



Newport City Council
Empty Homes Strategy 2010 - 2015

Foreword

In 2005, Newport City Council adopted its first formal Empty Homes Strategy. We have achieved some notable successes in working with owners to bring long-term, empty homes back into residential use. This benefits everyone; it protects the owner's asset, provides a home for a household, provides the city of Newport with tax revenue, and improves the physical and social environment of the neighbourhood. However, there is still a long way to go.

Unfortunately, since 2005, there have been dramatic changes to the economy and to the housing market in particular, Property prices have fallen, housing equity is lower, credit is much harder to obtain. It is not surprising that it has become more difficult to fund housing renovations, but it is surprising that people will still leave a valuable asset to deteriorate to the point where it causes problems for neighbours and for the local community. An empty home which looks empty and is not maintained so often becomes a target for vandalism or other anti-social behaviour; it can harbour damp and pests which affect neighbouring properties and it means that, where there should be a household who are members of the local community, there is none.

There are many reasons why properties are left empty and each case needs a different solution. This Empty Homes Strategy and its action plan set out how Newport City Council is revising the way it tackles empty homes, so that it has a range of options to call on, to help owners find a voluntary solution or, when that fails, to take appropriate action. There is not an easy answer to the problem of empty homes: there are complex issues involved and limited resources. But, by working together with other statutory and voluntary agencies, and with local residents, Newport City Council aims to make Newport a city where homes are not left empty.

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Introduction

'Empty homes not only restrict housing supply, they also detract from the quality of the local environment and can cause significant problems for local residents. Poorly maintained empty properties attract vermin, cause damp and other problems for neighbouring properties and are magnets for vandals, squatters, drug dealers and arsonists.'

This extract is from the introduction to the UK government's national policy on empty homes. It is widely accepted that it is necessary for social mobility and a vibrant housing market to have some homes empty at any given time, but that these should be short-term 'transactional' empties. It is argued that there is a natural 'churn' of properties due to births, deaths, marriages and moving out. Opinions about what is a healthy percentage of empty homes vary but, if the number of empty homes is rising, it may be a visible sign of underlying problems in the area which, without intervention, could escalate and turn into serious decline.

Newport City Council's position is that it is the responsibility of private homeowners to maintain their properties and keep them secure, whether they are owner-occupiers, landlords or investors. However, circumstances do arise when this becomes very difficult. The Council's Corporate Plan for 2009-2012 has, as one of its three clear aims: '*To make our city a better place to live for all our citizens.*' One of the key priority outcomes for this is that: '*the City and its assets are maintained in good order.*' Clearly, the housing stock is part of the physical fabric of the city and the Council must have a plan to deal with situations when owners are unable or unwilling to fulfil their responsibilities.

However, housing is about more than the physical environment; it is the foundation for communities. There are four key goals for the city over the next ten years, as set out in Newport's Community Strategy 2010-2020, and one of these is: '*To have vibrant and safe communities.*' The priority outcomes for this objective are that:

- *People live in a safe community*
- *People get on well with each other in their local area*
- *People live in a clean and pleasant environment*
- *People live in active communities*

As well as the impact which empty homes can have on the physical environment, they can undermine social well-being by becoming a focus for anti-social behaviour and simply being a wasted resource. In her foreword to the document '*A Cure for Empty Homes*¹, Baroness Ireland describes empty homes as, 'an affront to people who cannot get a foothold on the housing ladder.'

Newport City Council has always endeavoured to support individual owners of empty homes but, in 2005, the authority adopted its first formal Empty Homes Strategy. The strategy investigated 80 long-term empty homes in the city and focused Council resources on tackling those properties, as well as developing procedures to address the issues presented by empty homes in the private sector.

The next section summarises the significant progress that has been made over the past five years under the first strategy, but conditions have now changed substantially. Since the economic recession took hold, it has become more difficult

¹ Department for Communities and Local Government; '*A Cure for Empty Homes*' David Ireland.

for owners to raise money to carry out renovation works, especially those who are renovating properties for their own use without substantial capital to draw on. For those who are commercial developers and have the funds to renovate their property, there is little incentive to redevelop and sell because house prices have fallen and owners may believe they will achieve a better price by waiting for a market recovery. In addition, public funding for the purchase or renovation of empty homes at both a national and a local level has become very scarce. The challenge now is to find new ways of tackling the long-term empty homes which still persist in the city and to work with owners at an earlier stage to try and reduce the level of disuse in the longer term. Empty homes benefit no-one. Through this strategy, Newport City Council aims to work with local residents, communities and homeowners to make sure that Newport is a city where homes are not left empty.

What Counts as an Empty Home?

The Welsh Assembly Government has a set of nationally agreed and defined indicators for measuring how local authorities are performing – the national performance framework, introduced in 2005/06. The Local Government Data Unit provides a definition for each indicator and all councils submit their data at the end of the year. The framework includes an indicator on empty homes:

PSR/004: The percentage of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April that were returned to occupation during the year through direct action by the local authority.

The definition for this indicator is attached (Appendix 1). Some properties, although they are empty dwellings, are not counted as empty homes: for instance, holiday homes or student accommodation. In line with the national guidance, information on empty homes in Newport is based on Council Tax records.

Empty Homes in Newport

Newport City Council's first formal empty homes strategy was launched in 2005 with a physical audit of 80 empty properties mainly identified by the Environmental Health Service. Those properties were targeted for further investigation to establish why they were empty and take steps to bring them back into use. The Empty Homes Strategy, Policy & Procedures document described what had previously been achieved under various initiatives and introduced an action plan to deal with empty properties in the future. Extracts of the original strategy setting out the position at that time are attached (Appendix 2).

More recently, a database has been set up to enable effective management of the procedures for empty homes. Council Tax records are checked annually and the addresses of any properties which have been empty for over 2 years are added to the database for monitoring. Records may also be added for dwellings which have been removed from the Council Tax Valuation List by the Valuation Office Agency on the basis that they are in such a poor condition that they cannot be valued for Council Tax purposes. Such removals from the list are usually requested by the owners of the dwellings concerned.

