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# What is the Role of Community-led Housing Solutions in Reducing Empty Homes in Wales?

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# Summary

- The most common approaches taken by the local authority participants in this research to address the issue of empty homes are:
  - Enforcement action
  - Loans
  - Support, advice & negotiations
  
- The most common barriers for the local authority participants in addressing the issue of empty homes are:
  - Human resources
  - Funding
  
- 73% of the local authorities interviewed in this research said COVID 19 is creating a further barrier to them addressing the issue of empty homes.
  
- In terms of solutions, the most common response from the local authorities interviewed was 'more human resources', followed by 'less restrictions', 'Welsh Government appointed Commissioner training' and 'a joined-up approach'.
  
- 86% of the local authorities interviewed had no experience of community-led housing solutions.
  
- Of those that did have experience of community-led housing solutions, 63% felt this could be an effective solution to addressing empty homes.
  
- In terms of suggestions that would support local authorities to adopt community-led housing solutions, 58% felt additional resources would be required.

- In terms of the partnership between local authorities and housing associations, a housing association participant who has adopted a community-led housing solution to address empty homes felt that:
  - Local authorities are enablers (funders)
  - The partnership creates a cost-effective solution
  - The partnership can minimise the risk
  
- The most effective aspects of community-led housing solutions (according to one of the housing association participants) are:
  - The community that it creates
  - Tenancy sustainability
  - Efficient void turnovers
  - Low cost repairs
  
- In terms of the barriers which prevent the use of community-led housing solutions, a housing association participant highlighted:
  - Governance arrangements
  - Commitment & resources
  - Funding/financial viability
  
- When asked what information could be shared between the housing association participants and other organisations, a housing association participant discussed:
  - An effective business model and governance structure
  - A better understanding of community-led housing solutions
  
- A key recommendation identified within this research is to consider the development of a National Empty Homes Strategy in Wales.

# 1.0 Introduction

The Welsh Government and local authorities class an empty property as a dwelling that has been vacant for six months or more (Vale of Glamorgan, 2019). Similarly, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) categorise problematic vacancies as those that are inactive in the housing market and have also been empty for more than six months (Chartered Institute of Housing, 2009). According to Lavender and Wilson (2012) properties that have been empty for less than six months signify the usual churn of the market and are not normally a concern for local authorities or residents.

Latest figures suggest there are roughly 27,000 long-term empty properties within the private sector in Wales and 1,400 in the social housing sector (National Assembly for Wales, 2019). These properties are not only a wasted resource but cause great nuisance to people and local authorities. Long-term 'empties' are considered problematic for several reasons such as attracting anti-social behaviour, imposing the risk of environmental health problems, and contributing to the decline in the neighbourhoods in which they exist (National Assembly for Wales, 2019).

## Why properties become empty?

- Owners have insufficient income to maintain/make the property habitable
- The property may be owned/ inherited and out of the owner's local area
- Properties can be problematic to sell when in a very poor state or undesirable area
- The owners of empty properties can sometimes be difficult to trace and uncooperative resulting in years of vacancy (National Assembly for Wales, 2019)

In October 2019, the National Assembly for Wales' Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee published a report entitled 'Empty Properties'. This report highlights the impact of empty homes on individuals and communities and considers the current approaches taken to bring empty homes back into use. The data presented in relation to the current approaches indicates that despite additional funding being made available via the Houses into Homes scheme, returning empty homes to use remains a major challenge. Loan

conditions are considered to be very rigid with the requirement for funds to be paid back within 2/3 years of the property being sold or let. This suggests there is not enough of an incentive for owners to bring their empty properties back into use as the strict time frame can make it difficult to recover funds (National Assembly for Wales, 2019). Much of the evidence captured from the inquiry focuses on the importance of a collaborative work ethic to expand and ensure the best use of every opportunity given to bring empty homes back into use.

**Key points:**

- Empty properties are a wasted housing resource
- They impact on the economy through loss of income for the owners, extra council tax costs and costs to public services from dealing with the problems that result from empty properties
- They increase the risk of anti-social behaviour- arson, fly-tipping and vandalism
- Cause environmental problems that can affect neighbouring properties such as damp and pest infestations.
- Are responsible for the decline in neighbourhoods in which they exist
- Can lead to a decrease in surrounding property value (National Assembly for Wales, 2019)

## 1.1 The Research Aims & Objectives

The Welsh Government currently has an empty homes initiative in place which aims to bring 5,000 properties back into use by 2021. At the same time, this aims to tackle the negative social and environmental impact that such properties can have on a neighbourhood. Bringing empty homes back into use is also expected to address the housing shortage and contribute to the Welsh Government's affordable homes target of 20,000 additional units by 2021 (Baxter, 2019).

As discussed in the National Assembly for Wales' Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee report, working with community groups is key to meeting the needs of each community and is crucial to the success of regeneration projects. Plans for dealing with empty properties should, therefore, focus on community-based approaches to ensure dealing with

empty properties properly reflect the views of communities. (National Assembly for Wales, 2019)

#### The Research Aims:

- To understand the challenges of bringing empty homes back into use
- To understand current approaches to reducing empty homes undertaken by local authorities
- To identify any learning that can be taken from housing organisations that have adopted community-led housing solutions to bring empty homes back into use

## 1.2 The Research Team

This research has been undertaken by a group of students who are currently studying on the BSc Housing Studies Degree Programme at Cardiff Metropolitan University:



Emma Parcell



Anthony  
Morgans



Amy McMurray

## 1.3 Tyfu Tai Cymru

The research project has been developed in partnership with Tyfu Tai Cymru (TTC) which is a five-year housing policy project that aims to provide insightful analysis and fill evidence gaps to support policy progression. Funded by the Oak Foundation, the TTC project is managed by the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru.



## 2.0 Literature Review

In 2011 the Welsh Government committed to support local authorities to tackle the issue of empty properties by launching the Houses into Homes Scheme. A £10 million fund was made available in 2012/13 and a further £10 million in 2013/14 (Welsh Government, 2015). Despite the availability of additional funding, returning empty properties remains a major challenge. The current initiatives that aim to reduce empty homes have seen some progress, but several limitations and difficulties stop them from applying in all circumstances.

The Welsh Assembly's recent report on empty homes (2019) highlights that empty homes are managed effectively with the provision of reactive services however, this does not always address the cause of why a property has become empty or bring it back into use. The Committee undertaking the inquiry believe that working with community groups to understand their priorities is crucial to the success of tackling empty homes, based on the links with community regeneration being a common thread through much of the evidence. There is a keen interest (within this report) in the Wales Co-operative Centre Toolkit for Developing Co-operative Housing, as this offers guidance to housing associations to support community-led housing solutions. The 'Toolkit' can help schemes to develop resources and the capacity to bring empty homes back into use.

Community-led Housing can be defined as "any housing scheme involving communities that are taking a leading role in providing housing solutions for people in need" (Wales Co-operative Centre, 2019). These schemes can be varied, they can build new homes, protect existing decent, affordable homes, create homes from empty properties, and provide homes of all types of tenure (Wales Co-operative Centre, 2019).

