

Housing Scrutiny Commission

Thursday 5 March 2026

7.00 pm

Ground Floor Meeting Room G01A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1
2QH

Supplemental Agenda No.1

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5.	INTERVIEW WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COUNCIL HOMES To receive a report, accompanying the Interview, on empty properties in Southwark, noting the data showing a change in number of empty homes and appended Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan.	1 - 35

Contact

Adam Wood on 020 7525 0265 or email: adam.wood@southwark.gov.uk

Date: 27 February 2026

Meeting Name:	Housing Scrutiny Commission
Date:	5 March 2026
Report title:	Empty Properties in Southwark - Update
Ward(s) or groups affected:	All
Classification:	Open
Reason for lateness (if applicable):	
From	Hakeem Osinaike, Strategic Director of Housing

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. To note the data below, which shows changes in the number of empty homes over time in Southwark, and comparative data for London and the other London boroughs.
2. To note the Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan 2026 Update which accompanies this report (Appendix 1).
3. This update to the Plan includes updated data using Live Table 615, which uses data recorded at October 2025. It also includes updated commentary against the targets for the ongoing items.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 4 Given the significant demand for homes in the borough and high numbers of empty homes reported on the council tax database, Southwark Council adopted a zero-tolerance approach to empty homes. The Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan was approved by Cabinet in October 2021.
<https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AllId=62258>
- 5 Many teams from across the council contribute to the plan and the plan is regularly monitored by the Empty Homes Board. The Empty Homes Action Plan 2026 (Appendix B) provides commentary on progress in delivering each section of the Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan.
- 6 The plan is updated annually, using the annual official empty homes figures in Live Table 615 (based on data from the CTB1 council tax return from October). Data has been updated to October 2025.
- 7 While responsibility for council voids sits under the Cabinet Member for Council Homes portfolio, this LMB briefing includes information on empty council homes as these are included as part of the overall empty homes action plan.

Overall numbers of empty homes

8. Using the latest official update, in the Government's live table 615 the total number of vacant homes (across tenures) fell between 2018 and 2020 and has since fluctuated (this data excludes second homes and furnished but unoccupied homes). It also includes exempt properties (for example those in probate or undergoing major works), of which there were 1,187 homes in Southwark in October 2025. These are not included in our CDP reporting figures as they are not regularly supplied by council tax.

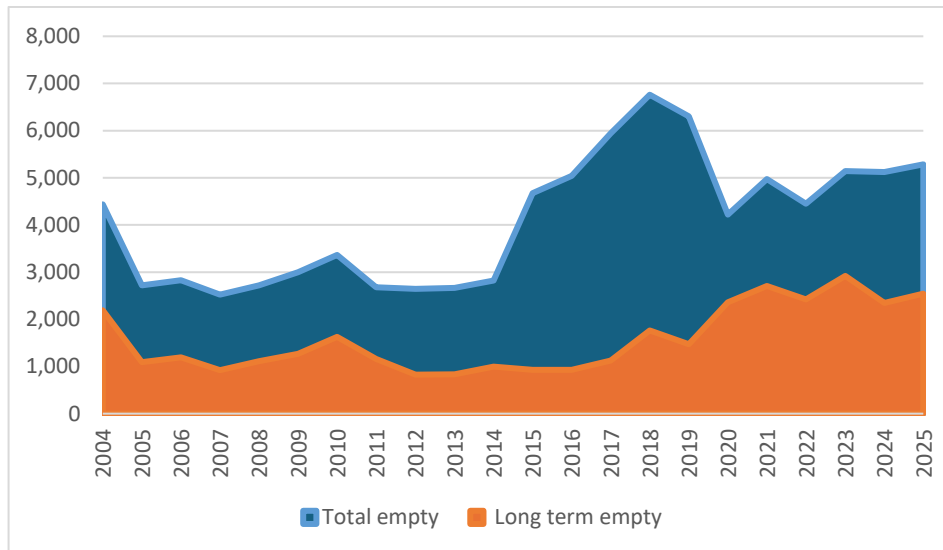


Fig. 1 – total and long-term empty homes

9. The total number of empty homes (including second homes and furnished empty homes) has also fluctuated. It fell significantly in December 2023 following a data cleansing exercise. It then rose back by October 2024 before falling again by March 2025, but by the beginning of October 2025 this had returned to October 2024 levels, it then fell slightly by December 2025. This data excludes exempted properties which are included in the chart above, therefore totals are different. Data was not available for all months, and the data is now supplied every three months, therefore there are gaps in the lines. Dots have been used in the chart below where data was supplied, lines have been connected to help interpret the data, but there may have been fluctuations between these periods. The council delivery plan (CDP) figure below includes properties reported as empty and/or charged a council tax premium. It does not include empty furnished properties or second homes, consistent with Live Table 615.

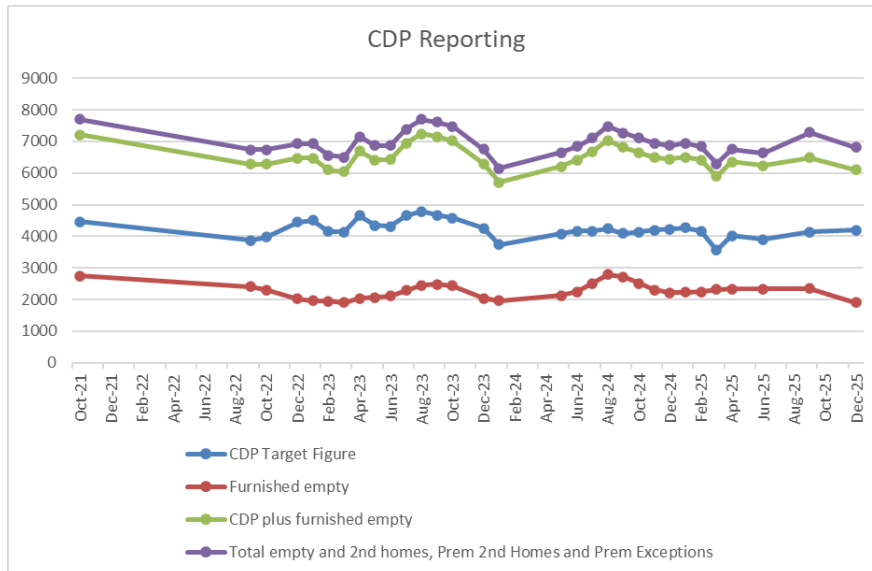


Fig. 2 – CDP reporting empty homes

10. The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) figure includes properties which are recorded as empty and charged 100% council tax and those charged an empty homes council tax premium. Consistent with Live Table 615, the CDP figure does not include the empty but substantially furnished properties or second homes which are predominantly found in the private sector. Over half of this CDP figure has been private sector voids and under half have been council voids, of which the vast majority are non-active voids. From the internal council housing data 81% of the council's general needs vacant properties are non-active awaiting demolition, disposal or major refurbishment. 87% of these are awaiting demolition. This chart is based on council tax primary liable party.

