



Northumberland County Council

Guide to Empty Homes

What is an Empty Home?

An empty home is classed as a dwelling or residential property which is privately owned and has been unoccupied for six months or more.

Why do Northumberland County Council become involved with Empty properties?

Empty Homes are not just a wasted resource, but they can cause nuisance and environmental problems to neighbouring properties and their communities. Empty homes can also be focus for increased levels of crime, anti - social behaviour and drug abuse. It can also discourage investment in the area.

Bringing empty homes back into use can help us address housing shortage issues. It gives us the opportunity to link suitable empty homes with the increasing housing need.

Minimising the number of long-term empty homes across the county reduces unsightly properties whilst also helping to improve the viability of local communities.

Why do homes remain empty?

Homes become empty for a variety of reasons. Whilst many routinely become empty because of being sold and are then re-occupied, other homes remain empty for a wide range of reasons. They can be a financial burden on owners who simply do not have the funds to refurbish the property to let or sell. Furthermore, if a property is inherited it can take years for the beneficiaries to decide what to do with it. These factors mean empty homes can become stressful and overwhelming for owners to deal with.

What can Northumberland County Council do about Empty Homes?

Northumberland County Council's Private Sector Housing Team specialise in helping and supporting owners of empty homes. We take a proactive approach working with

the owners to help bring them back into use and work with other teams within the Council to take enforcement action if they refuse to act.

The Council has a wide range of formal and informal interventions available to help resolve the many varied problems associated with empty homes. There needs to be a careful assessment of the most appropriate course of action for each case to ensure that homes are brought back into use in a cost-effective way.

Other powers the Council have to tackle problematic empty homes, include the use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) this is an enforcement procedure used to repair, re-let and manage problematic long term empty properties on the owner's behalf for a period of around seven years. Once repaired, the properties are let to tenants on Northumberland County Council's housing register. The costs of the works carried out is deducted from the rental income and paid back to the Owner at the end of the EDMO period. Before an EDMO can be considered for an empty home, a business case shall be produced, with expert opinion to the viability of letting the dwelling, including full costings to bring the property up to the decent home standard.

How to recognise an empty home?

A long-term empty property is usually easy to identify and there are some tell-tale signs to look out for;

- The garden looks poorly maintained and overgrown
- There is rubbish and fly tipping accumulating at the property
- There is a large build-up of uncollected mail in the property
- Signs of disrepair such as broken windows and damage to the roof etc
- The property is fully or partially boarded up.

What are the benefits of bringing empty properties back in to use?

For owners

- Receive an income from the property, by either selling or renting the property

- Helps retain the value of the property which is more likely if it is occupied and maintained
- Reduces monthly bills such as council tax, mortgage repayments, gas and electricity standing charges
- Also helps reduce the risk of the property becoming a target for vandalism and crime.

For the wider community

- Increase housing supply where there are housing shortages
- Helps tackle homelessness
- Reduces the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour in communities
- It makes environmental sense by reusing existing properties to create good quality housing and reduces the reliance on building new homes
- Improves the appearance of the neighbourhood.

Who can I contact to report an empty property?

Please visit our website for our report an empty home form [Report an Empty Home](#)

Private Sector Housing Team, Civic Centre, Renwick Road, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 2BX



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www.northumberland.gov.uk