



Empty Homes Newsletter

Empty Homes round-up for Cumbria - 2021/2022

News from Allerdale, Barrow, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland District Councils

Foreword

Government data released in November 2020 showed a massive year on year rise of over 42,000 to a total of 268,385 long-term empty homes in England. This is the biggest rise since current records began. Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government data showed that this was the fourth consecutive year in which figures had risen.

This was a rise of almost 20% meant that the national total had increased by over a third (34%) since 2016.

Meanwhile in England it was reported that 98,300 homeless families, including over 129,000 children languished in often unsuitable and over-crowded temporary accommodation at a cost of £1.2billion a year. The data in November 2021 showed a positive national reduction of 11% in long-term empty homes.

Furthermore, Carlisle and Copeland showed very significant reductions of 35% and 30% respectively of empty homes in their areas. Nevertheless, it is agreed that this total still remains too high and just above the national average. During 2021 positive steps have been made to raise the issue of the status of Empty Homes at a strategic level within the County and steps to raise the profile of the plight and to tackle Empty Homes at this strategic level are to be progressed.

A collective approach is hoped to improve the status of Empty Homes further. That said, it must also be recognised that reaching a zero target is not possible as properties are continually being added or removed onto the Empty Homes list on a daily basis for a variety of reasons. Continued progress is anticipated during 2022.

Jack Dilley

Chair of the Cumbria Empty Homes Group



National
 **empty homes**
Week 2022
Feb 26-March 6

Every year local authorities, housing providers, community-led organisations and others see Empty Homes Week as an opportunity to organise events and put out information so that people know about their work to tackle empty homes. Empty Homes Week is also the chance to celebrate successes and reflect on what more needs to be done to bring empty properties back into use to help meet housing needs.



Eden District Council round-up of news

Eden District Council currently have a portfolio of measures that are designed for empty property owners, these include:

- **A grant of up to £20,000** towards essential works. For example: roofing, window and door replacement, heating installation, kitchen and bathroom installation. On completion, the property must be leased to one of our Housing Association partners for 5 years. After this it reverts back to the property owner to continue renting or to sell.
- **A grant of up to £10,000** towards essential works. The owner will have to match-fund the amount of grant. On completion, the property must be rented through our Choice Based Letting Scheme. This will be to someone who is registered as seeking social housing. The property owner will be able to choose who you rent the property to from a list of applicants. The property owner will have to manage the property or may arrange for a Letting Agent to do so.
- **Empty property loan** - There is a loan to refurbish empty properties at 0% interest. The loan can only be used for works that are essential to the property. The property owner can apply for up to £15,000 to be repaid over a 5 year period. The refurbished property can either be sold or rented, to repay your loan.
- **Reduction in VAT** - VAT reduction on renovation works to empty residential properties was introduced as an incentive to bring them back to use. The reduction rate is available where properties have remained empty for over 2 years prior to the commencement of qualifying works (VAT rate of 5% when using VAT-registered builder). The EDC Environmental Health Officer/Empty Homes Officer can provide a letter confirming that the property has been empty for two or more years.
- **Council Tax** – After 2 years being unoccupied, properties will be subject to a 'Premium' council tax where 50% is added to the 100% tax being paid.

The Way Forward

Eden District Council are concerned, however, that the current incentives are not working for empty property owners resulting in poor uptake.

For this reason we are looking into the EDC Empty Homes Policy with a view to making changes to the grants and loans structure and the council tax rates.

Contact Andy Ramsay on 01768 212191 or at info.propertylinks@eden.gov.uk

These changes will hopefully facilitate and encourage a reduction in the number of empty homes in the district and increase the number of properties available for long term occupation.

The EDC Empty Homes Service will be working closely with 'Property Links' via a Private Rented Accommodation Officer and will be able to assist in finding tenants for properties new onto the market.

Property Links

Eden District Council has launched Property Links, a completely free matching service for letting your property.

Our vision is to match people facing homelessness with private landlords looking for long-term tenants.

Unlike many letting schemes, we don't believe in a one size fits all approach. We tailor our support for each tenant, based upon their needs.

The benefits the landlord will receive from the Property Links scheme

- It's free - no finder's fee, or commission
- The Landlord retains full control over the property
- Income assessments completed on potential tenants
- A Housing Health and Safety Rating (HHSRS) Assessment
- Full photographic inventory at the start and end of the tenancy
- Assistance for tenants to claim housing benefit, or universal credit
- Support with paperwork
- Support, advice and signposting to reduce disagreements between landlords and tenants
- No obligation to take the tenant
- Mid-term tenancy inspection
- End of tenancy property inspection
- A dedicated officer for your property

We are pleased to announce that we have recently recruited Mr Andy Ramsay, a new Private Rented Accommodation Officer. Andy has an interesting and varied career history which means that he is able to bring many transferable skills to his new role with EDC.



Copeland Borough Council service

We are aware that there are many reasons why a property becomes empty and can blight a neighbourhood or area. Empty properties can become an eyesore and unfortunately attract unwanted attention and are sometimes subject to anti-social behaviour, fly tipping and property damage.

