



Empty Homes Newsletter

Empty Homes round-up for Cumbria - October 2018

News from Allerdale, Barrow, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland District Councils

SLDC's Empty Homes Grants Management Scheme re-launch

- **Right:** Partners SLDC and South Lakes Housing outside the Devonshire Road house which was repaired in 2014/2015 as part of the joint Empty Homes Grants Management Scheme, which was re-launched last September.

- **Below:** Tenant, Justine, in her new home repaired as part of the scheme.



National
Empty
Homes week



15th - 21st October 2018

Every year local authorities, housing providers, community-led organisations and others see Empty Homes Week as an opportunity to organise events and put out information so that people know about their work to tackle empty homes. Empty Homes Week is also the chance to celebrate successes and reflect on what more needs to be done to bring empty properties back into use to help meet housing needs.

South Lakeland District Council round-up of news



Following the re-launch of our Empty Homes Grant Management Scheme last October we have had very encouraging results. Many empty home owners have approached us since then and we are currently working with three – the scheme funding allows for a maximum of three empty homes to be brought back into use with a maximum of £20,000 per property. Please read our Empty Homes Grants page at: www.southlakeland.gov.uk/housing/empty-homes/empty-homes-grant/ for more details.

Our current focus is on empty home owners whose property has been empty for more than two years. This is for two reasons.

Firstly, if an owner is planning repairs and uses a VAT-registered contractor then the Empty Homes Officer can provide a letter. The letter confirms that the property has been empty two or more years. An owner then gives the letter to their contractor and this allows them to charge the owner **only 5% VAT** on many repairs costs. The saving of 15% VAT on costly repairs can make a huge difference to owners and it is so easy. We also ask owners that if they plan to sell their empty property we would like them to make the new owner aware of these savings. The new owner then contacts the Empty Homes Officer to ask for the 'VAT' letter.

Secondly, when a home has been empty for two or more years the council tax Premium of 50% is added to the 100% council tax being paid. We write to owners to remind them that they are paying **150% council tax** and offer to help them

bring their empty home back into use. There is a more pressing reason at the moment to write to owners whose homes are still empty after two years. This is because **the government is planning to double, treble or quadruple the amount of Premium**, depending on how long a property has been empty.

We also contact owners whose property has been empty between one and two years to try to help them bring their home back into use before they become liable for the extra 50% Premium after two years empty.

Another option we can 'signpost' empty home owners to is Homesmatch. For owners who would like to sell their empty home but who would prefer to repair it first this may be a good alternative. This option is generally aimed at owners who cannot repair their homes due to lack of resources, time or other reasons. In their leaflet Homesmatch offer a 'Pre-Purchase' Renovation service. With no up-front cash required from owner or buyer, they offer to advertise your property for sale with a standard renovation included. They then match a buyer to your property and Homesmatch funds and manages all the works. All costs and fees are agreed before any work begins so that owners know the net sales income. Homesmatch can be contacted on 07449 075 618 or 07713 627 883 for an initial discussion to find out if this is a suitable option for the owner.

This is just one example of the many options and advice available for empty home owners.

Please look at our empty homes webpages www.southlakeland.gov.uk/housing - More on housing – Empty homes. Or contact our Empty Homes Officer, Lynne Leach, on 01539 793375 or at empty.homes@southlakeland.gov.uk

Eden District Council round-up of news



We offer empty home owners the following service –

- VAT letters (to save 15% VAT on costs of repairs)
- Schedules of works to bring empty homes up to legislative standards
- Advice to owners on how to return their properties to use
- Interest-free loans of up to £15,000
- Addressing empty properties which are a statutory nuisance

Contact Environmental Health Officer (Housing) on 01768 212490 or housing.services@eden.gov.uk

Copeland Borough Council round-up of news



Reducing the number of long-term empty homes is one of the key priorities in our 2016 to 2020 Empty Homes Policy.

This year one of our areas of focus has been bringing long term empty residential and commercial properties back to use in our town centres. Our Townscape Heritage Initiative is a project designed and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project began towards the end of 2013 and will come to an end in December 2018. By its completion date it will have transformed 10 commercial properties, facilitated the creation of four new businesses in previously vacant properties, provided a public space where a former toilet block once stood and provided training and learning opportunities for nearly 1,400 people. It will also have created or upgraded 10 residential units. In addition to date, four new residential properties have been created and completed and a fifth is nearly complete.

Contact Paul Cowings on 01946 598300 or at paul.cowings@copeland.gov.uk

We continue to work with individual property owners to help them renovate, sell or rent their properties rather than leave them empty. A Save Money leaflet which we launched last year has resulted in an increase of requests from empty home owners wanting us to provide them with a letter so they can save 15% on costs of repairs. We are continuing to work with Homesmatch, a matchmaking service linking properties with potential buyers and giving empty home owners options. Owners can either offer their property for sale with a full renovation (pre-funded) package as part of the deal, organised by Homesmatch. Alternatively they can locate potential buyers for a sale of the property in its current condition. This service can appeal to buyers who have purchased the property but do not have the time or resources to renovate the property themselves.

