



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

**Private Sector
Empty Homes Strategy
2021-2026**

Foreword

Since the publication of the last Empty Homes Strategy in 2014 the Empty Homes Team has brought 1,173 empty homes back into use. As a result of this effort there has been over £12.5 million private investment spent on improving the condition of empty homes within the city. This has been achieved using a combination of advice, assistance; grant funding and utilising enforcement powers, where necessary.

This new Strategy builds on our experience over the last 5 years and sets out our commitment to continue working to foster innovative approaches for dealing with empty homes. We remain committed to tackling the blight of empty homes and to our proactive approaches in supporting owners to help them to return their properties back into use.

Empty homes are a wasted housing resource, both for individual owners and for the local community. Long-term empty homes can fall into a state of disrepair and become dangerous as well as have a negative social and environmental impact on our local communities. A coordinated and sustainable approach is required in order to deliver an increase in housing supply, improve property standards and reduce the number of empty homes to regenerate our city. Returning an empty home back into use is usually a more cost-effective option than either redeveloping a site or building a new home.

The Council and its partners have achieved a great deal in relation to bringing empty homes back into use over the last five years, but there is still a great deal more to do. This Empty Homes Strategy has been informed through consultation with partner agencies and local communities across the city.



Councillor Carl Edwards

Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment

	Contents	Page
1.	<u>The Empty Homes Strategy Aims and Objectives</u>	
	Vision	5
	Aim	5
	Objectives	5
2.	<u>Defining the problem</u>	
	What is an empty home	6
	Why do homes become empty	6
	Problems associated with long term empty homes	7
	Benefits of returning empty homes back into use	8
3.	<u>National and Local Strategic Context</u>	
	Level of vacant dwellings nationally	9
	Action on Empty Homes	9
	Council Tax Changes	10
	New Homes Bonus	11
	The Strategic Context	12
	Links to other Policies and Strategies	13
4.	<u>Local Housing Context</u>	
	Property type and tenure within the city	14
	Vacancy rates within the city	16
5.	<u>The Approach to Empty Homes and the tools used</u>	
	Resources – The Empty Homes Team	17
	How empty properties are identified and prioritised	17
	Empty Homes Team Tools:	19
	Investigation, intelligence gathering, help, advice and support	19
	Technical refurbishment advice	19
	Landlord Accreditation Scheme North Staffordshire	21
	Landlord Accreditation Scheme Empty Homes Grant	21
	Empty Property Loans	22
	Bond Scheme	22
	Landlord Accreditation Scheme Matching Service	22
	Partnership Working	22
	Enforcement Action:	23
	Compulsory Purchase Orders	23
	Order for Sale	24
	Enforced Sale	25
	Schemes to bring empty homes back into use:	26
	Reviving Communities Scheme	26
	Help to Buy Scheme	26
6.	<u>Empty Homes Team Achievements</u>	
	Number of empty properties brought back into use	26
	Property Conversions	27
	Private Sector Investment	27
	Securing and recovering Council Tax Debt	28
	Empty Home Grants	28

	Case Studies	29
7.	<u>Delivering the Empty Homes Strategy</u>	33
8.	<u>Action Plan</u>	34
9.	<u>Consultation</u>	34
10.	<u>Contact Details</u>	34
11.	<u>Appendices</u>	
	1: Empty Homes Strategy Action Plan	35
	2: City Map: Empty homes and length of time empty	37
	3: City Map: Empty homes and council tax band	38
	4: City Map: Empty homes and index of multiple deprivation	39
	5: Enforcement options in relation to Empty homes	40
	6: Consultation Plan	43

1. Empty Homes Strategy Aims and Objectives

Vision

Our vision is to bring long term empty homes back into use to improve the quality and supply of housing and to enable our residents to fulfil their potential.

Aim

The key aim of the Empty Homes Strategy (The Strategy) is to enhance Stoke-on-Trent's housing offer by strategically directing resources in order to bring empty properties back into use as high quality, affordable homes. The local direction is in line with the Government's policy which is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Objectives

The main objectives of The Strategy are:

- To identify those long-term empty homes which are having a negative impact on the city and its communities.
- To contribute to the reduction in the number of empty homes within the city.
- To check the information held by the Revenues Team regarding empty homes periodically and then write to the owners of each long term empty home to offer guidance.
- To provide specialist advice, support and incentives to empty home owners.
- To develop an innovative and a coordinated approach across the Council to bring empty homes back into use.
- To raise awareness of the potential of empty homes as high-quality accommodation.
- To improve property conditions within the city.
- To help to revive the housing market within the city.
- To improve neighbourhoods by reducing the opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour.
- To make Stoke on Trent a more attractive place to live.
- To provide affordable home ownership and tenancy opportunities within the city.

2. Defining the Problem

What is an empty home?

In order to function effectively and to allow for residential mobility, the housing market needs to include a number of empty properties. These transitional empty periods are when a property is either between lettings, up for sale or undergoing repairs. Additionally, some properties are not occupied all of the time, for example, holiday homes. These properties do not require intervention by the City Council. The focus of this strategy is those long-term empty homes which have been empty for six months or more, with a primary focus on those that have been empty for more than two years.

Examples of two long term empty properties



Why do homes become empty?

There are many reasons why homes initially become empty and are allowed to remain empty for long periods of time. These include, but are not limited to:

- Inheritance
- Owner lacks the time, skills, capabilities or resources.
- Owner has lost interest following issues with the property or tenants.
- Repossession
- Prohibition Order
- Abandonment
- Owners may be in hospital, residential care or prison.
- Complications with probate. This can include instances where an owner has passed away, leaving no living relative.
- Property is subject to a legal dispute, i.e. a divorce settlement.
- Awaiting planning consent.
- Purchased as an investment and allowed to remain empty waiting for a capital gain.

Problems associated with long term empty homes

Empty homes represent a wasted resource and a missed opportunity which can have a negative impact on local communities. The problems associated with empty homes include:

- Causing damage to neighbouring properties.
- Affecting neighbouring house prices.
- Denying a home to those in housing need.
- Having a negative effect on communities whilst becoming a potential focal point for illegal activities and anti-social behaviour, including squatting and vandalism.
- Attracting fly tipping and subsequent issues with vermin.
- Increased renovation costs as a result of deteriorating property conditions.
- Increased strain and expense on other public services, including the Police and Fire Service.
- Being a risk to the public through unsafe structures.

Evidence of fly tipping in two long term empty properties



Benefits of returning empty homes back into use

There are many benefits of returning empty homes back into use. These include:

- Increasing the housing supply within the city for those in housing need.
- Recycle a wasted available resource.
- Enhance the local residential environment.
- Reduce the fear of and risk of crime and anti-social behaviour taking place.
- Contribute towards a balanced housing market.
- Reduce the reliance on new build properties to meet housing need. This helps to combat climate change as the amount of materials needed to achieve a housing gain is reduced and the amount of land needed is minimised.
- Modernisation of the city's older housing stock and raising its value.
- Regenerating run-down areas.
- Enhancing the vitality of town centres.
- Helping to tackle homelessness.
- Aid community cohesion by removing a potential magnet for anti social behavior and associated problems.
- Provide both work and training opportunities for local trades people.



Before and after photos of a long term empty property

3. National and Local Strategic Context

Level of vacant dwellings nationally

In October 2019 there were 24.4 million dwellings in England. Of these, 648,114 were vacant which equates to 2.6% of the total dwelling stock. Of these, 225,845 dwellings were categorised as long-term vacant, which saw an increase of 9,659 (4.5%) from the previous year. Long-term vacant dwellings make up 0.9 per cent of the total dwelling stock within England.¹ These high levels of empty properties are recognised as having a serious impact on the viability of communities.² Dealing with empty properties can have social, regenerative, financial and strategic benefits.

In 2019 the National Planning Policy Framework³ was updated. It included the expectation that local authorities will address empty home issues locally. The Framework states that plans and decisions should support efforts to identify and bring back into residential use empty homes and other buildings, supported by the use of compulsory purchase powers, where appropriate.

Action on Empty Homes

Action on Empty Homes is a charity which campaigns for empty homes to be brought back into use for people in housing need or those who are priced out of decent housing. The charities aim is to:

- Campaign for changes to national policy.
- Raise awareness of the waste of long-term empty homes.
- Support local communities in transforming their neighbourhoods.
- Provide advice for those seeking to bring empty homes back into use.
- Research and develop ideas for bringing long-term empty homes back into use for those in housing need.

