

Empty homes: why do some areas have high levels?



Empty Homes – the national campaigning charity aims in England to:

- Raise awareness of the waste of long-term empty homes.
- Research, develop and work with others to test ideas for bringing long-term empty homes back into use for those in housing need.
- Provide encouragement and advice for those seeking to bring empty homes back into use, or concerned about empty homes.
- Campaign for changes to policy and initiatives at national and local levels that will enable more action to bring empty homes back into use for those in housing need.

For more information on the work of Empty Homes-the national campaigning charity visit: www.emptyhomes.com

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Contents

Introduction	4
PART ONE	
Summary of findings from local authority survey	8
What does the research show?	15
PART TWO	
The full findings of the survey of local levels with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods to do this	29
Appendices	
A local authorities selected to take part in the survey in alphabetical order with regions	47
B email sent to selected local authorities on 19th July 2016	49
C email sent to local authorities on 8th August 2016	51
D email sent to local authorities on the 15th August 2016	53
E local authority questionnaire marked up with results	55
F statistical reliability	65
G Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder areas.	66
H Successful bidders and their local authority partners allocated funding through the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund	68

Introduction

It is clear when looking at the level of long-term (more than six months) empty homes recorded by local authorities across England that some places have a higher level than others.¹ Mapping the data shows that many of the hotspots are in the North.²

A look at the data on a regional basis shows that the three Northern regions have the highest levels of long-term empty homes followed by the two in the Midlands.³ The degree of difference between regions suggests it is worth examining what lies behind this. However, as the first map shows there are hotspots outside the Northern and Midland regions with some coastal areas in the South standing out as among the areas with the highest levels of long-term empty homes.

There are also a few high house price areas in the South with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes. This could be related to the phenomenon of people buying properties primarily as an investment, rather than to live in themselves, with the expectation of a high capital gain when the homes are sold (sometimes referred to as Buy-to-Leave empty).⁴ However, that is a topic for another study, and not the focus of this report.

The official Government data on empty homes are only available at the local authority level, but dig beneath and there are neighbourhoods where over 10% of homes are empty. There are roads which have been completely abandoned; in others, people are living in poor standard housing alongside many boarded up properties in bleak looking streets. Arguably, the housing conditions in these areas are equally a part of the housing crisis as the extreme affordability gap seen in other places. Both are symptoms of the housing market not working for people wanting decent housing in a pleasant area at a price they can afford.

We wanted to get a better understanding of what is going on in areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes, in order to raise the case for action and inform strategies for tackling the issues communities face in these places. This report draws on a survey of local authorities

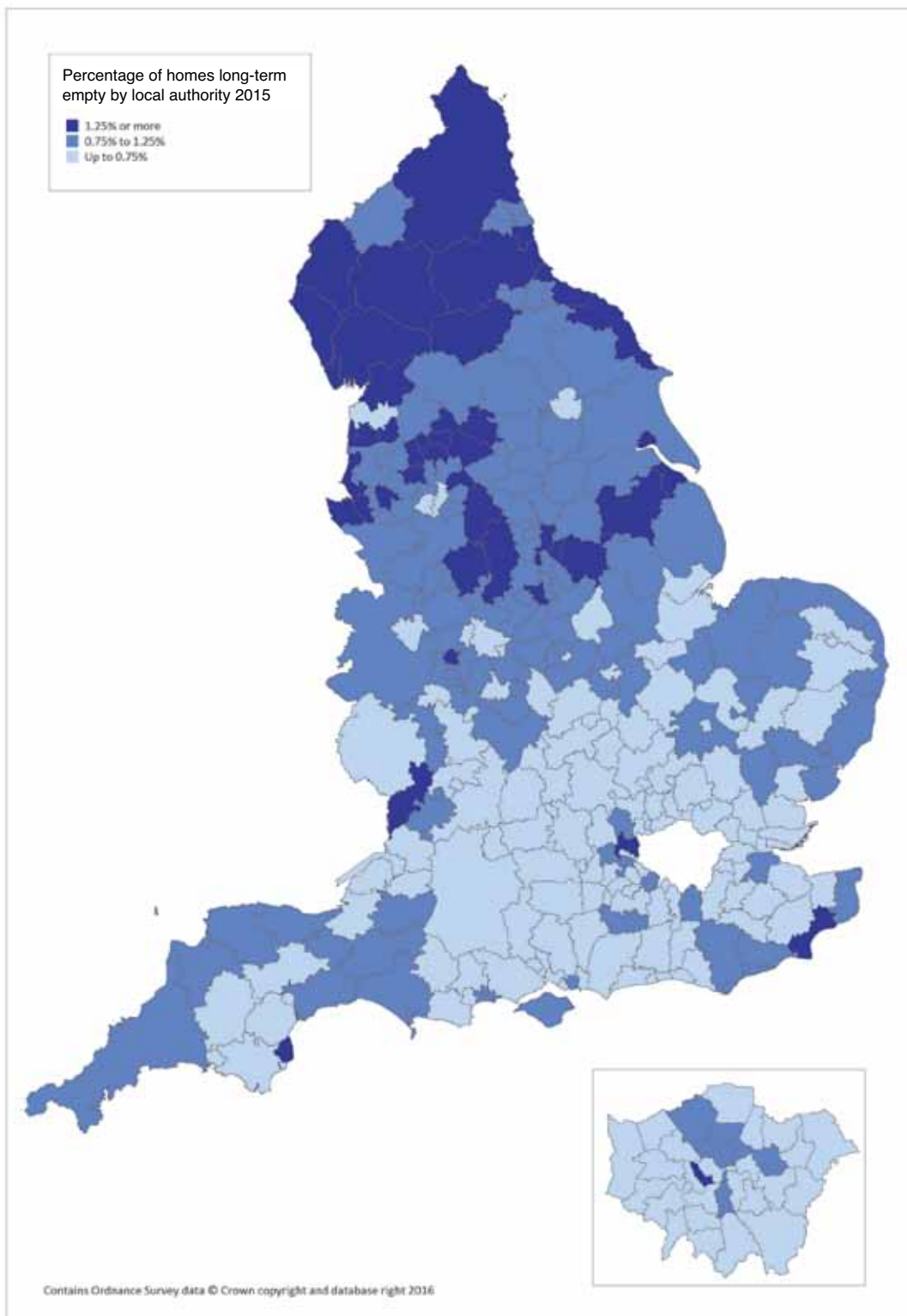
1 Empty Homes (2016) *Empty Homes in England*: <http://www.emptyhomes.com/research.htm>

2 Ibid

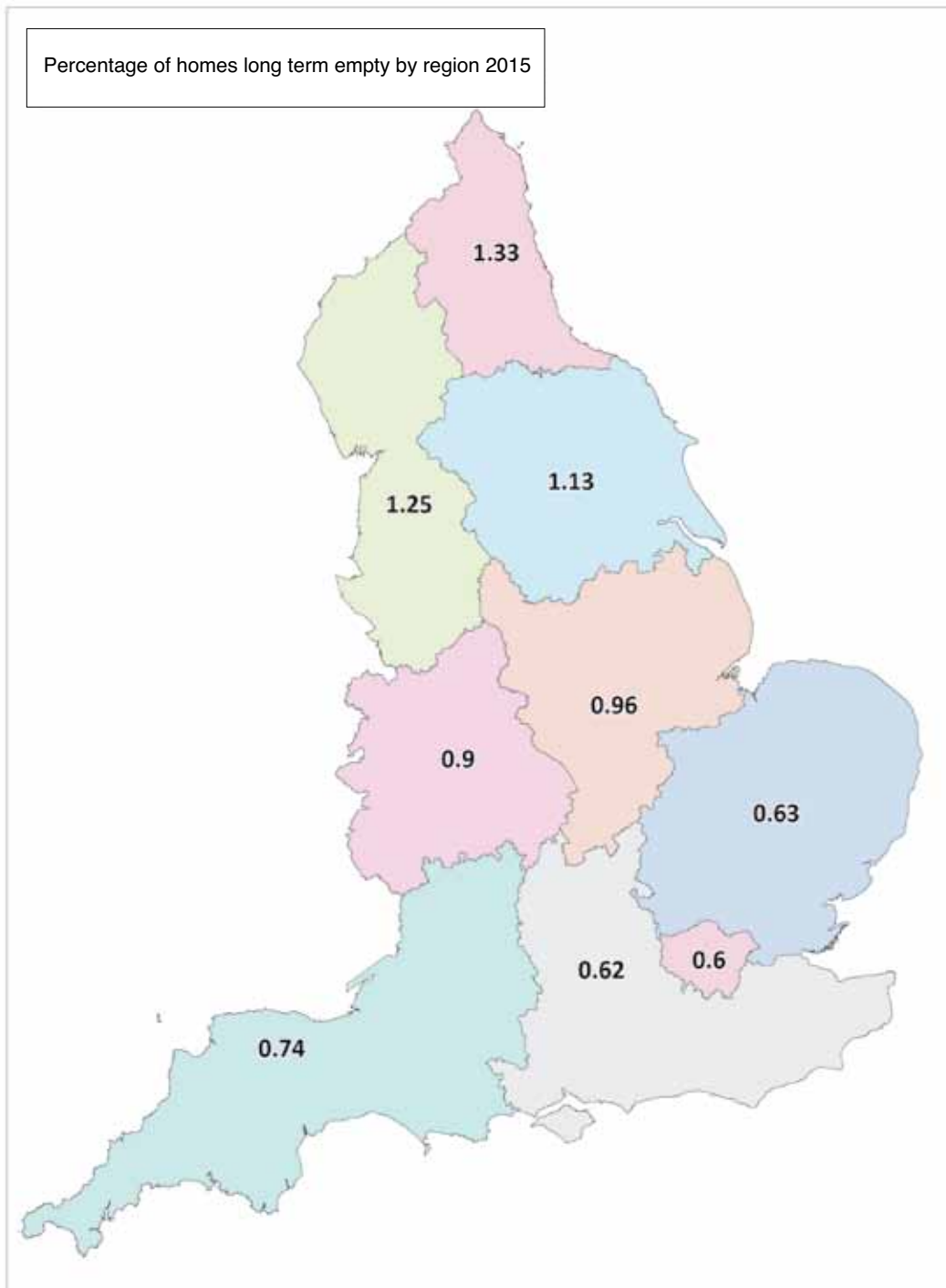
3 Ibid

4 Ibid

Map 1: percentage of homes long-term empty by local authority



Map 2: percentage of homes long-term empty by region 2015



with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally, according to Government data and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods.

This report is part of a wider project which Empty Homes is carrying out, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The overall objectives are to:

- Build the evidence base of the characteristics of areas that have higher levels/concentrations of long-term empty homes to help inform a better understanding of the underlying causes and what works in tackling the issue.
- Work with six organisations across England to support and follow what they do in order to demonstrate that community-led action is an effective means of bringing empty homes back into use as part of wider neighbourhood improvement approaches.
- Build a coalition of organisations championing the case for more support from central government, local authorities and others for community-led neighbourhood improvement approaches to tackling empty homes and wider linked issues.

The report is in two parts. The first part includes a summary of the findings from our local authority survey, followed by a detailed exploration of what the findings show and our recommendations for a range of stakeholders. The second part of the report shows the full findings from the survey of local authorities. At the end of the report the appendices include the list of 58 local authorities selected for the survey and a copy of the questionnaire, marked-up with the initial overall topline results (before any back-coding); and some details on statistical reliability.

Thanks

We would like to thank the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for their support for this work.

We would also like to thank the local authority officers who took the time to respond to our survey. We know they are often very busy and that resources are tight, so we appreciate that they recognised the importance of gathering evidence on these issues and gave priority to completing our questionnaire.

In addition, we would also like to thank our board member Toby Taper for helping us to devise the questionnaire and for writing Part Two: the full findings of the survey of local authorities. Also thanks to our volunteers: Alex Hughes, who helped to manage the online questionnaire fieldwork, and Guido Miani and Kiana Otsuka who helped with proofing, fact checking and putting together this final report. We appreciate the time they gave voluntarily.

