

Isle of Anglesey County Council	
Report to:	The Executive
Date:	28 November, 2023
Subject:	Empty Homes Strategic Plan 2023-28
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cyng Gary Pritchard
Head of Service / Director:	Ned Michael
Report Author: Tel: E-mail:	Elliw Llyr, Housing Policy, Commissioning and Strategy Manager 01248752137 Elliw Llyr@ynysmon.gov.uk
Local Members:	n/a

A –Recommendation/s and reason/s

The Executive is asked to:

R1 approve the Empty Homes Strategic Plan 2023-28

1. Background

The Empty Homes Strategic Plan was reviewed following a consultation with owners of empty homes and sessions to share information with other Services in the Council. Anglesey Housing Partnership will also be consulted on the proposed Empty Homes Strategic Plan.

Welsh Government has an Action Plan for dealing with empty Properties as part of its response to recommendations made by Senedd Cymru on the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, to assist Local Authorities to bring empty homes back into use. We as a Council have taken part in this and support the emphasis to bringing empty properties back into use.

2. Success of the Previous Empty Homes Strategy

The previous Empty Homes Strategy has had a number of successes including 525 empty homes have come back into use since 2017, with 32 units being created or re-introduced, meaning that the Council Tax budget is being collected. The Empty Homes Strategy has also ensured success with difficult sites like Beaumaris Social Club, the old Snooker Club in Holyhead and Plas Alltran, Holyhead.

3. Overview of the Empty Homes Strategic Plan

The Empty Homes Strategic Plan will work following its 4 main objectives, which are:

A – Recommendation/s and reason/s

1. **Data** – Using evidence base to target resources for empty homes.
2. **Publicity** – raising awareness of empty homes matters and how owners can bring a property back into use.
3. **Providing Financial support** – administer grants / loans from WG and using the Council Tax Premium
4. **Enforcement** – to prioritise empty homes for enforcement action and taking a Council wide approach to deal with empty homes.
5. **Working together** – work together as services who deal with the most problematic Properties.

4. Consultation

A consultation was held with owners of empty properties during May – June to understand why these properties are empty, what problems do they face and what interventions would help them bring the empty properties back to use. We will use the results to target our interventions. An event was arranged (3.10.23) with other services to review the content of the Empty Homes Strategic Plan with teams who are key to bringing empty properties back to use.

B – What other options did you consider and why did you reject them and/or opt for this option?

Not having a Strategy to deal with Empty Homes would mean a waste of resource on the Island and an increase in complaints from residents.

C – Why is this a decision for the Executive?

To ensure a Strategic approach to bring empty properties back into use.

Ch – Is this decision consistent with policy approved by the full Council?

yes

D – Is this decision within the budget approved by the Council?

yes

Dd – Assessing the potential impact (if relevant):

1	How does this decision impact on our long term needs as an Island?	The Strategic Plan sets out what will be done to deal with empty homes
2	Is this a decision which it is envisaged will prevent future costs / dependencies on the Authority? If so, how?	It encourages owners to bring empty houses back into use, a resource that would remain idle and generate complaints for the Council
3	Have we been working collaboratively with other organisations to come to this decision? If so, please advise whom.	Internally services have had an opportunity to contribute to the development of the Plan
4	Have Anglesey citizens played a part in drafting this way forward, including those directly affected by the decision? Please explain how.	A questionnaire was sent to all owners of empty homes
5	Note any potential impact that this decision would have on the groups protected under the Equality Act 2010.	See Impact Assessment that a positive impact
6	If this is a strategic decision, note any potential impact that the decision would have on those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.	See Impact Assessment which takes into account those who may be vulnerable
7	Note any potential impact that this decision would have on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.	No negative impact identified within the impact assessment

E – Who did you consult?		What did they say?
1	Chief Executive / Senior Leadership Team (SLT) (mandatory)	Supportive of recommendation
2	Finance / Section 151 (mandatory)	Supportive of recommendation
3	Legal / Monitoring Officer (mandatory)	Supportive of recommendation
4	Human Resources (HR)	n/a
5	Property	n/a
6	Information Communication Technology (ICT)	n/a
7	Procurement	n/a
8	Scrutiny	During the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held 21.11.23 it was recommended that approval should be given by the Executive
9	Local Members	

F - Appendices:

Appendix 1 Housing Empty Homes Strategic Plan 2023-28.
Appendix 2 Assessment of the Effect on Equalities.
Appendix 3 Assessment of the Effect on the Welsh language.

