2015/16 and 2016/17. Grants will be targeted towards long-term empty properties (over 6 months) and contribute towards bringing an empty property up to the decent homes standard, improving its energy efficiency and making any adaptations required. The maximum amount of grant per property is £25,000 and the grant is provided on condition that the owner signs 5 year nominations agreement for the Council to let the property to a household in housing need. Further details of the grants and loans scheme are provided in **Appendix 3**:

In addition to the capital funding for a grants programme over the next two years the Council will further encourage empty property owners to bring properties back into use by:

- ◆ Using empty property grants more flexibly (including making payments in instalments while works are underway);
- ◆ Offering incentives to owners to declare their properties as empty, and a package of assistance to help with moving where required;
- ◆ Improving joint working between Empty Property Officers, Corporate Debt Recovery, Revenues and Benefits, Council Deputyship including arrangements to share information where this will help identify owners of empty properties;
- ◆ Carrying out a further targeted audit of Council Tax list empty homes over the next 12 months;
- ◆ Improving administrative support and IT equipment for Empty Property Officers to enable them to use time more effectively through mobile working.

- 3.24. **Enforcement includes** responding to complaints and enquiries about long term empty properties, inspecting empty properties for hazards, obtaining court warrants and orders to enter empty properties, joint working with the Housing Enforcement Section to tackle any problems with pests, drainage or refuse, joint working with Corporate Debt Recovery to take action for bankruptcy and enforced

sale, and taking action to compulsorily purchase the property. Priority actions will include:

- ◆ Increasing the frequency of compulsory purchase order applications;
- ◆ Using Empty Dwelling Management Orders to bring empty properties back into use;
- ◆ Negotiating the purchase of empty properties where appropriate;
- ◆ Increasing the use of Planning powers to improve appearance of property (S215 T&C planning 1990); Building Act notices to improve condition of property; Environmental Health Act 1990 powers to tackle pest and drainage issues;
- ◆ Engaging with Banks and Building Societies to repossess properties in poor condition/sell repossessions quickly.

4. CONSULTATION

4.1. The council uses a range of methods of engaging stakeholders including online surveys, consultation documents, events and meetings. The council also regularly engages with landlords and potential landlords in Croydon by holding a landlords' forum. The forum allows the Council to inform landlords about relevant property issues and to receive feedback on the Council's services and suggestions for improvements. The council also receives regular feedback via customer complaints and suggestions. It is not proposed to carry out specific consultation on the campaign action plan, however, it has been developed taking account of general feedback from customers and residents relating to empty properties.

5. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

1 Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations

	Current	Medium Term Financial Strategy – 3 year		
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Revenue Budget				
Expenditure	0	0	0	0
Income	0	0	0	0
Effect of decision				
Expenditure	0	0	0	0
Income	0	0	0	0
Remaining budget	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Capital Budget				
Expenditure	0	500	500	0
Effect of decision				
Expenditure	0	500	500	0
Remaining budget	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>

2 The effect of the decision

The proposal in this report will require an allocation of £0.5m from the capital budget for each of the next two financial years 2015/16 and 2016/17 (£1m total). This is detailed in the July financial review report on this agenda.

This funding is in addition to the £200k loan fund that will remain available to be reallocated as and when repayments are made.

This expenditure will be partially offset by additional New Homes Bonus payable to the Council once properties are brought back into use and by a reduction in bed and breakfast costs as a result of the condition that grant assisted properties must be available for council nominations for 5 years.

For every empty property that is returned to use the council collects £7k in New Homes Bonus.

The current cost of emergency accommodation for homeless households is on average £4,000 per annum.

Many grants are paid below the maximum amount of £25,000 but still carry the 5 year nomination rights condition.

The financial impact of an average loan of £20k is shown below :-

	£ - year 1 period	£ - over 5 year
Loan	20,000	20,000
Saving - Cost of emergency	-4,000	-20,000
Income from - New Homes Bonus	-7,000	-7,000
Net cost	9,000	
Net Saving		-7,000

3 Risks

Empty property grants will be paid either on completion of the work or if works are significant then may be made in stage payments. The grant conditions ensure that there is minimal risk to the council.

4 Options

Do nothing: Current funding streams will end in March 2015 which means the grant-assisted empty property work would be significantly curtailed. Grants and loans are a very effective means of unlocking the barrier of lack of finance that prevents many property owners from returning their vacant properties to use.

5 Future savings/efficiencies

Empty property grants are provided on condition that the Council is given permission to use the property as temporary accommodation for homeless households for the next 5 years. Each property brought back into use through use of a grant would save the council the cost of providing high cost emergency accommodation. All properties are brought up to the Decent Homes Standard, improving their condition beyond the 5 year period for future occupants.

(Approved by: Lisa Taylor, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer)

6. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

- 6.1. The Council Solicitor comments that the proposed campaign and action plan properly reflects the Council's responsibilities towards empty properties and the powers the Council has to take enforcement action.
- 6.2. Advice on specific properties and proposals will be given as part of implementing the action plan.

