

Empty Homes

A service aimed at providing up-to-date and relevant information and guidance on what to do with empty properties has been launched in the western part of Somerset.

The Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership has introduced an **Empty Property Strategy** to bring empty properties back into use as a priority. This would help the housing market area to increase the supply of good quality homes to many people who need them. An empty property can be distressing for neighbours and attract antisocial behaviour, vandalism and squatting and lead to a reduction in local property values. Owners may be unaware of the impact their empty home is having. All you need to do if you own a property that stands empty or would like to report an empty home is call the dedicated hotline number:

**Empty Property
Hotline number 0845 241 7243**

Customer Services will take all enquiries on empty properties for the partnership area and forward them onto the empty properties officer who will deal with the enquiry within seven days.

There are a number of incentives the partnership can offer including discretionary grants, loans at an attractive rate, help in selling properties or bringing onto the letting market.

An empty property officer works in all three council areas. All empty properties are prioritised by using a scoring system enabling the empty property officer to tackle the priority cases. The empty property officer attends local exhibitions and events such as the recent Buildings Exhibition at the Somerset County Cricket Ground to help get the message across to the public and other organisations.



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Empty Homes Success

There have already been successes in all three districts with around **40** premises brought back into use throughout the partnership area.

There are also a number of bigger projects lined up in the near future, for example:

in Sedgemoor...

Empty property officer Nick Jobson is working with a Sedgemoor client who hopes to convert a large old building in Burnham on Sea into self contained units for the local community.

In Taunton...

In Taunton work is being done with a client who hopes to sell the premises following some valuations carried out with local estate agents on his behalf.

In West Somerset...

In West Somerset there were two recent completions of premises that have been brought back to "life" following grants that are still currently available, one on Exmoor another on the outskirts of Minehead.

Burnham-on-Sea:

An empty property was reported by police as being insecure. Following investigations it was found the owner had died. He had no apparent relatives or legatees. The property was found to be insecure both back and front and running water was heard from inside the property indicating a burst pipe.

The Partnership decided to use its powers to take action in securing the premises, ensuring the local water company was notified that the water supply needed to be turned off and informing other utilities of the situation.

The case proves that the Partnership is serious in addressing the problem caused by empty properties and will undertake any enforcement work as required especially if the property is causing a blight / distress to the neighbours or local community.