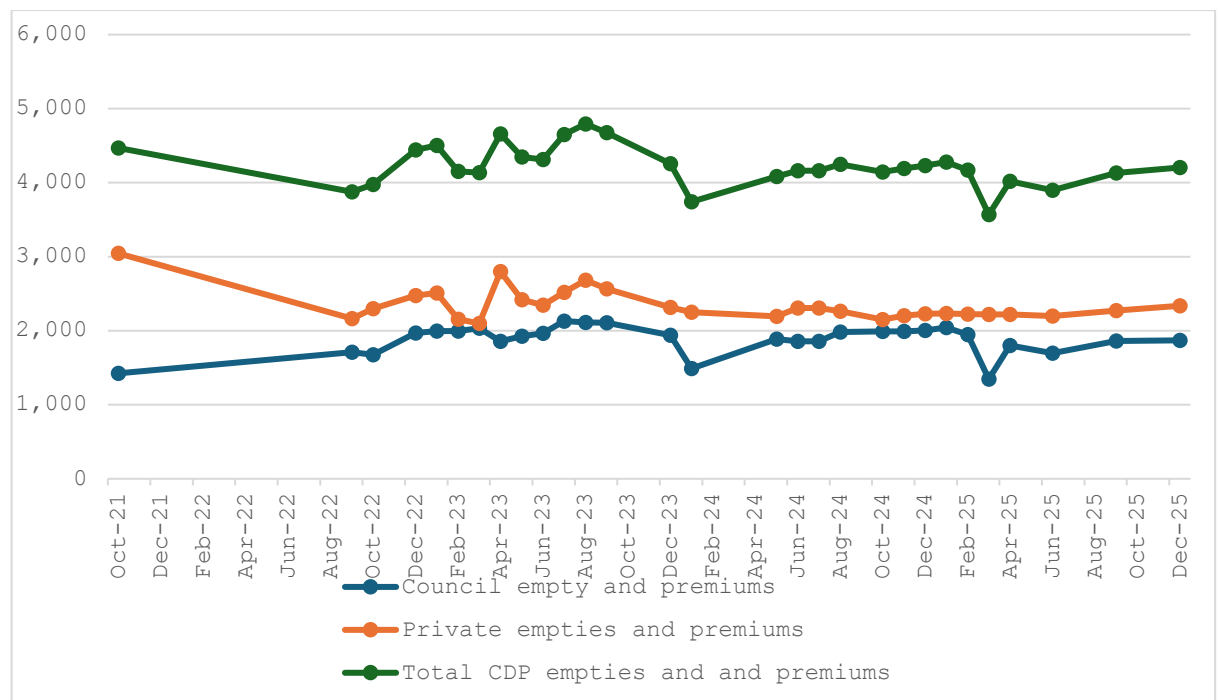


Fig.3 – private and council empty homes (CDP)

11. The snapshot data from the housing department voids monitoring reports demonstrate that a large proportion of the council voids are non-active voids. There is a disparity in the total council void figure as council tax data includes anything where the council is marked as the primary liable party e.g. private sector leasing, non HRA voids etc. In February 2026 there were 430 temporary accommodation estate voids, most of which were linked to the Aylesbury Estate redevelopment as the council seeks to make best use of these properties.

The London Context

12. Across London the number of empty homes has been increasing over the past ten years.

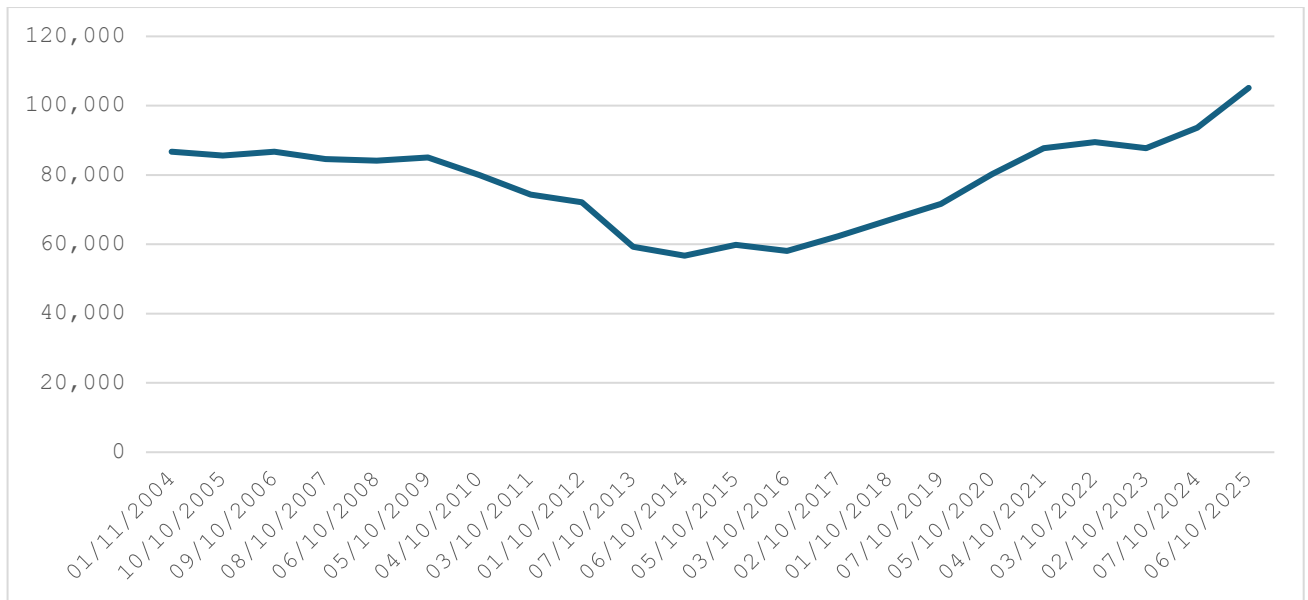


Fig.4 empty homes in London

13. Over the past few years some London Boroughs have seen big increases in vacant properties while the rise in Southwark has been more modest.

London Borough	02/10/2023	07/10/2024	06/10/2025	% Rise/fall since 2023
Wandsworth	852	1,385	2,661	212%
Westminster	2,002	2,148	3,724	86%
Hillingdon	1,651	1,899	2,799	70%
Enfield	3,029	3,626	4,455	47%
Greenwich	2,423	2,864	3,548	46%
Tower Hamlets	2,661	3,415	3,705	39%
Redbridge	2,394	2,664	3,320	39%
Barnet	4,614	5,185	6,253	36%
Barking and Dagenham	1,428	1,576	1,853	30%
Lewisham	2,389	2,253	3,097	30%
Brent	2,813	2,604	3,639	29%

Hammersmith and Fulham	1,259	1,182	1,538	22%
Hounslow	3,582	3,583	4,310	20%
Kingston upon Thames	1,981	3,303	2,374	20%
Hackney	2,174	2,513	2,573	18%
Merton	2,550	2,857	3,006	18%
Waltham Forest	2,454	2,564	2,874	17%
Bromley	3,700	3,722	4,252	15%
Richmond upon Thames	1,734	1,807	1,966	13%
Camden	4,320	4,208	4,773	10%
Newham	3,812	4,004	4,184	10%
Kensington and Chelsea	3,110	3,157	3,403	9%
Lambeth	3,553	3,815	3,842	8%
Haringey	3,066	3,332	3,220	5%
Islington	2,239	2,077	2,345	5%
Havering	2,191	2,122	2,280	4%
Southwark	5,143	5,120	5,287	3%
Croydon	3,946	3,651	3,916	-1%
Harrow	2,972	2,889	2,907	-2%
Bexley	1,884	1,932	1,797	-5%
Sutton	2,366	2,486	2,182	-8%
Ealing	3,155	3,462	2,853	-10%
City of London	316	197	202	-36%

Table 1. Change in numbers of vacant properties – London boroughs

14. Looking at empty homes data in October 2025, Southwark had seen a reduction in the total empty homes since 2018, but this has broadly been creeping upwards since 2020. It had fallen in the March 2025 figures but had come back up by the beginning of October 2025, partly due to regeneration schemes voids and partly due to new build properties completing.
15. Most other London boroughs have seen rises since 2018 in the number of empty homes, some of which have been significant increases such as Westminster and Barnet. This data excludes second homes and furnished empty homes but includes empty exempted properties.
16. Looking at the long-term vacant data in Live Table 615, which are defined as dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for over six months, between 2023 and 2025 Southwark was one of the few boroughs to see a fall in this figure.

