

London Borough of Bromley

# EMPTY PROPERTY Strategy



2009 - 2011

Draft Empty Property Strategy 2009-11

# Empty Property Strategy 2009 -2011

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Draft Empty Property Strategy 2009-11

## 1.1 Introduction

This Empty Property Strategy 2009-2011 represents a part of the council's overall Housing Strategy. It links with the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy - 'Building a Better Bromley' 2020 vision as well as other local, sub-regional, regional and national housing strategies. It provides a realistic approach to how the Council and its partners will continue to tackle long-term empty properties within the Borough over the next four years. This strategy also recognises the need to increase the availability of housing to help alleviate homelessness and address housing need, especially in recognition of the housing build decline and the current economic downturn. The Council respects the rights of property owners to decide on the best way to use their property. However this must be balanced against housing need and how empty properties, often in disrepair impact on the local community by attracting anti-social behaviour, squatters, drug dealing, arson attacks and vermin. Therefore a more innovative approach has been integrated with traditional methods to ensure the objectives of this Empty Property Strategy are met.

## 1.2 Key aims and objectives 2009-2011:

### To work in partnership to:

- help people to bring empty properties back into use through schemes and initiatives to increase the supply and standard of residential housing in the Borough
- continue to promote clean and safer neighbourhoods through raising awareness of identifying and reporting empty properties with a focus on listed and/or very dilapidated long term empty properties
- improve accuracy and collection of information about empty properties within the Borough and increase public awareness of reporting empty properties
- maximise the re-use of empty properties, including non-residential properties looking at opportunities to increase units available for disabled people and improving energy efficiency by retrofitting when developing units

## 2.1 Background

The Empty Homes Agency estimates that there are 943,000 vacant properties currently in the UK with a prediction to rise to over 1 million in 2009. 290,224 of these will have been empty for more than 6 months. In 2007 Communities and Local Government advised of 84,000 empty homes in London accounting for 2.7% of the total housing stock. Authorities have traditionally oscillated between numerous schemes of demolishing empty rows of properties, to renovating and bringing back others into use responding to the political course of action of the time. The introduction of the Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO's) give Local Authorities the legal power to challenge property owners to bring long term empty properties back into use.

The Empty Property Strategy 2006-8 gave an overview of the work undertaken to bring properties back into use within the London Borough of Bromley. The empty property work has primarily been undertaken by the part time Empty Property Officer, a post funded by the South East London Housing Partnership. However the knowledge and expertise of a number of officers offering support, advice and guidance, coupled with housing schemes and grants has led to the success of the work undertaken to date.

The Boroughs Sustainable Community Strategy – Building a Better Bromley 2020 vision, alludes to sustaining a quality environment in the Borough and therefore aims to prevent dereliction and bring back empty properties into use in line with this objective.

The Empty Homes Agency (Survey 2005) concluded that a single refurbished home produces 6 times less CO2 compared to the building of a new home. Bringing empty properties back into use also gives the opportunity to improve the housing stock in the Borough and allows for energy efficiency improvements.



Figure1. An example of two properties in Penge which have been brought back into use through works undertaken by the Council



## 2.2 What is an empty property?

An empty property, for the purposes of this strategy and relevant legislation is one that has been left empty for a period of more than 6 months. There can be a number of reasons why this happens and this is usually due to a period of transition where the owner(s) will be carrying out works, trying to sell the property or families waiting for legal issues to be resolved. There are a number of properties where ownership is unresolved or the property has been abandoned. These properties would potentially become long term empty properties which could need Council intervention to bring them back into use.



Figure 2. Empty Property (Penge)





## 2.3 Why is the property empty?

There can be any number of reasons why a property will remain empty over a six month period:

- property requires renovation but owner has no funds
- inherited property and beneficiary is undecided about action to take
- owner prefers property to remain empty
- owner doesn't want hassle of being a landlord
- cost of works to bring property into use is more than value of the property
- property is "second home"
- owner can't afford cost of selling property
- awaiting planning permission
- owner in process of renovating property
- determining ownership
- held in probate
- property abandoned
- owner in health or care institution
- owner in prison
- owner has many properties and does not have the resource to manage them sufficiently

Financial issues, mental health and family disputes are the most common reasons for properties being left empty. Some people need a significant amount of time, support or legal action to resolve the issues before they can bring the property into use. Where ill health, mental illness or vulnerability plays a part in the property being long term empty, the Council's approach will adopt a more sensitive approach. These situations, which are quite common, can take a long time to resolve, however Council Officers will board up or secure properties until the owner/resident returns home to minimise the damage which empty properties can attract. If the person is unable to deal with their affairs it is usual that family members or advocates will liaise with Council Officers to resolve the issues and bring properties back into use. However, where despite protracted efforts an owner fails to bring long term property back into use and subject to the Council's rating system for Compulsory Purchase and Empty Dwelling Management orders and subject to members decisions, then formal will be taken.

