

Carmarthenshire County Council  
**Housing Services**



**Empty-Homes Strategy  
2005-2009**



Certificate No. FS 84464



# Our Empty-Homes Strategy 2005 - 2009



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Producing an Empty-Homes Strategy was identified as a main priority in our Housing Strategy. The Empty-Homes Strategy includes a commitment to reduce the number of empty properties across all housing sectors, and supports the Welsh Assembly Government's Housing Strategy 'Better Homes for People in Wales'.

An empty home is a wasted asset from the point of view of the owner, people who need a home, and local residents who often have to put up with the problems that it creates, including crime, vandalism and antisocial behaviour.

We must reduce the number of empty homes to provide much-needed extra housing and reduce the negative effect that empty homes can have. We will do this by focusing on six main aims.

- **Keeping track of empty homes** by producing detailed records that list every empty home in Carmarthenshire and make sure that we have a good methods for recording those properties we have brought back into use.
- **Providing more homes and choice** by making full use of privately-owned empty properties to provide an extra source of accommodation for homeless households, single people, key workers (people providing a public service) and low-priority applicants waiting for social housing.
- **Reducing the effect on our communities** by making full use of our enforcement role to reduce the risks associated with empty homes.
- **Reducing the number of empty council homes** to make more homes available and also increase the quality of housing for renting and buying.
- **Improving services to landlords** by working closely with landlords to promote schemes which will help them to provide more affordable, good-quality and well-managed rented accommodation.
- **Promoting the empty-homes initiative** by raising awareness of the Empty-Homes Strategy, promoting successful projects and using them as a springboard to encourage residents to identify and tell us about empty homes in Carmarthenshire.

We will achieve these aims by being open to new ideas, strengthening our existing partnerships and creating new private-sector arrangements. We have a lot of work ahead to tackle the problem of empty homes in Carmarthenshire, and I am confident that this document sets out a clear framework of how we are going to achieve this.



