

Annex 1: Action Plan

1. OVERALL AIM OF PLAN

To maximise the return to beneficial use of empty properties within Blaenau Gwent County Borough thereby increasing the number of homes available to both rent and owner occupy,

improving the built environment, decreasing the number of both vacant and underutilised sites as well as supporting diversification of town centres.

2. OBJECTIVES OF PLAN AND ASSOCIATED ACTIONS

Objective 1: Promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers/developers

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
1) Ensure up to date advice and information relating to empty properties is readily available on the Council's webpages.	Overhaul existing webpages and develop revised webpages to provide comprehensive information including advice and financial assistance available to assist in bringing empty properties back into beneficial use. The website will have links to signpost interested parties to relevant services. A 'contact me' function will also be built into the web page to encourage engagement. (Special rules will apply if the building is listed)	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Housing IT web specialist Planning Officers	Initial scoping exercise to understand web site and online form development to be held by November 2024. Forward work programme to be provided thereafter.	Scoping exercise to fully understand web site and online form development. Translation of web site content into Welsh language. Revision of webpages. The number of visits to the website per month. The number of enquires received via the contact us function.
2) Empty Residential Property Information Pack.	Revise and update the Authority's 'Empty Residential Property Information Pack' with key information including advice and financial assistance available to assist in bringing empty properties back into beneficial use for owner occupation, rental etc. including VAT information, loans, grants, leasing and selling advice.	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	December 2024	Production of Empty residential Property Information Pack. Number of Empty Residential Property Packs issued. Number of Packs downloaded from the website.
3) Media releases engagements and promotion	Regular media releases such as news articles, social media posts to promote the empty properties work including the support available and the empty property pack.	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Communications Officers	Regular intervals	

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4) Maximise financial investment opportunities and utilise all available capital funding streams.	<p>Continue to offer, deliver and promote financial assistance to owners in respect of the interest-free loans.</p> <p>Explore and regularly review any other available funding streams such as external grant programmes when offered by Welsh Government.</p> <p>Publish all information relating to the availability of financial assistance on the 'Blaenau Gwent Homes website' and update/amend Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy as necessary.</p> <p>Regeneration Officers will continue to bid for WG funding (such as Transforming Towns, through Town Centre Placemaking Grants) to bring long-term empty town centre properties back into beneficial use.</p> <p>Funding has been secured in the 2024/25 financial year for a town centre grant scheme aimed at town centre property improvements. This funding is now fully subscribed. Details of any successor programmes are currently not known at this stage.</p> <p>The Regeneration team will also use BGCBC's core-funded Blaenau Gwent Enterprise Fund grant scheme to assist with town centre property improvements, although the scheme is very popular and is accessible to businesses/properties across the County Borough.</p> <p>Consider use of other capital funding such as Social Housing Grant / Transitional Capital Accommodation to assist with the return to beneficial use of empty properties.</p> <p>Listed Buildings – Check on funding streams available as heritage grants and update relevant officer with information for the website.</p>	Specialist EHO (Empty Properties) Team Manager – Housing Solutions Housing IT Specialist Team Leader - Regeneration Opportunities Residential Development Officer Planning Officers	Regular reviews throughout the timeframe	Number of enquiries for financial assistance annually. Number of formal completions relating to financial assistance annually. Number of properties returned to beneficial use annually.
5) To deliver National (VTF) Empty Homes Grants..	Continue to deliver the National Empty Homes Grant Scheme for owner-occupiers. Ensure all associated properties are bought back into beneficial use.	Housing Grants Surveyors Team Manager – Housing Solutions	Ongoing	Number of completed national empty homes grants. Number of properties that received national empty homes funding that are returned to beneficial use.
6) Developers list of people who are interested in buying empty properties.	To continue to hold and maintain a list of developers, landlords and investors who are interested in purchasing empty properties. This will enable introductions between sellers and purchasers with a view to purchase, redevelopment and/or re-occupation of empty properties.	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	Ongoing	Continuation of developers list. Number of introductions enabled.
7) Work with local estate agencies and auction houses to offer discount products.	Engage with local auction houses and estate agents to negotiate a discount fee and favorable conditions for empty properties owners referred via LA.	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	December 2024	Number of referrals made.
8) Offer technical support and advice on bringing an empty residential property back into use, including producing schedules of works for grant/loan works, estimate costings and general technical advice.	Visit to give property specific advice on the work required to bring the property to a reasonable standard and the estimated cost of the works. Special advice will be required if the building is listed.	Housing Grants Surveyors Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Planning Officers	Ongoing	Number of advice visits made. Grant/Loan works completed with technical assistance