### 3. Strategic overview

#### 3.1 The national context

Published in July 2007, the housing Green Paper, 'Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable', sets out the Government's strategy for meeting a new target of 2 million new homes by 2016. The Paper identifies the need to tackle long term empty properties and the consultation paper on the new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant may introduce a new requirement for local authorities to have in place an effective empty homes strategy to be eligible for a grant. Local authorities are also encouraged to use Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) as a lever to force owners to bring long term properties into use. Buy to Let landlords have found it beneficial to leave investment properties empty with the aim of waiting for values to increase. Whilst some may have gained financially, a considerable number have seen values depreciate and resulted in the properties being repossessed as economic downturn has impacted on the property market.

As part of the future Homelessness Strategy, the Homes and Communities Agency will focus on making better use of existing stock, including empty homes, to maximise supply and help meet the government's TA target. They also aim to "monitor impact of economic downturn on empty homes numbers and locality." The HCA will establish through its 'Single Conversation' with each Local Authority if empty homes are an issue and if so they will aim to influence the proposed strategy for bringing these properties back into use, and consider "how it fits in with the wider regeneration, VFM and affordable housing supply solutions".

In particular, HCA will confirm with investment partners the availability of Social Housing Grant (SHG) to acquire and bring empty homes back into use, targeting funding on permanent acquisitions that would contribute towards affordable housing supply. This could possibly include purchase and repair of housing association empty properties, should this be prioritised by the LMHS.

#### 3.2 The regional context

The latest Draft London Mayor's Housing Strategy was published in May 2009. It suggests that the proportion of homes lying empty across all housing sectors in London is at a 30 year low. Inner London traditionally has the highest figures of empty properties, with up to 5% in some Boroughs. Bromley is estimated to have between 2-3% of empty dwellings within its housing stock.

The Strategy advises of the Mayor's vision to work with a number of organisations, including local authorities, to deliver *'vibrant and varied communities'* and amongst other priorities *"to deliver and maintain a reduction in the number of long term empty and derelict buildings – transforming these into homes for Londoners."*

The Greater London Authority Act 2007 gave the Mayor of London new housing responsibilities and designated funding which will in turn deliver the aims of the draft Mayor's Housing Strategy, which are listed below:

- increase the supply of new and affordable homes
- improve the homes occupied by vulnerable households
- tackling long term empty homes
- addressing the housing requirements of homeless households
- increasing the number of three bedroom and larger social rented homes
- meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

**The Mayor's vision has been set out in the housing manifesto:**

#### **Reducing the number of empty homes**

- No more than one per cent of homes should stand empty and unused for over six months
- Long term empty homes, derelict empty homes and listed buildings at risk should be brought back into residential use

#### **Targeting empty homes**

- Better information should be available to help target action to tackle abandoned and derelict homes
- There should be no financial incentives to leaving homes empty

The Mayor proposes to work with the Homes & Communities Agency, London Boroughs and other partners to:

- use £60 million of the targeted funding stream to bring empty homes back into use
- undertake an audit of derelict abandoned homes
- use the discretion offered by the legislation for boroughs to remove Council Tax discounts on long term empty homes.

### 3.3 The sub-regional context

One of the seven objectives of the Sub-regional Housing Strategy 2006-2010 is to “maximise the use of all properties in the sub-region, in particular by bringing empty dwellings back into use”. The target to bring 140 properties back into use during the period of 2006-2008 using £2.25m funded through the London Housing Board allocation. The sub region delivered 151 against this target, exceeding the requirements.

The South East London Housing Partnership have developed an Empty Homes Grants and Loans Design Standard to ensure that any work undertaken reaches consistently high but achievable standards that comply with Government legislation and ensure an adequate level of efficiency, comfort and safety for future occupants.

The South East London Housing Partnership has been allocated £3m in 2009-10 and an indicative £1.6m in 2010-11 from the Targeted Funding Stream to bring empty properties back into residential use across the five Boroughs. The 2008/2009 SELHP programme update has been collated in the table.

SELHP Empty Property Programme - Outturn 2008-9						
Empty Properties - £2,414,625* Target outputs - 118-148						
	Outturn Allocation	Total expected outputs	of which: completed	of which: committed	spent £	Committed £
Bexley	172,800	17	8	9	68,800	104,000
Bromley	458,468	50	30	20	161,268	297,200
Greenwich	223,650	17	1	16	16,229	207,421
Lewisham	360,000	26	16	10	205,000	155,000
Southwark	576,763	20	9	11	211,763	365,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,791,681</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>663,060</b>	<b>1,128,621</b>

Figure 3, 2008/2009 Targets and progress - Jan 2009

The SELHP empty property programme 2009-11 will include:

- **Grants and loans** to assist owners to renovate properties and bring them back into use – often through borough Housing Options or temporary accommodation schemes. This forms the majority of the programme – around £2.6m or 55% of the total over 2 years. SELHP will introduce a revised suite of empty property grants – as set out below.