### 2.1 Funding

There are three main funding streams available to local authorities and housing associations to address the issue of empty homes (as illustrated below):

Funding: Wales		
Social Housing Grant	Recycled Capital Grant	Houses into Homes Scheme

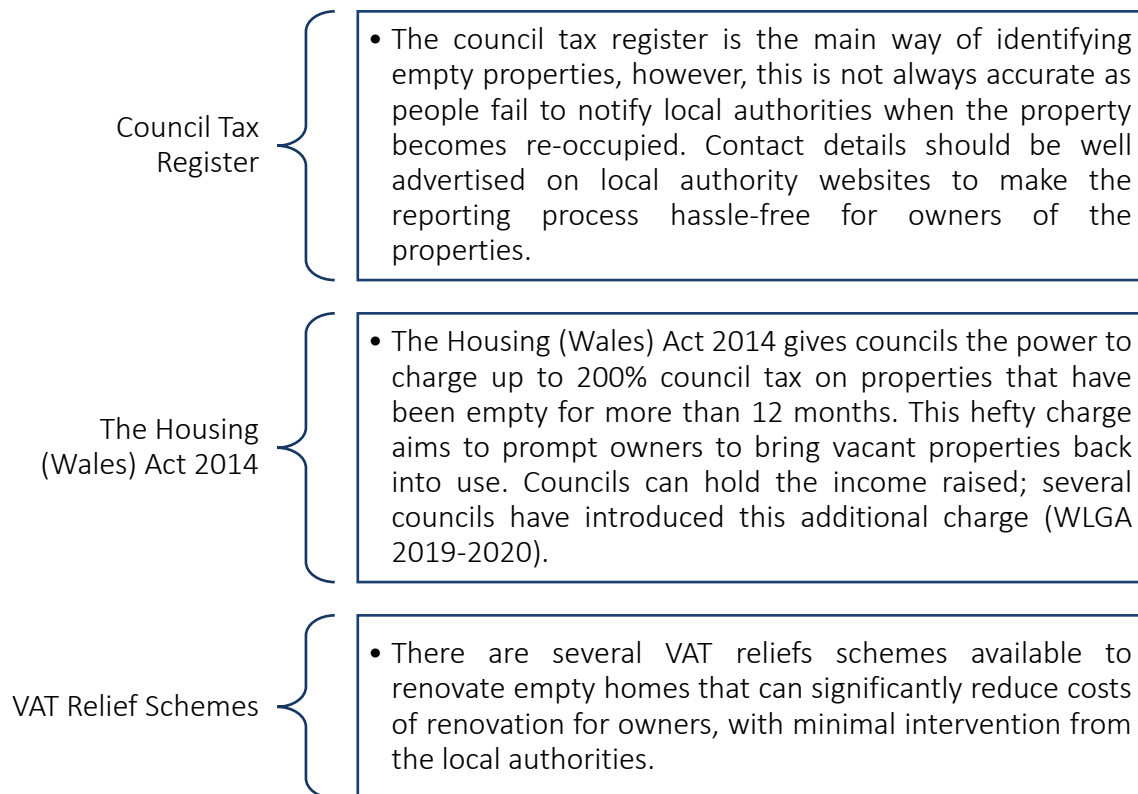
The **Social Housing Grant (SHG)** is allocated to each local authority in Wales to fund the delivery of affordable housing. Local authorities are responsible for deciding on priorities and can work with Registered Social Landlord's and partners to use the SHG to purchase empty properties. A **Recycled Capital Grant (RCG)** or reserves can bring empty homes back into use to increase affordable housing units in Wales. The RCG is funding that has been previously allocated by the Welsh Government to housing associations, to buy land or build affordable housing (Vale of Glamorgan, 2019).

The **Houses into Homes Scheme** is a recyclable loan fund of £20 million that intends to bring empty houses or commercial buildings back into use as homes for rent or sale. Loans are allocated to either individuals, charities, companies, or businesses. Loans are interest-free and are available at a maximum of £25,000 per property. However, they must be paid back within two years, depending on whether the property has been sold or let.

In England, the funding streams from the shared ownership and Affordable Homes Programme (2016) have not provided any separate funding for empty homes. This has resulted in local authorities providing incentives to encourage the regeneration of empty homes. Another issue is the inconsistency amongst local authorities with regards to empty homes teams and council tax departments which "can make it difficult or impractically time-consuming to challenge, for example, the status of apparently empty homes defined as second homes for Council Tax collection and billing purposes." (Action on Empty Homes, 2019).

In Scotland, community groups can apply for funding via the Islands Housing Fund & The Land Fund by liaising with Development Trusts. This encourages funding streams to promote the regeneration of empty homes. The community group funding does not provide funding measures for private homeowners, as suggested by the Scottish Government, (2012) "community group funding is to be used to provide affordable homes for social or private rental."

## 2.2 Local Authority Tools



An Empty Homes Value Tool is used in Scotland to assess the overall impact and value for money of the regeneration of empty homes (Shelter Scotland, 2019). The regeneration of empty homes will encourage the economic growth within a given area resulting in a reduction of anti-social behaviour, vandalism, and arson, whilst encouraging the property market to potentially increase where no empty properties are residing according to Orkney, (2018). The Empty Property Matchmaker scheme is a free service providing a tool that matches individuals who are looking to purchase a vacant home with owners who are looking to sell a vacant property. This is a voluntary scheme run by various local authorities within Scotland according to Aberdeenshire Council (2020).

The incentives provided by local authorities are council tax exemption or decrease, however, some incentives, it can be argued, provide more of an enforcement solution including Empty Dwelling Management Orders as suggested by (Wilson, et al., 2019), Council tax exemptions and premiums are discretionary additional measures that are used across all local authorities to reduce the number of empty homes in their area under the Local Government Finance Act

2012. Local authorities can offer incentives such as discounts which can be up to 100% for up to 12 months for “vacant properties undergoing major repair work or structural alteration” (Wilson, et al., 2019).

## 2.3 Enforcement Action

Enforcement action is considered the last resort where previous efforts to address an empty property have been unsuccessful. In Wales, local authorities have extensive powers that can be used when an empty property is believed to be unsafe or in very poor condition. Significant changes took place in 2004 with the implementation of the Housing Act.

Enforcement activity includes.

- Improvement or prohibition notices on owners, demolition orders, or management orders
- Compulsory Purchase Orders
- Renewal areas
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO's)

Long term empty homes in England are placed on an enforcement pathway that provides information and responsibility for empty homes in the local authority area. “In some councils, enforcement action is most often driven by complaints from neighbouring properties, and/or councillors, an approach which may be deemed necessary where resources are limited in relation to high numbers of long-term empty homes. Some officers take a ‘wait and see approach’, and only pursue cases which show no progress towards being brought into use after a long time has elapsed. Here, action may also be triggered by other officers or services reporting negative impacts arising from the home’s empty status.” (Action on Empty Homes, 2019).

As discussed further by Wilson, et al (2019), “the Government has given strong powers and incentives to local authorities to tackle empty homes. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019, they will have discretion to increase the maximum level of premium charged on properties that have been empty for more than two years, from 50% to 100% extra council tax, through new powers afforded by the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018. A Lords amendment extended the premium to 300% on properties that have been

unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for five years or more (in force from 2020), and 400% on properties that have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for ten years or more (in force from 2021).”

The implementation of the Local Government Finance, (Unoccupied Properties, etc.) Scotland Act (2012), was passed in December 2012, this has enabled the local authorities the power to amend the Council Tax against empty homes with the power to implement a 100% surcharge as a lever to bring empty homes back into use as suggested by Glasgow Government, (2016).

The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 provided legislative powers for the Housing Executive to intervene although The Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 provided additional legislative powers relating to the sharing of information in relation to empty properties which enable greater knowledge of empty homes, the solutions, and actions in addressing the issue. There is a suggestion that changing the tenancy law will enable social landlords to lease an empty home and renting it to tenants which could seek to address the housing need as well as bringing homes back into use. “Drawing on best practice elsewhere, the empty homes unit will take steps to actively work with housing associations, community groups, voluntary groups, and local councils to identify and rectify the problem empty homes present.” (Department for Social Development, 2013).

## 2.4 Strategic Approaches

Strategic work has been undertaken in Wales to ensure progress on tackling empty homes improves, through integrating such work with other strategic priorities. Senior housing officers from all local authorities make up the All-Wales Private Sector Housing Expert Panel, which has responsibility for empty properties (National Assembly for Wales, 2019). The role aims to coordinate the activity of the local authority to certify a unified approach to dealing with empty homes (WLGA- 2015-2020). Each local authority at a minimum should have a dedicated empty property officer, working behind an effective Empty Property Strategy.

