



# Denbighshire's Empty Homes Delivery Plan 2018 – 2022

## Contents page

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page number/s</b>
1. Executive Summary	2
2. Background	4
3. Issues and challenges	6
4. How we bring empty homes back into use	8
5. What next?	11
6. Empty homes projections & monitoring	14
8. Key outcomes	15
<b><u>Appendices</u></b>	
1 – Empty Homes Delivery Plan (action plan)	
2 – Geographical distribution of empty homes	
3 – Prioritisation scoring matrix – empty home cases	
4 – Denbighshire County Council Financial Assistance	
5 – Welsh Government – new Public Accountability Measure	
6 – Enforcement action – Relevant Legislation	

## 1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Empty homes are a wasted resource not only in terms of a home lost but in terms of the issues they can cause within communities including anti-social behaviour, vermin infestation and effect on neighbouring house prices. Denbighshire has around 780 homes (April 2018) identified as empty from Council Tax records – with concentrations of empties in and around the areas of Rhyl, Denbigh, Prestatyn and Ruthin.
- 1.2 Coupled with high levels of housing need and historically low levels of new build, bringing empty homes back into use plays a critical role in improving housing supply, both market and affordable.
- 1.3 Despite being very successful in bringing empty properties back into use over the last 5 years and consistently being one of the top performing Local Authorities in Wales, the overall number of empty homes in Denbighshire has remained relatively static.
- 1.4 The Council's Corporate Plan 2017 -2022 'Working together for the future of Denbighshire' includes the priority of 'Everyone is supported to live in homes that meet their needs', in order to contribute to this priority our target is to bring 500 empty properties back into use by 2022 and to continue to perform among the best in Wales.
- 1.5 To date most of the empty homes work activity has been reactive with an element of proactive work activity. However, in order to achieve a long term reduction in the number of empty dwellings across the County and in order to achieve the ambitious targets set in the Corporate Plan we need to develop a more proactive approach.
- 1.6 The aim of this delivery plan is to unlock the housing potential of long term empty homes. We have a package of financial assistance which provides grants and loans and we also provide advice and support. However, there will be times when it is necessary to use enforcement measures particularly in cases where owners are unwilling to engage with us.
- 1.7 We have identified four key priorities to help focus our resources to achieve our aim of increasing the supply and choice of decent homes of all tenures:
  - Raise awareness of the issue of empty homes and the role the Council can play in assisting to bring them forward, including the range of advice and assistance available to empty home owners
  - Continue to develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders
  - Address empty homes that have become a focus for crime, antisocial behaviour and neglect

- Have regard to local housing needs in targeting empty homes and developing solutions to bring them back into use

1.8 We have developed a detailed action plan (Appendix 1) which sets out the actions needed to achieve these priorities. This includes timescales for delivery and the lead responsibility. We have established an Empty Homes Project Group to oversee the delivery of the delivery plan and actions. The



**Mwrog Street, Ruthin** – before (Derelict row of terraced houses)

action plan and achievement of our target will be reviewed annually at each meeting and the target reviewed bi-annually.

1.9 Key to the success of our work on empty homes is partnership working with empty home owners and key stakeholders, including registered social landlords. This will be fundamental to achieving our ambitious target of bringing a further 500 empty homes back into use and providing much needed housing in Denbighshire.



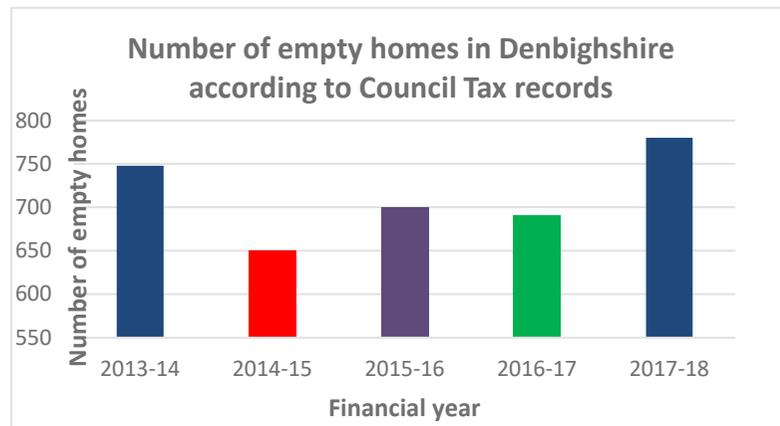
**Mwrog Street, Ruthin** – after (refurbished into a housing development of 3 dwellings with 2 additional properties)

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Key statistics

Nationally the number of empty properties in Wales is around 23,000 ([www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk) – 12/12/17) and the Welsh Government see bringing empty houses back into use having an essential role in tackling social issues and as part of meeting the housing demand in Wales. Within a Denbighshire context there are around 650 – 750 empty homes recorded each year which equates to 1.58 – 1.83% of all homes in Denbighshire. The graph below demonstrates the trends over the recent financial years. The greatest concentrations of empty homes are around the areas of Rhyl, Denbigh, Prestatyn/Meliden and Ruthin. There are significant numbers of empty homes within rural areas of Denbighshire especially Ruthin, Llangollen, Corwen and the surrounding areas. Appendix 2 provides a breakdown of the location of empty homes across Denbighshire.

Denbighshire is one of the highest performing local authorities in Wales in terms of bringing empty homes back into use. The table



shows the number of dwellings empty for more than 6 months that were returned to occupation through direct action by the Council.