Ff - Background papers (please contact the author of the Report for any further information):

--

Ynys Môn

THE ISLE OF

Anglesey



Empty Homes Strategic Plan 2023-2028

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg /

This document is also available in Welsh.



CYNGOR SIR
YNYS MÔN
ISLE OF ANGLESEY
COUNTY COUNCIL

www.anglesey.gov.wales

Why do we need an Empty Homes Strategic Plan?



Housing

Ensuring that everyone has the right to call somewhere home.

Empty homes are a wasted resource and can assist in addressing other housing problems through the provision of additional accommodation; thereby reducing pressures on waiting lists and providing homes on both a short and long-term basis.

There is currently an increase in pressure on the housing markets as less people can purchase their own home. Rents in the private rented sector also continue to increase.

Not all empty homes need action, for example, there would be little point in targeting transactional empty properties which are empty for good reason. This would also apply to properties that are not causing a nuisance, are in good repair or would not be suitable to address the local housing need.

The purpose of the Empty Homes Strategic Plan is to ensure that the number of empty properties are kept to a minimum and to encourage owners to bring them back into use. It provides information on how we deal with empty properties.

This Plan forms part of the range of housing solutions which will assist in achieving the Council Plan 2023-28, focusing on a co-ordinated and joined approach across internal and external partners.

Strategic context

The Empty Homes Strategic Plan responds to:

- The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 discretionary powers to local authorities to implement a premium charge on Council Tax for long term empty properties and utilisation of this towards affordable housing
- Local incentives such as Tai Teg assist with identifying and allocating affordable empty properties to purchase or intermediate rent who works in partnership with Local Authorities across North Wales
- Welsh Government (WG) response in working with Local Authorities in tackling empty properties following the recommendations of the [National Assembly for Wales, Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee report published in October 2019](#)
- Assistance available to Local Authorities in dealing with their long-term empty properties by WG with its Empty Property Enforcement Programme. The Council has actively taken part in this initiative and supports the WG emphasis on bringing empty homes back into use
- Empty Properties as a contributor to the local economy, an example of this during 2022-23 our First Time Buyer Grant has seen 68 small / medium sized businesses or contractors benefiting from the scheme by taking on work through this grant



Housing

Ensuring that everyone has the right to call somewhere home.

Who is the Strategic Plan for?

The plan provides information to key internal and external stakeholders.

It will also be of interest to a wide range of people, such as:

- people who are struggling to find an affordable and secure home to rent or buy where they work or grew up in
- people who live in the same street as an empty home and whose physical and mental health can be affected as the condition of the house deteriorates and it becomes the focus of anti-social behaviour
- people who have inherited a property and are looking for practical help and support to bring it back into use, but instead are receiving bills for council tax
- internal service areas to facilitate effective collaboration

