

Empty Homes

Key points:

- From inception of the Council's Empty Properties Project in September 2010 to 31st April 2021, 1446 empty properties have been brought back into use through intervention, including advice and assistance plus enforcement action;
- As of 1st April 2021, there were 2599 empty properties in Cornwall (including LTE plus LTE Premium);
- 38% of these properties were in West Cornwall, with the Camborne, Pool and Redruth Community Network Area (CNA) containing most empty properties overall;
- The majority of empty properties were in Council Tax Band A (36%) followed by Band B (28%);
- 65% of empty homes were LTE, 33% were LTE Premium, and the remaining 2% were EUMW;
- The predominant reasons for properties being empty were due to being under repair (22%), followed by the property being for sale (15%);
- Positive impact through the work of the Empty Homes team on New Homes Bonus payment from Government to the Council amounting to over £28 million since 2010;
- Loans to the value of approximately £2.9 million have been provided to bring 134 units of residential accommodation back into use since 2012.
- In comparison to national figures (based on annual snapshot and official return to Government - last in October 2020), the proportion of LTE properties in Cornwall (1.14%) is now just 0.03% higher than the England figure (1.11%), the gap having narrowed significantly since 2016.

Background

A home is categorised as Long-Term Empty (LTE) after it has remained empty for a period of 6 months and up to 2 years (also known as a LTE Class C). After which, the home will be categorised as LTE Premium and are subject to a:

- 100% additional Council Tax charge if empty for 2 years and over;
- 200% additional Council Tax charge if empty for 5 years and over;
- 300% additional Council Tax charge if empty for 10 years and over.

Empty Unoccupied and Unfurnished (U&U) are properties that have been empty for less than 6 months and receive the first months Council Tax fully exempt, followed by the standard full charge from this point onwards. Additionally, Empty Uninhabitable/Major Works (EUMW) properties may qualify for up to a year's discount of 50% Council Tax whilst they are undergoing renovation, which must include structural repair/alteration.

Several challenges arise when homes are left empty. They are a wasted resource, can promote anti-social behaviour (e.g. vandalism to the property), blight the neighbourhood aesthetics and decrease the market value of nearby properties.

Bringing empty homes back into habitable use could alleviate challenges presented by the housing crisis. This housing shortage results in unaffordable and/or lack of appropriate properties and homelessness. Maximising opportunities for the re-use of empty homes helps:

- Improve environmental quality in areas and communities affected by the presence of empty homes;

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- Support strategies for the economic stability, regeneration/growth, and sustainability of settlements and communities, along with the prudent use of existing resources.

The number of empty homes is dynamic and fluctuates due to market forces and other factors, such as repair, deceased estates and marketing. Most homes are empty for only a short period, as there is considerable 'turnover', with many owners having a reasonable plan of action. However, some homes are persistently empty and therefore, complex and difficult to resolve these cases which are the focus of enforcement action to bring homes back into habitable use. Common barriers to bringing empty homes back into use include:

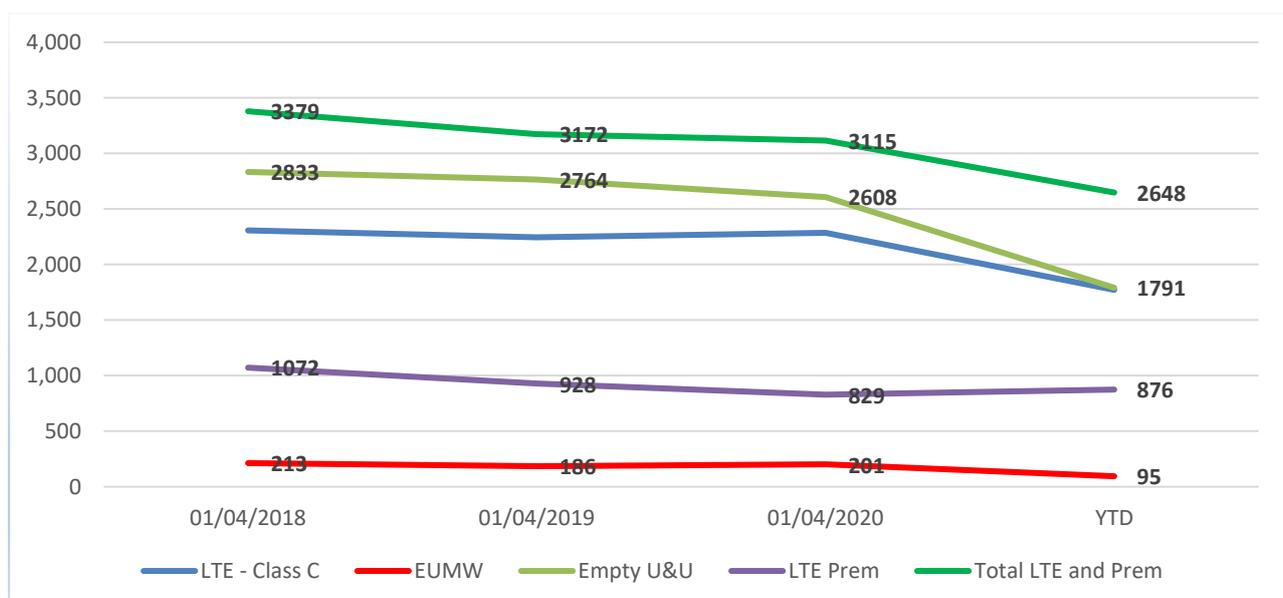
- Ownership or other legal issues/disputes;
- Inheritance issues/disputes or probate delays;
- Owners lack of finance for renovation;
- Saleability or letting problems.

% Comparison between Cornwall & England on LTE Properties (as total Council Tax Chargeable Dwellings)¹

Year	Cornwall	England	Gap*
2016	1.24	0.86	0.38
2017	1.2	0.87	0.33
2018	1.03	0.91	0.12
2019	1.06	0.94	0.12
2020	1.14	1.11	0.03

*Positive figure means Cornwall is higher than national proportion, whereas negative figure means lower. Considering the number of empty homes as a proportion of the overall number of Council Tax chargeable dwellings, the above table highlights that Cornwall has a high number of LTE properties. However, the gap between 2016 and 2021 has decreased from 0.39% to now 0.03%.

Empty Properties by End of Year Snapshot and Type



Data provided by Revenues, Academy Council Tax data.

¹ [Council Tax Base England](#)

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The snapshot figures submitted to the Government via the annual Council Tax Base form show a reduction in the number of LTE properties over several years, due to data cleansing (improvements in the accuracy of the Council Tax database) plus other pro-active and reactive work by the Council's Empty Homes team. However, the consistently high number, continually replenished by turnover, demonstrates a need for continuing action.

Links to further information

- <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/housing/private-housing/empty-properties/>
- <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn03012/>