

Factsheet 5

The costs and risks of owning an empty home.

Why is it a problem that I own a residential property that remains empty?

Your empty home is a wasted resource for you as well as the city or town it's located in. Nationally there are over 200,000 empty houses or flats.

As your house deteriorates its value is decreasing, and you could be losing out on income by not taking advantage of the many opportunities to let it out.

For the city or town it's located in, it could be a home for the many people who are looking for somewhere to live but can't find one due to the shortage of housing available.

For the local neighbourhood empty houses in poor condition can attract problems with anti-social behaviour, crime and damage to yours and your neighbour's homes. This can have a knock on effect on local house prices.

It's important that you keep your empty property looking cared for (Factsheet 3 covers what can help keep your property safe) and better still get it occupied to protect your important asset.

What are the benefits of letting out my property?

- You receive a regular income, enabling you to keep up with regular maintenance
- You have someone living there that's providing security and protection against squatting and crime
- If you decide to sell later, the property will have greater value due to being looked after and maintained
- You will have less outgoings such as council tax and utilities payments

- You keep your property. There are many options for letting:

- Renting through council leasing, Tenant Finder, private sector leasing or rent deposit schemes.
- Private renting through a private agency – letting agencies will offer a range of management services.
- Renting it out privately yourself

How can my local authority help?

Local authorities can provide information, advice and sometimes financial support to help you renovate your property, sell it or rent it out.

Financial assistance

They offer loans for essential repairs to owners of empty properties that have been empty for six months or more to help bring them back into use. Each local authority runs a slightly different scheme but they are all administered by Wessex Home Improvement Loans. Check with the appropriate local authority for details of the scheme in your area.

If I don't do anything can the council take action against me?

Where an owner leaves a property empty either in a poor condition or in an area of high housing need, councils do have powers to take the following action:

- Serve notices to improve the visual aspect of the property or make it safe, or prevent nuisance to neighbouring properties.
- **Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)**: This allows councils to take over the management of residential properties, where an owner of an empty property has turned down offers of help to bring the property back into use and can offer no good reason why the

property should remain empty. The council would oversee any capital works needed and use the property to accommodate people in housing need for up to seven years, under a lease agreement.

- **Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO):** Where a property has been empty long term, is in an area of housing need and an owner cannot demonstrate that it will be brought back into use, as a last resort, a council can seek permission from central Government to acquire the property from the owner. They will then renovate it to be used as residential accommodation or sell it to someone else to do the same.

What is the cost of leaving your property empty?

Owning an empty property is an expensive responsibility. The estimated cost of leaving a property empty for a year (based on an 'average' 2/3 bed terrace property) is estimated below.

Loss of rental income (at £900 a month)	£10,800
Maintenance	£500
Security	£280
Insurance (where obtainable)	£280
Council tax	*£2,490 (typical local Band D council tax plus 50% premium)
TOTAL	£14,350 per annum



Changes to your council tax

You may have noticed some changes to the council tax that you have been charged on your empty property. From 1st April 2013, a change in the way council tax is applied to empty properties has come into effect and councils are able to charge more. How new rules have been applied varies between councils – if you need clarification on why your bill may have gone up please contact your local council tax office.

Loss in property value: The value of empty properties depreciates rapidly, and there is a huge demand for housing. Letting out a flat or house can provide a significant income stream, whilst enabling you to afford necessary repairs and maintenance to stop your property from deteriorating further.

Other factsheets available:

Factsheet 1: What shall I do with my property now no one is living there?

Factsheet 2: Letting your house or flat.

Factsheet 3: Keeping your house safe from crime and damage while it's unoccupied

Factsheet 4: VAT, Planning Control and Building Regulations

Factsheet 6: What legal action can a council take with long term empty homes?

There's lots of information at www.no-use-emptywest.co.uk

You can talk to someone for advice by calling your local authority in the area you live:

Bath and North East Somerset:
01225 396411

Bristol: 0117 352 5010

North Somerset: 01934 426885

South Gloucestershire: 01454 865 565