

Empty Homes Newsletter

2014

Foreword

I am pleased to bring you Knowsley's second annual Empty Homes Newsletter.

Reducing the number of empty homes in the borough is a key priority for the council and this newsletter updates you on the range of methods we are using to achieve that goal.

I am delighted to say that we have some excellent examples in this newsletter of how we have helped owners and communities to tackle the issues posed by empty homes.

It is always worth making sure your property is in use. If it remains empty, you are missing out on rental income and could face expensive costs for maintenance, utility bills and possible anti-social behaviour.

I hope you will find the advice and case studies in this newsletter useful.

If you require further advice on any issue relating to empty homes in Knowsley, please do not hesitate to contact the relevant officer from the 'useful contacts' section.

Best wishes

Cllr Dave Lonergan

Knowsley Council's Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills

Becoming an Accredited Landlord

The Landlord Accreditation Scheme is designed to recognise good quality, well managed private sector accommodation in Knowsley.

The scheme is free for private landlords to join and will demonstrate their commitment to their tenants and to the good maintenance and management of their properties.

To receive accreditation, landlords must agree to a set of principles which include promoting good property standards, ensuring their properties are in good condition, abiding by the law and holding all safety certificates.

In return, landlords will be able to display the Knowsley Landlord Accreditation logo and take advantage of other incentives as the scheme develops, including regular Landlord Forums.

If you are a private landlord with property in Knowsley and would like to know more about Landlord Accreditation, call the Strategic Housing team on 0151 443 2287 or email housing@knowsley.gov.uk.



Reasons to bring your property back into use

There are a lot of reasons to want to bring your empty property back into use, including:

- The potential to make an income from your property;
- The potential to reduce maintenance and security costs on your property;
- Increasing the value of your property; or
- Improving the amenity of your local community.

There are also downsides to keeping your property empty:

- It can cost over £7,000 per annum to leave a home empty - that includes the cost of council tax, minimal security to the property (boarding), and lost potential rent;
- We have estimated that if your property lies unused and deteriorating it is at higher risk of vandalism, crime and damage from the elements;
- The longer your property is left empty the less valuable it becomes. Knowsley Council has estimated that property values of properties adjacent to empty homes can fall as much as 18%.



Empty Dwelling Management Orders

In 2012's Empty Homes Newsletter we highlighted that our Strategic Housing Service provides support and guidance to bring properties back into use.

When our offer of assistance fails, the Housing Act 2004 offers a variety of enforcement tools which can help bring empty properties back into use. One of these options is the use of an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO).

Knowsley Council has been successful in gaining a further four EDMOs. Two of these are highlighted below:

Meadowside Drive, Kirkby

This property had been unoccupied since 2008. Support and advice had been given to the then owner of the property but he had failed to act upon this support.

Following an application to the Residential Property Tribunal, an Interim EDMO was granted to Knowsley Council in September 2012.

Once this was in place, it enabled Knowsley Council to enter into negotiations with the mortgagor for the property. They subsequently agreed to sell the property to a local developer who totally refurbished the property and returned it back into use earlier this year.

Knowsley Council has now revoked this order and this property is now back in occupation.



Officers used the EDMO to secure the two bedroom house on St Nicholas Road in Whiston and appointed a contractor to carry out a wide range of improvement works.

Improvement works to the property consisted of a range of items including re-roofing, new kitchen, new bathroom, full electrical rewire and a full decoration of the property.

The property also received energy saving measures which included a new Gas Central Heating Boiler and the installation of External Wall Insulation to the property.

All building works to the property were carried out by Penny Lane Builders Ltd and the energy measures were supplied and fitted by Wetherby Building Systems Ltd.

After overseeing the improvements, the Strategic Housing team handed the property over to Knowsley Housing Trust to manage.

The house has now been let out to a local resident through the Property Pool Plus allocation scheme.

This resident was under-occupying her previous home so the availability of this property allowed her to successfully downsize and consequently avoid the bedroom tax.

You can see how we have transformed this property at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN058da78HU>



St Nicholas Road, Whiston

If - after an interim EDMO has been granted - Strategic Housing cannot work with the owner to bring the property back into use, we have the option to make a final EDMO and carry out works in default.

This approach was used to take control of a problem property which had been left empty as a blight on the community for eight years.

These two examples highlight how an EDMO can be used to successfully bring long term empty properties back into use and maximise the best use of our existing housing in the borough.

Where necessary, Strategic Housing plan to continue to use EDMOs as a tool to bring similar long term empty properties back into use and will provide a further update in our next newsletter.

