



Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Operational Services

Environmental Health Division

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

2008 - 2012

CONTENTS

1. **Summary**
 2. **Introduction**
 3. **Key aims and Objectives**
 4. **Strategic Framework**
 5. **Empty Properties In the Borough of Newcastle under Lyme**
 6. **Delivering the Strategy**
 7. **Resources**
 8. **Monitoring**
 9. **Review**
 10. **Consultation on Draft Strategy**
 11. **Enquires**
- Appendix 1 Action Plan**
- Appendix 2 Procedure Flow Chart**

1. SUMMARY

The Empty Homes Strategy links with the Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy and aims to bring empty dwellings in the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme back into use. Good partnership working with other service areas of the Council and with external partners as well as the co-operation of property owners is vital to ensure the success of the strategy.

Bringing homes back into use links into Government objectives; including creating sustainable communities, tackling low demand and market failure, tackling anti social behaviour, the provision of affordable homes and ensuring that homes meet a decent standard.

In 2006, there were 1073 empty homes in the Borough of which 428 were private homes that had been empty for more than 6 months.

To achieve the overall aim of the strategy we have identified the following four key priorities:

- To raise awareness of issues and problems associated with empty properties.
- To assemble relevant accurate and up to date information on the number of empty properties in the area.
- To work with partners to identify solutions.
- To bring empty homes back into use.

These priorities will be achieved by, wherever possible, engaging in a positive dialogue with owners. However, where this is not possible statutory action will be used.

The strategy contains an action plan that sets out specific and measurable targets for the achievement of each of the priorities and indicates which officer is responsible for taking appropriate action.



2. INTRODUCTION

Empty homes represent waste, financial expense and missed opportunity. They can blight communities, attract fly tipping, vandals and squatters and tie up the resources of the Council and the emergency services. Bringing empty homes back into use is a sustainable way to meet future housing demand and helps to alleviate pressure to develop green field sites.

The number of empty homes in England has declined steadily from a high of 869,000 in 1993 to 660,000 in 2006. Despite this trend, there remains a significant and long standing problem of empty homes, particularly those in the private sector which accounts for over 80 per cent of all empty homes. About 300,000 private sector dwellings have been vacant for more than 6 months.

How to distinguish an empty property

There is no widely accepted definition of an empty property and a range of terms, such as vacant and redundant are also often used. Generally speaking, a vacant dwelling is defined as a unit of residential accommodation that is empty at a particular point in time. This includes dwellings that are empty between change of occupants or undergoing modernisation, repair or conversion, or awaiting demolition, or newly completed but not occupied. Due to this wide definition, true 'empty properties' are not always as straightforward to identify as it may seem. For example:



- A home which appears empty may be a person's second home and occupied infrequently.
- An empty property may have been earmarked as part of a regeneration programme and demolition may have already been planned.
- Properties could be empty pending planning consent, refurbishment or whilst awaiting the new resident to move in.
- There may be sign of occupation but this may be from squatters.
- A property may be occupied but the garden may be overgrown and the home neglected.

Guidance contained in the ODPM Implementation Handbook (2003, p17) states that empty properties are those that;

- have been unoccupied for six months or more;
- have been unoccupied for less than six months and are a special case ie. Legal action is being taken by the Local Authority as a result of serious disrepair or other problems being caused by the property;
- are occupied, but the space is capable of more beneficial use;
- do not have a reasonable prospect of being brought back into use by the owner working alone.

Information can be obtained from Council Tax records for the purpose of identifying vacant dwellings and for taking steps to bring vacant dwellings back into use.

Reasons why dwellings become empty

Individual factors:

- Unresolved ownership usually following the death of the owner.
- Bankruptcy of owner.
- Owner may be institutionalised – hospital, prison etc.
- Lack of expertise in property and tenancy management.
- The owner may not be aware of the property's existence.

Property factors:

- The property may have been acquired solely for speculative investment purposes.
- The owner may not fully appreciate the financial benefits of bringing the empty property back into use.
- Poor property condition where the costs of bringing the property back into use may be prohibitive, relative to the income that could be generated.
- Repossession.

Housing Market Factors:

- Low demand.
- Housing market collapse – repossession, negative equity.
- Over supply of certain property types.
- Area regeneration may result in properties being empty pending renovation or demolition.

The negative effects of empty property

These include:

- wasted financial resources for the Council and also for the owners;
- increased dereliction, vandalism, litter and other anti social behaviour;
- reduced market values in neighbouring properties; contributing to a spiral of decline
- reduced demand for goods and services in the area;
- waste of useful and much needed units of accommodation.



