

# EMPTY HOMES



  
**Exeter City Council**

**HOUSING**  
*Strategy*

## ★ PARTNER HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS



## ★ INTRODUCTION

This leaflet describes the work of Exeter City Council's Empty Homes Service. It will be useful both to owners of empty homes and anyone who lives next to or knows of an empty home in their area.

## ★ WHAT IS THE EMPTY HOMES SERVICE?

The Empty Homes Service is a partnership between Exeter City Council, Mid-Devon District Council, East Devon District Council, Teignbridge District Council and seven partner Housing Associations. Since its creation in 1996, the partnership has helped hundreds of empty property owners bring empty homes back into use and in the process, hundreds of families in need of a home.

## ★ WHAT IS AN EMPTY HOME?

A home is classified as empty after it has been vacant for six months or more.

There are thousands of empty properties in the UK and most are **'transactional empties'**, a property in the process of being sold or renovated for new tenants. These are essential to the turnaround in the housing market and may only be vacant for short periods of time. True or **'problematic empties'** only occur when a property has been empty for more than six months with no sign of occupation or renovation.

Empty homes do not include second homes, holiday lets or student accommodation which is only occupied for part of the year.

## ★ WHY DO EMPTY HOMES CAUSE PROBLEMS?

Empty homes cause many difficulties for owners and the local community. Empty homes can attract:

- Vermin
- Squatters
- Vandalism and fly-tipping
- Petty crime
- Arson
- Anti-social behaviour

Some of the above problems may require emergency services to take action, often at the expense of the taxpayer. Unoccupied homes also quickly fall into disrepair, severely affecting the value of the property and neighbouring homes by as much as 10%.

For owners, an empty home can quickly become a source of misery:

- The property will be liable for Council Tax after the six-month discount period.
- It may become a constant source of complaints, both from neighbours and emergency services.
- Disrepair and vandalism can escalate repair costs.

The Empty Homes Agency (a national organisation for empty homes) also estimates that leaving a typical family-sized home empty costs the owner around £10,000 a year (including lost rental income).

## ★ HOW CAN THE EMPTY HOMES SERVICE HELP?

The Empty Homes Service provides information and impartial advice on:

- Selling a property
- Letting Agents
- Letting through the Council's EXtraLet and Private Sector Leasing scheme for families in housing need
- Repairs and renovation
- Grants and other sources of funding
- Renting to Housing Associations and other interested bodies.



## ★ WHAT IS EXTRALET?

EXtraLet is a scheme run by Exeter City Council to improve access to private rented accommodation for households in housing need.

The Council will help bring properties up to the Decent Homes Standard and acts as a managing agent, charging a competitive management fee and offering:

- A rent and damage deposit guarantee to the value of six months rent
- Guaranteed rent of 50% during void periods up to two months
- Arranging and paying for initial electric safety checks and an asbestos survey
- Arranging and paying for the annual gas safety check
- A fast tenant referral system
- A free referencing service
- Regular management inspections
- A comprehensive inventory and digital recording.

The scheme accepts quality one, two and three-bedroom, unfurnished properties with a secure garden or outside area (subject to requirements).





## ★ WHAT IS PRIVATE SECTOR LEASING (PSL)?

For the Private Sector Leasing Scheme the Council will help bring properties up to the **Decent Homes Standard**. The owner then rents the property to the Council, who sub-lets to the tenant. The owner is guaranteed a monthly income and has no involvement either with the tenant or the property for the leasing period.

Interest in properties is dependent on need and all properties are used for households in homeless need.

## ★ WHAT HAPPENS WHEN AN EMPTY HOME IS REPORTED?

Empty Homes Officers keep a register of all empty properties which are reported either by members of the public or through Council Tax.

When an empty home is reported officers will:

- Attempt to discover who owns the property. Officers have access to Council Tax records, Land Registry details and other tracing services
- Visit the property to assess its condition, speak to neighbours and take photographic evidence
- Speak to other Council departments and public bodies to find out whether there have been other complaints or notices served on the property

- Contact the owner to determine the reason the property is empty, negotiate with them and work together to bring the property back into use either through sale, renting in the private sector or letting through Council schemes or Housing Associations.
- Advise the source of the report on any progress

Where it is not possible to work with the owner for whatever reason there are several measures which can be taken but only as a last resort. These are:

- Enforced Sale
- Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO)
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)

## ★ HOW CAN I REPORT AN EMPTY HOME?

If you live next to or know of an empty property in your area, the Council would like to know about it. The Empty Homes Service is committed to bringing as many empty homes as possible within the City back into use.

Officer hours are 8.30am to 5pm  
Monday to Friday.

Please contact the service on:

Tel: 01392 265865

Fax: 01392 265859

Email: [Empty.homes@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:Empty.homes@exeter.gov.uk)

Empty Homes Service  
Exeter City Council  
Civic Centre  
Paris Street  
Exeter  
EX1 1RQ

**COMPLAINTS** – If you have any complaints about the way the service has been delivered please contact the Empty Homes Service for a copy of the complaints leaflet.



Exeter City Council

# HOUSING

Strategy

Leaflets available from the  
Housing strategy series are:

- ★ EXtraLet Tenants
- ★ Empty Homes

## AVAILABILITY IN DIFFERENT FORMATS

This leaflet is available in large print,  
on tape and in other languages.

Please contact: The *Empty Homes Service*  
on 01392 265685 or Fax 01392 265859

or write to:

Empty Homes Service, Exeter City Council,  
Civic Centre, Paris St, Exeter, EX1 1RQ.

[www.exeter.gov.uk](http://www.exeter.gov.uk)

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