



Uttlesford District Council Empty Homes Policy

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Forward by Cllr Petrina Lees, Portfolio Holder, Housing

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to outline the council's approach to bringing back into occupation private residential homes in the district which have become empty.
- 1.2 In defining its approach to dealing with empty homes in Uttlesford, the council seeks to:
 - a) Bring as many privately-owned empty homes as possible back into full and continuous residential occupation
 - b) Minimise the length of time a privately owned home stands empty
 - c) Reduce blight and nuisance caused by empty privately owned homes
 - d) Help meet local housing need in Uttlesford District Council

2. National Context

- 2.1 The Government has set out its commitment to bringing empty homes back into use in its 2011 "Housing Strategy for England, Laying the Foundations". Key actions contained within this strategy included:
 - a) awarding the New Homes Bonus (NHB) to empty homes brought back into use
 - b) investing £100 million funding to bring problematic empty homes back into use and
 - c) announcing £50 million of further funding to tackle some of the worst concentrations of empty homes
 - d) empowering local authorities to implement a levy or 'empty homes premium' on the Council Tax payable for those properties which have been registered as being empty for 2-years or more.
 - e) Changes to Empty Dwelling Management Orders to target their use on the very worst long-term empty homes which have become dangerous or are causing a nuisance to neighbours and the wider community.
- 2.2 In response to further pressure to fix the Countries housing market, In 2018 the government introduced The Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act, allowing councils to charge double the rate of Council Tax on homes left empty for two years or more.

3. Local Context

- 3.1 The Government has set a national target for 300,000 new homes to be built each year to tackle the acute shortage of housing across the country. It aims to end the housing crisis, tackle homelessness, and provide aspiring homeowners with a step onto the housing ladder.
- 3.2 The Councils Housing Strategy 2021 -2026 sets out the vision for delivering housing, particular for affordable housing in the district. It also acknowledges the work of the councils Environmental Health (Protection) service in improving private sector housing conditions and tackling empty homes.
- 3.3 The strategy confirms that the council will continue to intervene to ensure that empty properties in private ownership are returned to occupation. This commitment links in with the councils Corporate Plan priorities. The Corporate Plan 2021-2025 not only recognises the importance of delivering more affordable homes for the district but the need for the Council's actions and influence to contribute to the economic growth of the district and to protect the character of Uttlesford. Under the corporate plans key action to be an 'Active place-maker for our towns and villages, it commits to reducing the number of empty homes.
- 3.4 The service continues to provide a commitment to this work. Between April 2016 and March 2021, direction action by officers have resulted in 798 empty properties being brought back into occupation.
- 3.5 Statistics from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities show that UDC performs well in the number of empty homes within the district. Recent statistics published in September 2021 showed that Uttlesford performs well and has the lowest number of Empty Homes in any district is Essex.

District	Number of Empty Homes
Uttlesford	235
Maldon	238
Castlepoint	326
Brentwood	369
Rochford	370
Harlow	438
Chelmsford	479
Basildon	510
Epping Forrest	543
Braintree	618
South End	652
Tending	855

Table 1 Number of dwellings that are classed as empty on 4th October 2021 and have been for more than 6 months.

4. Background

4.1 The following paragraphs set out the definition of empty privately owned home, reasons why these homes become empty and unused for long periods of time and the impact they have at a local level. It also covers the benefits of bringing privately owned empty homes back into use for owners, neighbours and neighbourhoods and the Council. It should be noted that the actions by the council to bring empty homes back in to use, applies to the private sector and does not apply to any property owned or managed by the Council Housing Services or any Registered Social Landlord.

4.2 Empty Homes Definition

4.2.1 There is no absolute legal or case law definition for how long a home in the private sector needs to be empty before a local authority can take action to bring it back into use. Uttlesford Council will follow Government guidance and will concentrate on properties which have been empty for 6 months or more.

4.3 Why homes become empty and may stay empty

4.3.1 Residential homes become empty for a number of reasons. In the majority of cases, they become empty for relatively short periods of time because there are:

- changes of ownership following the sale of a home
- gaps in time between lettings of a home to different tenants

These changes are referred to as “transactional changes” and are a normal part of the housing market.

4.3.2 The range of reasons why homes become and stay empty over a long period of time include where the owner:

- is trying to sell the home but is unable to do so
- has died and their beneficiaries or executors are resolving their estate through probate
- is living or working abroad
- is using the property as an investment and does not want it occupied. This is commonly referred to as “buy to leave empty”.
- is wary of selling as they may be liable to Capital Gains Tax
- cannot afford to carry out repairs before enabling the home to become habitable available for re-occupation or sale.

- does not know how to let the empty home or perceives problems with this option
- has totally abandoned the home
- has inherited the property and does not know or hasn't decided what to do with it
- has gone into long term residential care
- has an emotional attachment to the home and finds it difficult to sell or rent
- wants to rent or sell it but the home may be inconveniently located and pose particular problems to bring it back into use. For example, the home can only be reached through ground floor commercial premises or via a dangerous rear access

4.4 The impact of empty homes

4.4.1 Some empty homes will show no signs of being unoccupied whilst others will be severely dilapidated. The latter can cause distress to neighbours and blight a neighbourhood. They can pose a number of problems including:

- attracting vermin
- being squatted in or being vulnerable to squatting
- being subject to or vulnerable to vandalism, graffiti, and arson
- accumulating dumped litter and rubbish, overgrown gardens and attracting fly tipping
- providing a focal point for anti-social behaviour

4.4.2 The Council will prioritise dealing with empty homes deemed to be detrimental to the neighbourhood and those, which according to its knowledge, have been empty the longest.

4.5 Benefits of bringing empty homes back into occupation

4.5.1 The benefits for owners of bringing back into use empty homes they own include:

- Realising a stable income from letting an empty home
- Release from the obligations of maintenance and repairs if the home is sold
- Release from the increased insurance and Council Tax premiums which are attached to empty homes
- Increasing financial security from the sale of their empty home
- Satisfaction with helping to improve the local neighbourhood and helping local households who need the empty home

4.5.2 The benefits of bringing empty homes back into use for neighbours and neighbourhoods include:

- reducing blight for surrounding homes
- reducing the potential for anti-social behaviour through squatting and criminal damage of empty homes
- reduces the potential loss of market value of surrounding homes
- increases the desirability of a neighbourhood
- increases a community spirit and social cohesion

4.5.3 The Council's proactive approach in tackling empty homes also makes an important contribution towards delivering its Housing Strategy. In particular, it supports its aims of:

- Increasing housing supply to meet the needs of local people
- Improving the quality of homes and neighbourhoods.
- discourages anti-social behaviour related to empty homes
- reduces complaints to the Council about empty homes
- can help to create stronger communities

5. Uttlesford's Approach to Empty Homes

5.1 In taking action to bring empty homes back into use, the council adheres to the following key principles:

- To be compliant legally and with government guidance and other accepted protocols.
- To act in accordance with the principles of the Councils Corporate Enforcement Policy
- To be fair and consistent
- To be transparent, easy to understand and straightforward

5.2 In delivering its promises, the service will pursue three main strands of activity:

- Locating empty homes and identifying out who owns them
- Information action through the provision of advice, support and where necessary, escalated warnings.
- Formal enforcement action as a last resort when all voluntary processes have been exhausted

The following section provides information on these activities in more detail.

6. Finding empty homes

- 6.1 This Council will always seek new and innovative ways of locating empty properties on rare occasions this can include use a tracing agent. New methods will be assessed and may be adopted if they are found to improve the effectiveness of the current procedure.
- 6.2 In targeting resources for tackling empty homes effectively. The possible sources of information for finding empty homes and establishing ownership include the following:
- Council Tax records
 - Other Council records
 - Land Registry
 - Utility companies
 - Contacting neighbours
 - Contacting other external partners
 - Use of a tracing agency
 - Investigating who has an interest in an empty home
- 6.3 In fulfilling its function the service have long maintained a “database” (spreadsheet and E files) of empty homes in the district. The “database” is primarily sourced from Council Tax data.

7. Empty Homes and Council Tax

- 7.1 Not all empty homes qualify for an exemption from paying Council Tax. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 and associated regulations sets out the mechanism for levying council tax on domestic properties. Section 11A of the regulations give Councils some discretion in setting the level of council tax charged in respect of unoccupied properties and second homes .
- 7.2 The Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 allows Councils to levy a higher amount of Council Tax for long-term empty dwellings that are unoccupied and unfurnished. This is known as an empty property premium.

7.3 With effect from the 1st April 2020 the Council has resolved to charge Council Tax for empty (unoccupied and unfurnished properties) and second homes as follows;

Properties empty (unoccupied and unfurnished) for up to 6 months	50% Discount
Properties empty (unoccupied and unfurnished) for 6 months and up to 2 years	0% Discount (full charge)
Properties empty requiring structural or major repair work (unoccupied and unfurnished) for up to 12 months	50% Discount
Properties empty requiring structural and major repair work (unoccupied and unfurnished) for over 1 year and up to 2 years	0% Discount (full charge)
Furnished properties and second homes	0% Discount (full charge) (This does not apply to dwellings regarded as Job-Related where the 50% discount will still apply.)
Properties empty (unoccupied and unfurnished) for 2 years or more	200% charge (includes 100% empty property premium)

7.4 Any periods of occupation of six weeks or less will be disregarded when considering how long a property has been empty.

7.5 When considering the above, there are a number of exemptions the need to be considered. No empty property premium can be applied to properties under the following circumstances;

- Properties which would be the sole or main residence of an individual who is residing in armed forces accommodation that is job-related
- Properties which form part of a single property including at least one other dwelling and is being used by a resident of the other dwelling as their sole or main residence

7.6 Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 also gives the Council the discretionary power to reduce liability for council tax in relation to particular cases .

8. Procedure For Identifying Empty Homes.

- 8.1 Each quarter, the Environmental Health (Protection) service receives details of properties homes on the Council Tax Register known to be empty, but which are not attracting an exemption from paying Council Tax. These are targeted for further investigation.
- 8.2 It should be noted that Section 85 of the Local Government Act 2003 inserted a new clause (18A) into Schedule 2 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 which specifically allows local authorities to disclose personal Council Tax data for use in undertaking work around bringing empty homes back into use. This is limited to an individual's name or an address or telephone number for communicating with them and provides the first step in identifying who the Team can begin working with about a long-term empty home.
- 8.2 Internal Council teams such as Planning and Building Control may come into contact with empty properties and their owners. Close ties are established with these departments to allow for information to be shared.
- 8.3 Although there is no mechanism for empty properties to be identified directly via data from the Land Registry, their records do present an important starting point in enabling an empty property owner to be identified in respect of registered land. Over 80% of land in England & Wales is registered but when dealing with unregistered land, tracing the owner can be a lot harder and additional checks are required.
- 8.4 Neighbours living next door or within the vicinity of an empty property are the people most likely to suffer from the negative impact which are often associated with such properties. They are also the most likely people to hold information about the owner's whereabouts and details which may enable the Environmental Health Team to contact a missing owner.
- 8.5 Where identifying owners is proving to be difficult contact will also be made with utility services (gas, electricity, water) subject to following data protection protocols.
- 8.6 The various types of primary and secondary data outlined above, are in most cases enough to enable an empty property owner to be traced and contacted. However, where all attempts to find an owner have failed then the use of a tracing agency will be considered. It is usual practice that a tracing agency will not charge the Council for its services and will welcome the opportunity to be able to negotiate directly with an owner if they are able to locate them.

9. Investigating Interests

9.1 There are Legal powers available to the Council which can be utilised to obtain the details of owners or those who may have an interest in a particular property. Such legislation includes:

- Section 16 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976
- Section 235 of the Housing Act 2004

10. Advice and support

10.1 We will always try and establish the particular circumstances which have led to a property becoming empty. This will enable appropriate solutions to be offered to owners. The following list of measures are to be offered to assist owners bring empty homes they own back into use:

PLACE Scheme loans

10.2 UDC is part of a consortium of authorities across Hertfordshire & Essex to develop a scheme that offers funding and support to owners to bring properties back into use. There are two types of loan assistance available.

1. Interest free (as long as terms and condition are adhered to) loans up to £25,000 (per unit of accommodation). The owner can choose their own contractor and to allow the property to be;
 - a) sold (repayable up to two years)
 - b) or let (repayable up to five years) upon completion of the works.

10.3 Where empty properties are provided with assistance, it is expected that the property will conform to the Decent Homes Standard before it is re-occupied. The Decent Homes Assessment Criteria stipulates that a dwelling should be free from unnecessary and avoidable hazards, in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities and services and provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

VAT reduction

10.4 A further mechanism to support a voluntary pathway is a "VAT reduction". If a property is two years or more empty, team can send the liable party a letter,

reducing VAT to 5% for building contractor(s) working on the property. This can aid/empower liable parties financially in addressing empty properties.

Sale of the property

- 10.5 Should the above measures not be deemed sufficient and where owners have not previously considered selling, advice will be offered about the various options available. In certain cases, e.g., where a property is in a derelict condition, it may be beneficial to consider sale by auction. Owners will be advised to seek independent financial advice where it is likely they may be subject to a Capital Gains Tax liability.

Letting Properties Privately

- 10.5 There is a significant demand for housing and letting an empty property can provide owners with an income stream. We are able to offer advice and support to owners who are considering letting their empty properties and what is involved. However, it should clearly be understood that becoming a landlord is a business opportunity and must be considered in this context. If an empty property owner has no business experience and limited time, then serious consideration should be made as to whether becoming a landlord is a suitable option.

11 Engagement & Enforcement

- 11.1 A voluntary process is initially followed to return empty property to an occupied status. Information is presented to the Environmental Health service from Council Tax on a quarterly basis. Initial Letters are sent to the owners of potentially empty homes informing them of the importance of returning their property to occupation and the responsibilities of the Council. We also offer the owner assistance in the form of loans (PLACE scheme) to assist with repairs.
- 11.2 If no reply is received after 28 days and after checking with Council Tax that the property has not been reoccupied, the property is visited, its appearance is recorded, and its impact is assessed using our Empty Homes Impact Assessment form]. This produces an arithmetic score and provides a way in which the empty homes that we identify can be prioritised for further action. [see appendix 1]
- 11.3 A second letter can be sent seeking dialogue and reiterating the PLACE scheme offer. At this stage and in the third and final letter it states that if no dialogue is achieved, then enforcement powers will be considered having regard to the priority banding scores.

- 11.4 If there is still no response is received with 28 days, then a formal notice is served under either Section 16 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 or Section 235 of the Housing Act. The covering letter advises the owner that the department is now considering options for enforcement. The letter reiterates that a voluntary path is preferred, but that if this is not possible, and the property is deemed suitable for formal enforcement, that this pathway may be followed. It considering this course of action the team will have regard to the Councils Enforcement Policy.
- 11.5 In addition to the above the Council has set a for long-term empty properties. Properties which have been unoccupied for over two years are required to pay 200% of the normal Council Tax (Empty Homes Premium).
- 11.6 It is recognised that sustained pressure, additional council tax charges and later threats of enforcement action more often than not have the desired effect in returning properties to occupation.

12. Formal Enforcement Measures

- 12.1 Enforcement is an important part of the empty property procedure and will only be used for properties where voluntary approaches have been exhausted. The aim of enforcement action will always be to ensure that the outcome is for an empty property to be re-occupied and/or renovated as quickly as possible.

Powers to enter and inspect

- 12.2 The Environmental Health Team will always try to negotiate with an owner for access to a property. In instances where negotiation has not been successful legal powers can be used to gain entry. If necessary, the Council can obtain a warrant from the courts to enter.

Powers to take immediate action

- 12.3 Should there be immediate concerns that pose a risk to the public and/or cause a nuisance, general enforcement powers are available to officers to board up a property or treat a vermin infestation.
- 12.4 In addition the Environmental Health uses the Housing Health and Safety Rating Systems (HHSRS) tool which assesses the potential risks and hazards to human health and safety which might be found in homes occupied or not. Serious hazards and risks are called Category 1 hazards and less serious ones are called Category 2 hazards. Category 1 and 2 hazards cannot be defined as such as they are based upon an assessment of the risks posed by a combination of factors. The factors include what kind of hazards are observed,

how severe they are and what effect they are having or could have on the health and safety of current or future occupants or visitors to the property being examined. The available options for dealing with identified hazards include:

- Serving an improvement notice
- Serving a suspended improvement notice
- Making a prohibition order
- Taking emergency remedial action
- Making an emergency prohibition
- serving a hazard awareness Notice

12.5 Following the inspection of an empty property each case will be individually assessed to ensure the most appropriate course of action is taken.

12.6 Should officers reach an impasse and have exhausted all voluntary means, government guidance Circular 06/04 16 states that Local Authorities, before embarking on compulsory purchase and throughout the preparation and procedural stages should seek to acquire a property by negotiation wherever practicable. It is the intention of this Council to avoid unnecessary costs and to achieve value for money. Therefore, it will always try to acquire a property by agreement.

12.7 Should all measures fail to address the empty property status, more robust enforcement measures will be considered; namely

- Obtaining a Compulsory Purchase Order
- Enforcing the sale of the property
- Obtaining an Empty Dwelling Management Order

13. Compulsory Purchase Order (CPOs)

13.1 Power to compulsory purchase a property exists under two pieces of legislation contained in both housing and planning law. Under housing law, CPOs are carried out pursuant to section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended). This power can only be used where a qualitative and/or quantitative housing gain is demonstrated.

13.2 Section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), grants the Council with power (subject to Secretary of State Authority) to compulsory purchase any land (which includes property) for the purpose of improving the social environmental or economic well-being of their area. CPOs will be used as

an action of last resort after all other options have been exhausted. The main drawback with carrying out a CPO is that the actual procedure can take a long time, in fact the Governments own guidance states that CPO procedure may take up to two years to complete.

- 13.3 It has been found that the threat of a CPO can act as an effective means to encourage owners of empty properties to take action to bring the property back into residential use.
- 13.4 The Council will consider taking CPO action on a property when:-
- All reasonable efforts to encourage an owner to voluntarily bring their property back into use have failed; and/or
 - Following extensive enquiries, it has not been possible to identify the owner of the property; and/or
 - Purchasing a property by voluntary agreement is not a viable option.
- 13.5 The Environmental Team has a well-established procedure for processing CPOs on privately owned empty properties. This has proved to be an effective enforcement tool. The authority has completed on 3 x CPO's since 2011. However, this has proven to be a time consuming and complex process and in future we would consider the use of a specialist external legal practice to undertake this on the councils behalf, which would be a more efficient way of proceeding.
- 13.6 The final decision to carry out a CPO on an empty property is taken by the Cabinet Committee, who consider and authorise making and proceeding with a CPO together with the acquisition and onward disposal where they are satisfied there is a compelling case in the public interest to make the order, as justified by the supporting statement of reasons and assessed on a case by case basis.
- 13.7 Once a CPO has been made and sealed by the Council, notice is published, served and site notices affixed, with time allowed for objection, in accordance with statutory requirements. Thereafter, it is sent for confirmation to the Secretary of State. If a valid objection is received, the objection may be dealt with by written representations or a Public Local Inquiry (PLI). The financial implications of this eventuality will be taken into consideration when the decision to make the CPO is undertaken.
- 13.8 If the Order is unopposed or where no valid objections are received and the Secretary of State is satisfied that the proper procedures have been observed, the CPO will be confirmed. (This is also the case where the Inspector's report from an Inquiry recommends confirmation). Following confirmation, notice is published, served and site notices affixed, with time allowed for challenge. Provided there is no challenge, the Council can make arrangements to vest the legal title to the property by serving notice of intent to proceed and then making a general vesting declaration (GVD).

- 13.9 Officers will continue to seek dialogue with an owner will throughout the CPO process. Where an owner agrees, it is the policy of the council to enter into a 'cross-undertaking' with the owner. This is a legally binding agreement by which the Council undertakes not to implement a confirmed Order while the owner undertakes to complete any necessary repairs to meet the Decent Homes Standard and also arranges to bring the property back to full continuous residential occupation within a mutually agreed period of time. If the property is sold, then the terms of the cross undertaking will be re-negotiated with the new owner. If the new owner does not carry out these actions or delays in carrying them out, the Council can then seek to implement the Order under the terms of the agreement.
- 13.10 Owners are entitled to compensation on a property once the property has vested in the Council. This will be based on the market value of the house minus any outstanding charges which are registered on the property. Owners are also entitled to receive reasonable costs for any surveyors and legal fees.
- 13.11 It is the policy of this Council to only pay one set of legal and/or surveyor fees per property. This will be applied even if there are multiple or joint owners of the property. The Council will only pay reasonable fees which have been agreed prior to the owner submitting their claim and parties are recommended to liaise with the Environmental Health (Protection) service to discuss this.
- 13.12 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced an entitlement for former owners to claim basic loss payments. The amount is 7.5% of the value of the person's interest in the land, subject to a maximum of £75,000. There are a number of exemptions to having to make this payment, such as where a statutory Notice or Order has been served on the property and not been complied with by the time the CPO is confirmed.
- 13.13 Once the Council takes possession of a compulsory purchased property it will endeavour to dispose of it as quickly as possible. This is to keep any financial and other risks to the Council to a minimum. The primary option available to the Council would be to place the property for sale on the open market to achieve best price. Before disposal, a valuation of the property is obtained. If going to auction a reserve price will be placed on the property.
- 13.14 The Council has responsibility for the property for the period of time between taking possession and its disposal. Each property will be assessed for the potential risks it may pose during this period.

14. Enforced Sale Procedure

14.1 The Law of Property Act 1925 enables a local authority to enforce the sale of a property. There are two situations where these powers can be used: -

- Where there is a registered charge on the property
- Where Council tax is owed on the property

14.2 The Law of Property Act 1925 – section 103 allows the Council to bring about the sale of a privately owned house which has a local land charge registered on it because the owner owes money to the Council e.g., Council Tax. This debt is usually as a result of the owner's failure to comply with a statutory notice for example where the Council has then been forced to carry out works.

14.3 All costs incurred by the Council can be recovered from the proceeds of a sale. Any other charges on the property are than paid before the balance is paid to the owner. This method has the advantage that not only is a debt recovered but the property is also usually returned into occupation. This procedure can be used to achieve a similar result as a Compulsory Purchase Order.

14.4 An enforced sale can also be carried out for outstanding Council Tax debt where the Council may apply to the courts to obtain a charging order. This has the effect of registering the debt onto the property, similar to a land debt above. The process of sale follows the same procedure.

14.5 The Council may consider pursuing an enforced sale in parallel with or instead of a CPO. The approach used is dependent upon what is considered to be the best course of action.

15. Empty dwelling management orders

15.1 This action tends to be reserved for the most problematic empty properties. EDMOs are a discretionary local authority power, introduced under section 132 of the Housing Act 2004. An EDMO gives the power to a Council to carry out any necessary repairs and then facilitate the management of the property as rental accommodation.

15.2 Before the Council can take such action where the following conditions apply in that the property:

- has been empty for over two years
- has been shown to be e a focal point for anti-social behaviour

15.3 The objective of an EDMO is to provide more rented accommodation. However, the major disadvantage to the Council is that it takes all the financial risk for the

period of the order and then hands the property it back to the owner. Therefore, to prevent a possible financial risk to the Council, EDMOs will not be considered on properties that need substantive repairs carried out before they can be occupied. Furthermore, the process takes a long time to complete and is complex in nature to follow. There have been few incidents of LAs taking this approach due the complex procedure and ability to finance the repairs and manage the property. Therefore, the Council will only use this power under exceptional circumstances.