Helen Williams, Empty Homes – national campaigning charity

PART ONE

Summary of findings from local authority survey

Methodology

The 58 local authorities for this survey (see Appendix A) were purposefully selected based on either or both of two criteria. Firstly, from Government statistics 49 had relatively high levels of long-term empty homes (vacant for more than six months).⁵ Secondly, they had received money from the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund (Clusters Funding).⁶ This was to ensure that some local authorities were included with known concentrations of empty homes in particular neighbourhoods, even if they were not among the local authorities with relatively high level of long-term empty homes overall (one criterion for Clusters Funding was having over 10% of homes empty in the neighbourhood).⁷ However, it is unlikely that we included all local authorities with concentrations of empty homes in particular neighbourhoods, because some of them would not have bid for Clusters Funding, while others may have bid unsuccessfully. As data is not available nationally on the number of empty homes below the local authority level it is not possible to identify all neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes.

From a list of 51 local authorities with over 1.2% of homes long-term empty, 49 were selected to take part in the survey; 2 were excluded as they were also ranked among the top 10 areas of England on house prices.⁸ An additional 9 local authorities were selected because they had received Clusters Funding, although their long-term empty homes levels were 1.2% or below. Nineteen of the initial 49 authorities selected were in both categories – level of long-term empty homes over 1.2%

5 See Empty Homes (2016) *Empty Homes in England*: <http://www.emptyhomes.com/research.htm> for an explanation of how Empty Homes calculates the percentage of homes long-term empty from official Government data, but also for an exploration of the limitations of the data.

6 Homes and Communities Agency (2014) *Clusters of Empty Homes Fund: Allocations*: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clusters-of-empty-homes-fund-allocations>

7 Homes and Communities Agency (2011) *Bringing Clusters of Empty Homes into use: Bidding Guidance*. Programme closed and document withdrawn 5th January 2016.

8 Office for National Statistics (2016) *Median house price for national and subnational geographies – HPSSA Dataset 9*: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/medianhousepricefornationalandsubnationalgeographiesquarterlyrollingyearhpssadataset09>

and they also received Clusters Funding; the other 30 were selected on the basis of relatively high levels of empty homes generally.

The fieldwork took place between 19th July and 19th August 2016 using Survey Monkey. The 58 selected local authorities were sent an initial email asking them to complete an online questionnaire (see Appendix B) followed by two additional emails chasing non-responders (see Appendices C and D).

In total, 46 completed questionnaires were returned from the initial 58 local authorities selected, giving a high response rate of 79%. Among this sample, 17 were in both selection categories; 20 were selected on the basis of generally high levels of long-term empty homes only and 9 received Clusters Funding only.

A copy of the questionnaire marked up with the initial overall topline results (before any back-coding) is appended (see Appendix E). The survey report is based on the sample of 46 local authorities completing the questionnaire from the population of 58 selected, and the high 79% response rate means that we can have confidence in the statistical reliability of the overall findings (see Appendix F). In addition, some sub-group analyses based on where the long-term empty homes are in each local authority were carried out using Survey Monkey, and are included where relevant; however, given the very small base sizes, these should be treated with caution.

Self-identification

In the survey, respondents were asked to self-identify which of the 3 categories their local authority was in. Twenty-eight respondents self-identify their local authority's long-term empty homes as in both categories: spread throughout their area generally and concentrated in particular neighbourhoods. Eleven say they are only spread throughout their area generally, and 7 that they are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods only.

Using self-identification, 39 local authorities have long-term empty homes in their area generally, including 28 also concentrated in particular neighbourhoods plus 11 in their local authority area only. Thirty-five have long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, including the 28 also spread throughout their local authority generally, plus 7 concentrated in particular neighbourhoods only. These sub-samples were used as the bases for some of the survey questions.

Characteristics of neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes v local authority generally

The 35 local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, including those saying they are also spread throughout their area generally, were then asked 3 questions comparing their concentrated neighbourhoods with their local authority area generally.

Area

From seven area characteristics, over 9 in 10 mention 3: lower household incomes, lower house prices and more deprivation. Four in 5 cite 2 others; more antisocial behaviour, and more changes in population/higher resident turnover. A half say more crime, and 1 in 7 say more very long-term (10 or more years) empty homes.

Six of the 7 characteristics are mentioned more often in local authorities with concentrated neighbourhoods only, particularly more changes in population.

Tenure

Among 6 tenure characteristics, almost all respondents say that their neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes contain more private rented accommodation than their local authority generally, and over 4 in 5 say that more do not meet Decent Homes Standard. Relatively few chose the other 4 tenure options.

Property

From 5 property characteristics, 9 in 10 say their neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes contain more pre-1919 housing compared with their local authority generally. Around 2 in 5 mention more small dwellings and more houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), with relatively few citing more poor conversions and large dwellings.

Two of the 5 properties types – more small dwellings and HMOs – are mentioned more often in local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes in both their area generally **and** concentrated in particular neighbourhoods.

Characteristics of local authority areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods v nationally

All 46 respondents were asked 3 similar questions comparing their local authority area with England nationally.

Area

The pattern is similar for the top 3 area characteristics chosen by respondents with empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods: around three-quarters mention lower household incomes, lower house prices and more deprivation. However, some way behind, over a third select more changes in population, while far fewer cite more antisocial behaviour and more crime; again, last is more very long-term empty homes. In addition, 5 respondents say that none of these characteristics apply to their local authority compared with England nationally.

Tenure

Similarly, on tenure the top 2 are the same as cited by respondents with empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, although with considerably fewer respondents – around half – citing more private rented accommodation and not meeting the Decent Homes Standard. However, the other 4 tenure types are mentioned by rather more respondents; 1 in 5 say more owner-occupied housing not meeting the Decent Homes Standard and more social housing generally, while fewer select more owner-occupied housing and the social sector size criteria (commonly known as the bedroom tax). Seven respondents say none of these apply to their local authority compared with nationally.

Property

The rank order on property is exactly the same as cited by respondents with empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, although with rather fewer respondents selecting 4 of them. 4 in 5 say their local authority contains more pre-1919 housing compared with England nationally, with over a third mentioning more small dwellings. Still fewer cite HMOs, more poor conversions and large dwellings. Again, 6 respondents say none of these.

Main reasons for long-term empty homes

Respondents were then asked 2 questions, from a list of 14, about the main reasons for the relatively high level of long-term empty homes; firstly, in their local authority area generally, and/or secondly in neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes.

Local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes spread throughout their area generally

Almost all 39 respondents in local authorities with relatively high level of long-term empty homes spread throughout their area generally, including concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, give the same main reason for the relatively high level of long-term empty homes in their local authority area generally: owners being unable to fund repairs/improve homes to occupy, sell or rent. Over half mention owners allowing, or previous occupants causing, homes to become uninhabitable, and around a third say low housing demand due to social problems or better housing elsewhere. At least 1 in 5 cites the effects of

Buy-to-Leave empty and the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) scheme effects where funding has stopped.

Respondents in local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes in both their local authority area generally **and** concentrated in particular neighbourhoods mention 2 of these reasons, which those with empty homes in their local authority only do not: low housing demand due to antisocial behaviour, and the HMR scheme effects.

Local authorities with long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods

Among the 35 respondents in local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, including those saying they are also spread throughout their area generally, the main reason given by 9 in 10 is again owners being unable to fund repairs/improve homes to occupy, sell or rent. However, next comes low housing demand due to social problems, followed by at least 3 in 5 mentioning owners allowing, or previous occupants causing, homes to become uninhabitable. Over a third select low housing demand due to lack of transport, better housing elsewhere, and Buy-to-Leave empty. Almost as many cite the HMR scheme effects where funding has stopped, and criminal damage making homes uninhabitable.

Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Affordable Homes Programme

All respondents were then asked a series of questions relating to the HCA Affordable Homes Programme since April 2015, which can be used to create new affordable homes from empty properties, even though the dedicated empty homes programmes run by the HCA had ended in March 2015.

Local authority area

From 3 funding options, nearly 3 in 5 respondents say that at least 1 of these has happened in their local authority area. The remainder say none of these, particularly in local authorities with long-term empty homes spread throughout their area only.

Nearly half say that registered housing providers attracted funding in their area, more frequently in local authorities with long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods only. Three in 10 local authorities bid for funding, particularly those with long-term empty homes both generally and concentrated, and a quarter attracted funding.

Registered housing providers

From 2 options, 3 in 5 local authorities say they helped registered housing providers to bid for funding, particularly where long-term empty homes are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods only. A quarter

funded them to supplement HCA funding. The other 2 in 5 did neither of these, again particularly where long-term empty homes are spread throughout their area only.

Community-led organisations

Similarly, nearly 3 in 5 local authorities have not done any of the options to help community-led organisations bring long-term empty homes back into housing use since April 2015, especially where long-term empty homes are spread throughout their area only. Among those helping, 1 in 5 mentions transferring ownership or leasing empty homes, particularly in local authorities with concentrated neighbourhoods only, and 1 in 8 providing funding from various sources. After back-coding, there were 4 new codes each mentioned by 4 or fewer respondents.

Action by local authorities

Among the 28 respondents saying their local authority is helping registered housing providers and/or community-led organisations, 23 provided the names of 56 organisations they are helping.

From 9 activities, all respondents were then asked what their local authority has done since April 2015 to help bring long-term empty homes back into housing use. Three in 5 mention updating local strategies and/or plans to set out how empty properties can contribute to housing supply, followed by around 2 in 5 who cite providing grants to private owners and consulting local people. Around 3 in 10 select obtaining compulsory purchase orders (CPOs), providing loans to private owners, and purchasing private empty homes. The other 3 activities are mentioned by no more than 1 in 8.

Barriers

From 12 possible barriers to reducing long-term empty homes, respondents were asked either or both of two questions about their local authority generally and/or concentrated neighbourhoods.

Local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes spread throughout their area generally

The 39 respondents with high levels both generally **and** concentrated as well as generally only were asked about the main barriers in their local authority generally. Around 4 in 5 say owners are unconcerned, and there is insufficient funding for regeneration. Some way behind, half mention poor repairs and management in the private rented sector generating more empty homes, and registered housing providers' lack of interest in bringing privately owned empty homes back into use, while nearly as many cite insufficient Affordable Homes Programme funding. Around a third select lack of capacity of community-led organisations and insufficient funding for selective demolition, and a quarter select asset disposal strategies of registered housing providers and high population turnover.

Local authorities with long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods

The 35 respondents with high levels both generally **and** concentrated as well as concentrated only were asked about the main barriers in their concentrated neighbourhoods.

Again, the top three responses are insufficient funding for regeneration, followed by owners unconcerned and poor repairs and management in the private rented sector generating more empty homes. However, half cite registered housing providers' lack of interest in bringing privately owned empty homes back into use, and high population turnover, and over a third cite lack of capacity of community-led organisations, insufficient funding for selective demolition, and the Affordable Homes Programme.

What would most help local authorities to bring more empty homes back into use?

Finally, from 11 options, all respondents were asked which would most help their local authority to bring more long-term empty homes back into housing use. Nearly 9 in 10 say central government targeting funding at local authorities with high levels of empty homes, followed some way behind by more legal powers and speedier CPOs, as well as central government support for neighbourhood regeneration generally and for areas with concentrations of empty homes. Over a third mention ring-fenced funding from the Affordable Homes Programme and more power and resources to tackle poor repairs and management in the private rented sector. Three in 10 say the ability to impose higher council tax rates on homes empty for over a year, and a quarter say a new Empty Homes Community Grants Programme for non-registered housing providers, and a devolution deal to enable their local authority to prioritise long-term empty homes. Six respondents wrote in a new code relating to central/local government, and a similar number mention the social sector size criteria (bedroom tax).

What does the research show?

Characteristics of local authority areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods v nationally

From the responses to our survey, a majority (but not all) local authority areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods can be characterised relative to other local authority areas as having:

- Lower household incomes.
- Lower house prices.
- More deprivation.
- More pre-1919 terraces.

Characteristics of neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes v local authority generally

In addition, the majority of local authorities characterise their neighbourhoods with particular concentrations of empty homes relative to other neighbourhoods in the same local authority area as having the same four characteristics plus five more:

- Lower household incomes
- Lower house prices
- More deprivation
- More pre-1919 terraces
- More antisocial behaviour
- More changes in population/higher population turnover
- More crime
- More private rented accommodation
- More private rented accommodation that does not meeting the Decent Homes Standard.

