

# Empty Homes in England



Empty Homes – the national campaigning charity aims in England to:

- Raise awareness of the waste of long-term empty homes.
- Research, develop and work with others to test ideas for bringing long-term empty homes back into use for those in housing need.
- Provide encouragement and advice for those seeking to bring empty homes back into use, or concerned about empty homes.
- Campaign for changes to policy and initiatives at national and local levels that will enable more action to bring empty homes back into use for those in housing need.

For more information on the work of Empty Homes-the national campaigning charity visit: [www.emptyhomes.com](http://www.emptyhomes.com)

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# Introduction

This is the 2017 edition of *Empty Homes in England*<sup>1</sup> produced by Empty Homes – the national campaigning charity. It analyses and explains the latest data available from the Government’s official statistics on long-term vacant dwellings in England. We want to spread understanding of that data, why homes are empty, particularly in the longer term, and what can be done to make more use of existing properties to meet housing needs.

The Government’s latest official statistics record around 200,000 long-term (more than six months) empty homes in England.<sup>2</sup> They were compiled from the record taken by local authorities in October 2016 as part of their Council Taxbase returns to central Government.<sup>3</sup> The total number of long-term empty homes recorded in October 2016 dropped by 3,451 to 200,145 from the 203,596 recorded in October 2015 (a 1.7% reduction). This downward trend has been apparent since 2008 when the Government data recorded 326,954 long-term vacant dwellings.

We urge anyone using these statistics to take time to understand how they are calculated, and how changes in policies through time may have impacted on the recording of empty homes. We explore these issues below and why we think the official statistics do not give us a full picture of long-term empty homes. In addition, we encourage people looking at empty homes statistics in any area to use them as a starting point for asking questions and undertaking analysis; we would caution against leaping to conclusions about what is happening there, or why it differs from other places and over time.

We do not pretend that all empty homes are problematic. Some properties on the market for sale or renting will soon be occupied again. We encourage a focus on long-term empty homes. If a property has not become re-occupied within six months, we encourage local authorities

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- 1 Empty Homes operates in England only and this is one of the reasons our report focuses on England. Another reason is that there are different legislative provisions for council tax that mean that our analysis cannot be simply read across to Wales and Scotland. For information on empty homes in Wales contact Shelter Cymru: <http://sheltercymru.org.uk> and for Scotland contact Shelter Scotland: <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/>
  - 2 Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) ‘Live Tables on Dwelling Stock (Including Vacants)’: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>
  - 3 Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) ‘Council Taxbase 2016 in England’: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/council-taxbase-2016-in-england>

to investigate what is happening – is it nearing being lived in again, or is it stuck empty for some reason? Then a local authority can take a view on whether to intervene, and how best to use its resources and powers to help ensure that the property does not remain empty.

In most parts of England, the housing market currently works such that homes are generally readily sold or let again; nonetheless homes become stuck empty in all parts of England. Local authorities tell us that this tends to be related to the personal and financial circumstances of the empty home owners. They advise that a case work approach – from advice to enforcement action – is what helps to ensure these properties become occupied.

However, in some parts of England, the relatively high levels of long-term empty homes suggest that there are underlying causes as to why homes are not so readily sold or let again. Our mapping of the data at local authority level shows that many of the local authority areas with higher levels of long-term empty homes are found in the North of England.

We draw on our recent survey of local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes to explore these issues.<sup>4</sup> Our research found that local authorities with higher levels of long-term empty homes tend to have lower house prices and higher levels of deprivation, with households on lower incomes than the rest of England.

The official data is only available at a local authority level, which masks much higher levels of long-term empty homes in some neighbourhoods. Our research found that neighbourhoods with these concentrations tend to have, relative to their wider local authority area, high levels of private rented sector accommodation; (and) they also tend to have a higher proportion of that accommodation not meeting the decent homes standard, as well as higher perceived levels of social problems.<sup>5</sup>

We think that the high levels of long-term empty homes and poor standard of existing housing in some parts of the country are an important part of the housing crisis – just as much as the extreme affordability gap in high value areas where demand more obviously outstrips supply. We recommend that Government should target investment at areas with high levels of long-term empty homes. This investment should also encourage community-based neighbourhood regeneration to tackle the underlying causes of the high levels of long-term empty homes in these areas.

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4 Empty Homes (2016) 'Empty homes: why do some areas have high levels?': <http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/empty-homes-why-do-some-areas-have-higher-levels-final-pdf.pdf>

5 Ibid.

At the same time, we think creating new homes from the empty properties across England has a valuable role to play in meeting housing needs in an environmentally sustainable way. Analysis suggests that England needs about 240,000 to 245,000 additional homes each year to meet new demand, and that nearly one-third of those homes need to be at below market prices and rents.<sup>6</sup> We think more could be done to generate additional housing supply through homes that have sat empty over the long-term. At the same time, we recognise that to meet housing needs more homes must also be built.

## Thanks

We would like to thank the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for its support in funding our working including the research study, *Empty homes: why do some areas have high levels?* We would also like to thank the Tudor Trust for its ongoing funding of our work to raise awareness about the waste of empty homes and what can be done to create more affordable housing in those properties.

In addition, we would also like to thank our board member Toby Taper for overseeing our analysis. Also thanks to our volunteers: Guido Miani, who helped us analyse the Government's empty homes data, as well as Florent Sherifi and Leigh Rowland who helped with proofing, fact-checking and putting together this final report. We appreciate the time they gave voluntarily.

Helen Williams, Empty Homes – national campaigning charity.

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6 Holmans, A (2013) 'Town and Country Planning Tomorrow Series Paper 16 new estimates of housing demand and need in England, 2011 to 2031', Town and Crown Planning Association (TCPA) and Alan Holmans/Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning: [http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Downloads/HousingDemandNeed\\_TCPA2013.pdf](http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Downloads/HousingDemandNeed_TCPA2013.pdf)

