



Hull City Council

Hull Empty Homes Plan

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Hull Empty Homes Plan aims to address the critical issue of long-term empty properties in Hull. In Hull, there are 3579 Empty Homes with 1963 being classed as Long Term Empties meaning they have been empty for six months or longer. The total number of empty dwellings equates to around 3% of total stock in the city. Roughly half of the chargeable empty dwellings are classed as “Long Term Empties”. Hull previously had a successful Empty Homes Plan and this plan builds on that success. Empty homes are a wasted resource that can lead to community decline, reduced property values, and increased anti-social behaviour. If properties are neglected, they can have a detrimental effect on the overall character of neighbourhoods, causing a sense of insecurity among residents.

1.2 It is expected that homes will occasionally become empty due to normal market activities, such as sales, rentals, or inheritance. Hull faces a challenge with a higher percentage of long-term empty homes compared to the regional average, necessitating a structured and proactive plan. This situation is compounded by recent economic challenges that have impacted homeowners, leading to prolonged vacancies.

1.3 This plan aims to bring approximately 50 empty homes back into use annually through targeted engagement and interventions. By doing so, we will enhance housing availability, improve the quality of life for residents, and contribute to the revitalisation of our communities.

1.4 The Hull Empty Homes Plan recognises that addressing empty homes is not just about housing; it is also about fostering community

pride, enhancing public safety, and creating a more vibrant city. The plan will involve various stakeholders, including local agencies, community groups, and residents, to ensure a collaborative approach.

1.5 Furthermore, the plan will explore innovative solutions and partnerships that can effectively tackle the issue of empty homes. By drawing on the expertise of various stakeholders, we aim to create a comprehensive framework that not only addresses the symptoms of empty homes but also tackles the underlying causes.

1.6 The Council has made a commitment in its Housing Strategy to bring empty properties back into use, making the best use of our existing housing stock and increasing the overall number of available homes.



Empty Homes Plan on a Page



Why Tackle Empty Homes?

3,579 Empty homes

1,963 Long-term empties



Meeting Housing Need

- Provide homes for those in need
- Improve our streets
- Reduce anti-social behaviour



How Will This Help

- Protect local amenities
- Increase options available
- Increase local economic activity

Our Approach



Monitor



Inform



Support



Advise



Enforce

2. Supporting Corporate Priorities

2.1 The Hull Empty Homes Plan supports Hull City Council's main goals, focussing on economic growth, building strong communities, and working together with partners.

2.2 People: We want to make it easier for residents to find quality housing from various sources. The plan will also help vulnerable residents access housing and support services to maintain community connections.

2.3 Housing: We are committed to improving the quality of homes, including updating older properties to meet energy-saving goals. By addressing empty homes, we can make better use of existing homes and ensure private landlords maintain high standards.

2.4 Place: Updated NPPF housing targets state that Hull should achieve 993 additional new homes per year. We will work with local communities to create safe and welcoming neighbourhoods. The

Empty Homes Plan is key to achieving these housing goals.

2.5 By reducing empty homes, we aim to provide reliable housing services and help build strong, connected communities. This plan is an important part of Hull City Council's effort to improve housing and support residents in our city.

3. Definition of an Empty Property

3.1 For the purposes of this Plan, a long-term empty home is defined as a residential property that has been unoccupied for 6 months or more. This can include single family homes, houses of multiple occupancy, flats, and

accommodation located above commercial premises.

3.2 When a property is brought to the Council's attention, an impact assessment will be conducted to determine the appropriate

course of action. This will involve reviewing Council Tax records, consulting with other departments and neighbouring residents, and engaging with relevant parties and agencies.

4. Reasons Why Properties Remain Empty

4.1 There are numerous reasons why properties may remain empty, including:

- The owner can't afford to maintain or rent it out.
- The owner doesn't want to rent or sell the property.
- The owner has financial problems, like negative equity.
- The owner is unwell or in long-term care.
- The property needs repairs, but the owner can't afford them.
- There are legal issues, like probate, that are holding things up.
- The owner just isn't taking any action to rent or sell the property.
- The owner doesn't know what support is available to help.

These reasons can vary a lot in how serious they are. That's why the Council will try to offer different types of help and support to address the specific needs of each property owner.

5. Developing Our Empty Homes Plan

5.1 The approach to tackling empty homes will focus on collaboration with property owners, community engagement, and targeted interventions. Hull City Council previously had a successful empty homes programme and this plan aims to use this learning to expand on this success. The plan will consist of the following key elements:

- Improving data accuracy: We will enhance our data collection methods to ensure that the reported number of empty homes is a true reflection of the situation. This involves regular audits and updates to our records, ensuring that data is current and actionable.
- Learning from others: The Council will actively seek out and learn from successful initiatives implemented by other local authorities. We will identify best practices that can be adapted for Hull and create a repository of effective strategies.
- Introducing new options for owners: We will develop a range of options to assist owners of empty homes

in letting or selling their properties. This may include guidance on the selling process and referrals to local estate agents. Additionally, the Council will consider purchasing empty homes for use as general needs or temporary accommodation. This will involve assessing the feasibility of such purchases, taking into account funding availability, demand for specific property types and any exceptional circumstances that may warrant intervention.

