

North Somerset Council

Empty Property Strategy



2008–2011

Contents

Councillor Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
The Context	7
• Local Plans and Strategies	
• National & Regional Plans and Strategies	
• The Number of Empty Properties	
• Housing Need	
• Legislation & Policies	
Our Priorities and Actions	16
Resources	22
Monitoring and performance	23
Appendices	
Appendix 1 - Glossary	
Appendix 2 - Contacts	
Appendix 3 - Policy	
Appendix 4 - List of groups/organisations consulted	
Appendix 5 - Consultation comments	

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the Empty Property Strategy developed by North Somerset Council and our partner agencies. This strategy complements North Somerset Councils Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing Strategy.

Empty properties represent a wasted resource to the community when there is a high demand for rented housing in the district. North Somerset Council is committed to reducing the number of empty properties by working with owners of properties.

This strategy provides information on our priorities and actions over the coming years to help tackle the issue of empty properties. The actions within this strategy should bring real benefits to communities within North Somerset.



Councillor Ian Peddlesden
Executive Member for Community Services, Adults and Housing

Executive summary

We have produced this strategy to develop an action plan of how empty properties in North Somerset can be brought back into use. It covers the period 2008 – 2012.

The aims of the strategy include:

- Increasing Options
- Improving Accuracy of Records
- Increasing Publicity
- Involving Others

Key issues are:

- Address environmental concerns
- Reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill
- Make our streets and communities safer
- Improve customer care and customer services across the council
- Maintain an affordable and sustainable level of council tax

We will do this by:

- Devising new and innovative ways of encouraging owners of empty properties to bring them back into use and developing a framework for using enforcement tools. Addressing the problems of disadvantaged areas, ensuring that the most appropriate uses are found for vacant or underused property which will enhance the quality and mix of property in the area.
- Ensuring that information held about empty properties is accurate and up to date.
- Raising awareness within the Community to tackle empty property issues.
- Seeking help from residents, stakeholders and external partnerships to tackle the problem and establish why the property is empty.

Introduction

This draft Strategy sets out what North Somerset intends to do about the issue of empty properties during the next 3 years.

The purpose of the Strategy is to ensure that the number of empty properties in North Somerset is kept to a minimum and to identify new opportunities to encourage owners to bring them back into use.

In a district where housing demand exceeds housing supply, it is difficult to see why properties are left empty, deteriorating and disused. An empty property can be a residential dwelling, disused office space, industrial building or space above a shop. It can be owned by an individual or an organisation and for the purpose of this Strategy, actions will be aimed at those empty for 6 months or longer.

The actions set out later in this document have been developed to achieve the following priorities and objectives:

- **Increasing Options** - Devising new and innovative ways of encouraging owners of empty properties to bring them back into use and developing a framework for using enforcement tools. Addressing the problems of disadvantaged areas, ensuring that the most appropriate uses are found for vacant or underused property which will enhance the quality and mix of property in the area.
- **Improving Accuracy of Records** - Ensuring that information held about empty properties is accurate and up to date.
- **Increasing Publicity** - Raising awareness within the Community to tackle empty property issues.
- **Involving Others** - seeking help from residents, stakeholders and external partnerships to tackle the problem and establish why the property is empty.

This strategy aims to ensure that the development of empty properties is in accordance with the Local Plan and is carried out in the best interests of the residents in the area promoting regeneration, investment and contributing to a reduction in social problems, crime and disorder.

Consultation and Partnerships

In February 2007 an Empty Property Steering Group was established. This is made up of officers from planning, housing renewals, conservation, housing options and a chosen Registered Social Landlord (RSL) from the Local Tier Partnership. The group meets four times a year to ensure targets are met and discuss joint working relationships, as well as contributing to the development of this draft document.

We will be consulting with a wide range of stakeholders during February and March to ask views on this draft strategy.

Stakeholders will include:

- Elected members and Town/Parish Councillors
- Private Landlords
- Residents
- Partner Agencies e.g. police
- Housing Association partners
- Officers in Planning, Housing Renewals, Conservation, Housing advice



Example of empty property in North Somerset

We will then amend the draft strategy in light of any responses we receive and aim to publish the Strategy in April/May 2008.

The Context

Local Plans and Strategies

Sustainable Community Strategy

The North Somerset Partnership has developed a Sustainable Community Strategy for North Somerset. This identifies long-term shared priorities that the agencies wish to work towards, to improve the wellbeing of local residents. These shared priorities are to:

- Tackle disadvantage and promote equality of opportunity
- Develop strong inclusive communities
- Improve health and wellbeing
- Ensure safer communities
- Develop a prosperous economy and enterprising community
- Ensure a quality environment

Corporate Plan

The Council's Corporate Plan is one of a number of plans and strategies that will contribute towards the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy. There is also a Local Area Agreement. This is an agreement with Central Government which sets out a series of areas where the council and its partners have agreed to focus on over the next three years.

