Appendix 1 Redditch Borough Council Empty Homes Strategy 2026 – 29

Redditch Borough Council
Empty Homes Strategy
2026 – 2029

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Foreword

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I am delighted to introduce this updated Redditch Empty Homes Strategy, as addressing the issue of Empty Homes continues to be a key priority for maximising the use of our existing housing stock.

Safe and secure homes should provide stability for people living across Redditch Borough. However, empty homes in our communities can lead to vandalism and other crimes as well as diminishing the quality of the environment overall. At a time of high housing need and increasing homelessness, empty homes are a waste of a valuable opportunity to provide a family with somewhere to build a successful future.

The aim of this strategy is to further improve our current approach to make the best use of all existing housing across our Borough, and it reflects a step change in our commitment to bringing empty homes back into use.

Whilst Redditch Borough Council already helps willing empty home owners with problems they may be experiencing; we have been able to secure Homelessness Prevention Grant funding to invest additional resources to provide a more proactive approach. We aim to contact owners of empty properties, empty for more than 6 months, and work collaboratively to find the right solutions to complex situations.

This strategy will not punish homeowners with valid reasons for vacancy (e.g. in care, serving in the armed forces), instead it targets those who allow assets to fall into disrepair, reducing housing availability for Redditch residents.

The Council carefully monitors the number of empty homes across the Borough. We are committed to finding new ways of ensuring, wherever possible, all housing is brought back into use, including adopting best practice, learning from successful approaches elsewhere and talking to our empty home owners to find out what support they need.

We are looking forward to seeing this new approach to tackle the scandal of empty homes, bringing them back to life as warm safe places to live.

Councillor Bill Hartnett
Executive Member for Housing

Introduction

In October 2025, Redditch Borough had 660 empty homes, of which 320 had been empty for more than 6 months. There were 943 households on the housing register requiring affordable housing. This strategy lays out how the Council will address local empty homes, supporting home owners to bring properties back in to use as quickly as possible and to use enforcement where appropriate.

Redditch Borough Council is committed to ensuring housing is available to meet the needs of local communities. The Council aims to provide more homes for residents, reduce social housing registers and to increase the availability of affordable rental properties. Bringing empty homes back into use, is a key objective to support these goals.

The aim of this strategy is to:

- help alleviate housing need
- improve housing conditions
- offer a wider choice of housing to residents
- minimise the blight that can result where properties are left empty and neglected

Empty homes can have a negative impact on a local area for several reasons, they:

- attract pests and vermin
- can become a focal point for illegal activities such as anti-social behaviour, vandalism and fly tipping
- increase the risk of squatting
- fall into disrepair – increasing renovation costs and possible risks to the public if structures are unsafe
- increase pressure on public resources

Our commitment

Redditch Borough Council is committed to identifying empty homes and developing options for bringing them back into use as quickly as possible. We will do this by setting out clear priorities and actions to tackle empty homes across the Borough and to use the most effective and appropriate interventions.

What is an empty home?

An empty home is a dwelling which is unoccupied and substantially unfurnished. There are two main types of empty homes. Short term empty homes are dwellings which have been unoccupied for under six months. It is often the case that these are in the process of sale. Short term empty homes naturally occur as people's circumstances change, and they move between homes.

Long-term empty homes are dwellings which have been unoccupied and are substantially unfurnished for six months or longer. Bringing long-term, privately owned empty homes back into use is the focus of this strategy. Rather than representing a natural process of change, long-term empty homes indicate there may be other factors leading to a property remaining empty.

What are the reasons behind empty homes?

Residential properties remain empty for various reasons, for example resolving legal ownership as part of an inheritance process. Other factors include new homes waiting for a buyer, owners abandoning properties, owners having a lack of funds for repairs and refurbishment, waiting for planning consent or decision, repossession and perceived difficulties in renting. There is also evidence that some owners have sentimental attachment to a property and are reluctant to part with it for emotional reasons.

Some owners refuse to engage with the council, or they may be unaware of the issues with their property and the effect it is having on the local area. These are often the properties which can fall into disrepair and stand empty for numerous years. It is essential that the council understands the reasons and intentions behind the properties remaining empty to be able to tailor an approach to support the owner in reaching the best possible outcome.

