

Empty Homes Policy

January 2024

Basildon Borough Council

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Date of Cabinet Approval:	
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	(Insert hyperlink) Click or tap to enter a date.
Consultee(s)	
Groups and/or individuals consulted during the development of this Policy:	There is no readily identifiable group representing property owners impacted by this policy. Meaningful consultation has not been possible.
Groups and/or individuals consulted on draft Policy:	There is no readily identifiable group representing property owners impacted by this policy. Meaningful consultation has therefore not been possible.
Policy, Performance and Insights Team approval	Tina Dodd Click or tap to enter a date.
Senior Leadership Team approval	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Click or tap to enter a date.
Has the Policy been considered at a Scrutiny Committee Meeting:	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Place Scrutiny Committee Click or tap to enter a date.
Governance	
The Policy applies to:	(List who is covered by this Policy)
The Policy is available in the following locations:	Publications Scheme <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intranet / SharePoint <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Council website / Service webpage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
This Policy has related documents:	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Insert links to related documents i.e. Strategy, Action Plan
The Policy was disseminated to:	
This Policy is due its next review:	Every 5 years

Document Control				
Date	Officer Name, title	Version	Action	Amendment(s)

Contents

0. Foreword	2
1. Introduction	2
2. Policy Statement	2
3. Background	2
3.1 The benefits of bringing empty homes back into use	2
3.2 National Context.....	3
3.3 Local Context	4
4. Who or what will be affected by the Policy?	5
4.1 Inclusion and Diversity	5
5. Corporate Knowledge.....	5
6. Accompanying Strategy	6
7. Links to other Corporate Policies or Partner documents	6
8. Appendices	6
9. Resources	6

0. Foreword

It is important to improve the physical urban environment in the borough by bringing empty properties back in to use as quality housing accommodation and to raise awareness of the issues surrounding empty properties and the impact they have on local communities.

High levels of empty properties are recognised as having a serious impact on the viability of communities. Consequently, it has been identified that dealing with empty properties can have social, regenerative, financial and strategic benefits.

1. Introduction

High levels of empty properties in an area can have a serious impact on the sustainability of communities. Basildon Borough Council's Housing Strategy 2023 - 2028 has identified "Improve access to housing opportunities and choice" as one of its three priorities. Any activity that brings empty homes back into use is supportive of delivering the housing strategy.

2. Policy Statement

To reduce the number of long-term empty homes in the Borough

Actively pursuing this policy aims to bring about the occupation of empty housing stock and thus increase the supply of housing.

Bringing empty homes back into use has clear advantages for the authority and its residents:

- It assists in meeting housing supply
- It improves the look and feel of a neighbourhood.

This is a corporate policy that is intended to reduce the number of long-term empty homes within the borough.

3. Background

3.1 The benefits of bringing empty homes back into use

There are significant advantages for everyone when empty homes are brought back into use.

For owners

- It unlocks potential capital if the property is sold. It will produce rental income if it is let and there is the potential for an increase in property value.
- It reduces the risk of vandalism, crime, fire risk and insurance claims against these risks (if indeed the property can be insured when vacant).

For residents

- It reduces the opportunities for vandalism, fly tipping and antisocial behaviour.
- It overcomes the negative effect empty unsightly properties have on an area such as reducing property values and lowering pride in a neighbourhood.
- It contributes to area regeneration, spending in the local economy and encourages investment.

For the Council and other public services

- It may reduce demands on the Police and Fire Service consequent upon problems associated with empty properties.
- Contribution to supply of stock to meet local housing need.

3.2 National Context

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) classes empty homes as those that are inactive in the housing market and have been empty for more than six months. Data published by the DLUHC shows that, as of October 2022, the numbers of long-term empty homes nationally rose by 11,293 (or 5%) to 248,633. Long-term empties are now at their highest level since 2011 (excepting 2020's pandemic-related data).

The government has placed considerable emphasis on the importance of returning empty homes to use and the 2011 Housing Strategy document, 'Laying the Foundations' ¹ stated:

'We are committed to bringing empty homes back into use, as a sustainable way of increasing the overall supply of housing and reducing the negative impact that neglected empty homes can have on communities.'

In terms of Planning Policy, Paragraph 51 of the National Planning Policy Framework, updated on 20 July 2021, highlights the expectation that local authorities will address the empty homes issue locally:

'Local planning authorities should identify and bring back into residential use empty housing and buildings in line with local housing and empty homes strategies and, where appropriate, acquire properties under compulsory purchase powers.'

The Local Government Act 2012 introduced technical reforms to council tax, enabling local authorities to determine local levels of discount for certain classes of dwelling.

For up to three months, any property left unoccupied and unfurnished will receive a 50% council tax discount. After three months, full rates will apply.

From 1 April 2021, additional premiums apply to properties left unoccupied for over two years, as follows:

- If empty for over two years - full council tax rates will be payable plus an additional 100% charge
- If empty for over five years - full council tax rates will be payable plus an additional 200% charge
- If empty for over ten years - full council tax rates will be payable plus an additional 300% charge

The VAT chargeable on renovation works has been reduced to 5% for properties empty for over two years and 0% on properties empty for over 10 years. The council can provide evidence that a property has been empty from council tax records to owners of an empty home to enable them to claim these VAT discounts.