Area	02/10/2023	07/10/2024	06/10/2025	% Rise/Fall since 2023
Wandsworth	165	194	936	467%
Hillingdon	396	392	1,050	165%
Westminster	1,132	1,242	2,279	101%
Ealing	460	529	838	82%
Enfield	1,089	1,563	1,943	78%
Barnet	1,905	2,094	3,277	72%
Brent	1,053	937	1,734	65%
Harrow	827	1,183	1,291	56%
Redbridge	850	869	1,288	52%
Greenwich	1,123	1,203	1,688	50%
Islington	657	749	973	48%
Tower Hamlets	1,491	1,474	2,174	46%
Bromley	1,068	1,193	1,522	43%
Havering	805	856	1,107	38%
Camden	1,541	1,652	2,059	34%
Kingston upon Thames	771	1,944	1,029	33%
London	36,210	38,386	47,287	31%
Hackney	977	1,184	1,219	25%
Merton	1,263	1,167	1,552	23%
Hounslow	1,420	1,448	1,729	22%
Waltham Forest	944	910	1,148	22%
Lambeth	1,886	2,024	2,280	21%
Lewisham	893	765	1,070	20%
Kensington and Chelsea	1,720	1,787	2,030	18%
Richmond upon Thames	615	558	703	14%
Haringey	1,468	1,574	1,643	12%
Barking and Dagenham	383	391	410	7%
Hammersmith and Fulham	778	665	811	4%
Bexley	655	701	649	-1%
Newham	2,053	2,180	1,852	-10%
Sutton	1,002	859	876	-13%
Croydon	1,639	1,606	1,432	-13%
Southwark	2,920	2,348	2,543	-13%
City of London	261	145	152	-42%

Table 2. Change in number of long-term vacant properties – London Boroughs

17. In Southwark the total number vacant (including second homes and furnished homes) was 7,698 in August 2023. This figure has fluctuated. By March 2025 this figure was 6,295 but by the end of September this had risen to 7,289. It fell to 6,817 in December 2025.

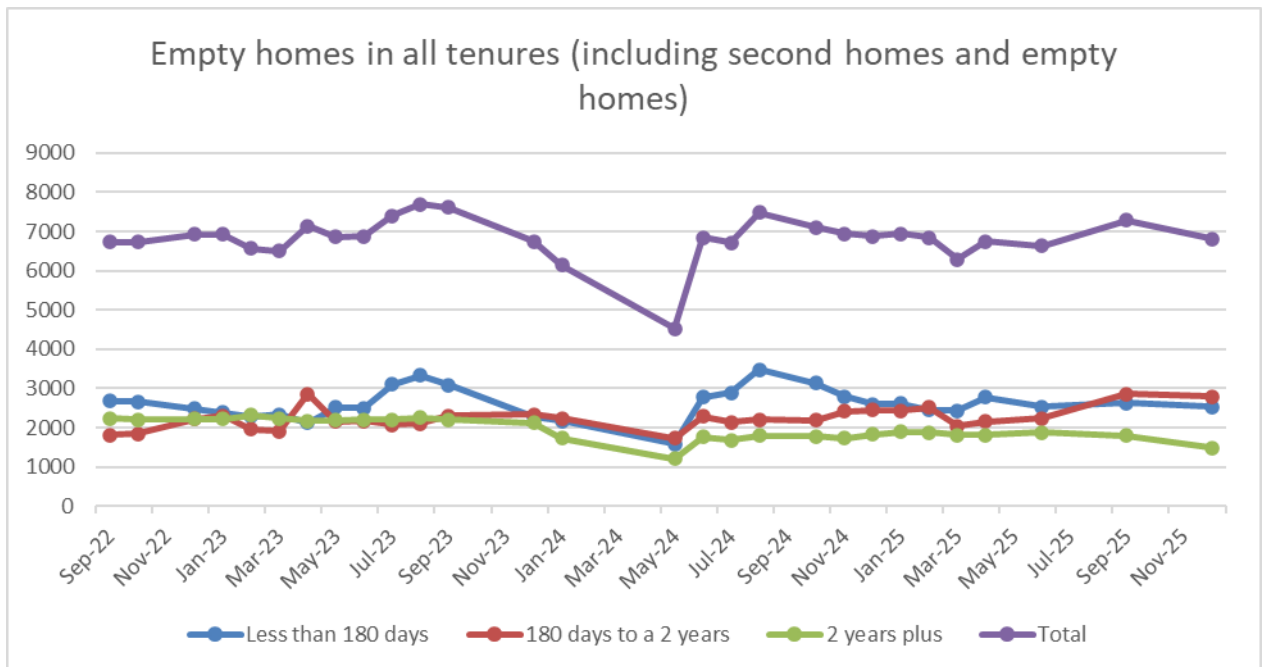


Fig.4 - Southwark empty homes all tenures

Notes

- Monthly data by time on the list was only routinely reported from September 2022
- There was a blip in April 2023 where the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) added properties to the council tax list which temporarily increased the apparent number of vacant properties for between 6 months and 2 years. This was resolved by May 2023.
- Data is not provided by council tax every month and is now provided quarterly. Data points have been connected with lines to show broad direction of travel. Dots show actual recorded data snapshots.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan

Lead Officer	Hakeem Osinaike, Strategic Director of Housing		
Report Author	Candida Thompson, Director of Housing Needs and Support		
Version	1		
Dated	26/02/2026		
Key Decision?	no		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER			
Officer Title		Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance		No	No
Strategic Director of Resources		No	No
List other officers here			
Cabinet Member		Yes	No
Date final report sent to Scrutiny			27 February 2026

Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan

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2026 Update

This is an update of the October 2021 action plan which sets out Southwark Council's zero tolerance approach to long term empty homes and sets out plans to bring empty homes quickly back into use. We will work closely with our residents and property owners while taking firm action where required.

One page summary of the Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan

This table is a one-page summary of the full action plan which is included towards the end of this document.