However, it should be remembered that not all local authorities in our survey reported having neighbourhoods where long-term empty homes are concentrated.

We have observed in many areas with concentrations of long-term empty homes that the condition of the housing stock is a factor. The poor quality of much of the housing can lead to some neighbourhoods

being seen as less popular where people tend to move only if they cannot afford to rent elsewhere, or cannot access social housing. As a result, there can be a vicious circle; owner-occupiers sell up and move to what they perceive as better neighbourhoods; then buy-to-let landlords purchase the properties relatively cheaply to let on a short-term basis. At the same time, landlords face a high tenancy turnover. In turn, fewer people seek to buy a property in the area to live in themselves, seeking better housing in what they also perceive to be better areas.

On the other hand, these streets often have groups of residents who are committed to the area and understandably want the issues they face addressed. Some of these residents have a long family history in the area, while others are more recent arrivals. Many of the people living in the areas are not in decent housing, which impacts on their quality of life. In addition, they are likely to be affected by the wider issues in their neighbourhood, for example antisocial behaviour. Arguably, the conditions they face are as much a part of the housing crisis as the large gap between housing supply and demand in other areas.

Main reasons for long-term empty homes

Owners' finances

The main reason respondents gave for relatively high levels of long-term empty homes was the same in both local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally, including those with concentrations of empty homes in particular neighbourhoods, and those where empty homes were concentrated in particular neighbourhoods. Nearly all respondents said that owners are unable to fund repairs/improvements to sell or rent out the homes.

From our discussions with owners of empty homes and local authorities, we understand this inability to fund works can be due to the owner's credit history; or because the property's sale value or rent yield are deemed by financial institutions to be too low relative to the sums required. This is more likely to be an issue in areas with relatively low property prices, which is a feature of many areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes as explored above. It is also more likely to be the case where properties are in a poor condition and the works required are extensive.

Among the local authorities in our survey, 20 provide loans and 14 grants to private owners of empty properties. Local authorities do this in recognition of the difficulties some owners have in financing works to their properties.

Low demand due to perceived social problems/lack of jobs and better homes/housing options available elsewhere

The second most frequent given reason for high levels of long-term empty homes from 7 in 10 local authorities with concentrations of

long-term empty homes in particular neighbourhoods are low housing demand due to perceived social problems, such as antisocial behaviour. However, this is mentioned by only a third of local authorities with high levels of empty homes generally, including those with concentrations in neighbourhoods.

As outlined above, neighbourhoods can get caught in a vicious cycle. Those that come to be seen as unpopular can have relatively high levels of residents perceived as having challenging behaviours and without the support they need. This, in turn, can put off other people from moving to the area. In extreme cases, properties are taken over to house criminal activities, such as cannabis farms, drug dens and brothels. Many people who have a choice understandably vote with their feet and seek to move on. Other people would not contemplate moving into a street where this was known to be happening.

Over a third of local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods also give the reasons as low housing demand due to lack of jobs and/or transport and better homes/housing options available elsewhere. We have visited neighbourhoods with high levels of long-term empty homes that have had an historical role in housing workers in industries such as fishing, steel works, mining or mills where employment numbers have sharply declined in recent decades. The high levels of pre-1919 terraced properties in these neighbourhoods marks the period in which they were built up.

Owners and previous occupants allowing homes to become uninhabitable

The second and third most commonly cited reasons by the majority of local authorities with higher levels of long-term empty homes generally are owners and previous occupants allowing homes to become uninhabitable. These are the third and fourth main reasons given by a majority of local authorities with concentrations of long-term empty homes in particular neighbourhoods. This is consistent with our experience when talking to organisations working in these areas. Some landlords simply fail to meet their basic legal obligations. We are often told of neglectful landlords, some of whom bought properties at auction without visiting the area. They may not understand or care about what is going on in the neighbourhood, nor that there is a need for more intensive property and tenancy management. In some cases landlords, having started with good intentions, may have taken on more than they can cope with.

Some landlords find their properties vandalised, and cannot afford to bring them back to a lettable standard; or the experience of this is putting them off re-letting the property. They could seek to sell the property, but some may feel that they cannot do this as they are in negative equity. In some housing markets property prices have not recovered to their

pre-2008 Financial Crisis level or have only recently begun to pick up again. Slow sales can relate to owners having unrealistic expectations about the price their property could fetch, or people being reluctant to buy into a stagnating local housing market. Trends in the local market can differ significantly from the average for England and/or what is happening in the wider area.

Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder legacy

The HMR Pathfinder programme ran from 2002 to 2011.⁹ It was a multi-million pound programme which sought to tackle the problems 'of neighbourhoods with acute low housing demand in the North of England and the Midlands. In such neighbourhoods the high concentrations of properties difficult to let or sell, the loss of population and the inability to attract new households had created a vicious circle of neighbourhood decline and deprivation'.¹⁰

Not all the local authorities in our initial survey population of 58, nor the actual sample of 46, were included in the 10 HMR Pathfinders which covered 30 local authority areas (see Appendix G). Nor did our survey population include all local authorities where an HMR Pathfinder previously operated.

Three in 10 respondents in local authorities where empty homes are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods cite the HMR scheme where funding stopped as one of the main causes of current levels of long-term empty homes. We have observed how some local authorities are left still owning whole streets, or large numbers of empty homes that had been compulsory purchased for demolition under the HMR scheme, or where households had moved out so that planned refurbishment could go ahead. In some areas, little seems to have happened since the incoming Coalition Government announced, in October 2010, that it was pulling the funding for what was seen as a controversial programme.¹¹

Our research indicates that there are still neighbourhoods (not just in ex-HMR areas) caught in a vicious cycle where the housing market is not working to bring properties back into use. It is understandable why poor standard properties in some neighbourhoods are in less demand. However, if they are refurbished to a decent standard and neighbourhood issues are addressed, we would challenge whether

9 Wilson, W. (2013) 'Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders'. Parliament Briefing Papers. London: Library of the House of Commons. pp. 5 5
<<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05953>>

10 National Audit Office (2007) 'Department for Communities and Local Government: Housing Market Renewal': <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/070820.pdf>

11 Wilson, W. (2013) 'Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders'. Parliament Briefing Papers. London: Library of the House of Commons. pp. 5

there is currently acute low housing demand for many of these empty properties.

We would not advocate a return to the HMR Pathfinder approach. However, currently, there appears to be a lack of sufficient ambition at a national level to support initiatives to tackle the problems that neighbourhoods with high-levels of long-term empty homes face. The Coalition Government plugged the gap to some extent with the Clusters Funding, which allocated £60 million to 20 bids.¹² But there are currently no funding programmes aimed at areas with higher levels and/or concentrations of empty homes.

We believe our research demonstrates that there is still a case for specific action and funding to address the issues faced by areas with higher levels of empty homes and/or concentrations within particular neighbourhoods.

Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Affordable Homes Programme

Nearly half of our survey respondents say that registered housing providers have attracted funding to tackle empty homes since April 2015, rising to 7 in 10 local authorities where empty homes are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods. At the same time, just over a quarter of local authorities say they have had direct funding from the HCA to tackle empty homes since April 2015 which is the period since dedicated empty homes programmes run by the HCA came to an end.

Our analysis of HCA data shows that the number of new affordable homes it has funded from empty properties outside London since April 2015 is relatively small. In 2015/16 across England, the HCA supported just 379 completed homes from empty properties, although it also provided funding for a further 341 homes from empty properties where works started on site as shown in the table below.¹³

12 Homes and Communities Agency (May 2014) *Clusters of Empty Homes fund allocations* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/367230/coeh_funding_allocations_290512.csv/preview and document withdrawn on 5th January 2016

13 Provided by the HCA (September 2016) on request to Empty Homes

Table 1: empty homes starts and completions on sites funded by the HCA 2015/16

HCA operating areas	Starts on site Total number of affordable homes from empty properties	Completions Total number of affordable homes from empty properties
East and South East	18	15
Midlands	21	14
North East, Yorkshire and the Humber	241	179
North West	15	18
South and South West	46	46
Total delivered as part of the Affordable Homes Programme 2015-18	341	272
East and South East		14
Midlands		14
North East and Yorkshire and the Humber		21
North West		31
South and South West		27
Total completions related to schemes started prior to April 2015		107
TOTAL	341	379

Furthermore, 107 of the empty homes completions recorded in 2015/16 relate to schemes started prior to 2015/16 when dedicated empty homes programmes were still in existence (see table above).

In 2014/15, the last year of the dedicated empty homes programmes which were run by the HCA from 2011 to 2015, the HCA supported 2,233 completed homes from empty properties. That last year was the peak for outputs from the empty homes programmes. As a whole, by the end of March 2015, the HCA's empty homes programmes had supported the creation of 3,504 homes outside London.

Community-led organisations

In our survey we distinguished community-led housing organisations from registered housing providers; our definition included non-registered organisations that were either community-land trusts, charities, co-ops and co-housing groups, or development trusts. These non-registered housing providers cannot access grants via the HCA's Affordable Homes Programme. However, from April 2012 to March 2015 funding was available from the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme run by Tribal for the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Our survey would suggest that few local authorities are filling that funding gap, with just 1 in 8 of our respondents saying that they had provided grants to community-led organisations to bring long-term empty homes back into use since April 2015. In addition, 1 in 5 have transferred ownership or leased empty homes to non-registered community-led organisations in this period. However, this rises to over 2 in 5 in local authorities with neighbourhoods with concentrations of empty homes. We know about transfers that have proceeded for sums considerably below the market value as local authorities have sought to provide support for community-led organisations tackling empty homes and addressing wider community concerns. In other cases, local authorities have leased properties to community-led organisations for up to 99 years for a peppercorn rent.

Having talked to community-led organisations, we know that they would welcome more support from local authorities – from discounted sales of empty properties to help with finding empty homes and grant funding for refurbishment work. They could achieve more with ongoing support from local government backed by funding from central Government. Some organisations continue to tackle empty properties by fundraising through charitable bodies. Although this is welcome, the resources available are insufficient for communities to address the issues they face in neighbourhoods with high levels of empty homes.

Action by local authorities

In addition to supporting registered housing providers and community-led organisations, our survey asked local authorities to tell us if they had taken other action to bring long-term empty homes back into use. Most frequently mentioned, by 3 in 5 respondents, is updating local strategies and/or plans to set out how empty homes can contribute to housing supply. This is followed by around 2 in 5 who cite providing grants to private owners and consulting local people.

Barriers

Local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes spread throughout their area generally

Around 4 in 5 say that the main barriers to reducing high levels of long-term empty homes in their local authority generally are unconcerned and unco-operative owners, and insufficient funding for regeneration schemes. Some way behind, half mention poor repairs and management in the private rented sector generating more empty homes. No other of the barriers listed are chosen by more than half of these local authorities.

Local authorities with long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods

The same three main reasons are also given as barriers to reducing high levels of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods although in a slightly different rank order: insufficient

funding for regeneration, unconcerned and unco-operative owners, and the state of the private rented sector. However, over half of these authorities cite registered housing providers' lack of interest in bringing privately owned empty properties back into use, and population turnover as other main barriers.

What would most help local authorities to bring more empty homes back into use?

Overwhelmingly, nearly 9 in 10 of the respondents say that central Government funding programmes targeted at local authorities with high levels of empty homes would most help them bring more long-term empty homes back into housing use. Some way behind come the next 5 suggestions, each mentioned in at least half the local authorities:

- Central Government funding/programmes targeted at local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes.
- More power to take legal action against owners of long-term empty homes.
- Speedier process for obtaining CPOs on long-term empty homes.
- Central Government funding/programmes for wider neighbourhood regeneration schemes.
- Central Government funding/programmes targeted at particular neighbourhoods with clusters/concentrations of high levels of long-term empty homes.

Our recommendations below draw on these responses together with what we have seen work in tackling long-term empty homes in areas with higher levels/concentrations of empty homes.