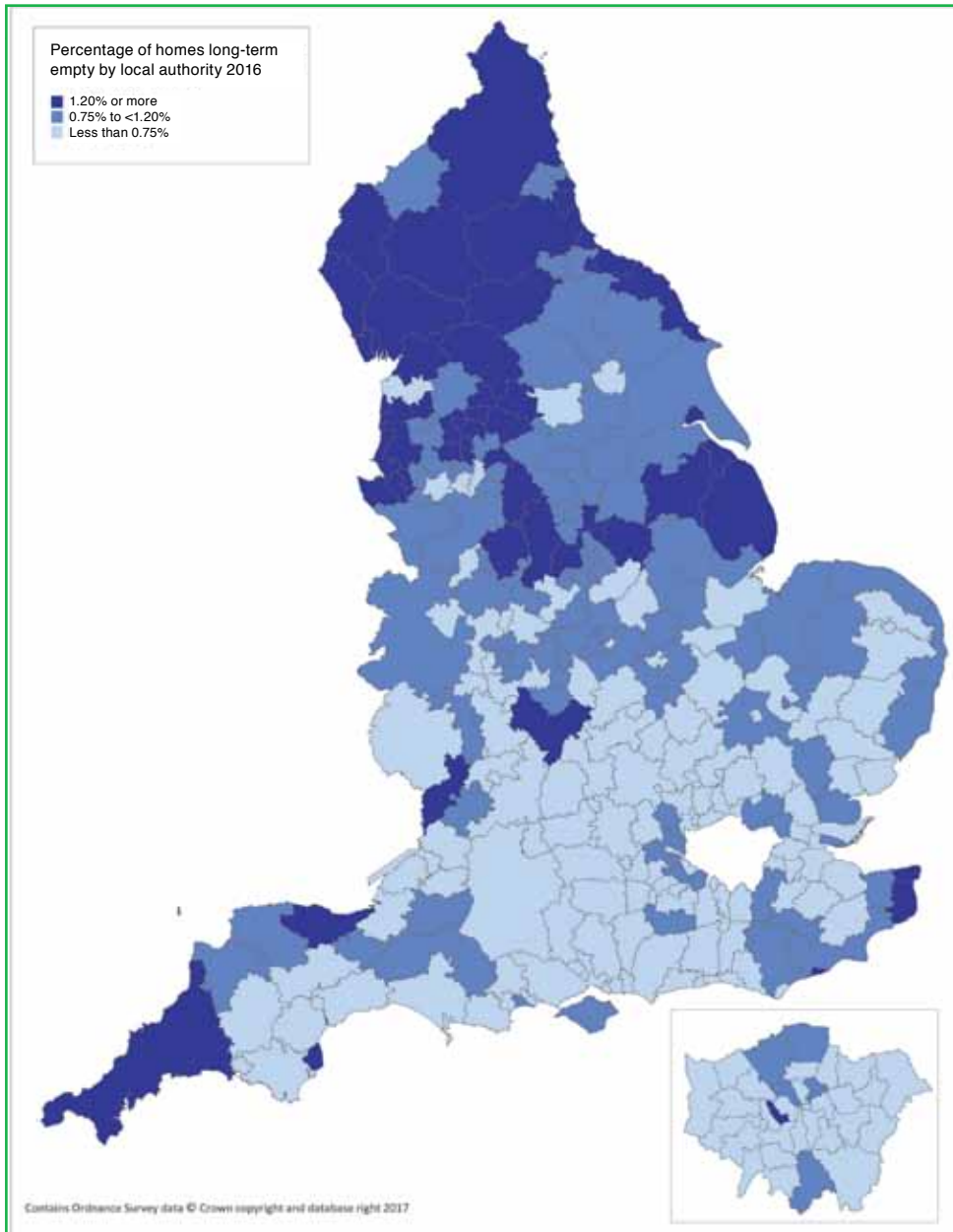
# The geography of long-term empty homes

## Where are the highest proportions of dwellings empty for over six months?

We took the official statistics on the number of long-term empty homes in each local authority area and calculated the percentage of dwellings empty there (see Appendix A for an explanation of the methodology used). We did that because just looking at the numbers of empty homes in a local authority area has limitations, partly because it may be related to the number of dwellings in the area, which varies considerably across authorities.

Mapping the results shows that local authorities with a higher proportion of dwellings recorded empty for more than six months are often in more northerly local authority areas (see Map one). 36 of the 54 local authorities with 1.2% or more of their homes long-term empty are in the North, ten are in the Midlands and eight are in the South, with coastal places standing out in the latter group. Some groupings of authorities (i.e. counties and combined authorities) stand out as having 1.2% or more of their homes long-term empty as a whole. This includes: Cornwall, Cumbria, Durham, Humberside, Lancashire, Merseyside, Northumberland and Tees Valley.

## Map one: percentage of homes long-term empty by local authority



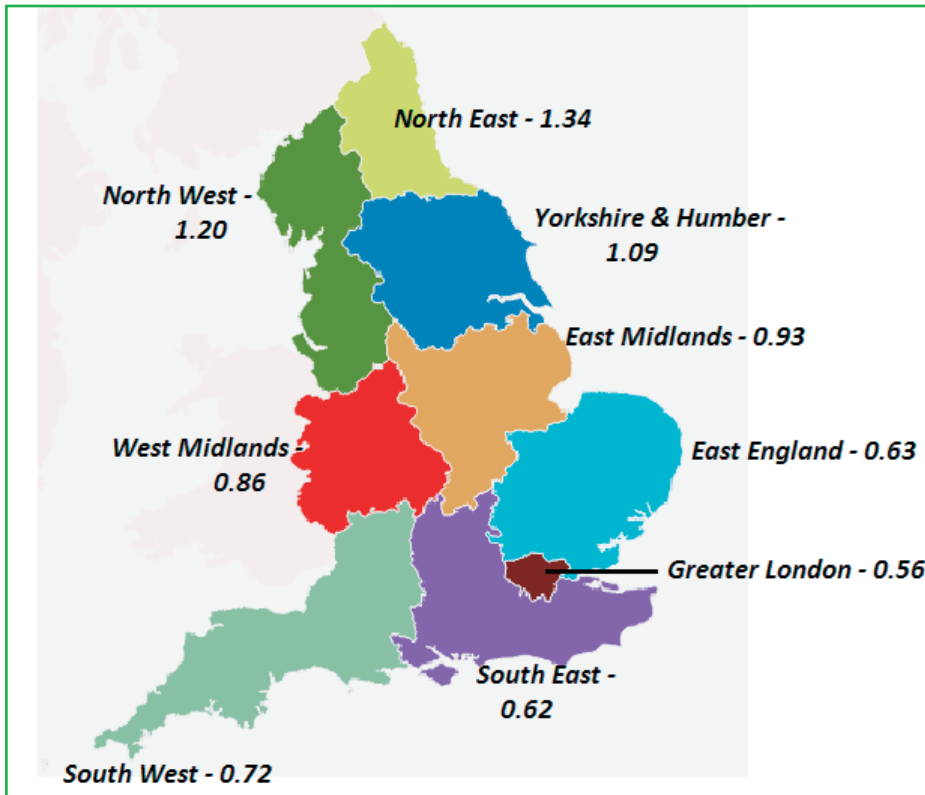


The extent to which the percentages of long-term empty dwellings are higher in the North can be seen when we collate the local authority level data on a regional basis (see Table one and Map two). All the Northern regions (North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humber) have higher percentages of dwellings recorded as long-term empty than the average for England. This is also true for the two Midland regions (East Midlands and West Midlands), although the percentage of their dwellings recorded as long-term empty is closer to the overall level for England than any of the Northern regions. The East of England, the South East, South West and London all have lower percentages of dwellings recorded as long-term empty than England.

