

# Empty Homes Newsletter

2016

## Foreword

**Welcome to the latest Empty Homes Newsletter 2016.**

This edition highlights a number of initiatives aimed at helping you bring your properties back into use - and save you money. There's news of a grant available to the owners of empty homes which could fund half of improvements works, and if your property has been empty longer than two years you can also save on VAT.

Over the past year our work to improve property standards and bring properties back into use is reaping rewards with a further reduction in empty homes expected in the coming year. I hope you will find the information in this newsletter useful and please do not hesitate to contact us if you need any further information.

Best wishes

**Cllr Mike Murphy**

Knowsley Council's Cabinet Member for  
Regeneration and Economic Development



## Empty home owners grant

**These repayable grants are available to owners of empty properties in Knowsley.**

If the grant application is approved, following the submission of two written quotations for the works, the council will pay 50% of the cost of improvement works up to a maximum of £10,000.

When the work is completed, you or a member of your immediate family must live in it as your sole residence or let it as a private rented property.

You must then repay the grant in full after five years. It's interest-free, so if you receive the full £5,000, you don't pay back a penny more than £5,000 at the end of the term.

Compare that to a five year, monthly repayment loan from the high street at a typical interest rate of 5% and it saves you £664.

**For more information, contact Charlie Hogan on 0151 443 5835 or email [charlie.hogan@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:charlie.hogan@knowsley.gov.uk)**



## Empty Homes Surgery

### help for empty property owners in Knowsley

Knowsley Council would like to invite all empty property owners to a free event aimed at helping you bring your property back into use.

Whatever the reason behind your property being empty, by attending the event you will stand a better chance of bringing it back into use. A range of experts will be on hand to provide/offer practical advice. We hope that you will use this event to turn your property into an asset.

There will also be an opportunity to display your Empty Property at the event and meet potential buyers.

The event runs from **4pm to 7pm** on **17 March 2016** at **The Venue**, Civic Way, Huyton, L36 9GD and you are welcome to drop in at any time for a chat.

**For further information about the event, register your attendance or submit your property forward for display please contact Tony Doyle or Michelle Wharton on 0151 443 5837 or email [empty.homes@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:empty.homes@knowsley.gov.uk)**



Knowsley Council

# Why leave your property empty?

Properties become empty for a wide variety of reasons and owners are often unaware of the options available to them or how much their empty property is actually costing them.

## Potential savings

If you own an empty property, you must now pay an additional 50% premium on top of your standard council tax charge. Alongside the costs related to insurance, security, dilapidation, mortgage interest and loss of potential rent, this could be costing you almost £9,000 per annum.

## Letting a property?

Letting out your empty property provides you with a source of income and reduces the chances of the property being targeted by vandals.

Should you decide to let the property, we recommend that you become a member of Knowsley's Landlord Accreditation Scheme. It is free to join, provides support and advice and may even help you find a tenant.

Contact Neil Walklett on 0151 443 2287 or email [neil.walklett@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:neil.walklett@knowsley.gov.uk)

## Selling a property?

Often the most straight forward solution when owning an empty property is to simply put it up for sale.

The council runs a matchmaker scheme and can offer your property to our list of accredited landlords who may be willing to buy the property from you.

Our Empty Homes team can provide advice and assistance to help you decide on your best course of action.

Contact Tony Doyle or Michelle Wharton on 0151 443 5837 or email [empty.homes@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:empty.homes@knowsley.gov.uk)

# Reduced or zero VAT for empty home owners



Support is available to help you cut the cost of bringing your empty property back into use, through lower rates of VAT.

Domestic building work is usually charged at the standard VAT rate of 20%, but certain concessions are available.

## If your property has been empty for two years or more

Some repair, maintenance or improvement works are eligible for a reduced VAT rate of 5%. This applies to labour and materials for redecoration, double glazing, providing water, power, drainage and access to the site.

If your property is being renovated or altered at the reduced rate, you can also arrange the renovation, construction or conversion of a garage at the property at the same reduced VAT rate. This is possible where the work is carried out at the same time as the works on the main property, and where the garage is intended to be occupied in conjunction with the renovated or altered property.

Works to be charged at standard rate of 20% VAT include the installation of goods that are not building materials, such as carpets or fitted bedroom furniture; hiring equipment, scaffolding, landscaping and professional services, such as architects and surveyors.



## If your property has been empty for 10 years or more

You can claim back all VAT charged on the renovation of such a property once the dwelling has been sold. If you keep the property to live in, you can make a claim for the VAT under the DIY Builders Refund Scheme available from Customs and Excise.

## Conversion of non-residential buildings into dwellings

If you are converting a non-residential building - such as a barn, church or school - into a residential property, the VAT rules are the same as for residential properties that have been empty for 10 years. That means, you can claim back 100% of VAT providing the building (or part) has never been used as a dwelling for 'relevant residential purposes', or if the building (or part) has been recently purchased or a long lease granted during the previous 10 years.



## Building control and planning consent

If you carry out work that requires statutory planning consent or statutory building control and it has not been granted, then your work is standard-rated.

You can find full guidance on VAT on building and construction online at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-refunds-for-diy-housebuilders-claim-form-for-new-houses-vat431nb](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-refunds-for-diy-housebuilders-claim-form-for-new-houses-vat431nb)

If you are employing the services of a builder, visit [www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-notice-708-buildings-and-construction](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-notice-708-buildings-and-construction)



# Enforcement Update...

**During the last year, the team has used a variety of enforcement tools to improve property standards and bring empty properties back into use.**

## **Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)**

An EDMO gives the council the power to improve the standard of a property and identify a tenant. The council then recovers its costs through the rent paid by the new tenant.

Since the last Empty Homes Newsletter, the council has successfully gained a further six EDMOs on long term properties.

As we enter into the new financial year all six of these properties will have been subject to full refurbishment and will be occupied, and the past blight of the neighbourhood will have been removed.

You can watch a short film showing how the council transformed a problem property using an EDMO on our YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN058da78HU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN058da78HU)

## **Reduction in over five year empty properties**

Over the course of our previous Empty Homes Strategy 2011-2014, our Strategic Housing team has made great progress in reducing the number

of properties which have been empty for over five years.

This number has been cut from 264 to 97, a reduction of 63%. We aim to reduce that total by a further 50% this year, through advice, support or enforcement action.

## **Warrant of Entry under Section 240 of the Housing Act 2004**

Another tool available to the council in engaging with empty property owners is requesting an inspection of the property.

This is done under section 239 of the Housing Act 2004 and allows officers to identify any hazards (if necessary, using a warrant under Section 240) in the property.

If category 1 hazards are present (posing a risk to harm) the council must take action, either by working with the owner or taking enforcement action.



# Living Over The Shops scheme (LOTS) in Prescott

**Knowsley Council has delivered a scheme to convert disused office, storage and retail space in Prescott town centre.**

The town centre had a high concentration of empty properties and, without a co-ordinated approach, these properties had little chance of being brought back into use.



At the same time, the Prescott Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) - a five year project to repair and restore the town's historic fabric and improve its appearance - was due to start.

The schemes were also funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Knowsley Council and other local partners and would see around £4m invested in the town, highlighting Prescott's heritage, attracting new business and creating new homes.

All properties are now fully accredited under Knowsley's Landlord Accreditation Scheme and will be let at affordable rents for a period of five years, via [www.propertypoolplus.org.uk](http://www.propertypoolplus.org.uk)

## Useful Contact Numbers:

### Empty Homes Knowsley

Telephone: 0151 443 5837

Email: [empty.homes@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:empty.homes@knowsley.gov.uk)

### Landlord Accreditation

Telephone: 0151 443 2287

Email: [neil.walklett@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:neil.walklett@knowsley.gov.uk)

### Planning and Building Control

Telephone: 0151 443 2380

Email: [planning@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:planning@knowsley.gov.uk)

### Environmental Health

Telephone: 0151 443 4712

Email: [Environmental.Health@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:Environmental.Health@knowsley.gov.uk)

### Energy Efficiency

Telephone: 0151 443 5817

Email: [simon.rugen@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:simon.rugen@knowsley.gov.uk)

### Council Tax

Telephone: 0151 443 4476

Email: [local.taxation@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:local.taxation@knowsley.gov.uk)

### Police (non urgent)

Telephone: 101

### Knowsley Housing Trust

Telephone: 0151 290 7000

## Case study - 40 High Street, Prescott

The building was formerly used as dry cleaners with accommodation above and was situated on a prominent gateway corner to Prescott town centre. The building had fallen into disrepair and required significant works to be brought back into use.

The work has made dramatic changes to the exterior of the building, which has seen decades of paint stripped away to reveal beautiful brickwork and stonework, traditional cast rainwater works and a renovated slate roof. In addition the twentieth century shop front has been replaced with a more traditional all-timber shop front which complements the building's architecture.

The two bedroom flat above benefited from a full renovation, including contemporary open plan kitchen/living area, full re-wire, new heating system and the original sash windows professionally restored.

The building was the first of 30 to be repaired, restored and brought back into use via the THI between now and 2018.



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