

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2022

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC QUESTION

1. QUESTION FROM EMMA DOBINSON TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR A SAFER, CLEANER BOROUGH

Southwark has, ‘taken action to bring more empty homes back into use’ (Kieron Williams, March 2022). [Southwark Empty Homes Action Plan, October 2021](#) confirms, ‘Total empty and substantially unfurnished’ = 3,720, October 2020 and 4,469, October 2021. How many empty Southwark homes were put back into use this financial year?

RESPONSE

I am dismayed at the waste represented by the large number of empty private homes we have in the borough and across London. It is clear that as a council, we have limited direct powers to intervene in the private housing market, but we are using every tool at our disposal to encourage landlords to use their asset for a home. Our action plan also sets out how we will campaign for greater powers to disincentivise this waste, and ensure that homes cannot continue to be left empty across our borough.

Our Empty Homes Action Plan has already seen success with over 230 homes brought back into use in last financial year and we expect another 160 by the end of this financial year. However, we know we must redouble our efforts to tackle this issue.

This is why we have created a new £2m Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) fund and will look to deploy Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) as appropriate.

Alongside enforcement measures we have also launched a generous package of support for landlords who do want to bring their properties back into use. This includes grants and loans for repairs and help to cover the cost of licensing, managing the property and finding tenants.

We also need the government to make it easier and cheaper to take action. We need more flexible council tax powers to reduce the amount of time a property can be left empty, and we also need the government to change the definition of ‘empty’ to include furnished properties, and to make EDMOs cheaper and quicker to deploy.