- **Support for enforcement work** – SELHP support borough enforcement work by covering the cost of 3 Empty Property Officers (LB Bexley, Greenwich and Bromley), and assisting with the up-front costs of Empty Dwelling Management Orders and Compulsory Purchase Orders – we estimate this to be around £1m or 20% of the overall programme.
- **Local authority-owned empty properties** – the allocation included £1m empty properties which are listed on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register. Further discussions are planned with each local authority to establish costs and planned works for each property identified. Whilst there are few such listed properties 'The Studio' could potentially attract such funding subject to the end use being residential units to meet housing need.
- **Empty property audit / surveys** – the GLA is asking local authorities to provide information on privately owned properties which have been empty for more than one year. SELHP have set aside £60,000 to support the costs of this local authorities, updated information could result in operational benefits.
- **Publicity** – approximately £25,000 will be available for publicity campaigns targeted at owners of empty properties.

SELHP facilitates an active bi-monthly group of Empty Property Officers from the South East London boroughs and partner housing associations. The delivery of the empty property programme and the allocated grant funding is monitored regularly by the group. The flexibility exists to move funding between elements of the empty property programme, and between boroughs to ensure delivery against targets to maximise the outputs for the sub-region. This method has proved successful over the last 4 years.

The SELHP Empty Homes group are able to share good practice and develop systems and practices to improve the efficiency of the Empty Property work undertaken in all five Boroughs.

There are grants and loans available to bring empty property back into residential use subject to available finance and evolving criteria. Both the grants and loans are granted at the discretion of the Council and SELHP and are subject to conditions:

- **Standard grant** of up to £15,000 to assist owners to renovate a property and bring it back to use with borough Housing Options or temporary accommodation schemes for a minimum of 5 years. SELHP boroughs have brought 189 properties back into use with these grants in the 3 years to April 2009, with another 140 in the pipeline. **Loans** of up to £20,000, repayable from the rental stream or breach of conditions, upon sale, may be given with the grant where renovation costs are high or

owners cannot raise finance themselves – an increasingly common situation. Loans may be offered instead of or alongside grants.

- “Help to Sell or Rent” **small grants** to assist owners to bring long term empty property onto the market where only minor works are required.
- **Large grants** of up to £50,000 per unit to tackle listed and/or very dilapidated properties where renovation costs are substantially more than usual – this addresses the Mayor’s priority to tackle listed empty property and those detrimental to the amenity of the neighbourhood. SELHP panel will consider each case upon its individual merits.
- **Energy efficiency grant** of up to £4,000 to encourage owners to install more expensive and difficult measures such as solid wall insulation and renewable energy sources.
- **Support for Empty Dwelling Management Orders and Compulsory Purchase Orders**, covering legal and surveying fees and up-front repair costs, to assist local authorities to take enforcement action.
- **Developers** may be eligible for assistance, but at lower rates and for conversion or renovation costs only.

Further information about the Partnership can be found through the SELHP website [www.selondonhousing.org](http://www.selondonhousing.org)

### 3.4 The local context

Building a Better Bromley 2020 Vision - Sustainable Community Strategy is a comprehensive 10-year strategy to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being and health of people who live and work in Bromley. The plan sets the direction and policies which other plans should help to deliver and sets out the key priorities revealed in our consultations with residents. The Strategy forecasts that by 2020 Bromley's population will increase to around 307,000. The number of households is set to increase to 136,000, with the average household size decreasing. It is estimated that 40% will be one-person households. It is therefore a key priority to maximise the opportunities available through making the best use of all housing stock in the Borough. The Council and its partners promise they “will foster initiatives designed to bring more empty properties back into use.”

This Empty property strategy forms part of the Borough’s Housing Strategy, which is currently being updated and due to be released in autumn 2009. It also links with other related strategies such as the Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2012, Overcrowding Strategy 2008-2009 and Temporary Accommodation Reduction Strategy 2006.

The Safer Bromley Partnership Community Safety Strategy 2008 – 2011 sets out how the Partnership will work to make Bromley a safer place to live,



work, learn and socialise. Increasing public confidence is a key outcome of the strategy and reducing the levels of crimes against property is an underlying priority. Empty properties attract anti-social behaviour and can be the target or haven for criminal activity. Therefore actions to identify and bring empty properties back into use are crucial to meeting key strategic objectives.