<p>9) Engage with Social Housing Stakeholders to discuss potential joint working schemes</p>	<p>Meet with all social housing providers working in Blaenau Gwent County Borough to discuss ways to work together on projects to bring empty properties back into use. This will include Listed Buildings (where applicable).</p>	<p>Team Manager – Housing Solutions Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Planning Officers</p>	<p>Initial meeting by November 2024 Ongoing</p>	<p>Ongoing meeting programme.</p>
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Objective 2: Prioritisation and targeted approach in addressing empty properties

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
10) Submit a report to potentially increase council tax premium on properties that have been empty for over 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather intelligence on the actual number of properties that the council would be eligible to charge a premium. Carry out an Equality Impact Assessment. Produce a report outlining the rationale for increasing the council tax premium and initiate a public consultation on the proposal. This will include the outcome of public consultation. Seek approval for additional staffing resources for Revenues and Public Protection to assist with the implementation of this strategy. 	Service Manager – Revenues and Charging Assessments Chief Finance Officer	July 2024	Number of properties charged a premium following adoption/ implementation of new policy.
11) Analyse the council tax and other data to fully understand the extent of the empty homes problem within the borough.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a comprehensive list of all empty homes within the Borough looking at several categorisations such as location, level of relevant debts, housing need and number of years home has been empty. Complementary surveys to be undertaken as necessary. Spatially map the data to assist with a strategic targeted approach moving forward. 	Service Manager – Revenues and Charging Assessments Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	December 2024	Development of comprehensive list of empty homes within the Borough. Spatially mapping of data Identification of properties having negative impact.
12) Agree prioritisation criteria of empty properties.	Agree on the criteria used to prioritise empty properties and the risk assessment template	Service Manager – Public Protection Team Manager – Housing Solutions Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Regeneration Officers	December 2024	Agreed Prioritisation tool.
13) Establish a priority list of properties to target proactively	Identify high priority empty dwellings to target to bring back to beneficial use	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	Ongoing from January 2025	Identification / list of target properties for both residential and mixed (commercial and residential use).
14) Proactively target the priority empty properties identified in action 13.	Use the information collected to send initial letters, questionnaires and empty property packs. Target a manageable number of 20-30 per month working down the priority list. Follow up letters to be sent to any that don't respond before escalating to the officer for further intervention.	Business Support Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	Ongoing from January 2025	Response to questionnaire. Engagement and number of properties returned back to use.

