



RESTORING EMPTY HOMES PROSPEROUS LIVES

Rhondda Cynon Taf Empty Homes Strategy



DRAFT

2026-2031

Delivering the priorities of the
Council's Housing Strategy
**PROSPEROUS HOMES,
PROSPEROUS LIVES**



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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg
Mae croeso i chi gyfathrebu â ni yn y Gymraeg

This document is also available in Welsh
You are welcome to communicate with us in Welsh

FOREWORD

In Rhondda Cynon Taf, we recognise that empty homes are not just unused properties, they are missed opportunities to provide safe and secure houses for our residents. At a time when demand for affordable homes continues to grow, it is more important than ever that we make full use of the properties we already have.



Through this next phase of our Empty Homes Strategy, we are reaffirming our commitment to bringing empty properties back into use and ensuring that every home plays its part in supporting thriving, sustainable communities.

Building on a strong track record of delivery, the Council has already worked with partners to return hundreds of empty properties to occupation - helping to improve communities across RCT and increase the supply of housing.

This Strategy sets out our clear forward direction for the next 5 years, guided by strong partnership working, targeted intervention, and a growing focus on prevention. It reflects our ambition not only to tackle the challenges associated with long-term empty properties, but also to address the factors that cause homes to become empty in the first place.

Above all, this presents a continued commitment to our residents. It is about ensuring that communities are supported, that housing opportunities are maximised, and that as many properties as possible are able to provide a home.

Together, through sustained action and shared responsibility, we can ensure that more homes are brought back into use, supporting stronger communities across Rhondda Cynon Taf, both now and into the future.



Councillor Mark Norris
Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rhondda Cynon Taf comprises of a mixture of urban, semi-urban and rural communities and according to the 2021 National Census, is home to 237,700 residents. It covers an area of 424 square kilometres and stretches from Bannau Brycheiniog in the North to the Southern outskirts of Cardiff.

Within this region there are large disparities between affluent communities and some of the most deprived communities in Wales. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) ranks small areas (LSOAs) in Wales from most to least deprived. The 2025 data confirms that Rhondda Cynon Taf contains a significant number of areas within the most deprived deciles nationally, demonstrating that deprivation remains both concentrated and persistent across parts of the County Borough.

The poor quality of housing in some of our communities, coupled with high levels of empty properties and derelict buildings, adds to the general sense of decline and represents a wasted resource in a time of increased housing demand. The importance of having a distinct empty homes strategy is in recognition of the increase in demand for housing, and the Strategy sets out how, over the next five years, the Council plans to reduce the number of empty properties, whilst increasing the supply of quality housing for our residents. In acknowledgement of this, the Empty Homes Strategy mirrors the vision of the Council's overarching Housing Strategy; Prosperous Homes, Prosperous Lives (2024-2030) to ensure that...

The housing market in RCT offers our residents access to good quality, affordable homes, in the right place at the right time.

This Strategy will provide a framework for all activity within RCT aimed at bringing empty homes back into use.

To achieve this, we have identified four strategic objectives...

- 1. STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS...**
with Registered Social Landlords and the private sector that will support empty homes being brought back into use.
- 2. PROVIDE...**
advice, assistance and financial support to empty property owners to increase the number of empty homes that are brought back into use.
- 3. DELIVER...**
proportionate and effective enforcement powers to bring empty homes back into use.
- 4. SUPPORT...**
regeneration and community wellbeing by providing targeted empty homes interventions for different housing market areas and improve community outcomes.



INTRODUCTION...

Empty homes represent a wasted resource, financial expense and in many cases, a missed opportunity to provide much needed affordable housing for people in Wales.

Empty properties have negative effects on neighbouring properties such as damp, pests and devaluing a home, and can also impact the wider community, potentially attracting anti-social behaviour.

In Wales, demand for housing has outstripped supply for many years. This extra necessity for housing is driven by an increase in households, a growing population and changing demographics. The Welsh Government had an ambitious target of delivering an additional 20,000 new affordable homes by 2026. Whilst this target relates to new build homes, it is acknowledged that better utilisation of the existing housing stock can help ease some of the burden to delivering homes whilst also acting as a catalyst for area regeneration and community sustainability.



OUR VISION...