What works in tackling long-term empty homes in areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods

A case work approach

In many cases local authorities find they need to take a casework approach liaising with individual owners to understand why their property is long-term empty and what has been holding them back from taking action. For example, are their financial circumstances preventing them from doing up the property for rent or sale? Or have they been put off letting again because of a bad experience in the past? Are they simply holding out for a higher sale price than may be realistic? Or are they struggling to deal with a property they have inherited and are in need of advice and assistance to put it on the market?

Local authorities have told us that, in the majority of cases, advice and encouragement is what works in ensuring an owner brings their property back into use. We certainly see the value of having dedicated empty homes staff who can develop knowledge of the local housing market and expertise in advising owners.

In addition, as our survey shows, some local authorities offer financial assistance to bring an empty home back into use through either grants or loans. Conditions are often attached for example, that the property must be refurbished to a set standard and let to a household nominated by the council.

Local authorities can also take enforcement action where individual property owners are not interested or are unable to bring their empty property back into use. Local authorities have powers to take over the management of or compulsory purchase an empty dwelling in some circumstances. We do not suggest that such action should be taken lightly; however, we recognise the importance of enforcement action where empty properties are a blight on the neighbourhood and/or inhibiting a drive to improve an area and meet housing needs.

A case work approach seems to work both in areas with relatively high and low levels of long-term empty homes. Even in the latter, despite a buoyant rental and sales market, there are likely to be some homes that remain long-term empty because of the financial and/or personal circumstances of the owner.

A wider neighbourhood improvement approach

It is clear from the findings of our research that strategies to tackle empty homes in neighbourhoods with concentrations need more than a case work approach. Otherwise, local action may result in some properties brought back into use only for a continuing high population turnover to generate yet more vacancies. We believe that tackling empty homes in these neighbourhoods needs to be part of wider initiatives which look at the issues people face there, such as poor private sector housing and high levels of antisocial behaviour.

We have seen many examples of neighbourhoods once labelled as low demand being transformed into popular places to live when these wider issues have been addressed. Without tackling such area problems, people are not being offered a satisfactory solution to their housing needs. While the homes themselves may be good, it is understandable more people do not want to live there, and high levels of empty homes will persist.

Attracting owner-occupiers back and diversifying local housing options

We have also seen local authorities and registered housing providers attract owner-occupiers back to a neighbourhood by creating

opportunities for them to buy homes where the local market has been dominated recently by the private rented sector; this includes homes being sold for £1 or at around a 20% discount. We have seen this happen where local authorities were left owning empty properties at the end of the HMR scheme or have recently acquired privately owned long-term empty homes; or where a registered provider finds its properties hard-to-let in a particular area. Five of our survey local authorities offer discounted sale schemes, and two offered loans to help people buy empty properties. We would like to see these practices spread further.

Involving local residents and providing responsive services

We think neighbourhood strategies are more likely to be successful if they involve residents and take into account their views about what does and/or does not work well in their neighbourhood. Lasting and far-reaching improvements are more likely to be secured if local people have a genuine say in what happens.

Good housing management and responsive services can also go a long way to ensure neighbourhoods are a good place to live and to challenge the behaviour of people who are causing problems. Although targeted action may also be needed in some areas to tackle more serious criminal activities. In addition, support services are often a vital ingredient where vulnerable people are trying to address the issues they face.

Improving the housing stock

Our research suggests that in many neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes the condition of the housing stock is a major issue, particularly where some private rented sector housing is not meeting the Decent Homes Standard. Even local authorities who tell us that this is not generally a problem in their area, still report that the homes that remain long-term empty are often in a poor condition. Understandably fewer would-be buyers want to take on these properties, while existing owners may find it difficult to meet refurbishment costs as explored above.

We understand the current policy emphasis on building new homes in areas where housing supply lags most behind housing demand. However, in order to make the most of the existing stock, there also needs to be investment in improving existing poor-standard housing, both for current residents and to provide housing that would be in demand by people looking for a home in the wider area. We have seen how community-led organisations have worked with local authorities to buy and lease long-term empty properties to refurbish them to a good standard. They tell us that there is no shortage of people who want to move into these properties once they are done up, even in areas that were once labelled as 'low demand'.

In some neighbourhoods, the majority of the long-term empty homes are relatively small – often what are termed 'two-up two-down'. They are

often pre-1919 terraced houses built originally to house those working in nearby industries. We have seen many examples of such houses being refurbished to create attractive sought-after modern homes, including lateral conversions or knocking two adjacent houses into one.

We have also seen how external solid wall rendering/cladding can help improve the attractiveness of a property and create energy efficient homes fit for the future. Where this is done for a whole street, it can be part of a wider neighbourhood improvement approach to help address the empty homes problem.

Improving the street scape

Some local authorities have also tried to smarten up the appearance of streets where there are high levels of empty homes by improving fencing and boundary walls, or by providing owners with funding to improve the external façade of their properties. This can help improve confidence, such that more people want to move or buy into an area or stay for longer. Local authorities have also told us that such approaches can incentivise landlords to invest in their properties, to improve them for existing residents or bring them back into use.

Boosting employment and life chances

The issues faced by people in some neighbourhoods with concentrations of empty homes also suggests there is a need to address the lack of employment prospects for people living in these streets. Many of the community-led organisations active in bringing empty homes back into housing use have also tried to generate local training and employment opportunities through their refurbishment works; in some cases, they have also tried to support people to find other work.

Where local authorities are more broadly seeking to boost local economic growth and attract new employers, questions remain about how to link people in these neighbourhoods to new employment opportunities. Otherwise communities may have the sense that they have been 'left behind', unable to access opportunities that appear open to others.

Linking empty homes to housing supply strategies

Areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods do co-exist in local authorities with large housing waiting lists where there are plans to increase the new housing supply. We believe there should be more recognition of the contribution that bringing empty homes back into use can make to meeting these housing needs. It is noticeable that over half of our respondent local authorities said that they had 'Updated local housing strategy/plan to set out how empty properties can contribute to housing supply' since April 2015.

Spreading what works

We want to see what works spread across areas with higher levels/ concentrations of long-term empty homes and our recommendations below are designed to help this happen.

Recommendations

In this section we make recommendations for key stakeholders. These recommendations relate not only to the survey findings; they also come from our own knowledge and experience in discussing what works in tackling empty homes with a wide range of local authorities and other organisations.

Central government

- 1 Establish a strategy and investment programme targeted at local authority areas with high levels of long-term empty homes overall and/or with concentrations in particular neighbourhoods. Ensure that the funding supports community-led neighbourhood improvement approaches; this should enable local authorities and their partners to tackle the underlying causes of empty homes and the wider linked issues that communities face.
- 2 Reinstate dedicated empty homes programmes with the Affordable Homes Programme.
- 3 Ensure that funding programmes to tackle empty homes are also open to community-led organisations who are not registered providers, and invest in capacity building in this sector.
- 4 Conduct a review of the workability of legal powers available to local authorities to tackle empty homes and poor standards of management in the private rented sector.

Local authorities in areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods

- 1 Develop and adopt an empty homes strategy which recognises the underlying causes of long-term empty homes in their area. Link to strategies that tackle poor standards in the private rented sector, address antisocial behaviour; meet housing needs and promote economic growth and the creation of jobs. Seek to deploy the authority's own financial capacity and attract new resources to achieve reductions in the number of long-term empty homes.
- 2 Develop neighbourhood improvement plans in areas with concentrations of long-term empty homes. Consult and engage local people and community-led organisations to identify and address the wider issues they face to achieve lasting improvements.
- 3 Support community-led organisations to be more active in tackling long-term empty homes; for example, transfer assets to them, help

them with advice to build their business for the future, and directly fund their work.

Registered housing providers working in areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods

- 1 Work in partnership with local authorities and community-led organisations to tackle the underlying causes of high levels of long-term empty homes.
- 2 As part of a wider strategic approach, purchase/lease privately owned empty properties to refurbish and bring them back into use. Seek to deploy the association's own financial capacity and attract new resources; for example, from the Affordable Homes Programme, to create new homes from long-term privately owned empty properties.
- 3 When developing any property disposal strategies, take into account what is best for local communities. Liaise with the local authority about making disposals to help ensure that they do not contribute to neighbourhood decline and undermine strategies to tackle empty homes in the area. If seeking to exit from a neighbourhood, look to dispose of properties to community-led organisations and/or other landlords who are committed to the neighbourhood for the long-term and will manage them well.

Community-led organisations working in areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods

- 1 Work in partnership with local authorities and local people to tackle the underlying causes of high levels of long-term empty homes.
- 2 Adopt a strategy of acquiring privately owned long-term empty properties to refurbish and bring them back into use to meet housing needs. Seek to attract new resources; for example, from local authorities, grant-making charities, community share issues and corporate donations. In addition, raise private finance where the organisation has the financial capacity and asset base to do so.
- 3 Make the case to local authorities and registered housing providers for transferring empty properties to them at a discount where this would enable them to create good homes.

Empty Homes-the national campaigning charity

- 1 Raise awareness of the findings of this research, and influence organisations so that they adopt these recommendations.
- 2 Work with six organisations across England to support and follow what they do in order to demonstrate that community-led action is an effective means of bringing long-term empty homes back into use as part of wider neighbourhood improvement approaches.

- 3 Build a coalition of organisations, championing the case for more support from central Government, local authorities and others for community-led neighbourhood improvement approaches to tackle long-term empty homes and wider linked issues in areas with relatively high levels.
- 4 Continue to raise awareness of what works in all parts of the country to create new affordable homes from empty properties.

PART TWO

The full findings of the survey of local levels with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods to do this

Introduction

This report contains the findings from a survey with local authorities; it forms part of a larger project on areas with relatively high levels and/or concentrations of long-term empty homes vacant for more than 6 months. The work, which is being carried out by the charity Empty Homes, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, aims to raise awareness about the need for investment and action in these areas.

The information provided by this survey will be used by Empty Homes to assess:

- The characteristics of areas that have higher levels of long-term empty homes, and the impact of empty homes on those areas.
- The actions being taken by local authorities and their partners to tackle long-term empty homes, and the changes they would like to see to support this work.

This will help in making recommendations about how central government, local authorities and others could help bring long-term empty homes back into housing use in areas with relatively high levels generally and/or in neighbourhoods with particularly high concentrations.

Methodology

The 58 local authorities for this survey (see Appendix A) were purposely selected based on either or both of two criteria. Firstly, from Government statistics 49 had relatively high levels of long-term empty homes (vacant

for more than 6 months).¹⁴ Secondly, they had received money from the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund (Clusters Funding).¹⁵ This was to ensure that some local authorities were included with known concentrations of empty homes in particular neighbourhoods even if they were not among the local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes overall (one criterion for Clusters Funding was having over 10% of homes empty in the neighbourhood).¹⁶ However, it is unlikely that all local authorities with concentrations of empty homes in particular neighbourhoods were included, because some of them would not have bid for Clusters Funding, while others may have bid unsuccessfully. As data is not available nationally on the number of empty homes below the local authority level it is not possible to identify all neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes.

From a list of 51 local authorities with over 1.2% of homes long-term empty, 49 were selected to take part in the survey; 2 were excluded as they were also ranked among the top 10 areas of England on house prices.¹⁷ An additional 9 local authorities were selected because they had received Clusters Funding, although their long-term empty homes levels were 1.2% or below. Nineteen of the initial 49 authorities selected were in both categories – level of long-term empty homes over 1.2% and they also received Clusters Funding; the other 30 were selected on the basis of relatively high levels of empty homes generally.

The survey was conducted using Survey Monkey, with an online questionnaire sent to, and returned by, the local authorities. An initial email, with a link to the online questionnaire, was sent on 19th July to the director level post with responsibility for empty homes in each of the 58 selected local authorities (see Appendix B). They were asked to pass these on to the person in their organisation best placed to complete the questionnaire, and to give this contact name to Empty Homes, with a closing date of 12th August. The 35 local authorities that had neither returned a completed questionnaire nor responded to the initial contact were then sent a second email on 8th August (see Appendix C).

14 See Empty Homes (2016) *Empty Homes in England*: <http://www.emptyhomes.com/research.htm> for an explanation of how Empty Homes calculates the percentage of homes long-term empty from official Government data, but also for an exploration of the limitations of the data.