¹ According to statistics published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/886251/Dwelling_Stock_Estimates_31_March_2019_England.pdf

² House of Commons Briefing 2019. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN03012/SN03012.pdf>

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

Action on Empty Homes produced a report titled Empty Homes in England 2019⁴. This report made several recommendations on how to bring more empty homes back into use. The recommendations included the following:

- Local Authorities should adopt a strategic approach to empty homes and ensure that approaches in neighbourhoods with high levels of empty homes fit within a local authority-wide empty homes strategy.
- Local Authorities should seek funding and allocate resources to buy and refurbish empty properties for people in housing need. They should also support community-based organisations and housing associations who wish to bring empty homes back into use.
- Central Government should re-establish dedicated funding programmes to support local authorities and housing providers to create affordable housing from long-term empty homes in all parts of England.
- Central Government should review how the legal powers available to local authorities to tackle empty homes and poor standards of management in the private rented sector could be improved.

Council Tax Changes

New legislation that was introduced in April, 2019, namely the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax Act 2018 (“the Act”) allows Councils to increase the Council Tax Empty Homes Premium that can be charged on long term empty homes. The Act amends section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. The aim of this Premium is to incentivise empty home owners to bring their properties back into use by removing reductions or exemptions that were previously awarded.

In Stoke on Trent it was determined that with regard to council tax liability, the following Empty Homes Premium would be applied, in accordance with the dates and the amounts set out below:

For the financial year beginning 1 April 2019, the additional Empty Homes Premium was 100% for properties that had been empty for at least two years.

⁴ <https://www.actiononemptyhomes.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=a5ea72d6-b24a-4f8e-8dc0-451a6da170e6>

For the financial year beginning 1 April 2020 the additional premium is as follows:

- 100% Premium for properties that have been empty for at least two years.
- 200% Premium for properties that have been empty for at least five years.

For the financial year beginning on or after the 1 April 2021, the additional premiums shall be as follows:

- 100% Premium for properties that have been empty for at least two years.
- 200% Premium for properties that have been empty for at least five years, but less than 10 years.
- 300% Premium for properties that have been empty for at least ten years.

New Homes Bonus

The New Homes Bonus was introduced in 2011 to provide an incentive for local Councils to support housing growth by increasing the number of homes. Following a consultation, a number of reforms were announced in December 2016:

- Reduction of the number of years New Homes Bonus payments are made (legacy payments) from 6 to 5 years in 2017-18, reducing to 4 years from 2018-19;
- Introduction of a national baseline for housing growth of 0.4% of council tax base (weighted by band) from 2017-18, below which New Homes Bonus will not be paid.

In 2018 Stoke on Trent had 1865 long term empty homes which reduced to 1670 in 2019. This reduction helped to secure a New Homes Bonus Payment to the Council. New Homes Bonus payments will be made in 2020-21 as a one year payment and the future of payments beyond this date is uncertain and may change following planned consultation as part of the 2020 Spending Review.



Before and after photos of a long term empty property

The Strategic Context

Housing Strategy and Stronger Together Plan

This Strategy is in line with the Housing Strategy 2017 – 2022 and the Stronger Together Strategic Plan for 2020 – 2024 which sets out the vision and overarching priorities of the Council. Two of the objectives of the Housing Strategy are:

- To improve the condition and liveability of existing homes and rental management practices in the city.
- To respond well to government requirements and make the most of government initiatives that relate to housing.

The Strategy will help to contribute to the achievement of the following key Stronger Together priorities:

Work with our communities to make them healthier, safer and more sustainable.

Delivery of the Strategy will support communities by improving the local environment and the quality of life of local residents. By removing boarded up and problematic empty properties it will improve the visual appearance of an area and reduce anti-social behaviour and crime and help to make our communities more sustainable. This will increase confidence in an area, encouraging investment in the repairs and renovation of properties, making our communities more sustainable.

An innovative and commercial council, providing effective leadership to help transform outcomes.

Through the delivery of the match funded grants, the Council is leveraging in very high levels of private investment; over £12m worth of private investment has been spent on improving the city's empty properties, creating quality homes for those in need of housing. The actions of the team have led to the re-use of redundant commercial properties into flats for single households, increasing supply exponentially as well as increasing the council tax base and thus generating income.

Support vulnerable people in our communities to live their lives well.

By bringing empty homes back into use the Council is supporting people to access appropriate accommodation that meets their housing needs. In addition to this, by removing boarded up properties it helps vulnerable residents to live better and healthier lives with a reduction in the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour that they face on a daily basis. The reduction in opportunities for fly tipping has immeasurable benefits for the local community, giving people the opportunity to live in a clean and safe environment.

Enable our resident to fulfill their potential

The work of the Council in this area provides help to many residents by improving the quality and quantity of housing across the city. Living in decent housing helps residents to be healthy and this allows them to live their lives, whether that be in securing work or prospering in their education. However, without a decent home, the life chances are restricted and hampered. Furthermore, living in close proximity to an empty property, for some, can be a huge challenge whilst experiencing issues on a daily basis. This can have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of residents. Bringing empty homes back into use will reduce those negative experiences which will help residents to live their lives better.

Help businesses to thrive and make our city prosperous

The refurbishment of long term empty homes results in a high level of investment into the housing stock, which in turn brings trade to local businesses for materials and equipment to undertake whole house renovations. Owners have invested over £12m through the Council's work on bringing long term empty homes back into use since the publication of the last strategy which has benefitted local businesses.

Links to other Policies and Strategies

The Empty Homes Strategy contributes to at least the delivery of the following Council Policies and Strategies:

- The Housing Strategy 2017 – 2022
- The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 – 2025
- The Allocations Policy 2020
- The Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2016 – 2020
- Safer City Partnership Strategy 2017 – 2020
- Fuel Poverty Strategy 2016 – 2020
- Joint Health and Well-being Strategy 2016 – 2020
- Adults' Strategic Partnership Plan 2016 -2020
- The Children, Young People and Family Plan 2016 – 2020

4. Local Housing Context

Property type and tenure within the city



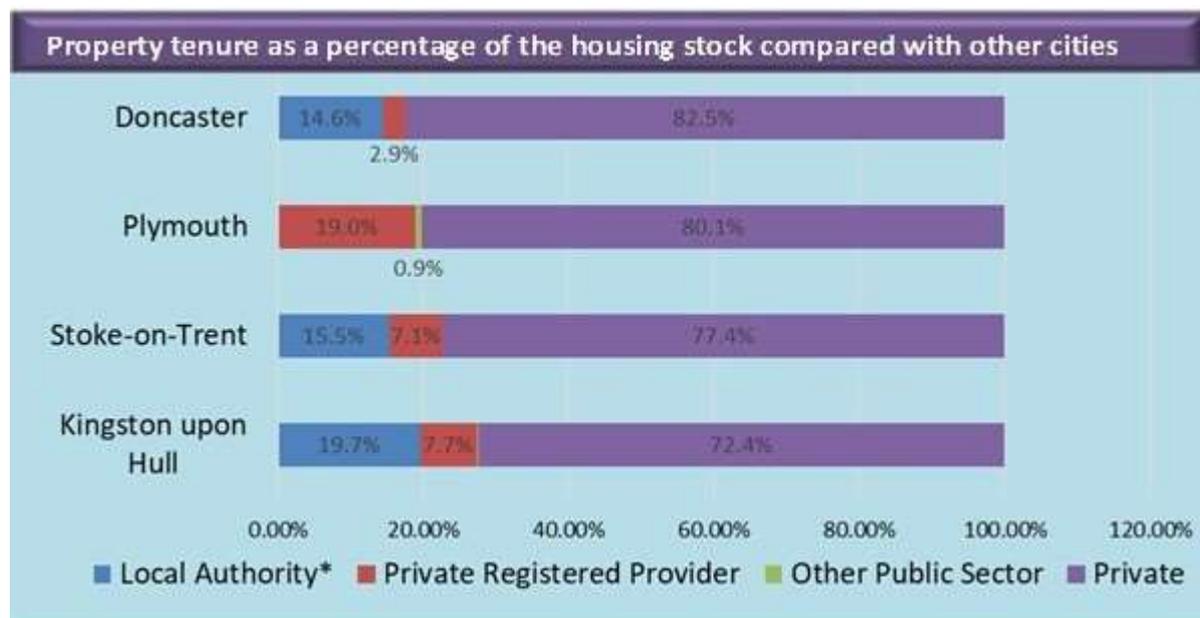
The city's Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey 2017 provides useful data to inform the Council's approach to the management of empty homes within the city.

The survey found that vacancy rates vary significantly across the housing stock and geographically across the City. Within the housing stock rates of vacancy are higher within the private-rented sector; estimated at 17.2% compared to 4.6% within the owner-occupied sector. Highest rates of vacancy are associated with the pre-1919 and inter-war housing stock, with terraced housing and with flats in converted or mixed use buildings.