Advantages of bringing empty homes back in to use

Advantages of bringing empty homes back in to use include:

- reducing and discouraging levels of anti-social behaviour, crime, fly-tipping and vandalism
- increasing the provision of affordable housing
- recovering debt owed to the council
- supporting corporate economic growth and development priorities, objectives and strategies
- improving an area, reducing environmental decline and local people's quality of life resulting from living near a long-term empty home
- reducing additional council tax premiums for home owners

National Context

According to the council tax database for 2025, there were 542, 276 empty homes recorded in October across England, representing 2.1% of all homes. This number has risen by 8% since 2024. Of all empty homes, 309,856 were recorded as long-term empty, 57%.

Action to tackle empty homes has a significant potential to address national housing needs. At the end of June 2025, 86,650 households were in temporary accommodation across England and owed a main housing duty by the local housing authority.

National empty homes policy focuses on empowering local authorities to bring vacant dwellings back in to use, guided by a local empty homes strategy. Local authorities have the discretion to charge empty home owners council tax premiums and have a range of legislative powers to tackle empty homes (*appendix 1*). There is no act of parliament that creates a duty on local housing authorities to tackle empty homes. However, councils do have a general housing duty to review housing conditions and needs.

Council Tax Premiums

Since April 2013 local authorities have been able to charge a council tax premium on homes, empty for more than 2 years, that is, an amount charged on top of the council tax due. From April 2021, local authorities could charge a premium of up to 100% for dwellings that had been empty for between 2 to 5 years, up to 200% for dwellings that had been empty for between 5 to 10 years, and up to 300% for dwellings that have been empty for 10 years or more. Since April 2024, local authorities have been able to charge a premium on properties empty for more than 1 year.

In 2025, 291 out of 296 local authorities charged a premium on empty homes. Across England, 153,000 home owners were charged a premium, 28.2% of all empty homes. Some empty home owners are exempt from paying council tax. The key reasons for this are the owner:

- is deceased and the property is subject to probate
- has moved to hospital or into a care home
- is a charity

Good Practice

The Local Government Association's (LGA) 2023 report, A Practical Approach for Councils on Dealing With Empty Homes, lays out recommendations for best practice identified through case studies and research exploring local authorities' empty homes approaches. LGA good practice approaches focus on systematically identifying and recording empty homes in their areas and engaging, encouraging and using enforcement to bring homes back in to use. Case studies in the report cover the benefits of well-trained and dedicated staff working to effective procedures.

Local Context

Redditch is situated in the north of Worcestershire and has a population of 87,847. In December 2025, there were 943 people on the housing register in need of affordable housing. In October 2025, Redditch Borough Council had 660 empty homes, of which 320 had been empty for more than 6 months. Bringing empty homes back into residential use, could contribute to meeting the Borough's housing needs.

National data shows that in October 2025 there were 33,215 long-term empty homes, across the wider West Midlands area [1], representing 1.26% of all dwellings or 12.6 per 1000 dwellings. Across the region, the number of empty homes increased by 4782 (16.8%) between October 2024 and October 2025.

The proportion of empty homes varies widely by local authority area. In October 2025, Stratford upon Avon had the highest number of long-term empty homes per 1000 dwellings at 18.38 and Solihull the least at 5.51. Redditch featured amongst the lowest 10 local authorities at 8.43 empty homes per 1000 dwellings.

Number of Long-Term Empty Homes in Worcestershire

Local Authority	Per 1000 Dwellings	Number Long-Term Empty Homes 2025	Number Long-Term Empty Homes 2024	Change since October 2024	
Bromsgrove	8.88	384	369	15	4.0 %
Malvern Hills	15.97	621	626	-5	-0.8 %
Redditch	8.43	320	283	37	13.0 %
Worcester	14.53	698	653	45	7.0 %
Wychavon	13.71	857	886	-29	-3.3%
Wyre Forest	7.40	364	337	27	8%
Worcestershire	11.59	3244	3154	90	2.9%

Source: Council Tax Base Oct 2025 & Oct2024

Wychavon achieved a reduction in the number of empty homes over the period, one of the top 5 highest reductions across the wider West Midlands. Rugby achieved the highest reduction, 212 empty homes brought back in to use since 2024. Birmingham saw the highest increase at 1654 empty homes.

