

**Decision Maker:** **RENEWAL, RECREATION AND HOUSING POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Date:** **Wednesday 31 January 2024**

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent                      Non-Executive                      Non-Key

**Title:** **EMPTY HOMES IN BROMLEY**

**Contact Officer:** Alicia Egan, Head of Regeneration  
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**Chief Officer:** Director of Housing, Planning, Property and Regeneration

**Ward:** All Wards

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1. Reason for decision/report and options

- 1.1 This paper provides an update on the management of Empty Homes, including the work streams that will be progressed and details of the team that will take this forward.
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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 This report is for information only.

## Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: Improve to use of properties in the Borough
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## Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy
  2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority (*delete as appropriate*):
    - (1) For children and young people to grow up, thrive and have the best life chances in families who flourish and are happy to call Bromley home.
    - (2) For adults and older people to enjoy fulfilled and successful lives in Bromley, ageing well, retaining independence and making choices.
    - (3) For people to make their homes in Bromley and for business, enterprise and the third sector to prosper.
    - (4) For residents to live responsibly and prosper in a safe, clean and green environment great for today and a sustainable future.
    - (5) To manage our resources well, providing value for money, and efficient and effective services for Bromley's residents.
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## Financial

1. Cost of proposal: No Cost
  2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
  3. Budget head/performance centre: Regeneration
  4. Total current budget for this head: £0
  5. Source of funding: N/A
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## Personnel

1. Number of staff (*current and additional*): 1
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: 18hrs
- 

## Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-Statutory - Government Guidance
  2. Call-in: Not Applicable – Information Briefing
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## Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: n/a
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## Property

1. Summary of Property Implications: n/a
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## Carbon Reduction and Social Value

1. Summary of Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications: n/a
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## Impact on the Local Economy

1. Summary of Local Economy Implications: See report
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## Impact on Health and Wellbeing

1. Summary of Health and Wellbeing Implications: see report
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## Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (*current and projected*): see report
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## Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: n/a

### **3. COMMENTARY**

- 3.1. Latest government data shows that there are 238,000 homes in England that have been empty for over six months. In total it is estimated that over 600,000 homes are currently vacant. This excludes holiday lets, as well as second homes. In Bromley there are currently reported to be 2149 homes registered as vacant.
- 3.2. There can be a variety of reasons why properties are left empty, these can be very genuine reasons, such as the death of the homeowner, and the property is left in testate; homeowners moving into care or older persons accommodation; properties being prepared for sale or redevelopment; to more recent occurrences of essential building works requirements such as cladding issues being managed.
- 3.3. However, whilst there may be genuine reasons for properties being empty, there will be others that are empty as a result of lack of interest from owners, or simply not knowing what to do with properties particularly if they are in disrepair. What is evident, is that bringing empty homes back into use can help to meet with the increasing demand for housing, but it also helps to revive and revitalise town centres. Empty homes can often attract anti-social behaviour, vandalism and be a blight on areas. The Council has previously managed an Empty Homes Programme. This Programme was kick started with government funding specifically for this. Following the departure of some officers during the pandemic, and the funding upon longer being available, there has been no robust monitoring or management of Empty Homes.
- 3.4. To help tackle the increase of empty homes in Bromley, following a consultation, in April 2020 the Council introduced the Council Tax Premium (see Report No FSD19063 Executive August 2019). This means properties that remain empty for 2-5 years now pay a further 100% of the Council Tax charge; those that remain empty from 5-10 years pay a 200% premium and those empty for 10 years or more, a 300% premium is charged. It was anticipated that this would be a deterrent on owners holding onto properties unnecessarily. Whilst the charging only came into effect in April, so far records indicate that at least 70% of owners are paying the increased charge, and this is therefore potentially not the deterrent that was hoped would release more homes into the market.
- 3.5. In the meantime, Bromley like so many other areas continue to face unprecedented challenges of insufficient housing. Given the above, a new Empty Homes Programme is now being coordinated. The most successful empty homes programmes have been delivered where the council can work with house owners to deliver much needed works to bringing the houses to a Decent Homes Standard, apply a charge on the property for doing this and take possession of the property for a set period for rental. Given the Regeneration team have the skills and expertise to manage such works, the Empty Homes Programme has been moved to the Regeneration Team to commence coordination of this piece of work.