Taking a zero tolerance approach to long term empty private sector homes
• Applying full council tax to all empty homes and applying the maximum premiums for long term empty homes • Using compulsory purchase powers with dedicated funding. • Using enforcement options where an empty property is a statutory nuisance
Working with residents and property owners to quickly bring empty homes back in to use
• Raising awareness and provide advice on the options to bring properties back into use • Providing enhanced grants and loans to bring properties back in to use • Encouraging property owners to let their homes through the council's social lettings agency to homeless families with a clear offer • Contacting developers of newly developed empty homes with the offer of leasing to the council • Making it easier to report empty homes
Improving our understanding of private sector empty homes to better target action and support
• Contacting owners of empty homes on the council tax database to improve our understanding of the reasons for this, and what additional support would help return the property to use.
Campaigning for more resources and more effective powers to tackle empty homes in the private sector
• Demanding flexibility to charge unlimited council tax premiums (we were also initially calling for a reduction in the initial 2 year period, and flexibility to charge premiums on second homes and furnished homes, which has now been introduced) • Demanding increased resources for grants and loans • Calling for simpler and swifter powers around CPOs and EDMOS • Calling for planning powers to revert property to the local authorities housing supply where vacant
Reducing the number of empty council homes
• Setting ambitious targets for quickly turning around major and minor council empty properties as they become vacant • Where possible, using council homes which are empty due to impending redevelopment as temporary accommodation.

The problem of empty homes and limited powers

London is in the midst of a housing crisis. At a time when tens of thousands of families across the capital are reliant on temporary accommodation or on waiting lists for a suitable home, it has never been more important to tackle the issue of empty homes, with numbers of empty homes rising across London and the country.

Empty housing in Southwark, as across London, is a problem predominantly driven by the private sector. The overwhelming majority of empty homes are privately owned where there are limited powers to tackle this. As a council we recognised the scale of this problem and are committed to clamping down on empty homes which are a needless waste and a lost resource, particularly in an area where there is high demand and significant levels of housing need. Empty homes can also create a serious blight on a neighbourhood by creating environmental problems with pests and as places of anti-social behaviour.

The council is committed to 'Take action to reduce the number of empty homes in our borough, so more local people can move into them', as set out in Southwark's Borough Plan. In February 2021 Cabinet agreed actions to be included in this Empty Homes Action Plan. The full report is available online [here](#). The council will use all powers available, while recognising that these are extremely limited and we need significant changes at a national level to support our ambitions. In March 2022 Cabinet agreed additional funding for Private Sector Empty Homes and changes to loans and grants. The full report is available [here](#).

Part 1 of the following action plan sets out Southwark Council's zero tolerance approach to long term empty homes in the borough. There is simply too high a demand for housing for it to be acceptable that properties are left empty for long periods of time. We plan to use all the powers available to us as cost efficiently as possible to deter landlords from leaving properties empty, while at the same time working proactively with landlords and residents to bring properties back into use as quickly as possible. We know in many cases people may just need advice or some financial support to make the required repairs, or to find a suitable buyer or tenant. We have conducted further research to increase our understanding of the reasons properties are being left empty and what further support may be required to assist landlords to quickly return properties to use.

While we are committed to use all the powers, buttons and levers available to us, our powers are limited. There is more that needs to happen at a national level to give local authorities the powers to truly tackle this problem, and therefore the following action plan sets out how we will lobby for further powers and resources in this area.

However we recognise there is more as a council we can do to reduce the number of empty homes we manage. While there are valid reasons for many of these being vacant there is more we can do to reduce the number of empty homes, through speeding up re-letting times and reducing the number of homes which are empty as part of regeneration schemes. This is set out in Part 2 of the action plan.

How many empty homes are there?

There are many different definitions of empty homes and a variety of sources of data, which all have some limitations. The simplest way to compare empty homes is to focus on the council tax data. This is the method we have used for the purposes of this report. However, to a large extent this does rely on self-reporting of the relevant council tax status of a property by the tenant or owner. Each property is either classed as being an empty home or an empty home with a premium applied for properties which are empty for over 1¹, 5 or 10 years, provided they are unfurnished. This gives a total of 4,131 empty homes in October 2025. Of these 575 had been empty for over 2 years down from 801 in October 2024. A higher figure of 5,287 empty homes is given on MHCLG Live Table 615 for the October 2025 figure. This includes an additional 1,187 homes which were empty but in exempt classes as detailed below and was from a slightly different date. Numbers empty fell by March 2025, mainly due to work to ensure homes with demolition notices were removed from the list, and that newly built council homes were not added to the list before they were inhabitable. The total rose again by October 2025 due to increases in empty homes vacant for less than 2 years.

Property category	Oct 2020	Oct 2021	Oct 2022	Oct 2023	April 2024	Oct 2024	Mar 2025	Oct 2025
Empty with zero council tax discount (note in April 2024 a 100% premium was applied for those empty 1-2 years as per footnote 1)	2,711	3,185	2,634	3,427	2,584	2,531	2,259	2,499
Empty for 1-2 years with 100% premium council tax	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	668	766	660	1,057
Empty for 2-5 years with 100% premium council tax	795	940	896	802	564	547	390	306
Empty for between 5 years and 10 years with 200% premium council tax	214	251	282	331	203	232	241	245
Empty for over 10 years with 300% premium council tax (from April 2021)	N/A	40	47	20	21	22	19	24
(Total with a premium)	1,009	1,231	1,225	1,153	1,456	1,567	1,310	1,632
Total empty and substantially unfurnished (with or without a premium)	3,720	4,416	3,859	4,580	4,040	4,098	3,569	4,131
All vacant dwellings from Live Table 615 ² - Includes exempt classes below	4,218	4,976	4,452	5,143	N/A	5,120	N/A	5,287

¹ Reduced to one year from 2 years from 1st April 2024 using new powers in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

Dwellings on the valuation list in exempt classes (included in the empty homes total in Live table 615)	October 2020	October 2021	October 2022	October 2023	October 2024	October 2025
Class B: Unoccupied property owned by a registered charity	63	83	56	63	55	88
Class E: Empty property previously occupied by a person now residing in a care home, hospital or hostel.	35	31	30	30	40	40
Class F: The council tax payer has died	308	363	393	285	351	388
Class G: Occupation prohibited by law	57	54	83	145	538	620
Classes D,H,I,J,K,L,Q covering issues such as prison, hospital, held for minister of religion, personal care, students, mortgagee in possession and bankruptcy	35	29	31	40	35	51
Total in exempt classes	498	559	593	563	1,019	1,187

The following table breaks each category down by tenure. It should be noted that this is a snapshot of time which does not exactly match the snapshot above as reported above as the reports were run off at slightly different times. There can be delays for people to notify council tax as they move in to properties. There is also a regular process of reviewing the data on council properties to correct issues and anomalies that arise, such as from the self-reporting of information by residents.

As of October 2025, there were 150,537 homes of all tenure types in Southwark, therefore taking the total figures in the following table for October 2025, there was an approximate 4.8% vacancy rate in the borough including second homes and empty but substantially furnished properties. Further information by tenure is included in the following sections.

