

# Denbighshire Empty Homes Strategy



2009 - 2012



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## 1. Foreword

**Imagine it ... the eyesore on the street, rundown, boarded up and overgrown. It been like this for years - a family home forgotten about and neglected.**



**Now imagine that you are homeless and desperately looking for somewhere to live. How do you feel looking upon this waste?**

That's what this strategy is all about - turning wasted and neglected housing into quality affordable accommodation for those who need it.

It sets out how, in partnership, Denbighshire County Council and North Wales Housing Association will bring long term empty homes back into use.

We won't just be looking at obvious empty homes, but also the many invisible ones. These homes are well maintained and in good condition, they just need us to find someone to live in them.

We wish our officers good luck with this project as we know it won't be easy. Each empty home has its own story to tell and understand, but whilst there is such a need for affordable housing we can not sit back and do nothing.

We want to work with rather than against owners, developing services to support them and overcome the hurdles they face. We are not, however, afraid of getting serious and, where necessary, will use our enforcement powers to make things happen.

**If you own an empty home or live near one please contact Denbighshire's Empty Homes Officer to find out how we can work together.**



Cllr David Thomas  
Lead Member for  
Regeneration  
Denbighshire County Council



Cllr Pauline Dobb  
Lead Member for Health,  
Social Care and Well-being  
Denbighshire County Council



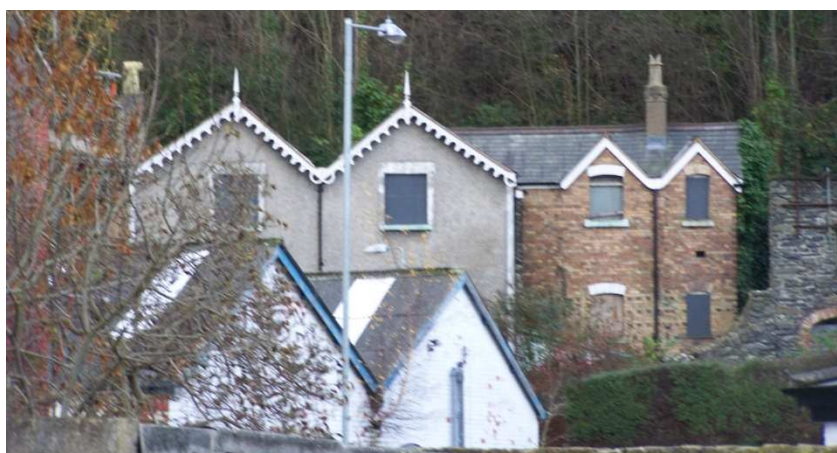
Ms Kathryn Beard  
Board Member for North Wales  
Housing Association Ltd



## 2. Introduction

Welcome to Denbighshire's first Empty Homes Strategy. This document sets out our plans for bringing the County's empty homes back into use over the next 3 years. It outlines our proactive, co-ordinated approach to tackling the problem of empty homes with our partners. Tackling Denbighshire's 800 long-term private sector empty homes is very much a positive project for all:

- **For those in housing need** – there's an empty home for every four households on the Council Housing Waiting List and seven for every homeless household who the Council had a duty to re-house in the last 12 months. There are real opportunities to use these homes to increase the supply of housing available to these households.
- **For those living nearby** – deteriorating empty homes can blight a street and undermine the community's confidence in an area. It is estimated that adjoining homes may be devalued by up to 18% (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors).
- **For the owner** – it costs money to leave a home empty.  
£5,700 in lost rent (2 bedroom average rent)  
£1,150 on Council Tax (Band D – full charge payable after 6 months)  
£1,500 through dilapidation, management, security and insurance  
That's £8,350 per year – it just doesn't make sense to leave it empty.
- **For the Council and emergency services** – Dealing with complaints and being called out to empty homes costs the Council, Police and Fire Service thousands of pounds each year which could be used on other services.
- **For the environment** – it would take 12 football pitches (probably of greenfield land) to rebuild the 800 homes that lie empty. It's far more sustainable to use up what we've got first.



Deteriorating empty homes can blight a street and undermine a community's confidence in an area.

### 3. Objectives

With all this in mind our objectives for this strategy are to:

- return as many empty homes as possible back into residential use
- improve the physical condition of the existing built environment by targeting the most prominent empty homes
- utilise empty homes for affordable housing thus reducing the demand for greenfield development by maximising the use of the existing housing stock
- recover debts owed to the Council by empty home owners

We also want to explore the wider benefits of bringing empty homes back into use, such as opportunities for training and skills development and developing specialist housing schemes (see 10.).



**There are real opportunities to use these homes to increase the supply of housing available to these households.**

## 4. Background

**The Empty Homes Agency predicts that there will be 1 million empty homes in the UK by the end of 2009. Over 60,000 of these will be in Wales representing 5% of the total number of homes.**



The **Empty Homes Agency** is an independent campaigning charity, which exists to highlight the waste of empty property in England and works with others to devise and promote sustainable solutions to bring empty homes back into use.

Changes to the housing market and demand for affordable accommodation have obliged us to look at these empty homes. When house prices soared affordability became a major issue. With the market slowing developers have stopped building and one of our main sources of affordable housing through the planning system has dried up. Without intervention the number of empty homes is likely to rise as owners struggle to sell and re-possession will increase.

### 4.1 Definition

This strategy focuses upon “long-term empty homes” which have been unoccupied for more than 6 months and have previously been used as a residential dwelling.

We want to target properties where there is no viable plan to bring them back into use. In the current housing market this includes properties that are for sale and we will advise and assist owners who have actively marketed their property for 6 months or more.

It is not within the scope of this strategy to provide assistance in the following circumstances:

- **new build empty homes** – there is a separate Welsh Assembly Government initiative to assist developers who have unsold, newly completed units
- **partly empty houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and non-self contained flats** – the Local Authority Housing Enforcement Team regulate HMOs. This is done using the Housing, Health & Safety Rating System, mandatory licensing and the proposed additional licensing scheme.
- **agricultural homes and business premises**

We will review this definition annually to ensure that it continues to meet current priorities and conditions.

## 4.2 The National Context

The need to tackle empty homes has become more widely recognised in Wales in recent years. Both the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) Commission report into Rural Housing in Wales (June 2008) and the “Essex Review” into Affordable Housing (September 2008) recognised the role that empty homes had in increasing housing supply.