At CBC we try to work with empty homes owners to try and bring their properties back into use using a varied range of services. We also use our Council Tax colleagues to help identify properties that have become vacant for longer periods and provide these owners with various options regarding their liabilities.

We can provide help and advice to empty homes owners and where applicable offer VAT letters, a free schedule of works service, various housing assessments including tenant sourcing, homefinder advice, property guardians options, energy efficiency appraisal, and free auction listings amongst other services.

Contact Paul Cowings on 01946 598300 or at paul.cowings@copeland.gov.uk

There are a number of powers using statutory legislation that we can use to deal with empty homes including-

- Town and Country Planning Act 1990
- Housing Act 2004
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Building Act 1984
- Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949.

We would however, prefer to work with owners in the first instance and therefore if you are an owner of an empty property in the CBC area, we would encourage you to contact us for free advice and help. Additionally, If you not an owner of an empty property, but would like to report an empty property please contact us.

CARLISLE
CITY COUNCIL



Carlisle City Council round-up of news

Carlisle City Council recognise that communities are entitled to quiet enjoyment and high levels of empty properties are

recognised as having a serious impact on the viability of communities in terms of blight on neighbourhoods and potential for anti-social behaviour to occur. Empty homes are also a wasted resource and when brought back into use contribute to an increase in the supply of housing. Dealing with empty properties can therefore have social, economic and regenerative benefits. Carlisle City Council remains committed to tackling empty homes in reducing the impact that these properties may have on communities and also to provide homes for the needy.

During 2021 Carlisle City Council are very pleased to state that there has been a very significant 35% reduction in empty homes within the district (one of the highest in the country). In Nov 2020 there were 1014 empty homes listed without exemptions and by Nov 2021 this had been reduced 656. Please note that there will be homes that have exemptions such as undergoing probate, undergoing major works/uninhabitable, owners in prison, etc that are not included in the list but, these are the figures used for national comparisons.

Carlisle City Council is a conscientious organisation and continues to strive to improve matters and to reduce empty homes in the district. Current support, action and initiatives include:

- Providing a dedicated Empty Homes Officer working (3 days a week) operating proactively as well as reactively regarding Empty Homes.
- Council backed empty homes grant offer. The grant targets homes that have been empty for 2 years or more and the letters sent offering grant also outlined all other support available from the Empty Homes Officer (325+ offer letters sent).
- An Increase of Premium C Tax rates has been introduced in 2021. Properties that are now empty for 2- 5 yrs will pay double annual Council Tax rate; properties empty for 5-10 yrs will pay treble the annual Council Tax rate and those properties that have been empty for 10 yrs plus will be required to pay quadruple the annual Council Tax rate.
- Increased communication continues through letters to owners of properties less than 2 years empty to advise owners of impending Premium Council Tax and also offer support. This also initiates engagement with owners and can allow us to update our records (400+ letters sent).
- Where owners are not compliant to resolve negative issues then enforcement activity is taken. The increased use of enforcement includes the use of Community Protection Notices, Enforced Sales process, Disamenity action (sect 215), Abatement Notices, etc

Contact Jack Dilley on 01228 817301 or paul.dilley@carlisle.gov.uk



Allerdale Borough Council update

Properties that have been empty for long periods of time deteriorate, causing environmental, social and economic problems for neighbours, communities and the borough as a whole.

Allerdale Borough Council have a range of incentives and services available to owners of empty homes helping them bring them back into use.

Due to recent Council Tax changes, owners of empty properties may be affected in such that additional council tax premium/s may be applied to such properties.

Contact us on 01900 702702 or email housing.services@allerdale.gov.uk

- Support has also been provided to owners through support in the disposal of properties (via auction/private sale).
- Proactive independent and unannounced visits are undertaken to properties that have been empty for 2 years or more – to assess condition and to take action where necessary.
- The Empty Homes Officer also works with the Homelessness Department – identifying potential homes and introducing owners.
- The Empty Homes Officer has a list of Contractors/Investors interested empty properties and provides these details to interested owners.
- The Empty Homes Officer regularly attends (and Chairs) Cumbria Empty Homes Meetings which enables Empty Homes Officers across the County to discuss initiatives.
- Procurement activity has been undertaken to reach an agreement through a company called NBe to provide a bespoke 1-2-1 Empty Homes Service for our owners in the Carlisle district. NBe will provide assistance such as: providing quotes, obtaining contractors and overseeing all aspects of a renovation/refurbishment project. They can also provide assistance with financial support.
- A trial agreement with a Probate Research Company is in process to see if their assistance can provide help and support in identifying contacts and offering Probate assistance.
- A Joint initiative with Brampton and Rural Housing Society (BRHS) and Carlisle City Council has just been finalised which will use identified Council funds to contribute towards BRHS funds. Funding will be used to buy empty homes (in their area) which will be used for low-cost rental opportunities for local residents.
- Other initiatives continue and currently we are seeking wider county support towards tackling Empty Homes in our area.