Newport City Council's Housing Services team is responsible for the Empty Homes Strategy and for seeing that the action plan is implemented. The team maintains the

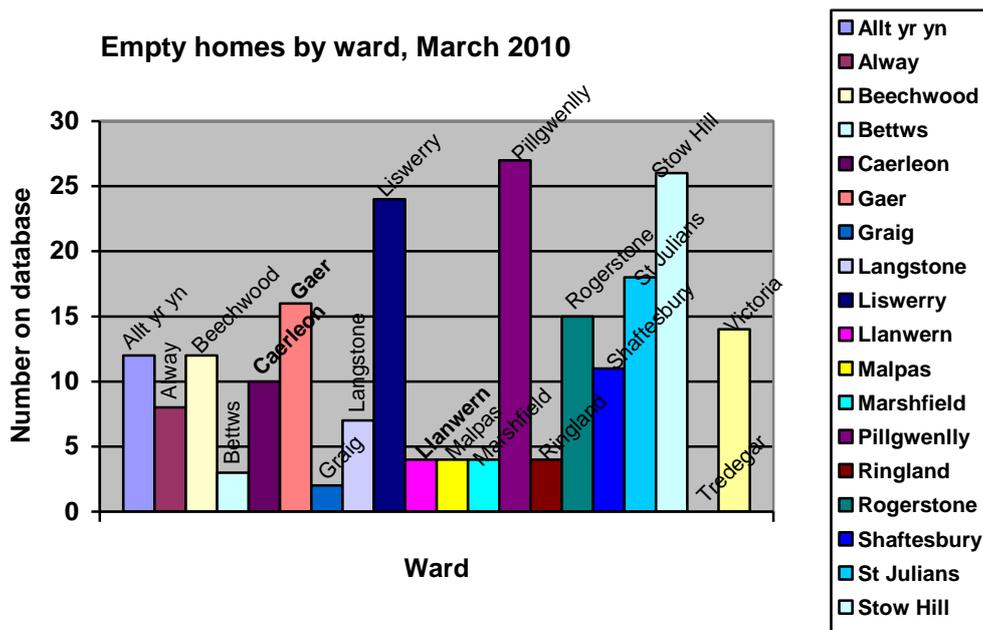
database and compiles data on the national performance measure for reporting to the Welsh Assembly Government.

The table below compares performance on returning empty homes to use in 2008/9 with 2005/6, for Newport and for Wales as whole. It shows that, since the Empty Homes Strategy was adopted in 2005, the Council has increased the number of homes returned to use from 26 to 66. Despite this, the total number of homes empty for more than 6 months in Newport has risen by nearly 30% during the same period. This compares with an all-Wales rise of 10.4%, suggesting that, in terms of empty residential properties, Newport may have suffered disproportionately from the impact of the economic recession and the downturn in the housing market. The total number of homes empty for more than 6 months includes some groups of property, such as new build properties awaiting occupation, which are not targeted under the Empty Homes Strategy, but which may nevertheless be empty as a result of the depressed housing market.

		2005/6	2008/9
Newport	No. homes empty for 6 months+	1,602	2,078
	No. empty homes returned to use following Council intervention	26	66
Wales	No. homes empty for 6 months+	19,693	21,758
	No. empty homes returned to use following Council intervention	317	567

The empty homes database is used to monitor the properties which are residential dwellings within the meaning of the national performance indicator and have been empty for more than 6 months. The information on the database changes on a daily basis as property records are updated. To date, the action plan for empty homes has focused on houses rather than flats, as empty houses are generally more visible and cause more problems for the local community than flats. As a result, most of the properties currently being monitored are houses.

At the time of writing (March 2010), there are 221 addresses being actively monitored by the council's Housing Services team. The graph below shows their distribution by ward:



As in 2005, Pillgwenlly is the ward with the highest number of empty homes, closely followed by Stow Hill and Liswerry. The only ward with no empty homes on the database is Tredegar.

Why Homes Are Left Empty

In 2005, the strategy outlined the variety of reasons why properties become empty, which have included:

- disputes over ownership
- awaiting sale
- property is being renovated
- owner in hospital or other institution
- repossession or bankruptcy
- deceased estate
- inability to sell
- low demand
- over-supply of certain property types
- investment holding
- ownership unresolved
- inheritance holding

Clearly, owing to the variety of different circumstances which can give rise to empty homes, they can and do occur throughout the city, but there is a concentration in some areas. The table below compares the number of empty homes on the Housing Services database, with average property prices and the percentage of privately rented homes, by ward. In Tredegar Park, there are no privately owned houses which are being monitored under the empty homes strategy. This is probably because, until recently, a large proportion of the housing stock was social housing and although the balance of tenures in the area has now changed, this is due to the commercial development of new homes which, even if they remain unsold for some time, are excluded from the definition of empty homes.

Bettws has the lowest average property price in the city but a very low level of empty homes, probably because there is still a very high proportion (42.5%) of social housing. The low average property price may reflect the impact that Right To Buy sales of former council homes have had on property prices, as well as the property mix in the area - a comparatively high proportion of purpose-built flats but few older houses. Stow Hill, in contrast, has more privately owned, older properties and a higher than average property price, owing to the larger size of properties to be found in the area. It also has a comparatively high level of private renting. These characteristics suggest that it is more favoured by potential investors and developers than either Tredegar or Bettws and it also has a high level of empty homes. Pillgwenlly, where property prices are lower than Stow Hill but which has a higher proportion of older properties, also has a very high level of empty homes. Areas such as Pillgwenlly and Stow Hill which are seen as offering investment potential tend to be more vulnerable to the problem of empty homes than others and have been hit harder by the economic downturn.

Ward	No. empty homes on database	Average income Jan 2010	Average Property price Jan 2010	% of private rented homes in 2009
Pillgwenlly	27		107,830	10.3
Stow Hill	26		158,593	20.0
Liswerry	24		118,308	4.3
St Julians	18		128,695	6.5
Gaer	16		135,067	2.3
Rogerstone	15		190,499	2.2
Victoria	14		102,861	15.5
Allt yr yn	12		247,492	6.5
Beechwood	12		137,542	3.5
Shaftesbury	11		108,970	5.7
Caerleon	10		205,753	3.0
Alway	8		129,300	2.6
Langstone	7		304,344	2.1
Llanwern	4		162,089	2.6
Malpas	4		132,315	1.8
Marshfield	4		254,822	3.2
Ringland	4		112,604	1.5
Bettws	3		87,429	1.9
Graig	2		246,803	3.0
Tredegar	0		138,092	2.2
Newport	221		160,470	5.0

Housing Need

A detailed assessment of housing need was made for the Newport, Torfaen and Monmouthshire Housing Market Assessment (LHMA), published in 2007. It identified that increasing numbers of households were being priced out of the owner occupied market in Newport, with the average property price rising by 165% between 1999 and

2007. The turnover of social rented properties in Newport is fairly low, at just 8% of the total stock, so that opportunities for social renting are comparatively rare. In addition, close to half the households in Newport would, in 2007, be unable to afford the rent on a 3-bedroom house, according to the Welsh Assembly Government's guidelines on affordable rents.

