

Trafford Council

Empty Homes Strategy 2019-2024

Annual Statement 2022



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Introduction

Trafford’s Empty Homes Strategy 2019-2024 was launched in November 2019. The Strategy identifies how the Council, with support from partners, will reduce the number of empty properties within Trafford by bringing them back into use. The Empty Homes Strategy complements the Trafford Housing Strategy 2018-2023 and plays a role in delivering the priorities set out in the GM Housing Strategy 2019-24.

Annual Review 2022

The Trafford Empty Homes Strategy 2019-2024 must be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure effective delivery. This annual review provides an update on the following:

- Strategic Context
- The Number of Empty Homes in Trafford
- Achievements
- The Empty Homes Strategy Action Plan

Strategic Priorities

The following strategic priorities have been identified for this Strategy:

- Work with owners of long-term empty properties to bring them back into use.
- Improve our neighbourhoods by addressing long term empty homes that have become the focus of anti-social behaviour and neglect.
- Provide advice and information to help raise awareness around long-term empty properties.
- Develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders to address long term empty properties.

Strategic Context

Greater Manchester Housing Strategy 2019-2024

The GM Housing Strategy was launched in 2019 shortly after Trafford's Empty Homes Strategy. It makes reference to the low levels of empty homes across Greater Manchester stating that only 2.5% of all dwellings in Greater Manchester are empty, which is the lowest level recorded since 2004. However, it is recognised that reducing the number of empty homes even further is a viable way to increase housing stock, improve communities, and tackle homelessness. The GM Housing Strategy therefore highlights that the £300m Housing Investment Loan Fund can be accessed to tackle empty homes.

Levelling Up and Regeneration

In May 2022, DLUHC published¹ a policy paper summarising the steps being taken through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and other legislation and policy. This is with the intention to devolve power and give local leaders and communities the tools they need to make better places and homes.

DLUHC intend to introduce wider support that will empower local authorities to double the standard council tax rate on any home left empty for longer than a year, rather than two. It is hoped this will bring more empty homes back into productive use, while raising additional revenue to support local services and keep council tax down for local residents.

In April 2020, Trafford Council made the decision to increase Council Tax on long-term empty homes in an effort to incentivise owners to bring the properties back into use. From this date Council Tax doubled on properties that have been vacant for 2 to 5 years, trebled for houses that have been empty for 5 to 10 years and, from April 2021, quadrupled for houses that have remained vacant for more than 10 years.

Action on Empty Homes

In a report published in March 2022², Action for Empty Homes offered insight to empty homes and underutilisation across Greater Manchester. The report focuses on several areas of impact to empty homes, namely Air BnB 'short term lets' and second homes. The report is clear that out of the ten boroughs across Greater Manchester, five boroughs have seen an increase in their long-term empty homes. The data shows that 1 in every 61 homes are empty in Trafford alone.

¹ [Levelling Up and Regeneration](#)

² [Action for Empty Homes – Pretty Vacant Manchester March 2022](#)

According to AirDNA³ data, there are currently 237 active rentals operating through Air BnB and VRBO (another short-term holiday let site) in Trafford. There are increasing concerns that empty homes are being redeveloped or converted into accommodation that is used on a short-term basis rather than benefiting the local demand for housing and reaching the local rental market.

The most popular rental size in demand is one, two and three bedroomed properties. The data confirms that 56% of the 237 properties are entire home short term lets. The remaining 44% are either a room in a house or shared rooms. The data confirms that 133 properties are in use for short term let alone, reducing the number of available long-term privately rented accommodation.

Official data on Air BnB use is not collated as part of a statutory requirement and therefore can be difficult to monitor. Information from the report states that there is a much higher concentration of such homes within the City of Manchester.

Empty Homes in Trafford

DLUHC produces annual data showing how many empty homes there are in each area of the country⁴. This data comes from Council Tax records, so will not include empty properties that are undisclosed to Council Tax nor derelict properties not recorded as dwellings. Despite these limitations, the data is a good indicator of the level of empty properties in each area.

Figure 1 uses the DLUHC data to show the number of homes within Trafford that are classed as long-term empty i.e., have been vacant for 6 months or more. It demonstrates that the number of long-term empty homes in Trafford has increased every year from 2014 to 2019.

