Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Empty homes strategy 2026-2031

Bringing empty homes back into use

FOREWORD

Providing good-quality housing and creating thriving neighbourhoods remain among the Council's highest priorities. At a time of increasing pressure on the housing market, it is more important than ever that we make the best possible use of the homes we already have.

Long-term empty properties are a lost opportunity. While many residents struggle to access suitable housing, homes standing vacant can also undermine neighbourhood confidence, attract anti-social behaviour and detract from the character of our communities.

Bringing these properties back into use benefits everyone – providing much-needed homes, improving local places and supporting wider regeneration.

I am proud of the progress made through our existing **Empty property strategy**. Through effective partnership working, proactive engagement with owners and, where necessary, decisive enforcement action, we have surpassed our target of bringing 375 empty properties back into occupation and delivered lasting benefits for communities across the Borough.

The challenges facing the housing sector continue however, and this strategy sets out how we will respond.

Building on our successful foundations, we will continue to work with owners to overcome barriers to bringing properties back into use, whilst taking robust action where long-term vacancy continues to harm local communities.

We have set ourselves a target to bring another 400 properties back into use over the life of this strategy. In doing so, the strategy directly supports the Council's commitment to **Better homes for all**, helping to increase housing availability, improve housing quality and create sustainable, resilient communities.

Bringing empty homes back into use also complements our wider **cost of living** work. By increasing access to housing, reducing the number of properties standing unused and helping owners overcome barriers to occupation, we can make a positive contribution to housing affordability, community wellbeing and economic resilience.

I look forward to working with residents, property owners and partner organisations to deliver the ambitions set out in this strategy and continue our strong record of making empty properties into great homes.

Councillor Nathan England

Cabinet Member for Housing, Enforcement and Transport

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INTRODUCTION

This **Empty homes strategy** sets out the Council's approach to reducing the number of long-term empty homes across the Borough during the period 2026-2031. It provides a framework for how we will identify, engage with and support owners of empty properties, whilst ensuring that appropriate intervention is taken where properties remain vacant without justification.

Properties become vacant for many different reasons. Some owners face financial, legal or personal circumstances that prevent them from returning a property to use, whilst others may lack the knowledge, confidence or resources needed to bring a home back into occupation. Recognising that every property and ownership situation is different, the Council will adopt a flexible and proportionate approach that balances support, advice and encouragement with formal enforcement action where necessary.

The strategy reflects both national and local priorities to make better use of existing housing stock. Returning empty homes to occupation represents a sustainable way of increasing housing availability without the need for additional land or significant new infrastructure. It also supports wider ambitions for place-making, neighbourhood renewal and the effective use of existing community assets.

Delivery of the strategy will rely on collaboration. Success will continue to depend upon strong partnerships with property owners, registered providers, community organisations, developers, funding bodies and other public sector partners. Through these partnerships, we will seek to overcome barriers to occupation, maximise opportunities for investment and deliver positive outcomes for residents and communities alike.

Progress against this strategy will be reviewed annually and reported to Cabinet, providing the opportunity to respond to emerging issues and changing circumstances.

Before

After

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS FROM THE PREVIOUS STRATEGY

386 homes brought back into use

exceeding our target of 375 of which:

238
were subject to complaints about ASB

285
were in Safer Stronger Areas

Contributed to 41% reduction
in crime and ASB
(as part of the wider Safer Streets/Safer Stronger programme)

Creating homes for
more than 900 people*
*based on census data

£76,000
brought back in debt owed to the Council

259
were in Council Tax bands A-C

519 inspections carried out
leading to improvements and homes back into use

5,145 contacts and actions
supporting private owners to bring homes back into use

114 properties acquired by the Council:

63 being used to support vulnerable groups including those facing homelessness or needing specialist and adapted accommodation

51 homes refurbished and re-let via a blend of private and affordable rents, creating a financially sustainable, socially responsible portfolio by Nuplace through Telford and Wrekin Homes.

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THE CHALLENGE IN 2021…

In 2021 we had 1,009 long-term empty homes many causing antisocial behaviour, fire risks, vandalism and community decline across the Borough.

Drawing on Borough-wide resources

Police, fire service, housing enforcement, public protection, anti-social behaviour and planning teams were all being inundated with complaints.

Complex legal and financial issues

Many empty properties were tied up in probate, absent owners, title disputes, and financial complications, meaning we were left to secure properties and clear up rubbish with no one to re-charge.

Homelessness

At the same time, we had many families in expensive temporary and B&B accommodation.