Under the Corporate Plan the council has identified nine key areas where it plans to focus its improvement efforts over the next three years. This Empty Property Strategy is able to link with five of these priorities:

Council Priority	Empty Property Link
Address environmental concerns	Empty properties can be targeted by arsonists, vandals, attract litter and vermin which impact significantly on the community.
Reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill	Hazardous and other special wastes, attracting high disposal charges are often dumped in and around empty properties.
Make our streets and communities safer	Empty properties attract squatters, children and young people who may have no criminal intent but who could cause noise and other problems including anti-social behaviour, underage consumption of alcohol and drug taking.
Improve customer care and customer services across the council	Complaints and queries about empty properties will decrease, improving the complaints performance indicator.
Maintain an affordable and sustainable level of council tax	By bringing empty properties back into use, the council will be able to maximise income through council tax.

Housing Strategy

The North Somerset Council Housing Strategy covers the period 2004-2009. It is currently being refreshed to cover the period 2008 –2010. The overall aim of the Housing Strategy is ‘delivering real improvements in housing and support services to meet the needs of our communities’.

The Housing Strategy priorities include:

- Improve access and choice in Housing For All
- Achieve decent and safe properties for our residents
- Target housing care and support where it is needed most
- Increase and manage our housing resources efficiently

Tackling the issue of empty properties is highlighted within the Housing Strategy.

Private Sector Housing Strategy

A robust Private Sector Housing Strategy was adopted in 2006, covering the period 2006 – 2010. This strategy concentrates on the private sector, which is the sector where most empty properties fall. It outlines the current headlines regarding empty properties as well as detailing future challenges and priorities for action.

Local Development Framework

The Local Development Framework (LDF) is a collection of documents that collectively delivers the planning strategy for North Somerset, and will guide all future development including housing. This comprises both the statutory development plan and supplementary planning documents. The Core Strategy will set out the spatial vision and objectives for the area, and the mechanisms for delivering that strategy. Where land is allocated for specific uses, this should be made in a document such as an Area Action Plan.

A number of documents are prepared to support the Local Development Framework. One of these which is currently under preparation is the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment that identifies potential sites for housing up to 2026. The potential for the reuse of empty properties will form part of that assessment.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy (2006-2011) was published in 2006. This proposes a significant step change in the amount of development proposed for the West of England sub-region including a 9,000 dwelling urban extension at Weston and 10,500 at SW Bristol (9,000 in North Somerset). Following an Examination in Public in 2007, the Panel Report was published in January 2008. This confirmed the proposed urban extensions within North Somerset, and increased the District allocation from 26,000 to 26,750 dwellings. Once approved (anticipated Autumn 2008), the Regional Spatial Strategy will form part of the Development Plan.

National & Regional Plans and Strategies

Housing Green Paper

Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable (2007)

The recent Green Paper which sought the views on the Government's proposals to increase the supply of housing, highlights the importance of bringing empty properties back into use. It also introduced the new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) to incentivise and facilitate local authorities to deliver a step change in housing supply. This will be to meet the Government's ambition of 200,000 new homes per year, this includes bringing empty properties into use.

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) (2006)

National planning advice on housing is set out in PPS3. It encourages local planning authorities to make effective use of the existing housing stock, and "they should develop positive policies to identify and bring into residential use empty housing and buildings in line with local housing and empty properties strategies". Obstacles to the development of vacant or derelict sites and buildings should be addressed, for example, by the use of compulsory purchase powers where that would help resolve land ownership or assembly issues.

Housing Act 2004

The Housing Act 2004 contains a wide range of measures that will help protect the most vulnerable in society while creating a fairer housing market for all those who own, rent or let residential property. In terms of how this relates to empty properties, Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) have been introduced. This enables local authorities to take legal action with owners of empty properties who refuse to bring their property back into the housing market. Other empty property planning tools are looked at later.

Unlocking The Potential (2003)

In February 2003 the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) published "Unlocking the Potential". This document sets the importance the government placed on the reuse of empty properties. It states that the reuse of empty properties can bring both financial and non-financial benefits to the owners, Local Authorities and the general public.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 (RRO)

The RRO enables Local Authorities to develop private sector renewal policies that reflect local needs and priorities and respond to challenges in the local housing market.

The South West Regional Housing Strategy

The Regional Housing Strategy 2005-16 has been prepared by the South West Housing Body (SWHB) within the context of “just CONNECT!” the Integrated Regional Strategy for the South West 2004-2026 (South West Regional Assembly, 2004). It has three strategic aims, improving the balance of housing markets, achieving good quality homes and supporting sustainable communities.

West of England Housing Delivery Plan

The West of England Housing Delivery Group consists of four unitary authorities - Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES), Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. Together they created the Housing Delivery Plan. Initial priorities include developing a sub-regional understanding of housing issues. Specifically, interpreting and advising on the Regional Housing Strategy, Regional Spatial Strategy and Integrated Regional Strategy. The group will focus on developing joint policy responses to and actions for the sub-regional housing study and to oversee actions to ensure the adequate supply of housing, especially affordable housing.

Audit Commission

The Audit Commission’s Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE’s) are looking for councils to proactively be targeting enforcement measures and an Empty Property Strategy will play a key part in demonstrating that the Council have a proactive approach.

The Number of Empty Properties

National Picture

In 2001 the Empty Homes agency recorded 753,188 empty properties. Official figures show there are 675,000 empty homes in England, of which 288,000 have been empty for more than six months. Although this statistic has reduced over the period of 6 years, the issue of empty properties remains a significant problem throughout the country.