**Table One: number and percentage of homes long-term (more than six months) empty by region**

Region	Dwellings No	Dwellings long-term empty No	Dwellings long-term empty %
North East	1,214,332	16,328	1.34
North West	3,235,988	38,969	1.20
Yorkshire and Humber	2,387,869	26,082	1.09
East Midlands	2,050,463	19,044	0.93
West Midlands	2,450,840	21,186	0.86
South West	2,504,894	18,117	0.72
East of England	2,636,195	16,639	0.63
South East	3,837,353	23,935	0.62
London	3,543,444	19,845	0.56
<b>England</b>	<b>23,861,378</b>	<b>200,145</b>	<b>0.84</b>

Map two: percentage of homes long-term empty by region



It is worth noting that regional averages mask some larger variations across individual local authorities within each region.

For local authority level data of the total number of long-term empty homes, please go to the official Government statistics from the Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) 'Live Tables on Dwelling Stock (Including Vacants)' which can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants> and go to Table 615.

We advise care should be taken when drawing on the local authority level statistics and the methodology used to produce them should be taken into account (see Appendix A and the notes that accompany the official statistics when following the link above). It is important not to leap to conclusions about what is happening in any area, or why the level of long-term empty homes differs from other areas or has changed over time. We recommend using the data as a starting point for asking questions about what more can be done to ensure that long-term empty homes are brought back into use to meet housing needs.

## Do the official statistics give us the full picture?

The official statistics on vacant dwellings are drawn from council tax data and the primary purpose of that data is not to count empty homes. There are limitations in what the statistics record and can tell us, as explored below.

### Derelict properties not classed as dwellings for council tax purposes

The council tax data do not include empty homes that have been removed from the council tax valuation list because they are in such a state of dereliction that, even with a reasonable level of repairs, no-one could be expected to live there. In effect, such properties are not classed as dwellings for council tax purposes and so are not counted in the official vacant dwelling figures.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, derelict properties are often a concern to local people as their poor physical state may have a directly detrimental impact on nearby properties and the local environment. Derelict properties also stand out as eyesores and symbolise waste when so many people are being priced out of decent housing across England. Many derelict properties can be, and are being, brought back into use. For all these reasons, it is important that strategies to tackle empty homes are not just focused on properties that are recorded and counted as empty in the official statistics.

### Undercounting if the local authority does not know a property is empty

In addition, the official statistics are probably an undercount of the number of empty homes, as they are dependent on local authorities knowing whether individual dwellings are vacant. It would seem probable that local authorities are more likely to receive information from outgoing occupants, such as former tenants, where people are keen to let them know that they are no longer liable for council tax payments. However, owners who are still liable for council tax payments may have no reason to let their local authority know that the property is vacant.

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<sup>7</sup> The Valuation Office Agency's Council Tax Manual provides guidance on what its listing officers will consider before agreeing to remove a dwelling from the valuation list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/council-tax-manual/voa-council-tax-manual>

People have probably been less likely to inform their local authority that their property is empty since April 2013, with the end of the automatic council tax exemptions. These applied where a home was unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for up to six months, or for up to 12 months if the property was undergoing major repair works or structural alterations. However, since April 2013, local authorities can decide to offer discounts of up to 100% in these circumstances. Offering discounts, particularly at a higher level, could encourage owners to inform the council that a property is empty.

On the other hand, since April 2013, authorities have been allowed to charge up to a 50% premium on the council tax if a dwelling has been empty for two years or more. It is possible that this policy has also had an impact on the willingness of people to tell their council that their property is empty. Nonetheless, as of 3 October 2016, councils were charging this premium on 59,443 dwellings across England.<sup>8</sup> However, this figure does not include all homes that were empty at that point in time for two or more years because it does not include those in local authority areas that have not adopted a policy of charging the premium.

Overall, from talking to local authorities, we believe these changes are likely to have impacted negatively on the reporting and recording of empty homes since 2013. We think there is a case for further research into the impact on the reported level of empty homes by local authorities adopting different council tax policies.

### Exemptions from council tax

However, there are still incentives for people to inform the council that a property is empty. Not least, there are still several short-term exemptions from paying council tax; for example, the death of a person liable for council tax. There are also indefinite exemptions in some circumstances; for example, if the former resident is detained, or in hospital or a care home.

It should be noted that the official long-term vacant dwellings figures do not include dwellings where there is an exemption from paying council tax (see Appendix A for an explanation of the methodology used). So, for example, they do not include unoccupied clergy dwellings, or dwellings taken into possession by a mortgage lender. Data on the number of long-term empty homes that are exempt from council tax (and therefore not included in the official statistics) cannot be derived from the Council Taxbase data.

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<sup>8</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) 'Council Taxbase 2016 in England': <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/council-taxbase-2016-in-england>

## Local authority verification exercises

On the other hand, local authorities do carry out verification exercises before submitting their Council Taxbase data to ensure that they have current information on whether individual dwellings are occupied or not. The timing of verification exercises could account for some of the differences in the number of empty homes recorded by a local authority between one year and the next. The Government has also acknowledged this as an issue 'Authorities report that they are carrying out exercises to ensure they have identified all occupied properties – the results of these exercises are often to revise the number of empty dwellings or second homes between years and this may be reflected in the data in this release'.<sup>9</sup>

Local authorities also investigate reports of empty homes, and will subsequently update their council tax records. Moreover, reports of empty homes can be the starting point for the local authority intervening to ensure homes are brought back into use. Local authorities also tell us that they use the council tax data as their starting point for investigations on empty homes. The sharing of information across empty homes and council tax teams can lead to more effective empty homes strategies and more up-to-date council tax data.

Some of the variations in the levels of empty homes recorded across different local authorities could be down to the quality and vigour of their local verification exercises. It could also depend on how well teams share data across the council. This re-enforces the need to avoid leaping to conclusions about what the official statistics are telling us about empty homes in an area.

## Under-utilised properties that do not count as vacant for council tax purposes

There is also an issue that many properties that neighbours consider empty are not recorded in the official vacant dwelling statistics as they do not count as empty for council tax purposes. For council tax purposes properties must be unoccupied and substantially unfurnished to be defined as vacant dwellings. So, a property that is furnished and occupied for some weeks a year, or occasionally at weekends, or during some working weeks may be recorded as a second home for council tax purposes. These properties could be said to be underutilised, and it is understandable that people perceive them to be empty. This leads to questions being asked about whether best use is being made of England's housing stock.

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<sup>9</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) 'Local Authority Council Tax base England 2016 – revised': <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/council-taxbase-2016-in-england>

## Using the statistics as a starting point

While it is important to recognise the limitations of the official statistics, nonetheless they are a good starting point for people to ask what is happening in their area. They also enable us to look at the geographical pattern of where there appears to be relatively higher levels of empty homes. This is helpful when exploring the underlying causes and what needs to happen to bring empty homes back into use.