There is no national empty homes strategy and no statutory duty for local authorities to publish empty homes strategies, they are, however, required to publish housing strategies which may

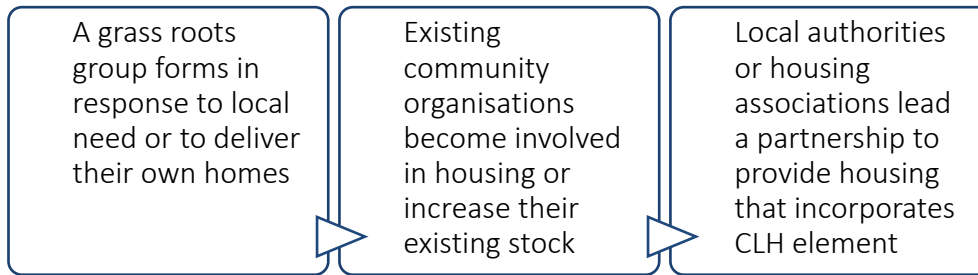
include a reference to empty homes - The Local Government Act 2003, Section 85 will allow the use of the Council Tax billing process to identify empty properties within a local geographical area, however, the data collected is limited in its accessibility to communicating with owners of empty properties and cannot interfere with a person's right to privacy, it also doesn't permit disclosure to third parties so limits the usefulness of the information gathered.

One issue highlighted by the National Assembly for Wales (2019) is that tackling empty properties is not always considered holistically by local authorities, but rather left to one empty homes officer with little strategic priority. Statistics produced by the National Assembly for Wales signifies that some authorities fail to have a strategy of empty homes in place, however, appear to respond effectively to the short-term impact of empty properties. This could be issues like environmental health problems but means the wider issues and long-term solutions are dealt with less effectively.

## 2.5 Community-led Housing Solutions

Wider community-led approaches to bringing empty properties back into use can "help local authorities to maximise their contribution to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act through creating additional social and economic value. In addition to creating cohesive communities, co-operative and community-led housing (CCLH) schemes can also contribute to building a more prosperous Wales through providing training opportunities" (National Assembly for Wales, 2019). Community-led approaches involve local people in taking the lead over the long-term to help solve housing problems, creating affordable homes and building strong communities. It can involve building new houses or returning existing properties to use through approaches such as housing co-ops, community land trusts (CLTs), tenant management organisations (TMOs), cohousing, community self-build schemes and self-help housing groups that renew empty homes (Co-operative Councils Innovation Network, 2017).

There are 3 ways in which CCLH groups can become involved:



Community-led solutions can also assist authorities in delivering their strategic priorities by:

- Improving housing supply and providing affordable housing
- Supporting regeneration and returning empty properties to use
- Empowering communities to be self-sufficient, resilient, cohesive, and sustainable

(See Appendices A-G for community-led housing practice examples)

## 3.0 Methodology

The aims of this research are to:

- To understand the challenges of bringing empty homes back into use
- To understand current approaches to reducing empty homes undertaken by local authorities
- To identify any learning that can be taken from housing organisations that have adopted community-led housing solutions to bring empty homes back into use

A mixed methods approach will be adopted throughout this research. In order to meet the research aims, primary research will be undertaken. This will involve semi structured interviews with local authority representatives from across Wales and housing association representatives. The research team felt it was important to capture the participants' experiences therefore, the responses received will be of a qualitative nature. In addition, secondary research of community-led housing practice examples will be undertaken to support the primary research. This will be presented as case studies within the appendices.

## 3.1 Research Design

Data collection for this project took place during August 2020. In order to maximise participation in this research, and in order to gain responses from across the whole of Wales, a series of online virtual interviews took place. The interview questions for this research were developed in partnership with Tyfu Tai and have been designed to meet the research aims. Two sets of research questions were produced, one for local authority representatives and one for housing association representatives (as illustrated below):

### Local Authority Questions:

1. What are the current approaches within your local authority to address empty homes?
2. What are the barriers/issues to address empty homes at a local authority level?
3. In respect of the barriers, what do you think could be the solutions to addressing empty homes in your local authority?
4. Do you have any experience of community-led housing solutions?
5. If yes, how effective do you think it is in addressing empty homes?
6. Is there anything you would suggest that would support the creation of opportunities for additional community-led housing solutions?

### Housing Association Questions:

1. What community-led housing solutions have you adopted in order to reduce empty homes in your area?
2. How does that partnership work with your local authority?
3. What do you think is the most effective aspect of the community-led housing solution?
4. Do you encounter any barriers which prevent the use of community-led housing solutions?
5. Is there anything that could be shared with other organisations?



## 4.0 Data Analysis

There was a high response rate from local authorities to participate in the research. The input from local authorities to this research study enabled us to gather views from all regions across Wales.

The data analysis for this section will be both qualitative and quantitative to represent the local authority responses.

### 4.1 A Local Authority Perspective

**Q1) What are the current approaches within your local authority to address empty homes?**

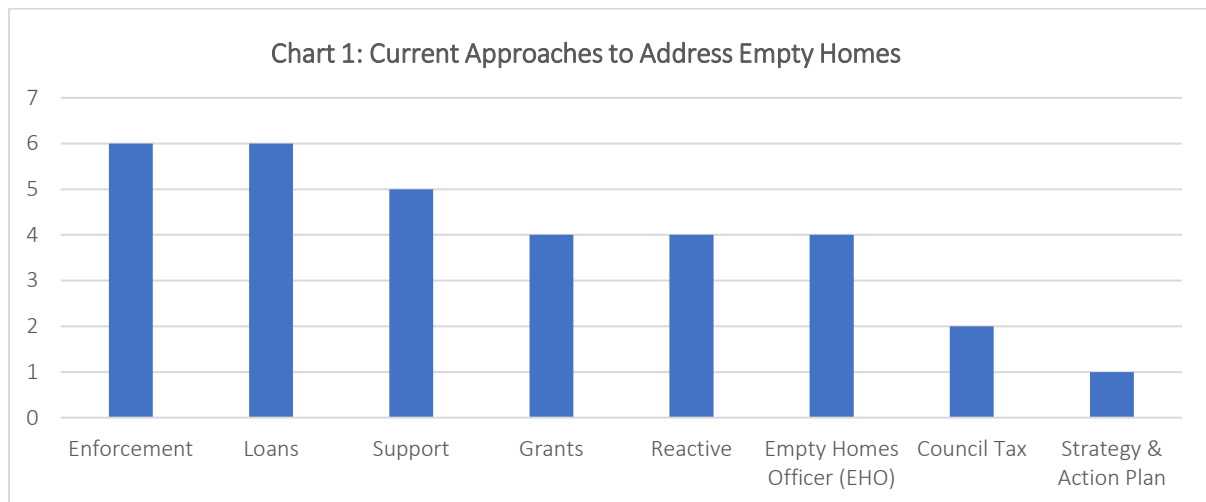


Chart 1 illustrates the current approaches used by local authorities to address the issue of empty homes in their area. The most common responses were the use of enforcement and loans at 86%. The least common responses were council tax at 29% and only 14% of responses stated their current approach included a strategy and action plan.

Chart 1 provides a useful quantification of the responses provided by local authorities to question 1 however, there were useful quotes provided in response to this question and these have been captured below under the same headings. All responses have been anonymised:

#### **Enforcement:**

*“We do enforcement, although probably not as much as we should do”*

*“The options we have got going at the moment are council tax in terms of charges/charging orders and enforced sale”*

*“We look for any properties that may be suitable for EDMO’s”*

**Enforced Sale:**

*“It’s a really effective way of getting and changing ownership of properties that are long term problematic”*

**Loans:**

*“We have got the Houses into Homes Loan and that is either for landlords or people that want to purchase empty homes to do them up and either live in or rent out”*