Data from this survey details private sector housing in the city is representative of all building eras but is predominantly of post Second World War construction. 52,285 dwellings (57.9%) were constructed post 1944. Of these, 21,649 (41.4%) were constructed post 1980.

There were 37,973 dwellings (42.1%) constructed pre 1945. Within this group, 17,308 dwellings (19.5%) were constructed pre 1919 and 20,665 dwellings (22.9%) were constructed in the inter-war period; 1919 – 1944.

Owner occupation is the most predominant form of private sector tenure within the occupied housing stock accounting for 62,706 dwellings (75.5%). 20,317 occupied dwellings are privately rented (24.5%). There has been significant growth in the private rented sector since the previous stock condition survey in 2009 with a rise in occupied private rented stock from 12.4% to 24.5% in 2017. Owner occupation has decreased from 87.6% in 2009 to 75.5% in 2017.



*Includes owned by other Local Authorities

Source of data: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

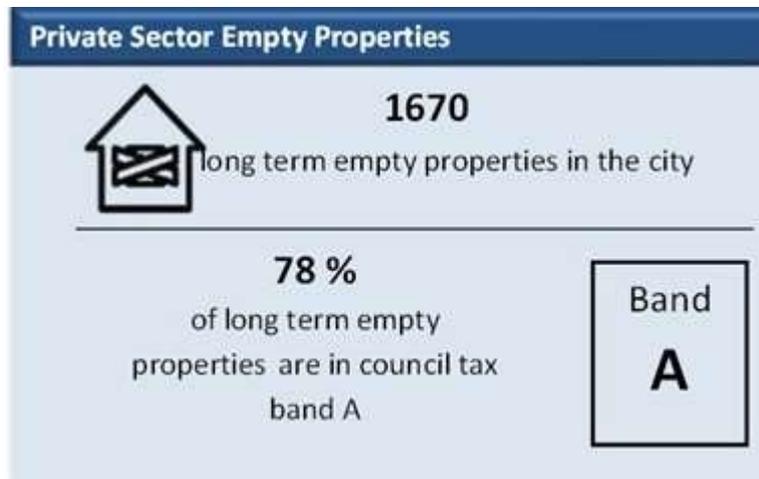
Vacancy Rates within the city

The Council Tax Base Data identifies that as at 7 October 2019 there were 3,624 chargeable dwellings classed as empty within the city. Of these, 1,670 dwellings were classed as empty for more than 6 months. The remaining vacant properties have been vacant under 6 months and are expected to return to occupancy within the short-term without significant intervention from the Council. These include dwellings which are being marketed for sale or for let and those that are currently undergoing repairs and improvements.

Vacancy rates vary significantly across the housing stock and geographically across the City, as can be seen on the map in Appendix 2.

The highest rates of vacancy can be seen in properties which fall within Council Tax Band A and are typically terraced houses and flats in converted or mixed use buildings. This can be seen on the map in Appendix 3. It is clear that there are few empty properties which fall within Council Tax Band D-H.

Stoke-on-Trent is currently ranked the 14th most deprived Local Authority in England⁵ out of 326. 136,221 people in the city live in the top 20% most deprived areas. This figure is unchanged since 2010. Overall, private rented properties and high vacancy rates are much more likely to be located in deprived areas of the city as seen in the map in Appendix 4.



⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

5. The Approach to Empty Homes

Resources – The Empty Homes Team

The Council's Empty Homes Team sits within the wider Private Sector Housing Team in the Housing, Development and Growth Directorate and takes the lead on the delivery of this Strategy. The Empty Homes Team consists of an Empty Homes Manager, one Environmental Health Officer, three Empty Homes Officers, one Environmental Health Assistant, two Court and Appeals Officers (temporary) and one Project Lead Officer (temporary).

The Empty Home Team's main approach is to build and maintain a relationship with empty home owners to encourage, persuade and support them to bring their property back into use voluntarily. There are many challenges that the team face as there are unique reasons why each property has been allowed to remain empty.

How are empty homes identified and prioritised

The Team have a number of ways of identifying empty homes and tracing its owner. The principle data source is Council Tax records which assist in the identification of long-term empty properties within the city along with the ownership details. On occasion, the ownership of a property is complicated as the owner may have passed away or there could be an ongoing legal dispute. In addition to this, some owners simply abandon their property leaving no up to date contact details on record. In these instances, officers carry out a search at the Land Registry and also undertake an extensive tracing exercise.

The team is often reliant upon the information provided to them by residents, Councillors, landlords, police, fire service and other partners including Registered Providers. These sources are crucial in ensuring that the information the Council hold is as accurate as possible and allows the team to target resources where they are needed most.

Once owners have been identified, officers undertake an external inspection to ascertain the condition of the property and the impact that it is having on the area. A letter is then sent to the owner making them aware of the problems their property is causing and the general issues surrounding leaving properties empty and providing a summary of the help and advice that the team can provide. Owners are offered advice on selling, renting, signposting and free technical advice concerning any refurbishment works.

A questionnaire is included with this letter seeking further information as to why the property has been allowed to remain empty, the internal condition and any problems that the owner is facing with bringing the property back into use. This questionnaire allows officers to research further options in order to provide bespoke solutions to bringing each property back into use. It also ensures that equality is maintained throughout the service.

To ensure that resources are allocated appropriately, officers examine lots of factors surrounding each empty property. This research allows officers to target resources to those properties which pose the biggest risk to an area if the property were to remain empty. Some of the factors that are taken into consideration include:

- Environmental factors, such as boarded up windows, accumulated rubbish/fly tipping, overgrown gardens and unsightly fire damaged properties.
- Social factors, which include if the property is a source of crime, vandalism, graffiti and anti-social behaviour.
- Health and safety factors, such as levels of disrepair or whether the property is in a condition that affects the structure of neighbouring properties or poses a hazard to the public. This can include pest activity.
- The length of time the property has been empty.

An example of some long term problematic empty properties



The Empty Home Team's Tool Kit

Investigation, intelligence gathering, help, advice and support

The Empty Homes Officer's role is to undertake extensive investigation to locate the owner but then to ascertain the history behind the empty property and to build a rapport with the owner. There are a huge number of reasons why properties are abandoned and remain empty for years. There are often sad and challenging situations surrounding empty properties; often properties are owned by multiple owners and the Empty Homes Officer's role is to gather as much information to formulate a solution and support and help the owner to understand the implications so that the property can be returned back into a home once again. The Empty Homes Officer is required to provide extensive bespoke support, often involving various services and engaging with agencies to help address the situations with each property. Each case is unique and requires negotiation and mediation skills as well as the ability to listen and provide care and support. The vast majority of cases are resolved without enforcement action, this is because of the level of support and help and assistance given to the owner.

Before and after photos following City Council intervention

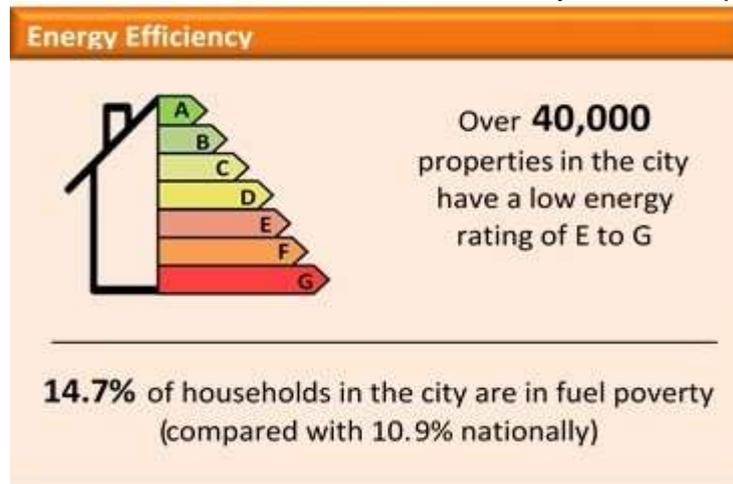


Technical Refurbishment Advice

Where an owner wants to bring a property back into use but lacks the technical knowledge required to undertake the repairs, the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) offers a free advisory service. The EHO will offer technical advice on all types of property repairs

including identifying hazards to health and the appropriate remedial action to remove them. The officer provides advice and guidance throughout the refurbishment, until the works are complete. Advice will also be offered concerning energy efficiency measures. This service ensures that those properties which are brought back into use are of a high standard and energy efficient. This is particularly important as it is estimated that in excess of 1500 rental properties within the city fall below the minimum Energy Performance Rating required under the Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Properties) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015. It is estimated that over 40,000 properties in the city have a low energy rating of E to G.