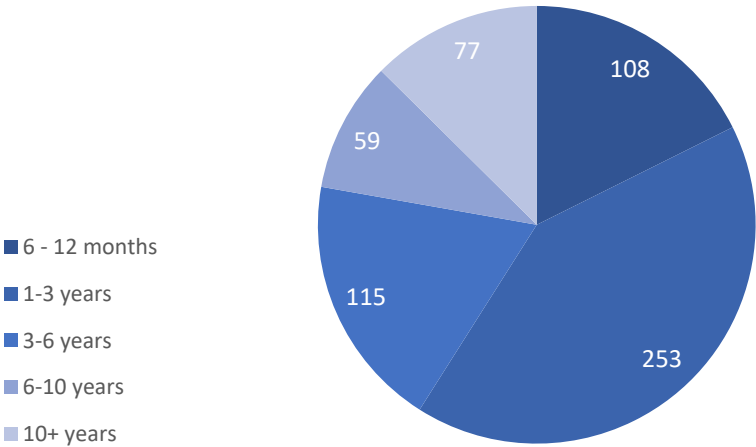


Baseline Data

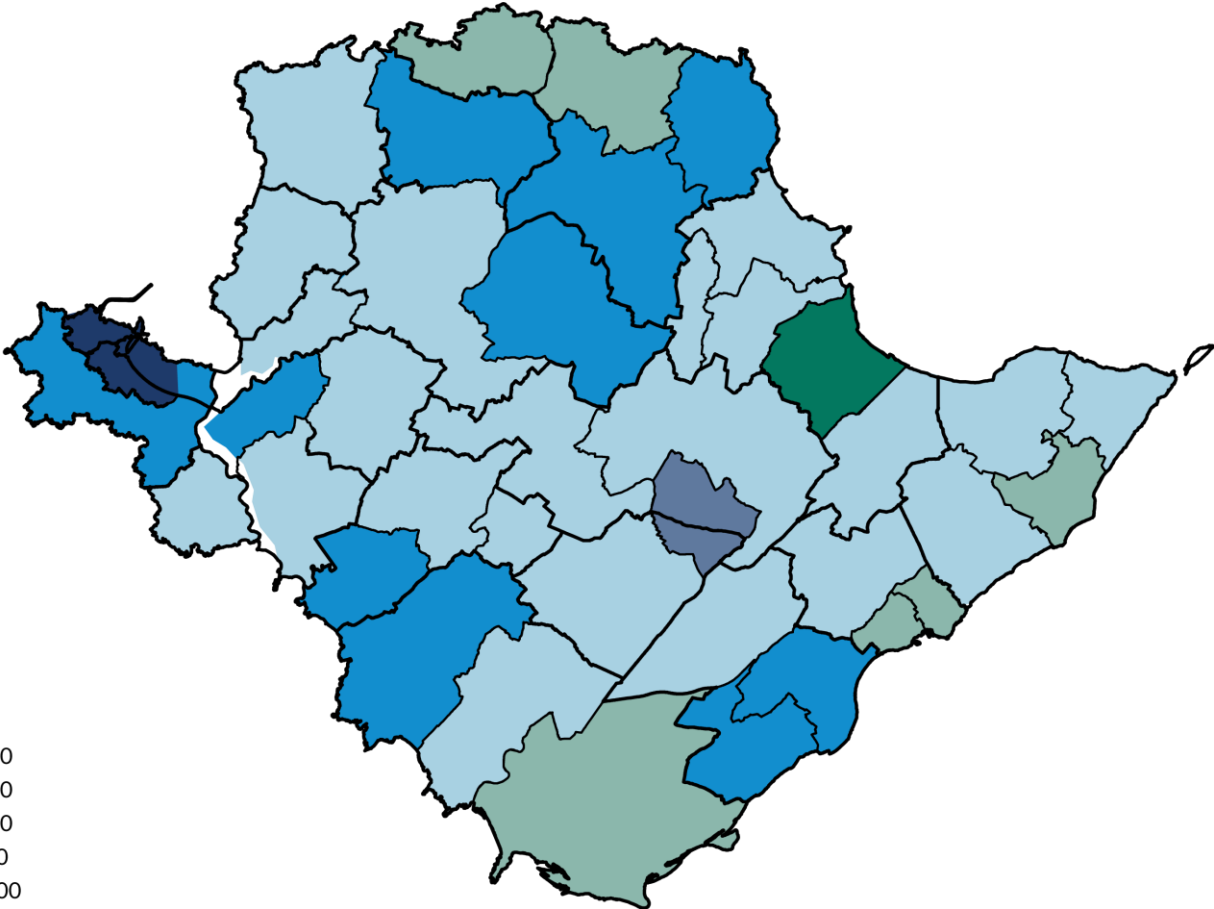


- 35,639 properties on Anglesey
- 612 empty homes*
- 2,591 second homes
- 876 households presented as homeless in 2022-23
- 69,000 people living on Anglesey