*“It is likely that actions on empty homes can potentially make an important contribution to meeting rural housing needs ....”* JRF Commission

*“Local authorities should develop an ongoing programme of tackling empty private housing in their area, working with landlords, housing associations and developers where appropriate.”* Essex Review



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

In response the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) is clearly promoting increased action on empty homes in the draft National Housing Strategy, Sustainable Homes (January 2009).

*“..any unnecessarily empty home is one less available for someone in need. Action plans to quantify and address empty homes need to be part of the armoury of affordable housing delivery.”*WAG

Local Authorities are now required by the WAG to produce an Affordable Housing Delivery Statement setting out how they will improve delivery of affordable housing, including the use of long-term empty homes.

To assist Local Authorities, WAG are re-writing their guidance on bringing empty homes into use and have provided funding to Shelter Cymru to support and build up the capacity of Empty Homes Officers.

Shelter  
Cymru

## 4.3 The Regional Context



In North Wales the empty homes issue is gaining momentum. In August 2008 a Daily Post headline announced that there were 8,000 empty homes across the region whilst 35,000 people waited for accommodation.

All North Wales Council's have recognised the need to tackle empty homes and are at various stages of bringing them back into use. Talks have begun to set up a network of the regions Empty Homes Officers to share experiences and good practice.

#### 4.4 The Local Context

A concerted effort to bring Denbighshire's 800 empty homes back into use began in July 2008 with the launch of the Denbighshire Empty Homes Project and appointment of a dedicated Empty Homes Officer.

An innovative partnership with North Wales Housing Association has been formed to employ the officer and clearly make the link between empty homes and increasing the supply of affordable housing.



**The Denbighshire  
Empty Homes Project**

Key milestones have been set for the 3-year project to:

- **develop an Empty Homes Strategy for the County**
- **create a database of empty homes**
- **source funding opportunities**
- **develop options for bringing empty homes back into use**

The project is steered by a group of representatives from both organisations including the Council's Lead Member for Regeneration and a Board Member of North Wales Housing Association.

The project has a key role to play in increasing the supply of affordable housing and contributing to regeneration initiatives such as the North Wales Coast Regeneration Area. It also has close links with the strategies and business plans of both Denbighshire County Council and North Wales Housing Association.

Relevant Denbighshire County Council Strategies include:

- **Community safety**
- **Health Social Care & Well-being**
- **Local Development Plan**
- **Community strategy**
- **Local Housing Strategy**
- **Affordable Housing Delivery Statement**

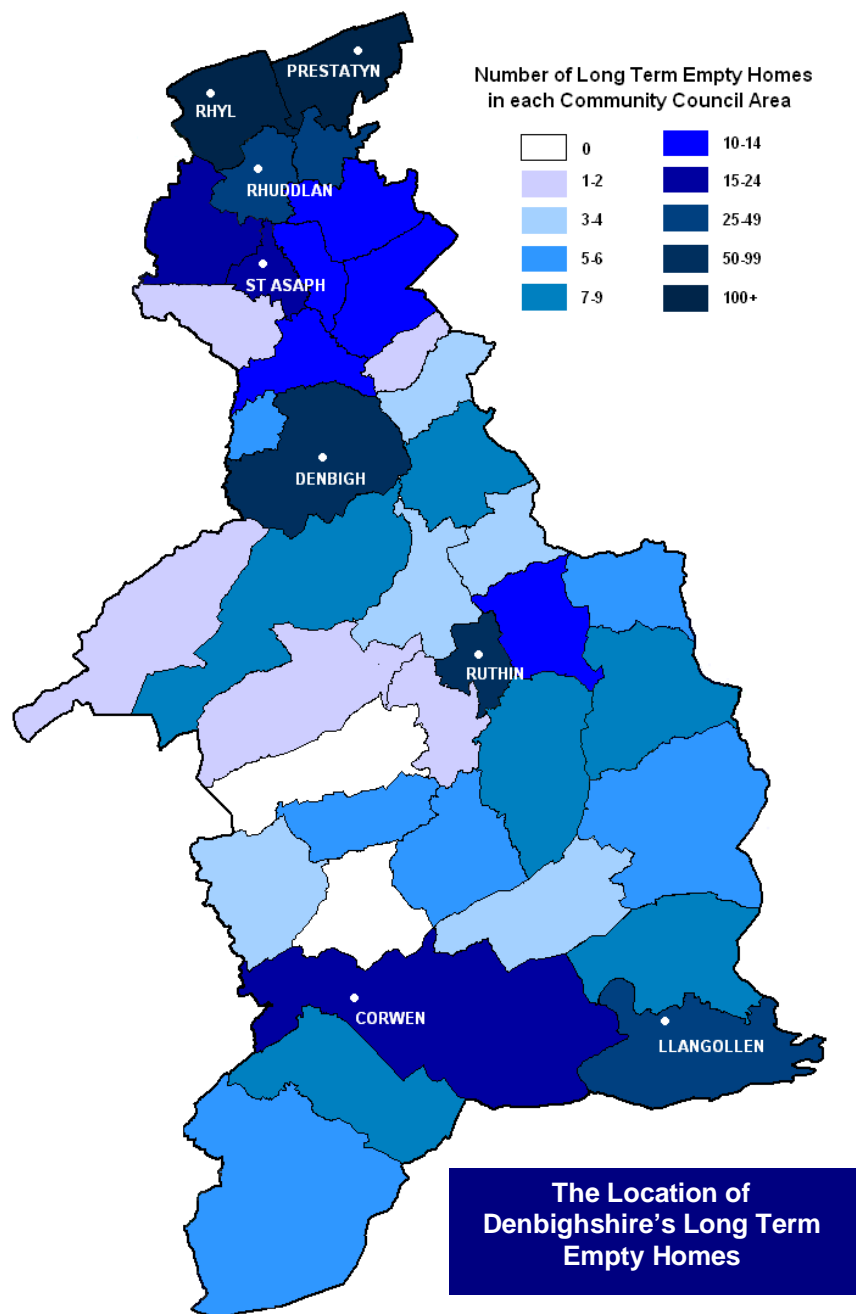
Whilst North Wales Housing Association's main aim is to "*ensure that the homes and services we provide make a positive contribution to the quality of life in the communities where we work.*"

## 5. Understanding the Problem

A survey of Denbighshire's private housing stock completed in 2008 estimated that there were a total of 1,890 empty homes in the County, 5.1% of the housing stock.