Financial year	Number of dwellings empty for more than 6 months returned to occupation through direct action by the Local Authority	Number of empty homes in Denbighshire identified through Council Tax records	Performance percentage (%)
2014/15	142	641	22.2
2015/16	172	699	24.6
2016/17	131	691	18.9
2017/18	52	725	7.2
<b>Annual average</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>19</b>

### 2.2 National context

Latest figures suggest there are around 23,000 empty properties in Wales. Some of these could provide homes for people who need them. Welsh Government's Programme for Government '*Taking Wales Forward 2016-2021*' states that Welsh Government will work

in partnership to deliver an extra 20,000 affordable homes in the current assembly term. It also commits to tackling the empty homes issue and Welsh Government have created a £20m fund to support this work through the Houses to Homes scheme.

## 2.3 Corporate context

**Denbighshire's Corporate Plan (2017 – 2021) 'Working together for the future of Denbighshire'** sets out the priorities for the Council and includes the priority: 'Everyone is supported to live in homes that meet their needs', in order to contribute to this priority our target is to bring 500 empty properties back into use by 2022 and to continue to perform among the best in Wales.

**Denbighshire's Housing Strategy 2016 – 2021** includes 'better use of the existing housing stock by continuing to target empty homes across the county' as a key outcome. This forms part of Theme 1 – More homes to meet local need and demand and is a key strand of our aim of delivering more homes in the County. The Housing Strategy also highlights the need to create a supply of affordable homes and the role of the empty homes programme in contributing to provision of affordable housing and regeneration.

## 2.4 Housing need

Denbighshire has high levels of housing need within the County and general affordability issues. Although incomes have generally slightly increased in Denbighshire over the last few years, house prices and housing rents have increased significantly over the past five years and many households are unable to afford owner occupation or market rents. Denbighshire currently has around 1240 applicants registered on the housing waiting list.

## 2.5 Performance

Denbighshire is currently one of the top performing Local Authorities in Wales in terms of bringing empty homes back into use.

The Welsh Government performance measure is the percentage of private sector dwellings vacant for more than 6 months at April 1<sup>st</sup> each year that were returned to occupation during the year through direct action by the Local Authority (see Appendix 5).

Welsh Government changed the way performance is measured and the way empty properties are reported in 2017. These changes have had a significant impact on numbers / percentages across the majority of Welsh Local Authorities, and as a result the number of empty dwellings recorded as returned to occupation in 2017/18 was lower than previous years. However, recent Welsh Government returns show that Denbighshire still remains in the top quartile of Local Authorities in returning empty properties to use.

## 2.6 Council tax premium

Welsh Government introduced legislation (Section 139 of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 which gives powers to Local Authorities to charge additional Council Tax of up to 100% on long term empty properties and second homes. Denbighshire County Council decided on the 4<sup>th</sup> December 2017 that a 50% premium should be raised on properties that have been empty and substantially unfurnished for 12 months or more from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018. The purpose of this premium is intended to help Local Authorities to:

- Bring long-term empty homes back into use to provide safe, secure and affordable homes: and
- Support local authorities in increasing supply of affordable housing and enhancing the sustainability of local communities.

### 3. Issues and challenges

3.1 Homes can become empty for a variety of reasons and issues often include:

- difficulty tracing or establishing ownership of the property
- inability to sell the property
- probate issues following the death of the occupier
- the owner may be in institutional care
- family disputes such as divorce settlements
- the property may need significant works before it can be let or the owner has an unrealistic value for the property.

In many cases the owners are not aware of any advice or assistance they can access to help them with their property. We offer a tailored advice service to assist landlords, owners and Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations) to bring empty homes back into use.

3.2 There are two main types of Empty Property – short term empty and long term empty.

**Short term empty homes** are those homes which have been unoccupied and unfurnished for up to six months. They are often in the process of being sold or between lettings, are being renovated and improved prior to occupation or awaiting probate. Short term empty homes are a natural part of the housing market and do not normally require any intervention.

**Long term empty homes** are those homes which have been unoccupied and unfurnished for over six months. In many cases, especially those that have been empty for less than two years, they

are merely awaiting a new tenant or are being marketed for sale. However, whilst not all long term empty homes are a problem it is good practice to establish what steps are being taken to reoccupy the property before it becomes problematic. Some homes are second homes or are separate 'Granny annexes' to properties, which are no longer in use. Second homes and holiday homes in the County will be subject to an additional 50% Council Tax premium from April 2019.

3.3 However, long term empty homes that have been empty for two years or more can pose a significant problem. They frequently become a target for anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood. They are also a wasted resource at a time when good quality housing is required across the County. The Empty Homes Delivery Plan will proactively take measures to address the issue and **Appendix 1** provides details of future actions.

3.4 Not all empty properties are identifiable through Council Tax records as the owner has not applied / received any exemption for one reason or another. These empty properties are generally the most problematic in terms of dilapidation, absent owners, target for fly-tipping / anti-social behaviour and are the source of most complaints. Denbighshire County Council has developed an empty homes database to deal specifically with these problem properties but identifying these properties and tracing the owners can be very time consuming and challenging.

3.5 The Local Housing Market Assessment and the Housing Strategy have identified high levels of housing need across the County. There are also housing needs in rural areas where there is a shortage of

market housing available. Addressing empty homes can help to meet our housing needs as residents can gain access to housing that was previously unavailable. Bringing empty homes back into use is a key part of our affordable housing programme.

- 3.6 The Council and partners are keen to work with owners of empty properties and will make every effort to work closely with them to bring these empty properties back into use. However, where insufficient progress is made and / or the empty property owner is unwilling to work with the Council, there are a range of enforcement tools which can be utilised from serving improvement notices through to enforced sales or Compulsory Purchase Orders. Enforcement is a good way of tackling the worst empties but is time



***Ty Coch, Henllan – before*** – a small two bedroom cottage which had been unoccupied for several years. The owner abandoned the property leaving it full of food which encouraged a pest control problem and it was still full of belongings.

consuming and requires a focused and proactive approach which is a challenge with current resources.