Neglected property

What we did...

Strategic response

A dedicated strategy set a target of **bringing 375 long term empty homes back into use.**

Resource

Two dedicated officers were employed to focus on this work.

Financial commitment

An empty property fund was set up as a revolving pot to deal with unclaimed properties or the most complicated properties.

Direct acquisition

We have worked with our largest social housing provider to make best use of their empty stock identified for disposal. Through private treaty we have been able to grow our affordable and private rented stock for our general needs residents through **Telford and Wrekin Homes**, a sub brand of **Nuplace**, our wholly owned housing company.

Bespoke commissioning

We worked with our Housing Commissioning team to identify long-term empty properties that could be acquired and repurposed to meet priority housing needs, including temporary accommodation and specialist or supported homes for residents with more complex requirements.

How we did it...

Advice and support

- Working directly with empty property owners to understand the barriers preventing a property from being brought back into use and providing tailored advice and practical solutions.
- Supporting owners, landlords, executors, beneficiaries and families with complex issues such as probate, inheritance matters, family disputes, abandoned properties and legal responsibilities.
- Assisting with property refurbishment and re-occupation by providing information on loans, reduced VAT schemes, local contractors, council tax, valuation matters and other financial incentives.
- Helping owners explore options for selling, renting or renovating their property, including access to specialist advice, auctions, lenders and partner organisations.
- Working with vulnerable owners and partner agencies to ensure appropriate support is in place, and the best possible outcomes are achieved.
- Tracing owners and resolving issues relating to property debt, maintenance, insurance, neighbour concerns and long-term vacancy.
- Providing clear guidance on council tax premiums, exemptions and other obligations associated with owning an empty property.

232 properties were brought back into use through advice and support

Financial incentives

- Since the adoption of the previous strategy, the Council has implemented the full range of Council Tax premiums for long-term empty properties. Homes left vacant for more than 12 months are now subject to increased Council Tax charges, creating a strong financial incentive for owners to bring properties back into use
- We have also partnered with our local Just Credit Union to provide owners with an affordable Better Homes for All loan to help with refurbishment
- We support owners to access government VAT relief available for properties that have been empty for more than two years, reducing refurbishment costs and encouraging the return of long-term vacant homes to productive use
- We have also carried out a thorough overhaul of all long-term empty properties exempt from council tax to ensure the exemptions still apply. Where appropriate we have applied for exemptions to be removed, allowing us to work with owners to return properties back into use

Before

After

Other novel approaches

- We work directly with banks to support the repossession of empty and derelict properties
- We have worked with the HM Crown to bring properties back into use that are subject to Escheat (unclaimed property returned back to the Crown)
- Facilitating the reuse of vacant park homes by working with owners to provide affordable housing solutions
- Working with owners of empty flats above shops

Before

After

Legal courses of action

- Where owners do not engage, are untraceable, or where we have unregistered properties which continue to cause serious problems, we are among a small number of local authorities nationally prepared to take formal legal action to resolve issues and bring homes back into use.
- In many cases, starting formal legal proceedings is enough to prompt some owners into taking action.
- Where necessary, we have successfully used enforced sale and order of sale powers through the Courts to transform properties that had stood empty for up to 20 years.

Before

After

16 properties were brought back into use using enforcement

Nuplace and Telford & Wrekin Homes

Nuplace and Telford & Wrekin Homes (TWH) have worked with Housing Plus Group to return long-term empty or redundant homes to active use. The partnership identifies properties across the Borough that required substantial investment due to their age and condition. Without intervention, these homes would have remained vacant, failing to contribute to the borough's housing supply or neighbourhood wellbeing. Through a coordinated refurbishment programme, each property has been upgraded to contemporary standards and re-let to meet a broad range of local housing needs.

The Approach

Nuplace and TWH implemented a structured refurbishment and acquisition programme, ensuring all properties were fully modernised to Nuplace specifications prior to purchase. This flexible strategy enabled the acquisition of a broad mix of 1 to 4 bedroom homes across the borough, guided by monthly commissioning reviews with council colleagues to align acquisitions with specific end-user requirements, including larger families and specialist placements. Refurbishment works focused on improving overall standards of safety, functionality and condition to deliver high-quality, compliant homes suitable for long-term occupation.