Further research by the Empty Homes Officer has provided more detail and located around 800 (as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009) which have been empty for 6 months or more.

As figure 1 illustrates, these properties can be found throughout the County. Whilst there are concentrations in the larger communities, when added together, a significant number of empty homes are located in rural areas.



### 5.1 The Empty Homes Database

A key milestone of the Empty Homes Project was to develop a database of long term empty homes and an understanding of which homes are empty within the County and the reasons why.

A survey form ([Appendix 1](#)) was sent to the property owners initially identified from the Council Tax Register and Electoral Role, to gather more information about the property and to introduce the empty homes project.

In this survey we took the opportunity to ask owners if they'd be willing to work with us to bring their property back into use. 20% responded positively giving us over 160 empty homes to potentially work with without the need for enforcement. Further details of these properties can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

The Empty Homes Officer is also continually adding to the database when new reports of empty homes are received by owners, concerned neighbours and Council Officers.

It is our intention to review the database annually against the Council Tax Register and Electoral Role to determine the number of long term empty properties in the County and the number brought back into use.

## **5.2 The Llangollen Pilot**

We believe that the best way to know if our plans would work was to test them out.

Whilst we've been developing this strategy we've been running a small pilot scheme in Llangollen. This has given us the opportunity to work with owners and understand the issues and opportunities that empty homes present.

Further information on the homes we have worked with can be found in [Appendix 3](#).



**The Llangollen Pilot has given us the opportunity to work with owners and understand the issues and opportunities that empty homes present.**

## 6. Identifying Solutions

### 6.1 Working in Partnership

**The existence of the Empty Homes Project itself is the result of close partnership working between Denbighshire County Council and North Wales Housing Association. The partnership sitting behind this strategy is, however, far wider.**



Empty homes and the problems associated with them are dealt with on a daily basis by many different Council departments (Environmental Health, Building Control, Planning, Council Tax etc.) as well as the Police and Fire Service. Empty homes may attract anti-social behaviour or vermin, they may be dangerous structures or be listed and they may owe debts for unpaid taxes or works completed in default.

Estate agents, lettings agents and private sector landlords also have some involvement with empty homes and understand their role in the market place, whilst housing associations, renewal officers and legal advisors are key to finding solutions for bringing empty homes back into use.

We've sought the views of all of these partners when developing this strategy. A consultation event was held on the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009 which brought together 40 professionals who work with empty homes. The views expressed at this event have helped to shape this strategy and ensure that it encompasses the whole range of work associated with empty homes. An annual event will be held to review the success of the strategy and ensure on-going engagement with our partners.

### 6.2 Involving the Local Community

From an early stage in the project we have taken every opportunity to raise awareness of the empty homes issue within the local community:



**Jessica, the winner of our drawing competition**

- We've talked to many of Denbighshire's Town and Community Councils, interested Community Groups and the Private Sector Landlord's Forum about the need to bring empty homes back into use.
- We've received coverage in the local press and displayed posters asking people to report empty homes.
- We've asked local children attending summer holiday clubs to design our logo.

The community have also been given the opportunity to comment on our draft strategy by making it available for public consultation on [www.denbighshire.gov.uk](http://www.denbighshire.gov.uk)

## 7. Engaging with Owners

**It is essential that a good working relationship is developed between the Empty Homes Officer and property owners to encourage voluntary re-use of long term empty homes. Only where voluntary approaches have been declined or ignored will we consider the use of the Council's statutory enforcement powers.**

We are keen to ensure that we do not discriminate either directly or indirectly, against any person on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnic or national origin, nationality, religion, age, disability or illness. Both Denbighshire County Council and North Wales Housing Association Ltd. will comply with all relevant equalities legislation and monitor any action taken in relation to this strategy to ensure that discrimination against any person or group of persons does not occur.



### 7.1 Prioritisation

We recognise that one Empty Homes Officer cannot tackle all 800 long term empty homes at once and that our funding is limited. For these reasons we will prioritise the empty homes that we work with.

Our Empty Homes Officer will focus upon our top 20 empty homes. This is a rolling list and as homes are brought back into use new ones will be added.

The top 20 will be those homes which receive the highest score when assessed against the Empty Homes Scoring Matrix ([Appendix 4](#)).

This aims to prioritise properties where the owner is willing to work with us as well as harder enforcement cases and takes into account the following factors:

- The funding opportunities available to bring a home back into use
- The willingness of the owner to work with us
- The location of the property and its impact on the local community
- The potential of the property to fulfil identified housing need
- The length of time that the property has been empty

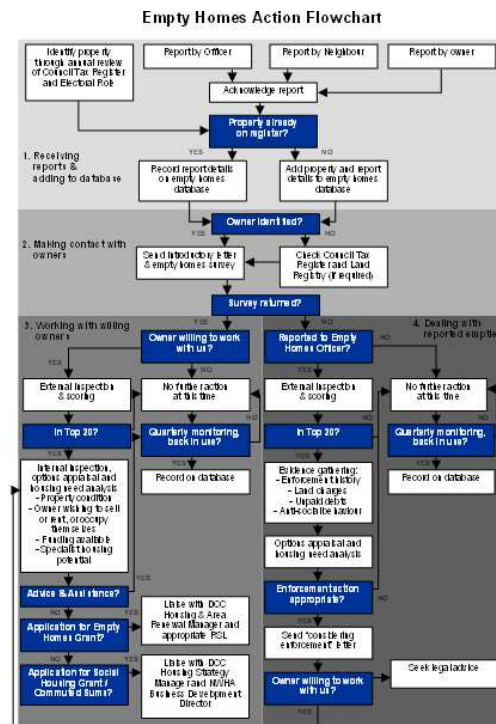
The matrix system will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it continues to our priorities.

## 7.2 Taking Action

Each empty home and owner will require an individual solution but there will be specific stages in all cases to ensure that all empty homes are investigated thoroughly and dealt with fairly.

Appendix 5 provides a flowchart of the actions our Empty Homes Officer will follow when:

- Receiving reports and adding new empty homes to the database
- Making contact with owners
- Working with willing owners
- Dealing with reported empty homes



## 8. The Range of Options

**Each empty home has a different story to tell and therefore different solutions need to be found to bring them back into use.**

There are a wide variety of reasons why a property may be left empty such as lack of funds, fear of renting, inability to sell, bereavement, care needs, imprisonment etc. To be truly successful in bringing them back into use we must have a wide range of options available for owners from supportive advice and assistance to proactive enforcement.