3.3 Local Context

As at March 2023 there were 156 properties that had been empty for over 2 years with a 100% council tax levy applied. 125 properties are on the Class F exemption list where the owners have passed away, but no probate has been granted. For properties with a Class F exemption, council tax is not payable until after probate has been granted.

These homes are empty for a variety of reasons including new builds and permitted developments that are yet to be occupied. There are also a number of HRA properties which are awaiting demolition/redevelopment.

The table below sets out the number of empty homes in each Essex authority as at October 2022.

	Date to which figures relate																			
	01-Nov	10-Oct	09-Oct	08-Oct	06-Oct	05-Oct	04-Oct	03-Oct	01-Oct	07-Oct	06-Oct	05-Oct	03-Oct	02-Oct	01-Oct	07-Oct	05-Oct	04-Oct	03-Oct	
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
Lower and Single Tier Authority Data																				
England	318,642	313,616	314,719	314,285	326,954	316,251	299,999	277,529	254,059	216,050	205,821	203,596	200,145	205,293	216,186	225,845	268,385	237,340	248,149	
Basildon	482	582	545	452	462	581	579	471	564	470	339	315	374	414	390	363	494	486	596	
Bramtree	700	757	768	841	755	805	827	747	622	535	601	603	592	581	647	707	568	614	785	
Brentwood	248	270	295	257	275	255	238	241	185	119	119	113	275	359	271	273	395	355	483	
Castle Point	252	258	305	323	311	321	327	364	358	291	258	225	216	230	290	332	356	326	320	
Chelmsford	452	480	530	507	629	550	517	420	444	276	412	356	377	435	480	510	639	479	501	
Colchester	653	655	543	612	742	636	569	591	506	627	518	487	494	554	648	578	746	585	620	
Epping Forest	821	934	753	558	611	607	680	708	647	451	431	374	429	426	374	300	612	472	558	
Harlow	163	180	163	141	138	98	123	189	218	144	125	109	120	225	322	359	479	432	424	
Maldon	210	298	311	328	338	252	235	231	202	177	247	196	207	213	194	282	326	238	248	
Rochford	338	366	430	432	437	452	395	338	271	257	174	189	181	223	266	277	313	370	293	
Southend-on-Sea	877	950	1,069	903	845	829	927	1,012	809	634	824	593	701	615	596	630	724	643	658	
Tendring	834	989	1,225	1,256	1,196	961	950	859	900	703	626	527	479	498	627	652	1,206	789	707	
Thurrock	319	696	747	679	657	683	664	618	638	350	192	214	131	129	152	166	261	260	342	
Uttlesford	413	461	301	338	329	370	340	355	295	221	246	168	161	220	278	209	224	215	253	

There are a number of properties that have been empty for many years and therefore, the council needs to consider using the various tools that are available to it to bring them back into use.

Research on various methods that have been used elsewhere to bring empty homes back into use has been undertaken. These methods and tools will be used, as appropriate, to the circumstances of each empty home.

4. Who or what will be affected by the Policy?

Owners of empty homes, residents and neighbours, the Council and other public services for example the police and fire service.

4.1 Inclusion and Diversity

Equality is about treating individuals fairly, supported by legislation designed to promote equality and eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Diversity is about the recognition and valuing of difference for the benefit of the Council and the individual.

An equality impact assessment has been carried out. There have been no barriers identified for any specific protected characteristics. We remain committed to identifying, understanding and eliminating all barriers that prevent access to services, information and employment, including as a result of the delivery of this policy. Our approach will take account of the specific needs which a home owner may have during our engagement with them.

5. Corporate Knowledge

Corporate Ambitions	Levels of Impact			
	High	Medium	Low	None
We want Basildon to be home to healthy and active local communities able to support themselves and each other.		X		
We want Basildon to offer a high quality of life for all residents through attractive, liveable, accessible and safe neighbourhoods and towns	X			

along with the provision of enduring facilities, green spaces and town centres that meet the needs of the community.				
We want Basildon to have a thriving, dynamic and diverse economy where all our communities benefit from increased opportunity and our workforce has the right skills for our local economy and beyond.		X		

Outcome and Priorities

Outcome	Priority
Make the most of existing homes in the Borough	Corporate

6. Accompanying Strategy

[Empty Homes Strategy 2023 Final version - 2.docx](#)

7. Links to other Corporate Policies or Partner documents

The Housing Strategy 2023 – 2028

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy 2019 - 2024

Corporate Plan

8. Appendices

None.

9. Resources

To effectively deliver this policy a collaborative approach involving the following council services is required:

- Environmental Health
- Housing Need

- Asset Management
- Planning
- Finance
- Legal
- Policy
- Revenues
- Development and Investment

A working group with representatives from each of the services has been established and meets every two months. This working group reports to the Homelessness Taskforce.

Terms of reference for the Empty Properties Working Group are included here:

[Empty Property Working Group - TOR.docx](#)

Monday to Friday
10am to 5pm



Basildon Council
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