To bring empty homes back into use as safe, good quality housing that meets local need, supports thriving communities and makes the best use of our existing stock across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

This strategy outlines how the Council will take a proactive, intelligence-led and partnership-based approach to reduce the number of empty properties, prevent homes from becoming vacant long term and ensure that all homes contribute positively to the local area.

Through a balance of support and enforcement the Council will work with property owners and partners to unlock the potential of empty homes, helping to address housing pressures and improve communities.



BACKGROUND..

Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) is one of the largest authorities in Wales with a population of 237,700 and 103,339 homes, with the majority of housing in the private sector (either owner occupied or privately rented) at 86% (89,164 homes)*.

According to the Census 2021, there were 120,450 vacant dwellings in Wales, a vacancy rate of 7%. The total number of empty properties in RCT, as at March 2026 is 2,687, representing a rate of 2.6%, which is below the national average.

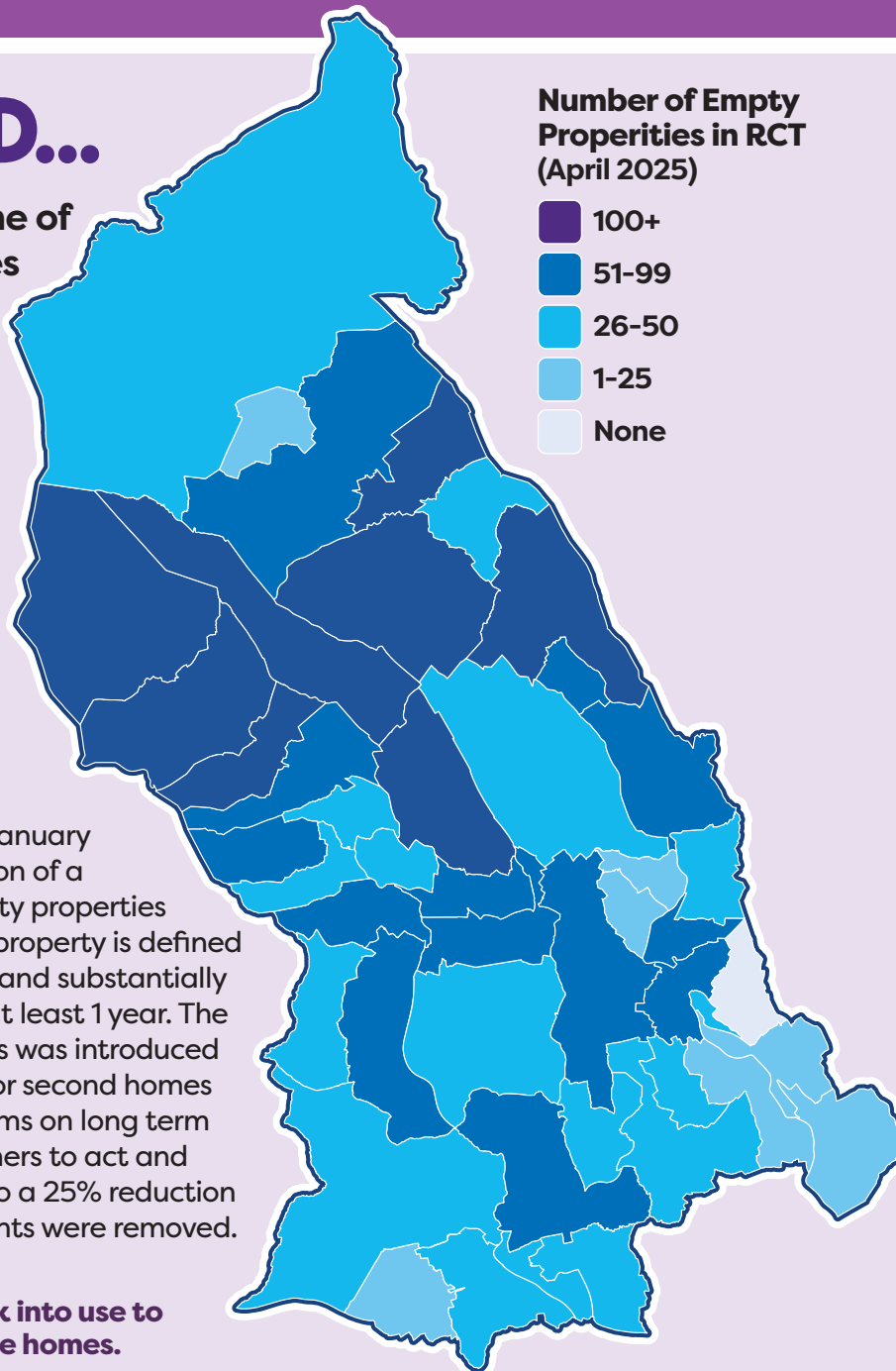
Following public consultation, on 18th January 2023 the Council agreed the introduction of a Council Tax Premium for long term empty properties and second homes. A long term empty property is defined as a dwelling which is both unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for a continuous period of at least 1 year. The premium for long term empty properties was introduced from April 1st, 2023, and the premium for second homes from April 1st, 2024. Council tax premiums on long term empty properties have incentivised owners to act and engage with the Council, contributing to a 25% reduction in long-term vacancies since the discounts were removed. The premiums are intended to:

- **Bring long-term empty homes back into use to provide safe, secure and affordable homes.**
- **Support the Council in increasing the supply of affordable housing and enhancing the sustainability of local communities.**

It is accepted that there will always be a number of empty properties within the housing market due to a churn in the market. However, in RCT, the distribution of empty homes is not balanced, with a concentration in the North of the borough of 74% compared to 26% in the South of the Borough as outlined in Figure 1.

There are several different reasons why homes become empty, including macroeconomic factors, demographic shifts and local housing market conditions, which can vary across the Borough. Tackling empty properties will therefore require a range of different methods depending on the location to bring them back into use to meet local housing need.

Number of Empty Properties in RCT (April 2025)



* Source: Census 2021

OUR KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Activities and outcomes since the introduction of the previous RCT Empty Homes Strategy include:

- » The number of empty homes across RCT has reduced from 3,556 in April 2017 to 2,687 in April 2026. This represents a reduction of 869 empty homes.
- » 1,930 interventions delivered resulting in 725 properties being brought back into use.
- » Delivered the Welsh Government's Houses into Homes loan scheme, which has provided £1.85M in loans and funding to private owners. This has leveraged a total investment of £2.21 million in the private housing stock, while also supporting local supply chains and sustaining employment within the local labour market.
- » The Council has led the delivery of the Welsh Government Valleys Taskforce Empty Homes Grant Scheme, securing funding to bring 263 empty homes back into use, representing an investment of £4.6M across Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- » Led the delivery of the Welsh Government National Empty Homes Grant Scheme, which has enabled 121 empty homes to be brought back into use, in RCT alone, representing a grant investment of £2.8M. This has leveraged a total investment of £3.9M in private housing stock, while also supporting local supply chains and sustaining employment within the local labour market.
- » The Council has worked in partnership with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to secure £7M of Welsh Government Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme funding, enabling empty properties to be brought back into use and contributing to a reduction in the number of households in Temporary Accommodation or at risk of homelessness.
- » Delivered the Homestep Plus scheme in partnership with a Registered Social Landlord (RSL), supporting 24 first-time buyers to purchase a property and bringing 24 empty homes back into use.
- » Developing an in-house RCT Social Lettings Agency which manages and lets 54 private rented properties, which were previously empty, on behalf of private landlords to those that are currently in Temporary Accommodation.
- » Introduced a Council Tax Premium for long term empty homes and second homes which has contributed to a reduction of 25% in long term empty homes.

However, we recognise that there is always more to be achieved.



NATIONAL POLICY

The new Strategy supports Welsh Government's focus of bringing empty homes back into use and responds to the following legislation used to deal with empty homes:

- » Environmental Protection Act 1990, Sections 79-81
- » Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949
- » Building Act 1984, Sections 77-79
- » Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 Section 29
- » Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Section 215
- » Housing Act 2004, Part 1
- » Law of Property Act 1925, Section 103
- » Housing Act 1985, Compulsory Purchase Orders
- » Housing Act 1985, Demolition Orders
- » Housing Act 2004: Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)
- » Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

LOCAL POLICY

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Corporate Plan

Working with our Communities 2024 – 2030

This is the Council's key strategic document. It has four well-being objectives to help improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

These are:



PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES

Supporting and empowering RCT residents and communities to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.