### 8.1 Advice and information

[For those looking to sell...](#)

- Information about estate agents and auctions
- Access to the interested purchasers database providing interface between empty home owners and interested purchasers and developers.
- Liaison with Registered Social Landlords and Local Authority Officers to explore opportunities to purchase the property for affordable housing. This would be dependent upon a specific need being identified and the property meeting Welsh Assembly Development Quality Requirements.

### For those looking to rent...

- Information about being a private landlord and accreditation schemes
- Invitation to Denbighshire's Private Sector Landlords' Forum

### For those renovating for their own occupation...

- Information about undertaking repairs and renovations
- Details of Denbighshire County Council's approved contractors
- Signposting to available grants

## **8.2 Management & Leasing Schemes**

### For those nervous or inexperienced about renting ...

- Free no obligation internal inspection, options appraisal and liaison with appropriate organisations
- Signposting to Landlord Accreditation Scheme
- Opportunities to lease the property or have it managed on their behalf by a Registered Social Landlord where there is a housing need for the property. Lettings will be made from the Local Authority's Housing Waiting List and rent levels set at Local Housing Allowance levels.



## **8.3 Empty Homes Grant**

### For those with insufficient funds to refurbish their empty home ...

- Free no obligation internal inspection, options appraisal and liaison with appropriate organisations
- A grant of £10,000 maximum (or 50% of eligible works) where the property is in an area of housing need for applicants who have owned the property for 3 years (except where recently inherited).
- "Business plan" detailing the amount of grant available and the rental income they will receive.

The owner must:

- Work with a Registered Social Landlord to provide affordable housing through a management or leasing scheme (see 8.2) for 5 years
- Re-pay the grant in full if the property is sold or removed from the affordable housing scheme within 5 years
- Become an accredited landlord

This grant is also available to first time buyers who have a local connection with the community in which the property is located and who would otherwise be unable to fund the work or buy an alternative property on the open market.

Details of the eligible works and the application process are outlined in [Appendix 6](#)



#### **8.4 Enforcement**

For owners of problematic empties who are unwilling to work with us ...

- Enforcement action to improve the condition of the property
- Enforced sale to recover land charges placed on the property by the Council. The owner is forced to sell to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party through auction or to a preferred developer of the Council
- Compulsory purchase by the Council where there is a wider strategic agenda e.g. regeneration.
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders where the property is in an area of housing need and there is no prospect of the property becoming occupied in any other way.

## 9. Funding

Capital funding for the empty homes project is sourced from a variety of existing funds.

### 9.1 For empty homes grants

- Denbighshire County Council private sector renewal funding
- Area based renewal scheme funding

### 9.2 For property purchase by a Registered Social Landlord

- Welsh Assembly Government Social Housing Grant
- Strategic Regeneration Area funding made available by the Welsh Assembly Government
- Denbighshire County Council Commuted Sums for Affordable Housing
- Privately sourced finance from the RSL

Other services offered, such as leasing and management schemes, are already operational and would be self-funding.

We will seek to harness any new funding sources and investigate the funding that is available from other organisations e.g.CADW, Town Heritage Initiative.



## 10. Maximising the Benefits

**As well as creating more affordable housing and improving the built environment, we believe that there can be many added benefits to bringing empty homes back into use.**

### 10.1 Specialist Housing Schemes

The private housing sector has great potential to assist the local authority in meeting specialist housing needs. Some families require types of properties that simply do not exist within the existing social housing stock, e.g. larger family homes or adaptable bungalows.

We are working with Denbighshire's Housing Services, Homelessness Team, Social Services, Occupational Therapists and Supporting People officers to find uses for our empty homes. This may include supported housing, "move-on" accommodation or alternatives to disabled facilities grants.

Wherever possible we hope to utilise the County's empty homes to fulfil specific housing need and will look at purchasing, managing or leasing suitable homes on the Empty Homes Database before building new or buying occupied ones.



### 10.2 Wider Regeneration Initiatives

Since beginning our project we have learnt that the northern edge of the County has been included in the Welsh Assembly Government's new North Wales Coast Strategic Regeneration Area. This brings a multi-million pound plan to transform the seaside towns, aiming to boost tourism, improve the environment and raise skill levels and job opportunities.

Bringing empty homes back into use is a key element of the plan. It has been recognised that our work will not only improve the physical appearance of this area but also offer opportunities to address tenure and house type imbalances in areas where the private rented sector and houses in multiple occupation dominate.

### 10.3 Training Opportunities

We plan to work with the Department of Work and Pensions Programme, the Rhyl City Strategy, to provide construction skills training when refurbishing empty homes.



There are many good practice models where future residents are involved in the works on their new homes. We hope to learn from these and adopt a similar approach.

We also recognise the potential to provide work opportunities for the Probation Service and community groups.

### 10.4 Fire Safety



Working with the North Wales Fire & Rescue Service, we will promote their work and ensure that every empty home we directly bring back into use has a free Fire Safety check.

## 11. The Way Forward

We have a lot of work to do to achieve our aims but we know that the rewards will be great. Our efforts will be monitored by the Empty Homes Project Steering Group to ensure that targets are met.

### 11.1 Targets

Denbighshire County Council is required to report their success in bringing long term empty homes back into use through a National Strategic Indicator ([Appendix 7](#)).

We have set targets against this indicator for us to strive to bring 50 long term empty homes back into use over the duration of the Empty Homes Project. Through our Empty Homes Grant and purchasing arrangements we would hope to make 30 of these homes available for affordable housing.

Number of long term empty homes (over 6 months) brought back into use over period

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	During 3-year project
5	15	30	50

Number for affordable housing

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	During 3-year project
0	10	20	30

### 11.2 Action Plan

We have also set ourselves a detailed action plan ([Appendix 8](#)) to guide our future development of the Empty Homes Project. This will ensure that we develop the capacity and skills to tackle the most problematic empty homes and not lose sight of the additional benefits we can achieve.

# Appendix 1 - Empty Homes Survey Form

## Survey of Empty Homes

Please complete this questionnaire for:



Denbighshire  
Empty Homes  
Project

**1** Are you currently the owner of this property or responsible for it? *Tick one box*  
Yes

Owner .....   
Responsible .....   
No, not owner/responsible .....