15 Homes and Communities Agency (2014) *Clusters of Empty Homes Fund: Allocations*: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clusters-of-empty-homes-fund-allocations>

16 Homes and Communities Agency (2011) *Bringing Clusters of Empty Homes into use: Bidding Guidance*. Programme closed and document withdrawn 5th January 2016.

17 Office for National Statistics (2016) 'Median house price for national and subnational geographies – HPSSA Dataset 9': <http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/medianhousepriceforationalandsubnationalgeographiesquarterlyrollingyearhpssadataset09>

Similarly, a third email was sent on 15th August to chase the 15 local authorities who had not responded and to extend the deadline to 19th August (see Appendix D).

In total 46 completed questionnaires were returned, which represents a response rate of 79% and forms the basis for the analysis in this report.

The table below compares the population of 58 selected local authorities with the sample of 46 who completed the survey. The population and sample are relatively well-matched, although there were fewer responses from local authorities with generally high levels of empty homes only (43% versus 52%).

Population and Sample: Selection Criteria	Population		Sample	
	No	%	No	%
High level of empty homes and Clusters Funding	19	33	17	37
High level of empty homes only	30	52	20	43
Clusters Funding only	9	16	9	20
Total	58	100	46	100

The local authorities selected were in 8 of the 9 English regions (excluding London). Again, the population of 58 and sample of 46 were relatively well-matched, with a particularly good response from the North West, as shown in the table below.

Population and Sample: Regions	Population		Sample	
	No	%	No	%
North West	24	41	22	48
East Midlands	9	16	6	13
Yorkshire and Humber	8	14	5	11
North East	7	12	6	13
West Midlands	4	7	2	4
South East	3	5	3	7
South West	2	3	1	2
East of England	1	2	1	2
Total	58	100	46	100

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed by Empty Homes, and took around 30 minutes to complete online. It was piloted with 3 local authorities; as there were relatively few amendments, these questionnaires were included in the analysis. A copy of the questionnaire marked-up with the overall topline results is appended (see Appendix E). Where

respondents wrote in a large number of 'other' answers to pre-coded questions, some new codes have been devised.

Layout

The next pages contain a summary of the key findings, followed by a detailed commentary on each question. Some sub-group analyses was also carried out using Survey Monkey. In particular, the sub-groups based on where the long-term empty homes are in each local authority, are included where relevant; however, given the very small base sizes, these should be treated with caution.

The appendices include the list of 58 local authorities selected for the survey and their region, the 3 emails sent to the local authorities, and a copy of the questionnaire marked-up with the initial overall topline results (before any back-coding). In addition, there are some details on statistical reliability (see below).

Presentation and interpretation of data

Although the survey was designed as a census, it should be noted that the analysis is based on a sample of the 46 local authorities completing the questionnaire, not the entire population of 58. This means that all results are subject to sampling tolerances, and not all differences are statistically significant, particularly as some of the sub-sample bases are small. However, the statistical reliability of the main findings is good, as indicated in the guide to statistical reliability adjusted for small population and sample sizes (see Appendix F).

It should be noted that percentages do not add up to 100 due to multiple answers.

Local authority areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods

As noted in the Introduction above, the population of local authorities for this survey was purposely selected for either or both of two reasons; firstly, according to official Government statistics, they had relatively high levels of long-term empty homes, and/or secondly those receiving Clusters Funding.

In addition, at the start of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to self-identify which of 3 categories applied to their local authority. Three in 5 (61%) say that their local authority's long-term empty homes are both spread throughout their area generally **and** concentrated in particular neighbourhoods. A quarter (24%) consider that they are spread throughout their area generally, and 1 in 7 (15%) concentrated in particular neighbourhoods.

This means that 39 respondents (85%) have long-term empty homes in their local authority area generally; this includes 28 also concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (61%), plus 11 in their local authority area only (24%). On the other hand, 35 respondents (76%) have long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods; this includes 28 also spread throughout their local authority generally (61%), plus 7 concentrated in particular neighbourhoods only (15%). These sub-samples are used as the bases for some of the questions below.

Q1 According to official government information, your local authority has a relatively high level of long-term empty homes, vacant for more than six months, and/or received money from the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund. Would you say that these long-term empty homes are spread throughout your local authority area generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s?

	No	%
<i>Base: All respondents (46)</i>		
Both local authority area generally and concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s	28	61
Local authority area generally	11	24
Concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s only	7	15

The table below shows for the 46 local authorities completing the survey both their initial selection classification (see Methodology above) and their self-identification in the questionnaire. Overall, considerably more self-identify as having both a high level of empty homes generally **and** concentrations in particular neighbourhoods (61% versus 37%). Correspondingly, there are fewer self-identifying in the other two categories, particularly generally high levels of empty homes only (24% versus 43%).

Selection criteria vs self-identification	Selection Criteria		Self-Identification	
	No	%	No	%
High level of empty homes generally and Clusters Funding/concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s	17	37	28	61
Generally high level of empty homes only	20	43	11	24
Clusters Funding/concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s only	9	20	7	15
Total	46	100	46	100

As noted above, three-quarters of respondents (76%) say that their local authority's relatively high level of long-term empty homes are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, including those saying they are also spread throughout their area generally. These 35 respondents were then asked 3 questions comparing these neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes compared to their local

authority area generally. However, firstly they were asked to attach any documentation with information about the long-term empty homes concentrated in these particular neighbourhoods. A third (34%) attached some additional information, including 5 each sending reports and other data, plus two maps.

Q2 Do you have any reports, maps and/or other information which indicated the numbers and/or percentages of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority?		No	%
<i>Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhood (35)</i>			
Yes	PLEASE ATTACH ANY OF THESE AT END WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE	12	34
	Report/s	5	14
	Map/s	5	14
	Other	2	6
No	Nothing to attach	23	66

Characteristics of neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes v local authority generally

Area

The first of the three questions asked respondents to compare their neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes with their local authority area generally in terms of 7 area characteristics. Over 9 in 10 mention 3 of these: lower household incomes, lower house prices and more deprivation (97%, 94% and 91% respectively). Four in 5 cite 2 others: more antisocial behaviour and more changes in population. A half (51%) select more crime, with 1 in 7 (14%) saying more very long-term empty homes.

Respondents in local authorities with high level of long-term empty homes in both their area generally **and** concentrated in particular neighbourhoods mention 6 of the 7 characteristics more often than those with long-term empty homes concentrated in neighbourhoods only, particularly more changes in population (61% versus 14%).

Q3 Which of these, if any, would you say apply to the particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority with concentrations of relatively high levels of long-term empty homes compared with your local authority area generally?		No	%
<i>Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (35)</i>			
	Lower household incomes	34	97
	Lower house prices	33	94
	More deprivation	32	91
	More anti-social behaviour	28	80

More changes in population/higher resident turnover	28	80
More crime	18	51
More very long-term empty homes (10 or more years)	5	14
None of these	–	–

Tenure

Next, from a list of 6 tenure types, almost all of these respondents (97%) say that their neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes contain more private rented accommodation than their local authority generally, and over 4 in 5 (83%) that more do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. The other 4 tenure types are each chosen by under 1 in 9 respondents where empty homes are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods as shown in the table below.

Q4 Now thinking about housing tenure, which of these, if any, would you say apply to the particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes compared with your local authority area generally?

	No	%
<i>Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (35)</i>		
More private rented accommodation	34	97
More private rented accommodation not meeting Decent Homes Standard	29	83
More owner-occupied housing not meeting Decent Homes Standard	4	11
More social housing tenants affected by social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	4	11
More social housing	3	9
More owner-occupied housing	2	6
None of these	–	–

Property

Finally, when asked about 5 property types, 9 in 10 (91%) say their neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes contain more pre-1919 housing compared with their local authority generally. Fewer mention more small dwellings and more houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) (43% and 34% respectively), with 1 in 9 citing more poor conversions and large dwellings (both 11%).

Respondents in local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes in both their area generally **and** concentrated in particular neighbourhoods mention 2 of the 5 property types more often than those with concentrated neighbourhoods only: more small dwellings (50% versus 14%), and HMOs (43% versus 0%).

Q5 And thinking about types of property, which of these, if any, would you say apply to the particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes compared with your local authority area generally?

	No	%
<i>Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (35)</i>		
More pre-1919 housing	32	91
More small dwellings (bed-sitters, one and two bedrooms)	15	43
More houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)	12	34
More poor standard flats converted from larger properties (houses, boarding houses, hotels, etc.)	4	11
More large dwellings (four or more bedrooms)	4	11
None of these	1	3

Characteristics of local authority areas with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhoods v nationally

All 46 respondents were then asked 3 similar questions comparing their local authority area with England nationally.

Area

Based on the same 7 area characteristics, and comparing their local authority area with England nationally, the pattern is similar at the top with around three-quarters mentioning the same 3: lower household incomes, lower house prices and more deprivation (78%, 76% and 74% respectively). However, some way behind, over a third (37%) select more changes in population, while far fewer cite more antisocial behaviour and more crime (both 17%). Again, last is more very long-term empty homes (11%). However, 5 respondents say that none of these characteristics apply to their local authority compared with nationally.

Q6 Which of these, if any, would you say apply to your local authority area compared with England nationally?

	No	%
<i>Base: All respondents (46)</i>		
Lower household incomes	36	78
Lower house prices	35	76
More deprivation	34	74
More changes in population/higher resident turnover	17	37
More anti-social behaviour	8	17
More crime	8	17
More very long-term empty homes (10 or more years)	5	11
None of these	5	11

Tenure

Next, on the 6 tenure types, the pattern is again similar with the same top 2, but with considerably fewer respondents citing each; around half say that, compared with England nationally, their local authority contains more private rented accommodation and more not meeting Decent Homes Standard (50% and 48% respectively). However, the other 4 tenure types are mentioned by rather more respondents; around 1 in 5 mentions more owner-occupied housing not meeting Decent Homes Standard and more social housing generally (both 22%). Fewer select more owner-occupied housing and more social housing affected by the social sector size criteria (commonly known as the bedroom tax) (15% and 13% respectively). In addition, a similar proportion (15%) or 7 respondents say none of these.

Q7 Now thinking about housing tenure, which of these, if any, would you say generally apply to your local authority compared with England nationally?

	No	%
<i>Base: All respondents (46)</i>		
More private rented accommodation	23	50
More private rented accommodation not meeting Decent Homes Standard	22	48
More owner-occupied housing not meeting Decent Homes Standard	10	22
More social housing	10	22
More owner-occupied housing	7	15
More social housing affected by social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	6	13
None of these	7	15

Property

Finally, when asked about the 5 property types, the rank order is exactly the same, although with rather fewer respondents selecting 4 of them. Four in 5 of all respondents say their local authority contains more pre-1919 housing compared with England nationally. Fewer mention more small dwellings (37%), HMOs or more poor conversions (both 17%), and more large dwellings (9%). Again, 6 respondents (13%) say none of these.

Q8 And thinking about types of property, which of these, if any, would you say apply to your local authority area compared with England nationally?

	No	%
<i>Base: All respondents (46)</i>		
More pre-1919 housing	37	80
More small dwellings (bed-sitters, one and two bedrooms)	17	37
More houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)	8	17

More poor standard flats converted from larger properties (houses, boarding houses, hotels, etc.)	8	17
More large dwellings (four or more bedrooms)	4	9
None of these	6	13

Main reasons for long-term empty homes

Respondents were then asked 2 questions, from a list of 14, about the main reasons for the relatively high level of long-term empty homes; firstly, in their local authority area generally, and/or secondly in neighbourhoods with concentrations of long-term empty homes.

Local authorities with relatively high levels of empty homes spread throughout their area generally

The first question was asked of the 39 respondents (85%) in local authorities with relatively high level of long-term empty homes spread throughout their area generally, including those saying they are also concentrated in particular neighbourhoods.