The benefits of this Strategy

The re-use of empty homes brings financial and social rewards to the Council, private owners and the community in the following ways;

Council:

- meets the housing needs of local people;
- improves/restores older buildings and homes to modern standards;
- provides a range of good quality homes for people in need of affordable rented property;
- generates additional revenue through Council Tax;
- prevents properties from falling into disrepair and becoming a focus of vandalism and anti-social behaviour;
- reduces the need to build new dwellings on Greenfield sites.

Community:

- prevents empty properties becoming the focus of anti social behaviour;
- improves market values in neighbouring properties and the local area by reducing a spiral of decline.

For the purpose of the strategy, efforts will principally be focused on the problematic properties which are usually those houses which are inactive in the housing market, often in poor condition and empty for six months or more. This definition usually allows enough time for market forces to return an empty property into use without intervention from an external agency.

3. AIM AND KEY PRIORITIES

The aim of the strategy is bring empty dwellings back into use. To achieve this we have identified the following key priorities:

- To raise awareness of issues and problems associated with empty properties.
- To assemble relevant accurate and up to date information on the number of empty properties in the area.
- To work in partnership to identify solutions.
- To bring empty homes back into use.

4. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Empty Property Strategy and its key components have been developed to reflect national regional and local housing strategies and policies.

National Context

Bringing homes back into use links into wider Government objectives including; creating sustainable communities, tackling low demand and market failure, tackling anti-social behaviour, the provision of affordable homes and ensuring that homes meet a decent standard. The following Government documents reflect this.

- 'Homes for the future: More affordable, more sustainable' (2007)

In this Green Paper, the Government states that local authorities, as part of their strategic housing role, should make better use of empty homes when looking to increase the housing supply. The Government indicates its intention to look at measures to encourage this, including the new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant.

- Sustainable Communities: Homes for All (2005)

This five year plan from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister focuses on the opportunities of a decent home for everyone at a price they can afford. It considers market restructuring, making homes decent, increased house building and dealing with vacant properties. Bringing empty homes back into use is a key priority within this policy document.

- Housing Act (2004)

The Housing Act 2004 provides local authorities with new powers to tackle long term empty homes. It introduced Empty Dwelling Management Orders to enable local authorities to take over the rights and responsibilities of the owner and to refurbish and rent out the property without becoming the legal owner.

The Act also introduced the Housing Health & Safety Rating System to assess hazards in dwellings and a new power of selective licensing to target areas suffering from low demand and/or high levels of anti-social behaviour.

- Local Government Act (2003)

This legislation allows information to be obtained from Council tax records to be used for;

- a) identifying vacant dwellings;
- b) taking steps to bring vacant dwellings back into use.

The Act also allows local authorities to reduce or remove entirely discounts for homes that have been empty for over 6 months.

- Planning Policy Statement 3 (2006)

This Statement directed local planning authorities to identify empty homes and bring them back into use.

- Unlocking the Potential(2003)

This is guidance issued by the Office of Deputy Prime Minister aimed at owners and local authorities to bring empty homes back into use.

Regional and Sub Regional Context

The West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy 2005 aims to create mixed, balanced and inclusive communities. Key issues relevant to the empty property strategy are urban renaissance and increasing pathways of choice which can be achieved in part by making best use of existing properties. Bringing empty properties back into use can play an important role in sustaining and regenerating neighbourhoods by widening choice and opportunity whilst also addressing problems of anti social behaviour and neighbourhood blight.

The Borough Council together with Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands Councils' form the recognised 'sub region' of North Staffordshire and is one of the nine national Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder Areas. A significant part of the urban area of the Borough is within the boundary of the area. Bringing empty properties back into use is essential in the restructuring of the housing market and will be encouraged by market renewal.

Local Context

- Corporate Plan

The future priorities for the Borough are contained in the Corporate Plan 2007-8 to 2011-12 which sets out the vision and outcomes for the next five years. The empty property strategy has a particularly important contribution to meeting some of the priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan. In particular;-

- *Creating a Cleaner, Greener and Safer Borough*-by reducing dereliction, vandalism, litter and anti social behaviour such as damage, theft and arson.
- *Creating a Borough of opportunity*- by improving market values and the attractiveness of areas adjoining vacant homes reducing a spiral of decline and helping increase the number of residents who feel the Council is making the area a better place to live.
- *Creating a Healthy and Active Community* –by ensuring access to a range of quality homes.
- *Transforming our Council to achieve excellence* - by working in partnership with relevant organisations to deliver dwellings which can be occupied.