**2** Is anyone currently living in this property? *Tick one box*

Yes .....  No .....   
*If YES, please stop here*

**3** What type of property is this? *Tick one box*

House .....   
Bungalow .....   
Flat/maisonette .....

**4** Please rate the condition of this property *Tick one box*

Very good .....   
Fairly good .....   
Neither good nor poor .....   
Fairly poor .....   
Very poor .....   
Don't know/no opinion .....

**5** How/why did you come to own/be responsible for this property? *Tick one box*  
Bought it

to live in myself .....   
for family/friends to live in .....   
as an investment .....   
for income from renting .....   
included with other properties .....   
Inherited it .....   
Received it as a gift .....   
Manage it for someone else .....   
Other .....  *Tick box & write below*

**6** How long has it been empty? *Tick one box*

0 - 6 months ....  3 - 5 years .....   
6 - 12 months ...  5 - 10 years .....   
1 - 2 years .....  10 years + .....

**7** Does owning this property cause you any problems? *Tick one box*

Always .....   
Often .....   
Sometimes .....   
Never .....

**8** Why is this property currently empty? *Tick all that apply*

It's being repaired/renovated .....   
It needs repairs/renovation .....   
Trying to sell it .....   
Trying to let it .....   
Bought for investment .....   
No separate/usable entrance .....   
Planning issues .....   
Legal dispute .....   
No reason/don't know .....   
Other .....  *Tick box & write below*

**9** Which of these services might encourage you to get this property occupied? *Tick all that apply*

Grant for repairs/renovation .....   
Loan for repairs/renovation .....   
Service to manage repairs/renovation .....   
Help/advice to find a tenant .....   
Guaranteed rental income .....   
Help/advice to find buyer .....   
Legal advice/mediation .....   
None of these .....

**10** Would you be interested in working with us to bring this property back into use? *Tick one box*

Yes .....   
No .....   
If yes, please give us your day time telephone number or e-mail address.

## Appendix 2

### Empty Home Survey Results – Owners willing to work with us

#### Where are their empty homes? What type of properties are they?

Community Council Area	Bungalow	Flat	House	Total
BODELWYDDAN	1		1	2
BRYNEGLWYS			1	1
CEFN MEIRIADOG	1			1
CORWEN	1		6	7
CYNWYD			3	3
DENBIGH	1	6	7	14
DERWEN			1	1
DYSERTH		1	1	2
EFENECHTYD			2	2
HENLLAN		1	1	2
LLANARMON YN IAL	1		2	3
LLANBEDR DYFFRYN CLWYD		3	2	5
LLANDEGLA			2	2
LLANDRILLO			2	2
LLANDYRNOG			4	4
LLANELIDAN			1	1
LLANFAIR DYFFRYN CLWYD			1	1
LLANFERRES	1		1	2
LLANGOLLEN	1	1	8	10
LLANRHAEADR YNG NGHINMEIRCH	1		2	3
PRESTATYN	11	3	7	21
RHUDDLAN	3		2	5
RHYL	6	30	16	52
RUTHIN		4	9	13
ST ASAPH	3			3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>162</b>

#### How long have they been empty?

Time Empty	Total	%
Unknown	8	5%
0-6 months	9	5%
6-12 months	35	22%
1-2 years	64	40%
3-5 years	20	12%
5-10 years	12	7%
10 years +	14	9%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>162</b>	

### Why do they own/are they responsible for them?

Ownership Reason	Total
Investment	28
For family/friends to live in	6
To rent out	19
Included with other properties	16
To live in myself	29
Inherited it	42
Manage it for someone else	11
Other	4
Unknown	7
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>162</b>

### Why are they empty?

Empty Reason	%
Being repaired/renovated	17%
Needs repairs/renovations	36%
Trying to sell	35%
Trying to let	16%
No separate entrance	1%
Planning issue	6%
No reason	1%
Other	1%

### What services should we provide?

Service	%
Grant for repairs/renovation	62%
Loan for repairs/renovation	17%
Service to manage repairs/renovation	15%
Help/advice to find a tenant	37%
Guaranteed rental income	41%
Help/advice to find buyer	32%
Legal advice/mediation	6%
None of these	3%

## **Appendix 3 - Llangollen Pilot**

### **Princess Street**

A three bedroom terraced house which has been empty for 3 to 5 years. The owners plan to live here when they retire. Health issues may make this necessary in the next few years. The property requires some damp proofing work and decoration throughout. The owners were hoping to have financial assistance with the work.

#### Action

The Empty Homes Officer explained that an Empty Homes Grant would require owners to let the property for 5 years. The owners did not want to take this up as they may require the property themselves during this time. The owners were given advice about energy efficiency schemes that they could access when preparing the house for them to live in.

### **Market Street**

A three bedroom, three-storey terraced house which has been empty for around 4 years. Bought to provide an affordable home for a young family, much of the renovation work has done to this property by the owners but a lack of funds has prevented them from finishing the project. A growing family now makes the property unsuitable for their needs. The cost of completing the work and redecoration is estimated at £10,000.

#### Action

The Empty Homes Officer discussed the Empty Homes Grant option with the owners and arranged a meeting with a Registered Social Landlord to discuss the practicalities of having the property managed. The owners decided that they would prefer to raise the funds themselves and rent the property out privately. The Empty Homes Officer provided them with information leaflets about becoming a landlord.

### **Hall Street**

A one bedroom terraced house which has been empty for over 2 years since the death of a family member. The property was extended to create a separate kitchen and bathroom. This extension was poorly constructed and wet rot has spread extensively. The owners wish to retain ownership but have little knowledge of building work and are worried by the extent of the works required. The cost of remedial works is estimated at £25,000.

#### Action

The Empty Homes Officer discussed the Empty Homes Grant option with the owners. The owners are keen to work with a Registered Social Landlord. The next steps are to fully assess and cost the works before making an application

to DCC for an Empty Homes Grant. A meeting will also be arranged with a Registered Social Landlord to discuss the practicalities of having the property managed.

### **Birch Hill**

A three bedroom end terraced property with basement accommodation. The owner, a small property developer, has gained Planning Permission to turn the basement into a self contained flat. He is hoping to have financial assistance with the work.

