

## **Health, Housing and Adult Services Empty Property Action Plan 2011-2012**

### **REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP2: Healthy City; SP3: Safe City; SP5:  
Attractive and Inclusive City**

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1 Customer focused services; CIO2 One  
Council; CIO3 Efficient and effective council; CIO4 Improving  
partnership working**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To brief the Committee on the Empty Property Action Plan 2011-2012 in advance of its consideration by Cabinet. A detailed report will be submitted in advance of the Scrutiny Committee meeting.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In July 2011, each Area Committee considered the Action Plan relevant to that area of the city and gave feedback accordingly.
- 2.2 At its last meeting on 26 July 2011, the Scrutiny Committee requested further information on the Empty Properties Plan, scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 5 October 2011.

#### **3. CURRENT POSITION**

- 3.1 This is the first Empty Property Action Plan and will serve as a tool to ensure that communities are sustainable at a local level. Additionally, at a local level, it ensures early intervention prevents residential empty properties causing problems to neighbourhoods and provides local people with local homes.
- 3.2 Local Area Plans (LAPS) (2009 – 2011) have been developed to assist the Council in tackling some of the priorities and ongoing issues in each of the regeneration areas. A key priority in each of these areas is the return of empty properties back into occupation and this priority is included in the LAP action plans for each of the five areas. Local Area Plans are currently being refreshed.
- 3.3 The Sunderland Housing Priorities Plan (SHPP) has been developed by Sunderland City Council working in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to create sustainable places and communities.

- 3.4 There are six overarching strategic priorities for Sunderland identified within the Sunderland Housing Priorities Plan SHPP; one of which is directly related to bringing empty properties back into residential use, which is: to improve the existing housing stock by accelerating housing market renewal – including block improvement schemes, demolitions, reducing the numbers of empty properties and effective licensing of landlords. One of the main housing priorities, therefore, within the SHPP is: working with owners to invest in empty properties and bring them back into use and to consider different models of investment in the private rented sector.
- 3.5 Consequently, the document sets out local empty property action plans for each area. It is to be read in association with both the Empty Property Strategy (2007 – 2011) and the Local Area Plans (2009 – 2011) and the Sunderland Housing Priorities Plan SHPP.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1 The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the Empty Properties Action Plan 2011-12 in advance of it being considered by Cabinet.

#### **5. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Forward Plan: Key Decisions from – 01 September 2011 to 31 December 2011; and
- Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee Agenda and Minutes, 26 July 2011.

---

**Contact Officer: Alan Caddick, Head of Strategic Housing (0191 566 1711)**  
**Alan.caddick@sunderland.gov.uk**

# Health, Housing and Adult Services Empty Property Action Plan 2011-2012

## CONTENTS:

Introduction and Context.....	2
Methodology .....	3
Aims and Objectives .....	5
Sunderland North .....	7
Sunderland East.....	11
Sunderland West.....	15
Coalfield.....	17
Washington.....	20
Conclusion.....	22
Appendix 1:.....	24
Appendix 2: Reference .....	26
Appendix 3: Case Studies .....	23

## Introduction and Context

Sunderland City Council has always been proactive in working with its partners to bring empty properties back into occupation. To this end the Council has produced its second Empty Property Strategy (2007 – 2011) which serves as a tool to ensure that communities are sustainable at a strategic level. Additionally, at a local level, it ensures early intervention prevents residential empty properties causing problems to neighbourhoods and provides local people with local homes.

Local Area Plans (LAPS) (2009 – 2011) have been developed to assist the Council in tackling some of the priorities and ongoing issues in each of the following areas:

- Sunderland North
- Sunderland East
- Sunderland West
- Coalfield and
- Washington

A key priority in each of these areas is the return of empty properties back into occupation and this priority is included in the LAP action plans for each of the five areas. Local Area Plans are currently being refreshed.

The Sunderland Housing Priorities Plan (SHPP) has been developed by Sunderland City Council working in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to create sustainable places and communities.

There are six overarching strategic priorities for Sunderland identified within the Sunderland Housing Priorities Plan SHPP; one of which is directly related to bringing empty properties back into residential use, which is: to improve the existing housing stock by accelerating housing market renewal – including block improvement schemes, demolitions, reducing the numbers of empty properties and effective licensing of landlords. One of the main housing priorities, therefore, within the SHPP is: working with owners to invest in empty properties and bring them back into use and to consider different models of investment in the private rented sector.

Consequently, this document sets out local empty property action plans for each area. It is to be read in association with both the Empty Property Strategy (2007 – 2011) and the Local Area Plans (2009 – 2011) and the Sunderland Housing Priorities Plan SHPP.

The success of the Empty Property Strategy can be measured as follows:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Reoccupied</b>	<b>Demolished</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Target</b>
2007-2008	240	8	248	200
2008 - 2009	329	77	406	369
2009 - 2010	291	49	340	375
2010 - 2011	376	0	376	355

The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review sets out £100m that the Government is investing to support housing associations to refurbish over 3,000 empty properties across the country. The Council is currently working with Gentoo on a proposed pilot project to identify, refurbish and let 10 empty properties each year until 2014. Young unemployed people will be used along side contractors to refurbish selected empty properties. The young people will also have the opportunity to be rehoused with Gentoo and gain a recognised qualification. Once refurbished Gentoo will lease the property from the owner for a five year period and act as managing agent for the owner. In the first year of the project, the owner will receive rent but in later years, the owner will receive part rent with the other part being recycled back into the project. A proposal has been submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency by Gentoo the outcome of which is expected in September 2011. Officers are currently investigating a number of problematic empty properties across the City, focusing on renewal areas and areas where there are large numbers of empty properties, which could be refurbished as part of a pilot project in 2011/12. If this project is successful, this will be added to the relevant local action plans.

The Government's New Homes Bonus also proposes that it will match fund the additional council tax raised by councils for bringing long term empty properties back into use. The number of empty properties (according to Government and Council Tax definitions) will be measured in October of each year. Any decreases in empty properties from one year to the next will be rewarded through the New Homes Bonus. The definition also includes empty Social Housing Registered Social Landlord properties in the City.

It was announced in January 2011, that the Government will use secondary legislation to introduce new constraints relating to Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs). The constraints allow local authorities to utilise EDMOs only if a property has been empty for two years and is attracting vandalism and anti social behaviour. This will be closely monitored as part of this project.

### **Methodology**

The development of this empty property action plan is also part of a series of directorate projects and has been monitored by the directorate Change Team. Currently, the project does not include empty commercial properties but the most effective way to bring commercial empty properties back to use will be explored with partners within the Council.

In order to deliver the action plans, dedicated empty property officers have been successfully appointed to each of the five geographical areas. By adopting an area approach, officers can tailor their approach to suit the needs of the locality. Officers are now introducing innovative solutions to bring empty properties back into use in line with the community's needs and working proactively in tackling problematic and long

term empty properties in each area of the city. Dealing with more problematic, long term empty properties in the city is a priority for local people, however, this can be very time consuming and has an impact on targets.

Officers will work together with owners of empty properties, and both internal partners (such as Planning Enforcement, Adult Services and the Housing Options Team) and external agencies to ensure the property is brought back into occupation or to prevent them from becoming empty in the first place. The solution to empty properties lies often in a partnership approach. Officers will also undertake inspections as necessary to ensure that the property meets the Decent Homes Standard.

The action plan will help contribute towards the Council's values: proud, decent and together in the way we treat our customers and work in partnership to achieve the community's needs. The following action plans have also drawn on good practice from other Local Authorities which are listed in Appendix 2.

At April 2011 the numbers of empty properties across each of the local areas and across the City as a whole are set out in Appendix 1. The statistics and analysis below are based on the figures from April 2011. The proportion of Private Sector Stock empty is as a percentage in each ward area.

## Aims and Objectives:

The Empty Property Service aims to:

‘Provide a proactive and innovative approach to the reduction in the number of empty properties in Sunderland to assist in the creation of sustainable communities in all neighbourhoods’.

This will be achieved by:

1. Developing a comprehensive and locality based empty property service which raises awareness of empty homes issues.
2. Using a preventative and innovative approach to reoccupy empty properties.
3. Ensuring reoccupied properties are sustainable within their neighbourhoods.
4. Responding to the needs and requirements of property owners, partners and neighbourhoods.
5. Involving a range of partners and individuals to encourage action and make best use of limited resources.

Throughout 2011-2012, the Empty Property service will prioritise the following across Sunderland:

1. Strive to reduce the number of empty properties across Sunderland to the city average of 2.47% as at the end of April 2011.
2. Reoccupy 360 empty properties across Sunderland with internal and external partners, focusing on 200 empty properties within wards where empty properties are higher than the city average as at the end of April 2011 and working within the context of the New Homes Bonus.
3. Reduce homelessness across the City.
4. Promote the Landlord accreditation scheme.
5. Look to target the worst hot spot areas as a first priority, especially in wards where empty properties are higher than the city average as at the end of April 2011.
6. To work closely with Officers in Environmental Services to explore the most effective way of bringing empty commercial premises back into use.
7. To work closely with partners to explore the effect and impact of the New Homes Bonus on empty properties.

Benefits of introducing the Empty Property Action Plan are:

<b>Customer Benefits</b>	<b>Council Benefit</b>
Empty property returned into occupation.	Attract payment of New Homes Bonus.
Reduction in empty properties being targeted.	Reduction in number of requests for service regarding empty properties.
More homes available for homeless families.	Reduction in costs of works in default.

## Sunderland North

### Background information:

Sunderland North covers the wards of Castle, Fulwell, Redhill, Southwick and St. Peter's.

### Private Empty Properties at April 2011:

Total		Empty for or between 1-2 years		Empty for five years or more	
No.	Proportion of Private Sector Stock Empty (H18)	No.	% Area	No.	% Area
427	2.33%	262	61.3%	62	14.5%

### Top 3 Types of Empty Properties in the North:

Type	No.	% Area
Semi detached	107	25%
Flats or maisonettes	130	30%
Terraced properties	85	19%

There is no one type of housing where empty properties are disproportionately represented. However, it should be noted that 119 terraced properties were demolished by the Council to make way for the new Castletown Saint Catherine's housing development as part of its renewal strategy. Phase 2 of the project is yet to be decided and depends on funding from the HCA.

Additionally, Gentoo has demolished 580 properties in Southwick, Carley Hill, Marley Potts, Castletown and Downhill. There are an additional 6 demolitions at Marley Pots, 34 at Castletown and 208 at Hahnemann Court, Southwick to be cleared late August early September 2011.

### Empty Properties per Ward:

Ward	No.	% Area	% City
Castle	45	10.5	1.53
Fulwell	86	20	1.77
Redhill	45	10.5	1.67
Southwick	95	22	2.90
St Peters	156	37	3.45

Southwick and St Peter's ward have a higher percentage of empty properties than the City Average. Initial research has shown that the empty properties in St Peter's are not linked to student accommodation and the empty properties in Southwick are not new build properties. Further detailed investigation is required to establish the cause of empty properties in the ward.

A block improvement scheme is ongoing in Castletown to 92 properties, with works to Sheppard Terrace, Stanley, Alder and Elizabeth Streets, Castleview and Oswald Terrace West being completed by August 2011. Of these properties, 5 are empty. Since the scheme commenced, 3 properties have become reoccupied. Properties receiving financial assistance through the scheme must not be empty for more than 12 weeks after the completion of the works or the financial assistance may be reclaimed.

**Population:**

Sunderland North has 24,622 households with almost 57,641 inhabitants. This equates to almost 21.5% of households living in the City and 20.6% of the City's population.

According to figures and categories used in the Census 2001, Sunderland North has a predominantly White Ethnic Group.

**Sunderland North Empty Property Action Plan 2011/12**

LOCALITY AIM	ACTIONS	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBILITY
Reduce the number of empty properties in all wards in the North to the current city average of 2.47%. (As at April 2011) Return 90 empty properties in the North of Sunderland back into use, of which 38 will be in St Peter's and 14 in Southwick wards.	Enforce the clause in the block improvement scheme legal agreement that properties taking part in the scheme should not allow their properties to be vacant for more than 12 weeks after the completion of the scheme or the Council's financial assistance must be repaid.	Reduce empty properties in the Block Improvement Scheme by 100%.	December 2011	Private Sector Housing Officer (PSHO) Environmental Health Officer (EHO) Owners
	Match empty properties with residents on the homeless register. <b>Ensure that support is given to tenants where required to ensure that the tenancy is sustainable.</b>	Reduce Homelessness by 5% citywide.	March 2012	PSHO/Housing Options Team (HOT)
	Bring empty Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) back into use and license them as appropriate.	Reduce empty HMOs by 5% in the North.	March 2012	Empty Property Officer and PSHO Building Surveyors Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) Owners
	Investigate the cause of empty properties in the St. Peter's and Southwick wards and tackle these issues in partnership with the university and identified local partners.	Reduce empty properties by 20% across St Peters, Fulwell and Southwick.	March 2012	PHSO. Sunderland University Local and Voluntary Sector

<p>To work innovatively and preventively to ensure that the number of empty properties are minimised.</p>	<p>To market a range of financial assistance products to make the new build housing affordable in Castletown.</p> <p><b>Work with local registered landlords and residents groups to find potential tenants for empty properties.</b></p> <p><b>To visit local schools in partnership with Northumbria Fire Brigade, to raise awareness of dangers of entering empty properties.</b></p> <p><b>To enhance links with local Estate/Lettings Agents and promote partnership working to ensure any issues with empty properties are quickly resolved.</b></p> <p><b>To Continue with positive news stories, publicising role of empty property team.</b></p>	<p>50% of new builds in Castletown not seen as a long term empty property</p>	<p>March 2012</p>	<p>Gentoo PSHO Area Renewal Co-ordinator (ARC)</p>
<p>New homes are not registered as empty</p>	<p>Ensure new builds at Castletown do not remain empty for longer than six months by actively engaging with Gentoo to promote affordable housing.</p>	<p>50% of new builds in Castletown not registered as a long term empty property.</p>	<p>March 2012</p>	<p>Gentoo PSHO</p>
	<p>Undertake proactive visits and external inspections to all properties empty for over one year, with particular focus on the St Peter's and Southwick wards.</p>	<p>Daily/monthly inspections completed by officer. All wards below current city average.</p>	<p>March 2012</p>	<p>PHSO Council Tax Section Planning Enforcement Section</p>
	<p>Develop a tool to risk assess, identify and prioritise problematic empty properties</p>	<p>Tool established and implemented</p> <p>Problematic empty properties identified</p>	<p>June 2011</p>	<p>Empty Property Officer and PSHO</p>
	<p>Prioritise identified problematic empty properties to ensure re-occupation, and where appropriate use the additional tools provided by the Housing Act 2004 to tackle problems within the private sector, with particular focus on the St Peter's and Southwick wards.</p>	<p>50% of empty problematic properties brought back to use</p>	<p>March 2012</p>	<p>EPO, PSHO, owners, Adult Services – Care.</p>
	<p>Get breakdown of empty properties by New Homes Bonus definition and identify location and any trends. Prioritise which properties to focus resources on.</p>	<p>Monthly locality report Increased New Homes Bonus returns</p>	<p>June 2011</p>	<p>Housing Analysis Officer (HAO), and EPO.</p>

## Sunderland East

### Background information:

Sunderland East covers the wards of Doxford, Hendon, Millfield, Ryhope and St. Michael's

### Empty Properties at April 2011:

Total		Empty for or between 1-2 years		Empty for five years or more	
No.	Proportion of Private Sector Stock Empty (H18%)	No.	% Area	No.	% Area
764	3.82	439	57.4	100	13%

### Top 3 Types of empty properties in the East:

Type	No.	% Area
Semi detached	82	10%
Flats or maisonettes	322	42%
Terraced properties	286	37%

Hendon, Millfield, and St Michael's wards have a higher percentage of empty properties than the City Average. The majority of empty properties (257/33%) have been empty for 6 months to a year but a high proportion 100 (13%) have been empty for five years or more. This is especially prevalent in the Millfield area.

A number of the empty flats include new apartments, many of which have been bought for investment purposes.

Examining the age of empty properties, by far the highest proportion is in pre 1919 properties (520/68%). These properties are prevalent in Hendon and Millfield wards where there is a higher percentage of older properties, many of which have been converted into flats or Houses in Multiple Occupation.

### Empty Properties per ward:

Ward	No.	% Area	City %
Doxford	47	7	1.43
Hendon	288	37.5	6.74
Millfield	181	23.5	4.25
Ryhope	82	10.5	2.40
St Michael's	166	21.5	3.47

Twenty seven pre 1919 terraced properties in the Salem Street Area of Hendon are awaiting demolition as part of Back on the Map's and the Council's renewal programme in the area. Demolitions are scheduled to take place between 2011/2013.

This demolition programme will assemble land (to join with the land at the former Amberley and Harrogate Streets) for a new build housing development (100 dwellings) of mainly houses for sale and a limited amount for rent when the housing market is more favourable.

It should be noted that Gentoo is progressing with their demolition programme at Doxford Park. The new build site consists of 286 new homes and all properties are allocated. There are 5 private properties still to acquire at Ryhope village by Gentoo as part of its renewal programme and the new build has not yet commenced. No date has been finalised as yet.

A selective licensing scheme was successfully introduced into the middle Hendon and “Long Streets” area of Hendon in July 2010. The aim of the scheme is to raise the standards in the private rented sector. An empty property officer has been employed to proactively tackle empty properties in Hendon and the East End. The officer is currently tackling more problematic, long term empty properties in the selective licensing area which are the most complex and time consuming. Other empty properties can have a quick turn around and this would help achieve the overall target, however, it would not tackle the most persistent problematic empty properties that can prove detrimental to the neighbourhood. A balance has to be arrived at to try and hit targets and the New Homes Bonus properties while also tackling the real issues empty properties cause.

**Population:**

Sunderland East has 58,744 residents, 21% of the City’s population. According to figures and categories used in the Census 2001, Sunderland East has a higher population of minority groups i.e. mixed, Asian or Asian British, black or black British and Chinese or other categories than city averages 4.9% or 2,878 people compared to a city average of 1.8%.

**Sunderland East Empty Property Action Plan 2011/12**

LOCALITY AIM	ACTIONS	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBILITY
Reduce the number of empty properties in the East to the current city average of 2.47%. (As at April 2011) Return 110 empty properties in Sunderland East back into use of which 18 will be in the Millfield, 50 Hendon and 12 St Michael’s wards.	Match empty properties with residents on the homeless register. <b>Ensure that support is given to tenants where required to ensure that the tenancy is sustainable.</b>	Reduce Homelessness by 5% citywide	March 2012	EPO, EPA and HOT
	Introduce a selective licensing scheme for the private rented sector within the Hendon, to enable further partnership with landlords. <b>To investigate possibility of re commencing the Good Tenants Scheme.</b>	100% of targeted Empty Properties meet the decent home standard	March 2012	NM and EPA (Hendon).
	Bring empty Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) back into use and license them as appropriate.	Reduce empty HMOs by 5% in the East	March 2012	EPO, EPA (NM). BS and EHOs

<p>To work innovatively and preventively to ensure that the number of potential future empty properties is minimised.</p>	<p>Ensure new builds at Doxford do not remain empty for longer than six months by actively engaging with Gentoo to promote affordable housing.</p> <p><b>Work with local registered landlords and residents groups to find potential tenants for empty properties</b></p> <p><b>To visit local schools in partnership with Northumbria Fire Brigade, to raise awareness of dangers of entering empty properties.</b></p> <p><b>To enhance links with local Estate/Lettings Agents and promote partnership working to ensure any issues with empty properties are quickly resolved.</b></p> <p><b>To Continue with positive news stories, publicising role of empty property team.</b></p>	<p>50% of new builds in Doxford not seen as a long term empty property</p>	<p>March 2012</p>	<p>Gentoo, EPO and EPA</p>
<p>New homes are not registered at empty; providing greater housing choice.</p>	<p>Actively engage landlords and owners from the city centre development to occupy the long term empty flats/maisonettes.</p>	<p>5 % of flats/maisonettes are brought back to use in the city centre</p>	<p>December 2011</p>	<p>Planning Policy , Housing Analysis Officer (HAO), owners and EPA (Hendon)</p>
	<p>Encourage landlords/ owners of empty properties that have been unoccupied for over 5 years in the Millfield area to bring them back to use.</p>	<p>5%. of long term empty properties in Millfield brought back to use</p>	<p>December 2011</p>	<p>EPO, owners and Voluntary Sector</p>
	<p>Undertake proactive visits and external inspections to all properties empty for over one year, with particular focus on Millfield, and St Michael's wards.</p>	<p>Daily/monthly inspections completed by officer. All wards to be reduced to the current city average.</p>	<p>March 2012</p>	<p>EPO/EPA Council Tax Section Planning Enforcement Team</p>
	<p>Develop a tool to risk assess, identify and prioritise problematic empty properties.</p>	<p>Tool established and implemented</p> <p>Problematic empty properties identified</p>	<p>June 2011</p>	<p>EPO and EPA</p>
	<p>Prioritise identified problematic empty properties to ensure re-occupation, and where appropriate use the additional tools provided by the Housing Act 2004 to tackle problems within the private sector, with particular focus on Millfield and St Michael's wards.</p>	<p>50% of empty problematic properties brought back to use</p>	<p>March 2012</p>	<p>EPO, EPA, Adult Services (Care)</p>
	<p>Get breakdown of empty properties by New Homes Bonus definition and identify location and any trends. Prioritise which properties to focus resources on.</p>	<p>Monthly locality report Increased New Homes Bonus returns</p>	<p>June 2011</p>	<p>HAO and EPO.</p>



## Sunderland West

### Background information:

Sunderland West covers the wards of Barnes, Pallion, Sandhill, Silksworth and St. Chad's wards.

### Empty Properties at April 2011:

Total		Empty for or between 1-2 years		Empty for five years or more	
No.	Proportion of Private Sector Stock Empty (H18)%	No.	% Area	No.	% Area
415	2.11	280	66%	49	12%

### Top 3 Types of empty properties in the West:

Type	No.	% Area
Semi detached	167	40%
Flats or maisonettes	55	13.2%
Terraced properties	155	37%

Pallion Ward (see App 1) has a higher percentage of empty properties than the current City Average. Examining the age of empty properties, by far the highest proportion is in pre 1919 properties (148/36%). This is likely to be mainly in Barnes and Pallion wards where there are a higher proportion of pre 1919 properties in the private rented sector.

### Empty Properties per ward:

Ward	No.	% Area	City %
Barnes	89	21.5	2.02
Pallion	88	21.5	2.97
Sandhill	59	14.5	2.12
Silksworth	70	17	2.01
St Chad's	65	15.5	2.11
St Anne's	44	10.	1.50

Gentoo has substantially completed its demolition at Pennywell. Further demolition is required at High Ford which will be May/June 2011.

Project work is currently being undertaken in the Eden Vale area of the Barnes Ward with officers tackling empty properties, anti social behaviour, landlord accreditation and issues of disrepair until October 2011. This is in response to requests from the local community and local ward members.

## Population

West Sunderland has 67,340 residents, 24% of the City's population. According to figures and categories used in the Census 2001, the area has a predominantly White Ethnic Group.

## Sunderland West Empty Property Action Plan 2011/12

LOCALITY AIM	ACTIONS	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	TIMESCALES	RESPONSIBILITY
Reduce the number of empty properties in the West to the city average of 2.47% (As at April 2011).	Investigate the cause of empty properties in the Pallion ward and tackle these issues with local partners.	Reduce empty properties by 30%	March 2012	EPA/Sunderland Royal Hospital, University and Voluntary Sector
Return 30 empty properties in Sunderland West back into use of which 13 will be in the Pallion ward.	Match empty properties with residents on the homeless register. <b>Ensure that support is given to tenants where required to ensure that the tenancy is sustainable.</b>	Reduce Homelessness by 5% citywide	March 2012	EPO, EPA and HOT
To work innovatively and preventively to ensure that the number of potential future empty properties is minimised.	<p>Ensure new builds in the St Anne's Ward do not remain empty for longer than six months by actively engaging with Gentoo to promote affordable housing</p> <p><b>Work with local registered landlords and residents groups to find potential tenants for empty properties.</b></p> <p><b>To visit local schools in partnership with Northumbria Fire Brigade, to raise awareness of dangers of entering empty properties.</b></p> <p><b>To enhance links with local Estate/Lettings Agents and promote partnership working to ensure any issues with empty properties are quickly resolved.</b></p> <p><b>To Continue with positive news stories, publicising role of empty property team.</b></p>	50% of new builds in the St Anne's Ward not registered as a long term empty property	March 2012	Gentoo and EPA

New homes are not registered as empty; providing greater housing choice.	To inspect and liaise with all empty property owners in the Eden Vale area to return back into use.	Return 20% of the properties in Eden Vale alone back to use	October 2011	EPA, ASB officer, residents, owners Local and Voluntary Sector
	Undertake proactive visits and external inspections to all properties empty for over one year, with particular focus on the Pallion Ward.	Daily/monthly inspections completed by officer. All wards reduced to the current city average.	March 2012	EPA Council Tax Section Planning enforcement Section
	Develop a tool to risk assess, identify and prioritise problematic empty properties	Tool established and implemented  Problematic empty properties identified	June 2011	Empty Property Officer and EPA
	Prioritise identified problematic empty properties to ensure re-occupation, and where appropriate use the additional tools provided by the Housing Act 2004 to tackle problems within the private sector, with particular focus on the Pallion Ward.	50% of empty problematic properties brought back to use	March 2012	EPO, EPA, Social Services SS
	Get breakdown of empty properties by New Homes Bonus definition and identify location and any trends. Prioritise which properties to focus resources on.	Monthly locality report New Homes Bonus returns	June 2011	Housing Analysis Officer (HAO), and EPO.

## Coalfield

### Background information:

The Coalfield area covers the wards of Copt Hill, Hetton, Houghton and Shiney Row.

### Empty Properties at April 2011:

Total		Empty for or between 1-2 years		Empty for five years or more	
No.	Proportion of Private Sector Stock Empty (H18)	No.	% Area	No.	% Area
379	2.39%	234	61.7%	64	16%

### Top 3 Types of empty properties in the Coalfield:

Type	No.	% Area
Semi detached	65	17%
Flats or maisonettes	73	19%
Terraced properties	102	26%

Copthill and Hetton wards have a higher percentage of empty properties than the City Average. Coalfield ranks the second highest among the five areas. Examining the age of empty properties, by far the highest proportion is in pre 1919 properties 166 (41%).

### Empty Properties per ward:

Ward	No.	% Area	City %
Copt Hill	132	35	3.37
Hetton	101	27	2.78
Houghton	62	16	1.56
Shiney Row	84	22	1.94

Hetton Downs, within the Copt Hill ward, is a renewal area and as part of the Council's renewal strategy, 161 pre 1919 terraced properties have been demolished by the Council to assemble a site for future housing. A Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment is currently being undertaken in Maudlin Street to determine the future of the street. There are currently 7 empty properties out of 28 in the street, with 5 being owned by the Council.

It should be noted that Gentoo is continuing to demolish its properties at the Eppleton and Broomhill Estates in the Copt Hill ward and Homelands and Race Course Estates in Houghton, with 177 left to demolish including 5 owned under the right to buy scheme. The demolition of 55 properties at Broomhill, 2 at Holmlands and possibility of 33 at Racecourse should be completed in 2011/12. Gentoo has already demolished 509 properties in the last 8 years at Chilton Moor, Homelands, Central Hetton, Race Course Estate and Eppleton Estate to make way for new houses.

Project work is currently being undertaken on the Race Course Estate within the Houghton ward with officers tackling empty properties, anti social behaviour, landlord accreditation and issues of disrepair in partnership with Gentoo and the police. This is in response to concerns from local residents and ward members. The targeted co-ordinated approach has proved to be successful in other areas of the city and is currently ongoing. It is estimated that the project will cease in January 2012.

### Population

Coalfield has 47,001 residents, 16.7% of the City's population. According to figures and categories used in the Census 2001, the area has a predominantly White Ethnic Group.

### Coalfields Empty Property Action Plan 2011/12

LOCALITY AIM	ACTIONS	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	TIMESCALES	RESPONSIBILITY
--------------	---------	---------------------	------------	----------------

Reduce the number of empty properties in the Coalfield to the city average of 2.47 (As at April 2011)	Investigate the cause of empty properties in Hetton, Copt Hill and Shiney Row wards and tackle these issues with local partners.	Reduce empty properties by 30%	March 2012	EPA, Voluntary Sector, Landlords, owners, residents and ward members.
	Match empty properties with residents on the homeless register. <b>Ensure that support is given to tenants where required to ensure that the tenancy is sustainable.</b>	Reduce Homelessness by 5% citywide	March 2012	EPA and HOT
Return 100 empty properties in Coalfields back into use of which 35 will be in the Copt Hill and 11 in Hetton wards.	<p>Ensure new builds in the Hetton Ward do not remain empty for longer than six months by actively engaging with Gentoo to promote affordable housing.</p> <p><b>Work with local registered landlords and residents groups to find potential tenants for empty properties.</b></p> <p><b>To visit local schools in partnership with Northumbria Fire Brigade, to raise awareness of dangers of entering empty properties.</b></p> <p><b>To enhance links with local Estate/Lettings Agents and promote partnership working to ensure any issues with empty properties are quickly resolved.</b></p> <p><b>To Continue with positive news stories, publicising role of empty property team.</b></p>	<p>50% of new builds in the Hetton Ward not seen as a long term empty property</p> <p>161 houses demolished</p>	March 2012	Gentoo, and EPA
	To inspect and liaise with all empty property owners in the Racecourse Estate area to return back into use with local partners.	20% of Empty Properties at the Houghton Racecourse re-occupied	February 2012	EPA, ASB officer, ARC, Police, Gentoo, residents, voluntary sector and owners.
	Undertake proactive visits and external inspections to all properties empty for over one year, with particular focus on the Copt Hill and Hetton wards.	Daily/monthly inspections completed by officer. All wards reduced to the city average.	March 2012	EPA and Planning enforcement Section
	Develop a tool to risk assess, identify and prioritise problematic empty properties.	Tool established and implemented	June 2011	EPO and EPA
To work proactively and preventively to ensure that the number of potential future empty properties are minimised.				
New homes are not registered as empty; providing greater housing choice.				
		Problematic empty		

		properties identified		
	Prioritise identified problematic empty properties to ensure re-occupation, and where appropriate use the additional tools provided by the Housing Act 2004 to tackle problems within the private sector, with particular focus on the Copt Hill and Hetton wards.	50% of empty problematic properties brought back to use	March 2012	EPO, EPA, Adult Services (Care).
	Get breakdown of empty properties by New Homes Bonus definition and identify location and any trends. Prioritise which properties to focus resources on.	Monthly locality report Increased New Homes Bonus returns	June 2011	HAO and EPO.

## Washington

### Background information:

The Washington area covers the wards of Washington Central, Washington North, Washington East, Washington South and Washington West.

### Empty Properties at April 2011:

Total		Empty for or between 1-2 years		Empty for five years or more	
No.	Proportion of Private Sector Stock Empty (H18)	No.	% Area	No.	% Area
270	1.54%	171	63%	32	11.8%

### Top 3 Types of empty properties in the Washington:

Type	No.	% Area
Semi detached	35	12%
Flats or maisonettes	72	26%
Terraced properties	43	15%

Washington North ward has a higher percentage of empty properties than the City Average. Examining the age of empty properties, by far the highest proportion is properties built between 1976 - 1990 89 (32%) which reflects the fact that Washington is a relatively new development.

### Empty Properties per ward:

Ward	No.	% Area	City %
Washington Central	53	20	1.46
Washington North	94	35	2.75
Washington East	31	11	0.93
Washington South	33	12	0.96
Washington West	59	22	1.60

It should be noted that Gentoo has demolished 168 properties to date in Albany, Glebe, Harraton and Sulgrave and it is predicting to demolish a further 30 in Barmston in early 2012. None of these properties are owned under the right to buy scheme.

Project work is currently being undertaken in Washington area in the Wellington and Waterloo complex. This has been ongoing since November 2010. Officers are visiting all properties to tackle issues of empty properties, anti-social behaviour and disrepair.

### Population

Washington has 66,721 residents, 24% of the City's population. According to figures and categories used in the Census 2001, the Washington Area has a predominantly White Ethnic Group.

### Washington Empty Property Action Plan 2011/12

LOCALITY AIM	ACTIONS	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	TIMESCALES	RESPONSIBILITY
Reduce the number of empty properties in Washington to the city average of 2.47% (As at April 2011).  Return 30 empty properties in Washington back into use of which 9 will be in Washington North.	To inspect and liaise with all empty property owners in the Wellington and Waterloo areas to return back into use.	10% of Empty Properties at Wellington and Waterloo re-occupied	February 2012	EPA, ASB officer. Owners.
	Match empty properties with residents on the homeless register. <b>Ensure that support is given to tenants where required to ensure that the tenancy is sustainable.</b>	Reduce Homelessness by 5% citywide	March 2012	EPA and HOT

To work proactively and preventively to ensure that the number of potential future empty properties is minimised.	<p>Undertake proactive visits and external inspections to all properties empty for over one year, with particular focus on the Washington North ward.</p> <p><b>Work with local registered landlords and residents groups to find potential tenants for empty properties.</b></p> <p><b>To visit local schools in partnership with Northumbria Fire Brigade, to raise awareness of dangers of entering empty properties.</b></p> <p><b>To enhance links with local Estate/Lettings Agents and promote partnership working to ensure any issues with empty properties are quickly resolved. To Continue with positive news stories, publicising role of empty property team.</b></p>	Daily/monthly inspections completed by officer. Reduce all wards to the current city average.	March 2012	EPA
New homes are not registered at empty; providing greater housing choice.	Develop a tool to risk assess, identify and prioritise problematic empty properties.	Tool established and implemented.  Problematic empty properties identified.	June 2011	EPA Council Tax Section Planning Enforcement Team
	Prioritise identified problematic empty properties to ensure re-occupation, and where appropriate use the additional tools provided by the Housing Act 2004 to tackle problems within the private sector, with particular focus on Washington North.	50% of empty problematic properties brought back to use	March 2012	EPO, EPA, Adult Services (Care)
	Get breakdown of empty properties by New Homes Bonus definition and identify location and any trends. Prioritise which properties to focus resources on.	Monthly locality report Increased New Homes Bonus returns	June 2011	HAO, EPO and EPA,

## Conclusion

Empty properties are a high priority in each of the local areas and this is reflected in local action plans. The above action plan provides a more local examination of the issues and provides an innovative local action plan aimed at specifically addressing those local issues in relation to bringing empty properties back into use and creating a greater housing resource for the City.

Project work is proving to be successful in various areas and it is hoped that this work will be continued and expanded to other wards, particularly those wards that do not meet the city average as at April 2011. This involves officers tackling empty properties, anti social

behaviour, landlord accreditation and issues of disrepair in partnership with Housing Providers the police and other local partners. This is in response to concerns from local residents and a ward members.

This action plan will be monitored quarterly and reviewed after one year by the Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal Senior Management Team and Area Committee. The information will also be made available to all local partners and the public should they request it.

Appendix 1: April 2011

Long Term Empty Properties by Period Empty

ARF	Ward	Period Empty						Grand Total	Proportion of Private Sector Stock Empty (H18)
		6 Months - under 1 year	1 Year - under 2 years	2 Years - under 3 years	3 Years - under 4 years	4 Years - under 5 years	Over 5 years		
Sunderland North	Castle	12	15	7	3	1	7	45	1.53%
	Fulwell	23	23	13	7	6	14	86	1.77%
	Redhill	13	19	4	1	3	5	45	1.67%
	Southwick	35	20	11	8	7	14	95	2.90%
	St Peter's	61	41	17	9	6	22	156	3.45%
<b>Sunderland North Total</b>		<b>144</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>2.33%</b>
Sunderland East	Doxford	16	12	7	3	2	7	47	1.43%
	Hendon	86	79	67	19	14	23	288	6.74%
	Millfield	64	47	21	12	9	28	181	4.25%
	Ryhope	22	22	13	10	3	12	82	2.40%
	St Michael's	46	45	13	25	7	30	166	3.47%
<b>Sunderland East Total</b>		<b>234</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>764</b>	<b>3.82%</b>
Sunderland West	Barnes	32	27	4	9	3	14	89	2.02%
	Pallion	27	30	14	4	4	9	88	2.97%
	Sandhill	22	16	7	8		6	59	2.12%
	Silksworth	20	33	7	3	2	5	70	2.01%
	St Anne's	16	12	4	2	2	8	44	1.50%
	St Chad's	27	18	9	2	2	7	65	2.11%
<b>Sunderland West Total</b>		<b>144</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>2.11%</b>
Coalfield	Copt Hill	27	40	24	14	8	19	132	3.37%
	Hetton	25	31	10	8	7	20	101	2.78%
	Houghton	14	23	9	6	3	7	62	1.56%
	Shiney Row	23	21	12	4	6	18	84	1.94%
<b>Coalfield Total</b>		<b>89</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>2.39%</b>
Washington	Washington Central	22	17	8	2	1	3	53	1.46%
	Washington North	28	24	8	13	4	17	94	2.75%
	Washington East	12	8	6	2	1	2	31	0.93%
	Washington South	12	12	1	2	2	4	33	0.96%
	Washington West	19	17	8	5	4	6	59	1.60%
<b>Washington Total</b>		<b>93</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>1.54%</b>

<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>652</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>2,255</b>	<b>2.47%</b>
--------------------	------------	------------	------------	------------	------------	------------	--------------	--------------

## Appendix 2: Reference

The HCA Homes and Communities Agency are developing an Empty Property toolkit which will be available from June 2011. This will be incorporated into the Empty Property Strategy Area Approach.

The following websites were used as reference and for benchmarking:

- <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/newhomesbonus/newhomesbonusquestions/>
- <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk>
- <http://www.camden.gov.uk>
- <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/>
  
- The Housing Act 2004
- Empty Property Strategy (2007-2011)
- Local Area Plans (LAPS) (2009-2011)

## Appendix 3:

### CASE STUDIES

**The following two case studies are success stories of the empty property team:**

The successful use of empty property procedures and protocols implemented by the Empty Property Officer enabled the owner of the following properties to refurbish and successfully occupy them.

#### **Chester Oval, Sunderland. SR2 8HS**

After standing empty and in poor state of repair for approximately 6 years, a large property has now been refurbished and one flat has been reoccupied the rest being reoccupied later in year. Despite a number of approaches by Council officers, the previous owner did not want to sell the property as an insurance claim was pending. The owner did have the intention to convert the property into student accommodation once the claim was resolved.

The property was deteriorating and the neighbours were very concerned regarding the property being empty. The property was the subject of numerous councillor enquiries during the period of time it was empty. These were fully explored but co-operation was not forthcoming from the owner.

The property was constantly being targeted by local youths, and had been the subject of several arson attacks and was in a really poor state of disrepair. The youths were using the property as an area to congregate and drink alcohol. This was causing major noise issues and nuisance problems for the local residents. Northumbria Police was also regularly being called out to the property to move the youths on and the property was regularly being broken into and left open. The Empty Property Officer regularly had to serve the owner with legal notices. Section 29 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 notices were served on several occasions. The owners failed to secure the property within the desired timescale and works were carried out in default by officers of City Services to secure the property. The owner was sent an invoice on each occasion and did eventually pay the monies owed to the council.

Partners from Planning Enforcement were contacted and enforcement action was initiated under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as the property was detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood and some external works were undertaken to 'tidy up' the property by the owners. Due to combined pressure from both Housing and Planning Services the owner decided to sell the property.

In June 2010, the Empty Property Officer confirmed with a local estate agent that a sale was pending. The sale was completed successfully and the new owner started work on the property immediately. Renovation works were completed to a very high standard. The Empty Property Officer undertook a monitoring visit late March 2011 and one flat has now been reoccupied.

The neighbours are absolutely delighted at the progress and have personally thanked all of the officers that were involved.

## **Lorne Terrace, Sunderland, SR2 7BU**

After standing empty and in poor state of repair for 7 years, this house has now been sold and reoccupied. Despite a number of approaches by Council officers, the previous owner did not want to sell the property. The owner did have the intention to convert the property into student accommodation however, they did not have enough funds to renovate the property or live in it.

The property was deteriorating and the neighbours were very concerned regarding the property being empty. The property was the subject of numerous councillor enquiries during the period of time it was empty which were fully explored but co-operation was not forthcoming from the owner. The property had also been the subject of an arson attack and broken into whilst it was empty. The owner did secure the property after they were advised that failure to do so would result in a legal notice being served on them.

Planning Enforcement has also been involved and enforcement action was initiated under the Section 215 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as the property was detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood and some external works were undertaken to 'tidy up' the property. Combined pressure from both Housing and Planning Services resulted in the owner decided to sell the property.

In June 2010, the Empty Property Officer confirmed with a local estate agents that a sale was pending. The sale was completed successfully and the new owner started work on the property immediately. Renovation works were again completed to a high standard. The Empty Property Officer undertook a monitoring visit late March 2011 and found the property to be reoccupied.

The neighbours are delighted that a problematic property is now reoccupied and have expressed their thanks to all of the officers that were involved.

The success of returning these empty properties back into use was two fold: the persistence of the Empty Property Officer using both formal and informal means to ensure that the owners kept the properties secure until they were due to be reoccupied using the Empty Property Action Plan and the Enforcement Policy, which are important documents in enabling officers to utilise the full powers that are available to them to tackle the owners of empty properties. Secondly, the regular contact made with the owners, and the successful use of Legal Notices ensured that both properties were kept secure while they were empty.

Working in partnership with other departments also proves to be extremely beneficial. Where empty property legislation may end, Planning Enforcement legislation can also ensure that owners of empty properties are maintaining their property or undertake remedial works so that the property does not become detrimental to the neighbourhood or amenities.