WORK & BUSINESS

Helping to strengthen and grow RCT's Economy.



NATURE & THE ENVIRONMENT

A green and clean RCT that improves and protects RCT's environment and nature.



CULTURE, HERITAGE & WELSH LANGUAGE

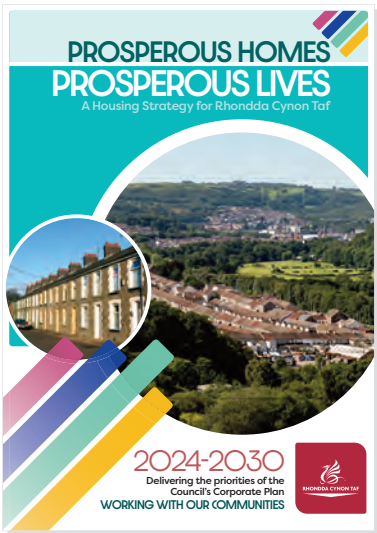
Recognising and celebrating RCT's past, present and future.



Rhondda Cynon Taf County
Borough Council Housing Strategy
**Prosperous Homes,
Prosperous Lives 2024 – 2030**

This strategy sets out how the Council will work with partners to shape and deliver safe, good quality, affordable homes and housing services.

The Strategy has established the following four key objectives:



- 1. TO ENABLE...**
a functional housing market that meets the needs of our communities.
- 2. TO PROMOTE...**
sustainable communities and create homes that are safe, warm and healthy by improving housing conditions and investing in community regeneration.
- 3. TO ENABLE...**
access to all types of suitable and affordable housing that meets the needs of residents.
- 4. TO CREATE...**
prosperous communities by ensuring residents have access to housing advice and support that meets their needs.

This Empty Homes Strategy contributes to all objectives.

➔ www.rctcbc.gov.uk/HousingStrategies

This Strategy also works alongside the following Council strategies and policy documents:

- » Local Development Plan
- » Town Centre Regeneration Strategies
- » Housing Investment Policy
- » Environmental Health/Public Health policies

THE STRATEGY

There is clear evidence that good progress has been made in bringing empty homes back into use in RCT. However, the scale of the problem persists and continues to create issues for some of our communities.

A strong strategic approach is required which has objectives that are clear, deliverable and will make a difference to the scale of empty homes that are brought back into use.

To deliver our vision, we have identified four strategic objectives. These are:

1 STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS...

with Registered Social Landlords and the private sector that will support empty homes being brought back into use.

2 PROVIDE...

advice, assistance and financial support to empty property owners to increase the number of empty homes that are brought back into use.

3 DELIVER...

proportionate and effective enforcement powers to bring empty homes back into use.

4 SUPPORT...

regeneration and community wellbeing by providing targeted empty homes interventions for different housing market areas and improve community outcomes.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

Strengthen partnerships with Registered Social Landlords and the private sector that will support empty homes being brought back into use.

Partnership working, both internally across Council services and externally with key stakeholders, is fundamental to effectively tackling empty properties and bringing them back into use.

RCT's Empty Property Operational Group (EPOG) brings together a range of Council departments to take a coordinated and strategic approach to addressing empty homes. The Group facilitates the sharing of intelligence, knowledge, and best practice to identify and respond to emerging issues, and plays a central role in driving forward delivery. It is collectively accountable for overseeing and implementing the Empty Homes Action Plan, ensuring a consistent and targeted approach to intervention.





Effective collaboration with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), Welsh Government and the private sector drives the improvement and/or conversion of empty homes that increases the supply and choice of housing across RCT thus reducing the number of empty properties within the County Borough. Partnership working across Rhondda Cynon Taf has already delivered tangible outcomes, including enabling redevelopment projects and maximising the use of Welsh Government Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme funding. This programme supports the reuse of empty properties while increasing the supply of affordable housing. In addition, collaborative delivery has facilitated initiatives such as the Homestep Plus scheme, whereby a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) identifies and acquires empty homes, undertakes refurbishment, and makes them available for sale at 70% of market value. This approach not only brings vacant properties back into use, but also supports access to affordable home ownership.