- 3.7 The aim of this delivery plan is to bring forward as many empty homes back into use as possible. Currently work is ongoing to bring more partners on board to take empty homes opportunities forward. The Council also has an important role in working with the private sector to enable empty homes to be brought back into use.



***Ty Coch, Henllan - after*** after tracing the owner who had moved out of the area, extensive negotiations were held with the owner. A large programme of works were drawn up and financing applied for the works to be undertaken. The works included a new kitchen, bathroom, plastering, electrical wiring etc. The property has now been tenanted and is providing affordable housing for a local family.

## 4 How we bring empty homes back into use

There are a number of ways in which we can help to bring empty homes back into use, from providing general advice and assistance, providing financial assistance through to taking enforcement action – a “tiered and escalating approach”.

The vast majority of empty homes are in private ownership and the owners of these properties are therefore key partners to engage with at every available opportunity. They have access to a range of personal and private finance to invest in bringing properties forward for sale or rent.

When dealing with empty property owners, a voluntary way forward is always our preference. Advice, assistance and incentives reduce demand on Council resources and the need for enforcement action at a later date. In the vast majority of cases this is sufficient, but there are occasions where owners cannot be traced or are unwilling to enter into a voluntary dialogue. In these circumstances, the use of regulatory action needs to be considered.

### 4.1 Advice and assistance

Every year we send out a short questionnaire to all empty properties identified from Council Tax records asking why the property is empty and what the owners' intentions are. We also include details of the options available to bring the empty home back into use. Any empty properties referred to us would also receive a letter requesting further information on the owners' intentions and setting out options for moving forward.

We offer tailored advice to owners and landlords to bring empty homes back into use. There are a range of potential ways that empties can come forward including working with Housing and Registered Social Landlords. The majority of empty homes are in private ownership and the opportunity to bring them back into use for sale or rent is a key strand in this approach.

### 4.2 Financial Assistance / Incentives

There are a number of financial incentives available to assist empty home owners to bring their properties back into use, from Welsh Government interest free loans to local authority assistance. The Council also provides a project management service to enable the empty home owner to get the property back into use. **Appendix 4** provides further information on what financial assistance the Council can provide.

- **Houses into Homes** - The Welsh Government 'Houses into Homes' loan scheme is a discretionary loan available to both developers and property owners to help bring empty properties back into use to either sell or let. It can be utilised on commercial / retail properties which have received planning permission for material change of use to residential. Denbighshire currently has access to a recyclable loans fund of around £700,000.
- **Denbighshire County Council's Empty Home Assistance** - Denbighshire County Council is able to provide match funding of 50% of the total cost of work (up to a maximum of £10,000) through a repayable grant to assist owners of previously residential properties to bring them back into use for letting.

- **VAT Reduction** - VAT reduction letters can be provided if a property has been empty for 2 years immediately before the renovation and mean VAT is significantly reduced to 5% for eligible building products / services.

### 4.3 Regulatory Action

Denbighshire County Council is keen to work with owners of long term empty properties and will make every effort to work closely with them to bring these empty properties back into use. However, when insufficient progress is made and / or the empty property owner is unwilling to engage with the Council there are a range of regulatory tools which can be utilised. Empty properties, by their very nature, are likely to be causing some harm to the general amenity of the area in which they are located. This is where the Council can intervene using regulatory powers.

Employing regulatory powers is a good way of tackling the worst empty properties and intransigent empty property owners, but it can be time consuming and requires a focused and proactive approach which is a challenge with current Council resources.

- **Serving Enforcement Notices / Carrying out Works in Default** Denbighshire County Council has a number of regulatory measures it can utilise where an empty property owner refuses to maintain their property thus causing harm to the amenity of the area in which it is located. Regulatory action ranges from serving formal enforcement/improvement notices through to the Council themselves undertaking works in default. A wide range of different legislation can be utilised by the Council to address harm including the Building Act, the Housing Act, Environmental Protection Act and Town and Country

Planning Act. **Appendix 6** gives a breakdown of the legislation that can be utilised with problem properties.

- **Enforced sale** The Council will take every opportunity to work with an empty home owner to try to bring the property back into use. However, as a last resort, and where the Council has undertaken works in default exceeding £1000, the owner has failed to repay the debt and is still unwilling to engage with the Council, the Council can enforce the sale of the property to recoup their costs. The problem property can be sold at auction or to a preferred bidder to ensure a change of ownership and fresh approach to bringing it forward for re-use.
- **Compulsory Purchase** In some cases the only option may be for the Council to compulsorily purchase the property. However, the compulsory purchase order process can be legally complicated, expensive and time consuming. The process also leaves the Council owning the property and having direct responsibility for it. Compulsory purchase may provide the final sanction to ultimately facilitate the renovation and reoccupation of the most problematic empty homes.

### 4.4 Working with Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations)

Denbighshire County Council is working closely with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), to bring forward as many empty homes as possible. Cartrefi Conwy were zoned to access funding for Denbighshire projects in 2017 and are progressing work on a range of empty homes as part of their wider development approach. Welsh Government is investing heavily in increasing delivery of

affordable housing with a target of 20,000 additional affordable homes in Wales by 2021. Bringing empty homes back into use will contribute to this target. The role of RSLs and the Council is critical as part of a wider approach. We work closely with RSLs using evidence of local needs to target empty homes to meet our strategic priorities.

