



**TRAFFORD
COUNCIL**

Trafford Council

Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2019-2024

Consultation Feedback Report



Consultation Feedback

Trafford Council undertook a period of public consultation to obtain views, comments and feedback from a range of interested parties, organisations and individuals on the new Empty Homes Strategy (2019-2024).

Formal consultation began on the Draft Empty Homes Strategy on Monday 2nd September and ran for a period of 4 weeks up until Sunday 29th September 2019.

An on-line survey was created which posed questions relating to the proposed priorities and actions required to deliver them. A copy of the survey, Draft Strategy and appendices were available on the Council's website following a press release and publicity via Facebook and Twitter.

In total, 102 responses were received to the on-line survey with 94% being a personal view from residents and elected members. 6% were on behalf of an organisation, with half of these being from a Local Authority and the other half being from a private sector organisation including voluntary sector/charity.

Trafford's Draft Empty Homes Strategy (2019-2024)

This Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2019-24 sets out the priorities for bringing empty homes back into use in Trafford over the next 5 years. Empty homes are a wasted resource when there is a shortage of housing across the country especially in Trafford. These properties also blight our neighbourhoods and can be a focus for anti-social behaviour.

The vision for the Draft Strategy is:

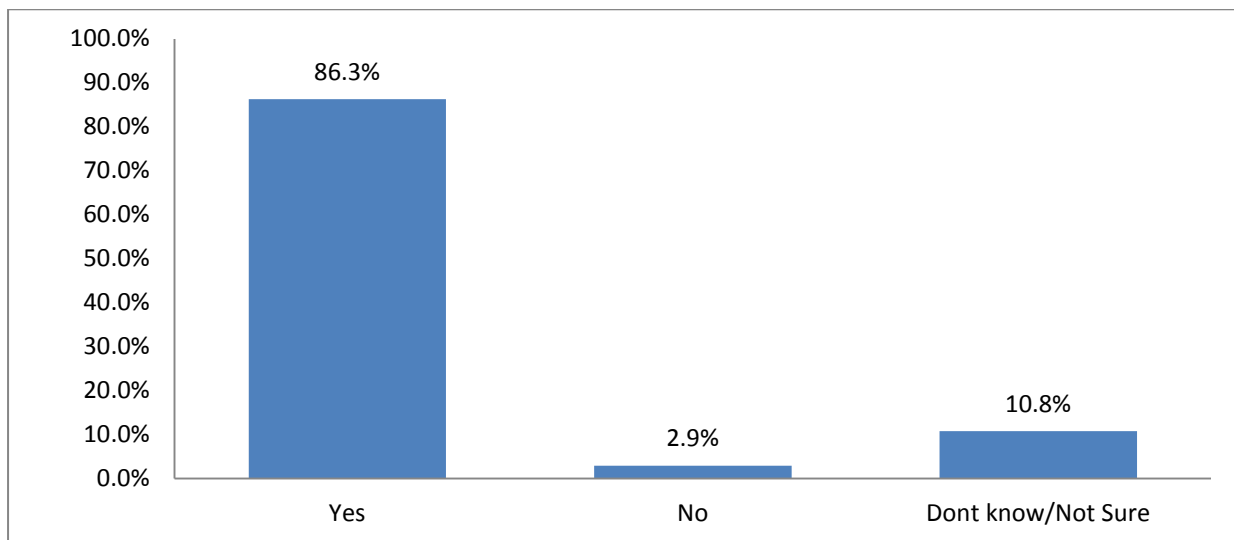
Work together to bring Trafford's long term empty properties back into use to increase the supply of quality, affordable homes for our residents"

To help achieve this vision the draft strategy is structured around 4 clear priorities:

Draft Empty Homes Strategic Priorities:

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

Question 1: Do you agree with the proposed draft empty homes strategic priorities for Trafford?



86% of the respondents agreed with the proposed draft strategic properties. 11% were unsure and 3% did not agree.

Question 2: Of the four priorities identified, which are most important to you and why?

The three most important priorities were recorded as:

1. Improve our neighbourhoods by addressing long term empty homes that have become the focus of anti-social behaviour and neglect.
2. Work with owners of long term empty properties to bring them back into use.
3. Develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders to address long term empty properties.

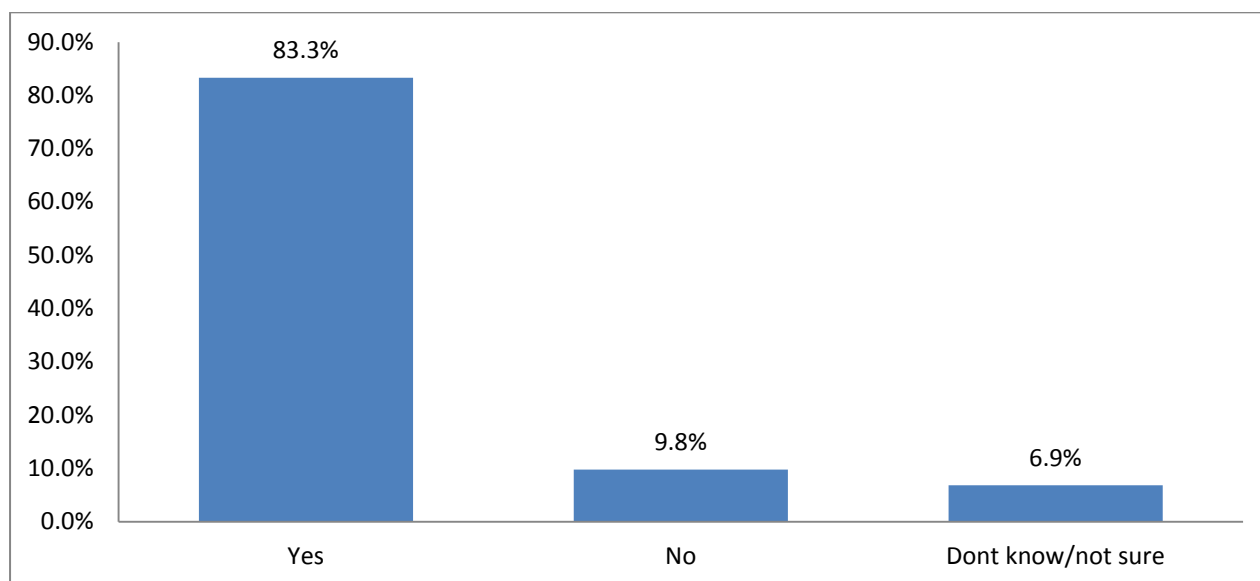
Priority 1: Work with owners of long term empty properties to bring them back into use

Empty homes can make a valuable contribution to meeting housing need when the local authority or a Registered Provider (RP) are able to buy or lease the empty properties from the owner and refurbish them. These can then be rented at an Affordable Rent (80% of market rent) or sold as a shared ownership property to those who are priced out of the housing market in Trafford.

The actions below show how empty properties can be brought back into use for the benefit of the community in Trafford. These actions include:

- Identify areas of highest housing need from the results of the Trafford Housing Needs Assessment.
- Work with owners of long term empty homes to bring them back into use as affordable housing and emergency/temporary accommodation.
- Carry out a pilot initiative in Sale and Stretford, which have the highest number of long term empty properties for the longest periods of time, and draw up action plans with owners to bring them back into use.

Question 3: Do you agree with these actions?