(1) In the context of the Council Tax Base, the wider West Midlands refers to Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire. West Midlands and Worcestershire (ONS)

When the number of long term empty homes and all empty homes in Redditch are compared with the number of dwellings in the area, we can see that approximately half have been empty, for less than 6 months. This indicates a relatively higher turnover when compared with the data for Worcestershire as a whole and England.

Local Authority	Proportion of Empty Homes 2025	Proportion of Long-Term Empty Homes 2025
Redditch	1.74%	0.84%
Worcestershire	1.91%	1.16%
England	2.10%	1.20%

In October 2025, there were 320 long-term empty homes in Redditch. The table below shows how these were dispersed over council tax banding. Just over 87% of all empty homes are in bands A to C.

Council Tax Banding	Number	Percentage
A	120	37.5
B	111	34.7
C	48	15.0
D	20	6.3
E	15	4.7
F	2	0.6
G	2	0.6
H	2	0.6

Of all 660 empty homes, 380 were paying full council tax. 134 were paying a premium, which constitutes 20.3% of all empty homes. This was slightly above the county average of 19.3% and below the average for England of 28.2%. There are 146 properties exempted from paying council tax. The reasons for this are varied but most commonly, the owner is deceased and their estate is in probate, or the owner has moved to receive or provide care elsewhere.

From April 2026, Redditch Borough Council premiums will be charged as follows, (where an empty home owner does not qualify for an exemption):

Time Empty	Council Tax Premium
1-5 years	100%
5-10 years	200%
10 years plus	300%

Local Good Practice

Wychavon and Malvern district councils have recently developed their empty homes resources. In 2024, Wychavon appointed a dedicated Empty Homes Officer, who has made progress, bringing long- term empty properties back in to use.

Wychavon District Council & Malvern Hills District Council

Both Worcestershire district councils have a full-time, dedicated empty homes officer working in the private sector housing team. The council tax and private sector housing teams work together, sharing data on a weekly basis to maintain an up to date and accurate empty homes data base.

Local Government Association recommended processes are used to track and monitor empty homes. Wychavon District Council has a target of bringing 30 homes back into use between 2024 and 2028, as part of the We Are Wychavon Plan. Empty homes officers use a range of tools to achieve their aims. Tools include informing property owners of support available as early as possible and using enforcement where necessary. Successful joint working with council tax colleagues also ensures owners of empty homes are paying the correct council tax premiums.

Empty Homes Strategic Priorities

Our approach to tackling empty homes and delivering on our commitment, is centred around three priority areas:

Priority 1

Develop systems, processes and multi-agency working

Priority 2

Improve intervention pathways, resources and performance

Priority 3

Strengthen early intervention, engagement and monitoring

The strategy action plan (appendix 2) lays out details of how each of the strategic priorities will be delivered.

Accountability

Officers will implement the action plan, and progress will be monitored through regular performance reports.

Appendix 1 Legislative Powers for Tackling Empty Homes

Legislation	Summary of Power	Lead Department	Timescale	Priority Use	Notes / Practical Considerations	If Owner Cannot Be Located
Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949	Require owner to keep property free from rats/mice and remove accumulations of waste.	Private Sector Housing/ Worcestershire Regulatory Services	Quick	First-line	Can be used immediately if infestations or waste are visible. Covers gardens and interiors. Cost recovery.	Serve notice to last known address, affix to property, and proceed with works in default if no response. Recover costs via local land charge.
Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 s.29	Secure unsecured or dangerous empty building to prevent unauthorised entry.	Private Sector Housing (with Legal & Property Services)	Quick	First-line / Escalation	48 hrs notice unless urgent. Works in default recoverable from owner.	Affix notice to property and proceed to secure if no owner contact. Charge costs to property as a land charge.
Building Act 1984 s.77 & s.78	Order owner to make building safe (s.77) or take emergency action (s.78).	Private Sector Housing/ Building Control	Quick (s.78) / Medium (s77)	First-line / Escalation	s.78 allows immediate works if imminent danger. Cost recoverable from owner.	Proceed under s.78 without owner consent if imminent danger. For s.77, serve notice to last known address and property. Charge