- Public awareness: Raising public awareness about the issue of empty homes is essential. We will implement a communications strategy that highlights the resources available to property owners and encourages community involvement in identifying and reporting empty homes.

5.2 The Hull Empty Homes Plan will also focus on creating meaningful partnerships with local organisations, housing associations, and community groups. By working together, we can pool resources and expertise

to tackle the issue of empty homes more effectively.

5.3 The success of the Hull Empty Homes Plan will be measured through specific metrics, including the number of homes brought back into use, the reduction in long-term empty properties, and community feedback on the improvements observed in their neighbourhoods.

5.4 We will create an Empty Property Working Group to focus on long-term empty homes. The group's goals will be to:

- Share ideas and solutions for dealing with empty homes.
- Track progress and see how well our efforts are working.
- Find funding to help with our initiatives.
- Make sure community voices are heard in decisions about empty homes.

5.5 We will establish a matchmaking service to connect owners of empty properties with a variety of stakeholders, including potential buyers, investors, domestic abuse services, housing organisations.

6. Identifying Empty Homes and Their Owners

6.1 Key information sources for identifying empty homes include Council Tax records and the Land Registry. The Council will continue to engage with property owners, ensuring records are accurate and up-to-date.

6.2 Increased Council Tax charges on long-term empty homes aim to encourage owners to take action. Homes that have been empty for two years or more will incur a 100% Council Tax charge, rising to

200% for properties empty for five years and 300% for those vacant for ten years or more. This financial incentive is designed to motivate owners to either sell or rent their properties.

6.3 Members of the public can report empty homes via the Council's website, aiding in data collection. Community engagement will play a crucial role in identifying vacant properties, and local residents are encouraged to

participate actively in the process. The Council will explore further options for the public to report empty homes such as third party websites and mobile apps.

6.4 The Council will also work with local community groups to raise awareness about the importance of reporting empty homes. This collaborative approach can lead to quicker identification and resolution of issues related to vacant properties.

7. Researching and Implementing Best Practice

7.1 The Council will actively participate in forums such as the Empty Homes Network to gather insights and effective practices from other areas. This will help identify successful initiatives that can be adapted for Hull.

7.2 We will create a database of best practices and case studies that can be referenced by stakeholders involved in the Hull Empty Homes Plan. This resource will provide valuable guidance and support for decision-making processes.

7.3 Additionally, the Council will conduct regular reviews of the strategies in place to ensure they are effective and responsive to the changing needs of the community. This will involve soliciting feedback from residents, stakeholders, and experts in the field.

8. A More Proactive Approach

8.1 To effectively reduce long-term empty homes, a proactive plan will be adopted. This includes:

- Early engagement with property owners: The Council will initiate contact with owners of properties that have been empty for three months. This proactive approach aims to prevent homes from becoming long-term vacancies and encourages owners to take action sooner.
- Regular reviews of Council Tax records: Neighbourhoods and Housing Service will work closely with the Council Tax department to conduct regular audits of records to ensure timely updates and accurate reporting of empty homes.

- A dedicated database for tracking: A dedicated database will be implemented to monitor and track statistics related to empty homes in Hull. This database will serve multiple purposes, including real time updates on the status of empty properties, categorising them by type and tracking engagement efforts with owners. In addition, prioritising properties based on criteria such as duration of vacancy, condition, and potential for re-occupation. This will ensure the most pressing cases are addressed first.
- Community outreach initiatives: The Council will develop outreach programmes to

engage with residents in areas with high concentrations of empty homes, encouraging local involvement in addressing the issue.

8.2 The target will be to bring 50 long-term empty homes back into use annually, with a focus on innovative partnerships and community involvement in the refurbishment of homes. We will explore opportunities for community-led initiatives that empower local residents to take action in their neighbourhoods. Additionally, we will provide a package of support including loans and grants to enable these organisations to purchase and renovate properties, facilitating their return to use.



9. Enforcement

9.1 The Council has several enforcement options to address issues caused by empty homes, especially when properties are causing a nuisance or when owners cannot be traced or refuse to engage with support.

9.2 While we always prefer to work co-operatively with property owners, there are situations where enforcement becomes necessary. If we cannot locate the owner of an abandoned home or if the owner ignores our offers to help and advise, we will take action to address the situation.