Welsh Government are significantly increasing the funding available to RSLs to bring forward affordable homes and empty homes will be important part of this approach. The range and amount of funding has doubled in the last two years and this will mean more opportunities to make a real difference in terms of bringing empty homes back into use.

### 4.5 **Property acquisition**

Denbighshire is focusing on various ways to bring forward additional council housing throughout the County. This includes utilising Housing Revenue Account funding (HRA) to bring empty homes back into use as council housing. The current focus is on properties with specific issues as a way to resolve them.

### 4.6 **Private sector leasing**

Under these schemes the Council or an RSL takes a lease on an empty property and brings it back into use. This approach can be particularly appropriate when the barrier to the re-use of the property is an unwillingness by the owner to take on the role of landlord and the responsibilities that entails. We use this approach to provide much needed accommodation for homeless families and individuals, with the Council's Preventing Homelessness Team working closely with private landlords to bring forward homes for people who need them.

### 5 What's next?

Our key target is to bring a further 500 empty homes back into use by 2022. We will achieve this target by building on the good work already established including providing advice, financial assistance and taking enforcement action where necessary. Alongside this we will implement an action plan that will deliver new initiatives and service improvements. We believe this will enable us to not only deliver our key target but it will also help us to provide an effective service to our residents, stakeholders and empty home owners.

To help us achieve our aim of increasing the supply and choice of decent homes of all tenures and meet our target of bringing 500 empty homes back into use we have identified four key priorities:

- Raise awareness of the issue of empty homes and the role the Council can play in assisting to bring them forward, including the range of advice and assistance available to empty home owners
- Continue to develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders
- Addressing empty homes that have become a focus for crime, antisocial behaviour and neglect
- Have regard to local housing needs in targeting empty homes and developing solutions to bring them back into use

Raise awareness of the issue of empty homes and the role the Council can play in assisting to bring them forward, including the range of advice and assistance available to empty home owners

We need to raise awareness of the issue of empty homes and better showcase the financial assistance as well as the advice and support we can provide to help empty home owners bring their property back into use. To help achieve this we will:

- Develop a Communication Plan to raise awareness of empty homes and publicise success stories whenever possible to encourage further referrals. This will include targeted press releases.
- Better publicise the range of advice and support available to empty home owners
- Utilise Denbighshire's Landlord Forum to engage with private landlords to raise awareness of available support
- Review the empty homes advice pack for landlords and owners and investigate the possibility of developing a sellers pack to promote the sale of specific empty properties
- Update and improve web-based information including developing an online complaint referral process that could pick up those empty properties not identified through Council Tax records.

### Continue to develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders

Key to the success of our work on empty homes is partnership working with empty home owners and key stakeholders, including registered social landlords. This will be fundamental to achieving our ambitious target of bringing a further 500 empty homes back into use and providing much needed housing in Denbighshire. To help achieve this we will:

- Establish an Empty Homes Project Group, comprising internal officers from planning, housing strategy, built environment, public protection and communications.
- Maintain and improve partnership working both within the Planning & Public Protection Service and with other Council service areas, including Housing Development and Economic Business Development colleagues.
- Continue to work with Registered Social Landlords to acquire and bring empty homes back into use as affordable homes, including allocation of Welsh Government funding. This will include exploring innovative ways of bringing more empty homes back into use.
- Work with empty home owners through providing support and advice as relevant and to identify the best way to bring homes back into use.
- Work closely with Council Tax and Finance to make better use of their data to focus our empty homes work in areas where there are large numbers of empty homes and identify trends to identify cyclic empty homes. We will also explore the potential of accessing monies raised from the Council Tax premium for empty homes to contribute empty homes work.

- Work with our County Councillors, together with City, Town and Community Councils to raise awareness, encourage reporting and share information.

### Addressing empty homes that have become a focus for crime, antisocial behaviour and neglect

Our work needs to address empty homes which have become a focus for antisocial behaviour and crime. Dealing with problematic empty homes can make a significant difference to local communities in terms of improving neighbourhoods and helping to prevent potential decline. To achieve this we will:

- Use our priority scoring assessment to ensure that we focus action and resources on those empty homes that are causing most harm to the amenity of areas thus attracting crime and antisocial behaviour.
- Work with external partners such as the Police to help identify and address those empty homes which have become a target for antisocial behaviour and crime.
- Take a proactive approach to address the most problematic empty homes including negotiating purchases, enforcement action, enforced sale and compulsory purchase.
- Continue to develop the empty homes database and other support systems to monitor progress with problematic empty homes, including mapping empty homes to identify "hotspots", tenure patterns etc

### Have regard to local housing needs in targeting empty homes and developing solutions to bring them back into use

There are significant housing needs across the County and the Council is committed to ensuring housing is available to meet the needs of our residents. To achieve this we will:

- Review our priority scoring assessment to ensure that we focus action and resources on bringing empty homes back into use in those areas with high levels of housing need
- Work closely with empty home owners by providing advice and support, and where appropriate, financial assistance to help them bring their home back into use.
- Work collaboratively with private landlords and Registered Social Landlords, having regard to local housing needs in developing solutions to bring empty homes back into use.



**Railway Terrace, Ruthin – before-** a two bedroom, mid-terraced, Grade II listed house unoccupied for over 20 years. The property became very damp due to damage to the roof resulting in complaints to the Council from concerned neighbours about the structural integrity of the building.