The Impact

- 114 empty homes refurbished and brought back into use
- Properties are let through a blend of private and affordable rents, creating a financially sustainable and socially responsible portfolio

Before

After

- Homes positioned strategically to support wider Council priorities, including:
  - Suitable housing for foster families
  - Specialist placements informed by assessed needs
- Enhanced neighbourhoods through the transformation of previously empty or deteriorating properties

This partnership demonstrates how the strategic refurbishment and re-use of existing housing stock can deliver high-quality, cost-effective homes while supporting broader community objectives. By focusing on empty and redundant properties, Nuplace and TWH are increasing supply, reducing voids, and helping ensure that housing across the borough continues to meet the needs of local residents both now and in the future.

Stalled sites

Our empty property work has expanded to target stalled development sites across the borough, encompassing both commercial and residential properties where development or refurbishment has ceased. These sites are often the subject of complaints relating to anti-social behaviour, environmental decline and neighbourhood blight.

We work collaboratively with owners and partners to identify barriers to progress, explore innovative solutions, and support the redevelopment, occupation and productive reuse of these properties for the benefit of local communities.

Before

After

CASE STUDY

THE RED LION PUB

The Red Lion Pub had been on the stalled sites register for a number of years. It was attracting anti social behaviour and causing neighbourhood blight.

With Local Authority investment plus £1m external grant secured we have been able to transform this site into 11 units of Local Authority owned/operated supported accommodation providing a better quality of life and home in their local community for a number of our most vulnerable people.

- Using modern methods of construction we have been able to provide a highly sustainable energy efficient building
- Modern, independent living for adults with learning disabilities
- Delivered £183,000 pa saving/cost avoidance to Adult Social Care allowing for investment into further front line services
- Supporting step down, avoidance of residential care and out of area placements
- Aligns with Building the Right Support and wider national priorities - promoting ordinary living, reducing reliance on residential care, supporting people to remain close to their communities and support networks

"The residents love having their own space, a place to belong and call home."

Jacqueline Scott, Project Manager, Lion House

Before

After

National partnerships

Throughout the strategy, we have strengthened national and regional partnerships to share best practice, build officer expertise and explore new approaches that support our aims of bringing more empty properties back into use.

We are active members of national forums such as the Empty Homes Network and Action on Empty Homes.

Since the adoption of the previous strategy, we have actively supported a number of national lobbying initiatives aimed at raising the profile and importance of empty property work. This has included advocating for the introduction of a National Empty Property Strategy and calling for empty property activity to be recognised as a statutory housing function, ensuring greater consistency, priority and resourcing across local authorities.

Regional partnerships

We are active members of the West Midlands Empty Property Group and regularly host meetings in Telford, providing a forum for professionals to discuss complex cases, share knowledge and develop solutions to challenging legal issues.

CASE STUDY

CHANGING LIVES – FROM ROUGH SLEEPING TO A FRONT DOOR

A young couple fleeing family-related violence were rough sleeping; with poor mental health and a worsening long-term condition; they needed safety, stability, and a place to build trust in services.

By bringing an empty property back into use we have provided supported accommodation with wrap-around practical and emotional support (move-in, utilities, benefits, trust-building).

As a result the couple are settled building positive relationships with neighbours, have improved mental/physical health, reconnected with family, and began planning for work/training and long-term housing.

This empty property has been transformed into a safe, stable home and foundation for a new life.

Before

After

CASE STUDY

UNOCCUPIED AND DERELICT BUNGALOW

Buried deep behind a number of 20 foot conifer trees, was an unoccupied and derelict bungalow. Being constantly broken into and used for anti-social behaviour and other forms of criminality, this property was an eyesore and source of fear for the neighbourhood. The property had been in this condition for many years.

After extensive engagement with the owner, they agreed to sell the property to the local authority. Taking into consideration the need for affordable bungalows, we have repurposed this property for a family in need of a level access property. The conifers have been removed, eliminating cover for anti-social behaviour and criminal activity while creating more light and open space for the wider neighbourhood.

Residents have reported feeling happier and safer as a result.

Before

After

CASE STUDY CONTINUED

Mrs Jones, neighbour, comments,

"The Conifers had been empty for quite a while. The windows were getting broken, we were getting people hanging around here and dumping rubbish. It was just an eyesore. The trees were causing an issue too. And now they've done it up, it's a nice bungalow now."

Before

After

LOCAL RECOGNITION

Resident, Drew White, comments:

“I want to express my gratitude and appreciation for the Empty Homes Strategy. Over the years, the team has worked with a number of landlords and property owners bringing derelict properties into use, many of which are now lived in.

“I personally thank the team so much for everything they’ve done, with the challenging estate like Sutton Hill, they’ve done a terrific job turning these houses back into family homes.”