83% of the respondents agreed with the proposed actions. The following qualifying responses were received:

<p><i>I'm not very clear on what the middle point of this means in practice. This objective is good UNLESS it involves using public money to do essential repairs or renovations on what will remain privately-owned properties on any basis other than a loan repayable within a relatively short time e.g. 5 years, during which time it would be a condition of the loan that the property be available for social housing. I'd rather see an initiative to CPO empty properties where the owners have refused to renovate using their own money/a loan, so that the council can retain a long-term stake in the property and ensure it remains available for social housing use. I appreciate that until the pilot is conducted it may be impossible to see if property owners are willing to lay out their own money, but there needs to be a clear alternative if they won't that doesn't involve spending public money to pay landlords to do what they should be doing anyway.</i></p>
<p><i>I have a distaste of the term 'work with owners'....they have allowed these properties to fall into this state, they should be held accountable and theirs hands forced. Council money should not be used for refurbishment unless the council will see a positive return or at the very least break even.</i></p>
<p><i>Shared ownership is a great way to feel secure and proud of your home. I feel lots of people including myself would benefit from this opportunity</i></p>
<p><i>I agree but you need to be careful what tenants are placed in the property. Wrong tenants could be worse for the area than an empty property. Perhaps have the landlord or even neighbours involved in the letting process as well.</i></p>
<p><i>But again enforcement has to happen if owners won't do the right thing</i></p>
<p><i>With housing stock so low would the authority consider compulsory purchase order for empty properties in disrepair. Would you work with Housing providers such as THT to bring back into use or would the council add properties to their portfolio and rent to HOST for example?</i></p>
<p><i>At last Empty Homes strategy meeting (back in the day) it was obvious there was difficulty in tracing owners,</i></p>
<p><i>The owners should not profit hugely from this as a problem has been caused by them due to their neglect of the property</i></p>
<p><i>Not the council problem. Compulsory purchase threat. Landlord will soon sort it out</i></p>
<p><i>If landlords are sitting on these properties and still making money as the property values in the area continues to go up then this is wrong. No home should be left empty and in no fit state to be lived in.</i></p>
<p><i>Sell them to people who need them cheaply and they will do them up</i></p>
<p><i>You want to pilot a scheme in Stretford and Sale and then let them out to the most undesirable of tenants, making certain areas even less desirable to decent people, I suggest you trial this sort of scheme in the leafy suburbs of Altrincham, Bowdon, Hale etc. Their council tax brings in far less than in other parts of the borough, flood their areas with a few more undesirables</i></p>
<p><i>Why do we need a pilot scheme? This is a huge issue across the borough that needs solving. Work should begin with all empty properties and their owners as soon as possible</i></p>
<p><i>All areas should be targeted</i></p>
<p><i>I think that you should do what they did in Liverpool and work with owners to sell the properties cheaply to people (not companies) who can prove they have the money to fully renovate them.</i></p>
<p><i>Although we are in agreement with the above, as suggested previously each property and ownership should be treated as a unique case. Not just tackling longest void properties rather a suite of options that deal with the "easier" cases alongside the harder ones will have a greater long term impact.</i></p>
<p><i>If private property it's up to owners what they do with it.</i></p>

Reasons already stated

Page 12: "areas should be prioritised for bringing long term empty homes back into use"

IF there are really only 774 long term empty homes (I disagree with the figure, its far too low, my data says the actual figure is close to double that - roughly 1500 ish) then contact all 774 owners.

No requirement to prioritise. Every single home brought back into use scores the New Homes Bonus (net)

Initial contact (landlord) should be as soon as practical. Possibly prioritise the enforcement actions but not initial contact.

By prioritising Sale & Stretford you may be missing the "low hanging fruit" that the private sector would be keen to bid on and win (so they can bring back into use quickly and earn them a profit)

Response

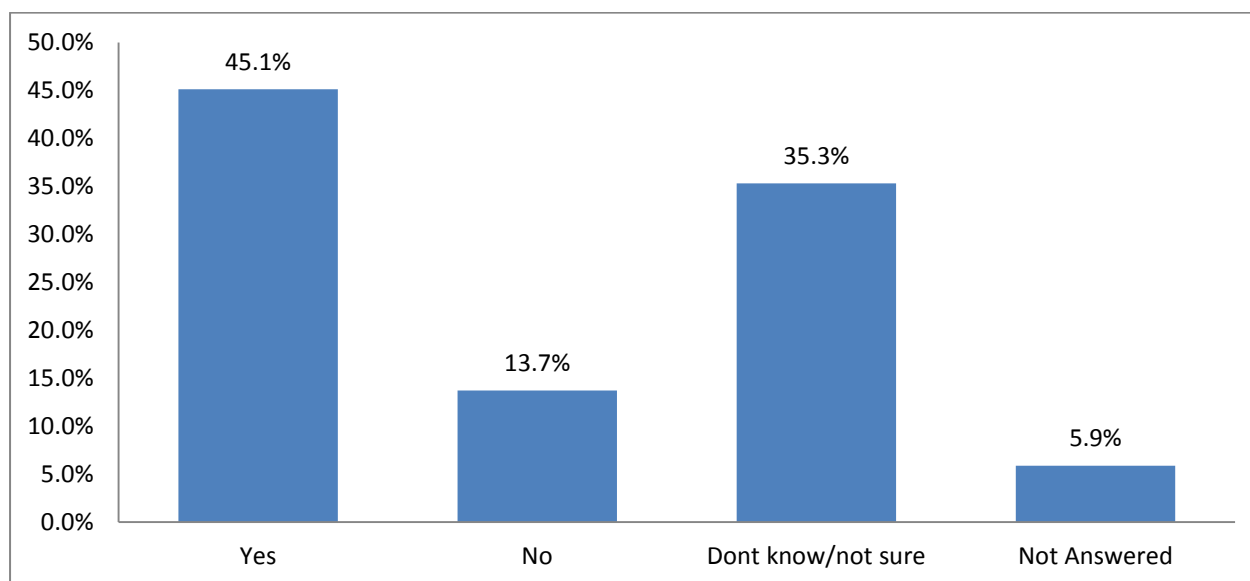
The Council thanks all those that responded and provided additional comments to how the Council can work with owners of long term empty properties to bring them back into use.

The Council appreciates that respondents would like to see all the empty properties targeted and brought back into use but unfortunately Council resources and staff won't enable this to happen and therefore identifying those property types in the highest demand areas such as Sale and Stretford are where staff resources will need to be targeted initially.

It is the Council's intention is to ensure that all the empty properties are assessed across the borough and not just those in the pilot areas. This action has been added to the Strategy and Action Plan

ACTION: Identify properties that are long term empty and draw up action plans to return them to use

Question 4: Are there any other actions we need to consider to bring empty homes back into use in Trafford?



45% of the respondents stated there were other actions that the Council and partners need to consider in order to bring back long term empty properties. The following comments and other suggested actions were provided by the respondents:

I believe we have a dire shortage of housing needs for homeless men over the age of 25 as priority seems to leave them being neglected e.g. there has been a homeless man who through circumstances out of his control has become homeless and there seems to be no urgency to resolve the situation.

CPO where landlords refuse to co-operate. Also a number of housing associations/trusts are now offering repair and building work services to the public as an extension of in-house maintenance on their own properties. It may help if this could be offered by the council as well so that property owners can have easy access to reliable, quality-assured tradespeople and possibly even project management services at a reasonable price to take some of the organisational work out of bringing their properties back into use. This might be of use in preventing properties becoming uninhabitable and falling out of use in the first place too - from personal experience, researching tradespeople and organising repairs whilst working full-time can be very challenging especially if you need to be present at the property during the day to supervise tradespeople who turn out to be unreliable.

Compulsory purchase if owners will not engage with the direction the council wants to take. Forced action, court action, fines etc... upon owners who will not get these properties up and running

Maybe purchase them yourselves and have proper council houses like the old days rather than all this housing association stuff.

If more than one long term empty property is on the same location should it affect traffic and pollution to the area?

These properties should be for those already living in Trafford (not brought in from surrounding localities). They really need to be fit for use and those near schools should be given priority to those with children of the age of the school. If Landlords are not prepared to have their houses turned back into use then they should be heavily penalised with fines or Council tax.