During 2017/2018 there were 33 long term empty homes brought back into use by our dedicated Empty Homes Officer.

Carlisle City Council round-up of news



During 2018 we have recruited a dedicated Empty Homes officer and we have developed a stronger response to managing empty homes in our city by providing more information.

We have enhanced our web pages at www.carlisle.gov.uk which includes detailed information for empty home owners explaining the options available for bringing their empty property back into use.

Additionally, in partnership with councillors, we will be helping to spread the word in their communities about options available to empty home owners and encouraging owners to work with the Empty Homes Officer.

We are working with Revenues and Benefits Service to identify and contact property owners of empty homes and encouraging engagement. We are targeting owners of homes that have been empty for two years or more with letters, phone calls and questionnaires to ascertain the status of the property and to provide assistance, where possible, to get the home back to residential use.

We are tackling the impact of empty properties through statutory action and providing focus on long term empty properties. We are currently developing the use of an Enforced Sales Policy to address properties that have been, for many years, a blight to neighbourhoods and where owners have been either unwilling to assist or we

have been unable to contact. The sale will be used to recover costs incurred by the Council and will provide an opportunity for another owner to bring the property to a habitable state.

We have links with the Homesmatch service. Homesmatch is a nationwide company which runs a matchmaking service linking properties with potential buyers. The company gives empty home owners a couple of options. Owners can either offer their property for sale with a full renovation (pre-funded) package as part of the deal, organised by Homesmatch. Alternatively, they can locate potential buyers for a sale of the property in its current condition. This service can appeal to buyers who have purchased the property but do not have the time or resources to renovate the property themselves.

We can provide VAT letters to save 15% VAT on repairs costs. This letter gives details of how empty home owners can save 15% VAT on repairs costs. Provided the property has been empty for two or more years immediately before works start, owners can save 15% VAT on many repairs costs. This is proving a popular option and is increasing the number of empty homes renovated and brought back into use.

The Empty Homes Officer is always available to provide advice and information on bringing empty homes into use and to use our legal powers to reduce the impact of empty properties on the local neighbourhood and community.

Contact Jack Dilley on 01228 817301 or paul.dilley@carlisle.gov.uk

Barrow Borough Council round-up of news



The Council is attempting to take a proactive approach towards tackling empty properties and dealing with the problems of neighbourhood blight that comes along with ruinous and dilapidated buildings.

Over the past year, we have taken a tougher approach to enforcement as it is our belief that owners of empty properties need to take responsibility for ensuring that their properties do not cause a nuisance to the neighbourhood in general. We have served a number of enforcement notices section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act, and are actively considering a number of cases where use of Community Protection Notices (CPNs) may be appropriate.

We are taking a common approach across a range of departments in the Council, with regular liaison meetings taking place between Private Sector Housing, Planning, Conservation, Public Protection, Property Information and Legal

Departments. An ongoing list of "Buildings of Concern" is kept up to date and reviewed, and co-ordinated action plans are agreed. We are also in the process of reviewing our Conservation Areas. This exercise will lead to us being able to collate a comprehensive list of Buildings at Risk. These will be logged onto the Council's GIS system so that the action plans for individual buildings can be refined into plans for wider neighbourhoods.

Already we have seen that improvements have been made to a number of high profile empty properties and we are hoping that this will lead to them being brought back into use.

We are always keen to engage with property owners wishing to bring empty properties back into use, and advise on technical matters etc. Where properties have been empty for over two years we are happy to confirm this in writing to allow the owners to carry out renovations at the reduced level of VAT (i.e. 5% rather than 20%).

Contact Chris Jones on 01229 876543 or at cwjones@barrowbc.gov.uk or Jayne Parrington on 01229 876561 or at jparrington@barrowbc.gov.uk

Allerdale Borough Council round-up of news



Reducing the number of long-term empty homes in Allerdale is one of the key priorities in our 2016 to 2021 Housing Strategy. We intend to work with empty home owners and with our internal and external partners to bring empty properties back into use.

We're also seeking opportunities to access empty properties that could be used as a shared tenure model or accommodation for key workers such as doctors/nurses and any workforce related to economic growth.

Currently we have a budget to offer empty homes grants of up to £10,000 where properties have been empty for more than twelve months.



We can offer empty home owners the following:

- VAT letters to save 15% VAT on repairs costs
- Empty home grants (up to £10,000)
- Matchmaker scheme
- Advice and information on ways to bring empty homes back into use
- Drawing up schedules of work to guide empty home owners on works needed to bring the property up to a suitable standard
- Possible purchase of empty homes where they're causing significant blight to an area.

For more information or to apply for an empty homes grant, contact David Baines on 01900 702665 or david.baines@allerdale.gov.uk