We do not pretend that all empty homes are problematic. Some properties will be on the market for sale or renting or awaiting the new occupant to move in. However, if a property has not become re-occupied within six months it is worth looking at what is happening – is it near to being lived in again, or is it stuck empty for some reason? Making the most of existing housing assets can help meet housing needs and address the blight of empty homes on local areas.

## Comparisons over time

The total number of long-term empty homes recorded in October 2016 fell by 3,451 to 200,145 from the 203,596 recorded in October 2015 (a 1.7% reduction). This is the lowest level ever recorded by the official data and part of a downward trend that has been apparent since 2008 when the Government data recorded 326,954 long-term vacant dwellings. This trend may be related to several factors:

- The housing market picking up in many areas post the 2008 financial crisis.
- The dedicated empty homes investment programmes of previous governments that targeted funding at housing providers creating new affordable homes from empty properties and additionally local authorities tackling concentrations of empty homes.
- The continued dedication of some housing providers, including community-based organisations, to creating new homes from empty properties.
- Local authorities allocating resources and developing their case work approach to give advice and assistance to encourage owners to bring their properties back into use.
- People becoming less likely to tell their local authority that the property they own is empty.

This last point was explored above, and the Government has also acknowledged that this is an issue: 'Since 1 April 2013, local authorities in England have had the choice to apply council tax discounts of between 0% and 100% for empty dwellings or between 0% and 50% for second homes. In addition, authorities can charge a premium on top of the normal council tax payable of up to 50% for dwellings that have been empty for more than two years. Because of these fundamental changes in the way empty dwellings and second homes have been handled it is not accurate to make comparisons of the numbers of empty and second homes before and after April 2013'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid



# Why do some homes remain long-term empty?

## Common reasons across England

In most parts of England, the housing market currently works such that homes are generally readily sold or let again, but homes do become stuck empty across all parts of the country. The Council Taxbase data does not give us the reasons that properties are long-term empty; however, from our discussions with local authorities and property owners, we have come to understand some reasons homes commonly remain empty. It is often related to the personal and financial circumstances of the property owners, for example:

- Inheriting a property, the new owner (or joint owners) may take some time to sort out and/or decide what to do before it is put on the market for rent or sale.
- A previously rented property may require substantial repairs before it can be re-let, but the landlord is putting off doing this work, often related to time and/or money constraints.
- People or companies have bought properties to redevelop; however, for a variety of reasons – including other commitments and/or financial constraints – it is taking a long time to complete the works and/or activity has stalled.
- Owners are holding on to a property hoping for a rise in its market value and a corresponding capital gain before trying to sell it. In this context, some people may have unrealistic expectations about the likely value of their property given local market conditions.

## Reasons behind higher levels of long-term empty homes in some areas

While there may be common reasons why some properties remain long-term empty, the official statistics indicate that there are relatively higher levels in some English local authority areas. This suggests that there are also other factors at play affecting why homes in some areas are not readily sold or re-let. As noted above, official Government data on empty homes are only available at the local authority level, although we know that there are neighbourhoods with much higher levels of empty homes than the highest levels reported at the local authority level.

To get a better understanding of what is happening in these areas, in 2016 we surveyed local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or known concentrations in some

neighbourhoods (see Appendix B for the methodology used to select the sample of local authorities surveyed and carry out the research). We reported the findings in *Empty homes: why do some areas have high levels?* as highlighted below.<sup>11</sup>

### **Characteristics of local authority areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods v nationally**

We found that most, but not all, local authority areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes, when compared with other local authorities nationally, can be characterised as having:

- Lower household incomes.
- Lower house prices.
- More deprivation.
- More pre-1919 terraces.

### **Characteristics of neighbourhoods with concentrations of empty homes v the local authority generally**

In addition, most local authorities with concentrations of long-term empty homes characterise these neighbourhoods, when compared with the same local authority area generally, as having:

- Lower household incomes.
- Lower house prices.
- More deprivation.
- More pre-1919 terraces.
- More antisocial behaviour.
- More changes in population/higher population turnover.
- More crime.
- More private rented accommodation.
- More private rented accommodation that does not meet the decent homes standard.

In many areas with concentrations of long-term empty homes, we have observed that the condition of the housing stock is an important factor. The poor quality of much of the housing in some neighbourhoods can

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<sup>11</sup> Empty Homes (2016) 'Empty homes: why do some areas have high levels?': <http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/empty-homes-why-do-some-areas-have-have-higher-levels-final-pdf.pdf>

lead to these areas becoming less popular. People tend to move there only if they cannot afford housing elsewhere, or cannot access social housing. As a result, there can be a vicious cycle: owner occupiers sell up and move to what they perceive as better neighbourhoods; then buy-to-let landlords purchase the properties relatively cheaply. At the same time, they also face a high level of tenancy turnover. In turn, other people would not contemplate moving to these neighbourhoods as they seek better housing in what they perceive to be more desirable areas.

### **Main reason for long-term empty homes in local authority areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally**

The local authorities in our survey with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes say that the main reasons for homes remaining empty in the long-term are:

- Owners are unable to fund repairs/improvements to sell or rent out the homes.
- Owners and previous occupants allowing homes to become uninhabitable.

### **Main reasons for long-term empty homes in neighbourhoods with particular concentrations**

In addition, local authorities with concentrations of empty homes in particular neighbourhoods give the main reasons as:

- Owners are unable to fund repairs/improvements to sell or rent out the homes.
- Owners and previous occupants allowing homes to become uninhabitable.
- Low housing demand due to perceived social problems, such as antisocial behaviour.

From our discussions with local authorities and owners of empty homes, we understand this inability to fund works can be due to the owner's credit history and/or financial institutions considering the property's sale value/rent yield to be too low relative to the loan sums required. The latter is more likely to be an issue in areas with relatively low property prices, which is a feature of many areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes. It is also more likely to be the case where properties are in a poor condition and require extensive works. This is more likely to be the case if properties have been left empty and uncared for over a longer period.

Organisations working in areas with high levels of empty homes often raise with us their concerns about the poor standards of management in parts of the private rented sector. We are often told of neglectful landlords, some of whom appear to have bought properties at auction

without visiting an area. In other cases, having started out with good intentions, landlords may find that they have taken on more than they can cope with, especially in neighbourhoods facing a range of problems.

In our survey, the second most frequently given reason for high levels of long-term empty homes, cited by seven in ten local authorities with long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, is low housing demand due to perceived social problems such as antisocial behaviour. As outlined above, neighbourhoods can get caught in a vicious cycle: the perception and reality of life in a particular area can put people off moving there, while many of those with a choice understandably vote with their feet and move out.