<i>Use compulsory purchase where possible</i>
<i>Availability of options to rent/buy homes is limited. Flexibility of rent to mortgage and reverse would be helpful</i>
<i>The rents need to be affordable and I think our veterans and homeless need to be given priority. Also background checks should be done on all new potential tenants to make sure they are going to look after and maintain the properties and also not cause any anti-social behaviour.</i>
<i>Enforcement. CPO and enforced sale. Owners even when offered a loan towards repair costs in exchange for leasing their property often still won't engage.</i>
<i>I think you're on the right lines by helping the owner bring it back into use. Quite often property will be empty not because the owner wants it that way, but because they can't access funds to turn it around. If I could access funds to turn my property around (outside of Trafford) I would jump at the opportunity. As it is, it's probably going to be vacant another 4-5 years until I am in a position to have the work done. I'd be happy for a council to renovate/lend funds and have a charge against the house/future rents.</i>
<i>If the owner won't cooperate Compulsory Purchase them</i>
<i>Would the council consider some practical, technical and or financial support to the owners of empty properties as a way to encourage the process.</i>
<i>I don't have enough data to know if there are any other actions that may be beneficial to the project objective</i>
<i>There need to be penalties for owners who fail to act, e.g. Council Tax multiplier</i>
<i>Please can you ensure that the debt situation of the property is clear before getting into agreements, in case the council could be exposed to paying debts of others. Also it is good that the housing should be affordable, and the council should not allow itself to be influenced by any possible NIMBY arguments.. It's better for affordable homes to be mixed in with other homes rather than lumped together as you risk ghettos.</i>
<i>Taking control of the houses as a last resort. But increasing council tax on empty properties & making it much harder for non-compliant owners to pretend houses are let when they're really empty. It should be as tough to prove this as it is to prove to the grammar schools that you're a true Altrincham resident</i>
<i>Private investors that could help with the initiative</i>
<i>We should not shy away from compulsory purchase. There are two properties on Greatstone Road opposite the sports centre that have been empty for years. Why should we allow the owner to profit in any way from this neglect?</i>
<i>affordable rents and maybe use as HMO to help house homeless single people</i>
<i>Consider finding ways to purchase them from unable or unwilling to put them back into use.</i>
<i>ask residents who are affected by empty properties to respond with info by social media</i>
<i>Action plan to ensure the strategy is not just another glossy document on a shelf. Use the pilot areas Sale and Stretford to ensure empty homes are brought back into use as affordable homes for Trafford tenants who deserve no less.....it's disgusting that so many young people are marginalised in terms of rental and purchase in Trafford. Please change this to ensure the stability of this vibrant, attractive and generally safe borough</i>
<i>There are some empty properties in Sale which have been empty for a considerable time. Some of these were shops along the A56 corridor. They are never going to be re-let as shops and many are boarded up creating problems for local residents. Please could the council use its CPO powers to buy such property and redevelop the sites for much needed housing? A good example is the flats that have been built on Cross St where the Waggon and Horses pub used to be. There is a mixture of affordable housing and more expensive housing and a new co-op store which the area can support.</i>
<i>The state of the building and cost</i>

<i>Establishing what type of properties is needed (flats/family homes/supported accommodation etc. to ensure work done will meet the needs of the future users.</i>
<i>Give the owners 12 months to deal with the property. After that the property should be compulsory purchased and renovated and resold or rented out</i>
<i>As mentioned before, there are tons of developers and people looking to get on the ladder who would be willing to buy these homes and live in them or make them liveable. You need to force the hand of the current owners.</i>
<i>Ensure that action is taken timely by the owners of these properties and if not then compulsory purchase should be considered.</i>
<i>homeless people and families</i>
<i>Help owners with planning which is very difficult in Trafford. Other planning depts. are much easier to deal with.</i>
<i>Sell me a property and I will redevelop it.</i>
<i>If owners of empty properties can't/won't bring empty properties into use after renovation then consider compulsory purchase.</i>
<i>You need to consider the age of tenants, as a 24 year old I don't want to move from my family but I am also expecting and want to have a family. I'm currently in a 2 bed flat - homes need to be available for people our age to stay within our community that we've grown up in.</i>
<i>What is the infrastructure like in the areas where houses go underutilised? Are there good travel links and amenities?</i>
<i>Compulsory purchase scheme</i>
<i>Give them a timescale to get the houses liveable, and if this doesn't happen take them to court and possibly take the property off them.</i>
<i>The council owns empty properties I.e. 220 Flixton Road has been empty for over 2 years and they should be addressing the refurbishment of their own empty properties too</i>
<i>Stoke on Trent and Liverpool have both run schemes where homes that have been empty and in disrepair have been sold for £100 then the new owners are required to have them habitable within 12 months and sign an agreement that they will live in the house themselves for no less than 5 yrs before selling.</i>
<i>Look at families currently who are desperate for social housing who already live in Trafford.</i>
<i>Draw up a list of all empty properties, domestic and commercial, with viability for development into housing</i>
<i>Abandonment proceedings</i>
<i>Start on empty business premises, clean our streets, and get rid of all the weeds that edge our footpaths, verges and roads.</i>
<i>Potential for compulsory purchase where viable?</i>
<i>I think you need a tight system in place when dealing with the homeowners to keep the proposals moving forward. If this is not in place then homeowners will find these loop holes to do nothing. As they do not want the work involved bringing their properties up to living standards.</i>
<i>Should also look at commercial derelict buildings</i>
<i>Helping people on the housing list get a home</i>
<i>See previous comment</i>
<i>To make sure infrastructure. Doctors etc. are accessible</i>
<i>Make homes accessible where possible as you are increasing stock therefore future proof it to accommodate any family from the beginning e.g. level access shower, bilateral stair rails, downstairs toilets, parking etc.</i>
<i>Please address the numerous empty properties above retail and business premises which could provide a wide range of suitable accommodation in a variety of sustainable locations throughout the borough.</i>

(low cost) Publicity campaign: Contact Landlord trade journals - make them aware of what is happening in Trafford and what the Council will do to help landlords. A well written press release with images will go in to a trade journal almost verbatim. Local/regional press - make a noise about this - PRESS RELEASE with contact links for landlords. Possibly anonymous reporting "hotline" (recorded message and answerphone or email?)

Response

The Council thanks all those that responded and provided additional actions to consider.

Bringing long term empty properties back into use is key to this Strategy. It was clear from the comments that respondents felt the Council should be doing more and utilising powers such as Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) to bring these properties back into use and into the ownership of housing associations and the Council for use as affordable housing. The Strategy does have an action under priority 2 regarding the use of Powers which the Council and partners will be working to use over the next five years.

No further actions were added following the comments received.

Priority 2: Improve our neighbourhoods by addressing long term empty homes that have become the focus of anti-social behaviour and neglect

It is important that Council resources are focused on those areas where properties have been empty for the longest time and are causing the most problems to the people who live in the local area. As well as affecting the overall environment through their appearance, empty properties can become the target of anti-social and criminal behaviour.

To ensure that resources are allocated appropriately, the Council proposes to assess the impact an empty home has on the local environment using a "priority scoring matrix". The scoring matrix contains a risk assessment on each empty home that is reported to the Council.

A summary of the factors to be used are listed below:

- **Environmental Factors** - such as boarded up windows, accumulated rubbish/fly tipping and overgrown gardens.
- **Social Factors** – such as is the property is a source of crime, vandalism, graffiti and anti-social behaviour.
- **Health or Safety Factors** - such as disrepair or if the property is in a condition that affects the structure of neighbouring properties, hazards to the public and pest activity.
- **Period Vacant Factor** – how long has the property been empty.

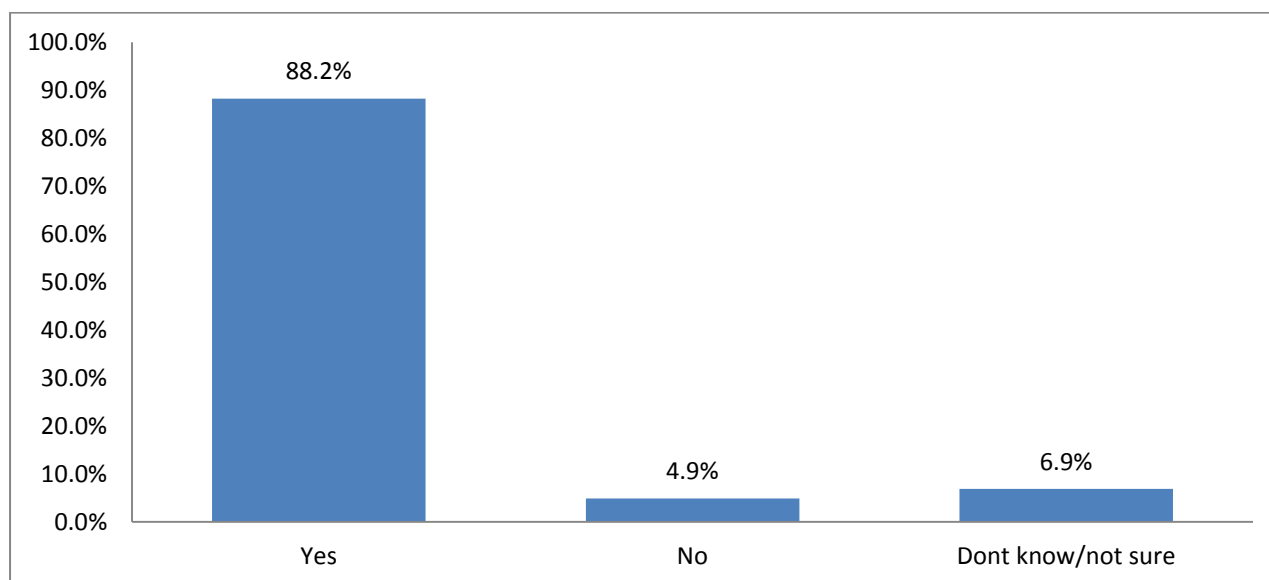
Those properties with the highest score will be prioritised for investigation and action.