Before

After

NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Our novel approach to tacking empty properties received peer-recognised national sector recognition by the Local Government Chronicle. Being shortlisted out of 100 housing entries nationally, the judges commented:

"A strong example of a political priority translated into action, with impressive community engagement and excellent results in bringing homes back into use. The submission demonstrates clear savings delivered to the council alongside positive community outcomes."

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Empty homes strategy

2026-2031

will bring 400 empty homes back into use

WHY DO WE NEED A NEW STRATEGY?

Trends in long-term empty properties

Across England there has been an increase in long-term empty properties since 2021. The latest data published by the Ministry of Housing, communities and local government[1] shows that between 2021 and 2025 the number of long-term empty properties in England increased by 27.7%.

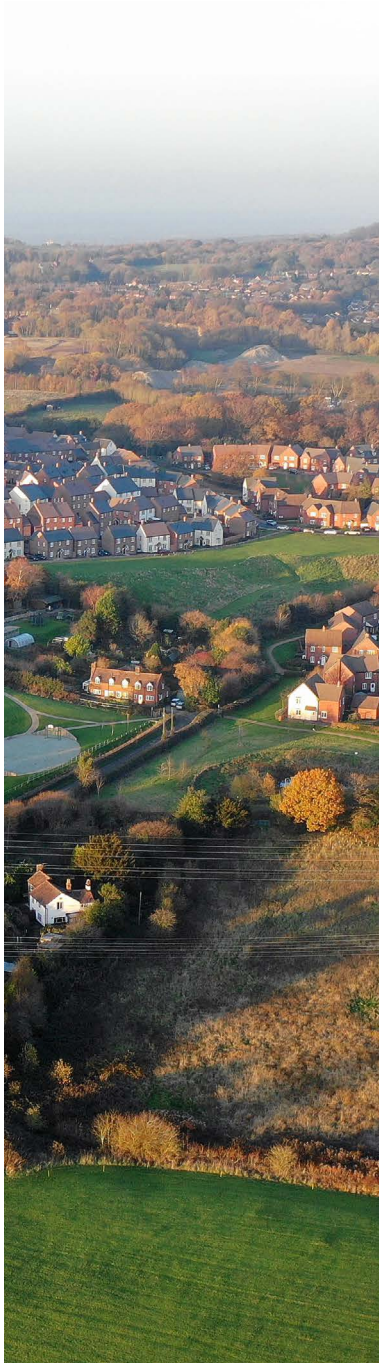
In Telford and Wrekin, despite the success of our work, there has also been an increase in long-term empty properties although the borough rate was lower than the national average in October 2025 with 8.5 per 1,000 dwellings in 2025, compared with 11.7 per 1,000 for England.

The increase in long-term empty properties since 2021 is unlikely to be attributable to any single factor. Nationally, numbers have risen steadily since the pandemic, reflecting a combination of delayed probate and complex ownership cases, increasing repair and renovation costs, higher borrowing costs, changes within the private rented sector and a slower housing market for properties requiring significant work. Changes to Council Tax premiums and increased scrutiny of empty and second homes may also have improved the identification and classification of previously under-recorded properties.

Central Government and national context

National housing policy is increasingly focused not only on building new homes but also on making the best use of existing housing assets. The government has committed to a major programme of council house building and action to tackle homelessness, whilst housing organisations and local government leaders continue to advocate for stronger measures to bring long-term empty homes back into occupation. At the same time, demand for affordable housing continues to outstrip supply, increasing pressure on housing waiting lists, homelessness services and temporary accommodation.

The Council's Housing Strategy 2025-2030 recognises the importance of increasing housing availability, improving affordability and ensuring that residents can access suitable homes that meet their needs. Bringing empty homes back into use makes a direct contribution to these objectives by increasing the supply of housing, creating opportunities for affordable accommodation and making better use of existing community assets. It provides a sustainable and cost-effective complement to new housebuilding, helping to meet local housing need whilst supporting the delivery of the Council's wider housing and regeneration ambitions.



What will we do:

Based on the learning from the last five years we propose to:

Reporting and communications

- deliver targeted communications campaigns encouraging residents to **report an empty property** and raising awareness of the support available to owners.
- publish regular updates on the impact of the strategy, highlighting successful projects, neighbourhood improvements and homes returned to occupation to maintain public confidence and support.
- consider appropriate use of publicity where enforcement action has been required, demonstrating that the Council will take action where owners refuse to engage and properties continue to blight communities.