Regional Picture

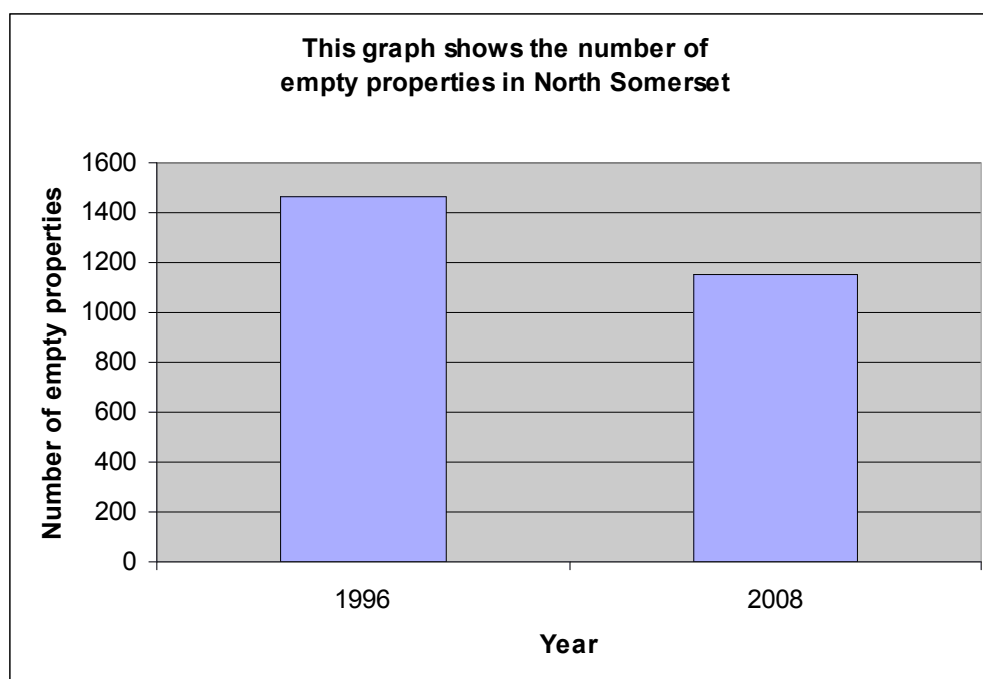
There are a total of 50,492 empty properties in the South West region, according to a report carried out by the Empty Homes Agency in 2006.

Long-term empty property rates in the South West are among the lowest of the English regions – only around 1.4% of the stock is empty for more than 6 months, and the region recorded the largest drop in empty properties in 2004 (ODPM, 2004d). There are however, variations in performance across the region, with more long-term empty properties in rural areas.

Local Picture North Somerset

The stock condition survey revealed that 3.08% of the housing stock in North Somerset is empty compared to the National Average of 3.19%.

An analysis of the Council Tax data on empty residential properties in April 1996 shows that there were 1467 empty properties left empty for six months or longer. In February 2008 the number of empty properties has decreased to 1156 that have been empty for more than six months. These figures include second homes.



Historically, due to limited resources North Somerset Council has concentrated on bringing empty properties back into use by advice or guidance. However, there is considerable room for improvement particularly with regard to properties that have been empty for many years, those that are in a dilapidated condition and where advice and persuasion has failed. It has been recognised through the Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing Strategy that a more robust and structured approach is required.

The majority of empty properties are in Weston-super-Mare, with 535 properties recorded as empty in 2008 with owners choosing not to occupy them, a large majority of these include second homes, which at present are not a high priority to target.

There are some properties that are of greater concern than others. Properties vacant less than six months are not a high priority due to the fact that for the housing market to function there will always be a need for a certain number of properties to be empty so that the normal buying and selling can take place.



Council Tax is payable in respect of empty properties, second homes and properties that have been unfurnished for more than six months. However, as these properties are not used as a main residence the amount of Council Tax payable will be reduced. Up to the end of March 2004 a 50% discount was applicable. But, Section 75 of the Local Government Act 2003 inserted Section 11A into the Local Government Finance Act 1992 giving billing authorities a discretionary power to reduce the Council Tax discount on long-term empty dwellings. In light of this North Somerset Council introduced a 10% discount in April 2004 on second homes, properties that have been unfurnished for more than six months and empty properties.

Housing Need

In 2007 there were 5096 households on the Council Housing Needs Register seeking affordable accommodation. On average around 630 social rented properties become available to let each year. Demand is therefore outweighing supply.

The West of England Housing Needs and Affordability model carried out in May 2005 by Professor Glen Bramley shows that the net need for affordable housing in 2006 was 1067, with the largest number in Weston-super-Mare. The need for one, two and three bedroom properties is evenly divided throughout North Somerset. New households are unable to afford to buy and dominate the need picture throughout the authority. Currently North Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucester are carrying out a new Social Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) to gain up to date information. The boundaries have changed, Mendip and West Wiltshire are also included in the study to give a wider south west perspective.

In 2006/07 527 households were presented as homeless to the Council, of these the Council accepted a duty to house 126 households. As at March 2007, 97 households were in temporary accommodation waiting for an offer of a permanent home. Given the shortage of social housing in the District, many families are seeking privately rented accommodation.