**Grants:**

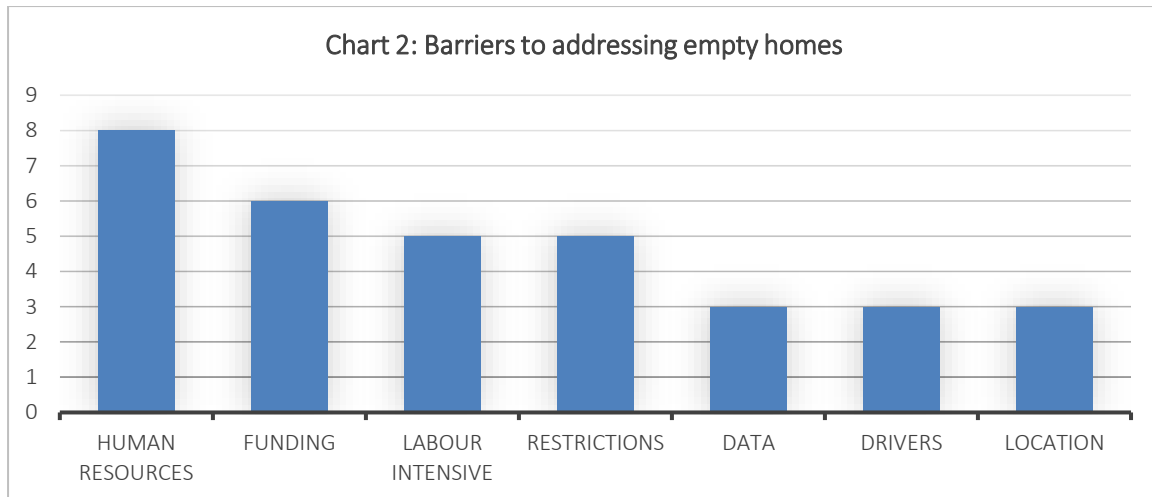
*“We have two different grants, which is the first time buyers and the landlord grants which are to help young people and those who are starting on the property ladder and the landlord grant to help them bring their property back into use to rent it out”*

**Reactive:**

*“Mainly reactive, very little proactive because the resource isn’t there”*

**Council Tax:**

*“We recently increased council tax, so they get 6 months free, they get the next 6 months at 50% rate and then it automatically goes to a 200% rate – that has actually helped in some respects because when people ring me I can warn them that if you don’t do this then it will go up year on year”*

**Q2) What are the barriers/issues to address empty homes at a local authority level?**

The chart illustrates the barriers local authorities face when addressing empty homes. The main barrier reported was that local authorities needed additional human resources followed by the need for more funding.

*“Resource, that’s the key one if you haven’t got the people on the ground to do the work that’s a big barrier”*

*“We haven’t got the staff to chase them down basically, that’s our main barrier really in us not getting more empty properties back into use”*

*“The funding to be able to offer new initiatives and new things”*

*“We haven’t got any in-house teams in place that can undertake the repairs or renovations as required, so that can incur costs which can be quite a drawback”*

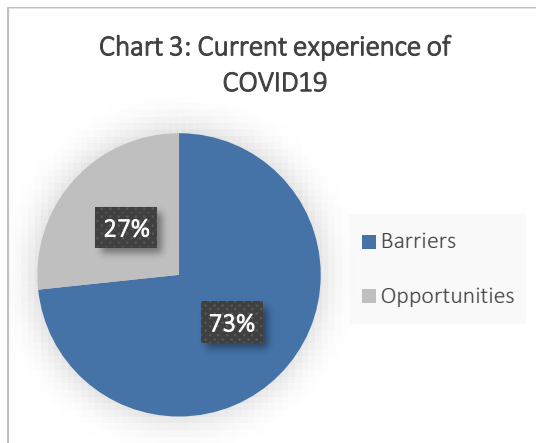


Chart 3 illustrates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the local authority's response to addressing empty homes in their area. The barriers include, postponing of training, less enforcement action, work being triaged, preventing community engagement, additional needs taking priority, and no decisions on grant applications.

*"Everything got cancelled because of Covid... so things haven't progressed there as they should have done and that was intended to drive empty property work within the council better so that is something that could happen but hasn't happened"*

*"We have a communication plan and we will go out into the community and talk about it, obviously we can't at the moment"*

*"Bearing in mind Covid, the restrictions that, that has put in place basically most of our work is triaged now, so any proactive planned work has pretty much stalled"*

*"Because of the Covid situation, there is no decision been made yet on grants and things because we are still working from home and we are not allowed to do any visits at the moment inside a property"*

Although Covid has been a barrier, it also provided an opportunity to consider their approach to addressing empty homes in their area.

*"This time has been quite a benefit to us"*

*"Covid has probably been a bit of a benefit for the team I'm in; it has given us the opportunity to relook at everything, do some good housekeeping, and making sure that everything is in order and using that time to contact people"*

*“We have found that quite a lot of people are more available now during Covid and are willing to start talking”*

**Q3) In respect of the barriers, what do you think could be the solutions to addressing empty homes in your local authority?**

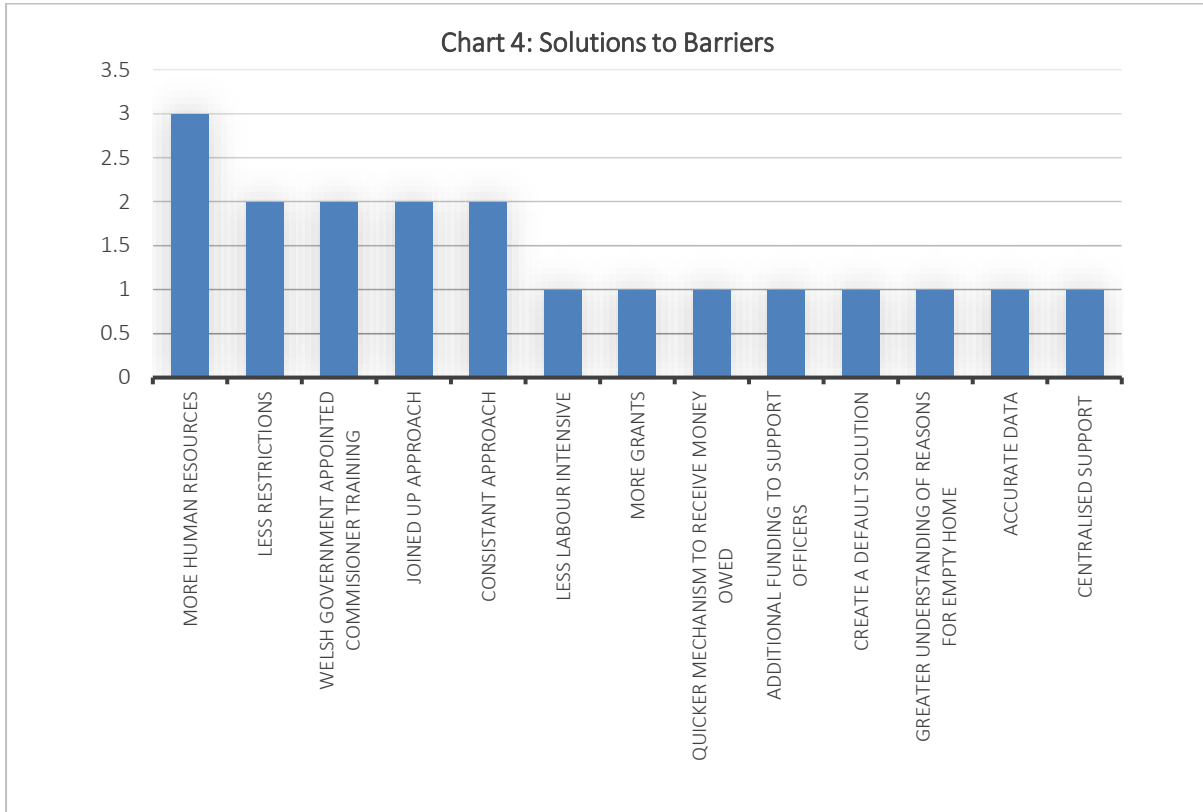


Chart 4 illustrates the solutions that the respondents felt could remove the barriers to addressing empty homes at a local authority level.