Current fuel poverty estimates suggest that 14.7% of residents in the city are in fuel poverty which is higher than the national figure of 10.9%. National statistics show that the required fuel costs for residents living in the least efficient homes are three times higher than those costs for the most efficient properties. People living in properties with an EPC rating of G are therefore almost three times more likely to be fuel poor.



Before, during and after photos following the renovation of an empty commercial unit



Landlord Accreditation Scheme North Staffordshire

When owners express an interest in keeping their property and letting it out, they are encouraged to join the Landlord Accreditation Scheme North Staffs. The aim of this scheme is to improve property standards and promote good management in the private rented sector. Landlords are kept up to date on new legislation or products on offer and any area which is related to the private rented sector. The Scheme is run as a partnership between Stoke on Trent City Council and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council.

This is a voluntary scheme available to any private landlord who owns and rents out properties in the North Staffordshire area, whether they are locally based or not. By encouraging landlords to join this scheme, it helps to encourage and ensure good standards are maintained within the property for years to come. More information about this scheme can be obtained at www.landlordaccreditation.co.uk.

Landlord Accreditation Empty Homes Grant

The Empty Homes Team assists the Landlord Development Officer to deliver the Landlord Accreditation Scheme's Empty Homes Grant. When owners wish to let their property but lack the funds to undertake the necessary refurbishment works, they are offered a match funded grant. This grant is offered to Accredited Landlords to help them to bring long term empty homes back into use as high quality and energy efficient accommodation. The EHO compiles a list of works required and ensures that the property is completed to a safe and decent standard. Full details are set out in the Council's Housing Renewal Assistance Policy⁶.



Before and after photos of the renovation of a long term empty unit

⁶https://www.stoke.gov.uk/downloads/file/70/housing_renewal_assistance_policy

Empty Property Loans

Interest Free Empty Home Loans are available to help owners to bring their properties back into use. To qualify for an Empty Homes Loan the property must have been empty for six months or more and the owner must be in a position to make regular repayments against the loan.

Bond Scheme

When owners are having difficulty finding a tenant, they can be signposted to the Bond Guarantee Scheme which is operated by the Council. This scheme is an incentive to private landlords to let their properties to people who are either on a low income or on benefits and who ordinarily would have found it difficult to raise a deposit for a tenancy. The Bond itself is a promissory agreement by the Council to pay landlords in the event of a customer breaking the agreement. No money is paid out unless there is a claim. This means that the landlord does not need to secure the monies into a deposit scheme and it helps those tenants who are on low income and ordinarily would have been priced out of renting in the private rented sector.

Landlord Accreditation Matching Service

When an owner expresses an interest in selling their property, the owner is offered the opportunity to advertise their property for sale, free of charge to accredited landlords through the Matching Service. Details of each empty property is sent through to those accredited landlords who are looking to expand their portfolio. Accredited Landlords can then contact empty home owners over a prospective sale.

Partnership Working

The success of the empty homes service is dependent upon good working relationships between agencies and inter-departmental teams, including those listed below.

- City Council Revenues and Benefits Team
- Landlord Accreditation Scheme North Staffordshire
- Environmental Crime Unit
- Housing Enabling Team
- Housing Solutions Team
- Bond Officer
- ASB Team
- Adult Social Care
- Governance, Legal
- Dangerous Structures
- Building Control

- Planning Team
- Staffordshire Fire & Rescue
- Staffordshire Police
- Other Local Authorities & Registered Providers
- 'Action on Empty Homes'
- West Midlands Empty Homes Officer Group

Enforcement Action

The Council will always try to resolve cases through voluntary measures and by providing encouragement, advice and incentives to the owner. If owners maintain communication with the team, support will be provided right up until the property has been brought back into use. Where owners are unwilling to engage or fail to take responsibility for their property, the team escalate their involvement ranging from offering help and support up to enforcement action, where appropriate. When a property is having a detrimental impact on the community and there is no commitment by the owner to remedy the problem, the Council will decide the most appropriate type of enforcement action to take. The decision to use a particular power will be dependent upon the condition and location of the property, the circumstances of the owner, the level of housing need and the level of public funding available to the Council. All enforcement action is taken in accordance with the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy. Some of the enforcement measures used by the Team include:

- **Compulsory Purchase Orders**

Compulsory Purchase Orders may be used to acquire houses, or buildings which may be made suitable for houses, to address housing need.



There are currently 2,187 live applications for council housing within the city and 1,024 of these applicants are considered to be in high housing need.

Occasionally enforcement action is necessary in order to meet the housing need demonstrated above. It is for this reason that the Council will consider Compulsory Purchasing long term empty homes when the owner fails to take responsibility for bringing their property back into use. Since the last strategy was published the Empty Homes Team have undertaken 5 Compulsory Purchase Orders to bring some of the most problematic and long term empty homes back into use.



Before and after photos following the renovation of a long term empty property

- **Order for Sale to recover debt**

Where there is over £1,000 Council Tax debt owed on an empty property the Court and Appeals Officer applies for a Charging Order to secure this debt against the empty property. The owner is provided with help and advice regarding both the debt and empty property. If the owner does not make any repayments or commit to bring the property back into use, the Council is then able to apply to the Courts to enforce the Charging Order and obtain an Order for Sale which allows the Council to sell the empty property on the open market to recover the debt. The owner's circumstances will be taken into consideration and enforcement action will only be used as a last resort. Since 2014 the Empty Homes Team have obtained three Orders for Sale therefore recovering the debt owed to the Council and bringing three additional properties back into the useful housing stock of the city. The team works with the new owners to ensure that the property is brought back into use and is safe and warm.

- **Enforced Sale to recover debt**

The Council has the right to sell a property where, acting under a statutory power, the Council has incurred costs as a result of works it has taken in default of the owner of the property. Provided such costs are capable of being deemed to be a charge against that property, then a power of sale arises in favour of the Council. Before such a power can be exercised, a formal notice demanding payment of the money has to be served on the owner of the property. If following the service of this demand, the Council's costs remain outstanding; the Council can then proceed to sell the property. This action is only used as a last resort and the owner will be provided with help and advice regarding both the debt and the empty property before this enforcement action is considered. The Empty Homes Team are currently looking to progress their first Enforced Sale during 2021.

Appendix 5 sets out a full list of the enforcement tools used to tackle empty homes.

Before, during and after photos of an enforcement case



Schemes to bring Empty Homes back into use

Reviving Communities Scheme

The Reviving Communities scheme is the second phase of the highly acclaimed Clusters of Empty Homes Programme, commonly referred to as the £1 Homes Scheme. The second phase builds upon the vision of a strong, healthy, thriving community in the Portland Street area which historically has had a high number of empty properties and some poor property conditions. This scheme will address not only housing market decline but also help to create safe and clean streets; build a community and contribute to a stronger Stoke-on-Trent.

The team have negotiated and acquired 19 long term empty properties within the Portland Street area. These properties are currently being refurbished by contractors through the Councils' wholly owned repair company Unitas Stoke-on-Trent. Upon completion, the selected applicants, who have been assessed against the scheme's eligibility criteria and conditions, will be assigned a property based on their need and personal circumstances.

Help to Buy

The Private Sector Housing Team will launch the Help to Buy – Stoke-on-Trent scheme in 2021. This scheme has been developed to support local people or those with a connection to the city and aspire to home ownership to purchase an empty property by loaning applicants the deposit to help them to secure a mortgage. This financial assistance will be directly linked to homes which have been empty for longer than six months at the time of completion of sale and have a sale price of £150,000 or less. Applicants will not be charged any interest in the first 5 years and thereafter 1.5% for two years and 3% thereafter. The deposit is to be paid back within 20 years.

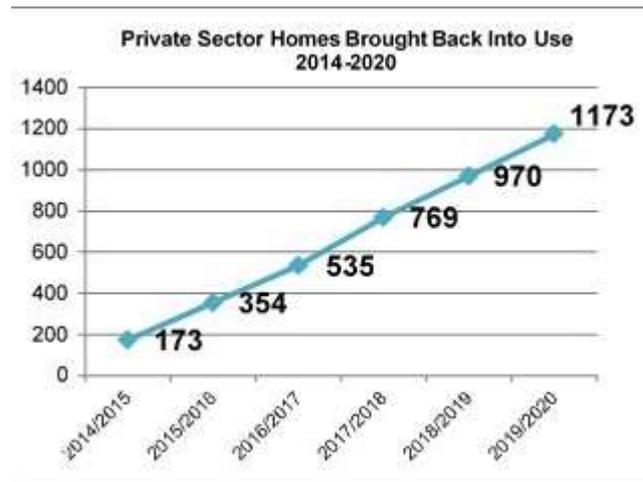
6. Empty Home Team's Achievements

Since the last Empty Homes Strategy was produced in 2014 the Team has achieved a great deal of success in its objective of bringing some of the city's most long term and problematic empty homes back into use.