#### Action

It was decided by the Empty Homes Steering Group that there was a viable plan for bringing this property back into use. The Developer had brought the property as an investment and was progressing with the project. From discussion about this case it was decided to only make Empty Homes Grants available to applicants who have owned the property for 3 years (except where recently inherited). If someone has bought a property recently they are more likely to have a viable plan to bring it back into use.

### **Willow Street**

The Willows is a Grade 2 Listed, 3-storey town house holding a prominent position. Due to its height and elevation it can be seen from other areas of the town centre. It is associated with Plas Newydd and the “Ladies of Llangollen”. The site is made up of the main house, a brick extension and a derelict coach house. Planning permission has been granted to demolish the coach house in order to widen Willow Street. The property has been owned by a developer and is thought to have been empty for over 20 years. It is in extremely poor condition, is boarded up and requires extensive works both internally and externally to secure its stability.

#### Action

An agreement has been reached in principle to convert the property into 3 self contained social housing units with the potential for them to be used for supported housing. This will be a package deal giving much needed work to the developer in the current economic climate. It is hoped that funding can be secured through the Social Housing Grant Programme, from CADW and from the commuted sums pot for Llangollen.

## Appendix 4 – Empty Homes Scoring Matrix

Category	Criteria	Score
<b>1. Funding Opportunities</b> (may be awarded for more than one criteria)	SHG already secured for type and location of property	<b>20</b>
	Within ward with commuted sums for affordable housing	<b>10</b>
	Within renewal / regeneration area	<b>10</b>
<b>2. Owner Response</b>	Positive response, willing to work with us	<b>10</b>
	Negative response / Survey unanswered	<b>0</b>
<b>3. Location</b>	Main Road	<b>10</b>
	Side Street/Estate	<b>5</b>
	Rural/Isolated	<b>0</b>
<b>4. Community Impact</b>	High	<b>15</b>
	Medium	<b>10</b>
	Low	<b>5</b>
	Nil	<b>0</b>
<b>5. Housing Need</b>	Required for specialist housing	<b>20</b>
	Suitable for move-on	<b>15</b>
	Rural housing need	<b>10</b>
	Suitable for single person with support	<b>10</b>
<b>6. Time Empty</b>	10 years +	<b>20</b>
	5 – 10 years	<b>15</b>
	1 – 5 years	<b>10</b>
	6 – 12 months	<b>5</b>
	Less than 6 months	<b>0</b>

### Definitions & Rationale

#### 1. Funding Opportunities (may be awarded for more than one criteria)

##### Definition

Properties which match the type and location needed for a specialist housing and where Social Housing Grant has already been secured will receive a score of 20. The score will only be awarded where the Empty Homes Officer has been advised of these circumstances by DCC's Housing Strategy Team.

Some communities within the County have access to commuted sums funding which are ring-fenced for affordable housing. DCC will advise the Empty Homes Officer where this is the case.

There are currently 3 designated Renewal Areas within the County which are managed by DCC's Area and Housing Renewal Team. When scoring properties the Empty Homes Officer will refer to the published maps of these areas.

## Rationale

We have a greater opportunity to bring empty homes back into use where there is greater funding. We also recognise that both Commuted Sums and Social Housing Grant which has been secured must be spent within a given time period. By linking our Empty Homes work to this funding we can ensure that it is not lost to the County.

## **2. Owner Response**

### Definition

A score of 10 will be awarded to properties where the owner has indicated a willingness to work with the Empty Homes Project in their completed Empty Homes Survey.

### Rationale

Whilst much of the Empty Homes Officer's time will be spent on this proactive work we recognise that there will be more straightforward opportunities to bring empty homes back into use where the owner is looking for help. In order to maximise the number of empty homes re-occupied it is important to support and advise these owners.

## **3. Location**

### Definition

Main Road = a principal route into or within a community

Side Street = a road leading off a main road

Estate = a predominantly residential area which is not on a main road

Rural/Isolated = a location outside a community boundary where the property is isolated from amenities.

### Rationale

By combining location with the community impact score, obvious empty homes in prominent locations will be prioritised.

Rural/isolated homes receive no score as they have the least potential to be returned back into use for affordable housing. Rural homes within established communities will be awarded the other scores based on their location within the community.

## **4. Community Impact**

### Definition

High = highly noticeable empty, very poor condition

Medium= noticeable empty, starting to deteriorate

Low = noticeable empty, good condition  
Nil = not noticeably empty

#### Rationale

By combining location with the community impact score, obvious empty homes in prominent locations will be prioritised.

### **5. Housing Need**

#### Definition

Required for specialist housing = where the type and location of the property is required for a specific household in housing need

Rural housing need = where a rural housing survey has been conducted by the Rural Housing Enabler and the property is able to fulfil the need identified

Suitable for single person with support = where the type and location of the property is required for a specific supported housing project

Suitable for move-on = where the type and location of the property is required for a specific move-on project

Scores will only be awarded following consultation with the relevant agency and DCC Housing Strategy Team.

#### Rationale

We recognise the potential for empty homes to be used for specialist housing schemes and want to prioritise suitable homes. Higher scores are given to specialist housing where there is a specific household in housing need as these are likely to be urgent cases. A higher weighting is also given to properties suitable for move-on accommodation as the need for more of this accommodation is recognised in both DCC's Supporting People Operational Plan and Local Housing Strategy.

