



COTSWOLD

District Council

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 1 DECEMBER 2025
Subject	REVIEW OF LONG-TERM EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Juliet Layton – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning Email: Juliet.Layton@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Jon Dearing – Executive Director Email: jon.dearing@cotswold.gov.uk
Report Author	Mandy Fathers – Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenues Email: mandy.fathers@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To provide an update on the Long-Term Empty Property strategy work
Annexes	Annex A – Sample of Long-Term Empty Properties (Exempt) Annex B – Long Term Empty Property Strategy
Recommendation(s)	That the Committee notes the report and agrees any recommendations it wishes to submit to Cabinet
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering Good Services • Supporting Communities
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	YES (Annex A)
Consultees/ Consultation	Leader, Cabinet Member for Environment and Regulatory Services, Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive, Chief Accountant and Deputy S151 officer, Director of Governance and Development, Director of Communities and Place, Head of Legal Services,



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	Assistant Director, Managing Director (Publica)
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report provides an overview of the empty property work carried out by the Revenues team, including the legal powers available.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Returning empty homes back into use can have a positive impact on the local community, providing much needed homes, whilst improving the street scene and reducing anti-social behaviour.
- 2.2** Properties left empty are a significant wasted resource, both to their owners and to those in housing need across the Cotswold district.
- 2.3** The most recent government statistics (November 2023) reported that there were 261,189 long-term empty properties in England. That figure represents a rise of 12,556 homes compared to 2022, up 5% annually and 16% since before the pandemic in 2019.
- 2.4** There are many reasons why properties may become empty, such as the owner being in care, the owner having a lack of skills or finances to manage the property, legal issues, such as probate creating delays, sentimental attachments or a fear of renting.

3. MAIN POINTS

- 3.1** The current Long Term Empty Property Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 3 October 2024.
- 3.2** At the end of September 2025 (QTR 2) there was 921 empty properties in the Cotswold District, of which:
- 277 have been empty between 6 – 12 months
 - 207 have been empty between 13 – 24 months
 - 353 have been empty between 25 – 60 months
 - 72 have been empty between 5 – 10 years
 - 12 have been empty for 10 years plus.
- 3.3** Those properties that have been empty between 6 months to 24 months mainly fall under the 'transactional' category. This means they can be for example, pending sale, under construction, pending planning approval or waiting for probate to be granted.



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- 3.4** For this category, officers monitor the progression and where applicable apply the necessary levies, exemptions and exceptions. There are currently 484 in this category.
- 3.5** It is those properties that have remained empty for over 24 months that are more problematic. At the end of September 2025 there were 437 in this category which represents less than 1% of all domestic properties within the district.
- 3.6** Of these properties:
- 108 are for over 55-year-olds and/or retirement properties for sale/rent
 - 29 are pending demolition
- 3.7** This represents 31% of all those properties that are empty for 24 months or more.
- 3.8** There is very little the council can do in respect of these properties, but continued monitoring is carried out, and empty property premiums are applied to the council tax accounts where applicable.
- 3.9** Of the 300 properties remaining empty continuous monitoring and engagement with owners is ongoing as per the approach outlined in the Long-Term Empty Property strategy. This includes:
- Monitoring the completion of known works on properties
 - If an owner is planning repairs to an empty home and uses a VAT registered contractor, then the Empty Homes Coordinator can provide the owner with a VAT letter. This confirms that the property has been empty for two or more years. The owner then gives the letter to their contractor and allows them to charge 5% VAT on many repair costs. From April 2025 to the end of September 2025, 20 of these letters have been sent.
 - Referring cases through to Environmental Protection and/or Planning Enforcement
 - Applying discounts/exemptions/levies and exceptions
 - Advising owners on the Valuation Office Agency processes
 - Applying Charging Orders to properties
 - Tracing owners
- 3.10** Many properties are undergoing major improvements, and many of these are undertaken by the owner and not a construction company. These types of renovations can and do take years, sometimes due to the costs involved in such renovations and some purely down to the time required in which to do the works. Property discounts/exemptions would have been exhausted, and most are now experiencing an increase in council tax charged due to the levies applied. Most



owners are maintaining their payments, and for the few who do not, recovery action is taken with many resulting in a charging order being applied to the property.

3.11 No actual enforcement powers have been implemented on any property so far. Such enforcement could include:

- An Empty Dwelling Order (EDMO)
- Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)
- Enforced Sale

3.12 Such enforcement can be an extremely complex and lengthy process as well as costly to pursue. There would be additional costs to consider following any successful action, such as renovation works of a property that might be required which could carry a significant financial risk to the council.

3.13 However, notices under the Local Authority (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 have been utilised and works to secure a property and make it safe has been carried out. Where this type of notice has been implemented and works carried out, the property owner is invoiced for the full costs incurred.

3.14 Engaging with owners of empty properties can bring various challenges. For example, where some owners are reluctant to engage with the council, believing that as the property is privately owned, the council has no right to interfere on what happens with it. These types of properties can remain empty for many years, and although they will attract council tax premiums from either 100%, 200% or 300%; depending on how long they have remained empty, council tax is paid and is up to date on the majority.

3.15 The Long-Term Empty Property Strategy 2024 details the approach the council will take to tackle the issue of empty properties, and this is backed up four objectives, which are:

- 1) To gather relevant, accurate and current information about empty homes in the district
- 2) To provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owners
- 3) To raise awareness of empty homes in the district and promote the strategy
- 4) To reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back into use, through all available and appropriate means.

3.16 Since the start of this financial year and up until the end of September 2025, there have been 514 new properties classified as long-term empty enter the list and 404



removed. For comparison, the figures for the same period in previous years are as follows:

Year: April-September	New Properties entering the List	Properties removed from the List
2022	343	336
2023	406	233
2024	250	441

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1** The cost of the Empty Homes Officer is included in existing budgets. This is a 0.81 FTE post and is shared across the three partner Publica councils.
- 4.2** Any costs incurred by the council for undertaking works in default following non-compliance with a statutory notice will be recovered in full from the property owner.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** There are no legal implications associated with this report.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1** The council already has a Long Term Empty Property Strategy that was approved in 2024. Should the Council decide to alter the measures that the council has in place to incentivise homeowners to bring properties back into use, then a risk assessment will be undertaken at the time.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 7.1** There are not considered to be any equality implications in relation to this report.

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** Creating homes from empty properties saves substantial amounts of material compared to building new homes, minimises the amount of land used for development and avoids wasting embedded carbon, helping to combat climate change.



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9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

9.1 None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None.

(END)