Almost all these respondents say the main reason for the relatively high level of long-term empty homes in their local authority area generally is owners being unable to fund repairs/improve homes to occupy, sell or rent (97%). Some way behind, over half mention owners allowing, or previous occupants causing, homes to become uninhabitable (59% and 54% respectively). Around a third select low housing demand including due to social problems or better housing elsewhere (33% and 31% respectively). At least 1 in 5 cites the effects of Buy-to-Leave empty and the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) scheme (26% and 21% respectively). Given the high level of 'Other' responses, these were back-coded with 2 new codes created which are included in the table below: elderly population and housing market (13% and 5% respectively). The rest of the reasons were mentioned by under 1 in 5 respondents as shown in the table below.

Respondents in local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes in both their local authority area generally **and** concentrated in particular neighbourhoods mention 2 of these reasons, which those just in their local authority only do not: low housing demand due to antisocial behaviour and HMR scheme effect (46% and 29% respectively, versus both 0%)

Q9 Which five or six of these, if any, would you say are the main reasons for the relatively high level of long-term empty homes, vacant for more than six months, in your local authority area?

	No	%
<i>Base: All if local authority generally (39)</i>		
Owners can't fund repairs/improve homes to occupy, sell or rent	38	97
Owners allowing homes to become uninhabitable	23	59

Previous occupants causing homes to become uninhabitable	21	54
Low housing demand due to perceived social problems such as anti-social behaviour	13	33
Low housing demand as better homes/housing options available elsewhere	12	31
Owners buying homes as Buy-to-Leave empty investments	10	26
Homes in Housing Market Renewal scheme/s where funding has stopped	8	21
Criminal damage by non-occupants causing homes to become uninhabitable	7	18
Low housing demand due to lack of jobs and/or transport	6	15
Mortgage providers unwilling to lend on homes	6	15
Elderly population: move into care, inheritance/probate, etc.	5	13
Flood risk/ongoing flood damage	4	10
Owners buying homes to 'launder' money	3	8
Low demand for larger, social rented homes due to social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	2	5
Owners waiting for housing market to improve	2	5
Homes decanted for demolition/rehabilitation as part of regeneration scheme	2	5
Other	6	15
None of these	1	3

Local authorities with long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods

The second question was asked of the 35 respondent (76%) local authorities with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, including those saying they are also spread throughout their area generally (see above).

The pattern for the main reasons for the relatively high level of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods is similar for the top 4 reasons; however, they are in a slightly different rank order, and with more respondents selecting 3 of them. Again, the main reason given by 9 in 10 (89%) is that of owners being unable to fund repairs/improve homes to occupy, sell or rent. However, next comes low housing demand including due to social problems (69%); this is followed by at least 3 in 5 mentioning owners allowing, or previous occupants causing, homes to become uninhabitable (66% and 60% respectively). Over a third select low housing demand due to lack of transport or better housing elsewhere (both 37%), and Buy-to-Leave empty (34%). Almost as many cite criminal damage making homes uninhabitable and the effects of an HMR scheme (both 29%). Other reasons given by under 1 in 9 respondents are shown in the table below.

Q10 Which five or six of these, if any, would you say are the main reasons for the relatively high level of long-term empty homes, vacant for more than six months, concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority?

	No	%
<i>Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (35)</i>		
Owners can't fund repairs/improve homes to occupy, sell or rent	31	89
Low housing demand due to perceived social problems such as anti-social behaviour	24	69
Owners allowing homes to become uninhabitable	23	66
Previous occupants causing homes to become uninhabitable	21	60
Low housing demand due to lack of jobs and/or transport	13	37
Low housing demand as better homes/housing options available elsewhere	13	37
Owners buying homes as Buy-to-Leave empty investments	12	34
Homes in Housing Market Renewal scheme/s where funding has stopped	10	29
Criminal damage by non-occupants causing homes to become uninhabitable	10	29
Homes decanted for demolition/rehabilitation as part of regeneration scheme	4	11
Owners buying homes to 'launder' money	3	9
Mortgage providers unwilling to lend on homes	2	6
Low demand for larger, social rented homes due to social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	2	6
Waiting for housing market to improve	2	6
Flood risk/ongoing flood damage	1	3
Other	4	11
None of these	–	–

Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Affordable Homes Programme

All respondents were then asked a series of questions relating to the HCA Affordable Homes Programme since April 2015 which could be used to create new affordable homes from empty properties, residential and/or commercial.

Local authority area

Firstly, from a list of 3 possible funding options, nearly 3 in 5 respondents say that at least 1 of these has happened in their local authority area. The remainder (43%) had done none of these, particularly in local authorities with long-term empty homes spread throughout their area only (73%). Nearly half (46%) say that registered housing providers attracted funding; this was more frequently mentioned in local authorities with long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods only (71%). Three in 10 say that their local authority bid for, and a quarter (26%) that they attracted, funding. Those with long-term empty homes

both generally and concentrated were more likely to say that they had bid for funding (43%).

Q11 Now thinking about the HCA Affordable Homes programme funding since April 2015 which could be used to create new affordable homes from empty properties, residential and/or commercial, which of these, if any, has happened in your local authority area to help bring empty properties back into housing use?

	No	%
<i>Base: All respondents (46)</i>		
Registered housing provider/s attracted funding	21	46
Local authority bid for funding	14	30
Local authority attracted funding	12	26
None of these	20	43

Registered housing providers

In addition, from 2 options, 3 in 5 (61%) say that their local authority helped registered housing providers to bid for funding, particularly in concentrated neighbourhoods only. A quarter (26%) funded them to supplement HCA funding. The other 2 in 5 (39%) did neither of these, again particularly where long-term empty homes are spread throughout their local authority area only (64%).

Q12 And again thinking about the HCA Affordable Homes programme funding since April 2015 which of these, if any, is your local authority doing to help registered housing provider/s create new affordable homes from empty properties, residential and/or commercial?

	No	%
<i>Base: All respondents (46)</i>		
Encouraging/supporting them to bid for funding	28	61
Funding them to supplement HCA funding	12	26
None of these	18	39

Community-led organisations

Similarly, respondents were asked what their local authority had done to help community-led organisations bring long-term empty homes back into housing use. Nearly 3 in 5 (57%) say none of these, once more especially where long-term empty homes are spread throughout their local authority area only (82%). One in 5 (22%) mentions transferring ownership or leasing empty homes, particularly in local authorities' long-term empty homes concentrated in neighbourhoods only (43%), and 1 in 8 (13%) providing funding from various sources. When the 'Other' responses were back-coded, 4 new codes were created, each mentioned by no more than 4 respondents as shown in the table below.

Q13 Now thinking about since April 2015, which of these, if any, did your local authority do to help community-led organisation/s (including charities, community-land trusts, co-ops, co-housing groups and development trusts, but excluding registered housing providers) bring empty properties back into housing use?

	No	%
<i>Base: All respondents (46)</i>		
Transferred ownership, or leased, empty homes	10	22
Provided grants including from commuted Planning Gain (S106) sums, Right-to-Buy receipts, New Homes Bonus, etc.	6	13
Provide (interest-free) loans	4	9
Help organisations find/obtain empty homes	4	9
Provide advice, assistance, support, etc.	3	7
Help with employment opportunities	2	4
Other	–	–
None of these	26	57

Action by local authorities

Based on the responses to the two previous questions, the respondents who say that their local authority is helping registered housing providers and/or community-led organisations were then asked who they are helping. Among these 28 respondents, 23 provided the names of 56 organisations.

All respondents were then asked, from a list of 9 activities, what their local authority has done since April 2015 to help bring long-term empty homes back into housing use. Most frequently mentioned, by 3 in 5 (59%), is updating local strategies and/or plans. This is followed by around 2 in 5 who cite providing grants to private owners and consulting (43% and 39% respectively). Around 3 in 10 select 3 others: obtaining CPOs, providing loans to private owners, and purchasing private homes (33%, 30% and 28% respectively). Other responses mentioned by no more than 1 in 8 are shown in the table below.

Q15 Since April 2015, which of these, if any, did your local authority do to help bring long-term empty properties back into housing use?

	No	%
<i>Base: All respondents (46)</i>		
Updated local housing strategy/plan to set out how empty properties can contribute to housing supply	27	59
Provided loans to private owners of long-term empty homes	20	43
Consulted local people/residents	18	39
Obtained compulsory purchase orders (CPOs)	15	33
Provided grants to private owners of long-term empty homes	14	30
Purchased privately owned long-term empty homes	13	28

Obtained empty dwelling management orders (EDMOs)	6	13
Operated discounted sales scheme for long-term empty homes owned/acquired by local authority	5	11
Operated purchase assistance loans to people wanting to buy long-term empty homes	2	4
None of these	6	13

Barriers

From a list of 12 possible barriers to reducing relatively high levels of long-term empty homes, respondents were asked either/both of 2 questions. Firstly, 39 respondents were asked about their local authority generally if they had high levels both generally and particularly concentrated as well as generally only. Secondly 35 respondents were asked about concentrated neighbourhoods if they had high levels both generally **and** particularly concentrated as well as concentrated only (see above).

Local authorities with relatively high levels of empty homes spread throughout their area generally

Around 4 in 5 say that the main barriers to reducing high levels of long-term empty homes in their local authority generally are unconcerned and unco-operative owners, and insufficient funding for regeneration (82% and 79% respectively). Some way behind, half mention the state of the private rented sector and registered housing providers' lack of interest (51% and 49% respectively), while nearly as many cite insufficient Affordable Homes Programme funding (44%). Around a third select 2 others – incapacity of community-led organisations, and insufficient funding for selective demolition (33% and 31% respectively) – and a quarter 2 more – asset disposal strategies and population turnover (both 23%). After back-coding, and with additional codes, less than 1 in 7 mention the other barriers as shown in the table below.

Q16 Which five or six of these, if any, do you think are the main barriers to reducing the relatively high level of long-term empty homes in your local authority area generally?

	No	%
<i>Base: All if local authority generally (39)</i>		
Owners not concerned about empty homes/unwilling to engage with local authority	32	82
Insufficient funding for regeneration schemes to tackle empty homes and other neighbourhood issues	31	79
Poor repairs and management in private rented sector generating more newly empty homes	20	51
Registered housing provider/s not interested in bringing privately owned empty homes back into housing use	19	49
Insufficient Affordable Homes programme funding	17	44

Community-led organisation/s lack capacity to help bring empty homes back into housing use	13	33
Insufficient funding for selective demolition of empty homes	12	31
Asset disposal strategies of registered housing providers	9	23
High population/resident turnover generating more newly empty homes	9	23
Community-led organisation/s not interested in bringing privately owned empty homes back into housing use	6	15
Other barriers within central/local government policies/resources	4	19
Social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	2	5
Community/local opposition to selective demolition	2	5
Owners' position	2	5
Other	1	3
None of these	–	–

Local authorities with long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods

The same 3 are the main barriers to reducing high levels of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods although in a slightly different rank order: insufficient funding for regeneration, unconcerned and unco-operative owners, and the state of the private rented sector (86%, 69% and 66% respectively). However, half cite registered housing providers' lack of interest, and population turnover. Over a third select 3 others: incapacity of community-led organisations, insufficient funding for selective demolition and insufficient Affordable Homes Programme funding (40%, 37% and 34% respectively). The table below also shows the barriers chosen by fewer than 1 in 6 respondents, including with additional codes.

Q17

Which five or six of these, if any, do you think are the main barriers to reducing the relatively high level of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority?

	No	%
<i>Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s (35)</i>		
Insufficient funding for regeneration schemes to tackle empty homes and other neighbourhood issues	30	86
Owners not concerned about empty homes/unwilling to engage with local authority	24	69
Poor repairs and management in private rented sector generating more newly empty homes	23	66
Registered housing provider/s not interested in bringing privately owned empty homes back into housing use	18	51
High population/resident turnover generating more newly empty homes	18	51

Community-led organisation/s lack capacity to help bring empty homes back into housing use	14	40
Insufficient funding for selective demolition of empty homes	13	37
Insufficient Affordable Homes programme funding	12	34
Asset disposal strategies of registered housing providers	6	17
Community-led organisation/s not interested in bringing privately owned empty homes back into housing use	5	14
Community/local opposition to selective demolition	2	6
Social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	2	6
Other barriers within central/local government policies/resources	2	6
Owners' position	1	3
Other	–	–
None of these	–	–

What would most help local authorities to bring more empty homes back into use?