*“Number one is that we get some funding to provide a dedicated Empty Properties Officer”*

*“I am the Empty Homes Officer, there isn’t a team there is just me and I sort of get roped into other stuff as well that aren’t empty homes”*

*“We have the powers, but we haven’t got the legal expertise sometimes to see it through, what it really needs is funding for legal skills and stuff like that to assist.”*

*“We need to try and get more grants, we are running out of grants, last year’s grants we ran out by June and that was from the start of the financial year”*

*“I think The Welsh Government could do more in terms of centralised specialist support for empty properties”*

*“The Welsh Government have got a bit of a drive on empty properties at the moment as well, so they commissioned an expert to give us all training”*

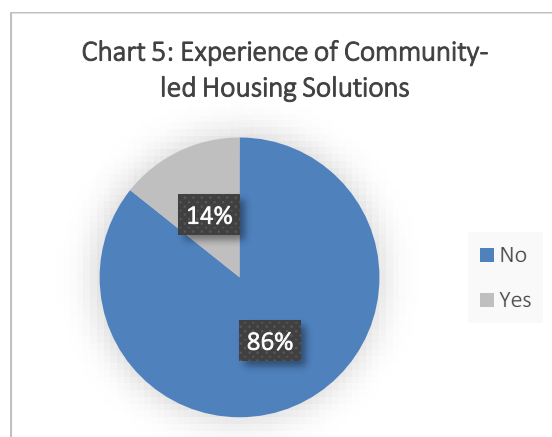
*“Simplifying processes and making it more like a default that your property is empty for X amount of time and apart from obviously certain criteria the local authority has more rights or powers or easier to access powers to bring that property back into occupation”*

*“It’s just helping with the resources and creating opportunities; it is making sure that everything is joined up”*

*“There could be council tax arrears, there could be care home charges, if someone goes into a council care home the council may put a charge on their house to cover those costs, but we could be waiting years and years and years to get that money back. So, all that money is held as charges in these empty properties and what we need is a quicker mechanism to release that money back to the councils”*

*“It is about understanding why people own an empty property and pay council tax on it but never do anything with it. We have got properties that are deteriorating, and the owners are paying council tax on them, but anything you offer they are just not interested”*

#### Q4) Do you have any experience of community-led housing solutions?



The chart illustrates there is little experience of community led housing solutions from the local authorities interviewed with 86% stating they had no experience.

*“We are not averse to it and we would like to support an initiative, but it really is led by those community groups, so it’s not something you can impose on anybody”*

*“It requires a few people in a community deciding that they want to do something first and then they come to us for support”*

The respondents who answered yes have recently started to use community-led housing solutions to address empty homes in their area.

*“That is what we are starting to do now”*

*“We have mapped all the empty properties and what we plan to do in our action plan is where there are clusters of empty properties that we target those community areas and we go and see them and talk to them and we ask why the property is empty and how we can help”*

*“We want to understand what the housing need is in that area, to actually identify so that we know that the housing need is X and the reason is Y, how can we make it so that we can create some movement and help so that we don’t have to keep developing units and we can bring those properties back into use and unlock that housing potential”*

*“The rural housing enabler service arranged a housing evening in January, where they invited members of the community to come and talk about what their issues were in relation to empty homes, second homes, and housing supply generally”*

**Q6) If yes, how effective do you think it is in addressing empty homes?**

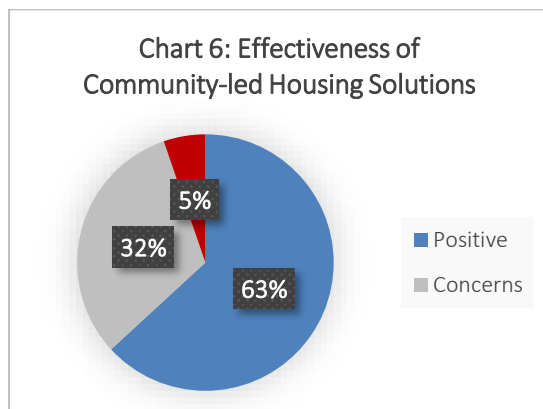


Chart 6 illustrates how the majority of responses were positive in that local authorities could see how effective community-led housing solutions could be in addressing empty homes in their area.

5% of the participants did not answer this question.

*“It definitely can be the solution and it should be part of the package”*

*“It can be very successful in particular property and scenario”*

*“Absolutely the way forward”*

*“Sounds really good, I would love to be involved in that”*

*“I haven’t had any experience of that but would be interested in learning more”*

*“Think it’s going to be a good programme”*

*“It’s really important to involve local communities and that things are community led, because they are the ones affected by empty properties in the community”*

*“Engaging local people will raise the profile which is a benefit”*

*“Quite bespoke but definitely should be part of the picture”*

There were concerns from some respondents about whether community-led housing solutions would address the issue of empty homes in their area.

*“Not particularly effective on a large scale”*

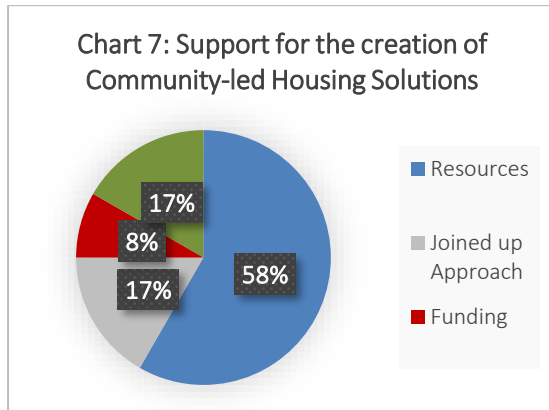
*“We will need funding for it”*

*“Will never be the driver behind all empty homes, because it’s got to come from that group”*

*“I don’t know if the community approach will necessarily alter how certain homeowners react or whether we could use any powers to change or do something about that”*



Q7) Is there anything you would suggest that would support the creation of opportunities for additional community-led housing solutions?



As illustrated in Chart 7, the respondents felt to create opportunities for additional community-led housing solutions, the majority (58%) felt they would require additional resources to assist them.

17% of respondents felt a joined-up approach is required and 8% suggested funding. 17% of participants did not answer this question.

*"I don't know how it could be successful as the tools we have are inadequate for us at the moment"*

*"I feel it would just put added pressure on local authorities who haven't got extra resources"*

*"It's down to capacity, it would be really good if we could do it"*

*"Making sure that we have got all departments there, all the skills there to enable us to do what we need to do"*

Ensuring there was a joined-up approach within the local authority was a way of creating opportunities for additional community-led housing solutions.

*"It's all there, we just need to join it all up and get to work"*

There was a positive response regarding the need for funding whilst creating opportunities for additional community led housing solutions as the community groups could access additional external funding for the projects.

*"I think that finance is not so key with them because they are a group, and they can all get individual bits of finance perhaps or buy shares in the property"*

## 4.2 A Housing Association Perspective

In addition to the local authority input into this research study, it is also important to consider the perspective of housing associations. The response to this element of the research was, unfortunately, low however, the views of the two housing associations in Wales that did respond are extremely important and we value their input. One of the housing associations interviewed has implemented a community-led housing association to address issues of empty homes in their area of work. The second association has adopted community-led housing solutions although not currently to address the issue of empty homes however, plans are developing for them to do so in the near future.

The data analysis for this section of the study will be purely qualitative, expressing the views and experiences of both housing organisations through direct quotes. This section is intended to contribute to a learning process for organisations who are considering adopting a community-led housing approach in the future.

### Q1) What community-led housing solutions have you adopted in order to reduce empty homes in your area?

These are the views of **Housing Association 1**, the association who have implemented a community-led housing solution.

*“We were looking at how we could regenerate one of our largest estates... where we had a block of flats”*

*“We worked with (the local authority) to look at different options for that block”*

*“It was completely derelict and had a huge amount of anti-social behavior”*

*“They were just completely unlettable at the time”*

*“We wanted to try to find a way for people to take ownership of the properties, care about the properties, and want to live there. We were also looking at ways where we could try and encourage people into employment in the area, so that is where the idea came from for a cooperative”*

*“We funded it through low-cost loans through the council so there was a really good bit of partnership work there”*

*“We completely refurbished the block of 12 properties to a really nice quality; they had new kitchens and bathrooms and were completely gutted. All of the communal areas were done too and they are a really high standard of properties now”*

*“Initially we struggled to let them because of the reputation of the previous properties and because of the co-operative solution. People were not aware of it and did not know what it was”*

*“They were like ‘what do you mean co-operative, I don’t want to do all that work, I just want to live in my property’. But when we had the finished product of the flats it was sort of like the golden carrot”*

*“We offered a lot of training and support (to the co-operative\_ in the beginning because we had a lot of tenants who had not been involved in co-op’s before”*

*“I have got to be honest, it has really paid off”*

*“It’s a fantastic project and we are four years in now to being a fully mutual co-operative. We still support them through a management agreement with housing management and rent collection but they do a large amount of the work themselves like allocation and rent setting”*

*“They look after all of their finances themselves so it’s a very positive project”*

These are the views of **Housing Association 2**, the association who have not implemented a community-led housing solution.

