

Committee: **Place Scrutiny Committee**  
 Date of meeting: **11<sup>th</sup> March 2025**  
 Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy**  
 Portfolio Holder: **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Place & Environment.**  
 Report Submitted by: **Service Manager – Public Protection**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
11.2.25		03.03.25			11.3.25	9.4.25		

**1. Purpose of the Report**

1.1 To report the outcomes of public consultation in relation to the Draft Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy and to seek approval for the adoption of the strategy.

**2. Scope and Background**

2.1 Bringing empty properties back into use is a key priority for the Council Empty Properties are a waste. They can cause nuisance and environmental problems. They can be the focus for increased levels of crime, including drug abuse and represent a significant loss of revenue for the Council that could be spent on public services.

2.2 Empty properties make no sense to the public, neighbours, those in need of homes and in many cases, the owners themselves. In prioritising the tackling of empty properties, the Council can help to address Blaenau Gwent’s current and projected housing needs by providing accommodation for owner occupation or renting whilst at the same time reducing the risk of nuisance and environmental problems. In some cases, demolishing and clearing unwanted and worn-out old buildings may be the best course of action.

2.3 Empty space above commercial units is also a wasted resource, particularly in town centres. Void spaces above shops and offices can be converted into residential units where this need can be demonstrated. This will also be a driving force to help the Council’s aim of revitalising town centres.

2.4 Extensive academic research has shown that poor quality housing is a key determinant of poor health. Tackling empty homes and bringing them up to standard will play an important role in promoting and contributing to positive health and well-being for the residents of Blaenau Gwent, a key priority of a Marmot Council.

- 2.5 Dealing with Empty properties is a key Welsh Government priority, and the Council supports their focus in this respect. This Authority has a high number of empties and last year we adopted a new Council Tax Premium Policy relating to empty properties and second homes, which will be implemented from April 2025 onwards. As part of this approach, additional permanent staffing was approved, tasked with proactively working with owners of privately owned empty properties. This work also needs to be a key priority for all relevant Council departments and managers.
- 2.6 The refreshed Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy (Appendix 1) sets out the range of initiatives available to the Council to help owners bring their empty homes back into use. The strategy document outlines the Authority's understanding of the current landscape, how properties become empty and the barriers to bringing them back into use. It aims to work proactively with empty property owners, providing relevant advice, support and incentives. Enforcement action, whilst necessary in many cases, will be a last resort. The Action Plan (Annex 1 of the strategy) is informed by the 3 key objectives of the strategy, namely:
1. To Promote and Educate Empty Homeowners and Stakeholders
  2. To undertake a Prioritised and Targeted Approach to Tackling Empty Properties
  3. To take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties.
- 2.7 Prior to finalisation, the strategy has been subject to Public Consultation during the second half 2024 and this report outlines the outcomes of that consultation.
- 2.7.1 **Public consultation.** This took place between 23 October and 18 November 2024 and consisted of general promotion via the Council's website and social media channels along with direct targeting of empty property owners, sourced from our Council Tax records. To this end, 296 emails were sent and 247 hard copy letters. The consultation consisted of an online questionnaire with the ability for questionnaires to be returned hard copy by mail.
- 2.7.2 The consultation consisted of 18 questions requesting views on matters including the clarity of the strategy, the aims and objectives, elements of the action plan, likely effectiveness and resources. 48 responses were received. In general, the document was well received and supported with strong support for the various actions to promote, educate and support empty property owners with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposed measures. Respondents generally agreed with a targeted approach and there was support for using enforcement powers for non-complaint homeowners and providing support during early intervention to prevent property deterioration.

2.7.3 A further summary of the main points from the survey is as follows:

**1. Clarity and Priority:**

- 85% of respondents found the strategy clear and easy to understand.
- 67% felt the strategy clearly explained why empty properties are a priority.

**2. Effectiveness and Agreement:**

- 59% believe the strategy will be effective or very effective in tackling empty homes.
- 85% agree with the overall aim to bring empty properties back into use.

**3. Broad Actions:**

- Support for initiatives to help empty homeowners: 79% agree or strongly agree.
- Proactive engagement with owners: 76% agree or strongly agree.
- Financial assistance schemes: 70% agree or strongly agree.

**4. Targeted Approach:**

- Using data to identify empty homes: 68% agree or strongly agree.
- Effective use of resources: 79% agree or strongly agree.
- Community reporting: 76% agree or strongly agree.

**5. Two-Pronged Approach:**

- Early intervention and support: 69% agree or strongly agree.
- Use of enforcement powers: 62% agree or strongly agree.

2.7.4 Question 11 of the survey invited some general comments on the draft strategy. A summary of the key themes from those comments is as follows:

**1. Shortages of affordable housing:**

- Criticism of Tai Calon for not building new houses.
- Utilisation of empties to add to the affordable housing stock

**2. Support for Property Owners:**

- Suggestions for more flexible and supportive measures for property owners.
- Calls for a helpline for anonymous complaints to avoid retaliation.

**3. Challenges with Renovations:**

- Difficulties in finding reliable builders and repair companies.
- Issues with the grant and loan schemes taking too long to process.