#### **Managing Empty Homes**

- 3.6. An Empty Homes Project Board has been established, and this is attended by the following departments, Regeneration, Finance, Exchequer Services (Council Tax), Housing, and Legal Services. The main purpose of the Board at this early stage is to identify Empty Homes, liaise with Owners and identify workstreams to support the use of the homes.
- 3.7. Whenever possible Local Authorities should improve housing standards through general guidance, and support to landlords, this could be facilitating discussions with care providers where properties are to be sold, directing to estate agents for sale etc. However, where landlords are less cooperative, Local Authorities have legal powers to support and manage Empty Homes. It will be for this Project Board over the next 6 months to identify the required

workstreams to bring as many Empty Homes back into use as possible, with recommendations to the Executive for legal actions where and if required.

- 3.8. Over the next quarter the team will be collating the detailed data needed to inform and support the Empty Homes Programme, this will be locating property owners of Empty Properties, writing to them to ascertain the reasons for the property being empty and setting out the implications of the Empty Home Premium, as well as finding out what support would help reactivate the house into a home. The team will then consider businesses cases together with Finance colleagues, on how to take forward the Empty Homes Programme, and whether there is a business case for investment into Empty Homes, that deliver quality homes for those in need of housing, unlocking revenue savings of costly nightly paid accommodation for the Council, or whether there is a business case for the acquisition of Empty Homes, making use of the recently announced Council Homes Acquisition Programme (CHAP) by the GLA. It is also worth noting that in the Government settlement the Council receives a new home bonus which is in part made up of how many empty homes the Council has successfully bought back into use.
- 3.9. Following this detailed data collection, a report will be bought back to Committee for recommendations related to the ongoing management of Empty Homes in summer 2024.

#### **4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN**

- 4.1. Supporting the availability of more homes in Bromley will support vulnerable adults and children in the Borough, increase availability of properties and standards of properties available.

#### **5. TRANSFORMATION/POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. Improving the quality and number of properties available in the Borough impacts on Building an Even Better Bromley Transformation Policy.

#### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. There are no direct financial implications in this report.

#### **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. There are no direct personnel implications at this stage, and the data collection and monitoring report will be managed and coordinated with the existing staffing team. Any further plans for Empty Homes will be costed included staffing.

#### **8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Housing Act 2004 allows and gives power to Local Authorities to take out an empty dwelling management order("EDMO") to ensure that empty properties are used for housing .
- 8.2 Furthermore Local Authorities have a range of powers and incentives at their disposal to bring empty homes back into use, including amongst others, the power referred to at 8.1 above, council tax exemptions and premiums, enforced sales, compulsory purchase, and measures to secure the improvement of empty properties.

#### **9. PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 These will be considered over the course of the works.

## **10. CARBON REDUCTION/SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1. These will be considered as part of any works that may be undertaken in the future on properties.

## **11. IMPACT ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY**

11.1 This programme is designed to improve the look and feel of areas that be blighted by empty and rundown buildings, including commercial spaces and will therefore have a positive impact on the Local Economy as buildings re bought back into use.

## **12. IMPACT ON HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

12.1 Improving housing is linked to having a direct positive impact on health and wellbeing

## **13. CUSTOMER IMPACT**

13.1 it is hoped that this will programme will be a supportive programme for customers and residents with empty homes in the Borough and who could find themselves paying the Empty Homes Premium as well as sourcing new homes for those most in need.

<b>Non-Applicable Headings:</b>	Procurement Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Empty Homes Premium executive August 2019 (Report No. FSD19063)