In addition the Council has a number of legislative powers and tools at its disposal which it can use to bring empty properties back into use.

The following actions will be taken to help us achieve this priority:

- 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.
- Identify priority properties to be targeted for action as a result of using the scoring matrix
- Make better use of the powers and legislation to bring long term empty properties back into use

Question 5: Do you agree with these actions?



88% of the respondents said they agreed with the actions identified. The following qualifying responses were received:

As long as priority is given where needed i.e. social and neglect issues should be priority not just that's nice so let's go for that

To be brutally honest this sounds like a high school kids home work. You should already know the areas that need addressing and already have all the information you need to target areas that will see the most benefit in line with the long term strategy for Trafford.

Yes use power and legislation from the outset

Add properties of high demand into matrix to target houses that meet specific need e.g. Bungalows and small family accommodation. Etc...

I would have another factor scored around impact of the empty property on the wellbeing of local residents and people who have cause to view the empty property in their daily business. It is quite depressing to travel on a bus or car and for years and see the same empty property boarded up. There are strategic locations in the borough such as town centres where such a property can have a detrimental impact on an area.

Great ideas

other types of empty properties which could be converted to residential under spatial framework should be included

Maybe. Every neighbourhood would argue theirs is the priority though.

I think the priority is to tackle fly tipping and the pot holes, weeds, dirty streets, unoccupied buildings that have been used for businesses, and buildings where businesses are operating without planning permission. Nobody should have to live in areas where the local council neglect, yet collect substantial amounts in council tax.

I agree with statement 3

No idea what powers of legislation could amount to.

Regardless of the priority of any specific property the most important objective is to transfer empty properties into homes, so taking action and utilising statutory powers to make that happen should be the priority - every empty unit turned back into accommodation is one person/family off the waiting list contributing to the vitality and sustainability of our communities particularly our town centres.

"Make better use of the powers and legislation to bring long term empty properties back into use".

More information on period empty factor

Your "priority scoring matrix" will identify the worst of the empty properties BUT ALSO the most challenging/costly to recover. Whilst they are the ones that gain the most benefit from recovering to occupancy they are also the hardest to achieve that! Conversely the ones that score at the bottom of the matrix should be the easiest to recover quickly (and therefor get fast results and benefits from)

Response

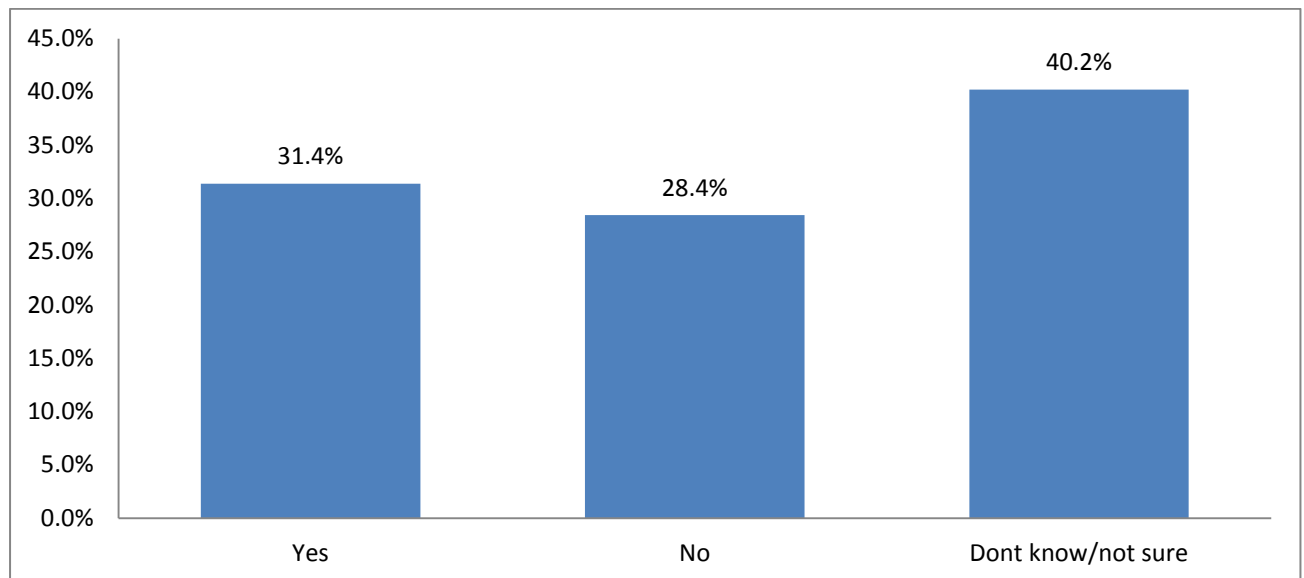
The Council thanks all those that responded and provided comments regarding Priority 2.

It was clear from the comments that respondents felt the idea of a matrix was useful to determine those empty properties that require priority action. It was also felt that although the matrix would, in most cases, identify the worst, this would also identify the most challenging/costing properties and that for a faster result the Council should look to those properties that are easily brought back into use. The identification of those 'quick win' properties has been included as an action within the Strategy.

ACTION:

Using the matrix to identify those empty properties that can be brought back into use quickly and with limited investment

Question 6: Are there any other actions we need to consider to achieve this priority?



31% of the respondents said there were other actions the Council and partners needed to consider. The following comments and other suggested actions were provided by the respondents:

<i>We need Trafford to properly identify need and modify offices/small business premises for conversion to single person apartments to allow transition from homeless and unemployed to proud and working</i>
<i>I don't know if the council can compel the owners of empty houses to let them be used to help the housing needs but if not there should be a time limit on how long a property may remain empty before the council can take action to use such properties.</i>
<i>This needs to be applied to commercial properties which have stood empty for ages as well as houses!</i>
<i>Increase council tax even further on empty homes</i>
<i>More protection for landlords when letting properties out would encourage more people to rent out. Possible some kind of shared ownership thing and purchase a percentage of the property and help bring it up to standard.</i>
<i>Subsidies to help the owners afford the materials to do so.</i>
<i>Work with social and cooperative housing groups</i>
<i>You just need to get on with the job. Less talk about it and more action. Trafford residents are getting very disheartened of late with all the false promises from Trafford council. The whole borough has gone downhill over the past few years especially the state of the roads streets and open spaces and nothing is being done.</i>
<i>Better fund empty home loans. Current £10,000 per property is insufficient amount to address significant disrepair and poor garden condition.</i>
<i>Main thing is discuss with the owner. If the owner is willing and needs help that they cannot get through traditional means, help them and make a profit along the way from future rents/charge on the property. I myself as someone in a similar position elsewhere would go along with this. However, if the owner is not willing to renovate or sell use powers such as the property is an eyesore, waste of resource and of detriment to the area.</i>
<i>Fine private owners and landlords who leave their property empty and neglected for long periods of time</i>

