

Empty Homes Agency – Report for the year ending 31st March 2010

Structure, governance and management

Empty Homes Agency Limited is registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 (registered number 27697R) as a charitable housing association and is governed by its Rules. It is recognised by the Inland Revenue as having charitable status (Reference 150/3471/ACJ). One third of the Committee retires and is eligible for re-election at the Annual General Meeting. Vacancies are externally advertised. Short-listed candidates are interviewed and external references taken. New Committee members are given an induction on joining the board. Management committee members meet five times a year, during which time they oversee current business, and review strategy, operational and financial performance against annual plans and budgets.

Mission and Objectives

Empty Homes is an independent charity. It helps people create homes from empty property and campaigns for more empty homes to be brought into use for the benefit of all those in housing need. Empty Homes was established in 1992 as “The Empty Homes Agency” a charitable housing association. In 2010 it changed its operating name to Empty Homes.

After its formation Empty Homes quickly became a campaigning voice for those who needed homes and those dismayed at the thousands of homes left empty and abandoned. Over the years it successfully challenged government over the thousands of its own homes that were left empty. It encouraged local government to get involved and today every council in England has a named person who seeks to get empty homes back into use. It successfully campaigned for tax breaks for owners of empty homes who brought them back into use. Its campaigns have ensured that councils have proper powers to deal with empty homes: Empty Dwelling Management Owners were introduced in 2006.

Empty Homes has four aims

- It helps: It offers practical advice and assistance, so that people and communities can create new homes by bringing empty properties back to life
- It challenges: it campaigns to ensure that those in power and those who own property make empty homes available to people who need homes,
- It develops knowledge – It undertakes rigorous research to provide facts and evidence to help people and to make sure its campaigns are targeted.
- It is enterprising – It strives to get the most from every penny it spends, and works with others who share similar aims to create new ideas for homes from empty property.

Empty Homes works with people in housing need, housing cooperatives, property owners, agents, local authorities, housing associations, Government departments and others to help bring these homes back into use. It also works extensively with the media and campaigns for action to help empty homes be returned to use.

Empty Homes pursued its strategic decision to offer more help and direct support to communities and individuals affected by empty homes. Empty Homes’ belief is that communities can be instrumental in helping empty homes be returned to use; either through campaigning to their local authorities to intervene, or by directly using the properties themselves through housing cooperatives and similar locally based organisations.

Public Benefit

When planning activities for the year, the Management Committee considered the Charity Commission’s guidance on public benefit. Empty Homes considers that causing empty homes to be returned to use brings public benefit by increasing the supply of housing available to

people in housing need. It does this by helping provide homes for those who might otherwise be homeless, and provides better quality and more suitable homes for those in unsatisfactory housing. Empty Homes also believes that providing housing from empty homes is one of the most sustainable and environmentally ways of meeting housing need.

Achievements and Performance

Empty Homes had a highly successful year, both in raising awareness of the issue at a national level and through significant progress with several local initiatives that are proving effective in returning empty homes to use.

To achieve the Management Committee's aims, and better align the organisation with its new objectives and funding arrangements, there was a staff reorganisation during the year, which involved changes to some staff posts. The branding of the organisation was also changed to reflect better the organisation's charitable aims.

During the year Empty Homes successfully undertook work against the priorities set by the Management Committee, including:

- Campaign for changes to government policy to enable more empty homes to be returned to use
- Increase support for community driven solutions to empty homes including helping housing cooperatives and other not for profit organisations make greater use of empty homes.
- Increase use of the ReportEmptyHomes website through a media campaign including linking use of the website to a forthcoming TV series.
- Expand the Report Empty Homes website to other parts of the UK.
- Encourage and help local authorities to prioritise properties reported for action and returning to use.

Campaigning for Action

Empty Homes campaigns actively for policy changes that would make it easier for people to bring empty homes into use. Empty Homes made extensive progress in highlighting the problems associated with empty homes and ensuring that all political parties in the local and general elections considered the issue.