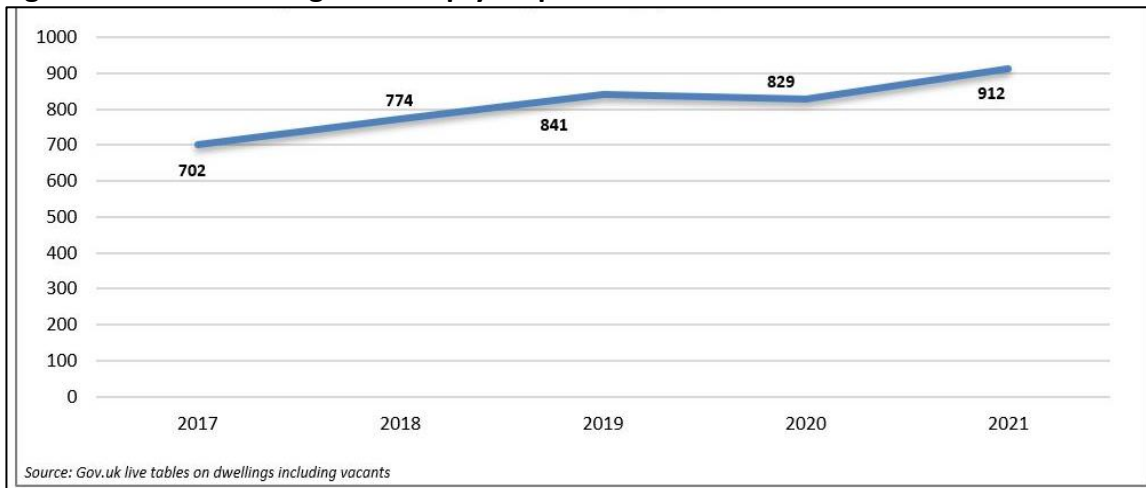
The increase in the number of empty homes being reported can be attributed to a number of reasons. The current cost of living crisis may see that owners can no longer afford their mortgages and therefore abandon the homes. Owners may also not be able to carry out essential repair work to continue living in a property due to affordability issues. Post COVID19 caused supply chain issues for materials to carry out building works, therefore properties with renovations works considered empty may have been delayed in completion to liveable standards. Properties could be subject to probate and divorce proceedings.

Although the empty properties have increased there have been a number of achievements following actions being progressed.

³ [Air Data Short Term Lets](#)

⁴ [Live tables on dwelling stock \(including vacants\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Figure 1: Number of Long-Term Empty Properties in Trafford



Achievements

In 2021/22, the Housing Standards Team has taken action against nine long term empty properties

Joint working with Registered Providers now ensures disposals of empty homes follow the correct process

The empty property scoring matrix is in full use to identify and score all empty properties in Trafford

All 163 properties identified using the scoring matrix have been surveyed. 88 empty properties have been prioritised based on risk.

An Empty Homes Online Reporting Tool has been developed to enable residents to report empty homes to the Council for action.

Since sharing news relating to the long-term empty homes in Timperley being brought back into use, 14 additional reports of empty homes have been received.

Case Study: Mossgrove Road, Timperley

A property that has been standing empty and in a poor condition for five years is now fully renovated and occupied. The house on Mossgrove Road, Timperley, had been empty and prompting complaints from neighbours until Trafford Council's Housing Standards team stepped in to take action.

The team contacted the owner on a number of occasions to ask that improvements be made to the property and gardens, which had fallen into disrepair.

A series of warning letters were then issued that required the owner to provide a comprehensive programme of renovation works and a firm timescale for their completion.



The owner continued to fail to make sufficient progress and the condition of the property and land deteriorated further.



When no action was taken, Trafford's Housing Standards team served enforcement notices that set a legal deadline for the owner to complete specific improvement works.

The owner was warned that if they failed to comply the council would complete the works itself and all unpaid costs would be recovered by the enforced sale of the property.

Due to the Housing Standards team's hard work, the owner sold the property last summer and it has undergone full renovation. It has since been sold to a new owner to the benefit of the local residents and local community.

Empty Homes Strategy Action Plan Update 2022

A review of the Empty Homes Strategy Action Plan 2019-2024 has been undertaken to determine what has been achieved, what is underway and what still needs to be actioned.

A copy of the Empty Homes Strategy Action Plan update is contained within Appendix A.

What challenges have been faced?

- Post Covid-19 challenges continue to place additional pressures on Housing Standards and Planning Enforcement which continues to divert limited resources away from proactive empty homes work.
- Increased workload in the Housing Standards team has delayed empty property survey work and progression of priority cases. A small number of actions are no longer achievable for the Housing Standards team and have been removed to account for the increased work load.
- Some owners of empty homes who, prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, had given undertakings to complete works leading to renovation and reoccupation or sale of their property, have experienced delays resulting in a lack of progress.
- Homes for Ukraine has increased the demand in workload for the Housing Standards team who must inspect properties when households express interest. This has taken priority over other work.

What has been achieved?