- Housing Strategy

This policy contributes to the following objectives in the councils housing strategy:

- *Improving the sustainability of the local housing market* – Bringing empty properties back into use provides an important role in sustaining and regenerating neighbourhoods.
- *Meeting the Decent Homes Standard* - The reoccupation of homes results in repairs and improvements to a decent habitable standard.
- *Providing a greater choice of housing in response to residents' needs* – Bringing empty homes back into use will increase the amount of living accommodation available in the Borough .

- Homelessness Strategy

The Empty Homes strategy contributes to the following objectives in the Council's Homelessness Strategy;

- *Ensuring sufficient accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless* – bringing empty properties back into use will increase the amount of living accommodation available in the Borough
- *Providing an excellent service* – bringing empty properties back into use will improve market values and the attractiveness of areas, thus providing customer satisfaction for residents

5. EMPTY PROPERTIES IN THE BOROUGH OF NEWCASTLE –UNDER –LYME



The Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme covers an area of 210 square kilometres with an estimated population of approximately 124,000. It is the second largest of Staffordshire's eight district council authorities, excluding Stoke-on-Trent, which is a unitary authority.

The Borough contains both high quality countryside and pockets of urban settlements, some of which show signs of deprivation. The Indices of Deprivation (source DETR 2000) place two of the Borough's wards in the 10% most deprived in England. These are Holditch and Cross Heath. A further two, Silverdale and Chesterton are in the 20% band. These are within the Renew North Staffordshire dwellings Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder and have pockets of low demand housing.

The housing stock consists of approximately 52,000 dwellings, of which 74% are owner-occupied, 22% in the ownership of Registered Social Landlords (including the Council's former housing stock which was the subject of Large Scale Voluntary Transfer in 2000) and 4% in the private rented sector. Approximately 35,000 of the dwellings were built after 1944, 10,000 dwellings were built between 1919 and 1944 and almost 7000 dwellings prior to 1919.

In 2006 according to Housing Investment Programme, data submitted by the Local Authorities in Staffordshire there were a total of 19,732 empty homes in the county which represented 4.26% of the total stock. Of these homes 52% (10,301) were privately owned and had been empty for more than six months.

Table 1 – Empty Properties in Staffordshire by Local Authority 2006

County	Local Authority/Borough	Total empty homes	% of homes empty	Local Council	Housing Association	Other Public body	Private inc Landlords	Private homes empty more than 6 months	No of properties brought back into use (2004/5)
Staffordshire	Cannock Chase	5552	2.08%	15	764	7	4766	3,025	14
	East Staffordshire	2065	4.47%	0	90	5	1970	872	4
	Lichfield	468	1.13%	0	52	0	416	115	1
	Newcastle-under-Lyme	1073	2.03%	0	84	0	989	428	23
	South Staffordshire	<i>875</i>	1.98%	0	110	4	761	451	6
	Stafford	<i>1613</i>	2.96%	0	212	0	1401	923	0
	Staffordshire Moorlands	1424	3.39%	0	25	0	1399	979	15
	Stoke-on-Trent	<i>5946</i>	5.38%	268	141	0	5537	3,346	73
	Tamworth	716	2.30%	70	14	0	632	162	3
	Total		19,732	4.26%	353	1,492	16	17,871	10,301

Source Empty Homes Agency

* *Figures in italics are based on incomplete figures provided by local authorities and are lower than actual totals*

Within Newcastle Borough in 2006 there were 1,073 empty homes; 989 in private ownership, 84 owned by Housing Associations. 428 private homes were empty for more than 6 months.

As table one shows, the total percentage of homes empty in the Borough was 2.03% which was lower than the neighbouring North Staffordshire authorities of Stoke and Staffordshire Moorlands.

Using council tax data the wards with the most empty homes were Town, Chesterton, both of which are within the Renew boundary, and Wolstanton. These wards will be the priority areas for action.

6. DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

To achieve the aim of bringing empty homes back into use we intend to work to the following key priorities.

1. **Raise awareness of empty property issues**

It is appreciated that there is a need to raise awareness and provide more publicity about the strategy and our approach to empty homes

It is proposed that we will write to owners of empty properties advising them of their responsibilities and options that may be available to help them return properties to occupation.

We maintain a comprehensive section on our website for issues relating to housing. This site is updated with changes in legislation, topical issues and has direct links to specialist sites. Additional information concerning empty homes will be posted on this webpage and kept updated.