Although the housing market has changed again since the LHMA was completed in 2007, and prices have fallen, affordability is still an issue for owner-occupation because mortgage finance has become much more difficult to find and lenders are requiring large deposits.

Given that it has become more difficult than ever for households in Newport to find affordable accommodation, it is increasingly important that homes are not allowed to fall into long-term disuse. Brought back into use, they can offer a home to someone in housing need and increase revenue to the public purse through local taxation.

Working With Owners

There are innumerable reasons why homes are left empty. Newport City Council aims to find out why homes are left empty and to try to find solutions that will enable the owners to bring that property back into occupation. Local authorities do have some enforcement powers that can be used for empty homes; these are explained in the next section, but Newport City Council will only consider using these powers when stringent attempts have been made to find voluntary solutions.

In common with other local authorities in Wales, Newport City Council is experiencing significant budget pressures which mean that the authority is now unable to offer grant funding for private sector housing renovation works. As lack of funds for renovation is one of the most frequent reasons why owners are unable to make progress with renovation works, this is a crucial issue. During the life of this Strategy, the Housing Services team will seek to explore and encourage funding options from other sources for renovation work on empty homes. The authority will continue to look for innovative ways to fund schemes to bring homes back into use, through new or existing partnerships.

Aside from the issue of capital funding, Newport City Council will seek to consult with owners on what barriers and problems they meet in trying to rehabilitate their properties, so that the authority can offer relevant and effective services to support them, such as:

- providing general advice and information
- providing tailored advice, information or technical assistance
- referral to specialist agencies or organisations
- advising on funding options
- advising on disposal options for properties
- maintaining a register of developers interested in purchasing empty homes
- supporting the Newport Landlords' Forum

The Housing Services team will also watch for good practice in other areas which might be replicated in Newport.

An important aim of this Strategy in the longer term is to try and prevent homes falling into long-term disuse. Communication will play a key role in this; for example,

if someone considers purchasing a property for re-development, they should have a clear idea of what help may or may not be available; or, if someone wants to keep a property empty, they know that they are responsible for keeping it secure and in sound condition. Developing the information available about empty homes, raising awareness of the issues, and improving communication with residents, developers, and empty home owners will be key parts of the action plan.

Enforcement

Newport City Council will continue to identify residential dwellings, to trace the owners whenever possible and to encourage them to take whatever steps are needed to bring their property back into use. However, in some circumstances this is unsuccessful. It may not be possible to trace the owner, or legal ownership may be unresolved, or the owner may be unable to take responsibility for their property. Sometimes, the property was bought as an investment and the owner is unwilling to improve or sell the property and becomes unwilling or unable to maintain it.

A home can remain empty for many years and, while it will still be a wasted resource, it will not cause problems for neighbours, the local community or for statutory services if it is secure and well maintained. These properties will be monitored under this strategy but will not be a priority for enforcement action.

However, the longer a home stands empty, the more likely it is to suffer physical deterioration or anti-social behaviour and to give rise to problems for the community. The Council may need to take action regarding environmental health risks, trespass, unsightly or unsafe land or buildings. Other statutory services, mainly the police and fire services, may also become involved. Unless the owner is maintaining it, the risks and costs associated with an empty home tend to escalate until it is returned to occupation. When this is the case, and there is no progress towards re-occupation, Newport City Council will consider using its enforcement powers.

There are three possible statutory actions available to the Council: enforced sales, Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO's) and Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO's).

Enforced Sale

An enforced sale can be carried out under s103 of the Law of Property Act 1925, where the local authority has registered an unpaid debt as charge against a property. For properties which are being monitored under this Strategy and are causing problems to neighbours and statutory services, or are the subject of substantial Council Tax arrears, Newport City Council will be pro-active in:

- carrying out any necessary remedial works
- registering a charge against a property
- bringing a property for sale through auction, through the open market or, as part of a wider strategic initiative, to a preferred developer

Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)

In Wales a Local Authority has the power, subject to approval by the Welsh Assembly Government, to obtain a property without the consent of the owner through the use of a Compulsory Purchase Order. Newport City Council will use this power in appropriate cases to buy an empty home and sell it either on the open market, where

there are grounds for doing so, to a preferred developer. The Council compensate the owner as required by law.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders – Interim and Final (IEDMO & FEDMO)

Newport City Council will, in appropriate cases, seek authorisation from the Residential Property Tribunal to issue an Interim Empty Dwelling Management Order, to assess whether a property is suitable for a Final Empty Dwelling Management Order and to develop a detailed business plan for bringing that property back into use. If the owner cannot provide sufficient evidence of bringing the property back into use themselves within a reasonable timescale, Newport City Council will issue a final Empty Dwelling Management Order and implement the business plan for the property.

Objectives

Newport City Council's key objectives for empty homes over the next five years are:

- To return to use as many empty homes as possible and prevent homes falling into disuse
- To take a cross-cutting, corporate approach to empty homes, with a designated lead officer supported by the Empty Homes Working Group, consisting of a designated postholder for each of the relevant service areas
- To ensure that there are clear channels of communication on empty homes for the public, for other statutory agencies and between council services, which are used to the best effect
- To identify and develop funding opportunities which will make empty homes work sustainable, for the local authority and for owners

Implementation and Review

The Empty Homes Working Group will play a key role in implementing this Strategy, bringing together expertise from all the Council services involved and co-ordinating action towards the end goal of re-occupation. Following publication of this Strategy the Housing Service will, in consultation with other services, review the role of the Empty Homes Working Group. Although the Group's initial purpose, to identify possible solutions for individual empty homes, will continue, the Group will need to look at implementing a shared database, reviewing procedures within the services, communicating with the public and adopting a preventative role.

