

Competition

Fill in and return the slip details below to be entered in our free prize draw and you could win £25 Marks and Spencer vouchers.

Which council service would you like to know more about?
(Please tick all that apply)

- Advice and support about letting/selling
- Repair grants
- Empty property improvement service (Pathmeads)
- Letting to a housing association

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel. no: _____

E-mail: _____

Address of empty property: _____

Which borough do you live in? _____

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EmptyHomeZone

Bringing homes back into use



Give your empty home an 'extreme makeover'

You too could turn your empty home from an ugly, dilapidated eyesore into a desirable income-generating home that you can either sell or rent out. Mrs P from Enfield worked with her council's empty properties team and just look at the results!



Mrs P from Enfield

"My property had been empty for many years and needed a lot of time and effort spending on it to bring it back into use. By working closely with Enfield's Empty Property Officer, I was able to obtain a grant and the property was completely renovated with four self contained flats which are now fully occupied. I used to pay out every month for my council tax and insurance bills whereas now I receive a regular guaranteed rental income."



Welcome to the first issue of EmptyHomeZone

The North London Empty Property Initiative aims to reduce the number of empty private properties in north London. By tackling this wasted housing we are increasing the supply of good quality and affordable accommodation that's available to let and buy.

The initiative is a partnership between six London boroughs (Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey, Islington and Westminster) that are working together to achieve real improvements in private sector housing.

Our work is delivered using a range of tools from advice and assistance to grant aid and enforcement action.

How we can help

If you have an empty property, it really does make sense for you to take advantage of the help that can be provided by your local council's empty property officer. Leaving a property empty is not only a waste of housing, which can cause problems to the local neighbourhood, but it is wasted source of income to you – the owner. You could be eligible to a grant to bring the property back into use – see overleaf for further information.



Contact us

Empty Property Officers

Most of the boroughs in north London have their own dedicated empty property officer (EPO).

London Borough of Barnet

Michael Polyviou
Tel: 020 8359 7468
Email: Michael.polyviou@barnet.gov.uk

London Borough of Camden

Joyce Amoateng
Tel: 020 7974 3023
Email: joyce.amoateng@camden.gov.uk

London Borough of Enfield

Dave Carter
Tel: 020 8379 4314
Email: dave.carter@enfield.gov.uk

London Borough of Haringey

Anoma Amarajeewa
Tel: 020 8489 4214
Email: empty.properties@haringey.gov.uk

London Borough of Islington

Jane Hilton
Tel: 020 7527 6080
Email: jane.hilton@islington.gov.uk

City of Westminster

Paul Palmer
Tel: 020 7641 3318
Email: ppalmer@westminster.gov.uk

For further information call 0800 953 6305 or visit www.nlep.co.uk



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Grant aid for owners

Did you know that the six councils in the North London Sub-Region offer repair grants to help owners (even some potential owners) bring empty properties back into use?

Landlords

Repair grants up to £25,000 are available to owners who would like to let or lease their property to the council or one of their partner organisations, such as housing associations, to house people/families nominated by the council.

Owner occupiers

In addition, repair grants are available to existing owners wanting to use the property as their primary home, or for first time buyers wanting to use the empty property as their home. This includes existing owners moving to a larger empty property because of overcrowding. Grants of up to £25,000 are available, with potentially extra available for key workers.

Policies vary from council to council – your local empty property officer can advise and explain any conditions that may be attached.

Empty property improvement scheme

Barnet, Camden, Haringey and Islington Councils have joined forces with Pathmeads Housing Association to provide an improvement service to all owners of empty properties. Pathmeads can arrange to carry out all aspects of the renovation of a property, from drawing up plans and schedules of work to appointing builders and project management. They can also help owners apply for grants and liaise with their respective council's planning and building control teams.

Contact Hasmita Bhojani, business team leader at Pathmeads on **020 8150 4341** for further information or check out the empty property refurbishment information at www.pathmeads.org.uk.

Celebrity interior designer Oliver Heath and David Ireland, chief executive of the empty homes agency present a cheque which the owner used to carry out repairs on a property in Camden which went on to provide much-needed homes for Camden residents.



A day in the life of...



Joyce Amoateng

Empty property officer
Camden council

What is a typical day?

With an active case load of around 160 properties, each day is different. One day I might be helping a tenant negotiate with rental agents and the next following up on leads and tracking people down.

What is a typical empty property?

Every property is different. The recently empty ones might be in a good condition, whereas others that have been empty for a long time are often in a really bad condition, sometimes totally derelict and in need of complete renovation.

Do you ever meet the owners?

Yes. It's good to meet at their property so I can understand the problems and come up with realistic solutions, which could include grants, rental schemes or finding builders.

What happens if you cannot find the owners?

I eventually find all the owners! This is where good investigating powers come into play. I've tracked owners as far as Italy, Georgia and South Africa.

What do you like most about your job?

My job is all about solving problems and figuring out what is needed to bring a property back into use. It's demanding but rewarding and takes a lot of common sense - leaving properties empty makes absolutely no sense to anyone.

What do you like least?

There isn't a single thing that I don't like.....well, maybe when it rains on inspection days!

Who lives in the properties that are brought back into use?

Some are used by the council's private rental scheme. The rest are either rented out privately or the owner decides to live there.

What advantages does an empty property owner get from accepting grant aided funding?

It can greatly reduce the cost of building works and they are guaranteed tenants for three years which generates a regular income where previously there was none.

What is the problem in leaving properties empty?

Owners who leave properties empty may not realise it but they can be responsible for problems which have an incredibly negative impact on our communities. Their homes are easy targets for squatters and attract many other types of anti-social behaviour. Empty properties are much more likely to be burnt by arsonists than occupied properties. In a nutshell, they are a waste of valuable housing and cost communities money.

What advice would you give to empty property owners?

Contact your council and speak to the empty property officer. They will give you advice and information on grants and work with you to bring your property back into use.

News from the boroughs

Looking like the back of a bus!

We recently ran a bus advertising campaign to publicise our 'use it or lose it' campaign to get empty homes back into use. If you found yourself sitting behind a bus you might have seen it!



Empty property action plan

Following a comprehensive survey of all known empty properties across most of the six boroughs we are now starting to prioritise an action plan on those properties. Empty property officers also find out about empty properties as a result of reports from concerned neighbours, colleagues, emergency services and other interested parties.

Residents are very aware of the problems associated with having properties left empty in their neighbourhoods and are keen to help in our efforts to improve their communities. They are encouraged to report empty properties via the 'report it' link on www.nlep.co.uk, using our freephone number, via their local council's website or by contacting their empty property officer directly.



WIN £25 Marks & Spencer vouchers

see back page for details

Enforcement – the last resort

If owners of empty properties can't be traced or they refuse to bring a property back into use, despite councils' offers of help, local authority enforcement policies may be put into action. This is very much a last resort as we prefer to work together with owners to make sure that empty properties are brought back into use.

Across the sub-region, there are currently 27 compulsory

purchase orders (CPOs) in progress. These are generally long term empty properties in a dilapidated condition, although this power can be used against any empty property as a last resort if the council is satisfied that it increases the number or quality of habitable properties. There are also 31 enforced sales in progress, which is where a council forces the sale of a property to recover a debt. Some councils are targeting empty properties with high council tax debt.