Number of properties brought back into housing use

The number of long-term empty properties brought back into use through active involvement by the Empty Homes Team is as follows:

Time Period	Number of properties returned to use
2014/2015	173
2015/2016	181
2016/2017	181
2017/2018	234
2018/2019	201
2019/2020	203
Total	1,173



Property Conversions

In addition to the return of empty properties, the EHO provides advice to owners on the conversion of empty commercial and domestic single units into either Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) or self-contained flats. This advice not only helps to create additional units of accommodation, but also increases the Council Tax Base and therefore revenue into the General Fund.

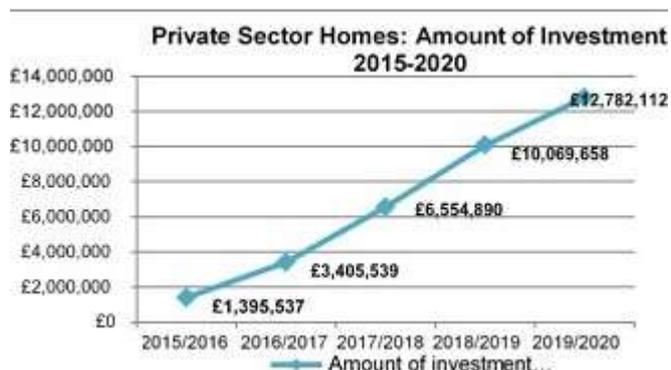
Time period	Amount of Additional Housing Units created	Additional Council Tax Accounts on the Ctax Base
2017 - 2020	164	35
Total increase in Ctax	£107,974	

The above 164 properties are not included in the 638 empty homes brought back into use during 2017 – 2020 but are in addition to these numbers.

Private Sector Investment

The Empty Homes Team offer owners' technical advice on their property repairs and also offer match funded Empty Home Grants. This activity helps to encourage private investment into the private housing stock within the city. The table below demonstrates the high level of investment by owners of empty properties in bringing 1,000 of the above 1,173 empty properties back into use:

Time period	Amount of investment
2015/2016	£1,395,536.91
2016/2017	£2,010,002.00
2017/2018	£3,149,351.00
2018/2019	£3,514,768.50
2019/2020	£2,712,453.12
Total	£12,782,111.53*



*Please note that the level of investment prior to 2015 was not recorded

Securing and recovering Council Tax and other debt

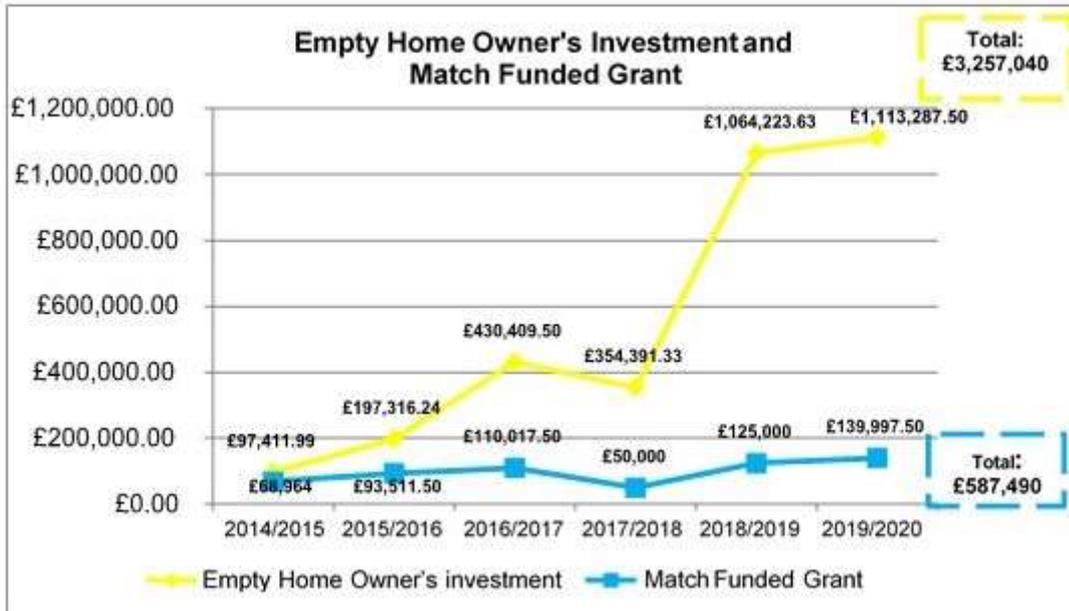
When Council Tax debt is identified on an empty home, an officer secures this debt against the property in the form of a Charging Order. This means that when a property is sold, or the Council enforces the sale, the debt is recovered. This has only been recorded since 2019 when the Empty Homes Team recruited an officer dedicated to this function.

Time period	Amount of Council Tax recovered	Amount of Council Tax further Secured
2019/2020	£100,763.41	£272,977.19
Total	£373,740.40	

Empty Home Grants

The number of Empty Home grants allocated during the period of the last strategy is as follows:

Period	Number of grants allocated	Total cost of renovation	Empty Home Owner's investment	Match Funded Grant
2014/2015	15	£166,375.99	£97,411.99	£68,964
2015/2016	20	£290,827.74	£197,316.24	£93,511.50
2016/2017	23	£540,427	£430,409.50	£110,017.50
2017/2018	10	£404,391.33	£354,391.33	£50,000
2018/2019	25	£1,189,223.63	£1,064,223.63	£125,000
2019/2020	28	£1,253,285.00	£1,113,287.50	£139,997.50
Total	121	£3,844,530.69	£3,257,040.19	£587,490.50



Case Studies

Case Study 1



Before and after photos of the renovation works

The Empty Homes Team received a referral from the Private Sector Housing Enforcement team for this property which was in a state of disrepair suffering from damp and mould. The tenants had moved out due to the poor property conditions

and the owner decided to sell the property on the open market following discussions with the case officer.

A new owner purchased the property and extensive advice was offered regarding how to renovate the property into either a large family house, four separate self-contained flats or a four bed HMO. The new owner decided to begin renovation works to change the use of the property into four self-contained flats.

Following discussions with the Empty Homes Officer, the owner was offered help with the complicated and costly renovation work to the property. The owner encountered many difficulties along the way and the Empty Homes Team assisted in overcoming these difficulties ranging from solving technical problems, arranging financial assistance, liaising with Building Inspectors, Architects and Energy Assessors, and offering support. The renovation of the flats took place between June 2017 and March 2020.

The house originally suffered from enhanced damp and mould growth with the energy performance of the property in March 2017, rated at a mid “F” Banding which is very poor. The estimated heating and hot water costs of the property per year were £2,370, meaning that a family on a low income would find it extremely difficult to afford to adequately heat the property and struggle to afford the hot water costs to bathe regularly. Following the conversion of the property into four self-contained flats the energy performance rating of each self-contained flat now ranges from a mid “C” to a high “C” banding. The cost of heating and hot water production for the high “C” banded self-contained flat is only £235 per year and the accumulative total cost of heating and hot water production for all four self-contained flats is only £1,147; less than half the costs of the house before the change of use.

The advantages of the conversion of this property, with the assistance of the Empty Homes Team and Landlord Accreditation Scheme, are as follows:

- Provision of three additional high quality, single bedroomed self-contained flats to meet the housing need.
- The removal of significant hazards to health to any resident or visitor to the property.
- Improving the quality of the housing stock and the local area.
- Removing the likelihood of anti-social behaviour and rodent activity connected with empty houses in a state of disrepair, and hence a drain on Council services.
- Generation of Council Tax revenue for the three additional Band A properties per year. The additional Council Tax revenue will repay the Landlord Accreditation Grant in just over 18 months.

- In addition to the grant, the owner spent additional private investment improving this property.
- A boost to the local economy in terms of building materials and work for trades people locally.
- A reduction in carbon saving on each property, helping to combat climate change.

Following the completion of the renovation, the owner was thankful for the help and assistance that they had received from the team, and submitted a corporate compliment.

Case Study 2 - Conversion of a long term empty engineers' workshop into 7 high specification flats



Before and after photos of the renovation and conversion

This property had been empty for three years. In November 2018 the Empty Homes Team responded to a request from a member of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme to offer renovation advice for the conversion of a former Engineers building/site from an industrial to residential change of use. A meeting was arranged to meet the prospective purchasers on-site to consider the feasibility of the proposal. During the meeting advice was given regarding the physical renovation of the building, the environmental requirements, energy conservation, and the termination of any potential pollution pathway of any industrial contaminant into the site. The prospective purchasers were reassured by the advice offered and they proceeded with the purchase of the building/site. The building/site was purchased in January 2019 and the new owners requested a meeting on-site to discuss further the specification of a conversion of the building/site into seven self-contained flats. A schedule of works was completed compliant to the Housing Act 2004, The Building Regulations 2013

and the Standard Assessment Procedure (Version 9, to meet energy performance requirements) and the owners proceeding to undertake the renovation works. The works were completed to a very high standard and all of the flats have now been occupied, providing much needed housing for single households.