Number of years a properties are recorded as vacant



Location of empty properties



*based on Housing Services information which includes exemption properties from Council Tax

Council Plan 2023-2028

The Council Plan is the key document serving as a focal point for decision-making at all levels; providing a framework to plan and drive forward priorities; shape annual spending; monitor performance and progress.

At its core is our desire to work with Anglesey residents, communities and partners to ensure the best possible services, improve the quality of life for all and create opportunities for future generations.

Its six main objectives reflect the key areas the Council should be focusing its efforts on.

The Council Plan's vision is to:

'Create an Anglesey that is healthy and prosperous where people can thrive.'

Our six strategic objectives




The Welsh Language

Increasing opportunities to learn and use the language.



Social Care and Wellbeing

Providing the right support at the right time.



Education

Ensuring an effective provision for today and for future generations.



Housing

Ensuring that everyone has the right to call somewhere home.



Economy

Promoting opportunities to develop the Island's economy.



Climate Change

Responding to the crisis, tackling change and working towards becoming a net zero organisation by 2030.

Values

The Council Plan 2023-28 is underpinned by the organisation's core values, which are used to develop and guide the vision, strategic plans and services.

Values



Respect

We are respectful and considerate towards others regardless of our differences.



Collaborate

We work as a team, with our communities and partners to deliver the best outcomes for the people of Anglesey.



Honesty

We are committed to high standards of conduct and integrity.



Champion the Council and the Island

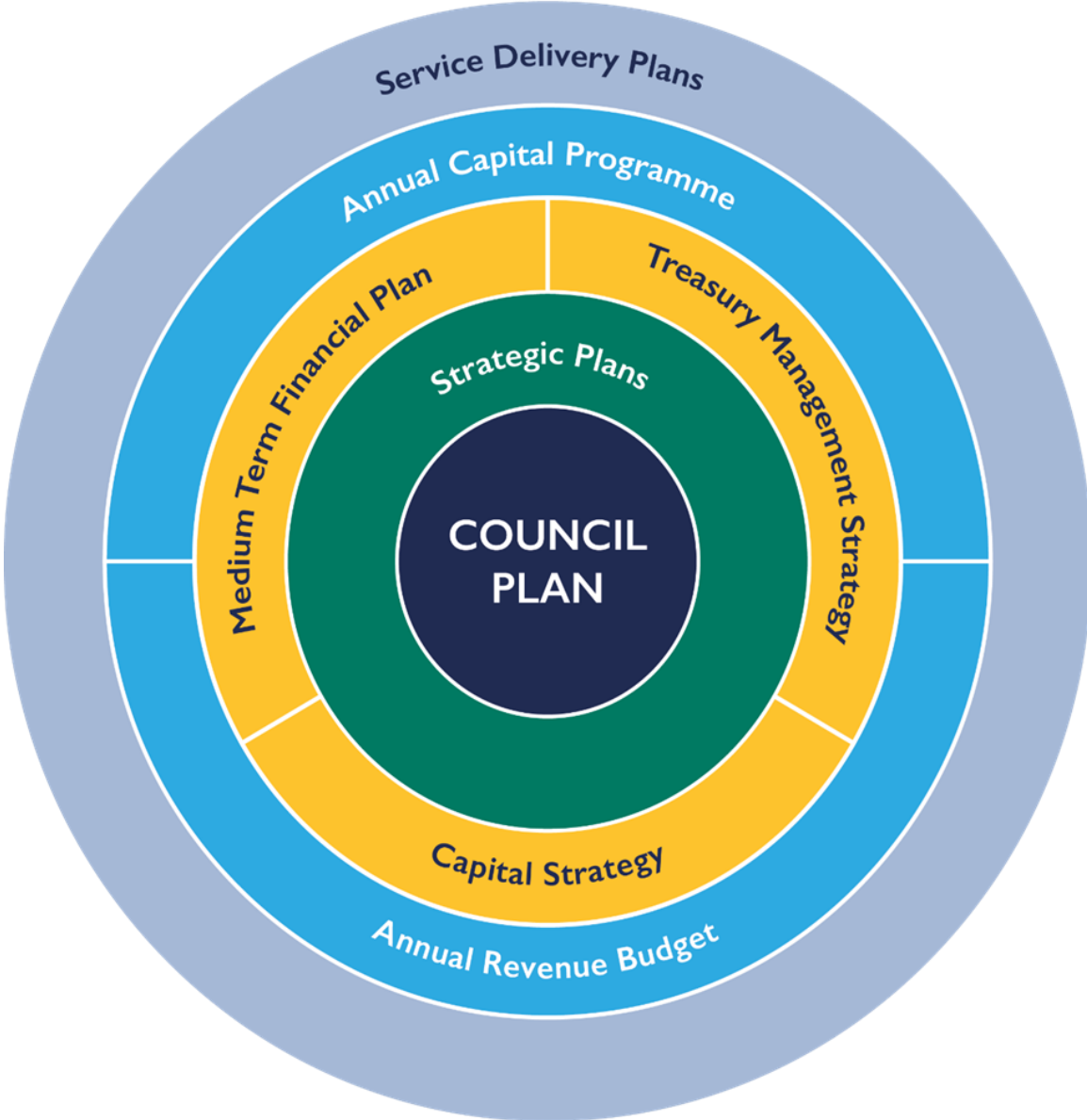
We create a sense of pride in working for the Council and present a positive image of the Council and the Island.