Each year Communities and Local Government collects data on the number of empty homes from each local authority in England and from other Government departments and bodies - HSSA Statistics. The Empty Homes Agency also publishes data relating to empty properties in relation to the overall housing stock, Bromley's data is shown in the table below.

London Borough of Bromley	Total empty homes reported in LBB	Percentage of homes empty in relation to the overall housing stock	Housing Association empty properties	Other empty public body properties	Empty properties in the private rented sector	Private homes empty more than 6 months
2006	2,993	2.27%	428	352	2,213	596
2007	3,106	2.34%	381	0	2,725	504
2008	3,537	2.65%	338	0	3,199	573

Figure 4. Empty Homes Agency - Breakdown of empty properties in relation to overall over housing stock 2006 - 2008

## 4. Tackling empty properties

### 4.1 Identifying solutions

Once the owner of a property has been identified and Council Officers have established why the property is empty then it is easier to identify the possible solutions available to them. If owners are willing to work through issues they will find the advice and guidance offered by the Council to be constructive and helpful.

Certain empty properties are no longer viable assets and for financial reasons demolishing them could be the best course of action. This has been the case with three properties demolished in 2008, making room for larger developments.

### 4.2 Enforcement action

Enforcement action is applied by the Council where the owner is unable to or refuses to bring a property back into use. It can be a resource intensive

process for the Council and is used as a last resort when all attempts to encourage the re-use of the property through our incentive schemes have failed. The enforcement options available to the Council are either a Compulsory Purchase order or an Empty Dwelling Management Order. Others including 'enforced sale' are being investigated.

### **What is an empty dwelling management order (EDMO)?**

An *EDMO* is a legal course of action introduced in the 2004 Housing Act. It is only applied for when all other voluntary routes to bring the property back into use with the permission of the owner have failed. A EDMO rating system has been established (figure 6) to determine which properties can be considered for such action.

There are two stages of application for the EDMO; interim and final. The interim order allows a Local Authority to take over some responsibility of managing a property which has been empty for a long period of time. The Council apply to the Residential Property Tribunal for the interim order and if this is granted they will work with the owner for a further year to bring the property back into use. If this course of action fails, the Council can make a final order.

Once a final order is made the Council will take full responsibility of the property. This allows them to repair it and create tenancies to recover all costs they have incurred. The owner can seek to take control of the property back from the Council at any time during the process subject to paying back any costs incurred, otherwise the order lasts for seven years.

Any surplus made after recovering the costs of the repairs has to be returned to the owner. However, it can take approximately seven to eight years rent to recover the costs incurred from pursuing an EDMO, any loss made has to be borne by the Council.

As of April 2009, approximately twenty EDMO's have been made by Local Authorities. The information and support available to progress EDMO's is being developed to ensure this number increases and the whole programme gathers momentum.

## Empty Dwelling Management Order scoring sheet

Item/Issue	Score range	Score	Points measured in increments of 5
How many years has the property been empty?	0-50		10 for each year to a maximum 50
Has the owner been responsive to approaches and is there confidence that the owner will undertake appropriate action to ensure occupancy?	0-20		0 for a responsive owner up to a maximum of 20 if there is no confidence based on experience of their activity and history and their long term plans for the property
Is the property subject to criminal activity, i.e. drug use, squatting, arson etc?	0-40		20 assigned for each incident of squatting, 10 arson, 10 drugs and 10 significant fly tipping
Is damage being caused to neighbouring properties?	0-20		0 for no damage to 20 for significant damage
Are neighbouring properties being devalued or visual amenity affected?	0-20		0 for no loss in value up to 20 for significant devaluation
Have there been complaints from the public/residents petitions etc?	0-20		No complaints 0, 2 or less 10, more than 2, 20
Are there other public health issues i.e. rodent or pigeon infestation, drainage etc?	0-20		20 if significant or more than one occurrence
Have the police or any other authority had to take action because of the property?	0-30		10 for each incident
Could action be taken under Housing Health and Safety Hazard Rating Scheme?	0-20		0 none, 10 significant category 2 hazard, 20 category 1 hazard

The total score for the property indicates the loss of the property and it's effect on the local community.

Any property scoring over 100 will be notified to the Housing Manager or Head of Residential Services to be considered for an application for an interim empty dwelling management order.

Consideration of the best course of action will require a detailed assessment of the property both internally and externally. The cost of the work necessary to bring the property back into use will be roughly estimated to determine if a final empty dwelling management order is feasible based on management of the property by a housing association. Any property not likely to be able to pay back within 7 years will still be considered for an interim EDMO, but may not be the subject of a final EDMO. In such a case compulsory purchase, demolition and where applicable, enforced sale will also be considered.