Case Study 3



Before and after photos of the renovation works

This semi-detached property was in a very poor condition and although it had only been unoccupied for just over two years it had not been maintained. There were broken windows which had been boarded to keep the elements out, the window frames were rotten, the porch above the front door was in an unsafe condition, the roof was in need of repair, the brick garage was in a dire state and the garden was vastly overgrown.

Complaints to the City Council had been received regarding the condition of the property stating that it had remained empty for some time and was deteriorating at a rapid rate.

The Empty Homes team carried out investigations to ascertain who the owner was and also visited the property and posted a 'Request for contact' card. Investigations provided confirmation of the whereabouts of the owner.

The family were contacted by the Empty Homes Team and in response to the letter discussions were initiated. On this occasion the family were able to discuss the property and make decisions moving forward. Initially, the property needed to be cleared and family visited regularly to achieve this before putting the property on the market.

Once the property was sold the Empty Homes Team contacted the new owner and a dialogue was struck up to ascertain the intentions for the future of the property. The

property was to be fully renovated which included, a full rewire, plastering, brickwork, new kitchen & bathroom and windows across the whole property. The Empty Homes Team role was to liaise with the new owners until the property had been refurbished and was put back on the market. It was then sold again to owner occupiers who are very happy in their new and fully refurbished home.

There were several benefits of bringing this property back into use which include;

- A good quality, fully refurbished home for a young couple starting out.
- Bringing a property up to a good standard which now compliments the local community appearance.
- Provision of an additional high quality property to meet the housing need.
- The removal of significant hazards to health to any resident or visitor to the property.
- Improving the quality of the housing stock and the local area.
- Removing the likelihood of anti-social behaviour and rodent activity connected with empty houses in a state of disrepair, and hence a drain on Council services.

7. Delivering the Empty Homes Strategy

The action plan is based on the existing resources available. The outcomes achieved will be dependent on the budgets available to deliver the Strategy and thus may be reduced to reflect any reduction in budgets.

Empty homes which have been brought back into use as a result of the team's involvement will count towards the achievement of the principal target. The team's involvement will be demonstrated through the use of the toolkit.

The team has adopted, as a baseline, the national agreement that any involvement to bring an empty home back into use will only be attributed to the team and recorded if officers have had active involvement in returning the property back into use.

To help to ensure the objectives of this Strategy are achieved, the team collect the following data and will report the data to the Director of Housing, Development and Growth as part of the performance framework.

1. The number of empty homes brought back into use with the assistance of the Empty Homes Team each year.
2. The number of additional units of accommodation created through the conversion of long term empty homes.
3. The amount of Council Tax debt collected and secured in relation to empty

properties.

4. The method with which the Empty Homes Team helped to bring the empty property back into use.
5. The level of private sector investment spent by owners bringing their long term empty home back into use.

8. Action Plan

Delivery of the Empty Homes Strategy will be supported by an action plan as set out in Appendix 1. The action plan will be monitored regularly with updates provided to the Director for Housing, Development and Growth and the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

9. Consultation

The Council has consulted a range of partners, residents, businesses and landlords on the Objectives and Actions contained within this Empty Homes Strategy. The feedback received has helped to shape and strengthen this Strategy and the Empty Homes Service. The Consultation Plan can be found in Appendix 6.

10. Contact details

Any queries or requests for information on any of the details contained within this Empty Homes Strategy can be directed to:

The Empty Homes Team
Private Sector Housing Team
01782 233086

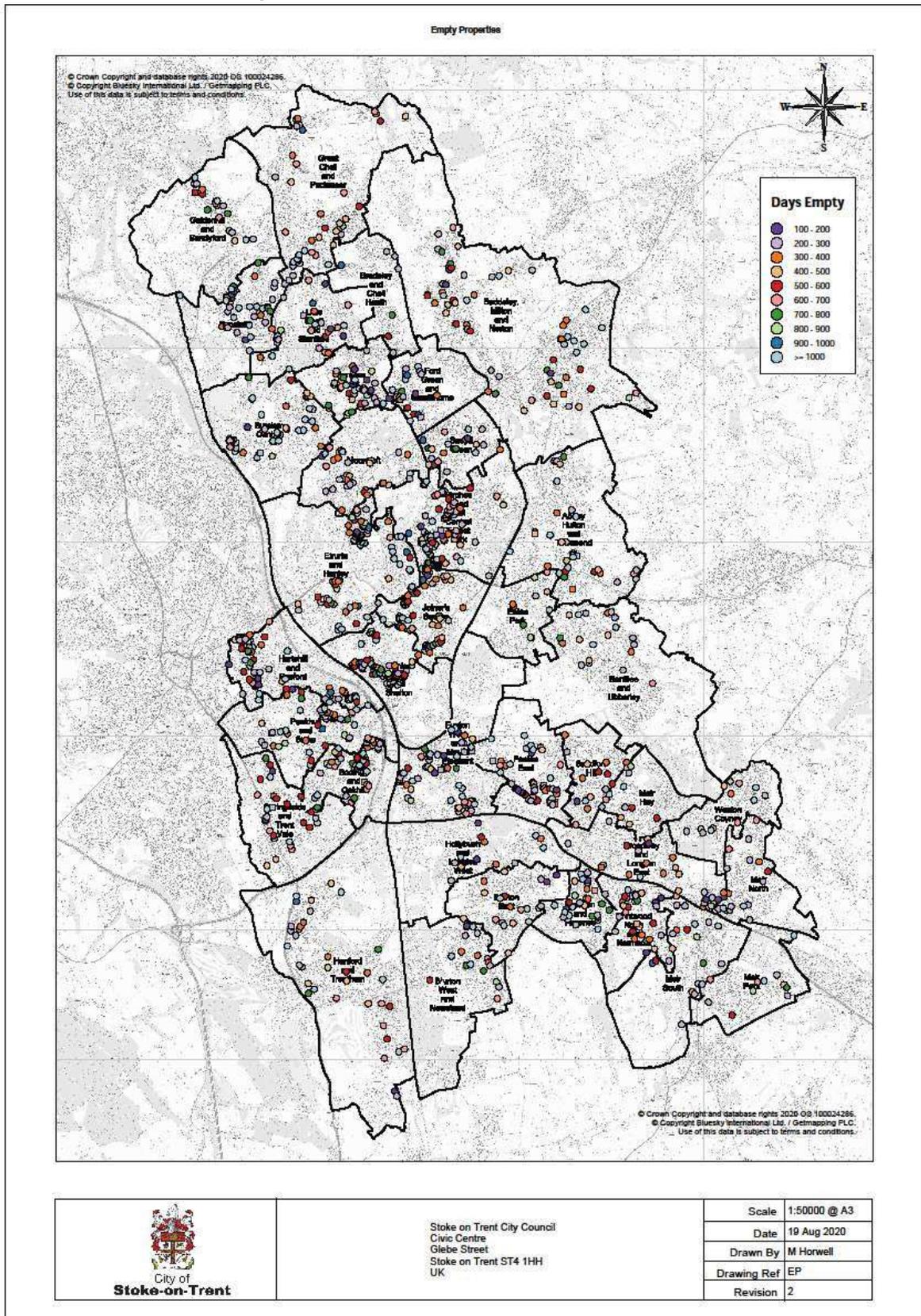
privatesectorhousing@stoke.gov.uk

Appendices. Appendix 1: Empty Homes Strategy Action Plan

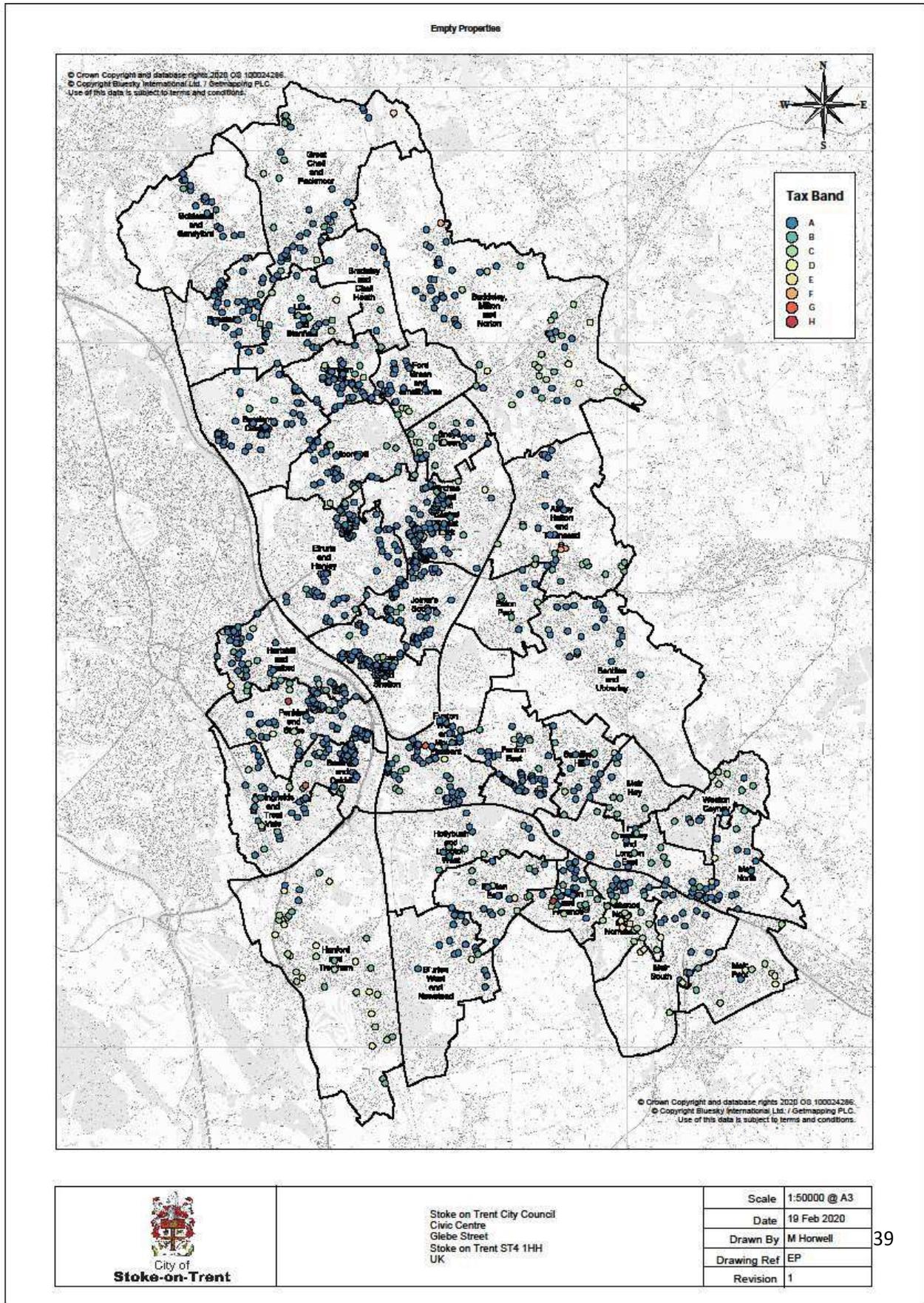
Aim	Action	Outcome	Lead Officer	Date	Monitoring
Bring 200 long term empty homes back into use each year – This is Stronger Together Strategic Plan measure	The Empty Homes Team will offer help and assistance to owners to help them to bring their properties back into use to meet housing need as demonstrated in the Council's housing register. Enforcement action may be used, where necessary.	Reduction in the number of long term empty homes within the city and the creation of additional units of accommodation	Empty Homes Team	Monthly	Figures will be collected and reported on a monthly basis
Generate additional units of accommodation from long term empty homes	The Team will provide technical advice to empty home owners to assist them in the conversion of their property into an HMO or self-contained flats.	Creation of additional units of high quality and energy efficient accommodation to meet the housing need and also create additional council tax accounts and revenue.	Empty Homes Environmental Health Officer	Assistance will be offered as and when a suitable empty property is identified	Figures will be collected and reported on a monthly basis
Proactively target short term empties in order to reduce the number of long term empties in the city.	Every six months the Empty Homes Team will utilise the Council Tax Data to identify those properties which have been empty between 6 -12 months. Officers will then write to the owners of these properties to offer help and assistance to bring the property back into use.	Reduction in the length of time a property remains empty before being returned to use.	Empty Homes Officers	Six monthly	Quarterly reporting to the Strategic Manager– Private Sector Housing
Widely promote the problems associated with empty properties, the benefits of bringing them back into use and the empty homes referral process.	Every six months the Empty Homes Team will use social media to publicise the problems that empty homes bring, the mutual benefits of returning them back into use and how people can refer an Empty Property in to the Council.	An increase in the number of empty homes reported through to the Council and an increase in the number of owners willing to accept help and assistance from the team to bring a property back into use.	Empty Homes Team	Six monthly	Quarterly reporting to the Strategic Manager– Private Sector Housing

<p>Maximise debt recovery opportunities</p>	<p>Every three months the Empty Homes Team will utilise Council Tax data to identify those properties where the Council Tax debt exceeds £1,000. Officers will then apply for a Charging Order to register this debt against the property and enforce the sale if unpaid. This action will only be used as a last resort; the owner will be provided with help and advice regarding the debt and empty property prior to any enforcement action being undertaken.</p>	<p>Securing the debt owed to the Council. Increase in income in the General Fund through collecting outstanding debt whilst also returning long term empty homes back into use</p>	<p>Court and Appeals Officer</p>	<p>Quarterly</p>	<p>Quarterly reporting to the Strategic Manager– Private Sector Housing</p>
<p>Maximise debt recovery opportunities</p>	<p>Every three months the Empty Homes Team will utilise the Council's Sundry Debt data to identify those properties with at least £300 debt. The team will then undertake feasibility checks and if deemed appropriate, will commence the process of enforcing the sale of the property. This action will only be used as a last resort; the owner will be provided with help and advice regarding the debt and empty property prior to any enforcement action being undertaken.</p>	<p>Increase in income in the General Fund through collecting of outstanding debt whilst also returning long term empty homes back into use</p>	<p>Empty Homes Officer</p>	<p>Monthly</p>	<p>Quarterly reporting to the Strategic Manager– Private Sector Housing</p>

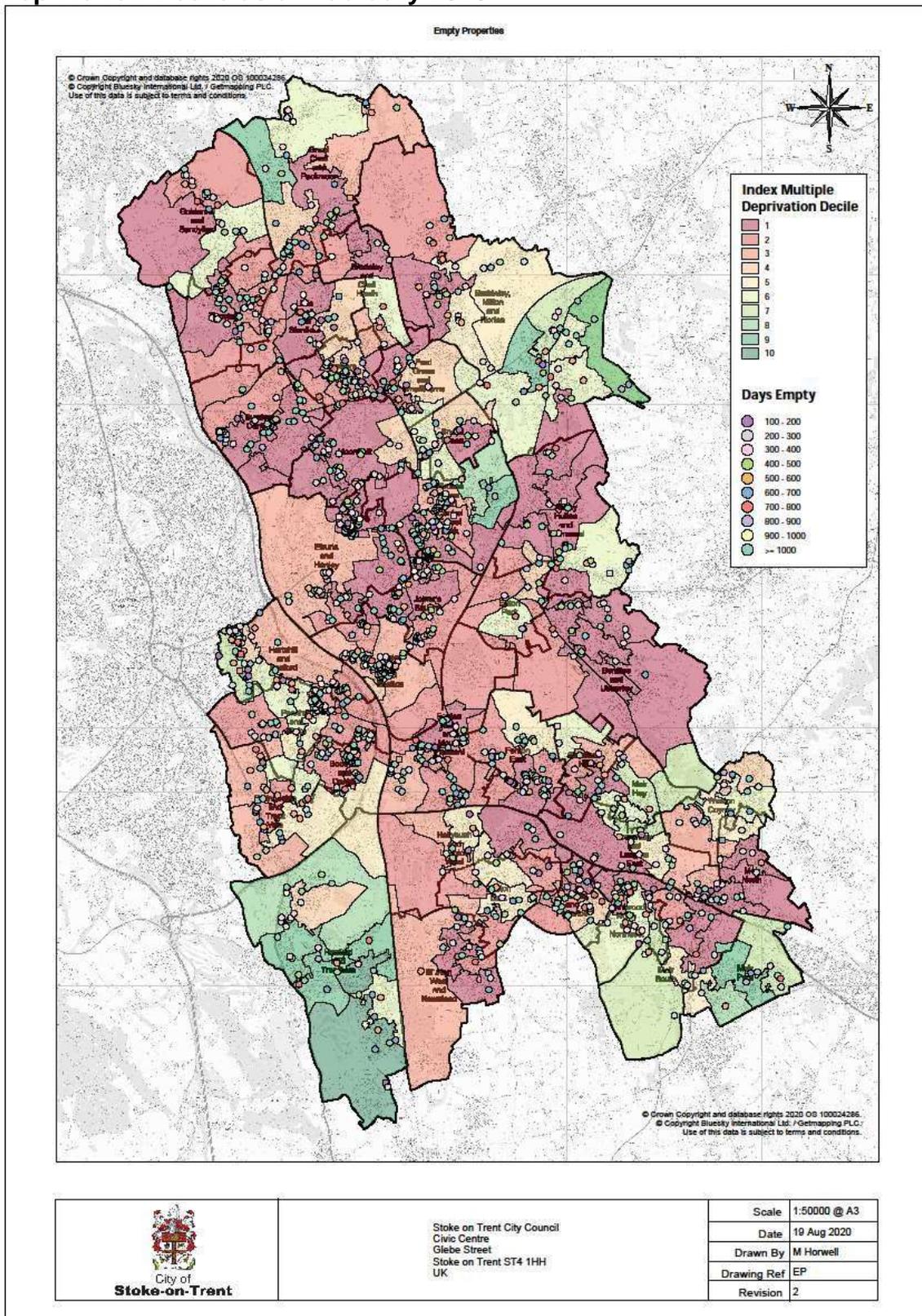
Appendix 2: City Map detailing each empty home and the length of time vacant, as at February 2020