	2021 (October)			2022 (September)			2023 (December)			2024 (November)			2025 (October)		
Primary liable party as recorded on council tax (right) and empty homes category (below)	Private and RPs ³	Council inc non-active ⁴	Total	Private and RPs	Council inc non-active ³	Total	Private and RPs	Council inc non-active ³	Total	Private and RPs	Council inc non-active ³	Total	Private and RPs	Council inc non-active ³	Total
Empty no premium	2,613	637	3,250	1,806	852	2,658	1,944	1,153	3,097	1,483	1,118	2,601	1,372	1,127	2,499
100% premium (empty 1-2Y)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	393	450	843	669	388	1057
100% premium (empty 2-5Y)	362	570	932	289	602	891	283	467	750	211	273	484	126	180	306
200% premium (empty 5-10Y)	53	194	247	55	223	278	74	315	389	82	159	241	87	158	245
300% premium (empty 10+Y)	16	24	40	15	32	47	16	4	20	14	10	24	16	8	24
Total premium	431	788	1,219	359	857	1,216	373	786	1,159	700	892	1,592	898	734	1632
<i>Proportions of total premiums by tenure</i>	35%	65%	100%	30%	70%	100%	32%	68%	100%	44%	56%	100%	55%	45%	100%
Total empty unfurnished	3,044	1,425	4,469	2,165	1,709	3,874	2,317	1,939	4,256	2,183	2,010	4,193	2,270	1,861	4,131
<i>Proportions of total empty unfurnished in each tenure</i>	68%	32%	100%	56%	44%	100%	54%	46%	100%	52%	48%	100%	55%	45%	100%
Second homes (inc premiums)	476	0	476	445	0	445	432	0	432	434	0	434	713	0	713
Furnished, but unoccupied	2,724	211 ²	2,745	2,395	15	2,410	2,035	10	2,045	2,289	13	2,302	2,357	0	2,357
Uninhabitable	10	0	10	14	0	14	14	0	14	20	0	20	0	0	0
Total empty homes including unfurnished and second homes etc.	6,254	1,446	7,700	5,019	1,724	6,743	4,798	1,949	6,749	4,926	2,023	6,949	5,427	1,861	7,288
<i>Proportions of grand total empty in each tenure</i>	81%	19%	100%	74%	26%	100%	71%	29%	100%	71%	29%	100%	74%	26%	100%

³ RP = Private Registered Provider (Housing Association)

⁴ This includes properties which are unavailable for letting due to redevelopment, major refurbishment, disposal or non-housing use. This information is split down in the section of this action plan specifically on empty council properties.

Since the 1st April 2025 councils have been able to charge a 100% premium council tax on second homes. Further information on how Southwark implemented this change is provided in a later section.

What lies behind these numbers?

- Southwark is a leading borough in terms of the delivery of new homes of all types but this does temporarily increase the number of empty properties, however most of these are then let or sold and therefore do not become long term empty properties. If any properties do remain empty the council works with the owner to explore other ways of bringing these into use.
- Some properties may be deliberately left empty as investment opportunities.
- There is an increased churn associated with having a significant private rented sector, larger than many boroughs.
- In figures for previous years, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many students not renting in the private rented sector while their courses moved online. In addition there was some evidence of an initial decline in demand in the private rented sector in London, with many households choosing to move further out given the opportunities presented by home working.
- When a resident passes away, it can take some time for a property to then be brought back to use, especially through probate proceedings.
- There are a high number of empty properties situated within large scale regeneration schemes such as at Aylesbury Estate. There are also some blocks which need to be temporarily vacated where fire risk assessment work or other essential safety work is conducted which identifies a need to take corrective action such as at Ledbury Estate and Marie Curie.

PART 1 – TACKLING PRIVATE SECTOR EMPTY HOMES

The main focus of the Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan is on the private sector as the overwhelming majority of empty homes are privately owned. In Southwark, privately owned and housing association empty homes account for about 74% of all empty homes including second homes and furnished homes. Practically all furnished empty homes are also in the private sector, and there were also 713 second homes in the private sector, most of which are now being charged a council tax premium using new powers under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. The Act gave councils new powers to charge a council tax premium for empty properties vacant for over a year, rather than 2 years. In Southwark this was introduced in April 2024. It also allowed a 100% council tax premium to be charged on second homes. This started to be introduced from 1st April 2025 as agreed in the Council Tax Base report at Cabinet on 7 January 2025 and at Council Assembly on the 26th February 2025.

The council has adopted a zero tolerance approach to long term empty properties. While the council's preference is to work constructively with landlords and residents to bring properties back into use, the council is committed to providing disincentives for properties to be left empty, such as applying the maximum permissible council tax premium, and through enforcement action where property owners are unwilling or unable to bring their homes back into use.

There are a number of means to bring empty homes back into use from informal measures to the use of enforcement powers, which includes Enforced Sales, Empty Dwelling Management Orders and Compulsory Purchase Orders. Many of these are extremely complex and time consuming and while we will not shy away from pursuing such measures where necessary, we will also lobby for simplification of the powers, and for further powers and funding to enable further action to be taken.

Taking a zero tolerance approach to long term empty private sector homes

Action	Officer lead	CMT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
Use of council tax powers					
Continue not to offer council tax discounts on empty and unfurnished homes. The full charge is payable unless they are exempt.	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Clive Palfreyman	In operation	As introduced in April 2016	Complete
Continue to apply a 100% additional council tax premium for properties empty for over 2 years	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Clive Palfreyman	In operation	As introduced in April 2019	Complete
Start to apply the 100% additional council tax premium for properties empty for over 1 year (double council tax utilising new powers in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023).	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Clive Palfreyman	April 2024	As detailed in the Cabinet Report "The Council Tax Base for 2024-25" from 5 th December 2023	Complete
Contact property owners of homes vacant for between nine months and a year to remind them of the upcoming one year premium and to sign post towards advice to help bring properties back into use.	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Clive Palfreyman	December 2024		Complete
Continue to apply a 200% additional council tax premium for those empty for over 5 years	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Clive Palfreyman	In operation	As introduced in April 2020	Complete

Continue to apply a 300% additional council tax premium for those empty for over 10 years	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Clive Palfreyman	In operation	As introduced in April 2021	Complete
Start to charge a 100% premium on second homes by April 2025 (utilising new powers in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023).	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Clive Palfreyman	April 2025	Implement the new premium	Complete
Further consider use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs)					
Explore use of EDMOs for properties which are empty for over two years	Sajda Munshi, PSH & Adaptations Manager	Strategic Director of Housing	April 2023	Officers met with a number of local authorities. It is clear that implementing EDMOs (Empty Dwelling Management Orders) poses significant challenges. This includes but is not limited to: a substantial workload due to the complexity, numerous exclusions, risk of cases being overturned at the Residential Property Tribunal (RPT), challenges working with the owners, who can apply to end the EDMO at any time. We also have to obtain their consent before for letting a property which is difficult is owners are untraceable or uncooperative. There are also issues with substantial repairs costs. The recovery of costs is uncertain, with the majority only becoming recoverable upon the future sale of the property. As a result, unless changes are made nationally, we have decided to focus on using alternative means to bring	Complete

				homes back into use and powers of enforcement such as CPO's.	
Use of compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers where other options have failed					
Creation of an 'Empty Homes CPO Fund' dedicated to deployment where all other options have failed to bring empty homes back into use		Strategic Director of Housing / Clive Palfreyman	April 2022	A capital allocation of £2m was agreed by Cabinet in March 2022 to provide funding to compulsory purchase (CPO) long-term empty homes. This will be a revolving fund as costs will be recouped from the sale of the properties.	Complete
Use of CPO for longer-term empty homes that are having a significant environmental impact	Keith Kiernan, Manager of the PSH & Adaptations Manager	Strategic Director of Housing	Ongoing	Of the eight properties initially identified as potential CPO candidates, progression of the cases has already led to a range of positive outcomes without the need to proceed to full compulsory purchase. These outcomes include refurbishment works commencing on site, funding applications submitted, probate applied for and granted, planning enforcement notices issued, properties being placed on the market for sale, and reoccupation. This reflects our continued success in resolving cases through engagement and intervention, avoiding the financial and legal burden of compulsory action wherever possible. Of the eight properties, two priority cases are currently being progressed for voluntary acquisition.	Ongoing
Use of enforcement powers					
Using enforcement powers as appropriate where an empty	Emma Trott, Housing	Strategic Director of	Ongoing	Where an empty property is causing a statutory nuisance to a neighbouring	Ongoing

property is a statutory nuisance – linking landlords to other support and options available to bring properties back into use.	Enforcement Service Manager	Environment, Neighbourhoods and Growth		property the Housing Enforcement service can take formal action to require the owner to resolve the problem causing the nuisance. For example this could be a leaking roof near a party wall which is making the wall damp within the neighbouring property. This action cannot require the owner to bring their property back into use but will ensure they are taking responsibility for any nuisance caused to neighbouring properties. To fall within the definition of statutory nuisance, an issue needs to be: • a nuisance • posing a threat to health	
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Working with residents and property owners to quickly bring empty private sector homes back in to use