On the other hand, we have met many residents and community-based organisations in these areas who are committed to staying and want their neighbourhood issues addressed. We explore below how community-based regeneration can help to bring long-term empty homes back into use and address the underlying causes in neighbourhoods with high levels.

### **Low demand and the legacy of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder programme**

In our survey, over a third of local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods also give the reasons as low housing demand due to lack of jobs and/or transport and better homes/housing options available elsewhere. We have visited many neighbourhoods with high levels of long-term empty homes that had an historical role in housing workers in industries – such as fishing, steel works, mining or mills – where employment has sharply declined in recent decades.

Three in ten local authorities in our survey with empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods cite the stopping of Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder programme funding as one of the main causes of current levels of long-term empty homes.<sup>12, 13</sup> We know that some local authorities still own empty homes that were compulsory purchased for demolition under that programme, or where households moved out so that planned refurbishments could go ahead. HMR was a multi-million pound programme which sought to tackle the problems ‘... of neighbourhoods with acute low housing demand in the North of England and the Midlands. In such neighbourhoods, the high

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12 The incoming Coalition Government announced, in October 2010, that it was pulling the funding for what was seen as a controversial programme.

13 Wilson, W (2013) ‘Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders’. Parliament Briefing Papers. London: Library of the House of Commons. pp. 5: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05953#fullreport>

concentrations of properties difficult to let or sell, the loss of population and the inability to attract new households had created a vicious circle of neighbourhood decline and deprivation'.<sup>14</sup>

Our research shows that there are still neighbourhoods (not just in ex-HMR areas) caught in a vicious cycle where the housing market is not working to bring properties back into use. It is understandable why poor standard properties in some neighbourhoods are in less demand. However, *Empty homes: why do some areas have high levels?* challenges the view that there is low demand for housing in these areas – if homes are refurbished to a decent standard, together with addressing the underlying causes and issues that the communities face.

Although we would not advocate a return to the HMR Pathfinder approach, there currently appears to be little support at the national level for initiatives to tackle the problems facing neighbourhoods with high-levels of long-term empty homes. The Coalition Government plugged the gap to some extent with the Clusters of Empty Homes fund, which allocated £60 million to 20 bids.<sup>15</sup> But there are currently no funding programmes aimed at areas with relatively higher levels and/or concentrations of long-term empty homes.

We believe our research demonstrates that there is still a case for Government to target investment at areas with higher levels of long-term empty homes, and this is reflected in our recommendations below. Arguably, the high levels of long-term empty homes and poor standard of existing housing in some areas are just as much a part of the housing crisis as the extreme affordability gap in high value areas where demand more obviously outstrips supply.

## Buy-to-leave

In other areas, particularly where the housing market is very buoyant with rising property prices, the level of long-term empty homes may be partly linked to buy-to-leave.

The official vacant dwelling statistics do not show why homes are being left long-term empty. However, there is evidence that in some areas people are purchasing properties not to rent out or use primarily as their own home, but for reasons that include finding a safe store for their wealth, seeking a high capital gain and keeping a place for occasional use. Such purchases can be characterised as buy-to-leave. Some

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14 National Audit Office (2007) 'Department for Communities and Local Government: Housing Market Renewal': <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/070820.pdf>

15 Homes and Communities Agency (May 2014) 'Clusters of Empty Homes fund allocations' [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/367230/coeh\\_funding\\_allocations\\_290512.csv/preview](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/367230/coeh_funding_allocations_290512.csv/preview) and document withdrawn on the 5 January 2016

of these properties may be counted as empty homes for council tax purposes. However, as we explored above, if properties are furnished and being used for part of the year, for example, for leisure, shopping and/or business trips – they are not counted as vacant in the official statistics. Some, but not all, of these properties may be recorded as second homes for council tax purposes. In other cases, the local authority may simply not know that the property is either vacant or being used as a second home.

Some studies have explored the extent to which buy-to-leave is happening in new build developments or neighbourhoods. This can be seen in the work of the London Borough of Islington, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster City Council, as well as Transparency UK and media investigations.<sup>16, 17, 18, 19, 20</sup>

The Mayor of London recently commissioned research from the University of York and the London School of Economics to contribute to his work looking into the effects of overseas investment on the London housing market, and the impact this investment is having on the price, affordability and supply of homes across the capital.<sup>21</sup>

The University of York found from Land Registry data that 13% of new build sales in London during its study period (the two years to March 2016) were made to overseas investors.<sup>22</sup> York also found that overseas investment was a greater proportion of sales in what are known as

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- 16 Islington Council (2015) 'Preventing Wasted Housing Supply: Supplementary Planning Document (July 2015)': [http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Planning-and-building-control/Publicity/Public-consultation/2015-2016/\(2015-09-21\)-Preventing-Wasted-Housing-Supply-SPD-\(adopted-July-2015\).pdf](http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Planning-and-building-control/Publicity/Public-consultation/2015-2016/(2015-09-21)-Preventing-Wasted-Housing-Supply-SPD-(adopted-July-2015).pdf)
  - 17 Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (2015) 'Report into Buy to Leave in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea': <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/committees/Document.ashx?>
  - 18 City of Westminster (2014) 'The Prime Residential Market in Westminster': [http://transact.westminster.gov.uk/docstores/publications\\_store/news/prime\\_residential\\_research\\_report\\_140722.pdf](http://transact.westminster.gov.uk/docstores/publications_store/news/prime_residential_research_report_140722.pdf)
  - 19 Transparency UK (2017) 'Faulty Towers: Understanding the impact of overseas corruption on the London property market': <http://www.transparency.org.uk/publications/faulty-towers-understanding-the-impact-of-overseas-corruption-on-the-london-property-market/>
  - 20 Booth, R. and Bengtsson, H. (2016) 'The London skyscraper that is a stark symbol of the housing crisis', *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/may/24/revealed-foreign-buyers-own-two-thirds-of-tower-st-george-wharf-london>
  - 21 Mayor of London (2016) 'ADD2054: Overseas investors in London's residential property market': <https://www.london.gov.uk/decisions/add2054-overseas-investors-londons-residential-property-market>
  - 22 Centre for Housing Policy University of York (June 2017), Alison Wallace, David Rhodes and Richard Webber 'Overseas Investors in London's New Build Housing Market': <https://www.london.gov.uk/moderngovmb/documents/s58641/08b2c%20University%20of%2>

the prime London boroughs.<sup>23</sup> Buy-to-leave cannot simply be equated with overseas buyers, as some will rent out, or live in, their English properties, while some UK nationals do not. It is interesting therefore that from a combination of data sources, York University estimated that across London about 10% of new build properties were under-used in some way and that this rose to half in prime London.<sup>24</sup> York concluded 'the estimates show that the propensity to leave homes empty or under-used in some way is greater among properties of higher values, in prime areas of London and among overseas investors. These sales represent a smaller portion of London's new build housing market, so in absolute terms UK and overseas owners hold similar numbers of homes that are under-used or under-occupied'.