It is recognised that increased awareness of the issue can help identify properties of concern to residents and also encourage the owners to come forward and seek advice and guidance. To raise awareness of the empty homes problem, a number of publicity and educational initiatives will continue to be employed, such as linking in with RCT's Landlord Forum and the Landlord Newsletter. Building positive relationships with empty property owners and offering productive advice and support is essential to bringing empty properties back into use.

HOW WILL WE DO THIS...

- Work with partners to bring empty homes back into use through the delivery of the Council's Empty Homes Strategy 2026 – 2031 and monitoring of the Empty Homes Action plan.
- Work in partnership with a range of partners including Registered Social Landlords, the private and voluntary sectors to identify and deliver additional models of returning empty properties back into use.
- Continue to work with the RCT Landlord Forum to raise awareness of available advice and assistance.
- Continue to deliver the RCT Social Lettings Agency to support empty property owners through the leasing process.
- Explore multi-agency partnership opportunities with estate agents and probate solicitors to identify, assess and resolve cases of empty homes more effectively.
- Explore the opportunity to develop and implement an RCT Transitional Capital Homes Grant to enable RSLs to purchase empty homes off the open market to be used for temporary accommodation.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

Provide advice, assistance and financial support to empty property owners to increase the number of empty homes that are brought back into use.

Not only are long term empty homes a drain on council resources and a wasted source of housing in a time of increased housing need, but they are also a cost burden on the owners of the properties.

Figure 2 shows that keeping a dwelling empty, costs the owner an average of £12,280 per annum. This is based on a three-bed council tax band A property, which has been empty for 3 years or more and is subject to a +200% (triple Council tax total) council tax premium. The rental loss is established by determining the Local Housing Allowance, currently £113.92 per week.

A recent survey carried out by RCT Council (2025) identified that empty property owners cited financial constraints as the primary barrier to bringing empty properties back into use.

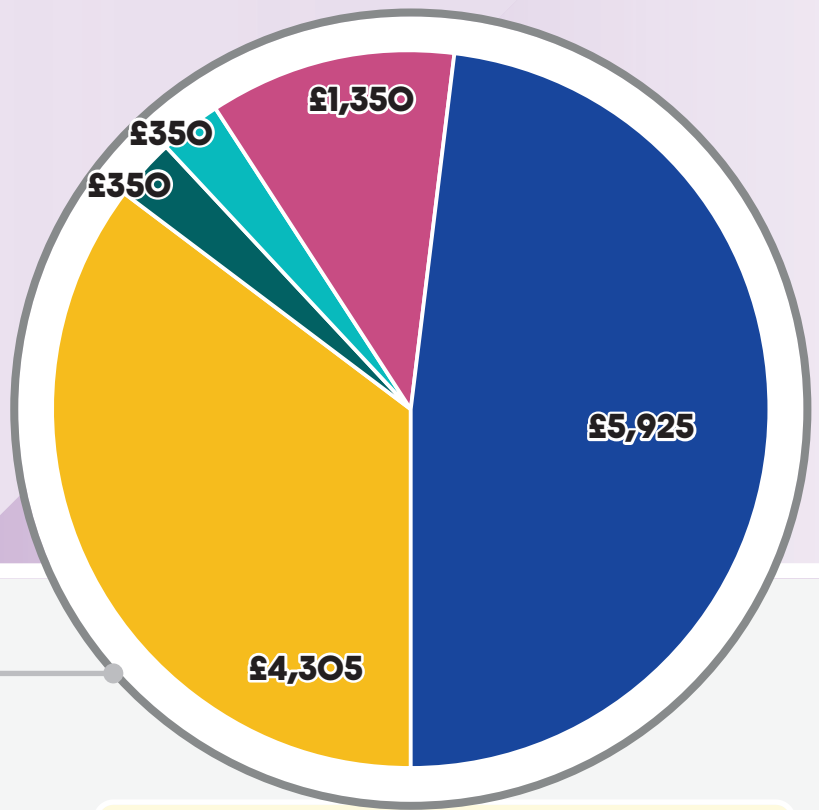
The work of the EPOG ensures that a wide range of interventions are used to support bringing empty homes back into use. Dedicated Environmental Health Officers conducting home visits and other office-based interventions, have assisted owners of long-term empty properties in the process of finding outcomes that enable their homes to be brought back into use.