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Action	Officer lead	CMT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
Explore offering enhanced grants tied to long-term leasing					
Review levels of grant and loans offered to property owners to help bring homes back in to use	Sajda Munshi, PSH & Adaptations Manager Dave Hodgson, Director of Asset Management	Strategic Director of Housing	October 2021	The review completed. The outcome of the review was that individual grants & loans needed to increase to take account of the increase in building costs and to incentivise landlords/property owners to complete repairs/ improvements.	Complete

				During 2025/26, as of the end of Q3, 22 properties have been brought back into use through the Empty Homes Service. 35 empty homes were brought back in to use in 2024/25 including cases where non-financial support was provided. Over 115 have been returned to use since the start of 2022/23. The council offers grants up to £40,000 for owners who let their properties through council-supported schemes, and loans of up to £70,000 for owners pursuing private letting or owner occupation. In 2024/25 over £1.1m was committed across 23 properties through grants and loans. 8 properties were allocated for temporary accommodation, reducing housing pressure and generating potential cost avoidance of up to £242,000 over three years (compared to nightly-paid arrangements). Three in-house management projects are pending funding approval, with works planned to begin before year-end In 2025/26 so far the council has approved £123,000 on grants and £404,000 on loans.	
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				During 2025/26 the council will review loan terms to ensure long-term sustainability and financial viability.	
Review funding for grants and loans as required	Sajda Munshi, PSH & Adaptations Manager	Strategic Director of Housing	March 2022	The review completed and these changes and additional funding were agreed by Cabinet in March 2022. Cabinet agreed to increase the annual capital funding available for grants to refurbish empty homes from £95k to £400k, and to increase the annual capital funding available for loans to refurbish empty homes from £62k to £700k. Further details are in paragraphs 22-26 of the report .	Complete
To publish an enhanced offer for grants and loans by the end of the year.	Sajda Munshi, PSH & Adaptations Manager	Strategic Director of Housing	December 2022	During 2025/26 the council will run a targeted communications campaign focused on owners of long-term vacant homes.	Complete
Incentivise property owners to let their homes through the council's social lettings agency to homeless families⁵					
Develop a standard maximum offer of how much we will pay for renting empty properties,	Candida Thompson, Director of	Strategic Director of Housing	December 2022	Grant levels have been publicised. Articles have been included in Resident E-News, Southwark Life	Ongoing

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⁵ The social lettings agency offers a guaranteed rent paid even if the property is empty, regular property visits to ensure the tenant is looking after it, a lease of up to five years, full management of all tenant issues including day to day repairs, guaranteed vacant possession at the end of the lease, and no fees or charge for the service. Please see this webpage for more information about the social lettings agency. <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/home-owners-services/private-home-owners-and-landlords/earn-money-from-your-property>

expectations of rents, letting terms etc. and publicise all the benefits that are available as part of the offer, through a variety of media channels.	Housing Needs and Support			and information has been updated on the Southwark website. Information is shared with empty home property owners as they are identified by council tax. A joint leaflet was produced.	
Introduce new Private Rented Sector Licensing Schemes to include an exemption for properties let via the council's social lettings agency. The landlord can let their property through the agency and receive guaranteed rent without having to apply and pay for a license acting as an additional incentive for landlords to sign up to the agency. The exemption should be highlighted in promotional materials for the agency. Introduce a Gold Standard Charter Membership Scheme to recognise good landlords. The scheme should also offer an additional discount to licensing fees for any member who has signed up to the Council's Finder's Fee Scheme.	Emma Trott, Housing Enforcement & Licensing Manager	Strategic Director of Environment, Neighbourhoods and Growth	Phase 1 licensing schemes and Gold Standard Charter - March 2022 Phase 2 licensing schemes - November 2023	Phase 1 of the new Private Rented Sector Licensing Schemes were approved by cabinet on 19/10/2021. The schemes include HMO licensing borough wide and selective licensing for single family properties in 5 wards and started on 1 March 2022. Phase 2 of the new Private Rented Sector Licensing Schemes were approved by cabinet on 6/12/2022 and approved by DLUHC in May 2023. The schemes started on 1 November 2023 and include selective licensing for single family properties in a further 14 wards. All new schemes include the exemption for properties let via the council's social lettings agency. The Gold Standard Charter offers 50% off of part B of the licensing fee for members signed up to the Finder's Fee scheme.	Complete
Use council tax empty homes information to identify newly	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Clive Palfreyman	Quarterly, starting with a new	A new process has been formalised where council tax run the reports and the data is used to identify newly	Ongoing

developed homes which are sitting empty			formal process from October 2021	developed properties which are vacant and potentially available for let. This is then shared with council officers in the regeneration team.	
Contact developers of newly developed empty homes with the offer of leasing to the council to let to homeless households.	Neil Kirby, Head of Sustainable Growth, Candida Thompson, Director of Housing Needs and Support	Steve Platts Strategic Director of Housing	Quarterly	On receipt of the council tax information, regeneration officers will contact the developers of new units to understand the reasons for any vacancies and to suggest leasing to the council on standard terms and rents.	Ongoing
Raise awareness and provide advice on options to bring properties back in to use					
Organise an empty homes publicity drive, as part of the housing crisis campaign	Edward Townsend, Director of Communications, Engagement and Change	Althea Loderick	October 2021	We will use all appropriate and effective council channels to ensure the public are aware of: • how to report empty homes, • the costs of leaving homes empty, both to owners and the wider community • incentives to bring properties back into use	Ongoing
Improve the council's web pages on the support and assistance for bringing empty homes back into use including better linking to the information about council tax premiums which will be charged as per the next action	Sajda Munshi, PSH & Adaptations Manager, Richard Selley, Director of Customer Experience	Strategic Director of Housing	October 2021	Complete	Complete
Ensure the council's council tax webpages about empty	Laurence Fleming	Clive Palfreyman	October 2021	A web link has been inserted to ensure a joined up approach.	Complete

properties and second home discounts links to the webpage above about bringing empty properties back into use.	Service Development Officer Richard Selley, Director of Customer Experience				
Making it easier to report empty homes					
Establish an empty homes reporting telephone line through the council' switchboard	Dominic Cain Director of Exchequer	Clive Palfreyman	October 2021	There is an existing empty homes reporting telephone number. A new flowchart has been provided to help the call centre better assign calls to the appropriate team. We will continue to explore methods to make reporting of empty homes easier.	Complete
Improve options for the reporting of empty homes online and via email	Dominic Cain Director of Exchequer	Clive Palfreyman	November 2021	The web form is in place and receives hits daily. The link is below	Complete

https://forms.southwark.gov.uk/showform.asp?nc=mbvs&fm_fid=2171

Improving our understanding of private sector empty homes to better target action and support