Strategic circle

The strategic circle identifies the plans in place to ensure we are able to achieve our priorities and objectives.

This plan is a key strategic plan that aligns with the Council's Plan and contributes to the achievement of the strategic objectives and vision.



Key priority areas

Delivering the strategic priority, together with key priority areas, sets a clear and ambitious mandate.

We want to ensure that we:

- Make best use of existing housing stock and improving homes and communities (Theme 2 of the Council's [Housing Strategy 2022-27](#))
- Be a contributor to the local economy (Theme 6 of the Council's [Housing Strategy 2022-27](#))



Data – use an evidence-based approach to targeting our resources on empty homes



Why is this important?

There are 908 applications on the Council's Social Housing Register requiring suitable social housing (as of March 2023).

There is an increase in the number presenting as homeless requiring temporary accommodation as a short-term solution to their housing situation.

Increasing the availability of accommodation through returning an empty property back into use is the most effective attempt of equalling the demand for suitable housing and helps to relieve the Local Authority of the housing pressures.

What are we going to do?

The Local Government Act 2003 makes it possible to share information about empty properties which facilitates the work of prioritising which properties need to be targeted.

By continuing to refine our data and correspondence on empty homes we will be able to analyse the particulars of the long-term empty and target our response.

Develop a Scoring Matrix for empty properties. The Scoring Matrix will be used to refer properties to an internal Empty Homes Surgery meeting where any possible outcome and enforcement action will be considered.

How are we going to do this?

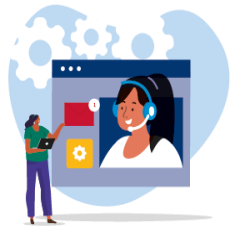
Utilise the toolkit of options available to owners to encourage empty homes back into use.

Promote funding opportunities to bring back empty homes into use.

By regularly reporting on the number of empty homes returned into use and which intervention was used.

Monitor the number of Equity Share and First Time Buyer Grants utilising the Council Tax Premium which have been approved on a quarterly basis.