<i>Please don't give too much weighting to duration, if the other antisocial factors are high. A bad apple can spoil a barrel, and homeowners nearby would be impacted as much as the negative influence on youth etc. It's important to handle antisocial properties swiftly.</i>
<i>working with the immediate community, I would want a say in what happens to an empty home on my street</i>
<i>details from housing providers and suggestions as to how they maximise occupancy e.g. Irwell Valley arranging events with other social housing providers to match needs</i>
<i>Ensure it's not all talk and take action against owners who neglect properties</i>
<i>Compulsory purchase threat</i>
<i>Allow residents to register problem properties for early intervention. Work with social/neighbourhood services to identify properties with vulnerable occupants to facilitate early intervention and offer support before homes fall into disrepair or become targets for antisocial behaviour.</i>
<i>See previous comments about compulsory purchase</i>
<i>Consider widening the scope to include empty retail properties also.</i>
<i>Look for easy wins rather than that suggested above. Get the simple to do properties back on the rental ladder and encourage owners to go for affordable rents.</i>
<i>Ensure that security measures are taken for all factors as and pro</i>
<i>You can work on creating neighbourhoods that care for each other so that they have a vested interest in keeping the areas tidy and free from vandalism and fly tipping</i>
<i>If anti-social behaviour and crime are a factor for a property, and that property is brought back into proper use, thought must be given to where that behaviour will move to.</i>
<i>Compulsory purchase</i>
<i>Possibly earmarking houses to be refurbished/improved for rental by developers when negotiating new builds</i>
<i>Try and help families to stay near their own extended. Family. I have a friend who has her daughter and her husband and children living with her. They are totally overcrowded in Sale. But there is no social housing available for them. They bid and try even contacting their MP but are still living in overcrowded accommodation.</i>
<i>Make areas pleasant to live in, crackdown in people who treat the areas with no respect.</i>
<i>Need to have the staff to push this scheme along not allowing huge time laps from each point of contact with the homeowner. You initially sent letters out to homeowners in April we are now in the middle of September (nearly 6mths later) and there has been no further action since then. The homeowner of the empty property next door to me has not been here for months. The gardens are like a jungle and the house is rapidly dropping into disrepair. It's been empty for over 6 years and the homeowner does not care.</i>
<i>Publicise the help available to the community so people approach you if they have empty properties they can no longer sell. Or maintain. Local papers etc.</i>
<i>The factors above are fine, it would be worth adding a location in relation to key vehicle corridors/arterial routes. From our experience working in these area and tackling these properties 1st has a greater impact on those properties in the locality that are away from the main routes rather than the other way round.</i>
<i>(low cost) Publicity campaign: Local/regional press - make a noise about this - PRESS RELEASE Possibly anonymous reporting "hotline" (recorded message and answerphone)</i>

Response:

The Council thanks all those that responded and provided suggested actions for Priority 2.

A respondent felt that the £10k empty property loan wasn't enough to address some of the properties that need bringing back into use. The Council needs to explore the possibility of increasing this amount or allowing flexibility to allow for an increased amount of money on a case by case basis. This has been added to the Strategy actions.

ACTION: Explore the opportunities to increase the £10k empty property loan on a case by case basis if required to bring back the most challenging of properties.

Respondents felt there needed to be more publicity regarding the reporting of empty properties within neighbourhoods which is one of the actions in Priority 3.

Priority 3: Provide advice and information to help raise awareness around empty properties

Owners of long term empty properties are often not aware of the support that is available to them to help them bring their empty property back into use. Initial advice is provided on the Council's website with the opportunity for owners to make contact with the Council.

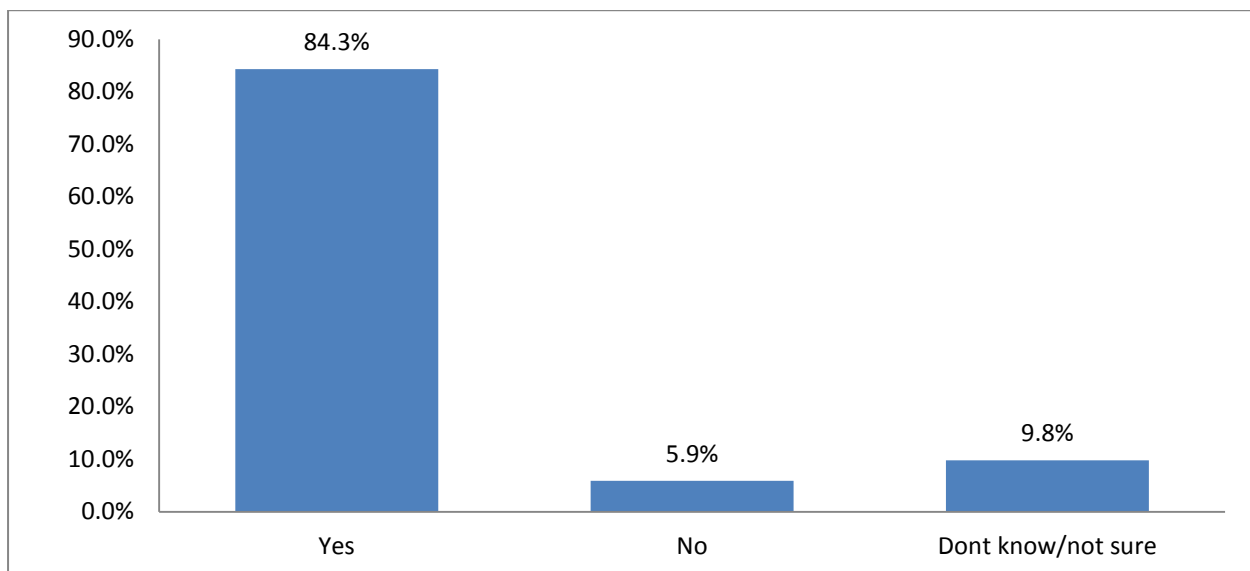
The Council can provide loans to owners of long term empty properties to assist with the repair and improvement in order to bring the property back into use. In order to qualify, the property must have been empty for a minimum of 12 months and the owner must confirm in writing that the property will be rented for at least five years or until the cost of the renovation work has been paid back in full to the Council (if that is greater than five years).

To help tackle long term empty properties in Trafford, the Council introduced an 'Empty Property Matchmaker Scheme' in October 2018. The Scheme is free and simple-to-use and brings together the owners of long term empty properties in Trafford with private individuals, investors and developers to enable homes that have been empty for more than six months to be brought back into use. The empty homes for sale are viewed on a secure council webpage and the scheme bypasses the need for Estate Agents.

The following actions have been suggested:

- Continue to engage with owners of long term empty properties to ensure they are fully aware of these 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.
- Investigate why there has been a low take up of Council's Vacant Home Loans through contact with all owners of properties that have been empty for more than 6 months.
- Investigate why property owners are not making use of the Empty Property Matchmaker Scheme.

Question 7: Do you agree with these actions?



84% of the respondents agreed with the actions proposed. The following qualifying responses were received:

<i>Why wait for the property to be empty for 12 months. If the owner cannot afford to do the work after 1, 2, 3 months you're just going to offer no help until after 12 months and by then it would need more work that it needed earlier on. Prevention is better than cure, step in earlier.</i>
<i>Providing loans may encourage some landlords to let a property become more neglected in order to access the loan.</i>
<i>Was not aware that such schemes existed anymore. This has given me the push to contact the council where my property is located to see if they run such a scheme.</i>
<i>Is it possible to put more pressure on empty property owners? Is it possible to say if there is no good reason an empty property should only be empty for 6 months?</i>