### **6. Time Empty**

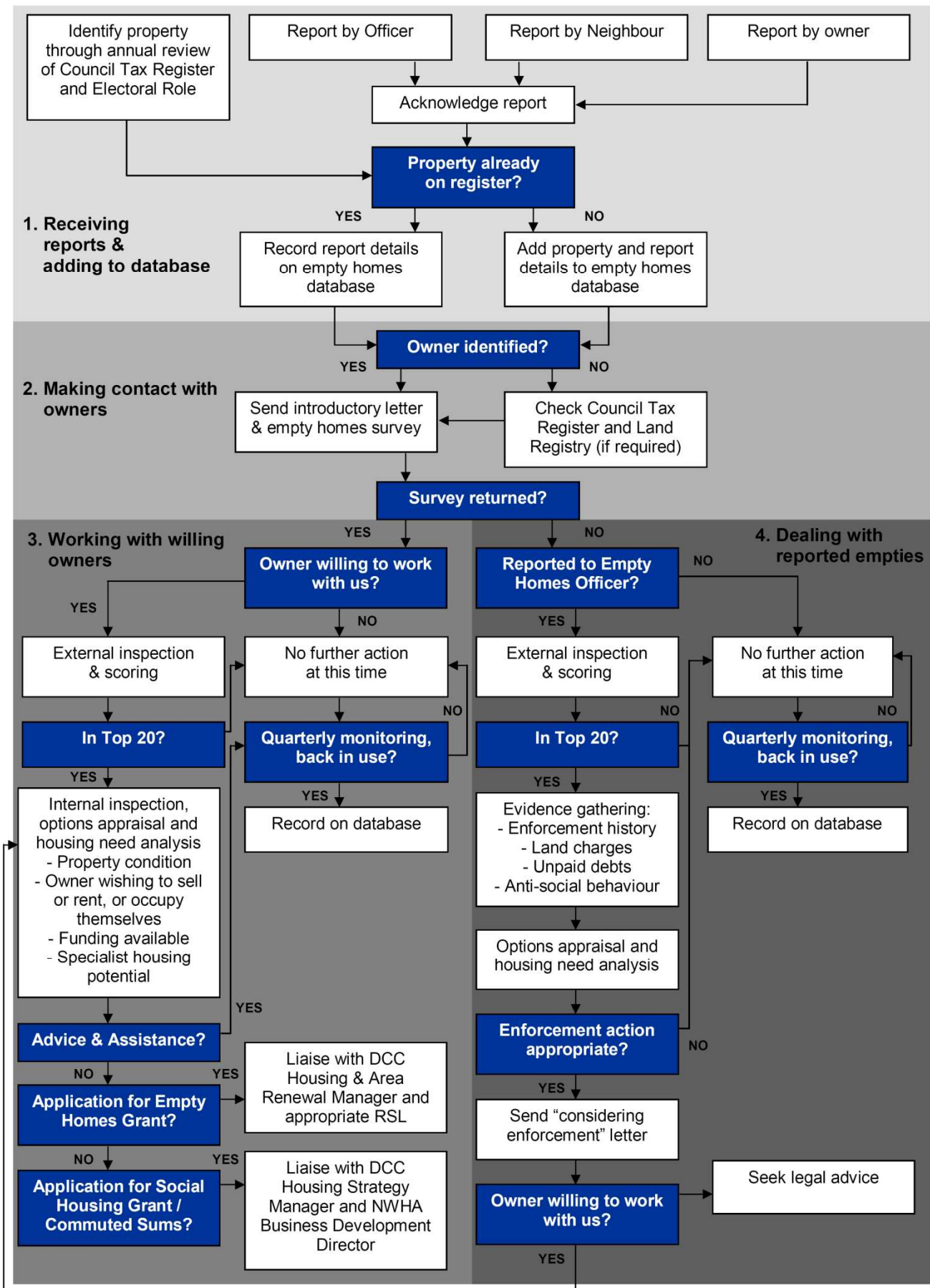
#### Definition

This is the amount of time that the property has been empty as declared by the owner in their completed Empty Homes Survey or recorded on Denbighshire County Council's Council Tax Register.

#### Rationale

The longer a property is empty, the greater the impact it will have on the community through deterioration etc., the less likely that there will be a viable plan to bring it back into use and also the greater the waste in terms of housing supply.

## Appendix 5 - Empty Homes Action Flowchart



## Appendix 6 – Empty Homes Grant Criteria & Conditions

### Extract from Draft Housing Renewal Policy

Assistance Type	Empty Homes Assistance (EHA)
<b>Purpose</b>	To bring back long term empty properties into use, with the aim of providing additional affordable accommodation in order to meet local housing need.
<b>Eligibility</b>	Anyone with an owners interest in the property. Property must have been empty at least 6 months. Owned by applicant for 3 years prior to application or a first time buyer with local connection who would otherwise be unable to fund the work or buy an alternative property on the open market. (see local connection definition on page 30)
<b>Eligible Work</b>	Property would be eligible for work to be determined by the Council having regard to the following:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removal of a Category 1 hazard as defined by the Housing Health &amp; Safety Rating System need to have been identified.</li> <li>• Weather tight roof is not present.</li> <li>• Provision or replacement of basic amenities is identified.</li> <li>• Bring property up to an approved standard</li> </ul>
<b>Financial Arrangements</b>	Assistance available at 50% of eligible works up to a maximum of <b>£10,000 (net of VAT and associated fees)</b> .
<b>Application</b>	An application for EHA will be made through the LA application process. The LA application form must be used and must be accompanied by the following:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proof of ownership.</li> <li>• Certificate of occupation.</li> </ul> All application will be dealt with in order of receipt and dealt with as soon as possible after receipt. Applications will be prioritised in accordance with the Empty Homes Strategy priorities.
<b>Approvals</b>	Approvals remain valid for twelve months from the date of grant approval. Approvals will be made within the adopted policy and subject to budgets available at the times of application. Approvals will be made by the Housing Renewal Manager following receipt of a valid application.
<b>Conditions</b>	EHA will be secured by way of a local land charge for 5 years. <u>Existing owners</u> must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work with an RSL to provide affordable housing for a minimum period of 5 years. Lettings will be made from the DCC housing waiting list.</li> <li>• be part of a landlord accreditation scheme</li> <li>• have building insurance for the property</li> </ul> Home Fire Safety checks must be carried out on all empty properties before grant approval.