The average house price in North Somerset for 2007 is £191,171 and the average gross annual pay for full time employees who are resident in North Somerset is £26,179 and the equivalent figure for those working in North Somerset is £23,170. The National Housing Federation has recently published a report stating that many people who are priced out of the housing market are now turning to the social housing sector. As a result housing waiting lists nationally have grown by 57% over the past five years to 1.6million households – or four million people.

Re-using empty properties including shops, office buildings and upper floors provides much needed accommodation and aids the regeneration of areas. Empty properties have a significant effect on the local area and are often eyesores and detrimental to the community, they can impact on the local trading community's image and strength. They can also be a focus for anti-social behaviour, vandalism and other nuisances that bear a cost to the local community as well as being an eyesore.

Legislation and Policies

Enforcement Concordat

In line with the “Better Regulation” consultation in 2005; an enforcement policy has been agreed which follows good practice principles and includes public interest and cost as important considerations when taking any form of enforcement action.

This policy will be taken into account when considering any form of enforcement activity.

A commitment to enforcement action must be supported and resourced for undertaking works in default (as required) and/or referral for court action – prosecution or recovery of costs.

There can be significant costs associated with default work; so any evaluation will include assessing recovery provisions in line with enforcement policy.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)

Since April 2006, local authorities have powers to take control of an empty property for up to seven years, carry out necessary works and then let the property. This power would only be used as a final resort when all attempts to encourage the owner to bring the property back into use voluntarily has failed.

EDMOs were a late addition to the Housing Act 2004 through strong lobbying by the Empty Homes Agency (and others) however, since commencement very few have been issued and presently none in the South West. These orders initially generated a great deal of press interest back in 2006, but in reality they offer another tool to help authorities bring empty properties back into use.

However, the numerous prescribed exceptions and procedural requirements make it difficult to secure an order. Safeguarding the owner’s interest and dealing with income from any letting are critical elements of using the power.

Residential Property Tribunals are becoming more demanding when considering requests from local authorities and evidence of advice and assistance through a strategy are essential to be successful, as must the ability to deliver desired outcome. This route could only be suitable for properties needing little or no refurbishment. When appropriate, applications for EDMOs will be made, following the appropriate stages, subject to satisfying legal and financial requirements.

Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)

The Council can in extreme circumstances, use compulsory purchase to bring a property back into use. However, this option is rarely used; the last occasion in North Somerset was 1993 and was resource intensive. Compulsory purchase is a complex area of legislation and in housing terms the main power comes from the Housing Act 1985. Amendments since that time have strengthened the powers but increased land compensation arrangements. Where local government wish to obtain another persons property, for the benefit of the community; compensation is payable. Each order must be confirmed by the Secretary of State who will require evidence of need, compensation arrangements and details of the planned use of the property; which must be for housing.

Enforced Sale

Enforced Sales procedure is a process by which the Council brings about the sale of a privately owned house. It is used as a means to 'sell on' a long term vacant house to a new owner, in circumstances where the present owner is either unwilling or unable to deal with the house or its associated problems. This tool can be preferred due to significantly lower costs and administrative burden.



Example of damage caused by leaving a property empty

An alternative approach would be to carry out work in default of notices that have not been complied with and charge for the works. Where costs are not repaid, enforced sale of the property could be actioned. This approach has been carried out with great success in Manchester and Leeds.

Overall, enforcement tools enable the process of bringing properties back into use more successfully. Enforcement is an important part of any empty property strategy, but is best reserved for properties where voluntary approaches have been tried and failed. Throughout using these tools, good practice must be followed, highlighting the benefit to the local community and identifying value for money.

Our Priorities and Actions

In developing this Strategy it is vital to have an understanding of the reasons why properties might be left empty and the value of bringing them back into use. Homes can be empty for a wide variety of reasons. Some reasons are indicative of a healthy market, for example major refurbishments, and others such as slow to let homes can be indicative of wider market problems. It's generally accepted that the number of long-term empty properties is the best indication of problems in the housing market.

In 2006 funding was secured for the post of the Housing Development Officer, to tackle the issue of empty properties in the district. Steps have already been taken to bring properties back into use; including identifying how many empty properties are in the district. Council Tax records have been used to provide this information. Properties identified as empty for longer than six months, were sent a letter to provide advice and guidance to the owner to bring the property back into use. Included in this was a questionnaire for owners to complete to establish why the property is empty.

The Council attaches importance to bringing all empty properties back into use. However, it has to make effective use of the available resources, therefore for the purposes of this Strategy efforts will be targeted at those empty for over six months. We also need to prioritise for investment this will be done through the Empty Property Steering Group.

Below are our priorities for addressing the issue of empty properties.

Increasing Options - Devising new and innovative ways of encouraging owners of empty properties to bring them back into use and developing a framework for using enforcement tools. Addressing the problems of disadvantaged areas, ensuring that the most appropriate uses are found for vacant or underused property which will enhance the quality and mix of property in the area.

It is important to ensure, particularly in areas exhibiting multiple deprivation, that the proposed new use for the empty property supports the community's wider objectives for the area. For example, there may be areas where a particular mix or tenure of property is preferred in order to create a more balanced community, and potentially help to address social, crime and disorder issues.