15) Target properties that have recently fallen into the empty property criteria to prevent them becoming long term empties.	Soft approach mail drop with Empty Property Pack to all empty property owners within in the 6-12-month empty bracket to prevent them becoming long term empty Information and advice action only.	Business Support Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	March 2025	Number of letters sent. Number of engagements.
16) Principal Town Centre Empty Property Lists	Undertake/update town centre vacancy surveys that will be used to monitor/identify/assess long-term vacant commercial/mixed use properties.	Regeneration Officers Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	March 2025	Regular monitoring of the town centres will take place, with properties added or removed from the list as required.
17) Principal Town Centre Vacancy Action Plan	Owners and/or agents of priority properties to be targeted to bring the properties back into beneficial use through grant schemes (where possible) or by assisting in identifying a tenant or meanwhile use. Where applicable, notices may be served when the building is in an extremely poor or dangerous condition.	Regeneration Officers Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Planning/Building Control Officers	Owners will be contacted/notices served in Q3 25/26	Number of grants administered to long-term vacant property owners. Number of properties brought back into beneficial use through targeted intervention.
18) Partnership working with Private Sector Landlords to offer tenant/ owner matching scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a pool of accessible quality, affordable private rented accommodation and to provide a long-term housing solution for homeless applicants. This should enable the Council to meet its obligations under part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to discharge the homeless duty by offering this accommodation to homeless or potentially homeless people. To develop a user-friendly website for landlords. To continue to work alongside Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Council Private Landlord Forum, and to provide a platform between PRS and BGCBC. 	Team Manager - Housing Solutions IT Housing Specialist Tenancy Sustainability Officer	On going	Target 2 properties per month. January 2025 September 2024 ongoing.
19) To review the Private Sector accommodation Pathway to meet the needs of those presenting to the Housing Solution Team.	Include within homelessness update report to DMT/CLT and Scrutiny current progress with the WG leasing scheme.	Team Manager - Housing Solutions	Annual	Decision regarding the outcome of the report
20) Ensure a corporate approach to bring empties back into use. Co-ordinate relevant activity of the Local Authority across all departments to ensure that there is a unified and effective approach to deal with the empty properties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet all relevant departments within the authority to highlight the work ongoing in the empty property team. Promoting what the team can do to assist them, highlighting the benefits of bringing an empty property back into use on the whole community including how it can help their specific area of work. Establish a Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Group with all internal stakeholder to ensure continual engagement. 	Service Manager – Public Protection Team manager – Housing Solutions Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Regeneration officers Planning Officers	Oct 2024 - Continually every 3 months	Establishment of corporate Empty Property working group.
21) Ensure engagement and input from external stakeholders.	Establish an external working group with relevant third sector stakeholders such as police and fire authority.	Team Manager - Housing Solutions Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	Date of initial meeting Jan 2025 Continually - every 4 months	Establishment of external working group.

Objective 3: Take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
22) Carrot and stick approach with any owners that fail to engage informally with the proactive contact are escalated to a more direct action. Targeted intervention on long-term vacant commercial properties,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that all owners that fail to respond to the initial contact letters are escalated for further intervention - such as site visits to assess any action that can be taken under the relevant legislation. Case conference approach, as necessary, with colleagues to identify most appropriate type of enforcement intervention. Take a risk assessment approach to prioritise enforcement action. Serving urgent enforcement notices where properties in a particularly dangerous condition/ruinous and dilapidated or causing statutory nuisance. 	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Environmental Health Technician (Environmental Protection) Other EHOs Planning Officers Building Control Officers	As required/ necessary	Number of site visits completed. Number of notices served. Enforcement Action taken.
23) Investigate all reactive complaints received regarding empty properties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate all complaints received regarding empty properties and take every opportunity to work with the owner to address the ongoing concerns and agree a way of bringing the property back into use where appropriate on a case conference approach. Identify the most appropriate type of intervention. Complaints in relation to commercial properties are assessed initially as to whether the building is dangerous and if notices should be served or emergency work done in default. Officers will attempt to work with the owner to bring them back into beneficial use. 	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer EHO Planning & Regeneration officers Building Control Officers Environmental Health Officers Environmental Health Technician (Environmental Protection)s	As required	No of complaints received regarding empty homes.
24) Engage with all departments to ensure all enforcement action on empty properties is highlighted and debts recovered.	Ensure that any engagement or work in default taken on an empty property is reported to the empty property team to ensure the debt recovery. Consider enforced sale for any that fail to pay.	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Solicitor Revenues Other	Ongoing	Meet with all relevant department to discuss working practice. All WID highlighted to Empty Property Office. Request information on empty properties with outstanding debts every four months. Number of cases where debts are recovered informally.
25) Ensure effective debt recovering mechanism for all work in default via Enforce Sale route.	Implement the Enforce Sale policy and procedure to recover outstanding debt via the enforce sale.	Principal Housing Officer Planning Officers Legal Officers	As required	Identification of properties with relevant debt to move forward with enforced sale procedure. Number of successful enforce sales. Amount of debt recovered.

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26) Promote all successful enforcementaction to highlight the authority position on empty properties.	Work with the authority's communication department to ensure that success storiesare highlighted through various media outlet.	Principal Housing officer - Communities Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer EHO Communication Officer	Regular intervals	Number of articles and cases to promote.

End