- ✓ The 'scoring matrix' has been successfully launched and all 163 identified empty properties have now been surveyed.
- ✓ A number of properties were found to be reoccupied and there is now a list of 88 empty properties that have been prioritised based on risk, the highest of which will take priority to be brought back into use.
- ✓ The 'scoring matrix' has identified that often properties which have recently become vacant due to the death of the occupier, and which are going through probate, are the easiest and quickest to sell and bring back into use.
- ✓ One high priority long term empty property at Mossgrove Road, Timperley brought back into use

- ✓ Work undertaken to identify areas in Trafford with the highest housing need. Old Trafford, Altrincham and Urmston have the highest housing need. Old Trafford needs mainly 2 and 3 bed flats, Altrincham needs 1, 2, 3 and 4 bed houses and Urmston needs 3 bed houses.
- ✓ The £10k Empty Property Loan amount can be increased if required on a case-by-case basis for the most challenging empty homes.
- ✓ Registered Providers are now notifying the Council when they intend to carry out a disposal.

What is underway?

- ✓ Work with owners of long-term empty homes to bring them back into use as affordable housing and emergency/temporary accommodation.
- ✓ Identify properties that are long term empty and draw up action plans to return them to use.
- ✓ Make better use of the powers and legislation to bring long term empty properties back into use.
- ✓ Continue to engage with owners of empty properties to ensure they are fully aware of their options.
- ✓ Promote the online reporting form on the Council's webpage more effectively through social media, to encourage the public to report an empty property in their neighbourhood.
- ✓ Work with Registered Providers to identify opportunities to jointly bring empty homes back into use.
- ✓ Work with Homes England to identify funding to bring empty homes back into use.
- ✓ Work with colleagues across the Council to identify empty properties and agree the most appropriate action to bring them back into use.
- ✓ Work to identify suitable empty properties above commercial premises which could be brought back into use as residential properties.

What still needs to be actioned?

- ✓ Carry out a pilot initiative in Sale and Stretford, which have the highest number of long-term empties for the longest periods of time and draw up action plans with owners to bring them back into use.
- ✓ Investigate why there has been a low take up of Council Vacant Home Loans through contact with all owners of properties that have been empty for more than 6 months.

- ✓ Investigate the reasons why property owners are not making use of the Empty Property Matchmaker scheme.
- ✓ Explore opportunities to use the renovation of empty homes to train and educate individuals regarding the construction trade.

The Empty Homes Strategy Action Plan (2019-2024) will continue to be reviewed and updated bi-annually, and an update report will be produced and published annually.

Appendix A

Trafford Council

Empty Homes Strategy Action Plan 2019-2024



www.trafford.gov.uk

Ref.	Action	By when	By who	2022 Update
ACTION 1: WORK WITH OWNERS OF LONG TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES TO BRING THEM BACK INTO USE				
1.1	Identify areas of highest housing need from the results of the Trafford Housing Needs Assessment.	March 2020	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team	COMPLETED Old Trafford, Altrincham and Urmston have the highest housing need. Old Trafford needs mainly 2 and 3 bed flats, Altrincham needs 1, 2, 3 and 4 bed houses and Urmston needs 3 bed houses.
1.2	Work with owners of long term empty homes to bring them back into use as affordable housing and emergency/temporary accommodation.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, HOST, Registered Providers	The Housing Standards and HOST team are continuing to identify and consider procuring empty properties that are viable to use as Temporary Accommodation. The Empty Homes Assistance Scheme initial policy was drafted and reviewed on the 1st of September 2021. Active discussions are being had to consider whether the use of funding for this scheme as it is has historically not been well utilised. It is not a priority for Housing Standards to work on this further at this time.
1.3	Identify properties that are long term empty and draw up action plans to return them to use.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team	The Housing Standards team continue to identify and engage with empty property owners to bring homes back into use. This year the team successfully completed a compulsory purchase order and carried out works and renovations to a property in Timperley. The Housing Standards team continue to reactively respond to any reports received about empty properties within the Borough and score these according to their condition, to prioritise enforcement action in relation to them. Each property is dealt with on a case by case basis, dependent it's condition, related nuisance/ASB issues and engagement of the owner(s). A further targeted mailshot was going to be considered but hasn't been carried out.