There are a number of options for owners of empty properties to consider including:

- Accessing help and advice from our Housing Resource Officer
- Change of use to residential or commercial
- Letting the property themselves or through a commercial letting agent
- Selling or leasing the property to a housing association
- Selling the property on the open market or auction

The Council is working in partnership with organisations and individuals to assist owners in bringing empty properties back into use.

Financial assistance can be given to bring a property back into use. Grants can help towards the cost of carrying out the necessary works to make the property suitable for habitation along with providing a property that meets the Government's Decent Homes Standard.

North Somerset has adopted an innovative approach through its own Housing Renewals Assistance Policy. A successful bid to the South West Housing Body secured £48,000 over two years to tackle the issue of empty properties by providing assistance to owners for renovation to meet the Decent Homes Standard, in return for nomination rights. This will help meet a range of needs including young people leaving care and homeless households. In addition, the council has agreed to provide additional resources to this scheme to contribute to the Best Value Indicator 64 (BVPI). BVPI 64 is the number of private sector dwellings that are returned into occupation or demolished during the target financial year as a direct result of action by the local authority.

Working with the West of England Private Housing Group, focus has turned to using compulsory purchase more widely and developing a common model for each authority to share good practice. Use of voluntary acquisition would be a favoured route with a willing owner, usually involving a housing association or development partner to take over the ownership. Sale through local auction is an option and could be agreed before committing resource to CPO use.

Action	Target 08	Target 09	Target 10-11	Responsible Officer
Provide owners with help and advice on how to bring property back into use by updating private landlord guide by December 2008.	X			Housing Development Officer and South West Empty Property Group
Explore options for Compulsory Purchase Orders, Empty Dwelling Management Orders and other powers that can be used.		X		Housing Development Officer and Housing Renewals team
Prioritise suitable properties and make recommendations for implementation of Empty Dwelling Management Orders or Compulsory Purchase Orders where all other incentives or enforcement have failed to bring long term properties back into use.		X		Housing Development Officer/ Housing Renewals Team

Improving Accuracy of Records - Ensuring that information on empty properties is accurate and up to date

There are a variety of databases holding information on empty properties. It is important this information is in one central place for all officers to access. New empty properties will be identified at the earliest opportunity and information will be at hand for officers to see if there is previous history, for example whether any notices have been served.

Action	Target 08	Target 09	Target 10-11	Responsible Officer
Create a database to record empty properties and update on to Flare system.	X			Housing Development Officer/Housing Renewals Team
Review council tax discounts for empty properties			X	Housing Development Officer and Council Tax Department
Create links with Council Tax to gain list of empty properties in North Somerset every six months.	X			Housing Development Officer

Increasing Publicity - Raising awareness of the issues

Promotional information is a great way to publicise the empty property service. Initiatives carried out by the council so far include designing a leaflet, creating a press release for National Empty Property Week, taking part in a local radio interview and many more initiatives. Exhibitions have been attended including the Landlord Expo which is an extremely successful landlord event now run in partnership with West of England local authorities and other Council events, to highlight the issue of empty properties in the area.

Effective publicity is critical to a successful empty property strategy as it is quicker and more cost effective than long-winded investigation in reaching a large number of property owners. Those that respond are likely to be more receptive to the advice and information given.

It is hoped that shared advertising with the West of England empty property officers together we can reach a maximum number of owners. Much of the awareness raising is likely to involve free publicity, such as using the council's newsletter and tapping into partner promotional activities.

Another method of publicity will be to continually promote the empty property hotline. Feedback to those that have reported cases is also important to demonstrate that it is worth using the hotline.

The response rate to the mail-shot was successful, 46% of people returned the questionnaire detailing why the property is empty. Each week questionnaires are returned on an ad hoc basis. Some owners detailed that in fact their property was a second home. Currently empty property work looks to focus on properties that are detrimental to the community. Work therefore needs to be carried out with council tax to identify 'true' empties not second homes.

Action	Target 08	Target 09	Target 10-11	Responsible Officer
Ensure contact is made with empty home owners keeping them informed of options open to them every six months.				Housing Development Officer
Mail shot empty property owners who did not respond to initial letter, following up with legislation. This letter will focus on advice to enforcement action. Maintain accurate record or enforcement activity.		X		Housing Development Officer
Create advertisement for local radio to promote empty property initiative.		X		Housing Development Officer
Create links with local press to publicise empty properties.		X		Housing Development Officer

Involving Others - Seeking help from residents, stakeholders and external partnerships to tackle the problem

Housing Advice Team

The Housing Advice Team provides advice and assistance to the public and can signpost to various organisations to obtain alternative accommodation including Housing Associations, Woodspring Deposit Guarantee Board (WDGB) and letting agents. They also provide assistance to landlords to bring their empty properties back into use by providing a number of incentives including finding suitable tenants, cash deposits, landlord subscriptions, Insurance, Tenancy Agreements and assisting with the Housing Benefit forms. They are also able to provide advice on tenancy deposit schemes, tenancy law and notice periods.

Residents

To enable properties to be brought back into use more effectively and efficiently, information surrounding empty properties needs to be detailed. Residents can play an important role in reporting where empty properties are. Although you can identify empty homes through council tax databases and other means, these sources are not error free. Reports from the public can help improve knowledge of an empty property situation. A further advantage is that reports from the public tell you about the cases that are affecting people the most.