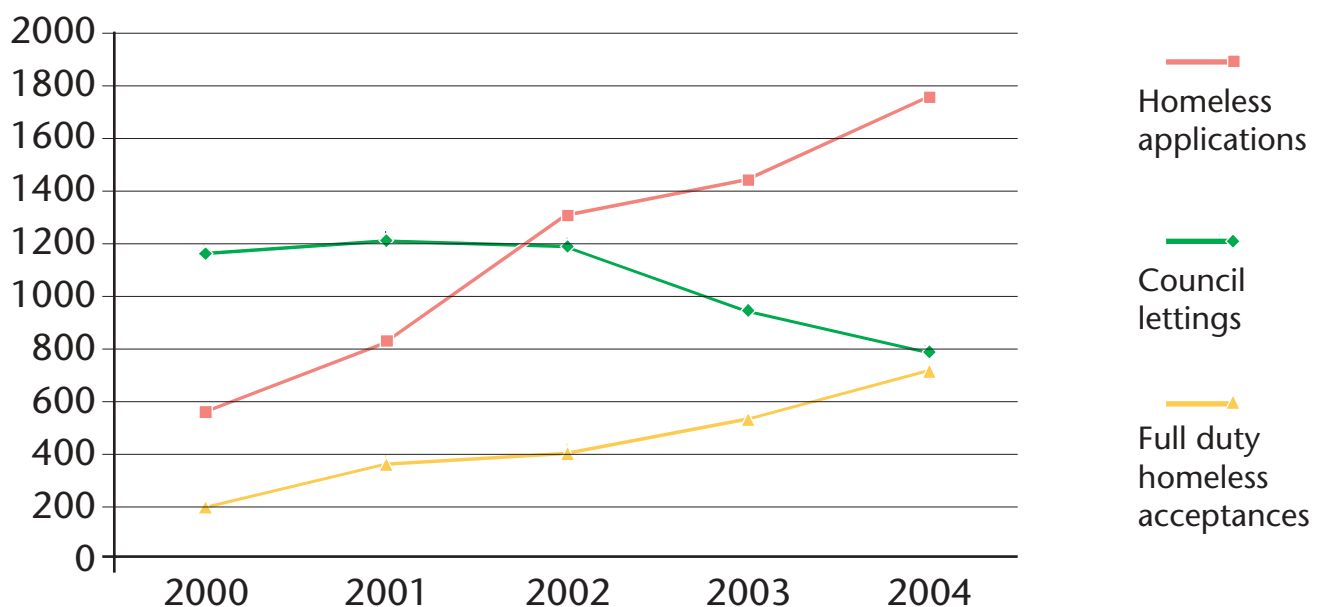
# Introduction

There are a total of 78,531 homes in Carmarthenshire. Our Council Tax records from 1 April 2004 show that 3,325 (4.2%) of these homes are empty. However, results from our recent private-sector stock-condition survey show that the actual figure may be higher than our Council Tax records suggest. The survey shows that 4,385 (6.4%) homes in the county are empty. We believe that over 2,000 homes have been empty for more than six months, and our strategy will focus on this category. (Six months relates to government figures on long-term empty properties and associated Council Tax relief.)

The demand for affordable housing in Carmarthenshire continues to increase while supply is falling at a rate that means we can no longer meet housing needs effectively. For example, we own 9,500 homes which last year provided approximately new 900 tenancies. However, there are over 4,000 people on the Housing Choice Register waiting for housing. The number of homeless households which we have a full duty to house (the number of households we must find homes for by law) has risen by over 300% in the last four years.



## Council Lettings and Homelessness, 2000 - 2004



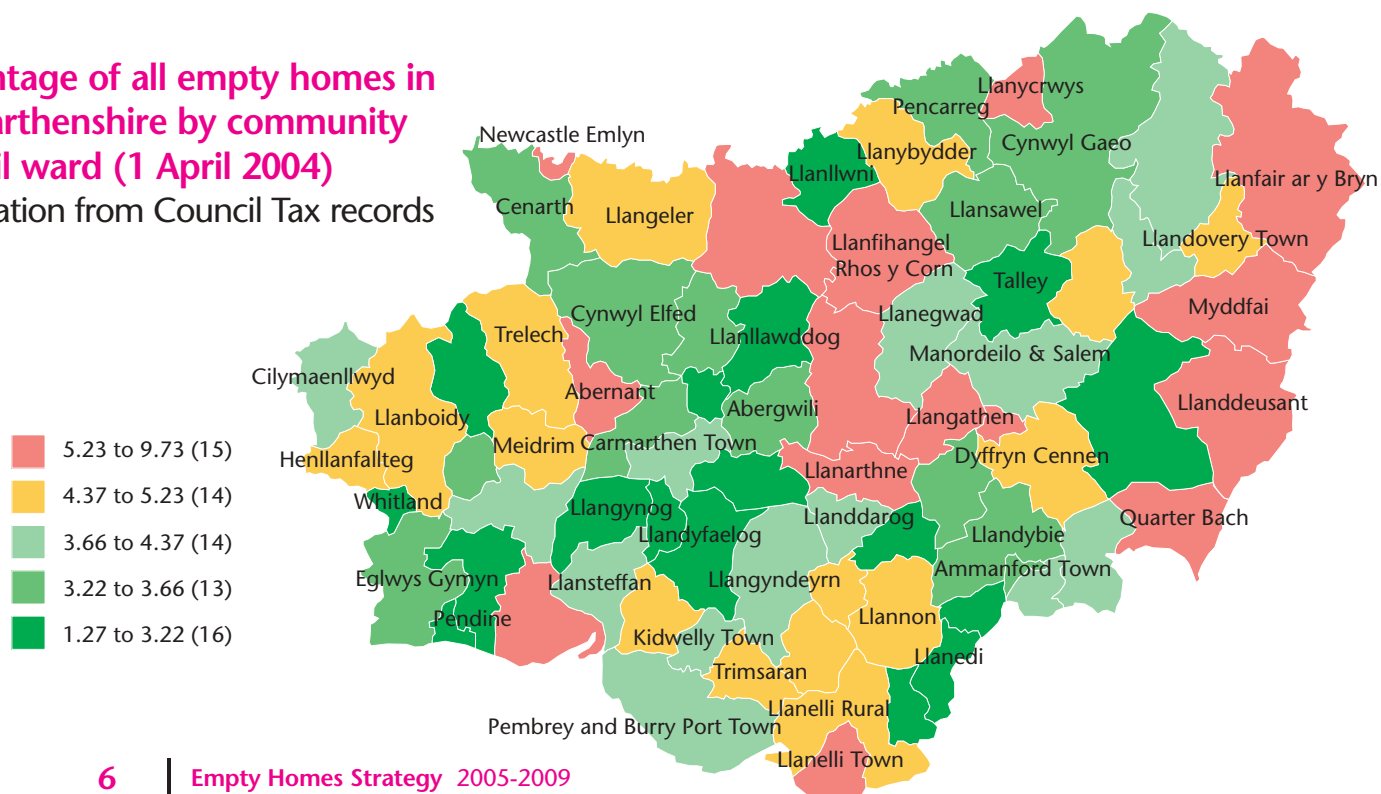
## What are the reasons for empty homes in Carmarthenshire?