The Action Plan below sets out the actions that will be taken to implement this Strategy in the short, medium and long term. The Housing Service will instigate a review of this Strategy on or before April 2015, although some of the longer-term actions will extend beyond this. The Housing Service will also produce an annual review of the Action Plan to evaluate progress.

Action Plan

Timescales are:

Short-term: to April 2011

Medium-term: to April 2013

Long-term: to April 2015 and beyond

Time-scale	Action	By Whom	Outcome
Short-term	Designate an Empty Homes Officer for Newport City Council	Head of Planning, Regeneration and Strategic Housing	One point of initial contact on empty homes for internal and external issues
	Review the role of the Empty Homes Working Group (EHWG) and agree participants (postholders) for relevant services.	Head of Planning, Regeneration and Strategic Housing	EHWG becomes the mechanism for co-ordinated action on empty homes
	Review Newport City Council policy and procedures on empty homes	Housing & Community Regeneration Manager	Newport City Council's intentions for empty private sector homes in the city are clearly set out; Clear procedures for all services are directed towards bringing an empty home back into use.
	Take steps to promote public awareness of empty homes and of this Strategy, such as a newsletter for empty home owners.	Housing & Community Regeneration Manager	Newport residents have a clear understanding of what action the Council is taking, or likely to take, on empty homes; There is increased pressure on owners of empty homes to maintain them in good condition and, wherever possible, bring them back into occupation.
	Set up a web-based database for empty homes to serve as a central resource for all services	Housing & Community Regeneration	There is an up-to-date record for each empty home which indicates:

		Manager/Business Services Development Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notices served • works carried out • unpaid charges • court proceedings • changes of ownership or status
	Review funding options for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compulsory Purchase Orders • Renovation work under EDMO's • Works in default leading to enforced sale 	Housing & Community Regeneration Manager/Group Accountant E&E	Limited funding is available to the Empty Homes Working Group for 'direct action' which will contribute towards bringing an empty home back into use
	Identify possible solutions for the very long-term empty homes currently being monitored, to include 'pilot application' for first Interim EDMO.	Empty Homes Working Group	A plan of action to resolve the most problematic empty homes
Medium-term	Use enforcement action effectively to bring about a change of ownership or management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implement the power to issue Empty Dwelling Management Orders • use a CPO where appropriate • where there is a substantial Council Tax debt, or unpaid charges in respect of works carried out in default, use the enforced sale procedure 	Housing & Community Regeneration Manager/Chief Legal Officer	Some empty homes are re-occupied as a result of enforcement action; There is a clearer public understanding about the responsibilities of owners and investors.
	Implement action plans for problematic, long-term empty homes	Empty Homes Working Group	Re-occupation of problem empty homes
	Work collaboratively with partner agencies, organisations, communities or individuals	Housing & Community Regeneration Manager/Empty Homes Working Group	No opportunity to develop or improve services, advice, information or assistance for the owners of empty homes is overlooked
	Build up resources to help owners bring their empty homes back into use	Housing & Community Regeneration	There is a wide range of information, advice and assistance that can be

		Manager/Empty Homes Working Group	offered to owners of empty homes
	Improve joint working on empty commercial premises and residential properties	Head of Planning, Regeneration and Strategic Housing	There is a coherent approach towards empty buildings, whether commercial or residential; actions link up to add value.
	Take account of local housing need	Housing & Community Regeneration Manager	Voluntary and enforcement solutions are directed towards meeting priorities for local housing need
Long-term	Investigate and, where possible, develop financing options for renovation work in private sector empty homes	Housing & Community Regeneration Manager	Owners of empty homes are able to access funding to renovate their property
	Make Newport City Council action on empty homes self-financing	Housing & Community Regeneration Manager/Group Accountant E&E	Newport City Council continues to have funds available for empty homes work

**APPENDIX 1 – National Performance Indicator guidance for Wales, 2009-10,
PSR/004 Vacant Dwellings Returned To Occupation**

Service/policy area	Housing - Private Sector Renewal
Domain	Strategic Outcomes
Reference	PSR/C/F/004/02-001 (PSR/004)
Headline	Vacant dwellings returned to occupation
Indicator	The percentage of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April that were returned to occupation during the year through direct action by the local authority
Guidance	<p>For a full definition of dwelling please refer to the Private Sector Renewal glossary.</p> <p>A vacant dwelling is vacant of people. This excludes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A second or holiday home • A newly completed dwelling that is awaiting occupation • An existing dwelling that is being converted or modernised • A dwelling that is in use but for non-residential purposes <p>The following are examples of the types of direct action that can lead to a dwelling being returned to occupation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants, loans or other financial assistance either provided or facilitated by the authority • Providing advice, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Literature on the authority's empty homes strategy ○ Advice on letting, including legal and housing benefit requirements ○ Advice on grants and other financial assistance including tax concessions available ○ Details of landlord forums or accreditation schemes ○ Advice on repairs, including details on building contractors meeting minimum requirements • Referral to partner Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) or other intermediary with relevant expertise • Enforcement action including statutory notices • Enquiries made to establish ownership of property and follow up action <p>A property should only be counted once, regardless of whether it has been subject to more than one action/intervention that led to it being returned to occupation.</p> <p>Where properties are sub-divided into additional units in an effort to return a dwelling to occupation, the number of units created should be included. For example, a house that has been converted into three flats and then returned to occupation would count as three dwellings having been returned to occupation.</p> <p>The data for this indicator can be obtained from the Revenue Section of the local authority, who should have information relating to whether council tax is being paid on the private sector dwellings.</p>

	The number of dwellings that have been vacant for at least 6 months should be counted at the 1 April. This figure should not be adjusted to include any properties that reach the 6 month limit during the year.		
Calculation	<p>Numerator: The number of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April which were returned to occupation during the year through direct action by the local authority</p> <p>Denominator: The total number of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April</p> <p>Formula: $\frac{\text{Numerator}}{\text{Denominator}} \times 100$</p>		
Data Source	-	Decimal Place	2
Explanation	This indicator measures the extent to which local authorities are bringing dwellings that have been vacant for long periods of time back into occupation.		
Disaggregation	Disaggregation should be considered to suit local context and knowledge.		