As a result of campaigning by Empty Homes, the issue featured prominently in the Conservative party's housing green paper "Strong Foundations", published in April 2009. The paper included two proposals advocated by Empty Homes: changes to funding for housing associations to make it more cost effective and easier for housing associations to work on creating new social homes from empty property. It also proposed changes to the PROD (public request ordering disposal) legislation which exists to enable the public to seek information and request the disposal of publicly owned empty property. The changes would give more powers to the public and update the list of public bodies to which the legislation applies.

An initiative to reduce empty homes numbers featured prominently in the Liberal Democrats' election manifesto. The policy was launched in March 2010 following campaigning by Empty Homes. The policy proposed a significant grants and loans programme aiming to reduce vacancy by 250,000 in England. The policy was launched by Nick Clegg, Vince Cable and housing spokesperson Sarah Teather with Empty Homes Chief Executive David Ireland.

The government supported Empty Homes' call for more action by local authorities by calling for greater use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) by councils in a statement issued by then housing minister Margaret Becket in April 2009. The government ran a seminar for selected local authorities in conjunction with Empty Homes, attended by then housing minister Iain Wright.

Most recently, building on policies developed by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, the Coalition Government's Programme for Government committed to "explore a

range of measures to bring empty homes into use.” We enjoy a constructive dialogue with ministers and civil servants on the development and implementation of these measures.

Supporting Community Action

Empty homes can have a severe negative impact on the communities in which they are located, leading to problems of crime, anti-social behaviour, and community neglect. In Empty Homes’ view, community action can be instrumental in campaigning for action and can help in the physical work of renovating empty homes. Empty Homes therefore actively supports communities wanting empty homes in their area brought back into use.

Empty Homes’ new website ReportEmptyHomes.com had a successful second year of operation. Over 1400 new reports were made during the year, reporting over 2000 empty properties. During the year 174 properties reported on the site were reported by site users as having come back into use. Responsiveness to the site improved during the year with 60% of councils responding to reports made on the site.

During the year the website was extended to Wales. Empty Homes, working in conjunction with Shelter Cymru, developed a new section to the site that had the option of Welsh language. The site was launched in June 2009.

As the body of its expert knowledge has grown, Empty Homes has spread the word and produces a monthly newsletter giving latest news, events and examples of good practice. Empty Homes published twelve monthly newsletters and bulletins that were distributed to every council in England and over 2,000 other subscribers including housing associations, MPs and other charities and the property industry.

During the year Empty Homes significantly improved its social media reach. It launched new pages on Facebook and Twitter and started its own YouTube Channel. These outlets have attracted significant numbers of new followers who are distinct from subscribers to traditional outlets.

Empty Homes played a significant role in developing a television series “Britain’s Empty Homes” that was broadcast in 20 parts during January 2010 on BBC1. The series followed the work of seven local authority empty property officers and identified empty homes that the programme sought to match to potential purchasers. The BBC did not support the series with on-line information, so Empty Homes provided this by publishing daily information on its website aimed at the audience of that day’s programme. The material proved popular, more than doubling the audience viewing figures for the website during the month. The month also saw a significant increase in the numbers of empty properties reported on the Report Empty Homes website.

Helping Local Authorities

Local authorities have a key role in tackling empty homes, firstly in ensuring the best use of their own stock and secondly as a strategic authority, encouraging (and in certain circumstances enforcing) the proper use of privately owned homes across their borough. Empty Homes encourages every local authority to establish an “Empty Property Strategy”, a corporate cross-departmental plan for bringing empty homes back into use across all tenures.

During this period Empty Homes played a key role in encouraging the government and Homes and Communities Agency to help promote greater levels of skills in getting homes into use. This resulted in the “Empty Homes Learning Programme” that was launched in March 2010. The programme involved providing intensive skills training to 17 local authorities across England, providing regional training courses across the country available to all English local authorities.

Empty Homes worked in conjunction with Shelter Cymru on a programme to encourage local authorities in Wales to take action on empty homes. The programme included two seminars, a skills training programme and the launch of the Welsh version of the Report Empty Homes

website referred to above. Empty Homes also advised local authorities in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland and spoke at the Irish Social Housing conference in September 2009.

Empty Homes ran two well-attended conferences (one in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health) during the period, aimed at housing association and local authority audiences. Empty Homes helped shape a debate on empty homes with the Homes and Communities Agency, which featured video contributions from experts including David Ireland, CEO of Empty Homes, and Sir Bob Kerslake, CEO of the Homes and Communities Agency. It had attracted 139 contributions by September 2010

Helping Housing Associations

Housing Associations have an important role in reducing the numbers of empty homes. As with local authorities, they are large landlords and effective management of their stock reduces vacancy levels. Through their acquisition programmes they can buy or short-term lease properties that were previously empty, thereby returning them to occupation. During this period Empty Homes successfully campaigned for greater flexibility to be given to housing associations to enable them to be grant funded for renovation of empty homes that they acquired.

Action on localised empty homes problems

Empty Homes periodically helps and campaigns on individual and local concentrations of empty properties of major public concern where the local authority is unable or disinclined to act.

Empty Homes was highly successful in helping facilitate a solution to the biggest empty homes problem in London. In the 2008 mayoral election Empty Homes had campaigned for action to be taken on the long-standing problem of empty homes owned by Transport for London on the North Circular Road in North London. Over 80 homes have been empty on this road since they were purchased in the early 1970s for a road-widening scheme that never took place. The successful mayoral candidate Boris Johnson included a commitment to deal with the houses in his housing manifesto. During this year the mayor took action on this commitment and the houses were sold to a housing association for renovation and reuse.

Empty Homes was also successful in persuading the owner of Hall Mead Close in Bugbroke Northamptonshire to renovate and market for sale 6 homes that had remained empty for 18 years.

Empty Homes campaigned on a number of other sites where large numbers of empty homes have resulted from regeneration programmes that have stalled or been abandoned. In Empty Homes' view this is an increasing problem that can in many cases be addressed or alleviated by use of temporary or short life housing. Empty Homes campaigned on this issue on a number of sites including:

- The Ferrier Estate in Kidbrooke South London, where over 1,000 flats remain empty.
- The Ocean Estate in East London where approximately 700 flats are empty
- The Rockfield/Anfield area of Liverpool where over 2,000 houses are empty

Future Plans:

Empty Homes plans to help support and promote the self-renovation of empty homes. It is keen to encourage the use of homesteading models and other self help systems that allow low income people to create their own homes through renovating abandoned property.

Empty Homes plans to campaign to ensure that reuse of empty homes is considered as a significant source of creating new homes. It plans to campaign for changes to ensure housing associations have easier access to funding for renovation schemes involving empty property.

Empty Homes plans to campaign for greater support to be given to the housing cooperative and mutual sectors to ensure that they have the capacity to reuse empty properties.

Empty Homes plans to extend its support for local authorities by offering a new “empty homes learning programme”

Empty Homes plans to ensure that lessons learned and good practice that is developed through its existing learning programmes is made widely available. It also plans to republish and make freely available on-line a selection of “out-of-print” good practice Empty Homes Agency publications

Financial review

In the year to 31 March 2010, the Charity sustained net outgoing resources for the year of £34,322, decreasing total funds from £151,329 to £117,007.

The Agency’s major funders in 2009/10 were the Homes and Communities Agency, and the Oak Foundation. Empty Homes is reliant for its operations on the generosity of its funders, and the charity’s management committee and staff continue to focus closely on securing additional funds to continue and expand the charity’s work.

Financial procedures are carried out in accordance with financial regulations approved by the Management Committee from time to time. These were last amended on 14 April 2009. During the period, financial control of Empty Homes was maintained by Chief Executive David Ireland supported by Alan Stratford, who kept the books of account, prepared monthly management accounts, budgets, and advised on major grant applications. Management accounts are regularly reviewed by the Management Committee.

The Management Committee of Empty Homes comprises senior figures from the charitable, property and housing sectors. Empty Homes maintains bank accounts with the National Westminster Bank plc and invests its surplus funds with COIF Charity Funds.

Risk Management

Empty Homes has compiled a risk register based on guidance received from the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations in accordance with SORP 2005. The register identifies the key risks and assesses the impact of the risk and the likelihood of the risk occurring. The register also includes current and potential action and a schedule for review by the management committee on an annual basis.

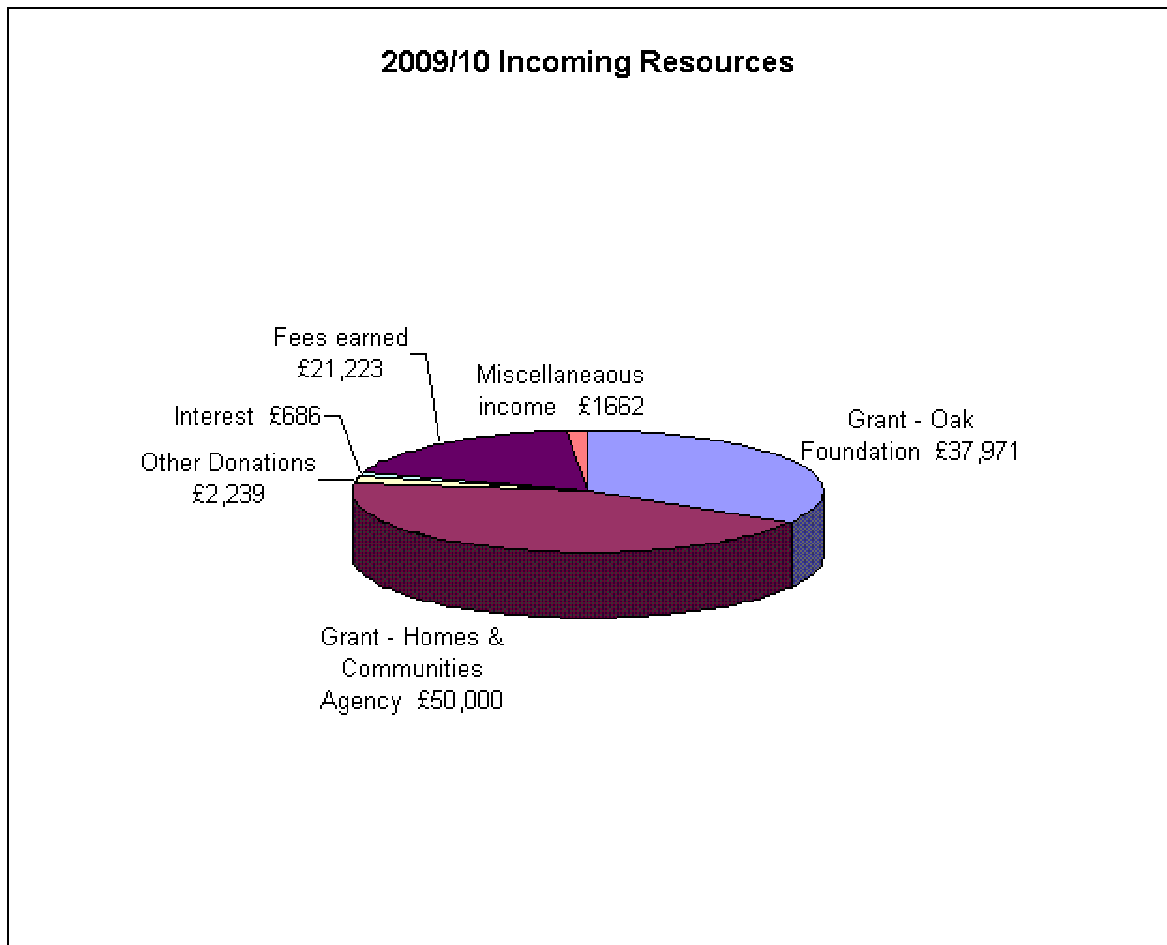
Reserves Policy

Empty Homes’ policy is to maintain sufficient reserves to enable the organisation to operate effectively on a cash-flow basis throughout the year. The policy underpins Empty Homes’ commitment to achieve its objectives and work plan outputs for the year as well as securing the financial position of the organisation as a going-concern.. The adopted policy of Empty Homes is to maintain reserves at no less than four months operational running costs, and this has been met



Empty Homes Agency Limited is a charitable Industrial and Provident Society Register no. 27697R in England

Financial Profile:



2009/10 Resources Expended

