



Introduction

Every empty home across the borough is a wasted resource particularly when there is a significant need and a lack of supply of affordable housing.

Returning empty homes back into use makes good economic sense as it is both cheaper and faster than building new homes.

Fylde Council defines a long-term empty home as “A residential property that has been unoccupied for 6 months or more and does not have a reasonable prospect of being brought back into use by the owner without local authority intervention”

This definition does not include second homes, student accommodation, properties already identified for demolition as part of the Councils Clearance Programme, houses for sale or houses awaiting planning permission for renovations or refurbishment.

The definition allows a sufficient length of time for market forces to act to return an empty home into use without any intervention. While the focus of the strategy is on private sector housing, the Council also recognise the need to work in partnership with Registered Social Landlords to tackle long term vacant properties within the affordable housing sector.

The scope of this strategy is those properties that have been empty for a period of 6 months or more and that are not actively being brought back into use.

PROBLEMS

Empty properties have a negative impact on communities. By bringing empty homes back into use, we can greatly improve an area's appearance and boosts people's confidence in their neighbourhood. They can also be a magnet for crime and anti-social behaviour.

There is currently a shortage of satisfactory affordable housing across the country. An empty property could be a new home for a person in housing need, a young family looking for their first home or an older person looking to downsize

BENEFITS

Benefits of returning empty properties into use; A profile of Fyldes empty homes problem.

There are significant advantages for everyone in the area by returning empty homes back into use.

For the owners it unlocks potential capital if the property is sold.

Leaving a property empty increases the risk of vandalism and crime, making the property more costly to insure empty, if it can be insured at all. This leaves the owner vulnerable to losing their asset completely if it were destroyed by fire.

For local residents it reduces the opportunities for vandalism, fly tipping and antisocial behaviour in all its forms. Unsightly properties can have a negative effect on a neighbourhood; reduce house prices and lower people's pride in the area. The properties would be redeveloped and managed through a Registered Provider which offers affordable housing to residents with a local connection to the parish.

For the local economy bringing an empty home back into use contributes to the regeneration of an area, increasing spending in the local economy and helping to protect the value of surrounding properties. Unsightly properties can often deter investment in an area, which can lead to decline.

For the wider community returning properties back into use reduces demands on services such as the Police, Fire and the Council to deal with the associated problems. As a result, resources can be used more effectively elsewhere, and those once empty homes provide additional affordable housing for the local community.

The Local Advised figures have not changed between 21 and 22.

The Local perspective: Fylde

Date	Long term empty	2 years+ empty	5 years+ empty	10 years+ empty
Oct 13	688	N/A		
Oct 14	611	126		
Oct 15	612	122		
Oct 16	604	93		
Oct 17	584	125		
Oct 18	634	123		
Oct 19	650	110		
Oct 20	808	97	37	
Oct 21	626	114	15	11
Oct 22	616	104	10	10

There has been a slight decrease in the number of empty homes within Fylde since 2021.

Long term empty more than two year's 100%

Long term empty more than five year's 200%

Long term empty more than ten year's 300%

The national perspective. Wyre, Blackpool, and Preston

Region	Local Authority	LTEH	LTEH Change	LTEH % change	2nd homes 2020	2nd homes % change	2nd homes 2021	2nd homes change	2nd homes % change	2021 Data total Home	LTEH Occurrence %	2nd Homes % occurrence	Total number not in use	Total % in primary residential use	1 in every x homes out of use
NW	Fylde	714	525	-189	-26	591	550	-41	-7	40,277	1.30	1.37	1075	2.67	37
NW	Wyre	93	82	-11	-12	155	137	-18	-12	53,807	0.15	0.25	219	0.41	246
NW	Blackpool UA	1,769	1,422	-347	-20	649	648	-1	0	72,019	1.97	0.90	2,070	2.87	35
NW	Preston	1,304	1,072	-232	-18	715	610	-105	-15	65,482	1.64	0.93	1,682	2.57	39
UK	National	268,385	237,340	-31,045	-12	262,953	253,357	9,596	-4	24,987,468	0.95	1.01	490,697	1.96	51

THE PURPOSE

The key aim of the Empty Homes Strategy is to set out the detail of this policy and maximise the number of empty homes that are returned into use. To achieve this the objectives and actions within this empty homes strategy will be delivered under four key priorities. It will then go on to look at what we intend to do in the future, what tools we will employ and what actions we will take to improve our performance on returning empty homes back in to use.

• **Priority One – Improve the recording and identification of empty homes**

Priority One is concerned with the identification of properties and the recording and monitoring of that information. This stage allows us to identify where the empty properties are located and details about the which enables us to begin our Empty Homes process.

At present, Fylde Borough Council identify a majority of empty homes from the Council Tax register. Whilst the Council Tax Register is a good starting point for identifying empty homes and obtaining and verifying information on the owners of these properties, it is not fully reliable as not all empty homes are reported. Fylde Borough Council does not currently have any other means for reporting or recording empty homes.