- The owner may be trying to sell the property, and will not consider leasing or letting it.
- The owner may be prepared to leave the house empty for some time while they are waiting for the right buyer and the right price.
- Properties are difficult to sell because they are in poor condition, have poor access or there are poor facilities in the local area.
- Properties may be in an unpopular area. Or, the condition of neighbouring properties may be putting off possible buyers.
- The owner may not want to sell a property even though it is standing empty. This could be because they are temporarily working abroad, because they have sentimental reasons for keeping the property or because other family members may want to live in the property in the future.
- The owners may be untraceable.
- Properties may have very complicated legal conditions concerning the ownership or are in the process of being repossessed.
- The property is above or joined to a business property, and the business owner does not want to let it.



### Percentage of all empty homes in Carmarthenshire by community council ward (1 April 2004)

information from Council Tax records



## Connecting the Empty-Homes Strategy with our key strategies

This commitment to reducing the number of empty homes is an important part of our Housing Strategy and Housing Renewal Policy. Both these documents stress the importance of improving the quality of housing in the county. Our Empty-Homes Strategy is closely linked to our Health, Social and Well-Being Strategy, as improving the quality of housing in Carmarthenshire will improve the quality of health and life for everyone in the area. This strategy also helps us meet a number of main priorities identified in our Community Strategy.

- **'Investment and innovation'**: increasing the amount of affordable housing in Carmarthenshire will breathe more life into the area and improve local neighbourhoods, the surrounding areas, and town centres.
- **'Safer communities'**: reducing the number of empty homes means fewer eyesores, less risk to public health, a reduction in possible crime hotspots and antisocial behaviour, and also discourages squatting.
- **'A better place'**: bringing run-down empty homes back into use improves the quality of the local environment, can reduce demand for housing on new greenfield sites and strengthen local communities.
- **'Putting people first'**: by increasing the amount of affordable housing, local people will have more choice and more opportunity to move to a quality home. We can develop empty homes into temporary housing and house more homeless households close to local support networks and in better-quality accommodation.



# Keeping track of empty homes

## Our aim

Produce detailed records that list every empty home in Carmarthenshire and make sure that we have good methods for recording those properties we have brought back into use.

### We will do the following.

- Appoint a designated empty-property officer **(by April 2005)**.
- Set up, maintain and monitor a database that lists all the empty properties in the county that have been empty for more than six months **(from April 2005)**.
- Set up an Empty-Homes Register which will act as a contact point for possible developers, buyers and owners of empty properties **(by April 2006)**.
- Set up a network of contacts across the council in departments such as social services, highways and refuse who regularly visit properties **(by April 2006)**.
- Set up partnerships with Royal Mail, the police, town and community councils to identify empty properties **(by April 2006)**.
- Share best practice on collecting information with other local authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government **(from April 2005)**.
- Monitor planning applications to work out whether we can provide support or advice **(from September 2005)**.
- Bring back into use at least 40 empty properties in the private sector each year by either taking direct action or providing advice or help **(from April 2005)**.
- Report each year on the number of private-sector properties we have brought back into use either by taking direct action or giving advice or help **(from April 2005)**.



# Providing more homes and choice

## Our aim

Make full use of privately-owned empty properties to provide an extra source of accommodation for homeless households, single people, key workers (people providing a public service) and low-priority applicants waiting for social housing.

### We will do the following.

- Identify 'empty-home partners' who can look at ways of reducing the number of empty properties in Carmarthenshire **(by April 2006)**.
- Produce an information pack for owners of empty properties which sets out the range of options available to help them to bring their properties back into use **(by April 2006)**.
- Bring back into use 25 empty properties including business premises through social housing grant **(by April 2009)**.
- Bring back into use 15 empty flats above retail premises (for example, shops) through social housing grant **(by April 2009)**.
- Set up a partnership with a private developer who can use renovation grants to bring back into use 10 empty properties a year **(from April 2006)**.
- Introduce a 'Home Improver' scheme which would mean that first-time buyers on the Housing Register could claim a grant through the Renewal Policy when buying an empty property that is not fit for living in **(by April 2008)**.
- Consult with public organisations and local housing associations to allocate their homes which are hard to let as short-term temporary housing **(from April 2005)**.
- Consult with Planning about relaxing restrictions on selling "tied accommodation" (homes set aside for farm workers and their families) **(from April 2005)**.