Figure 5. EDMO Rating System

## What is a Compulsory Purchase Order?

**Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)** is a legal course of action which allows the Local Authority to take ownership of land or property from an owner without the owner's consent. Whilst CPO action is used as a threat to force owners to bring their property back into use, this is an expensive and protracted process which requires Member approval. CPO action is normally used as a last resort when the owner cannot be identified or if the owner refuses to co-operate. The Authority must demonstrate that the taking of the property is necessary for housing and planning needs. The decision to issue a CPO can be challenged by the owner through an independent body.

One Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) was completed in 2008 and Council resolutions for a further two resulted in their demolition, with the likely construction of between 6 - 8 units in their place. Other CPO action has resulted in two further properties being either sold or renovated, with one currently undergoing conversion from a single property into 7 flats.

The Council will be pursuing this course of action in consultation with Members to ensure that a co-ordinated and strategic approach is taken.



Figure 6. Empty property in Orpington



Figure 7. property has now been refurbished using grant funding

## RATING SYSTEM FOR CONSIDERATION OF EMPTY PROPERTY FOR COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACTION

Objective: To establish criteria for empty property in the Borough of Bromley whereby a logical points scoring system will bring forward empty property that warrants consideration for Compulsory Purchase action.

It is proposed to carry out this exercise for all known vacant properties and once this has been done to review them at regular intervals in accordance with the Environmental Health and Trading Standards service plan.

### Target Score

The rating system has a target score of 100 points

If an empty property scores 100 points or more it shall be referred to the Residential Services Team manager for consideration for Compulsory Purchase action.

10 points are added for each year vacant, to a maximum of 80 points. Additional points are added to take account of impact on the community, and Council resources.

### Scoring

Property empty for 1 year	10 points
Property empty for each subsequent year	10
Property the subject of "criminal activity"	40
Property responsible for damage to a neighbouring property	20
Property the subject of a justified complaint about rubbish, tipping etc	10
Property confirmed to be infested with rodents or other pests	10
Property the subject of statutory action	10
Property is considered unfit or in substantial disrepair	10
Property the subject of "multiple complaints" or a petition from neighbours	20

### Notes

"Criminal activity" includes arson attacks, use for drug taking, illegal entry etc.

The number of complaints taken about rubbish or rodents will have no bearing on the number of points awarded when carrying out the initial scoring exercise. The additional points awarded for service of statutory action adds weighting to show the severity of complaints. However, new complaints etc, following the initial scoring will only attract further points when the 12 month review is carried out.

Service of notice will include Environmental Protection Act. Prevention of Damage by Pests Act, Local Government (Misc. Provisions) Act etc. The service of more than one notice at the initial assessment stage will not add additional points. Subsequent statutory action after the initial scoring will attract additional points. For the purposes of this scheme, a year is measured from the date when reliable proof of vacancy is obtained.



### **Examples**

A property empty for 10 years will score 80 points

A property empty for 3 years (30), the subject of complaints about rubbish (10) and has a positive rodent infestation (10) that has been boarded up by using statutory powers will score 60 points. If the same property had an arson attack (40) and a petition against it (20) it will score a total of 120 points.

## **5. Housing schemes**

Not all owners will welcome the intervention work undertaken by the council to bring long term empty properties back into use. Owners will be given significant time and opportunity prior to formal action being taken. There is also a range of incentives offered by the Council that will be beneficial to most to allow them to avoid the most extreme consequences.

### **Settled homes initiative – Temp2Perm**

Temp2Perm is an innovative housing scheme that allows housing associations to purchase properties and house homeless households on behalf of the Council. Broomleigh and Town and Country Housing Associations have been selected to purchase properties for the scheme. The Council obtained Government grant funding for £35k towards each property which they provide to the housing association with a further capital grant of £20k for each property purchased. The housing association will own the properties and be, landlord to the tenant. As landlords they will be responsible for all repairs, rent collection and tenancy matters. The Council are signposting owners who wish to sell their empty properties to the relevant housing associations. Four empty properties have been purchased from owners and brought back into use between November 2008 and February 2009 via this scheme.

### **Direct Let scheme**

The Council's Housing Initiatives team operates the Direct Let scheme which allows private sector landlords to let their properties to those people in housing need. The scheme identifies prospective tenants who meet the Council's homelessness criteria and matches them to suitable private sector properties. A property inspection will take place at the beginning of the process and health and safety certificates will be required to ensure that the property meets the required safety standards. This scheme is accessible to owners of empty properties.