THE POSITION IN NEWPORT

Empty Homes in Newport

Action to bring empty properties in Newport back into use has been a continual feature of all of the Housing Renewal and Urban Regeneration policies of the council for the last 25 years.

In the mid 1970’s a plan of Housing Action and General Improvement Area declarations was developed to span a period of 10-15 years. Empty properties within the areas were targeted for assistance. This was followed by Area Based enveloping with targeted grants to properties within the designated areas.

Newport City Council subsequently moved into the era of Renewal Areas where again empty properties were targeted as part of the area based approach.

Lately we have moved into an area based approach in the Lower Dock Street Town Heritage Initiative, where again empty properties have been targeted with some considerable success as in previous areas.

From the early 1980’s to 1996 the housing grants legislation placed no restriction on having to own or live in a property to receive grant and many took advantage of this fact both as individuals and landlords. It was used by many as a way of getting on the first rung of the home ownership ladder. To purchase a property at relatively low cost have some form of grant assistance and to invest a proportion of your own resources to secure a decent home.

In addition in the 1980’s Newport had a healthy purchase to let and purchase to sell programme where empty properties were either, purchased and brought into council stock or purchased, improved and sold on the open market. Many of Newport’s miscellaneous properties were acquired this way.

Around the same time period Newport was involved in a pilot project with the then Welsh Office in buying up properties, passing them on to a purchaser with the benefit of grant aid being available, some of these properties were shared ownership. However, the failing of this scheme was the reluctance of lenders to lend money on these properties due to there poor condition even though the council was giving a grant

Empty Properties in Newport

There are a number of ways to examine the number of empty properties in a City, some are more accurate than others but none of them are 100% accurate. These include:

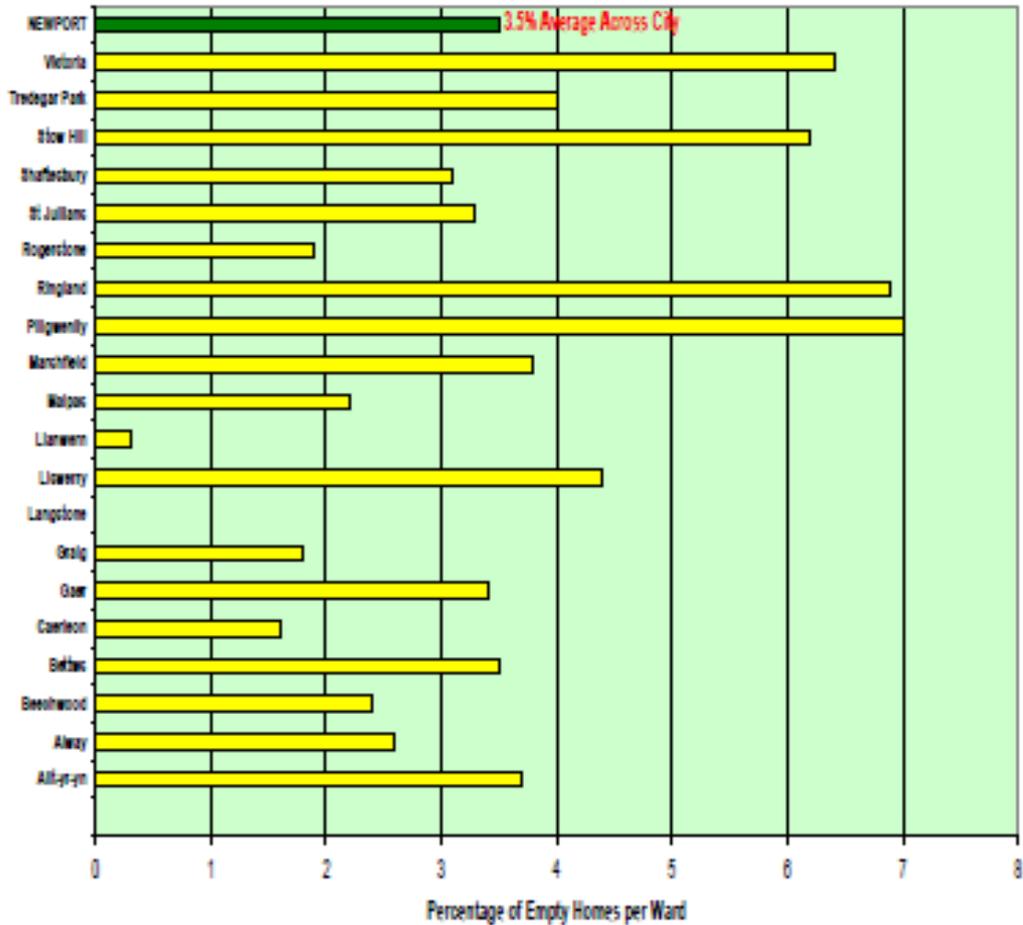
- Census Information
- Housing Needs Studies
- Planning Information
- Council Tax Data

The UK Census of 2001 revealed that Newport's resident population stood at 137,011 with 58,535 households. It found that the percentage of Newport's housing stock that was then standing empty was 3.5% with the Welsh average being 4%.

Information from Census 2001 regarding Empty Homes in Newport

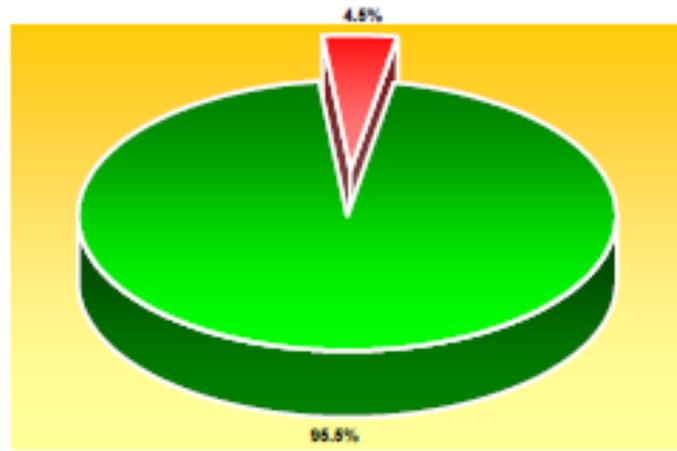
<i>Ward</i>	<i>Number of Households</i>	<i>Number of Empty Homes</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Allt-yr-yn	3638	135	3.7
Alway	3286	87	2.6
Beechwood	3241	79	2.4
Bettws	3402	118	3.5
Caerleon	3409	56	1.6
Gaer	3809	131	3.4
Graig	2221	40	1.8
Langstone	1535	0	0
Liswerry	4300	188	4.4
Llanwern	1213	4	0.3
Malpas	3300	73	2.2
Marshfield	1593	60	3.8
Pillgwenlly	2293	161	7
Ringland	3523	244	6.9
Rogerstone	3628	69	1.9
St Jullians	3588	119	3.3
Shaftesbury	2413	78	3.1
Stow Hill	2047	128	6.2
Tredegarr Park	1421	58	4
Victoria	2675	170	6.4
NEWPORT	56535	1996	3.5