# Reducing the effect on our communities

## Our aim

Make full use of our enforcement role to reduce the risks associated with empty homes.

### We will do the following.

- Use our enforcement role for dealing with the problem of empty homes. This will include producing an enforcement code between relevant council departments **(by April 2006)**.
- Develop a prioritisation programme for targeting 10 empty properties each year which meet housing need and are in a particularly poor condition **(from April 2005)**.
- Maintain a 'hit list' of properties in the worst condition which are causing serious problems in a neighbourhood **(from April 2005)**.
- Decide whether to remove or increase Council Tax discounts for empty properties in areas of the county which have higher than average levels of empty properties, after considering the findings of the local housing market assessment **(every year from April 2006)**.
- Apply charging orders against problem properties which have been empty for a long time where the owners do not carry out work within a set time **(from April 2005)**.
- Introduce a compulsory leasing scheme with our partners, where properties have been empty for a long time. We will improve the properties and nominate people from our Housing-Choice Register for the length of the lease **(by April 2007)**.
- Respond to general complaints within three days and respond to more serious matters within 24 hours **(from April 2005)**.
- Monitor properties that are not causing a major problem, and take appropriate action to deal with nuisance issues **(from April 2005)**.
- Use compulsory purchase orders to buy properties when all other options have failed **(from April 2005)**.



# Reducing the number of empty council homes

## Aim

Make more homes available and increase the quality of housing for renting and buying.

### We will do the following.

- Bring back into use at least 50 properties that have been empty for a long time and need major work **(by March 2006)**.
- Achieve improved targets on 'turnaround times' for minor work **(by December 2005)**.
- Redevelop the Brynmefys Estate, Llanelli, by working with a private developer to provide at least 80 affordable homes with different types of tenancy **(by April 2007)**.
- Redevelop 24 self-contained flats at Davies Square, Llanelli, to provide at least 20 affordable apartments for sale **(by April 2007)**.
- Look into the advantages of a leasing scheme for refurbishing 10 properties **(by April 2006)**.
- Consider the future of low-demand sheltered-housing schemes **(by April 2006)**.



# Improving services to landlords

## Aim

Work closely with landlords and promote initiatives which will help them to provide more affordable, good-quality and well-managed rented accommodation for people in housing need.

### We will do the following.

- Set up an advisory service which will provide technical and legal advice for people who want to buy or renovate an empty property **(by April 2006)**.
- Bring back into use 10 empty properties each year through Landlord Renovation Grants (depending on the outcome of the review of the Housing Renewal Policy **(from April 2006)**).
- Produce a landlord's pack which includes information on grants available for renovating property, housing associations who can manage the property, letting agents in the county, details of builders, and recent changes in legislation and tax regulations **(by April 2006)**.
- Introduce a referral scheme for landlords to contact housing associations and other leasing organisations to help them to repair and manage their assets **(from April 2006)**.
- Help at least 15 homeless households each year to rent a property through a Rent Deposit Scheme **(from April 2005)**.
- Set up a landlord's guarantee scheme for landlords who have properties that have been empty for more than six months. This will include a guarantee to find a suitable tenant, free advice on setting up an assured shorthold tenancy and a fast-track system for Housing Benefit claims **(by April 2007)**.
- Continue to provide advice on empty homes through the Landlords' Forum and newsletters **(from April 2005)**.



# Promoting the empty-homes initiative

## Aim

Raise awareness of the Empty-Homes Strategy, promote successful projects and use them as a springboard to encourage residents to identify and tell us about empty homes in Carmarthenshire.

### We will do the following.

- Publicise the empty-homes campaign and successful schemes in local press and media **(from April 2005)**.
- Make more people aware of the campaign through the Community Planning Forum, Housing Planning Group, Housing Association Liaison Group, Landlords' Forum and newsletters, Homelessness Forum and local business forums **(from April 2005)**.
- Distribute information packs to the owners of targeted empty properties **(from September 2005)**.
- Include information about empty homes in a landlord's pack and landlord's newsletter **(from April 2005)**.
- Set up and promote a direct hotline number and e-mail address for reporting empty properties **(by July 2005)**.
- Develop the corporate website for people to report empty homes **(by April 2006)**.
- Make it possible for people to report empty homes by text message **(by April 2006)**.
- Carry out a survey of owners of properties which have been empty for a long time to find out more about why homes are left empty **(by April 2007)**.