- Utilising legislative tools: The Council will utilise various legislative tools, such as Empty

Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) and Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs), when owners are unresponsive to engagement efforts. These measures will be considered as a last resort to address properties causing significant nuisance.

- Regular inspections and assessments: The Council will conduct regular inspections of properties identified as empty to assess their condition and determine the appropriate course of action. This proactive approach will help identify potential issues before they escalate.

9.2 The Council will work with local law enforcement and community safety officers to address any anti-social behaviour associated with empty homes. Collaborative efforts will ensure that properties do not become hotspots for criminal activity.

9.3 A clear protocol will be established for enforcement actions, ensuring that all stakeholders understand the procedures and standards expected. This will promote consistency and fairness in the enforcement of the Hull Empty Homes Plan.

10. Finance

10.1 Funding for the Hull Empty Homes Plan will come from existing budgets and potential new sources. This includes:

- Capital budgets for refurbishing empty homes: The Council will allocate funds for the refurbishment of empty homes, helping to bring them back into use and improve the overall housing stock in Hull.

- Support for community-led housing organisations: Financial support will be provided to community-led housing organisations to enable them to take on properties in the private sector. This support may include loans or potential grants, subject to available funding, to assist with the purchase and renovation of these properties.

10.2 The Council will develop a business case to secure funding for additional initiatives and partnerships. This will involve exploring opportunities for external funding from government grants, housing associations, and charitable organisations.

10.3 The Hull Empty Homes Plan will also explore innovative financing models, such as public-private partnerships, to maximise resources and enhance the impact of interventions.



11. Publicity

11.1 Raising public awareness about empty homes is critical. The Council will:

- Promote Empty Homes Week and other campaigns: National and regional campaigns will be used to highlight the issue of long-term empty homes and publicise what the Council can do to help. This will include community events, workshops, and information sessions.
- Develop a communications strategy: The Council's communications team will create a comprehensive strategy to promote the Hull Empty Homes Plan, including

social media campaigns, press releases, and informational materials distributed to residents and stakeholders.

11.2 When it is possible to identify the owner of an empty home, staff will write to them offering information and support to let or sell their disused property. This proactive communication will highlight the financial benefits of bringing homes back into use, as well as the positive impact on the local community. Work will also be done with the owner to show how much the empty home is currently costing them in terms of council tax, insurance, mortgage payments etc.

11.3 Public workshops and forums will be held to facilitate discussions about empty homes and gather community input on potential solutions. These sessions will strengthen community ties and promote collaboration.

11.4 The Council will also produce and distribute educational materials that inform residents about the social and economic impacts of empty homes, fostering a community-wide understanding of the issue.

12. Action Plan

12.1 The following actions will be taken over the next year:

- Set a target for bringing empty homes back into use at 1% of long term empty homes per year (approximately 18 homes) and an additional 1% of the total number of empty dwellings (approximately 35 homes) per year.
- Proactively review and update Council Tax records to ensure accuracy and timeliness.
- Implement a package of support, grants, and loans to assist community-led housing organisations in purchasing and renovating empty properties to bring them back into use.
- Collaborate with community groups to identify and refurbish empty homes through local initiatives.
- Monitor the success of the Hull Empty Homes Plan and report progress regularly to stakeholders.
- Conduct regular inspections of identified empty homes to assess condition and determine appropriate actions.
- Create a dedicated database for tracking empty homes in Hull.
- Develop a comprehensive communications strategy to raise public awareness of empty homes and available resources.
- Explore innovative financing models to support the Hull Empty Homes Plan and increase funding sources.
- Schedule regular community meetings to discuss progress and gather feedback.
- Establish an Empty Property Working Group.
- Create a matchmaking service to connect empty property owners with a diverse range of stakeholders (potential buyers, investors, domestic abuse services etc).
- The Council will explore further options for the public to report empty homes such as third party websites and mobiles apps.
- Explore the options around the development of a Local Housing Company.

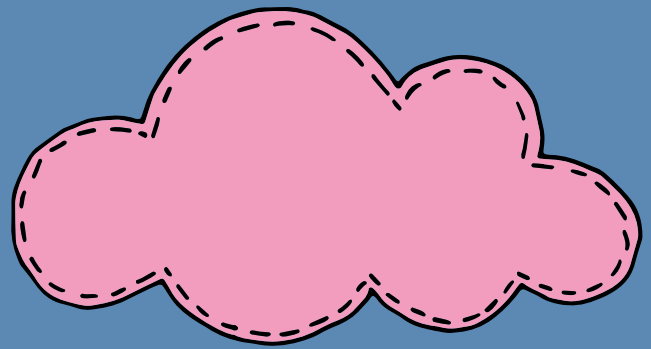
12.2 This action plan will be reviewed annually to ensure its effectiveness and relevance, allowing for adjustments based on progress and feedback from the community.



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