We will also develop an information pack, fact sheets, leaflets and posters aimed especially for owners and promote this through the Council's Newspaper and local media. Information will also be shared with private landlords through the landlord forum and our database of accredited landlords.

2. **Assemble relevant accurate and up to date information on empty homes.**

The Council may become aware of the existence of empty properties through various routes including;

- Council tax records,
- Complaints usually from residents,
- Residents Associations active in an area,
- Council officers working in the Borough,
- Owners/landlords requesting help or advice.

It is essential to maintain a good knowledge of the location of empty homes in the Borough. Whilst we use the Council Tax records to update information held on problematic properties we recognise that these may not be fully accurate for our purpose. We will therefore develop and maintain a bespoke empty property database linked to the Council Tax records and update this with information we receive from field officers. The feasibility of linking the information to a GIS system to help identify hot spots will also be investigated.

The database will be used to identify priority properties according to condition, length of vacancy and property type. Action will be targeted initially towards empty properties in the worse condition, then those within areas containing the highest level of vacant properties followed by vacant problematic properties which, due to

demand or need in an area, will be the most suitable for referral to Registered Social landlords

3. Work in Partnership to identify solutions

There is recognition that partnership working will be crucial in relation to the success of the strategy. The delivery of the strategy is through the private sector housing team but good links with other departments such as Planning, Housing Strategy, Building Control and Revenue and Benefits are important in the identification of empty homes, awareness raising and applying a range of enforcement measures using housing and planning legislation. It is therefore proposed that a cross department Empty Homes Working Group will be formed to meet and co-ordinate action.

As well as working corporately the Council works with external partners including Registered Social Landlords, Landlords Forums and Owners to develop new funding streams and initiatives. We are currently working with Registered Social Landlords and Renew North Staffordshire to focus resources towards properties that lie within the Renew boundaries. These partners are investing in the purchase and repair of over 26 properties which are due to be completed in 2008. We have encouraged them to target empty properties to enable us to give owners an option to sell their empty property to a housing association. We will continue to work with our external partners to develop further bids to target action on empty homes.

The Council is also considering whether the use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders will be appropriate and will carry out a feasibility study with Register Social Landlords to determine whether using an association will be a suitable and practical course of action.

The Council will continue to be pro-active in working with Landlords by co-ordinating the 'Private Rented Sector Focus group' to bring together agencies and individuals to cover issues relating to the private rented sector within the Borough. The aim of the group is to work in partnership to identify good practice and develop new initiatives where services and standards can be developed that are mutually beneficial. Consulting and sharing ideas through an open forum.

The Council will also continue its commitment to the development of the North Staffs Landlord Accreditation Scheme of which the Council is a partner agency. This scheme is very successful in working with private Landlords and currently boasts over 100 members that operate within the Borough. Members of the scheme are eligible to apply for the Accredited Landlord Grant to improve properties to the Decent Homes Standard and this grant also acts as an incentive to bring empty properties back into use. Details of this scheme can be found at www.landlordaccreditation.co.uk



4 To bring empty homes back into use

There are many reasons why properties become empty. It is important, therefore, for the Council to be able to offer a range of solutions to suit the individual circumstances. This flexible approach is shown in the procedure flow chart for dealing with empty properties – see Appendix 2. The various solutions are listed below:

- Advice and Assistance

We currently write to owners of empty properties which have been included on our database as being the subject of complaint and then offer appropriate advice and assistance. We will expand this and send out a questionnaire to all owners of long term vacant homes to find out what these owner's intentions are and offer advice and assistance.

In some cases owners are not able to deal with the property. We will provide advice to help owners to sell their properties. In particular where the owner wishes we will refer them to a Housing Association for it to purchase the house and then improve, let or sell it. Where an owner requires assistance in finding building contractors that meet minimum standards we will provide information through the Home Improvement Agency

- Grant/loan

The Council also provides financial assistance to owners of vacant dwelling in accordance with our private sector housing policy. Grants and/or loans may be available provided the Council determine that it is the most satisfactory course of action having regard to the location of property and the costs involved. A renovation grant or loan will only be available where the owner is willing to move back into the dwelling as their main residence.