(Approved by: Gabriel MacGregor, Head of Corporate Law on behalf of the Council Solicitor & Monitoring Officer)

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 7.1. There are no immediate HR considerations that arise from the recommendations of this report for LBC staff

(Approved by: Michael Pichamuthu HRBP on behalf of Heather Daley, Director of HR)

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1. Initial equality analysis has been carried out which indicates the action plan does not make any proposals that are likely to impact protected groups differently and a full equality analysis is therefore not required.
- 8.2. A full Equality Analysis was completed in October 2013 for the Housing Renewal Policy 2014, which includes the provisions for the Council to give empty property grants and loans. All enforcement powers that will be used under this campaign are covered by the Council's existing Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 9.1. The campaign action plan will have an overall beneficial environment impact through a reduction in fly tipping, vandalism and other environmental nuisance and an improved street scene. In addition engagement with owners of empty properties enables the Council to require improvements in energy efficiency in return for financial assistance which will result in a reduction in energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions for the borough.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

- 10.1. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires at section 17: It shall be the duty of each authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder

it its area. This action plan will help contribute to the reduction in anti-social behaviour and vandalism by bringing empty properties back into use.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

11.1. The proposed campaign action plan will make a contribution to both meeting housing need and in tackling environmental nuisance. The action plan requires additional capital investment in place of government/GLA funding which is no longer provided, however, properties successfully brought back into use will attract New Homes Bonus and a proportion will be used for temporary accommodation for homeless households (on agreement with the owner) thereby saving money on expensive emergency accommodation.

12. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1. None.

CONTACT OFFICER: Dave Morris, Housing Strategy Manager, Tel: 020 8726 6000 X60539

BACKGROUND PAPERS - LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None

APPENDIX 1: Empty Homes Agency statistics

Table : Empty homes in England 2013 by region – Empty Homes Agency

	Total Empty	% Empty
Northwest	114,882	3.70%
Yorkshire & Humber	81,322	3.56%
North East	40,411	3.47%
East Midlands	57,317	2.94%
West Midlands	65,490	2.78%
South West	65,641	2.76%
East Of England	61,741	2.45%
South East	89,010	2.43%
London	59,313	1.76%
England Total	635,127	2.79%

[Note: Empty Homes Agency figures do not include uninhabitable homes, homes due to be demolished and flats above shops]

Table : Empty homes in London 2013 by borough– Empty Homes Agency

	Total Dwellings	Total Empty	% Empty
Kensington & Chelsea	84,237	2,509	2.98%
Camden	100,568	2,804	2.79%
Sutton	80,031	1,874	2.34%
Hackney	104,131	2,227	2.14%
Southwark	126,800	2,668	2.10%
Barking & Dagenham	70,834	1,484	2.10%
Westminster	118,427	2,374	2.00%
Ealing	128,054	2,535	1.98%
Greenwich	103,935	2,049	1.97%
Bromley	135,060	2,653	1.96%
Croydon	146,890	2,846	1.94%
Newham	103,296	1,971	1.91%
Havering	100,260	1,890	1.89%
Hounslow	96,608	1,788	1.85%
Enfield	120,635	2,224	1.84%
Barnet	140,100	2,549	1.82%
Richmond upon Thames	81,728	1,449	1.77%
City of London	6,279	107	1.70%
Lambeth	133,053	2,190	1.65%
Hillingdon	105,148	1,715	1.63%
Islington	97,902	1,580	1.61%
Lewisham	118,467	1,894	1.60%
Kingston upon Thames	63,263	999	1.58%
Redbridge	100,396	1,513	1.51%
Merton	81,292	1,190	1.46%
Tower Hamlets	110,579	1,588	1.44%
Haringey	103,737	1,435	1.38%
Waltham Forest	98,727	1,338	1.36%
Bexley	94,607	1,271	1.34%
Hammersmith & Fulham	81,726	988	1.21%
Harrow	86,547	1,009	1.17%
Wandsworth	134,518	1,472	1.09%

| Brent | 110,937 | 1,130 | 1.02%

Table : Long-term empty homes 2013 by region – Empty Homes Agency

	Long term Empty	% Long Term Empty
Northwest	16,325	1.40%
South East	24,445	1.04%
Yorkshire & Humber	28,997	1.27%
South West	28,470	0.78%
West Midlands	24,056	0.71%
East Of England	21,563	0.91%
London	46,747	1.50%
East Midlands	20,562	0.82%
North East	21,435	1.10%
England	232,600	1.02%