Legislation	Summary of Power	Lead Department	Timescale	Priority Use	Notes / Practical Considerations	If Owner Cannot Be Located
						costs as land charge
Building Act 1984 s.79	Require repair/restoration or demolition of ruinous/dilapidated buildings affecting amenity.	North Worcestershire Building Control	**Medium**	**Escalation**	Limited to amenity impact. Can require rubbish removal from site.	Serve notice to last known address and property. Works in default possible if no owner found. Costs recoverable.
Town and Country Planning Act 1990 s.215	Require improvement of land/building where condition harms local amenity.	Planning Enforcement	**Medium**	**First-line / Escalation**	Minimum 28 days compliance. Used for overgrown/derelict sites.	Serve notice to last known address and affix to site. Works in default if no owner found; costs recovered as land charge.
Housing Act 2004	Require works to remove Category 1 or 2 hazards under HHSRS.	Private Sector Housing	**Medium**	**First-line / Escalation**	Enables works in default, fines. Powers of entry included.	Serve to last known address and property. If no access, use power of entry (with warrant if needed). Works in default recoverable.

Legislation	Summary of Power	Lead Department	Timescale	Priority Use	Notes / Practical Considerations	If Owner Cannot Be Located
Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)	Take control of empty home to let/manage it.	Private Sector Housing, Strategic Housing and Business Development Manager (with Legal & Cabinet approval)	**Medium / Long-term**	**Escalation**	Must be empty 6+ months. High capital and management resource required.	Can proceed even without contact, reasonable steps to locate owner required, then apply to First-tier Tribunal.
Enforced Sale Procedure (LPA 1925 s.103)	Force sale of property to recover debts over £1,000.	Legal Services (triggered by Private Sector Housing, Council Tax Recovery, or Housing Strategy)	**Medium**	**Escalation / Last resort**	Simpler than CPO. Can be linked to works in default or council tax arrears.	Ownership not required for contact, sale can proceed based on registered title and debt charge.
Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO)	Acquire property without owner consent to bring into use.	Private Sector Housing, Strategic Housing and Business Development Manager (with Legal & Cabinet approval)	**Long-term**	**Last resort**	Cabinet approval required. Must show voluntary action attempts first.	Can proceed without contact, but must evidence reasonable attempts to trace owner. Notice published and posted on site.
Housing Act 1985 s.17	Compulsory purchase to improve housing stock or bring empty homes	Private Sector Housing, Strategic Housing and	**Long-term**	**Last resort**	Needs Secretary of State approval. High cost. Disposal to	Can proceed without contact, but must evidence

Legislation	Summary of Power	Lead Department	Timescale	Priority Use	Notes / Practical Considerations	If Owner Cannot Be Located
	into use.	Business Development Manager (with Legal & Cabinet approval)			RSL/developer/owner-occupier.	reasonable attempts to trace owner. Notice published and posted on site.

Empty Homes Strategy – Action Plan

This action plan has been developed in line with the Local Government Association's Empty Homes Toolkit, which promotes a staged approach focused on accurate data, early engagement, proportionate enforcement and strong partnership working.

The plan reflects LGA best practice by prioritising the establishment of reliable data and governance arrangements first, followed by structured engagement and intervention pathways, and then scaling up early intervention and enforcement activity once systems are embedded.

The phased delivery model ensures the Council builds capability incrementally, demonstrates value for money, and uses enforcement powers proportionately and effectively to bring empty homes back into use.

Priority 1 – Develop systems, processes and multi-agency working.