Empty Homes in Each Ward of Newport (Census 2001)



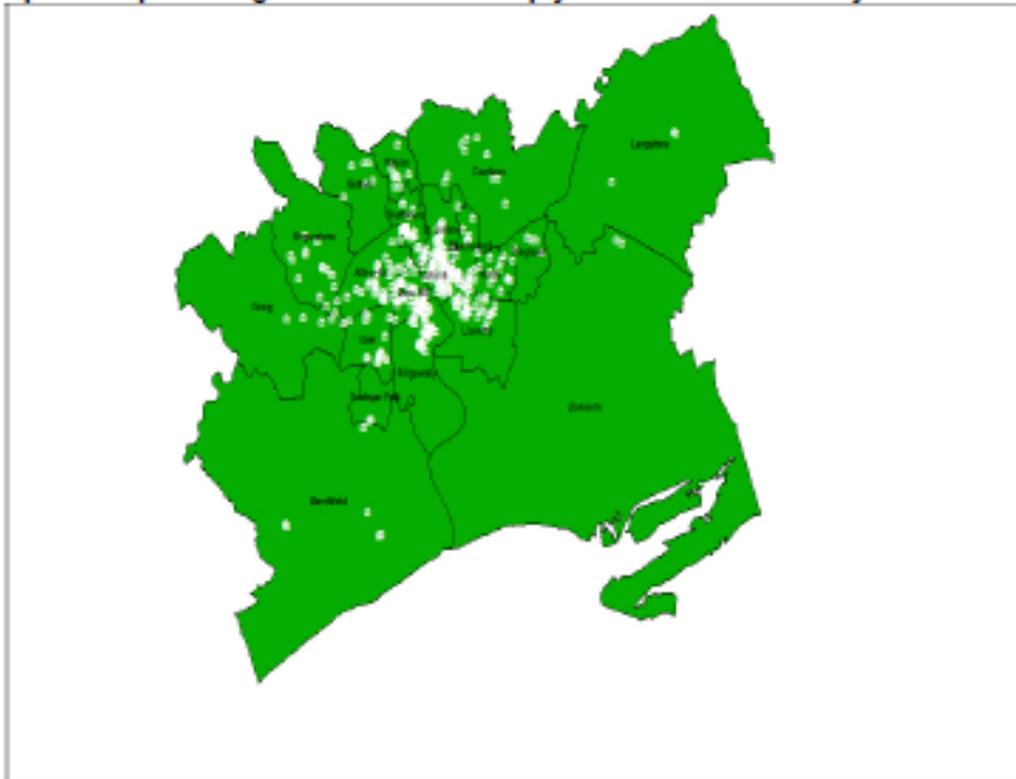
However, when Newport City Council commissioned a Housing Requirement Study in 2003⁴ it found that of the 5,627 addresses approached 257 were recorded as empty homes. This equates to 4.6% of the total housing stock which is higher than the Welsh average of 4%.

Reported Empty Homes from Housing Requirement Study



■ ADDRESSES APPROACHED ■ EMPTY HOMES

Spatial map showing cluster areas for Empty Home's across the City



As illustrated above the Ringland & Pillgwenilly areas show a very high number of empty homes. This can be explained in the Ringland area due to the large number of

demolitions undertaken by Newport City Council over the last three years. However, Pillgwenlly is one of the most deprived wards in Wales and has a significant number of retail properties with flats above the shops that are long-term empty housing units.

It is argued that house prices are lower in areas with an above average number of empty homes. Eighty percent of local authority areas with more than 5% of their dwelling stock empty have house prices below the regional average⁵. House prices in areas with a significant amount of empty homes were close to 30% below the average house price for the UK. Pillgwenlly has an average house price of ⁶£92,045. This is almost 50% cheaper than the average house price in Newport of £138,147.

Housing Demand and Supply in Newport

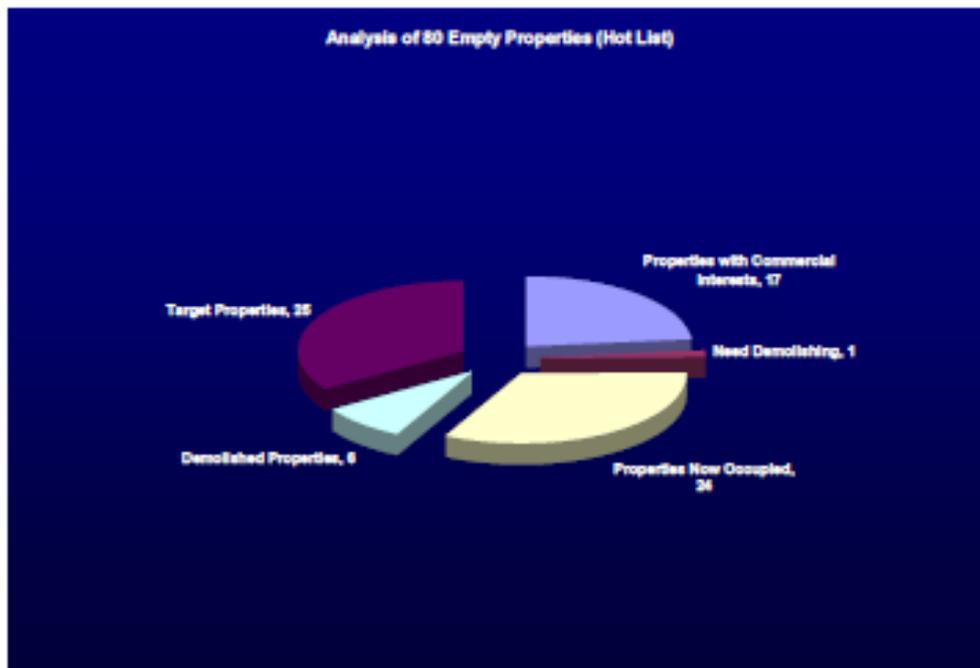
The demand for accessible and affordable accommodation in Newport far outstrips supply and the Council recognises that empty homes must be dealt with effectively. The average house price in Newport of £138,147⁷ is not affordable by a person earning the average Newport wage of £25,027⁸.