Empty Property Owners

Since promoting the empty property service, owners have been contacting the Housing Development Officer to explore the options available. This is a really positive step that owners have taken. There have been many people interested in applying for assistance, seeking advice and guidance. On another positive note, many individuals have expressed an interest in buying empty properties in the district.

Housing Associations

The Empty Property Service will continue to build upon the strong relationships with our Housing Association (HA) partners to explore the opportunity to manage properties on behalf of owners. The council is working with our HA partners to set up a 'pilot' scheme to encourage owners of empty properties to let them through an HA.



Example of a property brought back into use

Private Landlords

The Empty Property Service is keen to work with landlords to bring properties back into use. Professional and private landlords are key players in ensuring private sector empties are reoccupied. They are also likely to provide a major part of the market in the purchase of empties returned to sale, whilst also providing information regarding market conditions. Their active engagement will therefore be encouraged. Landlords may be interested to learn that financial assistance can be given to improve the condition of properties in return for nomination rights.

Action	Target 08	Target 09	Target 10-11	Responsible Officer
Continue and improve external partnership working to share good practice, resources and gain external resources through joint initiatives annually.	X			Housing Development Officer
Undertake initial publicity of the strategy and share with key stakeholders	X			Housing Development Officer
Share empty property information with private landlords through the Landlords Forum		X		Housing Development Officer
Investigate the existing management arrangements with RSL's for the development of empty property schemes annually.	X			Housing Development Officer and Local Tier Partners

Resources

The balance between resources available, priorities of the Council and national and local delivery targets are important in determining what is achievable in terms of reducing the number of empty properties in the District.

However the continued improvement delivered by identified actions can only be sustained if long term funding can be identified and secured. The council may incur costs of building or refurbishment works in using its legal powers. Although it may be possible to recover these costs at a later stage, either from the owner or by securing the sale of the property to a third party, they would need to be met in the first instance. Although decisions on investment can be made on an ad-hoc basis, this is unlikely to enable a prompt response, which may be essential if a property poses an immediate danger

It is therefore advisable that a dedicated budget is set aside within the council which can support the initial investment in bringing properties back into use and any repayments by owners or sale proceeds are repaid into it. Details of the proposed budget are in the next section.

<u>Capital Cost</u>	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	Total
	£,000	£,000	£,000	£,000
Capital Project Appraisal funding bid	60	60	60	180
Other funding available (subject to approval)	70	70	70	210
Total Capital Cost	130	130	130	390

Revenue costs

	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	Total
	£,000	£,000	£,000	£,000
Details: Promotional and publicity material	2	2	2	2
Total Increase / Decrease in Revenue Costs	0	0	0	0

Performance Monitoring

Clear management and co-ordination of resources and partnerships are essential to deliver good services.

This will be achieved by regular:

- Empty property steering group meetings
- Team updates to ensure in-line with Team Plan
- Best value performance indicators
- Capital monitoring programme
- Housing Investment Programme returns
- Business plans
- Comprehensive Performance Indicators
- Reduced complaints

The Council's performance is monitored under BVPI 64. Given the condition of housing stock within the district it is anticipated that the target in the main will be met through units being renovated rather than being demolished.

Financial Year	Vacant properties returned to use
06/07	10
07/08	30
08/09	40
09/10	50

For the year 07/08, a target of 30 empty properties to be returned back into occupation was set for local and national performance indicators. This target has been agreed on research carried out to compare neighbouring council's targets in the South West Region:

Mendip District Council	25
Sedgemoor District Council	20
South Somerset District Council	10
West Somerset District Council	20

This target has been set as a realistic target that is achievable within the resources available at present.

It is hoped that the empty property strategy will raise the profile of empty properties in North Somerset, with increased interest from Councillors, developers and the general public. The actions outline the key objectives of the empty property strategy 2008-2012. The target dates for delivery are set out in the actions highlighted in the priorities section. Delivery of the actions will be formally monitored and reviewed where necessary in-line with Government changes, in the national, regional and local picture.

APPENDIX 1 - GLOSSARY

Action Plan A specific method or process to achieve the results called for by one or more objectives.

Affordable housing Affordable housing is housing that is provided with subsidy (from public-funded sources or as discounts on cost from developers), for people who are unable to resolve their housing needs in the local private sector market because of the relationship between housing and incomes.

Anti social behaviour Anti social behaviour is any activity that impacts on other people in a negative way.

Audit Commission An independent body that is responsible for the appointment of external auditors to local authorities. It has a duty to ensure that local authorities make proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of their resources. It also has the power to undertake special value for money studies.

Area Action Plans is a development plan document which focuses on a specific area or location in order to deal with conservation of that area, or significant change which will happen within it.

Best value performance indicators Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) are a statutory set of 90 indicators developed by Government Departments to measure the performance of local authorities, that is, all local authorities must measure themselves against BVPIs. The data is collected and audited annually by the Audit

Commission. They are called Best Value Performance Indicators or 'BVPIs' as they derive from the duty of Best Value on local authorities, which came into effect under the Local Government Act 1999. Prior to Best Value, the Audit Commission set similar measures of performance.

Brownfield Land is land which has been used previously and is due to be or has been redeveloped (for housing).