### **Deposit Guarantee Bond scheme**

The Deposit Guarantee Bond scheme enables those people that the Council agrees to assist with housing to approach lettings agents and private landlords to find accommodation. The Council provides a guarantee bond, which is in most cases equal to one month's rent to the



landlord. The aim of offering such guarantee is to secure the letting of the property for an extended period of time, resolving the housing need. In accepting the Guarantee Bond the landlord effectively does not need to lodge a deposit with a Government approved Tenancy Protection scheme, as the Authority will be holding the money in abeyance should the need to make a claim arise.

### **Rent Deposit scheme**

This scheme offers owners of empty properties the opportunity to rent to a family in housing need. The rent deposit offered is equivalent to one month's rent. The landlord is required to lodge the deposit with one of the three Government approved Tenancy Protection schemes. It is offered to secure accommodation for people to prevent homelessness or in discharge of the Council's duty to re-house.

### **Housing Association Leasing schemes**

The Housing Association Leasing scheme provides longer term temporary accommodation on behalf of the Council. The work is undertaken in partnership with Avenue Lettings (AmicusHorizon Group) and Notting Hill Housing Group. It provides a private landlord with the opportunity of renting their property for a guaranteed rental income without the responsibility or hassle of managing it. The Council will continue to work with these housing associations to extend the options available to owners to bring their empty properties back into use.

## 6. Grants and loans

Where a property has been completely unoccupied for a minimum of six consecutive months, grants and interest free loans may be available for its repair and conversion. The grants and loans are determined by Bromley Council and funded through the South East London Housing Partnership, through money provided by the Greater London Authority (GLA). They are subject to a maximum limit of £15000 for grants and £20000 for loans, are subject to the availability of funding and property size and type. In exceptional circumstances larger grants may be considered.

In all cases of such assistance, recipients will be required to let to nominated clients from the Councils Housing Register by signing a 5 year lease with a nominated Housing Association, which will guarantee rental income for the owner and provide temporary accommodation housing for homeless households; empty flats above shops have been successful using this scheme. Alternatively a property owner can sign an undertaking to provide such accommodation and utilise one of the **Council's Guarantee Bond scheme**. In some cases smaller grants may be available for up to £3000 to help cover basic repairs to bring the property up to a habitable standard. In return for this funding owners will be required to provide a minimum of two years use of their property to tenants nominated by the Council. Additional grant for energy efficiency work such as solid wall insulation may also be available.

Grant and loan conditions are recorded as a local land charge and failure to comply with conditions will require repayment of the funding. All financial assistance is under constant review and grants and loans are all subject to the availability of funding.

## 7. Working in partnership

The Council's Corporate Empty Property Working Group consists of the Empty Property Officer, Town Centre Management, Housing, Environmental Health, Council Tax, Planning, Valuation and Building Control. The aim of the group is to steer and co-ordinate the best course of actions to deal with tackling empty properties within the Borough. The group meet bi-annually and is supported by the Empty Property Officer.

The Empty Property Strategy Action Plan provides the group with a range of actions that will need to be progressed in order for the objectives of this Strategy to be met. With future Member involvement the Group will be working proactively to oversee the work and delivery of the Action Plan.