In December 2004 7,274⁹ households were registered on Newport City Council's waiting list, furthermore, homelessness applications have increased by 90% in Newport since 1998¹⁰.

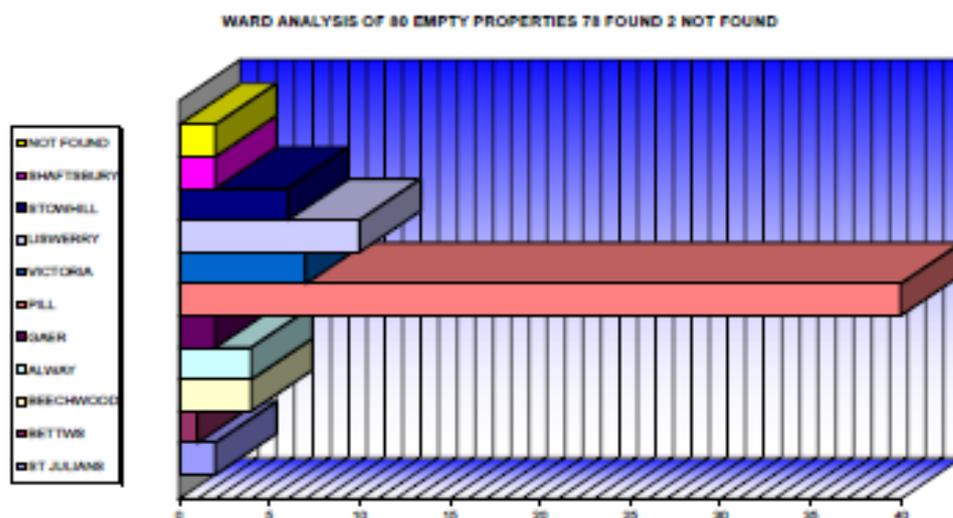
According to the ORS Housing Needs Survey which was undertaken during 2003, Newport's housing requirements for the next 5 years is 619 housing units required overall every year, of which 255 units should be affordable. Given that the number of private sector empty properties in Newport stands at 3.5% (a figure which is above the UK average of 3.4%) it is evident that empty homes represent a wasted resource that could be better used to alleviate homelessness and address housing need in Newport.

NEWPORT'S TOP EIGHTY EMPTIES

The Housing Strategy section took a sample of eighty problem empty properties which has been part of a list kept by the Environmental Health Officers (Housing) and undertook a physical audit of the 80 properties. The graph below shows that from the original sample of 80 25 properties are still long term empty residential properties that are causing a problem for communities around them.



Furthermore, when the original sample was looked at by Elective Ward there is a significant disparity between Pillgwenlly Ward and the rest of the elected wards within the City.



The Analysis of 25 Target Empty Properties

Number of Bedrooms

Number of Bedrooms	Number of Properties	Percentage of Target Properties
1 Bed	0	0%
2 Bed	0	0%
3 Bed	19	76%
4 Bed	1	4%
5 Bed+	2	8%
Unknown	3	12%

Type of Property

Type of Property	Number of Properties	Percentage of Target Properties
Flat	0	0%
Terraced	21	84%
Semi-detached	2	8%
Detached	2	8%

Age of Property

Age of Property	Number of Properties	Percentage of Target Properties
Pre-1919	21	84%
1919-1940	2	8%
1940-1980	1	4%
1980-1980	1	4%
1980+	0	0%

Length of Time Empty

Time Empty	Number of Properties	Percentage of Target Properties
Over 6 Months	0	0%
Over 12 Months	0	0%
Over 2 Years	3	12%
Over 5 Years	13	52%
Over 10 Years	5	20%
Unknown	4	16%

The vast majority of the target empty properties are 3 bedroom, terraced houses built pre-1919 that have been empty for over 5 years.

UNDERSTANDING WHY PROPERTIES BECOME EMPTY

There are various reasons why a property might become or be empty, e.g.:

- disputes over ownership
- awaiting sale
- property is being renovated
- owner hospitalised / institutionalised
- repossession or bankruptcy
- deceased estate
- inability to sell
- low demand
- over supply of certain property types
- Investment holding
- Ownership unresolved
- Inheritance holding

