

1. Is enough being done to tackle empty properties in Wales? If not, what needs to change?

Empty properties in the private rented sector are not great for business. A landlord should be looking to rent their property out all the time. If the property is empty, there is a reason. There are issues around those entering the market and those who do not have the funds to bring a property back up to standard. There are schemes which they can enter where they can lease the property to a third party. These could be advertised better, often they advertised just in the locality – the owner does not necessarily live there. This would include to those that have inherited a property and do not wish to manage the property themselves.

2. What impact can empty properties have on a community?

A long-term empty property can become an attraction to low level abuse and crime. It can also create misconceptions about the property and the owner.

3. How effectively are local authorities using the statutory and non-statutory tools at their disposal to deal with empty properties?

This depends on the empty property and the local authority. The powers are there and the decision to bring an empty property back into use can be time consuming and involve substantial work. There is an opportunity to let owners know that they can pass the property to a third party to manage, but this involves substantial research and work. Although the rewards for local authorities are great, the prioritisation of this does not always reach the top.

4. Do local authorities need additional statutory powers to deal with empty properties? If yes, what powers do they need?

It is not just powers it is the ability and resources to execute these powers. This falls into the trap that it is just the allocation of new powers that are required to solve every problem when many of the powers already exist.

5. Are owners of empty properties given the support, information and advice that they need to bring properties back into occupation? If not, what additional help do they need?

Yes, there could be more support, but it is difficult as the person receiving the advice is required to take it. Quite often they do not. It is not only one way, if a person has inherited the family home they still see it as a family home.

6. Is there sufficient awareness of the practical assistance that local authorities can offer to owners of empty properties? If not, how could this be improved?

There is not. If there was a simple answer to the question the local authorities would have done it. The question is about resources and time. The local authority will have to commit significant resources and time, work with the different owners etc. in many cases they will not take notice of the local authority until formal notice is taken by the local authority and proceedings start.

7. Are the skills and resources of housing associations and the private sector being fully utilised to tackle empty properties?

More can always be done, it is about providing routes and advice that people wish to listen too at a time when they are prepared to listen. Often it is not a priority for the owner or a too difficult question. The best advice and resources and only as good as the recipient is willing to take them, unfortunately they often disregard the advice.

8. Is enough being done to ensure empty properties can be brought back into use as affordable homes? Are there examples of good practice in this area?

It is not just from one side, to look at this just from what is the government doing, more powers, fines etc. It needs to show how a person with an empty property can make a profit and turn the property into an asset which returns a monthly income for them. It is important that they make the argument as to why a person should bring a property back into use and rent it out.

9. Is the power to charge a council tax premium on long-term empty homes a useful tool and is it being effectively used? If not, how could this tool be made more effective?

It is a useful tool, but it is not going to bring goodwill to the local authority from the owner. Instead of looking to penalise people first the local authority should be looking to work with people and only use this as the last tool, when the owner is not prepared to work with the local authority to bring the property back into use.