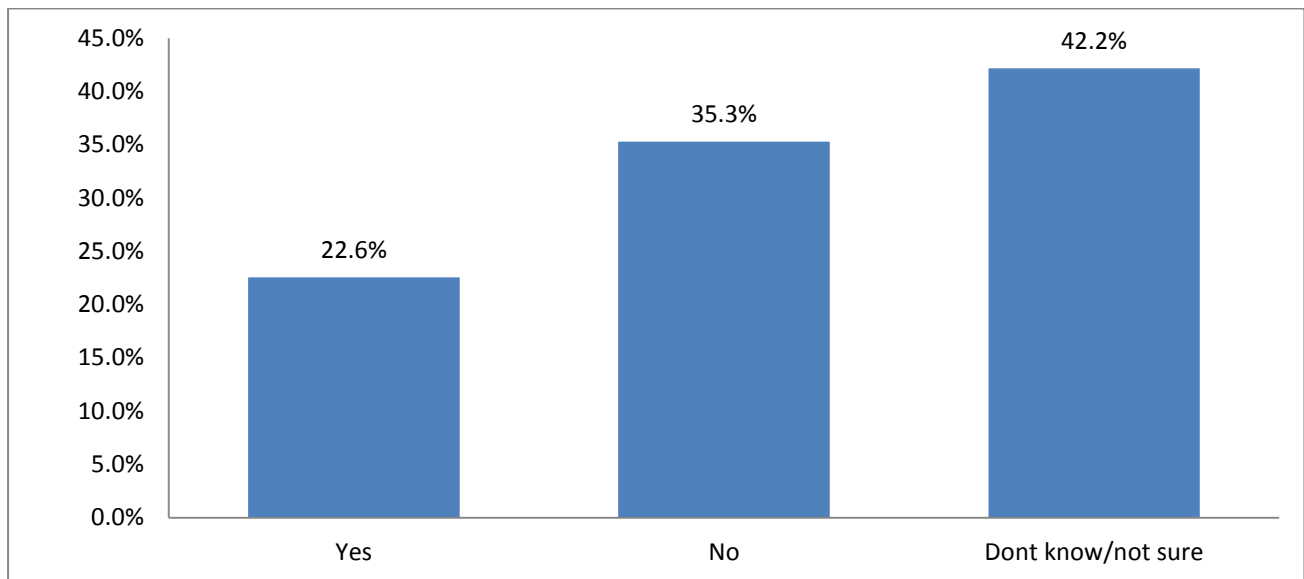
<i>But again enforcement needs to happen if this doesn't work.</i>
<i>Shouldn't you be working with the Council Tax Department who have more info on empty homes and ownership etc. so you can target engagement.</i>
<i>Stronger action to nudge owners to put them into use or if they are unwilling find a way to purchase them.</i>
<i>We have never seen the actions publicised so more publicity both with owners and neighbourhoods</i>
<i>Is there really a problem with owners of vacant properties not knowing this advice and support exists? Or are they sitting on the property till the time when someone else will purchase it?</i>
<i>I've never heard of the scheme though. I am a landlord (not of empty properties) and had no idea this was done. Maybe advertise more?</i>
<i>But consider legal action or compulsory purchase if required.</i>
<i>Avoiding use of estate agents will be a huge help.</i>
<i>Not many people trust or have any faith in Trafford Councils, it has a history of trying to avoid fulfilling its promises, as said before it looks after parts of the borough and it's residents very well, and totally disrespectful to residents who pay plenty into the coffers mainly in the dumping ground North of Trafford.</i>
<i>Making sure properties are reported as empty is key so they can be tackled early on before any disrepair etc. happens</i>
<i>Council should not interfere with privately owned property.</i>
<i>Worried about owners being bullied when emotionally vulnerable help & advice required with understanding not bullying</i>
<i>Vacant Homes Loan Scheme it is hardly surprising that the almost completely secret scheme has a low take up. I researched this area before writing my motion and FAILED to find this scheme! Also, if the strings attached to the interest free council loan outweigh a NSA commercial loan, the landlord will chose the latter. FULLY Back the Empty Homes Matchmaking Service. Currently it returns this message when you try to use it: "Sorry, but the link you have clicked is invalid. Please make sure you have the whole, correct link and try again. Error Retrieving Link Data."</i>

Response:

The Council thanks all those that responded and provided additional comments in relation to Priority 3.

Respondents commented on their lack of awareness regarding the Vacant Home Loan and also the Empty Property Match Maker Scheme which proves that further works need to be done to ensure that Trafford residents (including empty property owners) are aware of the assistance available from the Council.

Question 8: Are there any other actions we need to consider to achieve this priority?



23% of the respondents stated they were other actions the Council and partners need to consider. The following comments and other suggested actions were provided by the respondents:

<i>We need to ensure people are not forced to make their homes available if they don't want that to happen as long as the properties are maintained and secure</i>
<i>Raise awareness of any negative consequences to owners of refusing to engage with the council - and if required, set up some of those consequences!</i>
<i>Landlords MUST not be able evict tenants for ridiculous reasons after the 5-year agreement or repayment has been reached. These people deserve better.</i>
<i>Use local estate agents to publicise</i>
<i>Do be careful of unscrupulous developers who take advantage by buying more properties than they can handle and then coming to the council after 12 months for a cheap loan.</i>
<i>Just charge them lots for empty properties</i>
<i>Have a portfolio of property developers that would buy the houses off the owners to then rent them out affordably</i>
<i>Purchase of properties from owners.</i>
<i>Besides researching loan makers and property match schemes please ensure there is ACTION to address why these viable options are not working. We don't want more reasons why something not working we need action, initiatives and results for the long term future of our young Trafford residents</i>
<i>More extensive use of social media which is cheap and quick, to publicise these schemes</i>
<i>Compulsory purchase in a 12 month time frame will help all issues</i>
<i>Ensure that there is a timely response otherwise use legislative powers to ensure these action moves forward.</i>
<i>if the owners are not willing to sell the property , it should be taken and sold cheap so familys can afford to renovate with the help of council money</i>
<i>Advertise the availability of these solutions in sensible places not just on a website.</i>
<i>The property should have a rent cap.</i>

<i>Consider working with local estate agents</i>
<i>Change your working practices, put residents first then tackle the empty house problem.</i>
<i>Give a timescale</i>
<i>Promote the matchmaker and loan schemes to front line workers from other organisations who deal with properties in the area</i>
<i>Actions seem to be geared up to owners of property likely to be rented out.</i>
<i>Understanding council workers who will not bully</i>
<i>DIRECT Contact with every single owner of the (disputed) 774 long term properties. That contact must include the options open to the landlord.</i>
<i>(low cost) Publicity campaign:</i>
<i>Contact Landlord trade journals - make them aware of what is happening in Trafford and what the Council will do to help landlords. A well written press release with images will go in to a trade journal almost verbatim.</i>
<i>Local/regional press - make a noise about this - PRESS RELEASE with links for landlords</i>

Response:

The Council agrees that providing advice and information to help raise awareness around empty properties is crucial.

Respondents again felt that greater publicity is required and regular contact with the empty property owners not just an annual letter. An action to ensure that regular engagement takes place is included within the Strategy.

No further actions were added following the comments received.

Priority 4: Develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders

The Council needs to work with partners, such as RP’s and Homes England, to increase the number of empty properties brought back into use. Homes England currently makes funding available to bring empty properties back into use. The Council needs to encourage RPs to bid for funding from Homes England to purchase and renovate empty properties in Trafford.

To help engage further with long term empty property owners, there needs to be a more concerted effort across a range of Council teams such as Revenues and Benefits, Council Tax, Planning Enforcement, Housing Standards, Environmental Health and Building Control to maximise information on long term empty properties. A joint approach can help in encouraging homeowners to take a pro-active approach towards selling or improving their long term empty home for let or for sale

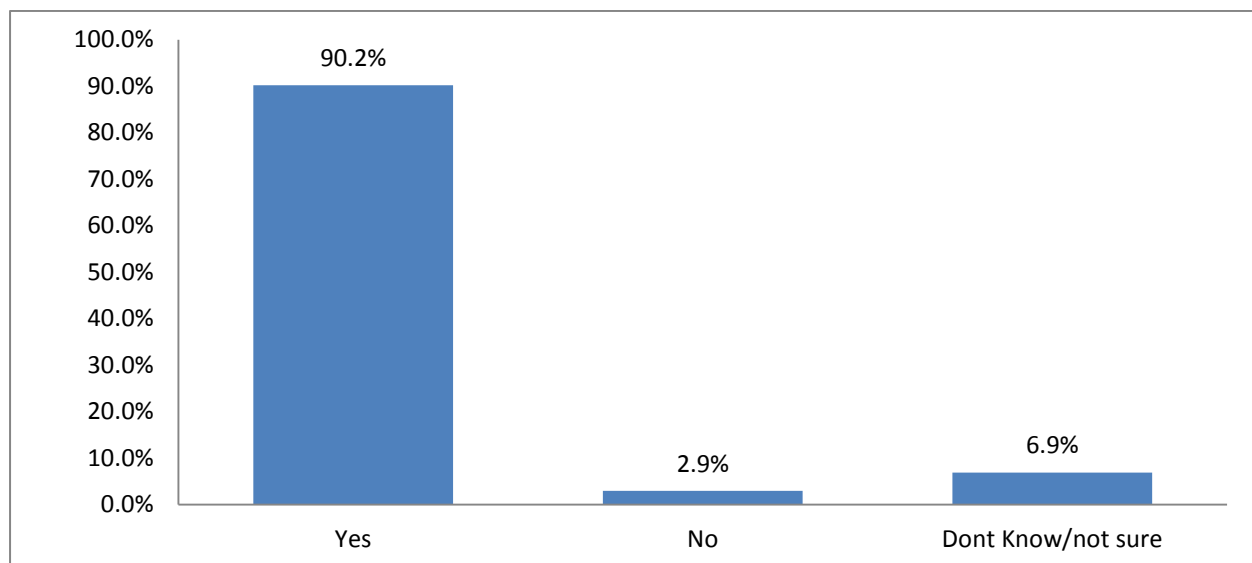
The Council needs to work to identify empty properties above commercial premises where there is little proven demand and work with RPs and owners of these empty properties to access funding to bring them back into use as residential properties.