*“It’s a bit of a rough time in terms of this as the plans that we did have, have kind of gone out of the window a bit with the pandemic”*

*“We have across the group around 300-400 of empty properties which are basically beyond economical repair”*

*“Particularly around 1 bedroom flats and things like that and we have also put a few up for sale as well”*

*“In terms of community-led initiatives in trying to get empty homes full it’s not something that we have kind of done so much as a focus previously, it’s very much something that we want to do”*

*“We have to work really differently and much harder to ensure that we can have sustainability long term and that comes from allocating that property correctly in the first place which you can't do without the community having some sort of input and knowing the communities. So that’s part of the plan going forward at the moment”*

## Q2) How does that partnership work with your local authority?

**Housing Association 1:** The responses provided by housing association 1 can be categorised into three sections:

1. Local authorities as enablers (funding)
2. A cost-effective solution
3. Minimised risk

*“The partnership for this project was key because without the (local authority) we wouldn’t have had funding”*

*“The (local authority), they were the enablers because they gave us a really low-cost long-term loan which is then paid back through the rent”*

*“The co-operative pay sort of a lease agreement which covers the cost of the loan, so for us it was financially very attractive as a housing association because we are not getting any profit from the rent it all goes back into the co-operative, but we were able to do this work to a block of our flats and make them a lot more attractive and add huge social value to the community”*

*“There was no capital outlay in the beginning which made it much more viable and a lot less of a risk”*

*“The partnership with the council was completely the enabler and it has been throughout as well because what they have done is work with us to ensure that we could allocate outside of the social housing waiting lists as well”*

*“That way we could attract people who were co-operators and people who were interested in that housing option then. Being able to operate outside of the (social housing) list was really helpful”*

**Housing Association 2:**

*“The conversations are now being had with the local authority to say let's look at the bigger picture and how much that's going to cost overall not just to the organisation”*

**Q3) What do you think is the most effective aspect of the community-led housing solution?****Housing Association 1:**

*“It is the community that it builds because what we have noticed is the people that came into the co-operative, in the beginning, weren't co-operators or aware of co-operative housing or what it really meant, but what it's built there is a very close-knit community”*

*“We had people in the beginning with quite high support needs who weren't able to come to meetings on their own, they came with family or a support worker. They are now fully involved in the co-operative they come to all of the meetings and have a really strong support network there and are doing fantastic”*

*“Everyone seems more set to maintain their tenancies; the co-operative can be quite flexible when people get into difficulty with employment”*

*“We have had people who have lost their job quite suddenly due to redundancy or the nature of the work they do around zero-hour contracts and the co-operative has been able to work with them to ensure they can maintain their property and stay in their property”*

*“The tenants have a lot more to do with the organization (the housing association)”*

*“What we find from a housing management perspective is that it's a real high performing model so we have like 1-day void turnover because the tenants let the properties themselves”*

*“We have incredibly low repair cost because tenants take a lot of responsibility doing things themselves and really looking after the properties as well”*

*“We have very very low void costs then when it comes to the turnover of properties as they are always left in a good quality state. They haven’t had a rent increase since they began so for the last 4 years their rent has stayed the same because they’ve managed their business really well”*

*“They have taken on things like communal cleaning, they take that on between them so they don’t have that added cost. Also, when they have got into difficulty with rent there has always been openness and honesty very early on and they’ve been able to support tenants to either access benefits or pay the rent back through a rental agreement so they haven’t got a huge rent loss either”*

*“It is about having the right properties in the right area”*

#### **Housing Association 2:**

*“It’s about getting to know those communities better and those guys (the community) having the same of what works for them and this is the thing we are not at that point at the moment and ways to get there are getting to know our customers a ton better than what we do, it’s a very common trap that housing professionals do and just fall into – well we know what you need or we think we know what you need and that tends not to be the case a lot of the time. So a huge part of that is resident involvement”*

#### **Q4) Do you encounter any barriers which prevent the use of community-led housing solutions?**

##### **Housing Association 1:**

*“The way we set it up from the beginning was it wasn’t just an extension of (the housing association) it was a stand-alone organisation; the tenancy agreements are not between the co-op tenants, they are between the co-operative and the members of the co-operative and they very much have full control”*

*“They could say tomorrow we are not going to work with (the housing association) anymore we are going to find a separate management agent and that would absolutely fine. They are at the stage of their journey where they would be capable of doing that as well”*

*“It’s taken a lot of time and commitment from a resource side of things”*

## **Housing Association 2:**

*“We have got a few barriers in terms of that so in terms of the community-led stuff, we don’t know our customers nearly as well as we should”*

*“Another one, particularly around empty homes, is funding, financing, the viability of those empty units, we do look at where we have got a big presence in an area if we have got leaseholders that want to sell we will look at buying back properties”*

*“It’s the balance between the social heart commercial head so that is a big thing, I think if it was a case of that we had unlimited funds then I think we would bring them all up to spec and let them all but you know they don’t do that”*

## **Q5) Is there anything that could be shared with other organisations?**

*“It’s a good model that has worked well, the housing management benefit side of things speaks for itself”*

*“The business model is a model that could be shared with other organisations”*

*“It is just knowledge, people’s understanding of community-led housing”*

*“It’s just the knowledge, from a housing association side of things what we tried to do from the beginning is to set up a governance structure that was very similar to ours because it was just too much it was too heavy”*

*“These people were all employed they had their own busy lives to get on with and we were saying you got to meet every week and all come together, but really we needed to be a lot more fluid and allow something natural to come from it”*



*“I think it is just having that understanding and setting expectations for the tenants and the organisation from the offset”*

*“I don’t think you can expect a very small housing co-operative to have the same sort of governance structure as a massive housing association. It is about understanding these are people with lives and things will work as they work, as long as you got that overview it goes really well”*

## 5.0 Discussion

The local authority responses identified specific key themes when addressing empty homes in their areas, these themes were:

- Funding
- Resources
- Enforcement
- Location

### 5.1 Funding

Whilst the respondents acknowledged the funding they received from Welsh Government to enable them to provide the Houses into Homes loan and grants for empty home owners to bring empty homes back into use, there was concern that there was not enough money available to address empty homes with funding running out within a few months. The loans and grants also have strict conditions which must be met for funding to be accessed by owners of empty homes. The limited funding at a local authority level make it difficult for them to be able to offer new initiatives in a bid to address empty homes in their area however, local authorities are seeking alternative funding streams to enable them to access further funding.

The response from Housing Association 1 paints a different picture. This organisation views the local authority as very much ‘the enabler’ with a large part of the enabling coming from the local authority funding model.

## 5.2 Resources

There was inconsistency with human resources, although many local authorities did have an empty properties officer there were some who did not, some were single officers whilst some had empty homes teams. Responses indicated that they could benefit from additional staff members who have legal skills with training to improve confidence and assist staff in making decisions, which would help speed up the local authority response to bringing empty homes back into use. The responses highlighted that their current processes and funding restrictions mean it is very labour intensive, often with little or no results. The empty property data is reported and compared between local authorities with respondents indicating that they target properties to work with which will produce results. Resources are limited and with the amount of empty homes increasing, local authorities are finding that they are working on a reactive basis which reduces the proactive interventions they can use.

There was clearly a positive impact from Housing Association 1 in adopting a community-led housing solution and having a dedicated resource within the housing association to develop this project. There is also much learning that can be taken from housing organisations who have implemented this model, and this learning could contribute to resource savings in the future.

## 5.3 Enforcement

Again, there were inconsistencies amongst local authority responses regarding the use of enforcement. Only some respondents indicated that they actively use an Enforced Sale to reduce empty homes the process is usually quicker and simpler than other enforcement powers to bring empty properties back into use. Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) are used although respondents highlighted that they can be a drain on their limited resources and are very labour intensive due to the notices they must send and the processes they must follow. There were also inconsistencies between respondents about the use of the Council Tax Premium that local authorities can charge owners of empty homes which can increase to 200% where properties have been left empty for over two years, without the owner actively trying

to sell the property or refurbishing the property to either rent out or live in it. The local authority respondents who did use the Council Tax Premium indicated that they have been in contact with those affected which has, in many cases, prompted action by the owners of the long-term empty homes. Some respondents acknowledged that they were not proactive in carry out enforcement which adds to the variation of local authority responses to addressing empty homes in their area.