The types of interventions that these officers undertake are:

- **Proactively identifying and visiting empty homes.**
- **Serving notices on owners of empty homes where they are having a detrimental effect on the locality.**
- **Undertaking works in default.**
- **Securing empty properties.**
- **Enforced sales where the Council has secured a debt against an empty home.**
- **Providing advice and information.**



**Figure 2:
Cost implications to owners
of empty properties in RCT
April 2025**



The Council will continue to make available (subject to funding) and ensure effective management of grants and loan schemes, and will provide advice and support to facilitate owners to bring their empty homes back into beneficial use.

HOW WILL WE DO THIS...

- Lead, monitor and evaluate the National Empty Homes Grant Scheme, which provides a grant of up to £25,000 to prospective homeowners.
- Deliver, monitor and evaluate the Houses into Homes loan.
- Review the Houses into Homes loan to ensure that private landlords can access the loan in order to assist the Council to discharge its homelessness duty.
- Explore opportunities for empty properties to be brought back into use in our town centres through the use of Welsh Government Transforming Towns funding.
- Revise the Empty Property pack, which provides an overview of the initiatives available to help owners bring their properties back into use.
- Further developing the Empty Homes dedicated website/webpage which provides a 'one stop shop' of information on available support and advice in one place for empty home owners.





STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

Deliver proportionate and effective enforcement powers to bring empty homes back into use.

Whilst the previous strategy targeted interventions at empty properties that had been consistently vacant over a four year period, going forward, home visits and interventions will concentrate on the properties where Council tax premiums apply.

This will simplify the methodology, while still concentrating on the most problematic, long-term empty properties.

The Council will continue to encourage or enforce the improvement or conversion of empty homes to increase the supply and choice of housing across RCT. Priority will be given to those properties which have the greatest detriment to the surrounding community and/or those properties which can most effectively be returned to use in terms of contributing usefully to housing supply.

HOW WILL WE DO THIS...

- Continue to proactively identify and visit empty homes.
- Serve notices on owners of empty homes where they are having a detrimental effect on the locality.
- Enforce sales where the Council has secured a debt against an empty home.
- Continue to enforce the improvement of empty homes to increase the supply and choice of housing across RCT.
- Utilise Power BI to develop and establish a risk/priority scoring system for individual empty properties to be targeted.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

Support regeneration and community wellbeing by providing targeted empty homes interventions for different housing market areas and improve community outcomes.

The Council in its strategic housing role will undertake further research to understand why some areas are blighted by empty homes, taking into consideration both the ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ social-economic considerations. It is possible that empty homes in some communities are a symptom of other issues, rather than the problem.

Outmigration in the North amongst younger and working age residents and a reduction in an aging population has reduced the demand for specific property types. This lower market demand has resulted in a high prevalence of long-term empty stock which is in poor condition. In contrast, the South has a more diverse economy, greater employment opportunities and better transport links to Cardiff and the M4 corridor, resulting in a higher demand for housing. Empty homes here are more transitional and linked to development cycles and “natural churn in the housing market”.

There are some reasons for homes becoming empty which are evident in both the North and South of the Borough. These include owner inertia where an owner may lack the necessary knowledge or skills to refurbish or manage a property but still unwilling to sell. There may be disputes regarding inheritance, which require the outcome of a legal remedy before rent or sale can be considered. There is a high number of homes that are empty due to their dilapidated condition where the owners are unable to carry out the necessary remedial works because of a lack of funds.

The various reasons why properties become empty may require tailored, area-specific interventions and action planning. Bespoke incentives can facilitate the refurbishment and subsequent occupation of targeted empty properties, thereby underpinning broader regeneration initiatives.

Undertaking in depth research and consolidating data sources strengthens the ability to identify, track, prioritise and respond to vacancy trends, and enable proactive, targeted and evidence-based interventions.

HOW WILL WE DO THIS...