Action	Officer lead	CMT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
Improve the data on empty homes					
Contact owners of empty homes on the council tax database to improve our understanding of the reasons for this, and what additional support would help return the property to use.	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Clive Palfreyman	December 2021	An empty homes audit was completed. Owners of empty homes were contacted to check if the property was still empty, why, and what additional assistance may be required to bring the property back into use. The council has received the final report. More than 2,000 owners of empty properties were surveyed to find out why homes were empty, future intentions concerning the property, and support required from the council. There were 290 responses received to the survey - a 14% response rate, which is positive in terms of this type of survey. 54% indicated that the home was not empty or being used as a second home. Of the owners that said the home was empty 34% indicated that they will be selling the property. 48% of owners indicated that work was needed before selling or letting the home. In 2023 5,540 correspondence was sent out to empty home owners. Approximately 580 responded, this led to 199 having empty status removed. The top changes were 71 properties were rented out, 63 owners had moved	Complete

				back in to their properties, 12 properties had been sold and 6 were awaiting sale. In 2024 we undertook a review of empty homes partnering with Liberata. 1,500 properties were contacted, this did not include any LBS property or any large developments which remained empty and all had been empty for at least 3 months. Of the 1,500 properties, 584 confirmed status as long term empty, 401 confirmed they were now occupied, 23 were confirmed as 2nd homes and 17 were uninhabitable. This raised an additional £837k in New Homes Bonus.	
Conducting pilots exercise to improve the reporting of empty homes.	Norman Lockie, Head of Income Operations	Clive Palfreyman	TBC	This action was agreed in response to the survey above. Following this the council has: • Run a targeted campaign against 450 properties empty for longer than 6 months. 103 responses have been received so far and the results are being analysed. This has been in conjunction with the empty property team • Used the temporary accommodation income database to understand which LBS properties are being used for this purpose and whether or not it ties in with Council Tax data • The council has introduced an automated process to identify owners of empty property who stop paying and then contact them to identify the reasons and offer help where appropriate. • Council tax are working with	Ongoing

				Ascendant Solutions to identify properties recorded as empty which may no longer be empty. This utilises real time sales and rental transactions data from various sources in real time to show changes at previously empty property.	
A new empty homes board					
Introduce a cross council empty homes board to meet bi-annually to agree and review the action plan	Robert Weallans, Housing Strategy Manager	Strategic Director of Housing	May 2021	The board has been set up and has met a number of times to agree this action plan and to coordinate workstreams across the council. The board will continue to meet to review the action plan as required and to monitor progress towards delivery of the actions, and to track the number of empty homes.	Complete

Campaigning for more resources and more effective powers to tackle empty homes in the private sector

In recognition of the limited powers the council has to tackle empty homes, the council will campaign for the following changes to legislation and national policy, working with the Mayor of London and London Councils.

Action	Officer lead	CMT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
Establish a thorough, consistent and long term public affairs plan, engaging both the Mayor of London, Greater London Assembly and London Councils in order to influence government policy towards empty homes and relevant local authority powers	Joseph Brown Cabinet & Public Affairs Manager	Althea Loderick	Ongoing	The Corporate Public Affairs Plan is in place. They are producing a script for those speaking to key external people. This will be sent out to the Directors Forum imminently. Current asks include: • Cost effective enforcement powers, such as simplifying EDMO and CPO procedures, such as allowing for community impact and housing need to be accepted reasons to seek enforcement actions. • New planning powers to allow Local Authorities to revert property to local authority's affordable housing supply where it remains empty following completion. Current planning powers do not allow for planning consent to require homes to be occupied. If new powers are introduced the council will quickly implement these new powers. • Greater flexibility over council tax premiums on empty homes - Government should allow unlimited	Ongoing

				council tax premiums on empty homes. • We had been calling for greater flexibility to enable local authorities to charge the premium on homes empty for less than 2 years, as well as the ability to charge premiums on second homes and other furnished empty properties. These changes were included in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. • Increased resources for grants and loans	
Work with partners from across the third sector to support and develop policy, campaigns and relevant other work streams, including organisations such as Action on Empty Homes	Joseph Brown Cabinet & Public Affairs Manager	Althea Loderick	Ongoing	The council has reached out to <u>Action on Empty Homes</u> and the council remains keen to work together where possible.	Ongoing
Ensure any related government consultation responses set out our clear asks	Perry Singh, Strategy and Business Support Manager	Strategic Director of Housing	As required	The council has met with MHCLG and DWP to discuss the issues with powers such as CPOs and EDMOs and remains in dialogue on these issues. The lobbying points will be used in all housing consultations as appropriate.	On target

PART 2 – REDUCING THE NUMBER OF EMPTY COUNCIL HOMES

While the issue of empty homes is concentrated in the private sector, about a quarter of empty homes (including empty furnished homes) have Southwark Council as the primary liable party for the council tax. The vast majority of these are related to ongoing estate redevelopment, major refurbishment, disposal or non-housing use. This includes properties built for sale as part of new homes programme (such as shared ownership properties).

According to the October 2025 council tax records there were 1,861 empty properties where the council was recorded as the primary liable party for the council tax (not just council rented).

As of mid February 2026 there were 152 active minor voids and 133 active major voids. Most of these are work in progress. The vast majority of voids are non active voids. According to housing department records there were 1,224 non active voids broken down as follows:

	Demolition	Disposal	Refurbishment and FRA type 4 safety works	Other ⁶	Total
Total	1065	22	87	50	1,224

Most of the non-active voids are involved with major regeneration schemes or where major investment or fire safety work is required. With the regeneration voids, some of the properties are effectively uninhabitable but there are strict rules about what can be removed from the council tax property list on which these figures are based. Many of these are expected to be removed from the figures shortly once demolition gets underway. Some of the key examples of these regeneration or structural issue voids are:

- Aylesbury Estate – The vast majority of the long term empty properties are linked to the Aylesbury Estate regeneration. In February 2026 this accounted for 759 general needs voids. This regeneration has run in phases which has resulted in many

⁶ Other (most of these are used as short term emergency accommodation TA by legal disrepair, area management, cleaners mess room etc)

homes needing to be vacated and sitting vacant prior to demolition. To reduce the number of vacant homes some of these homes have been used as temporary accommodation, there are a number of temporary accommodation voids as the council works to make best use of these properties (see below). The rehousing and purchasing of leasehold properties can take a very long time and it has not been possible historically to move all tenants simultaneously into new homes. Vacant properties are being used for temporary accommodation where possible. Some of the void properties on the Aylesbury are squatted which has been linked to serious organised crime. The team are working with the police and the legal team to reposess these properties which may increase overall turnaround time. A task force consisting of Senior Members of the police, Community Safety, Violence Reduction Unit, Southwark Construction and Area Management has been set up to tackle these issues. The voids service established a dedicated works team for the Aylesbury Estate to focus on bringing homes back into use and carrying out minor repairs on the estate.