Publicity- raise awareness of empty homes and how owners can bring back homes into use



Why is this important?

Since 2017, advice and guidance has been the most successful measure in bringing long-term empty property back into use: totalling 56% of the total empty properties.

The main reasons for properties remaining empty is that they:

- are currently being renovated (33%) or
- that they require repair or renovation works (28%).

33% of properties returned to use have been assisted by financial schemes offered by the Council.

Owners may choose not to engage as they believe that as the property is privately owned, the Council do not have the right to require action to return it to use.

They may be unaware or have no concern for the effect the property is having on the local area and surrounding properties.

What are we going to do?

Ensure the following information is readily available:

- guidance on bringing empty homes back into use
- details of assistance available and how to access funding
- offering shared equity and grants on empty homes
- a method of reporting concerns or complaints regarding empty homes



How are we going to do this?

Use a range of methods to communicate with owners of empty homes, which includes information on our website and social media including:

- Online reporting of empty homes
- Financial support for owners of empty homes

Targeted mailing to owners of empty homes

Delivering financial support- by administering WG loans/grants and utilizing the Council Tax Premium

Why is this important?

WG have developed an Empty Property Enforcement Programme to assist Council's in dealing with long term empty properties.

By offering solutions the Council is maximising the Council Tax revenue collectable.

The local economy benefits, as an example, 68 small / medium sized businesses or contractors have been employed via our grant schemes.

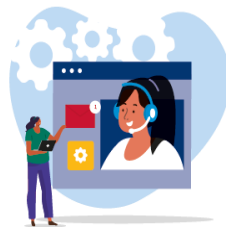
The thermal efficiency of properties are improved upon completion of renovation works, for example, an efficient boiler, insulation and heating systems leading to a reduction in energy costs for owners.

What are we going to do?

The Council has actively taken part in this initiative and supports the WG emphasis on bringing empty homes back into use.

Deliver financial support to empty homeowners as a practical means to bring houses back into use.

Encourage the use of local small and medium sized businesses



How are we going to do this?

Providing financial support by administering WG grants /loans and utilising the Council Tax Premium, including:

- Houses into Homes (to let or sell on)
- Home Improvement Loan
- National Empty Homes Scheme
- First Time Buyer Grant Scheme
- Town Centre Loans – which include Commercial and Residential units as well as conversions to create units, which would be subject to planning approval
- Working with owners to deliver affordable and improved energy efficiency use of current stock

In addition to the financial assistance and incentives above, we can also sign post to:

- WG Private Leasing Scheme
- Possible purchase of properties via the Transitional Capital Accommodation Plan

Enforcement – to prioritise empty homes for enforcement action by taking a whole Council approach to tackling empty homes

Why is this important?

Whilst we acknowledge that no owner wishes the Council to take enforcement action, powers are available to bring empty properties back into use:

- Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)
- Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO)
- Enforced Sale.

Records show that 4% of properties returned to use since 2017 received either threat of enforcement or notices had been served.

What are we going to do?

The preferred course of action is to return properties to use through negotiation and encouragement, avoiding the need for more time consuming and costly enforcement measures.

EDMOs are complicated and pose risks for LAs as capital funds are needed which can be attached as a local charge to the property and will require specialist legal advice.

How are we going to do this?

Certain properties that have been problematic over a long period, attracting volumes of complaints by the general public and elected members will be prioritised. Where possible, these will be re-developed or brought back into use by enforcement or purchase by agreement with the owner. See appendix 3 for successful examples.

Viewed as a last resort and used only where negotiations have failed or there is no other real prospect of an empty property being returned to use, the council will utilise the Enforced Sales Policy.

Appendix 1 shows the various powers available to the Local Authority.

The council will also utilise the WG Enforcement Action Plan to access specialist advice on difficult properties.



Working together – bringing services together to address the most problematic properties

Why is this important?