16. Raising awareness

- 15.1 Publicity plays an important role in encouraging others to provide information about possible empty properties within the district. The Environmental Health Protection service will initiate publicity campaigns to raise awareness.
- 15.2 The service will seek opportunities to raise awareness during the annual Empty Homes week. It will also make contact with all Town and Parish Councils annually to encourage reporting of empty properties.
- 15.3 This policy and services offered by the Council will be made available on its website. This information will be updated at regular intervals as and when policies and practices change over time.

Appendix 1 Empty Home Impact Assessment form and Score Boundaries

Empty Homes Impact Assessment

Property Address _____

Inspection Date _____ Officer _____

<u>Nature Of Impact</u>	<u>Impact Assessment</u>	<u>Score</u>
1) Length of time Vacant <i>On what date did the house become vacant?</i>	Under 6 months 0 points 6 – 12 months 1 point 1 point for each additional 6 months	
2) Property condition <i>Problem affecting health problem which affects other property? Unsightly property</i>	Affecting others health up to 5 points Affecting neighbours property up to 5 points Affecting street scene up to 5 points	
3) Pests / health risks <i>Is the property a source of verminous pests?</i>	No = 0 points Minor = 1 point Medium = 3 points Major = 5 points	
4) Unsightly / overgrown gardens <i>Does the property have gardens which are untended and unsightly?</i>	No = 0 points Minor = 1 point Medium = 3 points Major = 5 points	
5) Accumulation of rubbish / Fly tipping <i>Are there problems with accumulations of rubbish or fly tipping?</i>	No = 0 points Minor = 1 point Medium = 3 points Major = 5 points	
6) Insecure Boundaries <i>Are the walls and fences effective, and suitable for purpose?</i>	No = 0 points Minor = 1 point Medium = 3 points Major = 5 points	
7) Complaints received Number of complaints?	No complaints = 0 points 1 – 3 complaints = 5 point 4 – 6 complaints = 10 points 1 point for each additional complaint + 5 points for each member complaints	
8) Statutory Notices Served Number	No notices = 0 points 1-3 notices = 5 point 4-6 notices = 10 points 5 point for each additional notice	
9) Works In Default Number	No occasions = 0 points 1-3 occasions = 5 point 4-6 occasions = 10 points 1 point for each additional occasion Prosecutions = 20 points each	
10) Total Council Tax or other Debts Owed Value	£0-500 = 1 point £501-1000 = 2 points £1001-1500 = 3 points £1501-2000 = 4 points 1 point for each additional £500	

Empty Home Impact Assessment Score Boundaries

- 1) Low level impact 0-30 points*: Voluntary engagement only and monitor from time to time i.e., sent PLACE 1 letter and received reply outlining plans for property. This type of property should be empty for a relatively short period of time and become occupied generally within 6 months to 2 years. Offer PLACE Loan (to let or sell).

- 2) Medium Level Impact 30-60 points*: Voluntary engagement plus increased urgency with owner, notify them that they need to actively consider their options to remedy the medium-term empty nature of their property. Warn owner their property will be assessed for formal enforcement action. Check for any Council Tax debt/other Council debt. Offer VAT reduction letter (2+ years empty) and PLACE loan (to let or sell).

- 3) High Level Impact 60+ points*: If the owner fails to respond to initial Voluntary negotiations; and as the property is in very poor condition with a high impact on other properties and/or on street scene. The owner will be warned that their property will be assessed for enforcement action. A VAT reduction letter and PLACE loan (to let or sell) will also be offered

*The above point score boundaries are general guidelines which permit a “triage” of an empty property, so that it can be broadly classified and prioritised for action in terms of its impacts. The score each property achieves is indicative of its impact but does not preclude action if close to the top of the point boundary, conversely no action may be taken if the property is close to the bottom of the point boundary i.e., there is an inherent degree of flexibility and discretion in the impact assessment process and action taken based upon the score achieved.