**4. Impact on Neighbours:**

- Empty properties negatively affecting neighbouring homes.
- Reports of empty properties attracting crime and devaluing neighbourhoods.

**5. Enforcement and Legal Measures:**

- Support for legal proactive measures to address long-term empty properties.
- Mixed opinions on the use of enforcement powers, with some preferring early intervention and support.
- Shortage of Council resources to deliver the strategy

## 6. Tenant and Landlord Issues:

- Concerns about the Welsh government's changes favouring tenants over landlords.
- Experiences of landlords struggling with problematic tenants and lengthy eviction processes.

2.7.5 74% (34) of respondents were residents of Blaenau Gwent with over half of these from Ebbw Vale. 35% (16) of the respondents were empty property owners with 13 of these stating that their property was awaiting repair and 2 For Sale.

2.7.6 The detailed report on the survey outcomes is available at Appendix 2

2.7.7 Member consultation. All elected members were initially written to and invited to comment on the draft strategy during July and August 2024. No comments relating to the strategy were received. Members were provided with a further opportunity to comment as part of the public consultation outlined above.

2.7.8 Officer consultation. Internal professional officers were consulted. Comments were received which led to changes in the wording of the strategy and the action plan. One comment received related to the risk associated with points 24 and 25 on the action plan and the limited legal support resources available to support these actions. Consideration should be given to increasing the legal capacity on a permanent basis with tackling empty properties being seen as a priority.

2.7.9 Partner consultation. The Registered Social Landlord (RSLs) partners and Estate/Letting Agents were contacted during October and November 2024 and invited to comment on the strategy. There were no responses from the 4 RSLs in relation to the content of the strategy albeit regular dialogue at operational level continues in relation to specific projects/cases, as necessary. There were no direct or identifiable responses from Estate/Letting Agents (11 were contacted).

## 3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1 (Preferred) – That Members comment on the consultation outcomes and supports the adoption of the Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy.

3.2 Option 2 – That Members comment on the consultation outcomes, does not support the adoption of the Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy and advises on changes/amendments to the strategy.

## 4. Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

4.1 The Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan (2022/27) is a requirement of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and aligns to this legislation along with the Gwent Public Service Board (PSB) well-being plan and the eight Marmot principles. It identifies four priorities, known as well-being Objectives, which set out the direction for the Authority. Tackling Empty

Properties specifically feed into the themes are 3 of the Plan priorities, namely:

- **Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities.** Dealing with empty properties will assist in reducing carbon emissions, providing modernised energy efficient homes and supporting growth and well-being and connects communities.
- **An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place.** In dealing with empty properties, the Authority will work in partnership to provide high quality services to meet local circumstances in dealing with empty properties and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community by contributing to meeting housing need.
- **Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient.** Dealing with empty properties will contribute to a reduction in community safety problems. This will increase the resilience of Communities, where more people are welcome and safe, and it will minimise dependency and maximise independence.

## 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

### 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The adoption of this strategy do not have any direct budgetary implications.

### 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There are no direct risks resulting from the adoption of this strategy

### 5.3 ***Legal***

There are no direct legal implications relating to the adoption of this strategy.

### 5.4 ***Human Resources***

There are no direct implications resulting from the adoption of this strategy. Officers from Public Protection (Environmental Health & Housing Solutions), Planning, Estates, Regeneration, Council Tax and Resources have contributed to the development of this strategy. At the time of writing, and Empty Property Environmental Health Officer Post has been recruited following an internal advert and take up their post in May 2025.

### 5.5 ***Health and Safety***

No direct implications.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

According to the BGCBC council tax data on the 1st of April 2024, the number of properties that had been empty for 6 months or more was 854. Monitoring performance is a key feature of the strategy document (section 3.3).

6.1.1 The latest performance information is outlined in Appendix 3.

- 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***  
Reduction in local nuisance, environmental problems, crime anti-social behaviour, loss of Council tax income. Increase in the supply of good quality affordable housing.
- 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***  
As outlined in the report and appendices.
- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***  
The strategy looks long-term with a view to increasing the supply of good quality affordable housing.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***  
As outlined in the strategy document – relating to preventing properties from becoming long term empty. See also paragraph 6.2, above.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***  
The strategy relies on partnership working with property owners, registered social landlords and relevant others
- 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***  
See also Paragraph 5.4, above. The Action Plan to the strategy relies on continued cross- departmental working with the common goal of dealing with empty properties.
- 6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***  
Wherever possible, property improvements resulting from the work outlined as part of this strategy will contribute to the decarbonisation agenda.
- 6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***  
See Appendix 4

## 7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 Reports as required to Scrutiny, Cabinet, Council and Executive Leadership, as necessary.

### **Background Documents /Electronic Links**

[Empty Properties \(senedd.wales\).](https://www.senedd.wales)

[Reporting an Empty Property | Blaenau Gwent CBC](#)

[Landlord Loans | Blaenau Gwent CBC](#)

[Housing Standards | Blaenau Gwent CBC](#)

[National Empty Homes Grants - Blaenau Gwent](#)

### List of Appendices

1. Draft Empty Property Strategy (including Annexes)
2. Consultation outcomes
3. Performance Information
4. IIA