Parallel research commissioned from the London School of Economics (LSE) noted on the one hand that evidence suggested across London that less than 1% of homes were being left entirely empty, but, on the other hand noted that for second homes 'occupancy could be as little as a few weeks a year'. LSE also noted this was not confined to overseas buyers.<sup>25</sup> Certainly, official statistics, as explored above, show just 0.56% of homes long-term empty in the capital. But it is apparent when people talk about empty homes or buy-to-leave, that they are not confining their concerns to those that are counted in the official statistics. People are also concerned about what is not counted and the under-use of property. Though the problem of buy-to-leave may be limited in the context of England or London's housing market taken as a whole, that should not mask the evidence that shows it is an issue in some neighbourhoods.

We hope the work commissioned by the Mayor London will lead the Greater London Authority (GLA) and London boroughs to take action within their existing powers, to deter buy-to-leave and to ensure that more properties that are currently empty and under-used are brought into use to meet housing needs.

In addition, we think there is sufficient evidence and public concern for Government to explore additional measures to deter buy-to-leave. We are interested in exploring what would work. Measures could include a reform to the council tax system to enable councils to charge more where properties are left empty, or hardly ever used, or regulatory measures or planning reforms to ensure that properties are built and occupied primarily to meet housing needs. Exploring what would work best should include building on the lessons learnt from the supplementary planning guidance adopted by the London Borough of

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23 Different studies have different definitions of prime London. In the York research, it was taken to mean: City of London, City of Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea.

24 Ibid

25 Ibid



Islington which requires new dwellings not to be left unoccupied for any continuous period of three consecutive months or more.<sup>26</sup>

## Relationship between empty homes and house prices

In some areas, there are strong financial incentives for property owners to bring empty homes back into use, given the high return from either selling or renting them. However, there is evidence, as outlined above, which suggests that in some high value areas empty homes may have been purchased as buy-to-leave empty properties – i.e. not to live in or rent out, but primarily for capital investment. If this is the case, then the level of empty properties could be linked to house prices, with relatively high levels in high and rising house price areas.

To understand this relationship, we have analysed the official statistics on long-term vacant dwellings by council tax bands A to H. Council tax bands have also been used in other studies as a proxy for house price values. Although council tax bands are based on property valuations on 1 April 1991, not their current value, in relative terms most properties are likely to have remained in the same band: dwellings initially placed in the bottom band A are likely to have remained relatively low in value, with those in the top band H remaining relatively high. In addition, relatively highly priced new build properties will be placed in an appropriate higher council tax band.

Our analysis is based on showing long-term empty homes as a percentage of chargeable dwellings for each of the eight council bands A to H (see Table two and Appendix C for an explanation of the methodology). This gives a total mean average 0.86%, although two bands – bottom A and top H – are significantly higher (1.49% and 1.51% respectively). Excluding these two bands, the pattern is considerably more consistent for the other six bands B to G with a mean average of 0.65%. This suggests that the factors affecting the level of long-term empty homes in bottom band A and top band H are different in type and/or importance compared with the other bands. The higher percentage level in the lowest value properties is likely to relate to the housing market and neighbourhood conditions which we explored above. For the highest value properties, as also outlined above, buy-to-leave could be a factor.

It should be noted that Band A has the highest number of long-term empty homes (84,352) and Band H the lowest number of long-term empty homes (2,059) recorded by the Government data.

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<sup>26</sup> Islington Council (2015) 'Preventing Wasted Housing Supply: Supplementary Planning Document (July 2015): [http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Planning-and-building-control/Publicity/Public-consultation/2015-2016/\(2015-09-21\)-Preventing-Wasted-Housing-Supply-SPD-\(adopted-July-2015\).pdf](http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Planning-and-building-control/Publicity/Public-consultation/2015-2016/(2015-09-21)-Preventing-Wasted-Housing-Supply-SPD-(adopted-July-2015).pdf)



We would encourage further local analysis of this relationship between the percentage level of long-term empty homes and council tax bands, which could help to inform empty homes strategies.

**Table two: number and percentage of long-term empty homes by council tax band**

<b>Council tax band</b>	<b>Chargeable dwellings</b>	<b>Long-term empty homes</b>	<b>Chargeable dwellings long-term empty %</b>
	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	
A	5,659,959	84,352	1.49
B	4,572,155	37,037	0.81
C	5,096,935	31,075	0.61
D	3,612,011	20,437	0.57
E	2,233,487	12,123	0.54
F	1,183,414	6,950	0.59
G	825,531	6,112	0.74
H	136,327	2,059	1.51
Total No	23,319,819	200,145	
Mean %			0.86

# What works in tackling long-term empty homes?

## Across England

We outlined above some of the common reasons that properties remain empty over the longer term across all parts of England, and here we explore what works in those areas in tackling empty homes.

### Local authority case work

In many cases, local authorities find they need to take a casework approach in liaising with individual owners to understand why their property is long-term empty and what has been holding them back from taking action. For example, is it their financial or personal circumstances that are deterring them from selling or renting the property? Have they had a bad experience renting the property in the past? Are they simply holding out for a higher sale price, and is that realistic?

Local authorities have told us that, in most cases, advice and encouragement is what works in ensuring an owner brings their property back into use. We certainly see the value of having dedicated empty homes staff who can develop knowledge of the local housing market and expertise in working with owners, which is reflected in our recommendations below.

In addition, some local authorities offer financial assistance for bringing an empty home back into use through either grants or loans. Conditions are often attached; for example, that the property must be let to a household nominated by the council at below market rent.

Local authorities can also take enforcement action where individual property owners are not interested, or unable, to bring their property back into use. In some circumstances, councils have powers to take over the management and compulsorily purchase empty properties. Such action should not be taken lightly, but we recognise the importance of enforcement action; for example, where empty properties are inhibiting a drive to improve an area and meet housing needs.

### Government investment in creating affordable housing through empty properties

We have also seen the valuable contribution that long-term empty homes can make to meeting housing needs when local authorities and other housing providers are able to buy or lease such properties and refurbish them. These can then be rented or sold at below market

rates to people who are priced out of decent housing in the local housing market. However, Government investment in creating new affordable homes through long-term empty properties appears to have fallen significantly since the ending of dedicated empty homes funding programmes in March 2015. Figures we obtained from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) show that during 2015/16 the HCA supported (outside London) 379 completed homes from empty properties and funded a further 341 where works started on site. This is a small proportion of its total Affordable Homes Programme (AHP).