- Ensure that where empty homes are brought back into use via private landlords, those landlords are accredited and provide a good housing management service.
- Continue to work with Registered Social Landlords, the Council's Housing Development Manager and the Council's Homeless Prevention team to develop an empty homes programme, focussing on meeting local housing needs.
- Develop our scoring assessment to include housing demand such that resources can be focused on those empty properties that will be most beneficial to meeting housing need. Those empty properties where there is little need but still a significant problem to the community can be re-prioritised to the eyesore sites



**Railway Terrace, Ruthin – after** after tracing the owner, extensive negotiations were held to address the problem. A large programme of works were drawn up and financing applied for the works to be undertaken. Work was project managed by the Council's Built Environment Section. Following successful partnering with Denbighshire's Housing Solutions, the property has now been tenanted and is providing affordable housing for a local family.

### 6. Empty homes projections and monitoring

- 6.1 A key aim of this delivery plan is to maximise the number of empty homes brought back into use. The approach is to ensure that as many empties come forward through both the private and public sectors. Council Tax data will be used to highlight both the public and private sector empty properties brought back in to use and any reoccurring trends that can be identified for specific action. Appendix 1 sets out the action plan for this document.
- 6.2 Our principal target is to bring 500 empty homes back into use by 2022 and to continue to perform among the best in Wales. We believe that this will help to deliver much needed housing in the County. Empty homes which have been brought back into use as a

result of our involvement will count towards the achievement of our target. Our involvement will be demonstrated through:

- Providing advice and guidance
- Creating links with landlords, RSLs, agents and tenants
- Providing financial assistance
- Taking regulatory action

- 6.3 Delivery of the action plan will be overseen and monitored by the Empty Homes Project Group and the achievement of our target will be reviewed bi-annually.
- 6.4 As the reuse of empty homes is a corporate priority, progress will be monitored by the Council's Young People and Housing Programme Board, through regular reports on delivery of the action plan. Any issues and corrective action will be discussed regularly with the Lead Member.

## 7. Key outcomes of this Delivery Plan

The strategic priorities and subsequent key actions listed in Appendix 1 will deliver or contribute to the following outcomes:

Strategic priorities	Outcome
<b>Raise awareness of the issue of empty homes as a wasted resource and the role the Council can play in assisting to bring them forward, including the range of advice and assistance available to empty home owners</b>	Better awareness within our communities of our empty homes campaign and the range of help available to empty home owners.
	More efficient ways for the public to report an empty home. Increase in partnership working with empty home owners.
	More accurate and up to date information relating to empty homes.
<b>Have regard to local housing needs in targeting empty homes and developing solutions to bring them back into use</b>	Reduction in the number of long term empty homes.
	Maximised use of existing stock Reductions in the use of temporary accommodation and levels of homelessness by increasing access to private rented sector housing.
	Rejuvenated and more settled neighbourhoods
<b>Addressing empty homes that have become a focus for crime, antisocial behaviour and neglect</b>	Reduction in the levels of litter, vermin and fly tipping associated with empty homes.
	More attractive and sustainable neighbourhoods.

Reduction in the levels of vandalism, arson, drug use and other anti-social behaviour focused around empty homes  
Reduction of risk to and resources expended by emergency services.

**Continue to develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders**

An increase in the levels of partnership working with owners  
More effective partnership working between stakeholders.

**ACTION PLAN****Appendix 1**

*This action plan sets out what Denbighshire will do over the life of the delivery plan to meet the target of bringing 500 empty properties back into use by 2022 and to continue to perform among the best in Wales.*

<b>Key priority</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Lead</b>
Raise awareness of the issue of empty homes as a wasted resource and the role the Council can play in assisting to bring them forward, including the range of advice and assistance available to empty home owners	Develop a Communication Plan to raise awareness of empty homes and publicise success stories whenever possible to encourage further referrals. This will include targeted press releases.	Drafted December 2018 Completion end February 2019	
	Better publicise the range of advice and support available to empty home owners through roadshows in areas with high levels of empty properties, presentations to councillors and Denbighshire's Landlord Forum to engage with private landlords to raise awareness of available support. Develop standard presentation	Completion of presentation end February 2019  Communication programme developed end February 2019	
	Review the empty homes advice pack for landlords and owners and investigate the possibility of developing a sellers pack to promote the sale of specific empty properties	End April 2019	
	Update and improve our web-based information to help both empty home owners and to help residents to report empties. This will include developing an online complaint referral process that could pick up empty properties not identified through Council Tax records.	End April 2019	

## Denbighshire's Empty Homes Delivery Plan

	Review and develop our empty home reporting tools to ensure that our ICT platform can record and report all performance indicators.	End Sept 2019	
Continue to develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders	Establish an Empty Homes Project Group, comprising internal officers from planning, housing strategy, built environment, public protection and communications.	COMPLETE	
	Maintain and improve partnership working both within the Planning & Public Protection Service and with other Council service areas, including Housing Development and Economic Business Development colleagues to ensure effective collaborative working.	Ongoing	
	Continue to work with Registered Social Landlords to acquire and bring empty homes back into use, including allocation of WG funding. This will include exploring innovative ways of bringing more empty homes back into use.	Ongoing	
	Work closely with Council Tax and Finance to make better use of their data to focus our empty homes work in areas where there are large numbers of empty homes and identify trends to identify cyclic empty homes. We will also explore the potential of accessing monies raised from the Council Tax premium for empty homes to contribute to empty homes work.	End July 2019  End February 2019	
	Work with our County Councillors, together with City, Town and Community Councils to raise awareness, encourage reporting and share information.	Communication programme developed end February 2019 Delivery on-going	
	Investigate developing a tool to match owners who want to sell their property with developers interested in bringing empty homes forward.	Research completed end February 2019  Tool developed end September 2019	