RP's have large asset bases across the country and in Trafford and as part of their management of these assets they have strategies for disposal of long term empty properties which no longer meet the requirements of their business. The Council therefore needs to work in partnership with RPs with housing stock in Trafford in order to ensure that all options are considered to retain their empty stock as affordable housing.

The following actions have been suggested:

- 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.
- Work in partnership with Registered Providers with housing stock in Trafford in order to ensure that all options are considered when carrying out disposal of empty homes.

Question 9: Do you agree with these actions?



90% of the respondents agreed with the proposed actions. The following qualifying responses were received:

<i>What's an RP??</i>
<i>Are all these homes when done going to be actually affordable for your average working class person. Rents in Trafford are becoming silly and forcing people out of the area which then leaves properties empty.</i>
<i>The raising of the council tax premium on empty homes is likely to result in an increase in council tax debt on long-term empties. Rather than just instructing bailiffs to recover this debt use statutory powers to enforce the sale of the property where bailiff action is unsuccessful.</i>

Nothing re older people who might be prepared to downsize given assistance and who may be living in unsuitable properties which may become vacant when they moved into care

This should be a priority.

Don't allow fat cat landlords to make millions.

I think your being dishonest in your comments and saying who you are working with.

Council should not interfere with privately owned property.

As long as action carrying out with care for vulnerable home owners.

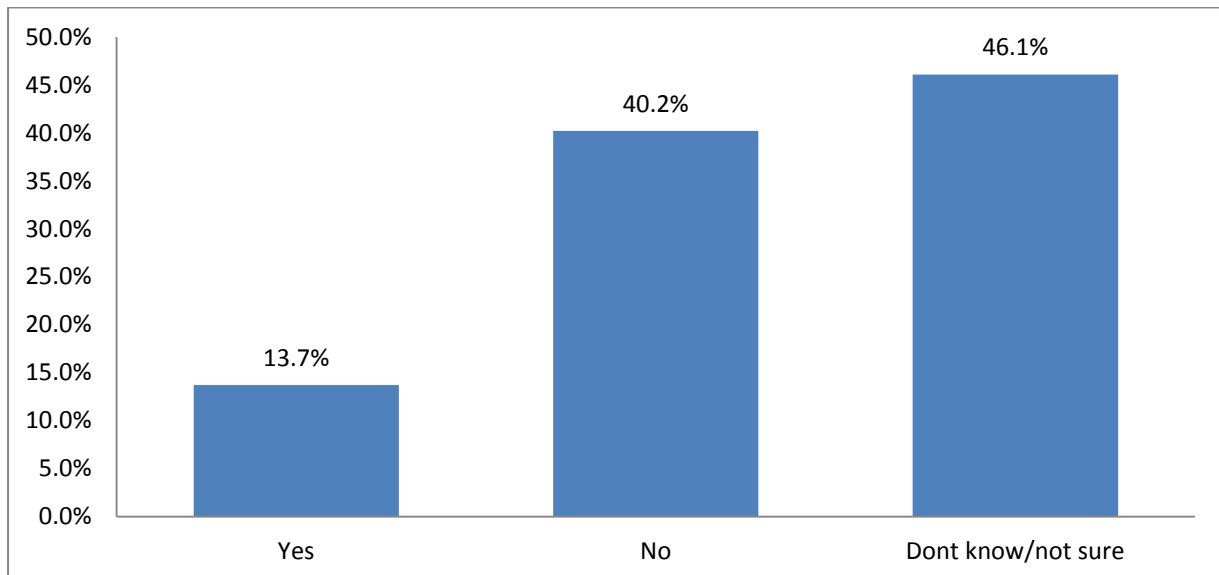
*"The Council needs to work to identify empty properties above commercial premises where there is little proven demand and work with RPs and owners of these empty properties to access funding to bring them back into use as residential properties."
this statement does not make sense to me.*

Response:

The Council agrees that developing effective partnership to address long term empty properties is crucial and were pleased that the respondents agreed with this priority.

Working with Registered Providers was popular with respondents as a way of bringing the properties back into the affordable housing market and assisting vulnerable residents.

Question 10: Are there any other actions we need to consider to achieve this priority?



14% of the respondents stated they had other actions that the Council and partners need to consider. The following comments and other suggested actions were provided by the respondents:

<i>Affordable rents. Rents that are too high force people out to cheaper areas which then leaves the properties empty.</i>
<i>Once properties have been renovated they must not be allowed to deteriorate again. The onus has to be on the Landlord to maintain properties otherwise this is a waste of money. Regular checks need to be made that they are safe for people to live in.</i>
<i>CPO</i>
<i>Is it possible to RP's a target for bringing empty properties into use. If we all agree there are such properties THT could have a target of bringing 50 back into use within 6 months.</i>
<i>I would need more information/data to be able to identify any other actions that may be appropriate.</i>
<i>Please don't be too forceful with empty properties above commercial units if they are owned by the commercial occupant. Sometimes their plans for storage etc. are longer than 12 months. Sometimes a tenant above the shop is not conducive to business.</i>
<i>Please ensure it's not just another bureaucratic talking shop which is using large amounts of council tax payers funding to give people jobs. Much better to put money into solutions and strong Managers who are committed to the future of Trafford people</i>
<i>If a RP or landlord cannot let a vacant property, can the council not offer to buy it and take it off their hands? The council could try to let it as affordable housing or redevelop the site to make better quality council owned housing (better than that on offer from RPs or private landlords) which could then be let.</i>
<i>See previous comments</i>
<i>This high priority should be enforced by a strict timetable for all to follow.</i>
<i>Get rid of Amey. Get some better qualified staff working directly for Trafford Residents. Start direct trade apprenticeship with Trafford Council.</i>
<i>Use the renovation of empty housing stock to train and educate individuals and encourage them to enter the construction trade in order to increase the numbers of organisations/individuals who can help refurbish the properties</i>
<i>Don't let registered providers sell their properties on the open market to private landlords for use as houses in multiple occupations.</i>
<i>See previous - publicity (the free/low cost kind) - get existing news channels to do the majority of the lifting on this.</i>

Response:

The Council thanks all those that responded and provided additional actions in relation to Priority 4.

Respondents suggested that the Council should use the renovation of empty housing stock to train and educate individuals and encourage them to enter the construction trade. This has been added as an action in which the Council could explore.

ACTION: Explore opportunities to use the renovation of empty homes to train and educate individuals regarding the construction trade.

Respondents were asked if they had any final comments to make regarding the Draft Strategy. The following comments were made:

<i>Step in earlier before 12 months. Make rents affordable where possible. Put more information out there for people.</i>
<i>I agree 100% that such properties should be brought back into circulation for those that need affordable housing. Priorities need to be drawn up as to who lives where, ie disabled/elderly near shops, young families near schools relevant to age of child.</i>
<i>Make compulsory purchases and use funds to support youth projects</i>
<i>Tackle the longest empty and worst condition properties first. Where owners are unable or unwilling to bring their property back into use the use your powers to apply pressure and CPO or enforce the sale, as necessary. Create a work in default budget to allow the prompt enforcement of notices by carrying out work in default. Get some charges on the prop and try to enforce the sale. Consider a minimum enforced sale threshold. Get all teams to contribute to enforce this. It's a corporate priority, not just the responsibility of a few hard working and dedicated teams.</i>
<i>What happened to the scheme you promoted on Twitter asking if people wanted to register to buy empty properties? I responded initially only to be told at that time you didn't actually have any properties on your books yet. Since then I've tried to get an update on the situation via Twitter but never had a reply.</i>
<i>As someone with an empty property in another area, I think you're doing all the right things. I'm now going to look into the possibility of getting access to funds to renovate my property from the council in that area. For me, I have always had the intention of renovating but it is difficult to access funding when the property is not fit for living in its current state. Saving funds to renovate likewise is a slow process so if councils can speed the process up I'd be more than happy. However, if someone has no intention of renovating and is just sitting on property I think you need to take control. It's not fair on the neighbours and community as a whole.</i>
<i>Affordable housing is needed everywhere. If this can be achieved this way, it's a really good thing. I hope this is a success as it would be real good reputation for Trafford Council.</i>
<i>The severe shortage of housing is known by everyone. I think the council would be supported by a majority of residents in whatever actions they take. With that support there is an opportunity to be bold as I have suggested with targets backed by regulatory action.</i>