Should the owner wish to let the property a landlord accreditation grant may be available. However, the house although vacant must not contain any class 1 hazards and eligible grant works must be to meet the Decent Home Standards. The maximum grant is 50% of the cost of the works (up to a maximum of £2,000) and the landlord must have become a member of the Accreditation Scheme. Further details concerning financial assistance can be found at www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk

- Deposit Guarantee Scheme

Through the landlord accreditation scheme the Council will seek to improve the links with the Deposit Guarantee Scheme and incorporate using empty properties that have been brought back into use

- Enforcement

Whilst, whenever possible, voluntary measures will be used to encourage owners to bring properties back into use, it must be recognised that in some cases owners will refuse to co-operate and enforcement action will be necessary.

The statutory action which can be taken will depend upon the condition and location of a property and the circumstances of the owner. Properties in a poor condition

which are a hazard to the health and safety of the public will be a prime target for enforcement action.

The available options for enforcement are:

Building Act 1984 Section 77- enables the Council to deal with buildings that it considers to be dangerous. It can apply to a Magistrates' Court for an order requiring the owner to make the building safe or demolish it.

Building Act 1984 Section 78- allows the Council to deal with buildings that pose an immediate danger. This emergency measure allows the local authority to carry out remedial works itself without giving the owner the opportunity to deal with it himself. The Council is only entitled to carry out works that remove the danger.

Building Act 1984 Section 79 – This empowers the Council to deal with ruinous and dilapidated buildings or structures and neglected sites and if necessary carry out work in default

Environmental Protection Act 1990 Sections 78-81-allows the Council to require the abatement of statutory nuisances. The term statutory nuisance applies to a range of problems that might arise from empty homes, including accumulations of rubbish or dampness affecting neighbouring properties. The Council can serve an abatement notice on the owner of the premises requiring works to abate the nuisance and if the notice is not complied with can carry out works in default.

Housing Act 1985. Section 17- allows the Council to acquire under-used or ineffectively used property/land etc for residential purposes if there is a general housing need in the area through compulsory purchase.

Compulsory Purchase is perhaps the strongest power available to tackle empty homes. It is not, however, a power that rests with the Council and it must apply to the Secretary of State for an order to be made. The whole process is drawn out complex and resource intensive as the Council will need to demonstrate that there is a compelling case in the public interest for the property to be compulsorily purchased, and that other methods of returning the property to use have been tried and have failed. In addition, the Council will need to show that it has clear intentions for the use of the property/land and be able to show that it has the necessary resources available to go through with the Compulsory Purchase Order. This means that compulsory purchase will be a method of last resort.

Housing Act 1985 Part 9-gives the Council powers to make Demolition Orders and Slum Clearance Areas to require the demolition of individual or groups of unsafe houses where that is the most satisfactory course of action

Housing Act 2004 Part 1-requires the Council to serve a notice to deal with category one hazards to which a member of the public may be exposed to.

Housing Act 2004 Section 132 –138-allows the Council to over the management of an empty property, undertake works, let out the property and collect rent. The Council must notify the owners of its proposal and try to work voluntarily to find an acceptable solution. Only if no agreement can be reached can the Council seek approval to make an Interim Empty Dwelling Management Order initially for 12

months. If agreement is still not possible a final order, which can last for 7 years, can be made. The process is time consuming and will require the Council to prepare a plan as to how it intends to manage any property throughout the duration of the Order.

The Council will develop a process for using such Orders and consult with Housing Association partners to determine the most practical way of carrying out and delivering the management of a scheme

Law of Property Act 1925 –the Council can force the sale of an empty property where abatement notices have been served and the work has been carried out in default by the Council. An enforced sale can only be pursued if the cost of the default works is comparable with the market value of the property.

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 Section 29- allows the Council to carry out works to an unoccupied building to prevent unauthorised entry or to prevent it from becoming a danger to public health. 48 hours notice is needed unless the works are required immediately

Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Section 215 -allows the Council to deal with unsightly land or the external appearance of property.

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 Section 226 (as amended by Section 99 Planning and Compulsory Act 2004) allows the council to acquire land or buildings if acquisition will allow improvements or redevelopment to take place provided the improvement, development, or redevelopment will contribute to the promotion or improvement or economic, social or environmental well being. This power can be used to acquire empty properties that adversely affect the street scene because of the dilapidated condition.

7. RESOURCES

- Staff

The key resource available to deliver the strategy is staff within the Housing and Enforcement Teams.

The lead positions for delivering are indicated on the action plan. The overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the strategy will be the Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing)

- Budget

Staff time will be met from the Revenue budget. The amount of capital resources allocated annually by the Council will be dependent upon the Housing Capital Programme. This is funded through central Government and the Council's capital programme. In addition funding will be sought from the Council's Housing and Regeneration fund to tackle empty homes where this is appropriate.