This compares unfavourably with 2014/15, the last year of the dedicated empty homes programmes which the HCA ran from 2011 to 2015, when it supported 2,233 completed homes from empty properties. This was the peak for outputs from the HCA's empty homes programmes; in total, by the end of March 2015, it had supported the creation of 3,504 homes from empty properties outside London.

We recommend below that Government reinstates dedicated funding programmes to create affordable homes from long-term empty properties. We also recommend that local authorities and housing providers attract and allocate funding for creating more affordable homes from long-term empty properties.

### **Areas with higher levels of long-term empty homes**

In neighbourhoods with high levels and concentrations of long-term empty homes, successful strategies are needed to tackle the underlying causes. This requires more than the local authority casework approach, outlined above. Otherwise local action may see some long-term empty properties bought back into use only for a high vacancy rate to continue to be generated from a high population turnover and the reluctance of people to consider moving into the area.

We have seen many examples of neighbourhoods once labelled as low demand being transformed into popular places to live when homes are refurbished and the underlying causes of empty homes in the area addressed. We explore what works below.

### **Improving the housing stock**

Our research, as outlined above, suggests that in many neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes the condition of the housing stock is an important factor. We have seen many examples of local authorities, community-based organisations and other housing providers creating sought-after good standard homes in neighbourhoods which had high levels of empty homes. Where there are mainly small pre-1919 terraced houses, this has included creating larger homes by knocking two adjacent properties into one.

In some cases, local authorities have told us that such action has encouraged more private owners to invest in improving their homes. In other cases, local authorities have unlocked this investment by providing loans to property owners. However, where private sector landlords are not meeting their legal obligations or are unwilling to bring an empty home back into use, enforcement action may be necessary.

### **Attracting back owner occupiers and diversifying local housing options**

Where the local market has recently been dominated by the rented sector, we have seen local authorities and registered housing providers attract owner occupiers back into a neighbourhood by creating opportunities for them to buy homes. This includes homes being sold for £1, although the new owners must then meet the refurbishment costs, or homes sold at around a 20% discount on the full market price.

### **Responsive services**

Good housing management and responsive public services can also go a long way to ensure neighbourhoods are a good place to live, including challenging antisocial behaviour where this is an issue. In addition, local authority-commissioned support services are often a vital ingredient to enable people to address the personal issues they face, for example addictions or mental health conditions.

### **Improving the street scape**

Some local authorities have also tried to smarten up the appearance of streets where there are high levels of long-term empty homes; for example, by improving fencing/boundary walls, improving local green spaces and organising clean-up days. Local authorities have told us that such approaches can also incentivise private owners to invest in their properties and help engage the community.

### **Boosting employment and life chances**

The problems faced by people living in some neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes relate not only to the housing conditions; in addition, there is a need to address wider issues such as the lack of employment prospects. Many of the community-based organisations active in bringing empty homes back into housing use are also generating local training and employment opportunities; for example, through their refurbishment works, or by establishing social enterprises such as cafes and bakeries.

Local authorities often seek to boost local economic growth, and attract new employers to their areas, but in some places questions remain about how to link people in the most deprived neighbourhoods to new employment opportunities. Otherwise communities may have the sense that they have been 'left behind', unable to access opportunities that seem to be available to other people living in other places.

## Conclusion

We believe that the current level of resources for tackling concentrations of long-term empty homes falls considerably short of what is needed to create lasting changes in many areas, and this is reflected in our recommendations below. Without the expansion of neighbourhood regeneration approaches that tackle the underlying causes of empty homes and its effects, there is a risk that people in some neighbourhoods are essentially being abandoned to live in sub-standard housing, alongside boarded up properties in poor street environments.

## What do the public want?

We carried out research with the general public about their attitudes to empty homes in both 2016 and 2014, and our latest ComRes poll found:<sup>27</sup>

- Over four in five (83%) of British adults say the Government should place a higher priority on tackling empty homes, which has increased since 2014 (83% versus 78%).
- Two in five people (39%) believe that empty homes are a blight on their local area.
- Three-quarters (76%) say their local authority should place a higher priority on tackling empty homes.
- From a list of five policies that Government could implement to tackle empty homes, the most popular – chosen by over half (54%) of the respondents – is that Government should fund local authorities or charities to buy and repair long-term empty homes to rent or sell to people in housing need.
- Nearly half cite the next two (both 47%): providing financial assistance to first time buyers, so they can buy and restore long-term empty homes; making it easier for local authorities to purchase long-term empty homes where the owners refuse to bring them into use.
- Two in five (41%) say that there should be higher council tax for property owners who keep their homes empty for a year or more.
- Finally, nearly a third (31%) support policies to make it harder for people to buy properties which they then leave unoccupied.

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<sup>27</sup> Empty Homes (2016), 'Strong public support for the Government to place a greater priority on tackling empty homes': <http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/2016-11-28-final-press-release-post-embargo.pdf>

## Recommendations

These recommendations are based on our knowledge and understanding about the patterns of long-term empty homes across different housing markets, including what helps in bringing them back into use.

- 1 Local authorities should have an empty homes strategy for their area, with the aspiration to reduce the number of long-term empty homes; they should aim to attract and allocate resources to refurbish empty properties for those in housing need. Local authorities should work in partnership with other housing providers and community-based organisations to achieve their plan.
- 2 Local authorities should take a casework approach with owners of long-term empty properties to encourage, advise and support them to bring homes back into housing use. Employing dedicated empty homes staff can ensure that the council is able to act on information about empty homes, and build up expertise in working with owners, including taking enforcement action where necessary.
- 3 Central Government should re-establish dedicated funding programmes to support local authorities, housing providers and community-based organisations in creating new affordable housing from long-term empty homes.
- 4 Central Government should adopt an investment programme targeted at areas with high levels of long-term empty homes. This programme should encourage community-based neighbourhood regeneration approaches that refurbish properties together with tackling the underlying causes of empty homes in these areas.
- 5 Local authorities with concentrations of long-term empty homes should look at how they can attract and allocate resources to support community-based neighbourhood regeneration approaches.
- 6 Local authorities in high value areas should conduct studies to understand the extent and impact of buy-to-leave. Where it is an issue, they should review the measures they could adopt to incentivise people to sell or rent those properties or not to buy properties in the first place to leave them empty or hardly ever used.

- 7 The Mayor of London should review the measures the Greater London Authority could adopt to incentivise people to sell or rent buy-to-leave properties, or not to buy properties in the first place to leave them empty or hardly ever used.
- 8 Government should explore additional measures to deter buy-to-leave. Measures could include a reform to the council tax system to enable councils to charge more where properties are left empty, or hardly ever used, or regulatory measures or planning reforms to ensure that properties are built and occupied primarily to meet housing needs.