<i>In case of refurbishment, can you give preference to making as many homes as possible out of an empty property? For you to verify, but I believe the people most in need of a home are single folks and not families</i>
<i>Parts of Trafford are now too expensive for people to buy and affordable homes across the whole of Trafford are needed.</i>
<i>Provide an easy means by which residents can report an empty home that should be assessed.</i>
<i>Jane did raise strategy at Task and Finish group on Housing for Older People. Will pass the survey on to Altrincham's Neighbourhood plan team.</i>
<i>As above, part of the strategy should address bringing residential empty property above shops back into use, but also bringing long-term unused shop units into use as housing, either by changing use and refurbishing or redeveloping the site</i>
<i>Trafford council should use larger, empty properties to house homeless in a bed for the night scheme, in an area where it's required</i>
<i>I would like to know how other areas on the north west or even UK have successfully addressed this. What does good look like? What is best practice? If you open up empty houses are you going to increase the places at schools, GPs, dentists etc. Otherwise you are increasing the pressures on these essential services and this could adversely affect people already living here.</i>
<i>I think as long as council not providing money to home owner. However there should be a legal way to ensure house are brought up to a legal standard before renting. Also if council take over home short contracts so no home for life and bit be handed down to next family member.</i>
<i>Low-rent properties should be prioritised over giving loans for owners to later sell properties for profit. This can incentivise owners to wait until they can access cheap finance then sell as soon as possible to release the increased value. This then removes a potential low rent property from the area</i>
<i>Get the empty properties sorted and occupied before attempting to build on green belt land, and build on brown sites before that.</i>
<i>Costly consultations should be kept to a minimum. Action is needed and should be enforced by our elected representatives.</i>
<i>None</i>
<i>Please consider the age of people, your generation of 21-25 year olds are still living at home because it is so hard to get a home. People can't even get them on council anymore or it takes forever on the list.</i>
<i>As a young person who is looking to move out I find it hard due to the price of housing and would like to do it more myself as opposed to through council housing and waiting list so I think some of the housing should be affordable to rent or buy or even a let to buy scheme</i>
<i>Compulsory purchase</i>
<i>This is an excellent idea. There should also be a focus on younger people, giving them opportunities they might not have otherwise had</i>
<i>Will central government help fund this?</i>
<i>The council should take over any property that has been empty for 18 months. The property should then be rented to local people from the area that is in need of a home. The rent should be capped for a fixed term.</i>
<i>The council should be forcing developers/builders to refurbish existing properties and use brownstone sites for development. Building on green belt should not be allowed unless ALL brownstone land has been regenerated within the borough and then only after consultation and agreement with the local community.</i>
<i>Given the shortage of affordable housing in the area I'm really pleased that the council are taking this step.</i>

Auction off properties so that they can be developed by the families who will live in them, similar to the "buy a house for a pound" scheme recently seen on TV. It's a great incentive to buy and a way to get on the property ladder, and if they are in our lovely Trafford that's a real bonus and selling point.

Whenever residents need to make contact or complain. We shouldn't have to wait 20 days for a response, sometimes even longer, if there are problems they should be addressed immediately not swept under the carpet for a few weeks.

Empty properties are unmaintained and can cause damage to adjoining properties. They mainly come with unkempt gardens and some are so bad hedges hand over the road making it difficult for cars to use.

Action needs to be taken soon as the problem is getting worse and the homes are requiring much work to be done to bring them into use. The longer this problem goes on the longer it will take to solve the problem and the bigger the cost to the council and taxpayers

We all know that the Tory government has massively cut local council spending. Therefore rather than trying to seek additional funding (which you probably won't get) why don't you get the local people of Trafford to come forward and register investment in the properties to bring them back into use instead? That way the people of Trafford are invested in the project and a new home/flat is available for people to rent or buy.

There is a desperate need for family housing for children with disabilities whilst refurbishing consider disabled adaptations and adding it into the housing stock. Saving money on the need to adapt properties at a later stage also making house future proof for aging /changing needs of the residents. Lifelong family homes.

Council should not interfere with privately owned property.

It is very difficult for the young people of Trafford get into an affordable property in their area as it is so expensive. We have encouraged our children to work hard and earn a living but they are unable to get a place of their own and now still at home at the age of 30. Anything that comes of this scheme should not go to people on the housing register as this is already being catered for with new homes in Carrington/Partington over the next 5 years. But give the people WORKING in Trafford and who have grown up in the area a chance to build their own lives.

More energy needs to be put into utilising the accommodation available above commercial premises particularly in our town centres. Doing so would help provide extra revenue for town centres in the most sustainable locations throughout the borough.

Me and my family are depending on private rentals for over 10 years and have been lucky and unlucky with landlords. Until now we were not able to make a house a home and would love to do that for our children. We are no able to buy yet but are good tenants pay rent in time and keep the property tidy and neat. It would be great to have mutual benefits for long term empty properties to become available with affordable rents and make it a home and benefit a community.

Please don't focus on turning houses into flats. Sale's streets are overrun with parked cars, because HMOs don't have enough off street parking. Please also consider the lack of school places, GPs and NHS dentists that we already struggle with, to ensure additional homes can be serviced.

Understanding required as some of your plans could be used by those with a personal vendetta

DRAFT Strategy uses 2018 figures - I dispute them I believe the data shows roughly double the amount stated - HOWEVER the final strategy needs to use 2019 figures (to date) - IF this was being run commercially, the EASIEST to fix/rent/sell would be the first to be done. With your Matrix, you are turning that upside down. You will gain the most benefit for the area(s), certainly, but at a higher cost and with FAR slower results. A double whammy as not only higher cost, but also LOWER New Homes Bonus (net. I would like to see all landlords/owners contacted and agree that extra attention will be required on the harder to fix problem properties but don't let it get in the way of the easy wins.

ERRATA: Page 10 : middle of page "Trafford Housing Strategy 2018-23" errata (its 2019-2024) Glossary Empty Property is classed as - errata - (no classification)

Response:

The Council thanks all those that responded to the survey. Overall the responses and comments were positive the Empty Homes Strategy and the need to tackle long term empty properties across Trafford.

Many of the respondents felt that empty homes should be brought back into use as affordable housing and there seems to be a lot of support for young people who cannot afford to buy a property in Trafford.

Respondents were very supportive of the Council using powers such as Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) which is very positive.

Also there was a consensus from respondents that there is a need to make the reporting of empty homes more effective and accessible, including an anonymous hotline

Following the comments made, the following actions have been included within the Action Plan:

- *Identify properties that are long term empty and draw up action plans to return them to use.*
- *Using the matrix to identify those empty properties that can be brought back into use quickly and with limited investment.*
- *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.*
- *Explore opportunities to use the renovation of empty homes to train and educate individuals regarding the construction trade.*

Equalities Monitoring Information

Respondent Profile:

By current living situation

70% of the respondents were home owners, either with a mortgage or without a mortgage (i.e. mortgage free), 18% of the respondents rented privately or with a housing association, 5% were living with parents or relatives, 1% were homeless and 6% did not respond.

By Gender

66% of the respondents were women, with 29% being male and 5% preferring not to say.

By Ethnic Group

65% of all respondents classified themselves as being White British, with a further 18% classifying themselves as White English, 1% White Northern Irish, 2% White Irish, 1% Pakistani; 3% White and Black Caribbean and 11% who preferred not to say.

By Sexual Orientation

80% of all respondents classified themselves as being straight / heterosexual, 3% were Gay/Lesbian and 17% preferred not to say.

By Religion / Belief

47% of respondents classified themselves as Christian, 1% Muslim, 4% Atheist; 33% as having no religion or belief; and 15% who preferred not to say.

By Marital Status:

59% of the respondents stated they were married or in a civil partnership, 24% were not and 18% preferred not to say.

By Disability

7% of respondents classified themselves as having a disability; 80% as having no disability; 13% preferred not to say.