## Denbighshire's Empty Homes Delivery Plan

Addressing empty homes that have become a focus for crime, antisocial behaviour and neglect	Use our priority scoring assessment to ensure that we focus action and resources on those empty homes that are having the biggest impact on the amenity of the neighbourhood.	Ongoing	
	Establish a protocol for joint working with external partners such as the Police and Arson Reduction Services to help identify and address those empty homes which have become a target for antisocial behaviour and crime.	End September 2019	
	Take a proactive approach to address the most problematic empty homes including negotiating purchases, enforcement action, enforced sale and compulsory purchase. Establish regular case reviews.	Ongoing	
	Continue to develop the empty homes database and other support systems to monitor progress with problematic empty homes, including mapping empty homes to identify "hotspots", tenure patterns etc	Ongoing	
Have regard to local housing needs in targeting empty homes and developing solutions to bring them back into use	Work closely with empty home owners by providing advice and support, and where appropriate, financial assistance to help them bring their home back into use.	Ongoing	
	Work collaboratively with private landlords and RSLs, having regard to local housing needs in developing solutions to bring empty homes back into use.	Ongoing	
	Ensure that where empty homes are brought back into use via private landlords, those landlords are registered and provide a good housing management service.	Ongoing	
	Continue to work with RSLs, the Council's Housing Development Manager and the Council's Homeless Prevention team.	Ongoing	

	Review our scoring assessment and include housing demand and ease of bringing back into use. Those empty properties where there is little need but still a significant problem to the community can be re-prioritised to the eyesore sites group.	End July 2019	
	Investigate the feasibility of adopting an empty dwelling management order process.	End July 2019	

## Appendix 2

## Summary of Empty Properties by Postcode

Postcode	Postcode Area	Areas where empties registered in 2018 denominator	Number of Empties
LL18	Rhyl	Rhyl; Rhuddlan; Bodelwyddan; Dyserth; Cwm	254
LL19	Prestatyn	Prestatyn; Meliden	122
LL15	Ruthin	Ruthin; Clawddnewydd; Cyffylliog; Pwllglas; Llanfair DC; Galltegfa; Gellifor; Bontuchel; Pentrecelyn; Llanfwrog; Graigadwywynt; Llanbedr DC; Llaneliden; Efenechtyd; Llanychan; Clocaenog; Rhewl	118
LL16	Denbigh	Denbigh; Bodfari; Henllan; Waen; Trefnant; Nantglyn; Saron; Llanrhaedr; Llanynys; Lawnt; Ystrad; Llandyrnog; Llangynhafal; Llangwyfan; Prion	102
LL21	Corwen	Corwen; Bryneglwys; Glyndyfrdwy; Llidiart Y Parc; Llandrillo; Cynwyd; Gwyddelwern; Carrog; Llangar; Melin Y Wig; Glanrafon; Bryn SM; Betws GG; Derwen; Pandyr Capel	73
LL20	Llangollen	Llangollen; Pentrefelin; Trevor; Ffioncysllte; Rhewl; Llantysilio	44
LL17	St. Asaph	St Asaph; Tremeirchion; Rhuallt; Waen; Trefnant	42
CH7	Mold	Llanferres; Maeshafn; Eryrys; Llanarmon Yn Ial; Loggerheads; Cadole;	16
LL11	Wrexham	Llandegla	6
LL22	Abergele	Groesffordd Marli	3

Total 780

**Appendix 3**

**Denbighshire Empty Homes  
Scoring Matrix Form**



**Property Inspection**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Empty Property Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Known Owner Contact Details:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pre-site visit check**

**i Are there complex ownership issues with this property?**

Yes - refer complaint to relevant enforcement section

No - proceed to item (ii)


**ii Has the future use of the property been decided (eg. To be demolished / CPO'd etc)**

Yes - write to registered owner about complaint

No - undertake site scoring visit


**Site Inspection - Criteria**

**1 SITE ISSUES**

Dangerous site posing a potential risk to health and safety and to adjoining property owners (including where Police / Fire Service are involved)

Score
20
15

Site with multi-agency involvement (environmental health, planning compliance, highways etc)

Untidy (overgrown gardens / fly tipping / windows boarded up etc)  
No site issues

10
0

**2 LOCATION**

Prime Retail or Visitor area  
Principal Transport Route  
Side street / estate

20
15
10

Conservation Area / AONB / WHS Buffer  
  
Rural / isolated

5
0

**3 PROFILE - Has there been previous complaints about this property?**

Yes - complaints from external agencies (police / fire etc)  
Yes - complaints from MP/AM/Member/C,T&CC  
Yes - multiple individual complaints  
No - this is the first complaint