## 5.4 Location

The local authority responses in terms of addressing empty homes was dependent on the location of both the local authority and the empty homes in the area. Local authorities in rural areas indicated that where there were singular empty homes, which were not accessible as they were not on a bus route, and were not financially viable for refurbishment work, then they would be difficult to rent out or sell. This limits the options for both owners and the local authority as loans and grants are for refurbishment costs to bring empty homes back into use. The Welsh Government's current drive for city-centre regeneration provides opportunities for urban local authorities with both singular and clusters of empty homes to unlock their housing potential and bring empty homes back in to use.

As discussed by Housing Association 1 - *"It is about having the right properties in the right area"*.

## 5.5 What Can We Learn from Community-led Housing Solutions?

86% of local authority respondents indicated that they had no experience of community-led housing solutions in addressing empty homes, however, the respondents who had experience had only just started to speak to the community to understand the issues and seek community-led housing solutions. Respondents were keen to understand more about how community-led housing solutions could potentially help in addressing the issue of empty homes and would support these solutions if they were approached. The local authority responses were mostly positive about whether community led housing solutions could be effective in addressing

empty homes, however, there were some respondents who felt that they would not be able to create opportunities for community-led housing solutions without additional funding and resources.

There are many benefits of community-led housing solutions one of these is by involving local people taking the lead over the long term to help solve housing problems in their area, this creates affordable homes and builds strong communities. Involving the community in decisions that affect them will provide a strategy that can benefit the wellbeing and economical status of an area, producing strong community ties.

In the case of co-operative community-led housing solutions, the community can allocate properties, having their say on who they would like to live there. If repairs and maintenance are required, the residents would take care of this themselves, enabling them to put jobs out to tender and have choice and control over who they employ to carry out the maintenance tasks.

Community-led housing solutions enable residents to take ownership of their properties and estates, when leased from local authorities and housing associations, this allows the landlord to ensure resources which would have been used in those homes and estates can be used in other areas of the organisation. Providing affordable housing both to rent and own. This is ideal for first time buyers who need to get on the property ladder.

The case studies have identified that the outcomes for community-led housing solutions can play a vital role in minimising areas that have empty homes. The outcomes show a strong link of collaboration between the community and different agencies that can provide an effective regeneration strategy that provides opportunities to the residents and local people. This can turn an estate that had no previous direction into a prosperous and self-maintaining community.

The outcomes for housing associations or local authorities, depending on who owns the stock, includes reducing the need for repairs and maintenance. The salary from the rents and service charge can pay the salary of the management team. This reduces the outgoings for the housing association or local authority. This is all dependent on the type of funding that has been acquired and the nature of the regeneration of the estate.

In many cases the regeneration of an estate has included the implementation of businesses that provide an increase in the local economy. The Granby Four Streets included a Granby Pottery Studio and Granby Market, enabling their own economic stability of their estate. The estates can provide apprenticeship schemes enabling individuals in an area with low employment rates being able to get back into work.

The partnership and collaboration between co-operatives, local authorities and housing associations can be suggested to prove beneficial in providing community-led housing solutions. This would enable the empty homes being brought back into use with shared access to funding and resources.

In terms of the potential barriers to community-led housing solutions, it can be suggested that this model is only as viable as the funding and resources that are available. The very rural areas that have empty homes with inadequate transport links could potentially prove to be a costly exercise not only with the repairs and maintenance but also providing adequate transport links. This, however, could potentially provide an essential work with private developers and co-operatives providing a strong connection with local authorities to address the transport links and to encourage the development of affordable rented and home ownership properties.

The governance structure within co-operative - community-led housing solutions needs to be set up differently to that of a housing association. This would require a less complex structure that can be centred around the properties and community with support and clear processes in place.

## 6.0 Conclusion

At the time of analysing the data that was collected from various local authorities and housing associations across Wales, the links between both primary and secondary data became very apparent. For example, The National Assembly for Wales' Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 'Empty Properties' report was a key source used when reviewing the literature around empty homes. The focus here was to look at the different approaches taken at a national level to bring empty properties back to use. Much of the issues that came to light were suggested to be resultant of insufficient funding, lack of collaborative work, and disjointed approaches to dealing with empty properties. Within the data analysis, these three elements consistently emerge as the key barriers to any significant progression taking place. For instance, when participants were asked what barriers they faced with addressing empty homes, funding came out as the second highest. Of all the local authority participants that were interviewed, 18% reported that additional funding was not only paramount to meeting empty homes initiatives but to support new ways of returning empty homes to use, as well as ensuring sufficient staff on the ground to manage such activities successfully.

Despite the role that community-led housing solutions could play, in reducing empty homes, the data shows only 14 percent of local authorities are experienced in using this approach. Drawing from best practice, there is a requirement for full commitment from human resources when implementing community-led housing solutions; human resources is noted as another key barrier that local authorities face when aiming to meet their empty homes initiatives. Therefore, without sufficient staff and in-house teams, the opportunities available to reducing empty homes in Wales through community-led housing solutions are fewer. When successful, this solution, in particular, could offer an array of benefits. As previously mentioned in the literature; wider community-led approaches to bringing empty properties back into use can "help local authorities to maximise their contribution to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act through creating additional social and economic value. In addition to creating cohesive communities, co-operative and community-led housing schemes can also contribute to building a more prosperous Wales through providing training opportunities" (National Assembly for Wales, 2019). Within the practice examples of community-led housing solutions, the emphasis is placed on innovative funding opportunities as a result of collaborative working,

this was discussed as extremely beneficial in overcoming funding barriers. Both Taf Fechan and the Achiltibuie projects highlight that taking a joined-up approach helped secure funding enabling the projects to commence and was instrumental to success.

Throughout the research the inconsistencies became more apparent across the whole of Wales, the literature highlighted that there is no national empty homes strategy and no statutory duty for local authorities to publish empty homes strategies. The respondents emphasised the need for more resources to enable them to address the issues of empty homes. There was a clear indication that empty homes are not always considered a priority as not all local authorities have dedicated empty homes resources with only 57% of respondents having an Empty Homes Officer and many of these officers work alone without the additional support of an empty homes team. Implementing a national empty homes strategy with a statutory duty for local authorities to publish empty homes strategies could improve the way empty homes are managed and prioritised.

The Covid-19 pandemic reinforces the concept that everybody deserves a safe place to call home. Gavin Smart, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing said “the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown has, more than ever, highlighted the importance of having a place we can call home - a place where we feel safe and secure, that has the space families need to work, learn and play. Lockdown has shown us this simply isn’t the case for many people” (CIH, 2020). Renovating empty homes provides an opportunity to increase housing supply and meet demand during the pandemic. Community-led housing solutions create opportunities and there is a potential that the impact of returning empty homes into use will be even greater due to the current pandemic.

To conclude, this research has highlighted some recommendations that can be taken forward:

- Welsh Government to place an emphasis on community-led approaches as a strand within its forthcoming National Empty Homes Action Plan, detailing the resources available to help grow the approach;
- Local authorities to publish their empty homes strategy detailing activities aimed at increasing use of community-led approaches;

- Welsh Government to commission and roll-out training available to all staff focusing on bringing empty homes back into use;
- Welsh Government to host a seminar each year focusing on sharing the learning from projects that have used community-led approaches to bring empty homes back into use; and
- Local authorities to develop a common framework for reviewing and improving how opportunities for communities to take action in partnership to address empty homes are communicated locally.



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# 8.0 Appendices

## 8.1 Appendix A: Case Study - Latch

Latch-Leeds Action to Create Homes is a charitable organisation that refurbishes empty and run-down properties across several areas of Leeds. When the properties are brought up to a quality standard they are used as supported housing for people who are homeless and in housing need. Much of the renovation work is carried out by Latch staff and volunteers. Whilst some have experience of working in the building trade, many volunteers develop new skills as they work on-site.