Support, advice and early intervention

- continue to provide advice, guidance and practical support to empty property owners to help bring homes back into use.
- expand in-house expertise and specialist knowledge on empty property solutions, funding opportunities and enforcement powers.
- increase proactive approach by issuing early warning letters to owners of long-term empty properties, encouraging engagement before formal action is considered.
- work proactively with landlords who are leaving the private rented sector to explore options that prevent properties becoming vacant.

Strengthen partnerships and intelligence

- establish more formal referral arrangements with services including Adult Social Care, Housing Solutions, Council Tax, Community Safety, Public Protection and Planning Enforcement.
- work with partners such as town and parish councils to provide early intelligence on void properties.
- continue to work with Police, Fire Service and Community Safety partners to identify and prioritise empty properties associated with anti-social behaviour, crime, arson risk, environmental issues and wider neighbourhood blight.
- further develop partnership working through the West Midlands Empty Property Group to share best practice and innovative approaches.
- work closely with our Housing Action Team (HAT), neighbourhood coordinators and community partners to identify and address empty properties at an early stage.
- strengthen information sharing with organisations

such as the Valuation Office Agency and Land Registry to improve property intelligence and ownership tracing.

- develop relationships with property finders and acquisition specialists to identify opportunities to bring vacant properties back into use.
- strengthen partnership working with Adult Social Care, health and voluntary sector organisations, including Age UK, to provide early intervention and advice where properties become empty due to bereavement, probate delays, declining health or a move into care.

Place making

- ensure that empty properties form part of wider social housing and affordable housing delivery projects, including our South Telford Estates and programmes such as Pride in Place.
- work with charities and community organisations that can renovate and manage empty properties to provide accommodation for those in housing need.
- explore innovative delivery models that support both housing supply and community benefit.

Skills, training and regeneration

- partner with local colleges, retrofit academies and training providers to transform empty properties into quality homes.
- use empty property projects to create apprenticeships, work placements and skills development opportunities for local people.
- support the delivery of retrofit and energy-efficiency improvements, helping to create sustainable and affordable homes.

Enforcement and compliance

- seek to resolve cases through advice and negotiation wherever possible.
- use enforcement powers where informal approaches have not been successful and properties continue to blight communities.
- take a proportionate and intelligence-led approach to enforcement, focusing resources on long-term empty properties that have the greatest impact on neighbourhoods.

Supporting communities

- empower neighbourhood coordinators and local communities to identify and report problematic empty properties.
- target action in areas where empty properties contribute to housing demand pressures, anti-social behaviour or neighbourhood decline.
- work with partners to ensure empty homes become assets that support thriving and sustainable communities.

Increase affordable and specialist housing supply

- continue to work with Nuplace and Telford & Wrekin Homes to acquire and refurbish strategically important empty properties, ensuring they contribute to wider housing priorities and generate long-term benefits for residents.
- expand partnership working with registered providers, charities, developers and support providers to identify opportunities for the reuse of empty homes for vulnerable households and priority client groups.
- explore opportunities to use empty properties to support wider strategic priorities including temporary accommodation, move-on accommodation, supported living, foster care households and independent living schemes.

Financial support

- explore innovative financial models and investment mechanisms, including loans, grants, revolving funds and partnership investment opportunities, to support owners in bringing properties back into use.

What will success look like

- 400 empty homes brought back into use
- A focus on properties:
  - in council tax bands A-C
  - that have been empty the longest
  - with significant debts owed to the Council, including unpaid Council Tax or costs incurred where we have had to secure the property due to vandalism or clear fly-tipping.
  - that are subject to complaints
- A continued reduction in anti social behaviour and crime associated with empty properties

OUR COMMITMENT TO BRING LONG TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES BACK INTO USE WILL ENSURE WE CONTINUE TO:

- **protect, care and invest in our Borough** by increasing the supply of affordable properties we will ensure **every child, young person and adult lives well in their community**
- address the anti-social behaviour, crime and blight associated with long term empty properties, **ensuring all neighbourhoods are a great place to live** and ensuring **safer and stronger communities**
- deliver our commitments under Telford and Wrekin's housing strategy 2025-2030:
  - to create sustainable, accessible, affordable and integrated communities
  - to make the BEST use of our existing homes
  - to provide homes to support and empower our most vulnerable people
- Support households experiencing cost of living pressures by bringing empty properties back into use as affordable, energy-efficient homes, increasing housing choice and reducing pressure on the existing housing market.

Empty homes strategy

2026-2031

Bringing long term empty homes back into use

www.telford.gov.uk/emptyhomes