20
15
10
5

**4 TIME EMPTY**

5 years +  
6 – 12 months

20
10

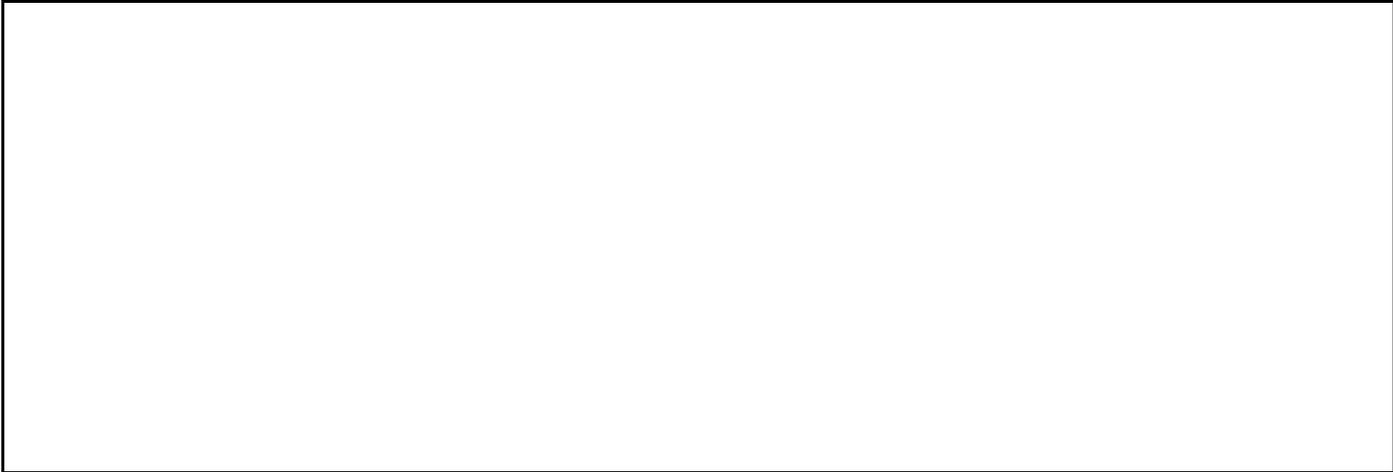
1 – 5 years  
0 – 6 months

15
0

Empty Homes  
Score

--

**Site Observations / Notes**



Name of Inspecting Officer \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_



## **Denbighshire Empty Homes**

### **Financial Assistance**

There are a number of financial incentives available to assist empty home owners to bring their properties back into use, from Welsh Government interest free loans to local authority assistance. Denbighshire County Council can also help with project managing the works and give advice on how to get a reduction on VAT for renovation works to empty properties.

#### ***Accessing reduction on VAT on renovation works***

The Government has recognised that renovations can be extremely costly and have therefore introduced a number of tax changes which could reduce costs and encourage bringing empty properties back into use.

Any empty property where no one has lived in it for 2 years immediately before renovation works start can get the VAT reduced to 5%.

#### ***Financial assistance available to Owners of Long Term Empty Properties***

There are a number of financial assistance streams available to eligible empty property owners

## **Appendix 4**

### **Welsh Government 'Houses to Homes' 0% Interest Loans**

The Welsh Government 'Houses to Homes' loan scheme is a discretionary loan available to both developers and property owners to help bring empty properties back into use. It will assist with:

- Renovations to a property with a view to selling (repayment period maximum 2 years)
- Renovations to a property with a view to renting out (repayment period maximum 3 years)
- Facilitating 'works in default' only where intention to proceed with enforced sales procedure.

Loans will be up to £25,000 per unit, maximum of £150,000 per applicant. Loans are interest free and will be subject to an application fee of between £295 and £495 plus land registry charge of between £50 & £70.

These loans will be registered against the property as a Legal Charge.

### **Denbighshire County Council's Empty Home Assistance**

For owners wishing to rent out their empty properties, there are repayable grants up to the value of £10,000 or 50% of the required works to bring the property back into use.

Empty Home Assistance for an owner or Landlord wishing to let their property may be available where:-

- the property has been empty for at least 6 months or more
- the property has previously been used as a residential dwelling
- Give regard to local housing need
- Be available to rent for 3 years at Local Housing Allowance rates
- The tenancy agreement can be managed by a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) for the 3 year period for a % management fee if required.

- Have an owner's interest in the property and have owned it for 6 months prior to application.

First time buyers can also access this assistance as long as they are buying an empty property:

- has been empty for at least 6 months or more prior to purchase
- has previously been used as a residential dwelling
- is being purchased for their own occupation only
- being purchased is in Council Tax Bands A, B C & D.

These repayable grants will be registered against the property as a Local Land Charge.

### ***Standard Expected***

For both the Welsh Government loan and Denbighshire County Council's financial assistance the renovated properties will need to remove all Category 1 hazards as per the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and meet the minimum standards set out in parts 1-4 of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) listed below:-

- In a good state of repair
- Safe and secure
- Adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated
- Contain up to date kitchens and bathrooms

### ***Denbighshire County Council's Project Management Service***

Denbighshire County Council can provide a project management service in most cases to help bring the empty property back into use. This project management service provides:

- an assessment of the property and advice on likely cost to bring it back into use;
- provision of schedules of works; surveys; statutory approvals etc;
- organizing reputable council approved contractors and
- regular inspections to ensure that the renovation works are completed to a satisfactory standard.

The cost of Denbighshire County Council's project management service is 15% of the cost of work and this may be grant aided.

## Appendix 5

Welsh Government have changed how empty homes returned to use are reported. Prior to 2017/18 direct action included, as a minimum, giving advice on getting the property back into use. This was facilitated through the issue of a yearly empty homes survey / information pack. Any property that came back into use in the financial year where it could be demonstrated that the owner had received the empty homes survey pack could be counted as a success.

The new Welsh Government Performance Accountability Measure (PAM) requires, as a minimum, the setting up of a dialogue with the owner of an empty property. We are still using the yearly empty homes survey / information pack as a vehicle for the setting up of a dialogue. Now the Council can only count as a success, any empty property where there has been a response to the survey and further dialogue (site visit / further advice and information etc).

Under the old National Strategic Indicator, Denbighshire County Council only included those properties classed as long term empty by Council Tax and the yearly denominator was based on this classification.