Table : Long-term empty homes 2013 London – Empty Homes Agency

	<i>Total Dwellings</i>	<i>Long Term Empty</i>	<i>% Long Term Empty</i>	<i>DCLG Live Table 615 – All Long Term Vacants</i>
Kensington & Chelsea	84,237	1,700	2.02%	1521
Camden	100,568	1,482	1.47%	1286
Westminster	118,427	1,699	1.43%	1503
Lambeth	133,053	1,430	1.07%	1329
Hackney	104,131	1,083	1.04%	1032
Sutton	80,031	774	0.97%	764
City of London	6,279	59	0.94%	47
Newham	103,296	945	0.91%	1136
Barnet	140,100	1,273	0.91%	939
Enfield	120,635	1,028	0.85%	847
Havering	100,260	836	0.83%	816
Merton	81,292	618	0.76%	562
Brent	110,937	751	0.68%	567
Southwark	126,800	853	0.67%	833
Lewisham	118,467	750	0.63%	737
Bromley	135,060	841	0.62%	709
Hillingdon	105,148	645	0.61%	556
Richmond upon Thames	81,728	489	0.60%	542
Haringey	103,737	618	0.60%	482
Bexley	94,607	544	0.58%	527
Waltham Forest	98,727	550	0.56%	598
Tower Hamlets	110,579	616	0.56%	536
Greenwich	103,935	535	0.51%	523
Kingston upon Thames	63,263	318	0.50%	296
Redbridge	100,396	499	0.50%	487
Hounslow	96,608	427	0.44%	356
Harrow	86,547	380	0.44%	300

Islington	97,902	404	0.41%	382
Ealing	128,054	516	0.40%	342
Wandsworth	134,518	536	0.40%	493
Barking & Dagenham	70,834	253	0.36%	242
Hammersmith & Fulham	81,726	281	0.34%	268
Croydon	146,890	323	0.22%	294

APPENDIX 2

Long term empty properties in Croydon as at 31 March 2014	
Recorded as empty following a previous Council tax exemption or discount for refurbishment or structural alteration but are believed to have already returned to occupation	808
Empty for more than 6 months (see below)	
Empty for more than 2 years	298
Empty and in probate for more than 6 months	163
Empty and owner is receiving care or giving care elsewhere	133
Empty – miscellaneous reasons	42
Sub total	(636)
Total according to Council Tax records	1444

APPENDIX 3: Empty Property Grant and Loan summary.

Empty property grants and loans provide a source of funding for renovation or conversion works to long term vacant properties in the borough.

A grant is provided to the owner in return for 5 years nomination rights for tenants for the council. Loans assist with the quick turnaround of vacant properties and conversion to an increased number of housing units. They are a very effective means of unlocking the barrier of lack of finance that prevents many property owners from returning their vacant properties to use.

Croydon has been awarded £1.21M in grant funding from the GLA for 2012-15 with a target of returning 80 units of accommodation to occupation. Croydon has also allocated £200k per annum of the Recycled Loan Fund to Empty property Loans. In 2015-16 the GLA funding will cease.

Since January 2010 there have been a total of 137 properties returned to use by the actions of the empty property service with some financial assistance, via a grant or loan.

Empty Property Grant

Purpose:

This grant is intended to help owners bring long term (over 6 months) empty properties back into use or to create new dwellings through the conversion of residential and non-residential space (generally former commercial/storage space above shops) and to make them available for letting to tenants nominated by the Council on an affordable rent. On completion of the works the dwellings must achieve the Decent Homes Standard.

Works covered under Empty Property Grant:

- ◆ Works to put a dwelling or building into reasonable repair and to achieve the Decent Homes Standard are covered. This includes virtually all types of repair including internal decoration, but not furnishing.
- ◆ Works to provide additional dwellings by conversion.
- ◆ Works to provide adequate thermal insulation including the following:
- ◆ Works to provide adequate facilities for space heating.
- ◆ Works to provide satisfactory internal arrangements including provision of separate access to flats above a shop.
- ◆ Works to provide adequate means of escape from fire and other fire precautions. Where the works are to a single dwelling house, mains wired smoke detectors are to be provided for each floor level.
- ◆ Energy Efficiency/environmental works such as low energy bulbs, double glazing, a water meter, dual volume flush WCs, water butt.

Grant amount for Empty Property Grant:

The maximum amount of grant is £25,000 per unit of accommodation.

Main conditions:

The Council may secure nomination rights for the property for 5 years and the landlord will be required to sign a formal nominations agreement to this effect. The property must also be managed by either Croydon Council or an alternative Registered Provider. This may be a registered housing association in the form of a lease.

Empty Property Loan

Purpose:

This loan is intended to help owners bring long term empty properties back into use or to create new dwellings through the conversion of non-residential space (above shops) and to make them available for letting to tenants nominated by the Council. On completion of the works the dwellings must achieve the Decent Homes Standard but there is no condition requiring occupation by Council nominated tenants.

Works covered under Empty Property Loan:

The works covered are identical to those covered by empty property grant.

Loan amount for Empty Homes Loan:

The maximum loan amount is £40,000 per unit of accommodation.

Main conditions:

The loan is for a term of 2 years, starting at the point of the first payment from the Council to the owner. At the end of the 2 year period the loan is repayable in full.

It is a condition of the loan that the eligible works are commenced and completed within **twelve months** from the date of approval of the application