## Housing Associations

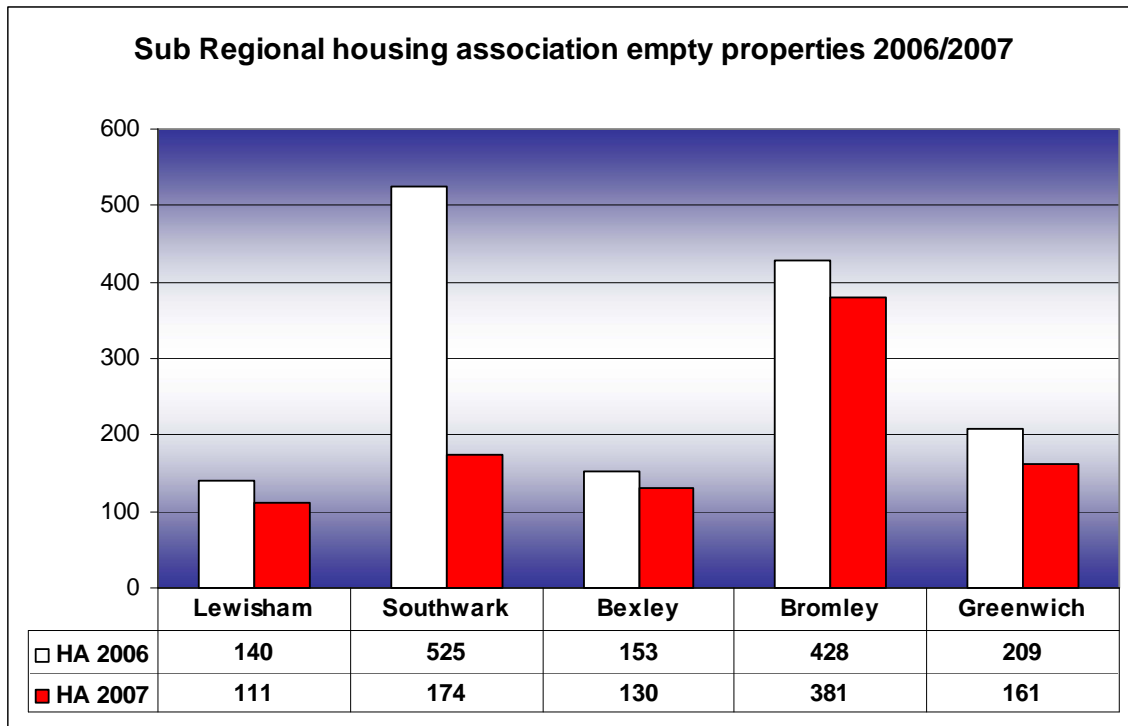


Figure 8. Housing Associations Empty properties data across the sub region

Housing association figures for empty properties within the Borough have risen mainly due to the regeneration and development of some of the stock that is either difficult to let or not viable to carry out the works necessary to meet the Decent Homes Standard. For example, Broomleigh, the largest stockholding housing association within the borough, have been decanting blocks in the Crays pending regeneration. However, the economic downturn and particularly the effect on reducing the value of market sale housing that would have formed part of these regeneration projects has impacted on the ability to complete the regeneration of the schemes in the planned timescale. The Council and Housing Associations are working closely to make an interim use of the stock whilst alternative avenues are explored to proceed with the regeneration.

## 8. The way forward

Bromley is an area of growing housing need. This Empty Property Strategy sets out the number of opportunities which exist to help owners bring their properties into use whether voluntarily or involuntarily to help to meet this need. In promoting these opportunities, the Council and its partners aim to make the best use of the existing housing stock.

As the impact of the current economic downturn is felt in the wider housing market, it brings challenges which jeopardise the delivery of the national, regional and local Empty Property Strategy action plans. The Council is mindful that issues such as affordability will impact significantly on achieving the set targets as owners struggle to rent, sell or renovate properties. Mortgage repossessions leading to evictions could lead to a rise in housing register figures and an increase in the demand for social housing. New housing developments subsequently lay empty as housing associations find themselves in a spiral of financial uncertainty. The Council will continue to be innovative to deal with these situations, seeking assistance from the government and other bodies to survive this economic downturn.

This strategy is therefore very realistic in setting short term goals which can be achieved and aims to deliver against these using the available resources. We will continue to work within the sub-region and take every opportunity that exists to ensure that the Borough maximises its potential to bring long term empty properties back into use.

This draft strategy will be distributed for consultation to colleagues and partner agencies for their views and comments to ensure that it is robust enough to meet its strategic objectives and ensure that the outcomes are deliverable.



Figure 9: Property in Bromley centre, now demolished following threat of CPO action

Draft Empty Property Strategy 2009-11

## Empty Property Strategy 2009 -2011 Glossary

<b>Sustainable Communities Strategy - Building A Better Bromley 2020 Vision (BBB)</b>	The London Borough of Bromley's medium-term plan, which sets out priorities for the Borough in accordance with the Council's stated purpose to enhance quality of life in the Borough, and the Council's vision that Bromley remains the place where people wish to live and do business.
<b>Empty Property</b>	An empty property is one that has been left empty for a period of more than 6 months.
<b>Empty Homes Agency</b>	The Empty Homes Agency as an independent charity which aims to raise awareness of the potential of empty homes in England to meet housing need and devise and promote, with others, sustainable solutions that will bring empty homes back into use.
<b>Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)</b>	An Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) is a procedure that allows a local council to take over the responsibility of managing a property and for ensuring it is occupied. There are a number of important safeguards to ensure that the property rights of owners are respected.
<b>Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)</b>	Local authorities and government agencies in England have powers under various acts of parliament, to buy land that is not necessarily for sale by the owner. These are called 'compulsory purchase' powers and are important for local authorities and other public bodies to use in order to buy land that is needed to help deliver social and economic changes.
<b>London Mayor's Housing Strategy</b>	The GLA Act 2007 gives the Mayor responsibility for producing London's housing strategy. The draft for public consultation was published on 21 May 2009.
<b>Greater London Authority (GLA)</b>	The GLA has responsibility for transport, policing, fire and emergency planning, economic development, planning, culture and environment at a London-wide level. It is made up of a directly elected Mayor and an Assembly of elected members.
<b>Homes And Communities Agency</b>	The Homes and Communities Agency is the national housing and regeneration delivery agency for England creating thriving communities and affordable homes
<b>Sub Region And South East London Housing Partnership (SELHP)</b>	The Partnership is made up of the boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lewisham and Southwark and includes the Housing Corporation, London Councils (formerly known as the Association of London Government) and our housing association partners.
<b>London Housing Board</b>	The London Housing Board is responsible for producing the London Regional Housing Strategy. The Board comprises Government Office for London, Greater London Authority, Housing Corporation, London Councils, London Development Agency and English Partnerships.