## Appendix 7 – Performance Indicator Definition

### Extract from National Performance Indicator Guidance for Wales 2008-09

Service/policy area	<b>Housing - Private Sector Renewal</b>		
Domain	Strategic Outcomes		
Reference	PSR/C/F/004/02-001 (PSR/004)		
Headline	<b>Vacant dwellings returned to occupation</b>		
Indicator	The percentage of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April that were returned to occupation during the year through direct action by the local authority		
Guidance	<p>For a full definition of dwelling please refer to the <a href="#">Private Sector Renewal glossary</a>.</p> <p>A vacant dwelling is vacant of people. This excludes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A second or holiday home</li> <li>• A newly completed dwelling that is awaiting occupation</li> <li>• An existing dwelling that is being converted or modernised</li> <li>• A dwelling that is in use but for non-residential purposes</li> </ul> <p>The following are examples of the types of direct action that can lead to a dwelling being returned to occupation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grants, loans or other financial assistance either provided or facilitated by the authority</li> <li>• Providing advice, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Literature on the authority's empty homes strategy</li> <li>○ Advice on letting, including legal and housing benefit requirements</li> <li>○ Advice on grants and other financial assistance including tax concessions available</li> <li>○ Details of landlord forums or accreditation schemes</li> <li>○ Advice on repairs, including details on building contractors meeting minimum requirements</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Referral to partner Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) or other intermediary with relevant expertise</li> <li>• Enforcement action including statutory notices</li> <li>• Enquiries made to establish ownership of property and follow up action</li> </ul> <p>A property should only be counted once, regardless of whether it has been subject to more than one action/intervention that led to it being returned to occupation.</p> <p>Where properties are sub-divided into additional units in an effort to return a dwelling to occupation, the number of units created should be included. For example, a house that has been converted into three flats and then returned to occupation would count as three dwellings having been returned to occupation.</p> <p>The data for this indicator can be obtained from the Revenue Section of the local authority, who should have information relating to whether council tax is being paid on the private sector dwellings.</p> <p>The number of dwellings that have been vacant for at least 6 months should be counted at the 1 April. This figure should not be adjusted to include any properties that reach the 6 month limit during the year.</p>		
Calculation	<p><b>Numerator:</b> The number of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April which were returned to occupation during the year through direct action by the local authority</p> <p><b>Denominator:</b> The total number of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April</p> <p><b>Formula:</b> <math>\frac{\text{Numerator}}{\text{Denominator}} \times 100</math></p>		
Data Source	-	Decimal Place	2
Explanation	This indicator measures the extent to which local authorities are bringing dwellings that have been vacant for long periods of time back into occupation.		
Disaggregation	Disaggregation should be considered to suit local context and knowledge.		

## Appendix 8 – Empty Homes Action Plan

Strategy Area	Action	Target Date(s)	Responsible Officer(s)
<b>Understanding the Problem</b>	Maintain and develop the Empty Homes Database to increase functionality and reporting facilities	Apr 2010	EHO
	Review database annually against the Council Tax Register (April) and Electoral Role (December) to identify new long term empty homes	Apr / Dec 2009 Apr / Dec 2010 Apr 2011	EHO
	Review “long term empty home” definition to ensure that it continues to meet current priorities and conditions	Apr 2010 Apr 2011	Steering Group
<b>Identifying Solutions</b>	Attend Empty Homes networking opportunities to share experiences and good practice with other officers	As required /Ongoing	EHO NWAHA BDD DCC HARM
	Hold annual event with partners to review the success of the Empty Homes Strategy	Jan 2010 Jan 2011	EHO NWAHA BDD DCC HARM
	Take advantage of any opportunities to raise awareness of the Empty Homes Project through presentations to Elected Members, Town and Community Councils and other interested groups	As required /Ongoing	EHO NWAHA BDD DCC HARM
	Take advantage of any opportunities to raise awareness of the Empty Homes Project through the local press and media	As required /Ongoing	EHO NWAHA BDD DCC HARM
	Publish the approved Empty Homes Strategy on both DCC and NWAHA’s websites	May 2009	EHO
<b>Engaging with Owners</b>	Include equalities questions on Empty Homes Survey to allow equal opportunities monitoring	Sep 2009	EHO
	Review Empty Homes Scoring Matrix annually to ensure that it continues to meet our priorities	Apr 2010 Apr 2011	Steering Group

Strategy Area	Action	Target Date(s)	Responsible Officer(s)
<b>Range of Options</b>	Produce a range of advisory leaflets for owners and members of the general public: - Introduction to the Empty Homes Project - Seller's Pack - Landlord's Pack - Repairs & Renovations Pack - Management & Leasing Schemes - The Empty Homes Grant	<b>Sep 2009</b>	EHO
	Create an interested purchasers database	<b>Apr 2010</b>	EHO
	Explore opportunities for discounted membership with National Landlord's Association	<b>Apr 2010</b>	EHO
	Expand building surveying knowledge EHO and support from DCC Housing Renewal & NWA Development Teams	<b>Sep 2009</b>	NWA BDD DCC HARM
	Develop managing / leasing model with RSLs and links with DCC Lettings Policy & Nomination Agreement	<b>Jun 2009</b>	EHO DCC HSM
	Develop Empty Homes Grant application process	<b>Jun 2009</b>	EHO DCC HARM
	Design template "business plan" detailing the amount of grant available and potential rental income	<b>Jun 2009</b>	
	Expand knowledge of enforcement powers and skills of EHO, DCC Legal and Enforcement Officers through training and visits to other Local Authorities	<b>Apr 2010</b>	EHO DCC HARM DCC PEHO
	Develop Enforcement Procedure with DCC Legal and Enforcement Officers	<b>Apr 2010</b>	EHO DCC HARM DCC PEHO

<b>Strategy Area</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Target Date(s)</b>	<b>Responsible Officer(s)</b>
<b>Funding</b>	Secure Strategic Regeneration Area funding	<b>Sep 2009</b>	EHO NWAHA BDD DCC HARM DCC PEHO DCC HSM
	Identify and submit schemes for Social Housing Grant in accordance with WAG timescales as well as ad-hoc in year bids	<b>As required /Ongoing</b>	EHO NWAHA BDD DCC HSM
	Ensure that DCC funding for Empty Homes Grants is fully committed to maximise future allocations	<b>Mar 2010 Mar 2011</b>	EHO DCC HARM
	Investigate additional internal and external funding sources	<b>Apr 2010</b>	EHO
<b>Maximising the benefits</b>	Promote empty homes as a resource for specialist housing schemes and consider potential use of top 20	<b>As required /Ongoing</b>	EHO DCC HSM
	Contribute towards the Strategic Regeneration Area programme	<b>As required /Ongoing</b>	EHO NWAHA BDD DCC HARM DCC PEHO DCC HSM
	Work with the Rhyl City Strategy Programme to develop opportunities for construction skills training	<b>Sep 2010</b>	EHO NWAHA BDD DCC HARM DCC HSM
	Work with North Wales Fire Service to develop a protocol for delivering free Fire Safety Checks on every empty home we directly bring back into use	<b>Jun 2009</b>	EHO DCC PEHO

Responsible Officer Abbreviations:

EHO	Empty Homes Officer
NWHA BDD	NWHA Business Development Director
DCC HARM	DCC Housing & Area Renewal Manager
DCC PEHO	DCC Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing Enforcement)
DCC HSM	DCC Housing Strategy Manager