Building Regulation The Building Regulations apply to building work in England & Wales and set standards for the design and construction of buildings to ensure the safety and health for people in or about those buildings.

Business plans Details the steps required to carry out the activities critical to achieving a department's mission.

Capital monitoring programme to provide information on matters affecting capital spending in the current year.

Community Strategy Identifies the key challenges that need to be overcome and demonstrates a commitment to developing and co-ordinating joint work programmes to address issues.

Compulsory Purchase This is an acquisition in accordance with statutory procedures and practice, of interests in land or rights, by a public or private body empowered to do so by an Act of Parliament, and authorised so to do by an appropriate Compulsory Purchase Order.

Core Strategy The Core Strategy sets out the overall planning vision and framework.

Corporate plan This is our delivery plan for realising the broader 25 year vision for North Somerset. Council Housing Needs Register.

Decent Homes Standard The Governments target to ensure that all Social Housing meets a basic standard by 2010.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders The Government consulted on proposals for secondary legislation to Part IV of the Housing Act 2004, regarding Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs).

Empty Homes Agency is an independent campaigning charity, which exists to highlight the waste of empty properties in England and works with others to devise and promote sustainable solutions to bring empty properties back into use.

Empty Properties for the purposes of this strategy are properties that have been empty for longer than six months.

Empty Property Steering Group A group of officers who meet half yearly to discuss the action plan and current issues.

Executive Members Councillors who are members of the cabinet.

Green Paper This Housing Green Paper seeks views on the Government's proposals to increase the supply of housing, to provide well designed and greener homes that are supported by infrastructure and to provide more affordable homes to buy or rent.

Greenfield sites These are sites which have never been developed or used for an urban use, or are on

land that has been brought into active or beneficial use for agriculture or forestry i.e. fully restored derelict land.

Housing and Planning Delivery Grant is a new £500m fund to incentivise improved housing delivery, including more effective planning, to better address local needs.

Housing Association A non-profit making organisation providing housing for rent or shared-ownership for those in need. Housing Associations are either registered as Charities or friendly societies and most are registered with the Housing Corporation.

Housing Corporation The Government organisation, which provides capital and revenue funding for registered social landlords such as Housing Associations and monitors their performance.

Housing Development We aim to create an appropriate mix of homes and tenure types on all new housing developments. A set of documents for developers in the form of our Affordable Housing Developers' Pack is available to explain our policies.

Housing Needs The requirements that individuals and households have for housing.

Housing Renewals This service provides housing renewal advice and grants, repairs and home improvement assistance, home energy efficiency and conservation advice

Housing Stock The total number of houses owned.

Housing Strategy A document produced by the local housing authority usually covering a three-year period setting out strategic aims and objectives across all housing tenures within the district.

Local Authority Elected Councils, which provide local services.

Local Plan It applies and implements all national and regional planning policies interpreting them into specific planning guidelines for the district and was adopted in June 2000.

National Housing Federation Umbrella body that represents independent non-profit housing associations in the United Kingdom.

National Statistics Free access to data produced by the Office for National Statistics, government departments and devolved administrations.

Notice periods The notice of termination, what is required to be given by the parties.

Performance Indicator A comparative measure of performance against a present standard, which helps to show whether an objective is being achieved.

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) underpins the delivery of the Government's strategic housing policy objectives and our goal to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent home, which they can afford in a community where they want to live.

Private Sector Housing Strategy Private Sector Property or finance not controlled by, for example, local

authorities, Central Government agencies, voluntary organisations or Housing Associations.

Regional Spatial Strategy RSL (Registered Social Landlord) All landlords wishing to claim Social Housing Grant must be registered with the Housing Corporation as RSLs. Housing Associations are the main existing RSLs.

SPG (Supplementary Planning Guidance) Planning Guidance, which supplements the policies and proposals of the development plan, giving more detailed advice on a particular topic or site. It does not have the same status as a development plan but the local planning authority will take it into account as a material condition.

Sustainable Development Where the environmental impact of new building takes into account transport, landscape, wildlife, waste disposal and social issues.

Stock condition An Independent Survey carried out to assess the quality of housing in the North Somerset area. The data collected from the survey will be considered when setting future housing policy.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment are key component of the evidence base to support the delivery of sufficient land for housing to meet the community's need for more homes.

Sustainability A state or process that can be maintained indefinitely.

Tenancy Agreements The tenant is given exclusive possession of the site for a term.

The Housing Act 2004 The Housing Act 2004 introduced several reforms to protect the most vulnerable tenants, bring empty homes back into use, and tackle antisocial behaviour. Most of the changes took effect on 6 April 2006.

The Local Development Framework Is a set of documents that will guide planning and development in North Somerset unit 2026 and beyond.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2003 The Order gives local authorities greater discretionary powers to provide assistance such as low cost loans and equity release as well as grants to private homeowners and others to help them to renovate, repair or adapt their home.

The West of England Housing Needs and Affordability Model A report commissioned to research housing need in the West of England.

Woodspring Deposit Guarantee Board Assist single individuals/childless couples 18-65 who have lived in North Somerset for a minimum of 6 months with a contribution towards a deposit to access private rented accommodation.