<b>Residential Property Tribunal</b>	The Residential Property Tribunal Service is the public body that can decide many rent and leasehold disputes.
<b>Tenancy Protection Scheme</b>	<p>From 6 April 2007, all deposits taken by landlords for what is called Assured Shorthold Tenancies – the vast majority of tenancies in England and Wales, must be protected by a tenancy deposit protection scheme.</p> <p>To avoid disputes going to court, each scheme will be supported by an alternative dispute resolution service (ADR), whose aim is to make disputes faster and cheaper to resolve.</p>
<b>Decent Homes Standard</b>	The national minimum standard of decency that all social landlords should aim to meet by 2010. This also applies to homes occupied by vulnerable households in the private sector. A decent home must meet the minimum statutory standard for housing; be in a reasonable condition of repair; have fairly modern facilities and services; and provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.
<b>Registered Social Landlord (RSL)</b>	Social landlords, (mostly Housing Associations) who are registered with the Housing Corporation and therefore eligible for funding from them.

# Empty Property Strategy

ACTION PLAN 2009 – 2011

	Action	lead	timescale	progress report
1	A mapping exercise across the Empty Property Working group to develop terms of reference and establish clearly identified roles for each member of the group and increase frequency of meetings.	Empty Property Officer Residential Services	October 2009	
2	Bring long term empty properties back into use in 2009/2011 with target of 30 units per annum including grants and loans.	Empty Property Officer Residential Services	per annum	
3	Mail shot at least once a year, to all owners of properties empty for over 1 year, providing information, advice and options on grants, loans, enforcement, bringing properties back into use.	Empty Property Officer Residential Services	per annum	
4	Continue to manage and operate an effective grant and loan scheme (subject to available funding) and reporting outcomes.	Empty Property Officer Residential Services	On going	
5	In partnership with Legal Services and Residential Services Grants Surveyors and Admin, operate a grant and loan scheme linked to nomination rights using SELHP funding and reporting outcomes.	Empty Property Officer Residential Services	On going	
6	Working with SELHP to realistically determine and implement local empty property audit requirements once final information is confirmed by the GLA.	Empty Property Officer Residential Services Surveyors and EHO's	TBC	

# Empty Property Strategy

ACTION PLAN 2009 – 2011

7	Provide a list of reliable and competent builders/contractors to empty home owners-subject to demand.	Trading Standards and Residential Services Grants Team	Dec 2009	
8	Assist enquirers about specific empty properties by forwarding letters or expressions of interest to known owners.	Empty Property Officer Residential Services	On going	
9	Provide advice to owners of businesses with empty living accommodation in High Streets/shopping area. Provide advice to businesses about use of flats over shops. Improve links with Director of Regeneration.	Empty Property Officer Residential Services Town Centre Managers	On going	
10	Put in place management arrangements for utilising Empty Dwelling Management Orders. Use EDMO's subject to council policies and member agreement.	Empty Property Officer Residential Services, Surveyors from Residential Services Grants team and Legal Services	April 2010	
11	Make links to other SELHP working groups for advice relevant to empty properties, e.g. Landlord advice literature.	South East London Housing Partnership Co-ordinator	April 2010	
12	Use Compulsory Purchase Orders in line with Council policies and procedures, subject to Member decision	Empty Property Officer Residential Services Valuation and Estates and Legal Services	On going	

# Empty Property Strategy

ACTION PLAN 2009 – 2011

13	Partnership work with agents, to assist owners by giving advice on reputable companies and how to let or sell properties, such as an estate agent. Contact local estate agents and bring them on board with Corporate Empty property working groups and arrange meeting.	Housing Initiatives Team	July 2010	
14	At all points of contact with the Council owners are able to access information about how to bring their property back into use. (website, call centres, landlords days, landlord forums, receptions, Council tax, Town Centre managers etc).	Empty Property Officer Residential Services	TBC	
15	Working with housing associations and letting agents to reduce the amount of long term empty properties within the Borough and the time that properties remain empty.	Empty Property Officer Residential Services	On going	
16	Working with the HCA to determine Borough's position in relation to purchase and repair of empty properties by HA's as per final draft of LMHS	Head of Housing Development & Strategy	TBC	
17	Improve the accuracy and collection of information about empty properties within the Borough			

2009-11