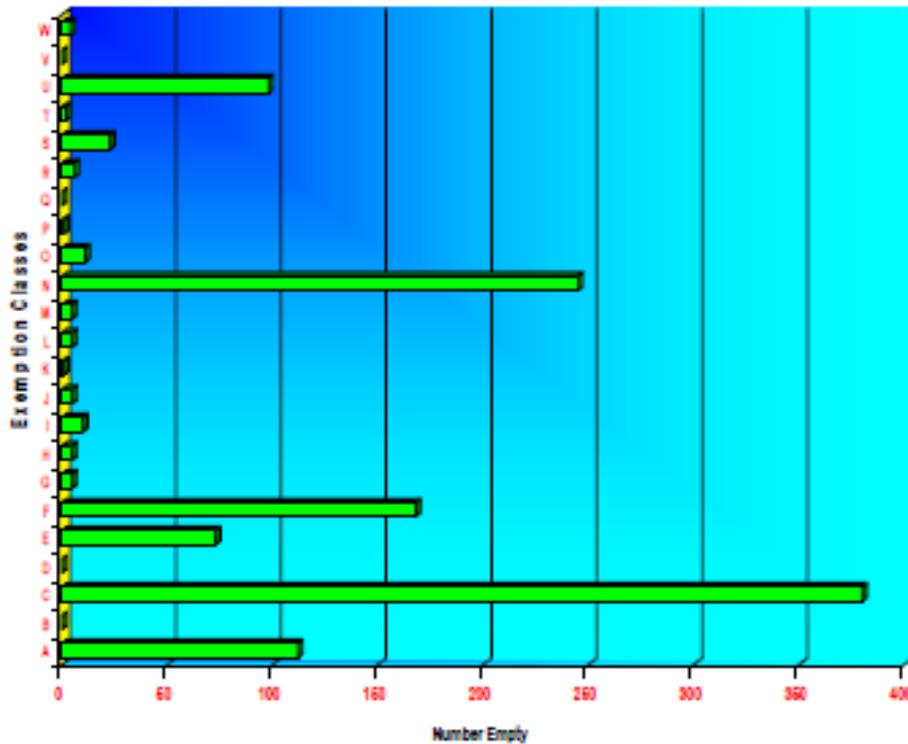
Historically, there have been a number of discounts available to the owner of an empty property. Owners of empty, unfurnished properties that are in a habitable condition have been able to apply for a six month exemption from payment of Council Tax followed by a 50% reduction in the charge until the property is re-occupied. However, in 2003 the Government introduced a discretionary power available to local authorities to impose 100% Council Tax on long-term empty properties. To date in Wales few authorities have used this power. However, there are wider issues for this council's financial performance that need further consideration. The Empty Homes Working Group is working with the Head of Finance on this very issue.

Council Tax Exempt Classes

Class	Description
A	A dwelling that is unoccupied, substantially unfurnished, and requires or is undergoing major repair in order to render it habitable and for up to six months following the substantial completion of repairs. Effective from 1st April 2000, this form of exemption cannot exceed one year.
B	An unoccupied dwelling owned by a charity, maximum period, six months.
C	A dwelling that is unoccupied and substantially unfurnished, maximum period, six months.
D	An unoccupied dwelling where the liable person and last occupier is detained (prisoner).
E	An unoccupied dwelling where the liable person and last occupier have their main address in a hospital or Residential/Care/Nursing Home.
F	An unoccupied dwelling which falls within the estate of a deceased person for up to six months following the issue of the Grant of Probate or Grant of Letters of Administration.
G	A dwelling which is prohibited from occupation by law.
H	An unoccupied dwelling awaiting occupation by a minister of religion.
I	An unoccupied dwelling where the liable person and last occupier is living at another address in order to provide personal care from the other occupier(s) there.
J	An unoccupied dwelling where the liable person and last occupier is living at another address in order to receive personal care from the other occupier(s) there.
K	An unoccupied dwelling where the liable person and last occupier is a full-time student.
L	An unoccupied dwelling where a mortgagee is in possession.
M	Student halls of residence.
N	A dwelling which is occupied solely by students.
O	A dwelling owned by the Ministry of Defence and held for armed forces accommodation.
P	A dwelling where a liable person is a member of a visiting force.
Q	An unoccupied dwelling owned by a bankrupt
R	An unoccupied caravan pitch or boat mooring.
S	An occupied dwelling where no occupier has attained the age of 18.
T	Unoccupied annexes which may not be let separately from that other dwelling without breaching planning control
U	A dwelling which is occupied solely by a person or persons who is or are severely mentally impaired.
V	Diplomats.
W	Annexes occupied by a dependant relative of the occupier(s) of the main dwelling.

Registered Exemptions 08/12/2004

Total 1159



Council Tax Statistics on Empty Properties (2005)

1. Number of domestic units in Newport (2005)	2. Exemption classes for unoccupied dwellings	3. Standard Empties, Exemption periods expired	4. Number of Properties on the Deleted list (indicating they are empty)	5 Total number of empty properties columns 2,3, and 4	6. Total number of Commercial Properties registered in City
59,720	769	765	506	2056	4500 not included at this time in empty housing figures

BENEFITS AND ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Benefits

A Strategy that successfully brings empty properties back in to use will bring the following benefits to the local authority and its residents:

- More housing will be available for those in housing need
- There could be financial gains due to increased Council Tax and reduced pressure on staff time and resources
- A reduction in crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour
- The physical regeneration of areas
- Redevelopment of Brownfield sites and reduced need for Greenfield development
- Response to public concern
- The creation of affordable homes
- Creation of more homes fit for private rent at affordable prices

Newport City Council's achievements in bringing empty properties back into use

The Lower Dock Street Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)

This is a five year scheme with the objective of regenerating the area through the restoration of the built environment. The majority of the buildings in Lower Dock Street date back to the early 19th century and are mainly merchants' housing and commercial premises connected with the railway, canal, River Usk and the development of the Old Town Dock. The street and surrounding area represents an important chapter in the maritime growth of Newport when it would have been a busy and prosperous area of the town.

The scheme commenced in April 2000 as a result of an £800,000 grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund to refurbish buildings of heritage value within the Lower Dock Street Conservation Area. This grant was subsequently match funded by Newport City Council, Local Regeneration Fund (Wales Assembly Government), Welsh Development Agency and Cadw. The scheme comprises of three critical projects, a number of other prominent properties along Lower Dock Street, and a Group Repair Scheme focusing upon residential properties.

The grants programme is fully committed at present, but has been available to property owners for high quality repair, restoration and refurbishment of buildings. As a result of the restoration of these historic buildings new restaurants and businesses are opening in the area.

A fine example is of an old Chandlers Warehouse renovated into a fine modern restaurant. The name of the restaurant is in keeping with the history of the building and the seafaring heritage of this City.



Another old industrial unit now used as a main office and resource centre for Solas formally known as Newport Action for the Single Homeless

Newport City Council has recently submitted a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to run a second scheme in the area. We anticipate that this will begin in April 2005.

Housing Improvements Team Empty Property Grant

The Housing Improvement Team has been running an Empty Property Grant since 2002 which treats one building as one unit rather than allowing for conversions or looking at the grant on a unit basis. Since 2002, it has brought 7 residential units back into re-use and it is suggested that the budget for this grant is reviewed in the light of the current Empty Homes Strategy. The grant allows for 50% of eligible costs or £35,000 whichever is the lower. See pictures below property on the left a sort of blue shell of a before grant aid and the new fine looking renovated property on the right.