- Conduct proactive outreach and targeted owner engagement to identify problematic empty homes.
- Utilise Power BI and Microsoft analytical service to monitor empty properties and build automated data matching systems between Council Tax records, housing databases, Public Health and Land Registry and Revenue.
- Recruit a HDRC Graduate officer to focus on the collection and collation of data in order to establish a Power BI dashboard and create interactive reports and dashboards.
- Develop tailored incentives and strategic action plans to address local drivers more effectively.
- Implement a targeted renovation programme focusing on older vacant homes, with priority given to those of strategic or community significance.
- Establish bespoke incentive packages for areas with persistent vacancy to assist those property owners with greater financial hardship.
- Deliver ‘Healthy Homes Action Areas’ in strategically targeted areas to take action on empty homes through specific housing interventions that are bespoke to the challenges facing individual communities.
- Adopt an operational typology (e.g., condition, transactional, owner-choice, legal/probate) and standardise templates of responses per typology to identify the most effective mix of interventions (grants/loans, marketing, enforcement).

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Delivering on the 4 objectives, we aim to achieve the following outcomes:

1 By strengthening partnerships with RSLs and the private sector that will support empty homes to be brought back into use...

we aim to achieve the following outcomes:

- Reduce the number of empty homes in RCT.
- Increase the number of affordable homes made available by bringing empty homes back into use.
- Develop and deliver collaborative models of returning empty homes back into use through new and established partnerships.
- Increase awareness of RCT's Social Lettings Agency to support empty property owners through the leasing process.

2 By providing financial support, advice and assistance to empty property owners to increase the number of empty homes that are brought back into use...

we aim to achieve the following outcomes:

- Reduce the number of empty homes.
- Maximise available funding streams to continue to provide grants and loans to support empty homeowners to bring their properties back into use.
- Faster delivery in bringing empty homes back into use.
- Support the use of local contractors used to bring empty homes back into use.
- Improve the overall standard of the housing stock.
- Increase awareness of available grants and loans.



3 By delivering proportionate and effective enforcement powers to bring empty homes back into use...

we aim to achieve the following outcomes:

- Reduce the number of empty homes.
- Enforce the improvement or conversion of empty homes.
- Supplement the broader strategic aim of focused interventions on properties subjected to the council tax premiums.
- Reduce Anti-social behaviour.

4 By supporting regeneration and community wellbeing and providing targeted empty homes interventions for different housing market areas and improve community outcomes...

we aim to achieve the following outcomes:

- Reduce the number of empty homes.
- Increase housing supply.
- Improve trend-based data to target interventions.
- Maximise use of Power BI to transform raw data into actionable insights for making data driven strategic decisions.
- Ensure that interventions respond to the diverse housing needs of all our residents.
- Increase the demand for housing in areas where the housing market has been affected by depopulation in recent years.
- Establish interventions and strategic action plans to target empty homes depending on their locality.
- Improve local pride with residents feeling more positive about their community.



MAKING IT HAPPEN!

This Strategy will provide the impetus for delivering on the Council's priorities, contained within the Corporate Plan "Working with our communities 2024-2030". The Council will provide a strategic and operational focus across all departments with responsibility for reducing the numbers of empty properties within RCT.

The Strategy strongly supports the Welsh Government's sustainable development approach, and it has been developed to reflect the "five ways of working", which include:

1. INVOLVEMENT:

A wide range of internal and external stakeholders have been involved in the development of the Strategy, and this will provide a sense of local ownership.

2. LONG-TERM:

The Strategy has been developed to provide sustainable objectives for the future of empty property work within RCT, and outlines how this will be achieved.

3. PREVENTION:

The Strategy aims to help prevent properties from becoming empty, by engaging with owners and targeting interventions to enable them to bring properties back into use.

4. INTEGRATION:

The Strategy is synonymous with both corporate and national priorities, including the wider strategic aims associated with the delivery of affordable housing, prevention of homelessness, providing housing support and alleviating fuel poverty in our communities.

5. COLLABORATION:

The Strategy promotes a collaborative method of working and further reflects the Councils' commitment to working with our residents and both private and third sector partners.



ACTION PLAN AND MONITORING

An Empty Homes Action Plan accompanies this Strategy, with the purpose of driving forward its strategic aims, whilst also developing mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of the pro-active work being undertaken.

The Action Plan echoes the strategic aims outlined above and is monitored by the Empty Property Operational Group (EPOG). The EPOG meets quarterly and provides cross team governance for all works relating to empty properties.

Monitoring reports will capture both quarterly and annual performance data and contribute to national performance indicators and delivery plans. Success will also be reflected in the positive outcomes and impact that our work has on the lives of people living in RCT.