Appendix 3: City Map detailing empty homes by Council Tax Band as at February 2020



Appendix 4: City map detailing empty properties and Index of Multiple Deprivation Decile as at February 2020



Appendix 5: Main Statutory Enforcement Options and Tools

- **Anti-Social Behaviour Crimes and Policing Act 2014** - to deal with land and properties which are affecting the amenity of an area.
- **Building Act 1984, section 79** - to deal with an empty home which is seriously detrimental to the amenity or to the neighbourhood.
- **Building Act 1984, section 59** - to deal with the condition of the drainage to a building which is prejudicial to health or is a nuisance.
- **Building Act 1984, Section 78** - to fence off the area and or take emergency action to make the property safe in regards to a dangerous building or structure.
- **Building Act 1984, Section 77** - to make the property safe where danger arises from the condition of the building or structure.
- **Building Act 1984, Section 76** - to deal with premises in such a state (“defective state”) and determined to be either prejudicial to health or a nuisance. Notices can be served in order to direct owners to carry out the necessary works or for the local authority to carry out emergency action.
- **Environmental Protection Act, 1990, Section 80** - to deal with premises which are in such a state and determined to be either prejudicial to health or a nuisance. Notices can be served in order to direct owners to carry out the necessary works or for the Local Authority to carry out emergency action.
- **Housing Act 2004, Part One, sections 11, 12,** - requires the owner to make the property safe if category 1 or category 2 hazards are present.
- **Housing Act 2004, sections 20 and 21** - prohibits the use of a property where at least a category 1 hazard exists and additional category 2 hazards exist.
- **Housing Act 2004, section 237** - served where confirmation or further information regarding property ownership; interests or other information is required.
- **Housing Act 2004, section 239** - informs all relevant interested parties of the Council’s intended inspection for empty property verification purposes and to ensure tenanted property attains the statutory minimum standards.

- **The Housing Act 2004 Part 4** - Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) allow the Council to take control over an unoccupied building and make sure that empty properties are occupied and managed properly. Ownership remains with the empty property owner
- **Housing Act 1985, section 17 Compulsory Purchase Orders** - to take control over an unoccupied building and acquire the property in circumstances where the Local Authority can demonstrate housing need.
- **Housing Act 1985, section 265** - where a building is considered to be ruinous and dilapidated or a dangerous structure the Council can serve a notice on the owner requiring them to demolish or repair the building within a set timescale.
- **Housing and Planning Act 2016, section 172** - authority to enter and survey or value land in connection with a proposal to acquire an interest in or a right over land.
- **Public Health Act 1936 Section 79** - to serve notice and remove any noxious accumulations on land and to carry out works in default if accumulations are not moved within a specified time.
- **Public Health Act 1961, Section 17** - requires the owner to address blocked or defective drains and sewers.
- **Public Health Act 1961, Section 34** - requires the owner to deal with any accumulations of rubbish which appears to be detrimental to the local amenity. Failure to comply can result in the Local Authority carrying works out in default.
- **Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, section 4** - applies where the condition of the property is such that it is providing or likely to provide harbourage to rodents.
- **Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 15** - to enter land (and property on that land) in connection with a proposal to acquire a compulsory interest in that land.
- **Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 16** - served where confirmation or further information regarding property ownership; interests or other information is required.
- **Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, Section 29** - requires the owner to take steps to secure the property or allows the Local Authority to board it up in an emergency.

- **The Law of Property Act 1925, section 103** - to enforce a sale. This provision allows the Council to register debt against a property and demand payment of outstanding debt. If the debt over £300 remains unpaid the Council may sell the property to recover the debt following the statutory requests for payment.
- **Charging Order/Order of Sale using the Charging Orders Act 1979; Local Government Finance Act 2003** - means to initially secure Council Tax debt and then recover monies by enforcing the Charging Orders and selling the property to recover the outstanding debt when it exceeds £1,000.
- **Section 116 of the Senior Courts Act 1981; Section 50 of the Administration of Justice Act 1985; Section 1 of the Judicial Trustees Act 189; Section 41 of the Trustee Act 1925** - means to pursue an application to court to remove or replace a personal representative. For example, a personal representative's conduct may be preventing the proper administration of the estate.

Appendix 6 – Empty Homes Strategy Consultation Plan

Communication Objectives:

- To raise awareness of the consultation on the aims, objectives and Action Plan of the Empty Homes Strategy.
- To encourage feedback on the aims, objectives and Action Plan to shape the development and direction of the final strategy.

The Empty Homes Team will commence the following consultation on this draft strategy in November 2020. The deadline for responses will be the 27th January 2021:

Target Audience	Method/Activity	Timescale
Stoke on Trent Cabinet members and Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Manager to attend the November Policy Briefing to introduce the Draft Strategy and request feedback. 	3 November 2020
Empty Home Owners and Local Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Draft Empty Homes Strategy will be uploaded onto both the City Councils website with an online feedback form and the Landlord Accreditation Scheme: North Staffordshire's website with a Word version of the feedback form. • A letter will be sent out to the owner of all of the active empty home cases directing them to the consultation on the city councils website. • Hard copies of the Strategy and feedback form will be made available on request. • The launch of the consultation will be publicised on social media. • A link to the Draft Strategy and feedback form will be sent out via Gov Delivery to those individuals who have requested updates relating to Landlords. 	16 December 2020 – 27 January 2021

Target Audience	Method/Activity	Timescale
Accredited Landlords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to the draft strategy and feedback form being uploaded onto the Landlord Accreditation Scheme: North Staffordshire's website, an email will be sent out to all Accredited Landlords publicising the strategy and feedback form. 	16 December 2020 – 27 January 2021
Estate and Letting Agents within the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An email will be sent out to Agents with a link to the Draft Strategy and an online feedback form on the city councils website. 	16 December 2020 – 27 January 2021
Key external stakeholders, including: Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Staffordshire Police Registered Social Landlords CAB North Staffs Landlord Association West Midlands Empty Homes Officer Group Chairs of the city's Residents Associations Immigration NHS Modern Slavery Group Staffordshire University Keele University Beat the Cold My Community Matters Neighbouring Councils Unitas Stoke on Trent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An email will be sent out to all stakeholders with a link to the draft strategy and an online feedback form. All external stakeholders will be encouraged to share the consultation with their respective teams, service users, forums and others as appropriate. 	16 December 2020 – 27 January 2021
Key internal stakeholders, including: Private Sector Housing Team Revenues and Benefits Fortior Homes Governance, Legal Adult Social Care Children and Family Services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An email will be sent out to all stakeholders with a link to the Draft Strategy and an online feedback form. All internal stakeholders will be encouraged to share the consultation with their respective teams, service users, forums and others as 	16 December 2020 – 27 January 2021

Target Audience	Method/Activity	Timescale
Public Health Housing Solutions Team Bond Officer Communities Team Housing Enabling Welfare Reform Group Homelessness (including circulation to the Homelessness Forum) Early Help Team ASB Team ICT Team Communications and Marketing Information Assurance, GDPR Stoke on call Trading Standards Environmental Crime Unit HMO Officer (including circulation to the HMO Register) Landlord Accreditation Officer Environmental Services Planning and Building Regulations Dangerous Structures Planning Team	appropriate.	

Please note that the consultation for this draft strategy has been adapted to minimise face to face communication due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. Drop-in events at local venues throughout the city are not possible at this time. The consultation will be led by the Empty Homes Team.