**Empty Homes Data (as of December 2023)**

According to the Council Tax system there were 2149 recorded at Empty

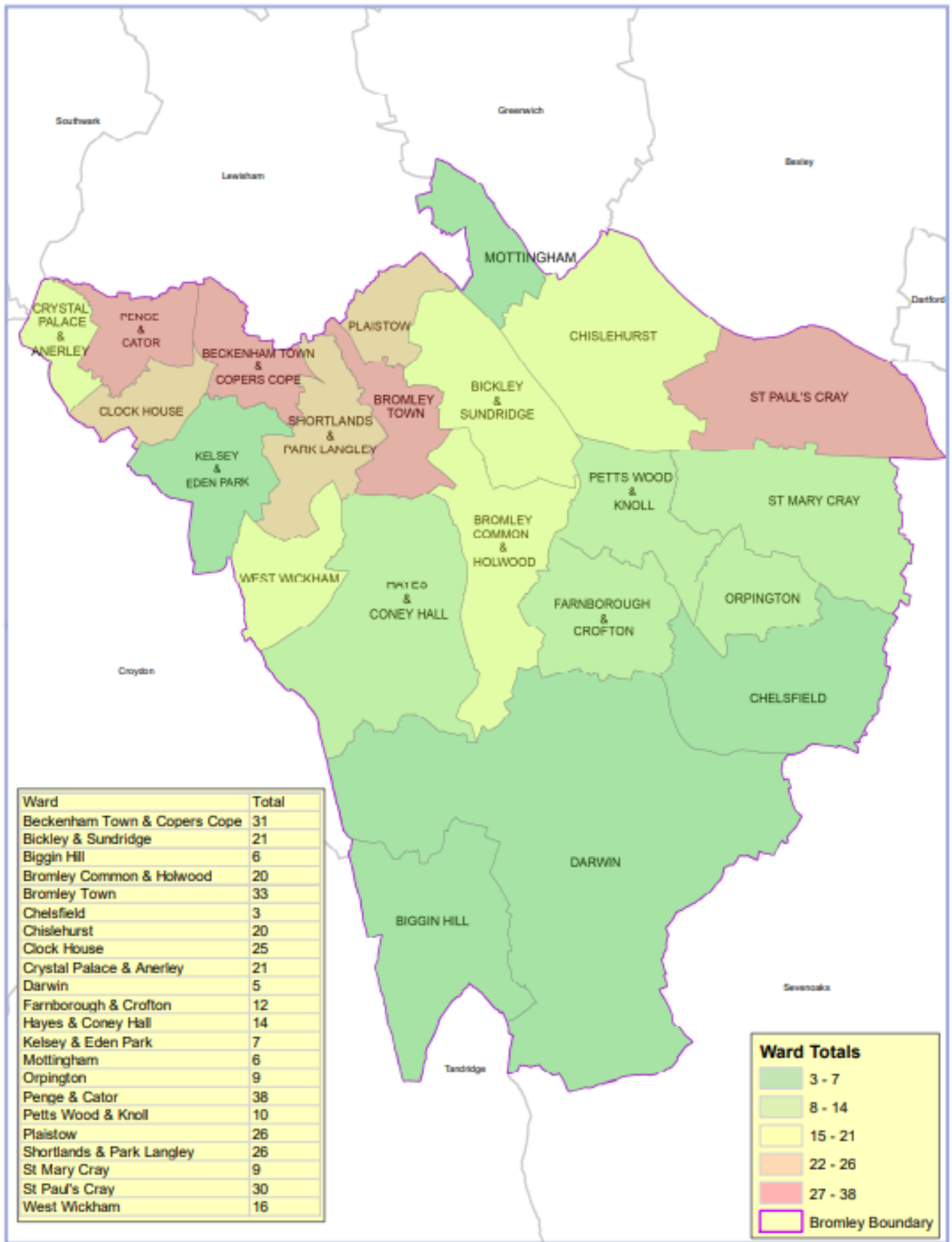
It should be noted that many of these will relate to accounts awaiting probate and sale.

Of the 2149 Empty:

<b>Band</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Income Generated</b>
Number of properties to which an EHP is being applied	12	51	162	87	37	21	15	3	388	
Number of properties Empty between 2 and 5 years (100% premium)	10	37	124	51	31	16	11	1	281	
Number of properties Empty between 5 and 10 years (200% premium)	2	9	28	25	4	2	3	1	74	
Number of properties empty over 10 years (300% premium)	0	5	10	11	2	3	1	1	33	

# Empty Homes - Ward Totals

17 Jan 2024



0 1,450 2,900 5,800 8,700 11,500 Meters 1:61,581

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