The new PAM includes properties in exemption categories A (new build/major renovation); C (unfurnished / unoccupied – long term empty); F (left empty by deceased persons); G (unfit dwellings); L (repossessed properties) and Q (left empty by a bankrupt)

Welsh Government Public Accountability Measures 2017-18: Guidance for local authorities	
<b>Theme</b>	Housing: Empty properties
<b>Measure</b>	Percentage of empty private properties brought back into use
<b>Technical title</b>	Percentage of empty private sector properties brought back into use during the year through direct action by the local authority
<b>ID</b>	PAM/013
<b>Other IDs</b>	-

<b>Definition</b>	<p>An empty property is a property liable for Council Tax, which has been unoccupied for a period of 6 months or more.</p> <p>This excludes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A second or holiday home.</li> <li>• A property owned by any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• registered social landlords (RSLs);</li> <li>• Police and Armed forces;</li> <li>• National Health Service;</li> <li>• universities and colleges;</li> <li>• local authorities and government;</li> <li>• Crown estate; or</li> <li>• churches and other religious bodies.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• A property that is in use but for non-residential purposes.</li> <li>• Properties that have been un-banded by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA).</li> </ul> <p>The following are categories of direct action that local authorities can take to bring a property back into use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• grants, loans or other financial assistance either provided or facilitated by the local authority;</li> <li>• working with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) or other intermediary with relevant expertise in order to seek a suitable tenant for the property;</li> <li>• enforcement action including statutory notices;</li> <li>• tax concession letters (on request from owner);</li> <li>• direct third party purchases enabled by the local authority; or</li> <li>• dialogue with the owner where the owner has engaged with and responded to the local authority.</li> </ul>
<b>Calculation</b>	Numerator/Denominator x 100
<b>Numerator</b>	Number of empty private properties brought back into use
<b>Technical title</b>	Number of empty private sector properties brought back into use during the year through direct action by the local authority
<b>Sourced from</b>	Local authorities

<b>Denominator</b>	Number of empty private sector properties
<b>Technical title</b>	Number of private sector properties that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April
<b>Sourced from</b>	Local authorities
<b>Guidance for local authorities</b>	
<p>An empty property is a property liable for Council Tax, which has been unoccupied for a period of 6 months or more.</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 property. Include all properties which are liable to Council Tax, in the following exemption classes, regardless of whether a discount is applied or not and that have been empty for more than 6 months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Unoccupied and unfurnished property undergoing repairs /renovation.</li> <li>C. Unoccupied and unfurnished property.</li> <li>F. Unoccupied property which is awaiting probate.</li> <li>G. Unoccupied property which is unoccupied because occupation is prohibited by law.</li> <li>L. Unoccupied property where a mortgagee is in possession.</li> <li>Q. Unoccupied property where the person who would normally pay the Council Tax is a bankrupt or insolvent trustee.</li> </ul> <p>Properties which have been classed under exemption C and then re-banded as '0' or 'zero' should also be included.</p> <p>This excludes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A second or holiday home.</li> <li>• A property owned by any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• registered social landlords (RSLs);</li> <li>• Police and Armed forces;</li> <li>• National Health Service;</li> <li>• universities and colleges;</li> <li>• local authorities and government;</li> <li>• Crown estate; or</li> <li>• churches and other religious bodies.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• A property that is in use but for non-residential purposes.</li> </ul>	

- Properties that have been un-banded by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA).

The number of properties that have been empty 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 mark during the year.

The following are categories of direct action that local authorities can take to bring a property back into use:

- grants, loans or other financial assistance either provided or facilitated by the local authority;
- working with registered social landlords (RSLs) or other intermediary with relevant expertise in order to seek a suitable tenant for the property;
- enforcement action including statutory notices;
- tax concession letters (on request from owner);
- direct third party purchases enabled by the local authority; or
- dialogue with the owner where the owner has engaged with and responded to the local authority.

A detailed record of the above direct action should be kept by local authorities for audit purposes.

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 brought back into use. A property should also only be counted once, regardless of whether it has been subject to both direct and indirect interventions.

The action by the local authority must have taken place during the current or previous financial year and prior to the property being brought back into use for it to be counted.

Properties which were un-banded on the 1 April tax list, but were brought back into use and re-banded during the reporting period should be counted as additional dwellings created.

Where properties are sub-divided into additional units in an effort to bring them back into use, only the original number of empty properties should be included. For example, a house that has been converted into three flats and brought back into use would count as one property having been brought back into use.

## Relevant Enforcement Legislation

Set out below are some of the most common statutory provisions that can be used for problematic empty properties and that can enable the enforced sale procedure to be used.

<b>Statute</b>	<b>What notice is used for</b>	<b>Type of charge</b>
Section 4 Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949	Requiring land to be kept free of rats and mice	On the premises and on all estates and interests therein
Section 79 Building Act 1984	Requiring works to remedy ruinous and dilapidated buildings and neglected sites	On the premises and on all estates and interests therein
Section 80 Environmental Protection Act 1990	Requiring abatement of statutory nuisance	On the premises
Section 215 Town and Country Planning Act 1990	Requiring steps to be taken for the purpose of remedying the adverse effect on amenity caused by detrimental condition of land and buildings	Binding on successive owners of the land
Sections 11 and 12 Housing Act 2006	Requiring the taking of action to deal with category 1 or 2 hazards in residential premises	On the premises
Section 43 Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014	Requiring the cessation of unreasonable conduct which is having a detrimental effect of a persistent or continuing nature, on the quality of life of those in the locality	On the individual carrying out the unreasonable conduct

Enforced Sale example – if Work in Default has been undertaken through any of the legislation named above and the debt is not paid off when invoiced, then Denbighshire County Council can write to the owner advising of charge and demanding payment (with pay-back period). If the charge remains unpaid then the Council can serve a notice under Law of Property Act 1925 (section 103) demanding payment and advising the owner of the Council's power to sell the property if the debt remains unpaid. This can result in the Council taking possession of the site and selling it to recoup their charge.