General support remains including providing help with many other aspects such as helping with VAT reduction of renovation costs if the property has been unoccupied for 2 years or more etc. For more information on this and all other support please refer to the Council's website: <https://www.carlisle.gov.uk/Residents/Housing-and-Homeless/Private-Housing>

SUCCESS STORY

Photos of a successful outcome are below for an empty home that has been transformed. With the help and incentive of the Empty Homes Grant, a troublesome house that had been causing issues in the community was sold (through the intervention of the Empty Homes Officer) and purchased by a new owner. The new owner turned a 'distressed' house into a wonderful home for his daughter.

Therefore, to help owners of such properties, we are asking owners to contact us. The Council will then be in a position, if relevant, to give you advice and financial help if applicable, in bringing your property back into use.

Our website contains all the relevant information, help and advice available as well as legislation that the council has available to use.

If you know of an empty property and would like to report it and make us aware, please contact us below.



South Lakeland District Council round-up of news

HELPING EMPTY HOME OWNERS AND THE COMMUNITY

There are many benefits for everyone when we help owners bring their empty homes back into use. For example bringing an empty home back into use leaves less of a carbon footprint than a new home. It makes sense to 'recycle' our empty homes whenever we can, in addition to building new homes. Bringing empty homes back into use sends out a positive message about an area and helps to restore confidence in the property market. As a home is brought back into use it often improves the area around it. From potentially being a magnet for vandalism, an empty home brought back into use can help neighbours feel safer in their own homes.

Please use our online Report An Empty Home form ([www.southlakeland.gov.uk/Housing/Empty Homes/problems that empty homes cause](http://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/Housing/EmptyHomes/problems%20that%20empty%20homes%20cause)) if you would like to tell us about an empty home near you. We always follow these up and will keep you updated on progress.

Owners whose homes have been empty for more than two years have seen their council tax bills increase with the recent annual Premium charges. But if owners are planning repairs we can help them save money. Provided they use a VAT-registered contractor then we can provide a letter confirming the property has been empty two or more years. An owner then gives the letter to their contractor and this allows them to charge the owner **only 5% VAT** on many repairs costs. The saving of 15% VAT on costly repairs can make a huge difference to owners and it's so easy.

The council tax increases are as follows. When a home has been empty for two or more years the total council tax is now 200% (100% Premium plus 100% Council Tax) for owners to pay. And this year for

homes empty 5 or more years the total council tax is 300% (a 200% Premium).

Because of the increases in council tax charges, it's important that we help owners where we can to bring their homes back into use.

One of the ways we help owners is through our empty homes webpages: www.southlakeland.gov.uk/Housing/Empty-Homes

On these pages owners can find tips on Selling, tips on Repairing, How to be a Landlord and Rent their property. There are also a couple of options which owners may not be aware of – Property Guardians and Homes-matching. And there's always the 'Selling by Auction' option, where (with some companies) the Buyer (instead of the Seller) can pay the Commission charged.

The **Homes-matching** option is one that people are not usually aware of. These companies can help owners wanting to sell their empty home but who'd like to repair it first. Homes-matching companies can 'pre-fund' the repairs prior to a sale, and often they will help with the sale too. With no up-front cash required from owner or buyer, these companies can offer to advertise your property for sale with a standard renovation included. They then match a buyer to your property and the companies fund and manages all the works. All costs and fees are usually agreed before any work begins so that owners know the net sales income.

On our webpages we help owners start their research on what could suit their situation best by listing links to websites on those subjects. We feel it's good for owners to be able to look at their options first and they're always welcome to talk these through with us.

These are just some examples of the many options and advice available for empty home owners.

Contact Lynne Leach in Case Management on 01539 793375 or at empty.homes@southlakeland.gov.uk to discuss your empty home.



Barrow Borough Council round-up of news

Barrow Borough Council is aware that an empty property can blight an otherwise attractive neighbourhood, and can attract anti-social behaviour,

such as fly tipping and drug taking. Empty properties are also a wasted resource that could in other circumstances be providing homes for people who need them.

We try to work with empty home owners to bring their properties back into use by providing advice, VAT letters and liaise with Council Departments.

If complaints are received regarding an empty property it can be dealt with in the teams responsible for Public Protection, Private Sector Housing, Building Control and Planning Department.

The main powers available to deal with empty homes arise from the following statutory provisions:

- Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA);
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 (LGMPA)
- Building Act 1984 (BA);

- Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA);
- Housing Act 2004 (HA);

The various forms of action that can be taken can be summarised as follows:

- Abatement Notice (s80 EPA);
- "Boarding Up" Notice (s29 LGMPA)
- "Dangerous structure" Notice (s77-78 BA);
- "Ruinous and dilapidated" Notice (s79 BA);
- "Wasteland" Notice (s215 TCPA);
- Improvement Notice (s11 HA);
- Prohibition Order (s20 HA);
- Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) (Part 4 HA);
- Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) (s17 Housing Act 1985; s226 TCPA);

Contact Jayne Parrington on 01229 876561 or at jparrington@barrowbc.gov.uk