- 108 dwellings have been vacant for between 6-12 months
- 253 have been vacant between 1-3 years
- 115 have been vacant for between 3-6 years
- 59 have been vacant for between 6-10 years
- 77 have been vacant for over 10 years.

There will be a continual cycle of properties which become problematic and classed as long-term empties.

What are we going to do?

There are reasons, which require different approaches in intervention, as to why property becomes and remains empty.

By identifying the reasons why properties are empty, we can work together to bring them back into use in a targeted way.

Example of reasons why properties are empty:

- Death of the occupant
- Need for repair and refurbishment beyond the budget
- Fears about renting the property - the owner may have had a former bad experience though letting
- Properties which are for sale- properties can be in good condition but have been unable to sell for various reasons.
- Inherited properties - the owner may lack the knowledge or the inclination to do anything with inherited properties. Some keep them in case their children choose to occupy them in future.
- Speculative purchases - Properties bought as an investment by buyers who are not inclined to do anything with them.

How are we going to do this?

Work together as Council Services via the Empty Homes Surgery and other agencies to deal with the different aspects of empty homes and the various legislation there is in place (see *appendices 1 and 2*).



Governance: Monitoring and Evaluation

To ensure the strategic plan is realised, we will establish robust governance arrangements.

The arrangements will ensure clarity, accountability, coordination and the structure to monitor progress effectively. This will include quarterly monitoring of performance indicators and an action plan.

Progress will include information on actions, outcomes and the impact highlighting successes and issues.

An annual progress report and review of the strategic plan will be completed.