Finally, from a list of 11 options, all respondents were asked which they think would most help their local authority to bring more long-term empty homes back into housing use. Overwhelmingly, nearly 9 in 10 say central government funding targeted at local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes (87%). Following some way behind are more legal powers and speedier CPO processes (both 57%), as well as central government support for neighbourhood regeneration generally and targeted at neighbourhoods with concentrations of high levels of empty homes (52% and 50% respectively). Over a third mention ring-fenced funding for empty homes through the Affordable Homes Programme and more powers and resources to tackle poor repairs and management in the private rented sector (43% and 35% respectively). Three in 10 select higher council tax rates, with a quarter saying a new Empty Homes Community Grants programme and devolution deals enabling the local authority to prioritise empty homes (both 26%). A new code relating to central/local government was written by 6 respondents (13%), with a similar proportion mentioning the social sector size criteria (bedroom tax) (11%).

Q18 Finally, which five or six of these, if any, do you think would most help your local authority to bring more long-term empty homes back into housing use?

	No	%
<i>Base: All respondents (46)</i>		
Central government funding/programme/s targeted at local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes	40	87
More power to take legal action against owners of long-term empty homes	26	57
Speedier process for obtaining compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) on long-term empty homes	26	57

Central government funding/programme/s for wider neighbourhood regeneration schemes	24	52
Central government funding/programme/s targeted at particular neighbourhoods with clusters/concentrations of high levels of long-term empty homes	23	50
Affordable Homes programme with ring-fenced funding for long-term empty properties	20	43
More power/resources to tackle poor repairs and management causing long-term empty homes in private rented sector	16	35
Able to impose higher council tax rates on homes empty for over a year	14	30
New Empty Homes Community Grant programmes for non-registered community-led organisations	12	26
Devolution deal to enable local authorities to prioritise long-term empty homes	12	26
More central/local government (legal) powers/resources/flexibility	6	13
End social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	5	11
Other	16	35
None of these	–	–

Appendix A: local authorities selected to take part in the survey in alphabetical order with regions

Local Authority	Region
Allerdale	North West
Amber Valley	East Midlands
Barnsley	Yorkshire and Humber
Barrow-in-Furness	North West
Blackburn with Darwen UA	North West
Blackpool UA	North West
Bolsover	East Midlands
Bolton	North West
Bradford	Yorkshire and Humber
Burnley	North West
Calderdale	Yorkshire and Humber
Carlisle	North West
Copeland	North West
Derbyshire Dales	East Midlands
Durham UA	North East
East Lindsey	East Midlands
Eden	North West
Erewash	East Midlands
Forest of Dean	South West
Fylde	North West
Hartlepool UA	North East
Hastings	South East
High Peak	East Midlands
Hyndburn	North West
Hull UA	Yorkshire and Humber
Kirklees	Yorkshire and Humber
Knowsley	North West

Lancaster	North West
Liverpool	North West
Manchester	North West
Mansfield	East Midlands
Middlesbrough UA	North East
Newark & Sherwood	East Midlands
Newcastle upon Tyne	North East
North East Lincolnshire UA	Yorkshire and Humber
Northumberland UA	North East
Oldham	North West
Pendle	North West
Preston	North West
Redcar and Cleveland UA	North East
Richmondshire	Yorkshire and Humber
Rochdale	North West
Rossendale	North West
Salford	North West
Scarborough	Yorkshire and Humber
Sefton	North West
Shepway	South East
South Lakeland	North West
St Helens	North West
Staffordshire Moorlands	West Midlands
Stoke-on-Trent UA	West Midlands
Sunderland	North East
Tendring	East of England
Thanet	South East
Torbay UA	South West
West Lindsey	East Midlands
Wirral	North West
Wolverhampton	West Midlands

Appendix B: email sent to selected local authorities on 19th July 2016

Dear

We are writing to ask for your local authority to help with a survey on empty homes, which is being carried out by the charity Empty Homes funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. It is part of a wider project which aims to raise awareness about the need for investment and action in areas with relatively high levels and/or concentrations of empty homes.

Your local authority has been purposefully selected to take part in this research for one or both of two reasons. Firstly, according to official Government statistics, it has a relatively high level of long-term empty homes, vacant for more than six months; secondly you received money from the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund.

Please can you pass this email and the questionnaire attached to the person in your organisation who is best placed to complete it. The questionnaire should take around 30 minutes to complete, and it should be returned to us by Friday, 12 August 2016. Please let us know who is completing this questionnaire by returning the short form below. Please click on the link below to begin the survey.

[https://www.research.net/r/emptyhomes1?SN=\[01\]&LA=\[Name of local authority\] &Region=\[Region\]](https://www.research.net/r/emptyhomes1?SN=[01]&LA=[Name of local authority] &Region=[Region])

The information your local authority provides will be used by Empty Homes to assess:

- The characteristic of areas that have higher levels of long-term empty homes vacant for more than six months, and the impact of empty homes on those areas.
- The actions being taken by local authorities and their partners to tackle long-term empty homes, and the change they would like to see to support this work.

This information will help us make recommendations about how central government, local authorities and others could help bring long-term empty homes back into housing use in areas with relatively high levels generally and/or concentrated in neighbourhoods with particularly high concentrations.

By completing this questionnaire your local authority is giving consent for the information provided to be used for research purposes only. The information will be treated as strictly confidential. It will not be transferred to any organisation outside Empty Homes without your local authority's prior consent, and will be handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. In reporting the results of the survey, Empty Homes will ensure that the answers given by any local authority/respondent will not be identified. The findings will be reported in total for all local authorities/respondents, and may be aggregated at a regional level.

If you have any queries about this survey or the wider project, please contact me: helen.williams@emptyhomes.com or ring 07788 272 123

Thank you very much for cooperation, and best wishes

Helen Williams

Empty Homes – national campaigning charity

If you would like more information about Empty Homes, please see www.emptyhomes.com

This email and the questionnaire linked is being passed for completion to:

Name

Department

Job Title

Email address

Telephone number/s

Appendix C: email sent to local authorities on 8th August 2016

Dear

We wrote to you on the 19th July asking for your local authority's help with a survey on empty homes, which is being carried out by the charity Empty Homes funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. It is part of a wider project which aims to raise awareness about the need for investment and action in areas with relatively high levels and/or concentrations of empty homes.

Your local authority was purposefully selected to take part in this research for one or both of two reasons. Firstly, according to official Government statistics, it has a relatively high level of long-term empty homes, vacant for more than six months; secondly you received money from the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund.

We have forwarded our original email as an attachment with the link to the questionnaire.

We would be very grateful if you could please pass the email and questionnaire attached to the person in your organisation who is best placed to complete it. The questionnaire should take around 30 minutes to complete, and it should be returned to us by Friday, 12th August 2016.

Please could you let us know who is completing this questionnaire by returning the short form below.

If you have any queries about this survey or the wider project, please contact Helen Williams: helenwilliams@emptyhomes.com or 0203 135 0672

Thank you very much for co-operation, and best wishes

Helen

Helen Williams
Empty Homes-national campaigning charity
70 Cowcross Street
London
EC1M 6EJ
www.emptyhomes.com
Tel: 0203 135 0672

This email and the questionnaire attached is being passed for completion to:

Name

Department

Job Title

Email address

Telephone number/s

Appendix D: email sent to local authorities on the 15th August 2016

Dear

Extended deadline until the end of Friday 19th August

We wrote to you on the 19th July asking for your local authority's help with a survey on empty homes, which is being carried out by the charity Empty Homes funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. It is part of a wider project which aims to raise awareness about the need for investment and action in areas with relatively high levels and/or concentrations of empty homes.

Your local authority was purposefully selected to take part in this research for one or both of two reasons. Firstly, according to official Government statistics, it has a relatively high level of long-term empty homes, vacant for more than six months; secondly you received money from the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund.

We have forwarded our original email as an attachment with the link to the questionnaire.

We would be very grateful if you could please pass the email and questionnaire attached to the person in your organisation who is best placed to complete it. The questionnaire should take around 30 minutes to complete. We have extended the deadline for completion for one week only to Friday 19th August 2016.

Please could you let us know who is completing this questionnaire by returning the short form below.

If you have any queries about this survey or the wider project, please contact Helen Williams: helen.williams@emptyhomes.com or 0203 135 0672

Thank you very much for co-operation, and best wishes

Helen

Helen Williams

Empty Homes-national campaigning charity
70 Cowcross Street
London
EC1M 6EJ
www.emptyhomes.com
Tel: 0203 135 0672

This email and the questionnaire attached is being passed for completion to:

Name

Department

Job Title

Email address

Telephone number/s

Appendix E: local authority questionnaire marked up with results



EMPTY HOMES

Areas with High Levels of Long-term Empty Homes

Local Authority Questionnaire

Topline

- Figures are based on initial analysis before any back-coding shown in the full report and summary.
- 58 online questionnaires sent to local authorities with relatively high level of long-term empty homes, and/or had received money from the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund
- 46 questionnaires completed and returned
- Fieldwork conducted between 19 July to 19 August 2016
- Results based on all respondents, unless otherwise stated
- Percentages (%s) do not add up to 100 due to multiple answers

This survey is part of a wider project that the charity Empty Homes is carrying out, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. The aim is to raise awareness about the need for investment and action in areas with relatively high levels and/or concentrations of empty homes.

Your local authority has been purposefully selected to take part in this survey for one or both of two reasons. Firstly, according to official Government statistics, it has a relatively high level of long-term empty

homes, vacant for more than six months, and/or secondly you received money from the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund.

Q1 According to official government information, your local authority has a relatively high level of long-term empty homes, vacant for more than six months, and/or received money from the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund. Would you say that these long-term empty homes are spread throughout your local authority area generally and/or concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s?

	No	%
Local authority area generally	11	24
Concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s only	7	15
Both local authority area generally and concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s	28	61

ASK IF CONCENTRATED IN PARTICULAR NEIGHBOURHOOD/S

Q2 Do you have any reports, maps and/or other information which indicate the numbers and/or percentages of long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority?

Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (35)

	No	%
Yes PLEASE ATTACH ANY OF THESE AT END WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE	12	34
No Nothing to attach	23	66

Q3 Which of these, if any, would you say apply to the particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority with concentrations of relatively high levels of long-term empty homes compared with your local authority area generally?

Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (35)

	No	%
Lower household incomes	34	97
Lower house prices	33	94
More deprivation	32	91
More anti-social behaviour	28	80
More changes in population/higher resident turnover	28	80
More crime	18	51
More very long-term empty homes (10 or more years)	5	14
None of these	–	–

Q4 Now thinking about housing tenure, which of these, if any, would you say apply to the particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes compared with your local authority area generally?

Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (35)

	No	%
More private rented accommodation	34	97
More private rented accommodation not meeting Decent Homes Standard	29	83
More owner-occupied housing not meeting Decent Homes Standard	4	11
More social housing tenants affected by social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	4	11
More social housing	3	9
More owner-occupied housing	2	6
None of these	–	–

Q5 And thinking about types of property, which of these, if any, would you say apply to the particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority with relatively high levels of long-term empty homes compared with your local authority area generally?

Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (35)

	No	%
More pre-1919 housing	32	91
More small dwellings (bed-sitters, one and two bedrooms)	15	43
More houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)	12	34
More poor standard flats converted from larger properties (houses, boarding houses, hotels, etc.)	4	11
More large dwellings (four or more bedrooms)	4	11
None of these	1	3

ASK ALL

Q6 Which of these, if any, would you say generally apply to your local authority area compared with England nationally?

	No	%
Lower household incomes	36	78
Lower house prices	35	76
More deprivation	34	74
More changes in population/higher resident turnover	17	37
More anti-social behaviour	8	17
More crime	8	17
More very long-term empty homes (10 or more years)	5	11
None of these	5	11

Q7 Now thinking about housing tenure, which of these, if any, would you say generally apply to your local authority area compared with England nationally?

	No	%
More private rented accommodation	23	50
More private rented accommodation not meeting Decent Homes Standard	22	48
More owner-occupied housing not meeting Decent Homes Standard	10	22
More social housing	10	22
More owner-occupied housing	7	15
More social housing tenants affected by social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	6	13
None of these	7	15

Q8 And thinking about types of property, which of these, if any, would you say generally apply to your local authority area compared with England nationally?

	No	%
More pre-1919 housing	37	80
More small dwellings (bed-sitters, one and two bedrooms)	17	37
More houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)	8	17
More poor standard flats converted from larger properties (houses, boarding houses, hotels, etc.)	8	17
More large dwellings (four or more bedrooms)	4	9
None of these	6	13

ASK IF LOCAL AUTHORITY GENERALLY

Q9 Which five or six of these, if any, would you say are the main reasons for the relatively high level of long-term empty homes, vacant for more than six months, in your local authority area generally?

Base: All if local authority generally (39)

	No	%
Owners can't fund repairs/improve homes to occupy, sell or rent	38	97
Owners allowing homes to become uninhabitable	23	59
Previous occupants causing homes to become uninhabitable	21	54
Low housing demand due to perceived social problems such as anti-social behaviour	13	33
Low housing demand as better homes/housing options available elsewhere	12	31
Owners buying homes as Buy-to-Leave empty investments	10	26
Homes in Housing Market Renewal scheme/s where funding has stopped	8	21
Criminal damage by non-occupants causing homes to become uninhabitable	7	18
Low housing demand due to lack of jobs and/or transport	6	15
Mortgage providers unwilling to lend on homes	6	15
Flood risk/ongoing flood damage	4	10
Owners buying homes to 'launder' money	3	8
Low demand for larger, social rented homes due to social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	2	5
Homes decanted for demolition/rehabilitation as part of regeneration scheme	2	5
Other	13	33
None of these	1	3

ASK IF CONCENTRATED IN PARTICULAR NEIGHBOURHOOD/S

Q10 Which five or six of these, if any, would you say are the main reasons for the relatively high level of long-term empty homes, vacant for more than six months, concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s in your local authority?

Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (35)

	No	%
Owners can't fund repairs/improve homes to occupy, sell or rent	31	89
Low housing demand due to perceived social problems such as anti-social behaviour	24	69
Owners allowing homes to become uninhabitable	23	66
Previous occupants causing homes to become uninhabitable	21	60
Low housing demand due to lack of jobs and/or transport	13	37
Low housing demand as better homes/housing options available elsewhere	13	37
Owners buying homes as Buy-to-Leave empty investments	12	34
Criminal damage by non-occupants causing homes to become uninhabitable	10	29
Homes in Housing Market Renewal scheme/s where funding has stopped	10	29
Homes decanted for demolition/rehabilitation as part of regeneration scheme	4	11
Owners buying homes to 'launder' money	2	6
Low demand for larger, social rented homes due to social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	2	6
Mortgage providers unwilling to lend on homes	2	6
Flood risk/ongoing flood damage	1	3
Other	6	17
None of these	–	–

ASK ALL

Q11 Now thinking about the HCA Affordable Homes programme funding since April 2015 which could be used to create new affordable homes from empty properties, residential and/or commercial, which of these, if any, has happened in your local authority area to help bring empty properties back into housing use?

	No	%
Registered housing provider/s attracted funding	21	46
Local authority bid for funding	14	30
Local authority attracted funding	12	26
None of these	20	43

Q12 And again thinking about the HCA Affordable Homes programme funding since April 2015, which of these, if any, is your local authority doing to help registered housing provider/s create new affordable homes from empty properties, residential and/or commercial?

	No	%
Encouraging/supporting them to bid for funding	28	61
Funding them to supplement HCA funding	12	26
None of these	18	39

Q13 Now thinking about since April 2015, which of these, if any, did your local authority do to help community-led organisation/s (including charities, community-land trusts, co-ops, co-housing groups and development trusts, but excluding registered housing providers) bring long-term empty homes back into housing use?

	No	%
Transferred ownership, or leased, empty homes	9	20
Provided grants including from commuted Planning Gain (S106) sums, Right-to-Buy receipts, New Homes Bonus, etc.	6	13
Other	11	24
None of these	27	59

ASK IF ANY CODED AT Q12 AND/OR Q13

Q14 Which registered housing provider/s and/or community-led organisation/s are your local authority supporting to help bring long-term empty homes back into housing use? WRITE IN

Base: All if any coded at Q12 and/or Q13 (28)

ASK ALL

Q15 Since April 2015, which of these, if any, did your local authority do to help bring long-term empty properties back into housing use?

	No	%
Updated local housing strategy/plan to set out how empty properties can contribute to housing supply	27	59
Provided loans to private owners of long-term empty homes	20	43
Consulted local people/residents	18	39
Obtained compulsory purchase orders (CPOs)	15	33
Provided grants to private owners of long-term empty homes	14	30
Purchased privately owned long-term empty homes	13	28
Obtained empty dwelling management orders (EDMOs)	6	13
Operated discounted sales scheme for long-term empty homes owned/ acquired by local authority	5	11
Operated purchase assistance loans to people wanting to buy long-term empty homes	2	4
None of these	6	13

ASK IF LOCAL AUTHORITY GENERALLY

Q16 Which five or six of these, if any, do you think are the main barriers to reducing the relatively high level of long-term empty homes in your local authority area generally?

Base: All if local authority generally (39)

	No	%
Owners not concerned about empty homes/unwilling to engage with local authority	32	82
Insufficient funding for regeneration schemes to tackle empty homes and other neighbourhood issues	31	79
Poor repairs and management in private rented sector generating more newly empty homes	20	51
Insufficient Affordable Homes programme funding	17	44
Community-led organisation/s lack capacity to help bring empty homes back into housing use	13	33
Insufficient funding for selective demolition of empty homes	12	31
Registered housing provider/s not interested in bringing privately owned empty homes back into housing use	10	26
Asset disposal strategies of registered housing providers	9	23
High population/resident turnover generating more newly empty homes	9	23
Community-led organisation/s not interested in bringing privately owned empty homes back into housing use	6	15
Social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	2	5
Community/local opposition to selective demolition	1	3
Other	7	18
None of these	–	–

ASK IF CONCENTRATED IN PARTICULAR NEIGHBOURHOOD/S

Q17 Which five or six of these, if any, do you think are the main barriers to reducing the relatively high level of long-term empty homes, concentrated in particular /neighbourhood/s in your local authority?

Base: All if concentrated in particular neighbourhood/s (35)

	No	%
Insufficient funding for regeneration schemes to tackle empty homes and other neighbourhood issues	30	86
Owners not concerned about empty homes/unwilling to engage with local authority	24	69
Poor repairs and management in private rented sector generating more newly empty homes	23	66
Registered housing provider/s not interested in bringing privately owned empty homes back into housing use	18	51
High population/resident turnover generating more newly empty homes	18	51
Community-led organisation/s lack capacity to help bring empty homes back into housing use	14	40
Insufficient funding for selective demolition of empty homes	13	37
Insufficient Affordable Homes programme funding	12	34
Asset disposal strategies of registered housing providers	6	17
Community-led organisations not interested in bringing privately owned	5	14
Community/local opposition to selective demolition empty homes back into housing use	2	6
Social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	2	6
Other	3	9
None of these	–	–

ASK ALL

Q18 Finally, which five or six of these, if any, do you think would most help your local authority to bring more long-term empty homes back into housing use?

	No	%
Central government funding/programme/s targeted at local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes	40	87
More power to take legal action against owners of long-term empty homes	26	57
Speedier process for obtaining compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) on long-term empty homes	26	57
Central government funding/programme/s for wider neighbourhood regeneration schemes	24	52
Central government funding/programme/s targeted at particular neighbourhoods with clusters/concentrations of high levels of long-term empty homes	23	50
Affordable Homes Programme with ring-fenced funding for long-term empty properties	20	43
More power/resources to tackle poor repairs and management causing long-term empty homes in private rented sector	16	35
Able to impose higher council tax rates on homes empty for over a year	14	30
New Empty Homes Community Grant programmes for non-registered community-led organisations	12	26
Devolution deal to enable local authorities to prioritise long-term empty homes	12	26
End social sector size criteria (bedroom tax)	5	11
Other	16	35
None of these	–	–

IF YES, CODE 1 AT Q2

PLEASE ATTACH ANY REPORTS, MAPS AND/OR OTHER INFORMATION WHICH INDICATE THE NUMBERS AND/OR PERCENTAGES OF LONG-TERM EMPTY HOMES CONCENTRATED IN PARTICULAR NEIGHBOURHOODS IN YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY, AND WRITE IN WHAT YOU ARE ATTACHING

Yes:

Report/s

Map/s

Other

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING AND RETURNING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix F: statistical reliability

The 58 local authorities purposely selected for this survey represent the population, while the 46 who replied by returning a completed questionnaire are the sample. Therefore, the figures obtained may not be exactly the same as if all questionnaires had been returned (the 'true' values). However, the variation between the sample results and the 'true' values can be predicted from a knowledge of the size of the sample and population on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which this prediction can be made is usually chosen to be 95% – that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the 'true' value will fall within a specified range.

The table below illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample and sub-samples, adjusted for a population of 58, with percentage results at the '95% confidence interval'.

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels			
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
Sample size	±	±	±
46	4	6	7
39	6	8	9
35	6	10	11
28	8	13	14

For example, with a sample size of 46 completed questionnaires, where 50% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the 'true' value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had returned questionnaires) will fall within the range of + 7 percentage points from the sample result; in fact the actual result is proportionately more likely to be closer to the centre (50%) than the extremes of the range (43% or 57%).

Appendix G: Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder areas.

In April 2002 the then Labour Government announced 9 HMR Pathfinder areas:

- 1 Birmingham/Sandwell
- 2 East Lancashire
- 3 Hull and East Riding
- 4 Manchester/Salford
- 5 Merseyside
- 6 Newcastle/Gateshead
- 7 North Staffordshire
- 8 Oldham/Rochdale
- 9 South Yorkshire

In addition Tees Valley operated as an HMR Pathfinder after 2005, bringing the list to 10.

These 10 HMR Pathfinder areas covered 30 local authority areas as listed below. Though it should be noted that HMR Pathfinder areas did not neatly match local authority boundaries. For example, only parts of Manchester and Liverpool were covered.

Local authorities that were wholly or partially within the HMR Pathfinder areas¹⁸

- 1 Barnsley
- 2 Birmingham
- 3 Blackburn with Darwen Unitary Authority (UA)
- 4 Burnley
- 5 Darlington UA
- 6 Doncaster
- 7 East Riding of Yorkshire UA
- 8 Gateshead
- 9 Hartlepool UA
- 10 Hyndburn

¹⁸ Empty Homes (2016) 'Empty Homes in England': <http://www.emptyhomes.com/research.htm>

- 11 Kingston upon Hull UA
- 12 Liverpool
- 13 Manchester
- 14 Middlesbrough UA
- 15 Newcastle upon Tyne
- 16 Newcastle-under-Lyme
- 17 Oldham
- 18 Pendle
- 19 Redcar & Cleveland UA
- 20 Rochdale
- 21 Rossendale
- 22 Rotherham
- 23 Salford
- 24 Sandwell
- 25 Sefton
- 26 Sheffield
- 27 Staffordshire Moorlands
- 28 Stockton-on-Tees UA
- 29 Stoke-on-Trent UA
- 30 Wirral

Appendix H: Successful bidders¹⁹ and their local authority partners allocated funding through the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund²⁰

Allerdale Borough Council (included Carlisle and Copeland)
Barnsley MBC
Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council
Blackburn-with-Darwen Council (Pennine Lancashire)
Blackpool Borough Council
Calderdale MBC
Durham County Council
Greater Manchester Combined Authority (money allocated to
Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale and Salford)
Hartlepool Borough Council
Hull City Council
Kirklees Council
Lancaster City Council
Liverpool City Region (on behalf of Restore Consortium) (money
allocated to Liverpool, Sefton, Wirral and Knowsley),
Middlesbrough Council
Newcastle City Council
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Sunderland City Council
Tendring District Council
Thanet District Council
West Lyndsey District Council

19 Homes and Communities Agency (May 2014) *Clusters of Empty Homes fund allocations* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/367230/coeh_funding_allocations_290512.csv/preview and document withdrawn on the 5 January 2016

20 Empty Homes (2016) *Empty Homes in England*: <http://www.emptyhomes.com/research.htm>