

Advice and Information for Empty Homeowners

Northumberland County Council's Private Sector Housing Team are available to offer you advice and support to return your property to use. We can help you make the most of your property and provide advice tailored to your own individual circumstances.

VAT Discount and Exemptions on Empty Homes

Did you know that a builder can now charge a reduced VAT rate of 5 % compared with the standard rate of 20%, on work to renovate a house that has been empty for two or more years. If you are in the process of buying an empty home to bring back into use this can provide you with significant reduction in the overall building work costs of bringing the home back into use.

For more information, visit the direct gov website or call the VAT Helpline on 0300 200 3700.

You can also contact a member of the team to see if your property is eligible by for the reduced VAT rate by emailing privatesectorhousing@northumberland.gov.uk or call 0345 6400 600 and ask for a member of the Private Sector Housing Team.

Grants

We can also look to see if there is any grant funding available to help towards necessary improvement works to help bring an empty property back into use.

Renting your property

The Council can offer a range of advice and assistance if you would like to rent out your empty property, including free access to our Property and Landlord Accreditation Northumberland Scheme - **PLAN**. We can help owners to source suitable tenants for their properties, by advertising the property on Northumberland Homefinder, and carry out free tenant reference checks. The council can also help tenants raise the deposit needed in the form of a paper bond.

By deciding to rent out your empty property and become a landlord, not only maximises your income, by getting your property accredited with our accreditation scheme PLAN, you will get a range of free benefits such as free yearly membership to the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA), assigned a dedicated Housing Officer who can provide you

with help and advice to start becoming a landlord as well as access to free training plus much more!

For more information about PLAN and the benefits to private landlords please contact the Private Sector Housing Team by emailing privatesectorhousing@northumberland.gov.uk or take a look on our website www.northumberland.gov.uk or call 0345 600 6400.

Selling your property

Northumberland County Council hold an investors list of potential investors for those wishing to sell their empty properties. The council will hold, manage, and pass on the investors details to private owners of empty properties that have expressed, during the course of a discussion, with the Private Sector Housing Team that they wish to consider selling an empty property. We will not be recommending either party and it would be both parties' responsibility to progress and make contact once details are shared by the council.

If you are interested in joining the investors list, please email privatesectorhousing@northumberland.gov.uk or call 0345 600 6400 and ask for the Private Sector Housing Team.

Fly Tipping

Empty properties can be seen as an ideal spot for fly-tipping. If your empty property attracts fly-tipping, it is your responsibility to have it removed and to make sure the property and gardens are secure to prevent any further fly-tipping. Making sure all waste bins are empty and secure will also minimise this.

Council Tax Premiums

Changes have been made to the Council Tax Long Term Empty Homes Premium. The change will come into effect from 1 April 2024

Changes to the Council Tax Long Term Empty Homes Premium were approved at a meeting of Full Council on 21 February 2024. The change will come into effect from 1 April 2024.

The change means that a Long Term Empty Property Premium will now be applied when a property has been unoccupied and unfurnished for one year. Currently the Long-Term Empty Property Premium is applied when a property has been unfurnished and unoccupied for two years.

The Long Term Empty Property Premium is being applied considering the need to reduce the number of empty homes in the County. The Council's aim is to incentivise owners and landlords to bring long term empty properties back into use.

The Empty Homes Premium is being applied as follows:

From 1 April 2024

100% for properties which have been empty and substantially unfurnished for 1 year or more, but less than 5 years. This means 200% council tax is payable.

200% for properties which have been empty and substantially unfurnished for 5 years or more, but less than 10 years. This means 300% council tax is payable.

300% for properties which have been empty and substantially unfurnished for 10 years or more. This means 400% council tax is payable.

Home Insurance

If a property is vacant for more than a certain period of time (30-60 days), depending on the insurer, the policy could be invalid. Contact your insurance company and advise them that the property will be empty to ensure it is covered with the correct insurance policy. An empty home is more likely to be broken into and if you do not have the correct cover, you may be liable for any costs relating to break ins etc. If your property is uninsured, it could be a breach of your mortgage conditions. As could leaving the property empty for a certain length of time.

What will happen if my home remains empty?

Northumberland County Council are keen to assist owners returning their empty properties to use. If a property is considered to be having a detrimental effect on the neighbourhood and voluntary assistance has been rejected the council may take appropriate enforcement action.

If you are an owner of an empty home please contact us, the information you provide can be discussed in strict confidence and we can explore a range of help and support options with you. Please contact the team by email privatesectorhousing@northumberland.gov.uk or call 0345 600 6400 and ask for a member of the Private Sector Housing Team.