## Appendices

### Percentage of all empty homes in Carmarthenshire by community council ward (1 April 2004)

information from Council Tax records

	Number of empty homes	Total number of homes	Percentage of empty homes	Households on the Housing Choice Register (see note 1)
Llangathen	21	216	9.72%	0
Llanycrwys	10	111	9.01%	4
Newcastle Emlyn	42	525	8.00%	82
Myddfai	13	175	7.43%	0
Llanfair ar y Bryn	19	260	7.31%	0
Llandeilo	66	925	7.14%	77
Abernant	9	129	6.98%	0
Laugharne Town	36	592	6.08%	30
Llanegwad	35	586	5.97%	1
Quarter Bach	76	1317	5.77%	62
Llanfihangel ar Arth	53	922	5.75%	38
Llanfihangel Rhos y Corn	13	227	5.73%	5
Llanarthne	17	309	5.50%	2
Llanddeusant	6	113	5.31%	0
Llanelli Town	581	11119	5.23%	982
Henllanfallteg	9	174	5.17%	0
St Ishmael	41	794	5.16%	19
Llanboidy	21	419	5.01%	3
Trelech	15	302	4.97%	1
Llansadwrn	10	205	4.88%	2
Llangeler	71	1499	4.74%	59
Llannon	101	2153	4.69%	89
Meidrim	12	256	4.69%	2
Trimsaran	51	1112	4.59%	42
Dyffryn Cennen	23	505	4.55%	17
Llandovery	45	989	4.55%	53
Llanelli Rural	420	9314	4.51%	490
Llanybydder	29	657	4.41%	36
Pontyberem	54	1237	4.37%	70
Pembrey & Burry Port Town	160	3794	4.22%	253
Cwmamman	82	1996	4.11%	113
Llanddarog	20	498	4.02%	13
Cilymaenllwyd	12	301	3.99%	6



Cilycwm	9	226	3.98%	0
Llangyndeyrn	52	1324	3.93%	19
Manordeilo & Salem	26	674	3.86%	0
Llansteffan	19	501	3.79%	20
Llanwrda	8	211	3.79%	2
Kidwelly Town	55	1465	3.75%	96
Carmarthen Town	235	6281	3.74%	548
St Clears	43	1163	3.70%	54
Betws	28	761	3.68%	12
Llanfynydd	7	191	3.66%	1
Cenarth	19	522	3.64%	20
Eglwys Gymyn	6	166	3.61%	2
Llanpumpsaint	10	277	3.61%	2
Llansawel	7	194	3.61%	2
Ammanford	88	2447	3.60%	308
Llangynin	4	112	3.57%	1
Newchurch and Merthyr	10	281	3.56%	13
Pencarreg	17	477	3.56%	18
Abergwili	23	681	3.38%	44
Cynwyl Gaeo	14	419	3.34%	0
Cynwyl Elfed	14	422	3.32%	7
Llanfihangel Aberbythych	18	544	3.31%	9
Llandybie	139	4319	3.22%	39
Gorslas	52	1639	3.17%	69
Llanllawddog	9	284	3.17%	5
Llanedi	71	2292	3.10%	91
Llangynog	6	195	3.08%	5
Llanddowror	11	362	3.04%	2
Llangadog	17	563	3.02%	13
Whitland	24	799	3.00%	57
Llangynnwr	29	1052	2.76%	30
Talley	6	220	2.73%	1
Pendine	4	152	2.63%	25
Llangain	6	254	2.36%	12
Llangennech	45	2045	2.20%	59
Llanwinio	4	186	2.15%	0
Llanllwni	6	296	2.03%	5
Bronwydd	4	251	1.59%	0
Llandyfaelog	7	552	1.27%	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3325</b>	<b>78531</b>	<b>4.23%</b>	

**Note 1:** Housing Choice Register, 6 May 2005. This table only records the people who have chosen the area as their first choice. The total number of people on the register for all the above areas is higher than the figure shown.



## Empty homes in Carmarthenshire on 1 April 2004

Information from Council Tax records