We will use a scoring and rating system for each referral to help us categorise and prioritise each property. *See appendix 3.*

Aim

Ensure all empty homes are identified and monitored by targeting the following types of empty homes:

- Homes which have been empty for more than 6 months
- Empty homes that are a nuisance or the cause of complaints from residents.
- Empty homes that appear in priority action areas.
- Empty homes that are in a poor state of disrepair

Objective

We intend to use various methods to help identify and record including:

- An Empty Homes webpage which allows members of the public to report Empty Homes in the area
- Develop a database which records information about properties and owners details. The database will be updated and monitored by the Empty Homes Officer
- An Empty Homes email address will be set up to monitor any reports or updates
- Intention to use Local Government Act 2003, Section 85 which permits the use of Council Tax data to identify empty homes. *See appendix. 1*

Priority Two - Working with owners to bring empty homes back into use

Aim – Develop an empty homes service

Our Empty Homes service will provide encouragement and detailed information to empty property owners. In order for the process to work, it is important that we offer good quality advice and support regarding all aspects of bringing their empty home back into use.

Objective

- Offer support through our legal team to clearly explain the process
- Create an information hub on our website with helpful links
- Properties that come forward are scored against a scoring and rating system – see appendix 3

- **Priority Three** Develop a web page for the reporting to improve action on empty homes

Aim

Create a user-friendly web-based approach to identifying empty homes

Objective

Fylde council intend to have a dedicated empty homes web page only Fylde Council website which can be accessed by members of the public and internal departments within the council. This webpage will provide information on empty homes within Fylde and detailed information but hard to report empty homes and Fyldes plan for empty homes moving forward.

We also intend to work closely with internal services including housing enforcement, Environmental Protection on other services working with service users. We will create a separate form for internal services to report empty homes to affordable housing

Priority Four Working with Registered Provider (RP) to reduce the number of empty homes

Aim

Bring empty homes back into use as Affordable Housing

Objectives

Fylde council intends to work closely registered providers to deliver the empty homes strategy. All registered Providers will be invited to submit a bid to become the dedicated RP for Fylde Empty Homes. Whilst we understand that opening up the bids to contractors etc would gather more interest in the scheme, we feel it would be beneficial to work with providers who are better positioned to offer tenant support and property management once the property renovations have been completed.

Funding available

Funding sources identified will come from 2 sources.

1 – The Registered Provider with draw down on funding from Homes England to purchase the property.

2- Fylde council have available two sources of funding.

Primarily we will use S106 funding to contribute towards the renovation costs of the property. We will propose an amount of approx. £20,000 per property.

If there is an element of community enhancement an option could be to draw down funding from the Community Housing Fund Grant if S106 funding is not deemed appropriate for whatever reason.

HYPERLINK

"<https://fylde.cmis.uk.com/fylde/MeetingsCalendar/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1029/Committee/19/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx>" [CMIS > Meetings Calendar](#)

Staffing Resources available

Fylde Borough Council has a dedicated Affordable Housing Officer who will manage the Empty Homes project. Initially it is anticipated that The Affordable Housing Officer will be working alongside other departments within the council in order to set the scheme up.

Internal departments will include

- Council Tax
- Legal Services
- Finance
- Environmental Protection
- Private Sector Housing Enforcement
- Planning Policy

External

- Genealogy Service. Genealogy services are used to track down the next of kin of homeowners who may be deceased. We can contact the Next of Kin to discuss the property and offer advice on the options available to them.

Once the scheme is live, the Empty Homes project will be managed and monitored by the Affordable Housing Officer and the involvement of other departments will be drastically reduced.

Preston City Council approach

Preston City Council have adopted a scheme where they work with registered providers to bring empty homes back into use. They have recently won 3 awards for the work they are doing regards Empty Homes in Preston and they have been kind enough to share their process with us.

The Preston Model fits with the Fylde Affordable SPD and would not only provide much needed affordable housing across the Fylde Coast, it will also reduce the demand for services such as Housing Enforcement and Environmental Protection who may be dealing with recurring ASB or Disrepair.

Fylde is fortunate to have a good working relationship with our Registered Providers and we can be assured that they will provide continued tenancy support and property management once the property has been completed. Fylde Council and the Affordable Housing Team are required at the start of the process to determine if a property is empty and to locate the owner or NOK. Once this information has been established, the Registered Provider takes ownership.

Appendix 1:

. 18A(1)A billing authority may use information it has obtained for the purpose of carrying out its functions under Part 1 of this Act for the purpose of—

(a)identifying vacant dwellings, or

(b)taking steps to bring vacant dwellings back into use.

The information would be restricted to the owners name, address or telephone number.

(2)The power under sub-paragraph (1) above, so far as relating to personal information, extends only to information which consists of an individual's name or an address or number for communicating with him.

(3)In this paragraph—

- “personal information” means information which relates to an individual (living or dead) who can be identified—

(a) from that information, or

(b) from that information and other information of the authority,

and includes any expression of opinion about the individual and any indication of the intentions of any person in respect of the individual;

- “vacant dwelling” means a dwelling in which no one lives and which is substantially unfurnished.”

Appendix 2.

[\\fyfs1\Housing\Empty Homes\Take to committee\Empty Home Flowchart.pdf](#)

Appendix 3.

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Any enquiries regarding this document/publication should be sent to us at the Town Hall, St Annes Road West, St Annes FY8 1LW, or to listening@fylde.gov.uk.