## Appendix A – Methodology used for calculating the percentage of dwellings long-term empty

We took the official statistics on the number of long-term vacant dwellings in each local authority area and calculated the percentage of dwellings empty there.

### Methodology Government used for producing statistics on the number of long-term vacant dwellings for 2016

To arrive at the number of long-term vacant dwellings for each local authority area in 2016,<sup>28</sup> the Government used the Council Taxbase data returned by each local authority.<sup>29</sup> It used the figures for those dwellings classed on 3 October 2016 as empty for more than six months and charged council tax, excluding those that were empty on 3 October 2016 because of flooding either between 1 December 2013 and 31 March 2014 and/or 1 December 2015 and 31 March 2016 and those that were empty for more than six months that were undergoing major repairs or alterations.

This is the same definition as used by Government for determining the empty homes part of the New Homes Bonus payment to each local authority which reflects year-on-year reductions in the number of long-term empty homes recorded in an area. It is also the definition commonly used by local authorities when asked to state the number of empty homes in their area.

It should be noted that this definition of long-term empty homes does not include those properties that are exempt from council tax. Thus, it differs from the definition Government uses to produce the total number of vacant dwellings for each local authority area.<sup>30</sup> The Government calculated the total number of vacant dwellings from the Council Taxbase data and included those homes that were classed, on 3 October 2016 as empty that were charged council tax, and those

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28 Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) 'Live Tables on Dwelling Stock (Including Vacants)': <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

29 Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) 'Council Taxbase 2016 in England': <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/council-taxbase-2016-in-england>

30 Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) 'Live Tables on Dwelling Stock (Including Vacants)': <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

homes that were classed as empty and exempt from council tax in the following exemption classes:

- B – Unoccupied dwellings owned by a charity (up to six months).
- D – A dwelling left unoccupied by people who are detained, e.g. in prison.
- E – An unoccupied dwelling which was previously the sole or main residence of a person who has moved into a hospital or care home.
- F – Dwellings left empty by deceased persons.
- G – An unoccupied dwelling where the occupation is prohibited by law.
- H – Unoccupied clergy dwellings.
- I – An unoccupied dwelling which was previously the sole or main residence of a person who is the owner or tenant and has moved to receive personal care.
- J – An unoccupied dwelling which was previously the sole or main residence of a person who is the owner or tenant and has moved to provide personal care to another person.
- K – An unoccupied dwelling where the owner is a student who last lived in the dwelling as their main home.
- L – An unoccupied dwelling which has been taken into possession by a mortgage lender.
- Q – An unoccupied dwelling where the person who would otherwise be liable is a trustee in bankruptcy.<sup>31</sup>

It is not possible to determine the number of long-term empty homes in these exempt classes from the Council Taxbase data.

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<sup>31</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) 'Council Taxbase 2016 in England': <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/council-taxbase-2016-in-england>

### **Methodology Empty Homes used for calculating percentages of homes long-term empty**

We took the official statistics on the total number of long-term vacant dwellings recorded in each local authority area (see above) and used that to calculate the percentage of dwellings long-term in that area. We took the dwelling figure to be the total number of dwellings on the valuation list for each local authority, less the number of demolished dwellings recorded for each area on 3 October 2016.<sup>32</sup>

Given the official long-term empty homes figures do not include properties that are exempt from council tax, we could have calculated the percentage of long-term empty homes based on the number of chargeable dwellings on 3 October 2016 as opposed to the number of dwellings on the valuation list. However, we decided to keep the same base as commonly used for both calculating the percentage of total dwellings empty and those long-term empty.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid

## Appendix B – Methodology for our report *Empty homes in England: why do some areas have high levels?*

### Selecting the sample

For the survey, 58 local authorities were purposely selected based on either or both of two criteria. Firstly, from Government statistics 49 local authorities had relatively high levels of long-term empty homes (vacant for more than six months) as of October 2015; this was based on the Council Taxbase returns for 2015, using the same methodology as outlined in Appendix A for calculating the percentage of homes long-term empty.<sup>33</sup> When we conducted the survey the Council Taxbase returns for 2016 (used for this edition of *Empty Homes in England*) had not been completed, therefore we used the 2015 data.

Secondly, the local authorities had received money from the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund (Clusters Funding).<sup>34</sup> This was to ensure that some local authorities were included with known concentrations of long-term empty homes in particular neighbourhoods, even if they were not among the local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes overall (one criterion for Clusters Funding was having over 10% of homes empty in the neighbourhood).<sup>35</sup> However, it is unlikely that we included all local authorities with concentrations of long-term empty homes in particular neighbourhoods, because some of them would not have bid for Clusters Funding, while others may have bid unsuccessfully. As data is not available nationally on the number of empty homes below the local authority level it is not possible to identify all neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes.

From a list of 51 local authorities with over 1.2% of homes long-term empty, 49 were selected to take part in the survey; two were excluded as they were also ranked among the top ten areas of England on house

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33 Department for Communities and Local Government (2015) 'Live Tables on Dwelling Stock (Including Vacants)': <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

34 Homes and Communities Agency (2014) 'Clusters of Empty Homes Fund: Allocations': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clusters-of-empty-homes-fund-allocations>

35 Homes and Communities Agency (2011) 'Bringing Clusters of Empty Homes into use: Bidding Guidance'. Programme closed and document withdrawn 5 January 2016.

prices.<sup>36</sup> An additional nine local authorities were selected because they had received Clusters Funding, although their long-term empty homes levels were 1.2% or below. Nineteen of the initial 49 authorities selected were in both categories – level of long-term empty homes over 1.2% and they also received Clusters Funding; the other 30 were selected on the basis of relatively high levels of empty homes generally.

## Fieldwork

The fieldwork took place between 19 July and 19 August 2016 using Survey Monkey. In total, 46 completed questionnaires were returned from the initial 58 local authorities selected, giving a high response rate of 79%, which means we can have confidence in the overall findings.

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36 Office for National Statistics (2016) 'Median house price for national and subnational geographies – HPSSA Dataset 9': <http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/medianhousepriceforationalandsubnationalgeographiesquarterlyrollingyearhpssadataset09>

## Appendix C – Methodology used to explore the relationship between long-term empty homes and council tax bands across England

We went to the original source of the Council Taxbase data for long-term empty homes (used to calculate the official statistics on the number of long-term vacant dwellings, see Appendix A).<sup>37</sup> We then extracted the number of long-term empty homes in England by council tax bands A to H. From the same source, we extracted the number of chargeable dwellings in England by council tax bands A to H. We then calculated the percentage of chargeable dwellings long-term empty by council tax band. It is a different base to the one we used for calculating the percentage of dwellings long-term empty by local authority (see Appendix A) as we do not believe the issues around consistency with how this is commonly calculated applied here.

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<sup>37</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) 'Council Taxbase 2016 in England': <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/council-taxbase-2016-in-england>