In 2018/19 Latch worked in collaboration with many of its partners in which their 'Empty Homes 3' Project was completed. Latch purchased and refurbished 16 properties over two years whilst also commencing a follow-up project- 'Empty Homes 4', to create 8 additional homes by the end of 2019. The Empty Homes 4 Project consists of a combination of flats, back to back and terraced properties to create 5 one-bedroom houses/flats and 3 two-bedroom houses that were considered on local demand. All work is to be carried out by Latch employees, volunteers, and local contractors.

Latch is also undertaking a property development project that involves converting a five-bedroom house into 4 one-bedroom energy-efficient self-contained flats. The aim is for the flats to be used to provide much-needed housing for single homeless people that can access the required support for them to sustain their tenancies, develop new skills and move on to live independently.

### Benefits

- Creating quality homes for homeless people
- Providing training and volunteering opportunities for long-term unemployed people
- Skills development for future employment
- Improving neighbourhoods by turning rundown empty properties into much-needed quality homes

### Outcomes

- 30 people took part in volunteering and training activities on property refurbishments
- 3 people found work or apprenticeships
- 5 people completed formal Health and Safety training and registered on the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme
- In total, 189 people have been housed
- 18 tenants have moved on to independent living

## 8.2 Appendix B: Case Study – Achiltibuie’s School House Transformation

Communities Housing Trust is experienced in renovating and converting empty properties into affordable housing units. Achiltibuie’s transformation was a collaborative project that CHT led on. It involved Coigach Community Development Company, the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust, with support from the Scottish Government, the Highland Council, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The schoolhouse was unused and empty for 5 years prior to community ownership, through the transfer of assets to the Coigach Community Development Company. A joined-up approach to the project helped to secure innovative funding in which the community will benefit from two new fit-for-purpose affordable homes.

The Nationwide Foundation provided CHT with £120,000 of grant and loan funding which came under the Nationwide Foundation Decent, Affordable Homes Strategy to bring long-term empty properties back to use. Additionally, the Scottish Government’s Rural Housing Fund was used for the first time and was instrumental in this renovation. This funding mechanism was reported to be popular with meeting the communities’ aspirations to own their own homes whilst complimenting other recent interventions from the Scottish Government:

- Scottish Land Fund
- Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016

### Impact

- “By working closely with The Scottish Government, the Nationwide Foundation and The Highland Council, this adds to the growing number of community-owned housing projects in the Highlands” (Communities Housing Trust, 2017).
- “The creation of these two housing units will go a long way in providing valuable affordable accommodation in an area where housing provision is scarce and expensive. This will encourage young families to remain in the area and could provide key-worker housing” (Communities Housing Trust, 2017).
- “The Achiltibuie project is a wonderful example of what can be accomplished when a community is supported to bring an empty property back into use. It offers real hope to the many places across Scotland where people are forced to watch buildings decay when they could be transformed into much-needed homes” (Communities Housing Trust, 2017).
- “Affordable housing is vital to the sustainability of communities. For places like Achiltibuie, community-driven schemes to bring empty homes back into use could play a vital role in meeting demand” (Communities Housing Trust, 2017).

## 8.3 Appendix C: Case Study – Taf Fechan Housing Co-operative

The Taf Fechan project was launched in 2015 under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014. It is a fully mutual housing co-operative in Gellideg that was developed in partnership with Merthyr Valleys Homes (MVH). A fully mutual housing co-operative means that all tenants of Taf Fechan are members of the co-op and all the co-op members are tenants. All tenants living at Taf Fechan are, therefore, in control of running the co-operative and manage the following:

- Rent collection
- Tenant selection

- Procuring maintenance and cleaning services

Within the Taf Fechan building, are 12 two-bedroom flats that are let at intermediate rent, offering an affordable housing option in the area. Refurbishing the building was part of the wider regeneration strategy for Gellideg. Before forming the co-op and refurbishing the building, most of the flats were empty and had been since the 1990s. The flats were unlettable for reasons such as:

- Appearance
- Anti-social behaviour
- Poor reputation
- Stigma

To encourage people into the area, the flats were refurbished to a high standard. This was made possible by funding support from the local authority because of the regeneration aspects of the project as well as its contribution to the Welsh Government's affordable homes target. The partnership between MVH and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MVCBC) meant that the money borrowed by MVH to fund Taf Fechan Housing Co-operative could be paid back at a very low-interest rate over 25 years. The collaborative work and funding arrangements made the project extremely appealing whereby Taf Fechan Housing Co-operative can keep rents at an affordable price whilst keeping homes to a high quality.

The project has had an extremely positive impact on the community with an increased demand for housing in the area.

Other benefits since forming Taf Fechan Housing Co-operative include:

- No anti-social behaviour since the co-operative was established in 2015
- Low void turnover time
- Low housing management support time
- Sustainable tenancies
- Sense of ownership and responsibility
- Creation of positive relationships
- Supportive community network
- Choice and involvement with decision making and provision of services
- Option to take on more responsibilities



## 8.4 Appendix D: Case Study – West Rhyl Co-operative

West Rhyl Co-operative set up by West Rhyl Community Land Trust (WRCLT), and North Wales Housing Association (NWH), has been produced to regenerate an area that had become run-down because of the loss of the tourist industry. This resulted in the Affalon Housing Development being established, with planning being approved in late 2014. This resulted in demolishing 11 bedsits to create seven 3-bedroom family homes with a community shop, and bakery on the ground floor, with 4 flats above these, that provide affordable rents.

The benefits that have been achieved through this project include:

- Residents had their say on housing related issues
- Hiring Contractors
- Allocating homes
- Service charges
- Organising Community Events
- Bringing the Community Together

Collaborative working with another organization

## 8.5 Appendix E: Case Study – Granby Four Streets

In 1993 the Granby Residents Association (GRA) was established to stop the demolition of houses, thus creating a community forum to protect its tenants. The forum later resulted in 2002 the Housing Market Renewal Incentive being created which identified Four Streets as a site for demolition and refurbishment. Later leading to the Granby Four Streets being disbanded in (2010). The uncertainty of the estate was left with no input from government or Local authorities resulting in the residents deciding to regenerate the estate themselves. This produced an effective community regeneration of an estate that otherwise had no direction. At the end of (2011) the residents became known as the Granby Four Streets Community Land

Trust, who worked alongside Xante Hamilton of Social Investors, resulting in (2014), 10 properties being transferred from the Local Authority to the CLT.

The regeneration of the estate has produced 10 properties to own or rent, this includes a ceramic studio known as Granby Workshop, with the addition of planning for the winter garden being approved in (2015).

The benefits of the regeneration of the Granby Four Streets project include:

- Producing affordable housing for rental and home ownership
- Building job prospects and apprenticeships for local people
- Community spirit
- Collaborative working with other organisations
- A thriving multi-cultural area
- Arts and social hub
- Economic progression – Granby Market, and Ceramic Studio

## 8.6 Appendix F: Case Study – Cultures CIC

Cultures CIC based in Stockton-on-Tees, originally formed in 2007 to support the BAME, migrant and refugee community aiming to improve social, economic, and cultural inclusion whilst building social cohesion. When the group was first established, they did not provide housing, however, they identified a need for safe, affordable housing within the communities.

In 2016, Cultures CIC began a housing project where they leased four empty flats from Thirteen Group and refurbishment works began in February 2017 with the flats being occupied by May 2017. Cultures CIC have since secured a further three homes at a reduced rent for the next five years which volunteers who work on the property are offered to apply to live in the homes.

Funding is limited as Cultures CIC have tried not to rely on grants and have received some funding from Thirteen Group and used some of their own resources to fund the projects. They rely on volunteers from their client base and trades to provide voluntary labour to run the projects. As a community interest company, they seek donations of time from volunteers and

resources from local suppliers and housing associations to bring the empty properties back into use.

Cultures CIC have refurbished seven properties that were previously empty to benefit the community. As the projects have been successful Cultures CIC have been approached to increase their portfolio, they have since set up Cultures Homes which is an independent community led housing organisation to enable them to bring more empty homes back into use.



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