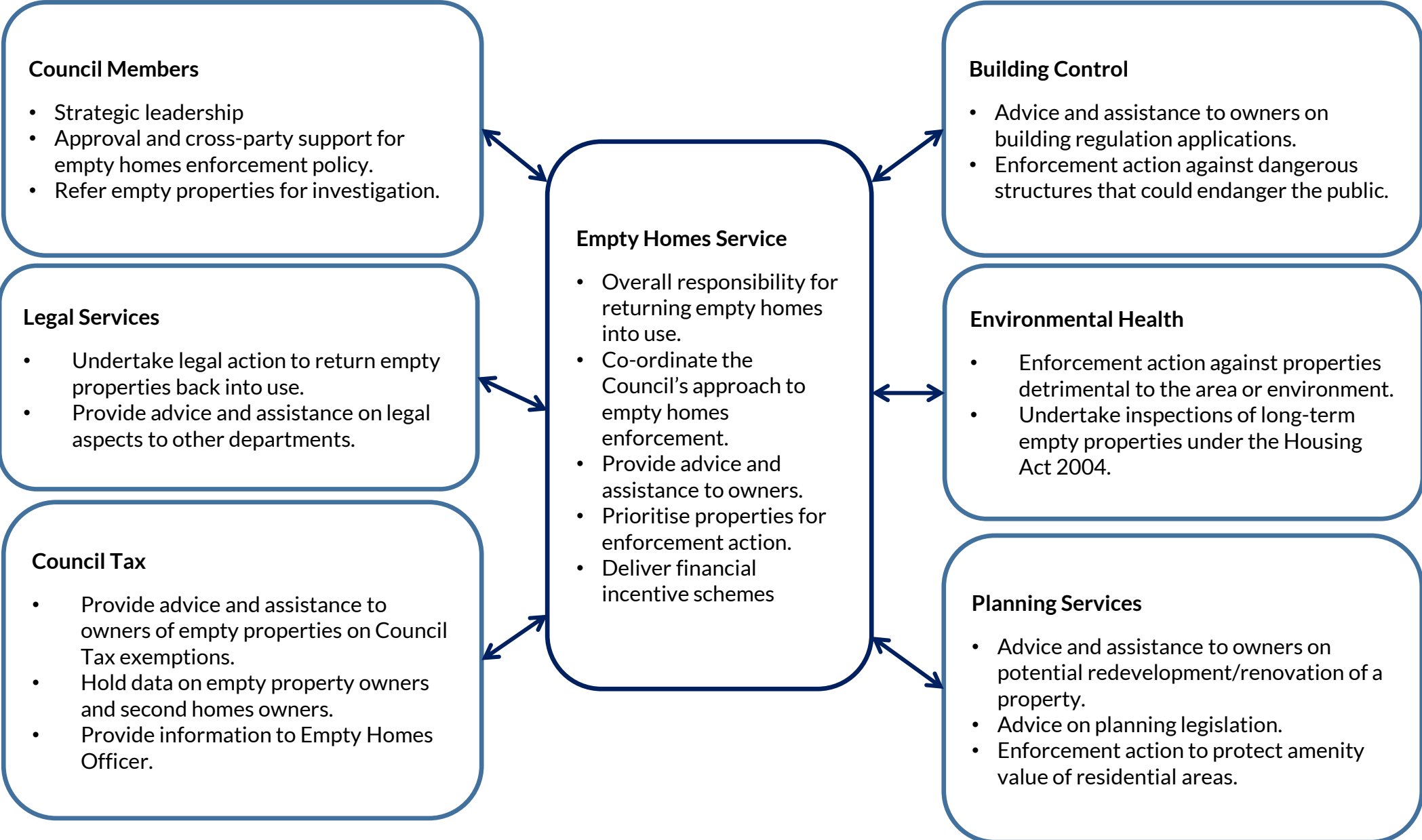


Appendix 1: Legislation to support Councils to resolve problematic properties

Problem	Legislation	Power Granted
Dangerous or dilapidated building structures	Building Act 1984, ss77 & 78	Section 77 – requirement for owner to make property safe
Dangerous or dilapidated building structures		Section 78 – Enables Council to take emergency action to make building safe
Unsecured properties (risk that it may be entered or suffer vandalism, arson etc.)	Housing Act 2004, Part 1	Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) enables councils to evaluate potential risks to health and safety arising from property deficiencies and take enforcement action.
	Building Act 1984, s79	Requirement for owner to repair, restore or demolish.
Unsecured properties (risk that it may be entered or suffer vandalism, arson etc.)	Building Act 1984, s78	To allow councils to fence off property.
	Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, s29	To allow councils to take steps to secure property

Problem	Legislation	Power Granted
Blocked or defective drainage or private sewers	Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976), s35	To require owner to address obstructed private sewers.
	Building Act 1984 s59	To require the owner to address blocked or defective drainage
	Public Health Act, 1961, s17	To require the owner to address defective drainage or private sewers.
Vermin (either present or there is a risk that they will be attracted)	Public Health Act 1961, s34	To require the owner to remove waste so that vermin is not attracted to the site, to destroy an infestation and to remove any accumulation prejudicial to health
	Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, s4	
	Public Health Act 1936, s 83	
	Environmental Protection Act 1990, s.80	
	Building Act 1984, s76	
Unightly land and property affecting the amenity of an area	Public Health Act 1961, s34	To require the owner to remove waste from the property
	Town and Country Planning Act 1990 s215	To require the owner to take steps to address a property adversely affecting the amenity of an area through its condition.

Appendix 2: List of Council Services which are involved with empty homes



Appendix 3: Case Studies

The following case studies highlight some of interventions with long term empty properties.



Old Social Club, Beaumaris – Compulsory Purchase Order

- The Council has executed a Compulsory Purchase Order to acquire the Old Sport and Social Club Site at Steeple Lane, Beaumaris where the existing dangerous building was demolished and re-developed to six new one bedroom apartments. These apartments are offered on intermediate rent to people, primarily with a local connection to the area. The development will be completed in September 2023.

Plas Alltran, Caergybi– Purchase by Agreement

- Re-development of the derelict Grade II Plas Alltran, is located near the port of Holyhead, was purchased through negotiations with the previous owner to create four, one-bedroom apartments to be offered as social housing.

Before:



After:



Before:



Proposed Development:

