

Response to Request for Information

Reference FOI 003583
Date 16 May 2019

Long Term Empty Properties

Request:

I am writing to you to request the following information under the Freedom of Information Act:

1) Can the council confirm their current number of Long Term Empty Properties as of the 8th May (those domestic properties which have been empty for six months or older)? [1,047](#)

2) What work is the council currently undertaking or planning to undertake around reducing their long term empty properties in 2019?
[In Financial Year 2019/20, the council is piloting an early intervention strategy. Once a property has been empty for 3 months, the owners will be contacted with a canvas. The initiative will serve to remind occupiers to inform the council if a property is now occupied or encourage owners to act before the property becomes long-term empty.](#)

[A canvas of long term empty properties \(starting with those empty longest\) will also take place.](#)

[Encouragement/ enforcement approach will continue on an average of 230 reactive cases throughout the year. These are cases brought to our attention via a complaint, bad debt or identified as a problem from pro-active intervention.](#)

[Checks on probate cases, owners in care and Council owned property takes place annually and will continue in 2019/ 20.](#)

[The empty property strategy is currently under review.](#)

3) During 2018 did you undertake any work around reducing your Long Term Empty Properties. If you did was this done using internal resource or a third party?

[In financial year 2017/18 all owners of empty properties were contacted and analysis of the reasons for properties remaining empty was carried out. The analysis is being used to inform the councils approach going forward.](#)

Encouragement/ enforcement approach continued on an average of 230 reactive cases throughout the year. These are cases brought to our attention via a complaint, bad debt or identified as a problem from pro-active intervention.

Checks on probate cases, owners in care and Council owned property continued.

In certain circumstances, an incentive of £500 was offered to owners as a contribution to legal/ agents fees. The payment was dependant on the property either –

1. Being sold on the open market;
2. Being rented via the council;
3. Probate being applied for and granted.

The above was carried out using internal resources. However, an external resource is being used to develop the empty properties strategy.

- 4) If yes is the answer to question three, did the council review every single long term property?
Yes. However, it should be appreciated that there is a significant churn of properties that become occupied and become empty over 6 months. In Wolverhampton, around 300 long term empty properties (listed as empty over 6 months) will become empty while another 300 are occupied each month.
- 5) Does the reduction of empty homes in the council area form part of your Housing strategy?
Yes.
- 6) Does the council have a budget in place to help support the reduction of empty properties?
There is a revolving fund in place to finance the compulsory purchase of long term empty properties.

There is a revenue budget in place to finance the £500 incentive scheme described in question 3.
- 7) How much did the council spend on temporary accommodation during 2018?
The total expenditure on temporary accommodation during the 2018/19 financial year was £373,585
- 8) Does the council offer financial support /loans to Long Term Empty property owners to help them bring properties back into use?
Apart from the £500 incentive, there are no grants or loans currently available.