Action	KPI / Measure	Start	End	Key Milestones	Responsible Team(s)
Develop systems to record and track empty homes across the district	Centralised empty homes system goes live, 100% of known empty homes logged and tracked	1st Aug 2026	1st January 2027	System design complete (1st August 2026); Go-live (Jan 2027)	Private Sector Housing (Lead), Council Tax
Develop and embed data-sharing processes between PSH and Council Tax	Data-sharing arrangement agreed; routine data transfer embedded as business as usual	1st July 2026	1st Sept 2026	Data-sharing agreement signed (1st July 2026); Automated / routine transfer in place (1st Sept 2026)	Council Tax (Lead), Information Management, Private Sector Housing
Participate in joint departmental and agency working group for complex cases	Quarterly meetings held; minimum 5 complex cases reviewed and actioned per year	15th June 2026	Ongoing	First meeting attended (15th June 2026)	Private Sector Housing (Lead), Council Tax, Planning, Building Control, Legal Services,

					Worcestershire Regulatory Services
Review options for public reporting of empty homes	Online reporting route improved and promoted; baseline established for number of public referrals	1st July 2026	31st Dec 2027	Online updates completed (1st Oct 2026); Communications campaign launched (Dec 2026)	Web Team (Lead), Private Sector Housing, Communications, Customer Services

Priority 2 – Improve intervention pathways, resources and performance

Action	KPI / Measure	Start	End	Key Milestones	Responsible Team(s)
Review PSH processes using support, advice, incentives and enforcement	Baseline established for case progression times; standard empty homes case pathway approved and implemented	1st September 2026	1st December 2026	Process mapping completed (30th Sep 2026); Pathway approved (1st December 2026)	Private Sector Housing (Lead), Legal Services, Finance, Strategic Housing
Identify range of support, incentives and enforcement options	Menu of support and enforcement tools agreed and documented	1st October 2026	1st March 2027	Options appraisal completed (1st December 2026); Toolkit approved (1st March 2027)	Private Sector Housing (Lead), Strategic Housing
Develop scoring matrix aligned to LGA Empty Homes Toolkit	Scoring matrix designed and applied to 100% of empty home cases	1st November 2026	1st March 2027	Draft criteria (1st December 2026); Full implementation (1st March 2027)	Private Sector Housing (Lead)
Analyse effectiveness of empty homes	Annual performance report produced; improvement	1st December	1st February 2028 (then	Baseline dashboard (1st November 2027); Year-end	Private Sector Housing (Lead),

processes	actions agreed and tracked	2027	annual)	analysis (Feb 2028)	Strategic Housing
Identify and explore good practice to address barriers	Benchmarking completed; practice note adopted and implemented	1st December 2027	31st March2028	Desk research (Dec 2027); Peer engagement (Mar 2028); Practice adoption (Jun 2028)	Private Sector Housing (Lead), Strategic Housing, Empty Homes Regional Network
Develop targets to bring empty homes back into use	Annual and strategy-level targets set; quarterly monitoring in place	1st Sept 2026	15th Dec 2026	Baseline agreed (Oct 2026); Draft targets (Nov 2026); Sign-off (Dec 2026)	Private Sector Housing

Phase 3 – Strengthen early intervention, engagement and monitoring

Action	KPI / Measure	Start	End	Key Milestones	Responsible Team(s)
Develop early intervention processes for newly identified empty homes	From go-live, 100% of newly identified empty homes contacted within 12 weeks	1st Nov 2026	28th Feb 2027	Workflow design complete (30 Nov 2026); Go-live (Feb 2027)	Private Sector Housing (Lead), Council Tax
Create survey to establish effectiveness of early intervention for previous empty homes owners	Survey designed and issued	1st Jan 2027	31st Mar 2027	Survey design (Feb 2027)	Private Sector Housing
Consult previous owners of empty	Annual survey completed; action	1st April	30th June	Findings Report (June	Private Sector Housing

homes	log agreed and monitored	2027	2027	2027)	(Lead)
Monitor and report on homes brought back into use	Annual empty homes performance report published	1st Jan 2027	Ongoing	First annual report published (Apr 2027)	Private Sector Housing
Explore options to increase homes brought back into use (complex / multi-agency cases)	Options appraised annually; at least one new delivery option piloted	1st Jan 2027	31st Dec 2027	Long list (Mar 2027); Shortlist & pilots (Jul–Sep 2027); Appraisal (Dec 2027)	Multi-Agency Working Group (Lead), Legal, Finance, Registered Providers / Partners