National Empty Homes Loan

National Empty Homes Loan Fund is an innovative new scheme aimed at bringing some of England's 710,000 empty homes back into use launched in the summer of 2013.



- Knowsley Council is one of 46 local authorities taking part in the scheme, which aims to bring empty properties back into use to help tackle the country's housing shortage.
- In a joint initiative between Knowsley Council, the Empty Homes Agency, the Government and the Ecology Building Society, the scheme can provide loans of up to £15,000 to owners of empty properties to help bring them back into affordable use.
- The National Empty Homes Loan Fund will enable access to secured loans at a fixed at 5% interest rate, and will enable owners to renovate the property to a Decent Home Standard.
- To be eligible for the National Empty Homes Loan you must:
 1. Be the owner of an empty property that has been empty for six months or more;
 2. Be over 18 years of age;
 3. Not have secured borrowing of more than 70% of the property's value in total (including the Empty Homes Loan); and
 4. Have the ability to repay the loan.
- There are no fees to pay if you apply through Knowsley Council. If you apply direct there are administration and valuation fees applicable.

If you are interested in applying for a loan contact Tony Doyle on 0151 443 5837 or email tony.doyle@knowsley.gov.uk

Council Tax charges What you need to know

The Government has given local authorities discretion to award discounts on empty properties, the cost of which is borne locally. The council has introduced one month's full discount, followed by a 100% charge on empty properties.

Owners of vacant and unfurnished properties will therefore have nothing to pay for the first month they are vacant. After this time, they will be charged at the full council tax level. Properties that require major repairs will be charged at the full council tax level from the date they become vacant.

Long term unoccupied and unfurnished property

From April 2013, properties which have been vacant in excess of two years will be subject to an additional premium charge of 50%.



Second homes and unoccupied furnished property

From April 2013, if a property is not anyone's main home, the owner will be charged the full council tax. This will apply to unoccupied properties (which are substantially furnished) and second homes (furnished properties that are not used as main residences). Certain second homes would continue to have their bill reduced by 50%, in the following situations:

- The Council Tax payer is required to live elsewhere in job-related accommodation because of the terms and conditions of their employment, for example a caretaker, minister of religion or a member of the armed services. This does not apply to a second home that you are renting because living there is convenient for work.
- The second home is a pitch occupied by a caravan or a mooring occupied by a boat.
- A planning restriction on the second home prevents occupancy for a continuous period of at least 28 days in a year.

Lease Management Schemes

Knowsley Council has been approached by several partner organisations including Knowsley Housing Trust, Plus Dane Group and Magenta Living who are looking to return a number of properties back into use through two different schemes.

Purchase and Repair

Purchase and Repair could be the solution for you if you are looking to sell your empty property. Strategic Housing are working in partnership with Registered Providers who are all currently looking to purchase homes that have been empty longer than six Months in Knowsley, refurbish them to decent homes standards and look to let these properties via the Property Pool Plus system.

Lease Management

If you are looking to retain ownership of your property, these same Registered Providers all also looking to enter into lease agreements with empty property owners. Lease agreements would typically be for between five – 15 years and the Registered Provider would carry out refurbishment works to bring these properties up to the decent homes standard before similarly letting them through Property Pool Plus. The rental income from the property would then be used to pay off the money invested in bringing the property up to standard. At the end of the lease period you would get your property back and nothing else to pay.

Do you own a home that may be suitable? Our partner Registered Providers are very interested in two bedroom houses in Kirkby or Halewood which have been empty for a minimum of six months. Other properties may also be considered. If you think one of these schemes may be of interest to you please contact Tony Doyle on 0151 443 5837 for more information.



Useful Contact Numbers:

Empty Homes Knowsley

Telephone: 0151 443 5837

Email: emptyhomes@knowsley.gov.uk

Landlord Accreditation

Telephone: 0151 443 2287

Email: neil.walklett@knowsley.gov.uk

Planning and Building Control

Telephone: 0151 443 2380

Email: planning@knowsley.gov.uk

Environmental Health

Telephone: 0151 443 4723

Email: Environmental.Health@knowsley.gov.uk

Energy Efficiency

Telephone: 0151 443 5817

Email: simon.rugen@knowsley.gov.uk

Council Tax

Telephone: 0151 443 4476

Email: local.taxation@knowsley.gov.uk

Anti-Social Behaviour

Telephone: 0151 443 2000

Road and Highway Maintenance

Telephone: 0151 443 2380

Email: road.maintenance@knowsley.gov.uk

You can also get this information in other formats. Please phone Customer Services on 0151 443 4031, or email customerservices@knowsley.gov.uk