Ref.	Action	By when	By who	2022 Update
1.4	Carry out a pilot initiative in Sale and Stretford, which have the highest number of long term empties for the longest periods of time, and draw up action plans with owners to bring them back into use.	December 2023	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, HOST, Registered Providers	No further action at this time due to other priority work. This will need to be progressed.
ACTION 2: IMPROVE OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS BY ADDRESSING LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES THAT HAVE BECOME THE FOCUS OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND NEGLECT				
2.1	Develop a matrix to be used to assess the priority for bringing empty properties back into use and draw up a marking scheme for priority scoring.	March 2020	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, HOST	COMPLETED An empty homes scoring matrix has been developed and used to prioritise areas and properties.
2.2	Identify priority properties to be targeted for action as a result of using priority scoring matrix.	December 2021	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, HOST, Registered Providers	COMPLETED All 163 properties have now been surveyed. Some of the properties were found to be reoccupied and there is now a list of 88 empty properties that have been prioritised based on risk, the highest of which will take priority to be brought back into use.
2.3	Using the matrix to identify those empty properties that can be brought back into use quickly and with limited investment.	December 2021	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, HOST, Registered Providers	COMPLETED The matrix is in full use and the Housing Standards Team score all new empty properties reported to us to prioritise those that need to be focussed on more urgently. Often properties which have recently become vacant due to the death of the occupier, and which are going through probate are the easiest and quickest to sell and bring back into use.

Ref.	Action	By when	By who	2022 Update
2.4	Make better use of the powers and legislation to bring long term empty properties back into use.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, Legal	<p>Housing Standards have drafted procedures for enforcing the sale of and compulsory purchasing empty properties. These are in the final stages of completion but there is no deadline for this. The team continue to serve enforcement notices on problematic empty properties and where applicable, undertake works in default of those notices and place a charge on the property, which is recoverable upon the sale of the property.</p> <p>The online reporting form is live and has been complete for some time https://www.trafford.gov.uk/residents/housing/housing-standards/Report-an-empty-property.aspx</p>
ACTION 3: PROVIDE ADVICE AND INFORMATION TO HELP RAISE AWARENESS AROUND EMPTY PROPERTIES				
3.1	Continue to engage with owners of empty properties to ensure they are fully aware of their options.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team	The Council website promotes the benefits of bringing long-term empties back into use and how the Council may be able to assist with this, including interest-free loans of up to £10,000 and the Matchmaker Scheme.
3.2	Promote the online reporting form on the Council's webpage more effectively through social media, to encourage the public to report an empty property in their neighbourhood.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, Communications & Marketing Team	<p>Further work in the near future by the Housing Standards Team will be carried out in relation to the publication of the online reporting tool.</p> <p>The team have been reporting via Trafford News on the website successes which have led to new enquiries from local residents about other empty properties within the Borough.</p>
3.3	Investigate why there has been a low take up of Council Vacant Home Loans through contact with all owners of properties that have been empty for more than 6 months.	December 2023	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team,	No further action at this time due to other priority work. This will need to be progressed.

Ref.	Action	By when	By who	2022 Update
3.4	Explore the opportunity to increase the £10k empty property loan on a case by case basis if required to bring back the most challenging of properties.	March 2021	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team	COMPLETED The Empty Property Loan amount can be increased if required on a case-by-case basis.
3.5	Investigate the reasons why property owners are not making use of the Empty Property Matchmaker scheme.	December 2023	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team	No further action at this time due to other priority work. This will need to be progressed.
ACTION 4: DEVELOP EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS				
4.1	Work with Registered Providers to identify opportunities to jointly bring empty homes back into use.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, SHP, Registered Providers	All the relevant teams continue to work in partnership with the Registered Providers to bring any empty homes back into use. The Housing Standards team are on hand to provide any guidance where necessary.
4.2	Work with Homes England to identify funding to bring empty homes back into use.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, Registered Providers, Homes England, SHP	All the relevant teams continue to be aware of Homes England advice and information in relation to empty homes. Any funding that may become available will be utilised by the teams undertaking work on Empty Homes.

Ref.	Action	By when	By who	2022 Update
4.3	Work with colleagues across the Council to identify empty properties and agree the most appropriate action to bring them back into use.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, HOST, Planning Enforcement, Council Tax.	Housing Standards continues to work in conjunction with Planning Enforcement, Estates and Legal teams to try and bring back into use 2 long-term, problematic empty properties. This work is ongoing and will continue for those problematic homes.
4.4	Work to identify suitable empty properties above commercial premises which could be brought back into use as residential properties.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, HOST, Registered Providers, Town Centres Team	Housing standards respond to any reports irrespective of their status of commercial or residential. It may be that specific monitoring of empty properties includes the property status is considered moving forward.
4.5	Work in partnership with Registered Providers with housing stock in Trafford in order to ensure that all options are considered when carrying out disposals of empty homes.	Ongoing	Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, HOST, Registered Providers	COMPLETED RPs are now notifying the Council when they intend to carry out a disposal.
4.6	Explore opportunities to use the renovation of empty homes to train and educate individuals regarding the construction trade.	December 2023	Employment, Education and Training Task and Finish Group, Housing Standards Team, Housing Strategy & Growth Team, HOST, Registered Providers	No further action at this time. This will need to be progressed within another group or joint working as the Employment, Education and Training Task and Finish Group has been disbanded.