The Council will work in partnership with Registered Social Landlords to seek funds from the Housing Corporation and Renew North Staffordshire to develop schemes to bring empty homes back into use.

8. MONITORING

The Council monitors the number of private sector empty properties that are brought back into use or demolished during the year as a direct result of action by the local authority (National Best Value Performance Indicator BVPI 64).

The audited out turn figures for:

- 2004/05 were 23 empty properties back into use,
- 2005/06 were 27 empty properties back into use ,
- 2006/07 were 27 empty properties back into use.

We will bring;

- 27 empty properties back into use during 2007/8,
- 30 empty properties back into use during 2008/9,
- 35 empty properties back into use during 2009/10,
- 50 empty properties back into use during 2010/11.
- 60 empty properties back into use during 2011/12

Progress against targets are reported quarterly through the Councils management information system

9. REVIEW

This Strategy will be reviewed after 12 months and a new strategy will be published in 2012

10. CONSULTATION ON DRAFT STRATEGY

The draft strategy was circulated to other departments within the Council and to representatives from external organisations such as:-

- Landlords
- North Staffordshire Landlords Association
- N.A.C.R.O.
- Housing Associations
- Thistleberry Residents Association
- Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder (NMP)
- Stoke City Council
- Citizens Advice Bureau
-

The Council would like to thank these agencies for any comments or suggestions that assisted in the production of this strategy.

11. ENQUIRIES

A copy of the Policy can be obtained upon request from the address below or by visiting the Council's website at: www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council,
Civic Offices,
Merrial Street,
Newcastle-under-Lyme,
Staffordshire,
ST5 2AG.

Telephone 01782 717717
Textline 07800 1400 48
Email: contact@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk

To receive Council information in other languages, please telephone 01782 742562

如需要以华语翻译关于县政府的服务，请拨这电话：
01782 235085

কাউন্সিল সম্পর্কিত তথ্য বাংলায় পেতে চাইলে অনুগ্রহপূর্বক
01782 235085 নাম্বারে ফোন করুন ।

کونسل کے بارے میں معلومات اردو میں حاصل کرنے کے لیے براہ کرم **01782 235085** پر فون کریں۔

**W celu otrzymania ulotek/informacji Urzędu Miejskiego w języku polskim
należy telefonować pod nr. 01782 235085**

Appendix 1

2008/2012 ACTION PLAN

Objectives	Actions	Target Date	Lead Officer	Outcomes
Raise awareness of empty property issues	Review and update current publicity material and develop information pack.	July 2008	Housing Standards Officer	Increased awareness of empty property issues in the Borough.
	Publicise through the Councils newspaper and website the importance of bringing empty properties back into use.	September 2008	Housing Standards Officer	
	Share empty property information at landlord's forums.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Officer	
	Annually review information/ documentation produced by the Council and ensure this remains topical and relevant .	Annually	Housing Standards Officer	
Assemble relevant accurate and up to date information on empty homes	Develop and maintain a bespoke empty property database linked to Council tax records and investigate the feasibility of links to GIS system to identify hot spots	September 2008	Principal EHO	Empty Homes located
	Carry out Borough wide stock condition survey including empty homes	2008/09	Principal EHO	
Work in partnership to identify solutions	Form cross department empty Property Working group to co-ordinate activity within the Council.	January 2008	Team Leader	A more coordinated approach to empty homes work.
	Develop funding bids with Registered Social Landlords and Renew.	November 2008	Principal EHO	Additional funds levered in towards

	Carry out feasibility study with Registered Social landlords on the possibility of Empty Management Orders and/or private leasing schemes	July 2008	Team Leader	bringing empty homes back into use.
Bring empty properties back into use	BVPI 64 The number of private sector dwellings that are returned into occupation or demolished as a result of action of the local authority.	30 during 2008/9 35 during 2009/10 40 during 2010/11	Principal EHO	Within the period of the strategy there will be a significant reduction in the void rate of problematic vacant dwellings.
	Send letter to owners of problematic empty homes advising of options available to return properties into use.	Ongoing	EHO	
	Provide a loan/grant to eligible owners in accordance with the Council's assistance policy.	Ongoing	EHO	
	Respond to complaints concerning empty homes	Ongoing	EHO	

The Strategy will be reviewed after 12 months and the Action plan will be amended to reflect any changes and newly identified actions

Appendix 2

DEALING WITH EMPTY DWELLINGS