- Ledbury – Ledbury - In 2021 due to structural issues, in consultation with residents a decision was made to demolish the four tower blocks at Ledbury Estate, consisting of 224 homes. The work is scheduled to complete in 2026. Ledbury accounted for 158 voids in February 2026.
- Tustin Estate and Hillbeck Close Estates - In March 2021, residents voted in favour of demolishing and rebuilding the low-rise buildings in a residents' ballot. The programme comprises the demolition of 249 homes (200 council rented and 49 leasehold). Tustin accounted for 41 voids in February 2026.
- Marie Curie – In May 2021, the council informed residents in Marie Curie that they needed to move out to carry out major essential works, including fire safety improvements to their homes and block. Marie Curie is a 16 storey block of 98 two bedroomed maisonettes. In February 2026 this accounted for 93 voids. Due to increasing fire safety concerns, combined with increasing refurbishment costs, Southwark Council's Cabinet approved the recommendation to demolish Marie Curie in December 2025.

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The council is keen to make best use of these empty properties. It conducts frequent review of empty homes on regeneration schemes to ensure empty properties are used as temporary accommodation for as long as possible. Where there are delays to the programme, the temporary accommodation strategy for the scheme is reviewed and additional homes brought back into use. In February 2026 there were 430 estate temporary accommodation voids, of which a large proportion were on the Aylesbury Estate. The council is working to make the best use of these properties whilst they await redevelopment.

The action plan contains targets to return council homes to use. The monitored target for major voids for 2025/26 is based on new voids. In October 2025 this was running at 97 days against a target of 100 days. The previous target in the action plan was against all major voids. This is running at 166 days. Letting some of the long standing major voids affects turnaround time. 2 new contractors have been brought in to deal with backlog. 98 long term voids were brought back in to use between April 2025 and October 2025.

In October 2025 the relet times for new minor voids for was running at 81 days against a target of less than 28 days.

Voids remain a priority and works are monitored closely to ensure properties are turned around as quickly as possible.

The optimum number of all voids should be rolling at about 100. Therefore the council is working hard to reduce the number of voids.

Actions to reduce the number of council empty homes includes:

- On 16th October, we launched the Tiered Nomination Strategy. This initiative is designed to increase acceptance rates, reduce property turnaround times, minimise delays caused by declined offers or no-shows, and enhance the efficiency of matching applicants to available homes.
- We are also working collaboratively across the council to co-design solutions that reflect our shared priorities and challenges. As part of this, a dedicated project within the Change Team has been engaging with the relevant teams involved in void management, focusing on streamlining end-to-end processes and systems to further support these improvements.
- Working with contractors to ensure all empty homes are brought back into use. Two additional contractors were brought in to focus on complex long standing and Temporary Accommodation voids. A new KPI for Contractor's performance monitoring has been developed to ensure targets are met.
- Voids will have the option of being allocated to contractors and managed through the Plentific Market Place platform in the coming months. This platform allows much more oversight, costing and forecasting for the works. Plentific is also working with the team in reviewing the void process to identify any gaps and suggest process changes for improvement. Plentific's Void Management Solution offers several benefits that can improve the Voids Process. The service are also looking to secure additional contractors via the London Tender Portal and the Council's approved list. However in house delivery will always be the Council's preferred option and the service are planning on recruiting enough in house operatives to delivery 80% of the voids we turnaround via in house delivery within the next year. Repairs partners via any platform will then be used only due to specialisms or capacity issues.
- Working with utility companies to speed up resolution of issues with gas and electricity arrears and resolve meter issues. The team are working with Ovo to clear arrears and digitalize the process to fast-track appointments to clear debts and replace meters.
- Managing the impact of new homes programme voids. Five officers were appointed in January 2025 to aid capacity, including three Surveyors, a service manager and an additional administrative officer.
- Continuing to review regeneration projects to maximise the use of our stock and ensure properties are used as TA where demolition/development work is not imminent.
- Voids will be allocated to contractors and managed through the Plentific Market Place platform from April 2025. This will allow much more oversight, costing and forecasting for the works. Plentific is reviewing the void process to identify any gaps and suggest process changes for improvement.
- Rolling out a new IT system, as part of the repairs improvement plan. This will allow for enhanced functions for monitoring works from specifications through to completions, including detailed monitoring on financial completions.
- Raising the profile of sheltered voids, and increasing take up by improvements and service upgrades to the schemes including improving digital accessibility and assistive technology. The council is also making direct offers to homeless households where

appropriate. The 'Maximise the use of Sheltered Housing' project resulted in an increase in take up of the properties and a reduction in the number of voids from 44 to 25 within 6 months but it increased to 35 in February 2025 due to quicker turnover of Sheltered voids. The Project Officer is working with Adult Social Care and contacting applicants on the waiting list to assist with bidding etc to increase take up. The team also routinely check homeless households who qualify for Sheltered and make direct offers where appropriate.

- A reduction of work in progress voids
- Reviewing key to key time including a review of processes, work content, roles and responsibilities, resources etc. The team are also trialling a system where we work much closely with contractors and oversee them with a contractor taking possession of the void property from key to key. The project is looking at whether this process is quicker across the overall turnaround time as well as monitoring the quality and spend. So far, the results are very positive, and it is expected that this will be rolled out further in the coming weeks.
- A contractor management review driving improved contractor controls and commercial performance.
- The Voids Structure Realignment concluded in April 2025. The full void delivery team is now centralised under Repairs. This aids not only with capacity and direction but will negate the need for unnecessary hand offs.
- Reviewing the lettable standard, decorations are no longer carried out in General Needs or Temporary Accommodation properties. Instead, decoration packs are given to each new householder. Sheltered housing and Extra Care properties continue to be decorated
- Increased resources, as it is anticipated that there will be an estimated two years' worth of voids in a 12 month period, a number of extra voids works contracts were let in October 2023. This significantly increased the contractor resource to deliver the service.
- Improving processes to delay new build properties being added to the VOA database through more accurate completion notices, and to ensure properties are removed where demolition notices are in place, or exempted where possible, on regeneration schemes. This includes gathering information on the demolition notice or refurbishment, the occupancy rates and access to the building where they are already empty.
- Disposing some long term voids - The disposal of a number of long term empty council properties was agreed in 2024 with a plan to remove about 20 long term empty council properties.

Reducing the number of empty council homes

Action	Officer lead	CMT lead	Targets	Comments	PRAG
Setting targets for returning empty council homes ('voids') to use					
Average relet time, void date to let date (calendar days) new major voids general needs voids <100	Director of Resident Services	Strategic Director of Housing	2025/26	In October 2025 for new major voids the average relet times was running at 97 days against a target of 100 days. Voids remain a priority and works are monitored closely to ensure properties are turned around as quickly as possible. Please see the text above for details on our plans to address this.	Ongoing
Average relet times, void date to let date (calendar days) new minor general needs voids <28 days	Director of Resident Services	Strategic Director of Housing	2025/26	The monitored target for minor voids for 2024/25 is based on new voids. As of October 2025 this was running at 81 days. Please see the text above for details on our plans to address this.	See text above
Maximise use of empty homes designated for redevelopment					
Review use of lettings on the Aylesbury Estates and Ledbury redevelopment as part of the empty homes awaiting redevelopment in the Temporary Accommodation Supply Action Plan	Director of Resident Services	Strategic Director of Housing	Ongoing	All properties on regenerations schemes are reviewed on an ongoing basis responding to any potential changes in phasing.	Ongoing