APPENDIX 2 CONTACTS LIST

Stuart Palmer
Head of Housing
Tel: 01934 634 542
email: Stuart.palmer@n-somerset.gov.uk

Victoria Kay
Housing Development Officer
Tel: 01275 884136
Email: Victoria.kay@n-somerset.gov.uk

Howard Evans
Housing Renewals Manager
Tel: 01934 634 819
email: Howard.evans@n-somerset.gov.uk

Phillippa Yeates
Housing Development Manager
Tel: 01934 634 833
email: Phillippa.yeates@n-somerset.gov.uk

Kay Topazio
Housing Strategy and Policy Manager
Tel: 01275 888 350
email: Kay.topazio@n-somerset.gov.uk

Claire Hawkins
Housing Options and Advice Manager
Tel: 01934 634 507
email: Claire.hawkins@n-somerset.gov.uk

APPENDIX 3 – DOCUMENTATION LIST

North Somerset Community Strategy

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Your+Council/Policies+plans+and+strategies/Community+Strategy/>

North Somerset Corporate Plan

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Your+Council/Policies+plans+and+strategies/Corporate+Plan/>

North Somerset Housing Strategy

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Housing/strategiesandpolicies/housingstrategy/>

North Somerset Affordable Housing Delivery Plan

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Housing/strategiesandpolicies/ahdp/>

North Somerset Private Sector Housing Strategy

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Social+care/Housing/Housing+strategy/privatesectorhousingstrategy.htm>

North Somerset Local Plan

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Your+Council/Policies+plans+and+strategies/Local+Plan/>

North Somerset Local Development Framework

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Environment/Planning+policy/Local+Development+Framework/>

Audit Commission

http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/7AEDA72A-F51D-4AC2-B2AC-FE8BDFE6ED74/0/document_20070701_AuditCommission_HousingServicesReport.pdf

Housing Act 2004

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/strategies/yearplan/thehousingact/>

The National Housing Federation

<http://www.housing.org.uk/>

Stock Condition Survey 2005

http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C162D5AF-16AB-4CCB-9F32-B72AEA1729A7/0/report_20060701_PrivateSectorHouseCondReportExecSummary.pdf

National Statistics

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/>

The Empty Homes Agency

<http://www.emptyhomes.com/>

Housing and Planning Delivery Grant

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/overviewpolicy/proposals/>

Decent Homes Standard

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/decenthomes/>

Empty Dwelling Management Orders

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagementcare/emptyhomes/frequentlyaskedquestions/>

Compulsory Purchase

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/planningpolicyimplementation/reform/planningcompulsory/>

Links to other Councils

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DI1/Directories/Localcouncils/AToZOfLocalCouncils/index.htm>

The South West Housing Body

http://www.southwesthousingbody.org.uk/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=1662

South West Regional Spatial Strategy

http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=836

Area Action Plans

<http://consult.n-somerset.gov.uk/inovem/consult.ti/WestonTownCentreAAP/viewCompoundDoc?docid=34996&partid=46836>

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2002/20021860.htm>

Housing Renewals Assistance Policy

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Housing/adaptationsandimprovements/>

The Housing Green Paper

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/homesforfuture>

APPENDIX 4 – LIST OF ORGANISATIONS/GROUPS CONSULTED

North Somerset Council Members
North Somerset Council Planning Department
North Somerset Council Public Website
North Somerset Housing Management Forum
North Somerset Local Tier Partnership
North Somerset Parish Council

APPENDIX 5 CONSULTATION COMMENTS

Below are some of the comments made from participants in the consultation and where, if relevant, in our strategy these issues are covered.

ORGANISATION/ INDIVIDUAL	KEY COMMENTS	WHERE ADDRESSED
Brockley Parish Council	Very comprehensive Could be helpful, deserves publicity Positive idea – hope the proposal bears fruit A lot of thought gone into this Looks good, no suggestion for improvement	Within Actions
Winscombe & Sanford Parish Council	Easy to understand Agreed with priorities	Within Actions
Aster Housing	Easy to understand Agreed with priorities Targeting of B&B owners in the Weston-super-Mare area to release property	Section - Our Priorities and Actions
Cllr Sue Creasey, North Somerset Council	Easy to understand Agreed with priorities When promoting to the public the span and services provided by the Housing Options Team should be highlighted. I think it likely that landlords and homeowners may not be aware that information may also be relevant/of help to them. They may think for the benefit of tenants only. Hopefully you will also include approaching businesses that have unused accommodation above premises.	Section - Our Priorities and Actions

Your details:

Name

Address

Telephone

Languages:

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (✓) | <input type="checkbox"/> Arabic | <input type="checkbox"/> Polish | <input type="checkbox"/> Tagalog |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Bengali | <input type="checkbox"/> Portuguese | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese | <input type="checkbox"/> Punjabi | <hr/> |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Greek | <input type="checkbox"/> Thai | |

Other formats:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (✓) | <input type="checkbox"/> Large print |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Braille / Moon |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CD / Tape |

Return to:

Housing Strategy and
Commissioning Team
Town Hall
Weston-super-Mare
BS23 1UJ

or call: **01934 888 819**

**This publication is available in large print,
Braille or audio formats on request.**

**Help is also available for people who require council
information in languages other than English.**

Please contact 01275 884 136