

# Empty Homes Assistance

### **Purpose**

To provide financial encouragement to owners of empty properties to voluntarily bring them back into use.

### **Applicant Eligibility**

The freeholder or leaseholder of an empty property that has been empty for 6 months or longer. Decisions will be made on a case by case basis and the council would need to undertake a cost benefit analysis to consider whether assistance can be provided.

### **Eligible Works**

Works required will be to bring the property up to both the decent homes standard and to reach a good standard for letting.

### **Empty Home Grant**

100% allowance for eligible works up to £20,000 if the property is let at the Local Housing Allowance level.

50% allowance for eligible works up to £10,000 if let at above the Local Housing Allowance level.

### **Grant Conditions**

It is a condition of the empty homes grant that the property owner lets the property for a period of 5 years for grants of £5,000 and under and 10 years for larger grants.

Discretionary Financial Assistance will be made available subject to funds being available and the following conditions:

- 1.1 The applicant is over 18 years of age and applies for assistance on the forms prescribed by the Wiltshire Council.
- 1.2 The applicant holds either a relevant interest in the property as the Owner, leaseholder or under a trust with repairing obligations. That a leaseholder must have a repairing obligation and have at least five years remaining on the lease.
- 1.3 In the case of a grant of £5,000 or less, that the applicant must make a declaration to let the property for the following 5 years at either the local reference rent or below the local reference rent and agree that if higher rents are received then the assistance provided by the council is repaid.
- 1.4 In the case of a grant of over £5,000 that the applicant must make a declaration to let the property for the following 10 years at either the local reference rent or below the local reference rent and agree that if higher rents are received then the assistance provided by the council is repaid
- 1.5 That the council have nomination rights for a five year period.

- 1.6 That the property is suitably insured throughout the grant condition period.
- 1.7 That there are no unreasonably long periods where the property is left vacant.
- 1.8 In the case of a property held jointly then all those listed with the land registry must be included in the application.
- 1.9 That grants can be made for improvements and repairs to flats, houses and bungalows. Grants will not be offered for other temporary structures, caravans or mobile homes unless they have remaining planning consent of at least 10 years.
- 1.10 A reasonable element of the grant or loan can be used to cover the costs of agency fees, planning and building regulation charges, architectural services, specialists surveys, land registry charges and legal costs unless clients choose to pay these costs themselves.
- 1.11 No works to commence before approval.
- 1.12 Only work assessed by the council as reasonable, practicable, necessary and appropriate will be eligible for assistance.
- 1.13 That the life expectancy of any structural items repaired or replaced should be 20 years or more (except in the case of mechanical items where it may be a shorter period).
- 1.14 That eligible work must be carried out within 12 months of the date of approval.
- 1.15 For work up to £10,000 2 quotes are required. For work above £10,000 three quotes are required.
- 1.16 That the work is completed by the contractor whose estimate accompany the application unless expressly agreed and then the council will reimburse the cheapest price.
- 1.17 The payment of Housing Assistance is conditional upon the authority being provided with an acceptable invoice and the work being completed in a professional and satisfactory manner. The payment will be made directly to the contractor on behalf of the landlord.
- 1.18 It is a condition of Landlords Assistance that an energy efficiency survey of the property is undertaken and that such works that the Authority considers practical, cost effective and that will improve the energy efficiency of the property are carried out.
- 1.19 That the landlord advises the council forthwith of any changes of tenancy.
- 1.20 At completion of the works the landlord may be required to belong to the Wiltshire Landlord Accreditation Scheme
- 1.21 Maximum Grant £20,000.
- 1.22 Grants in excess of £5,000 are repayable if the property is sold within 10 years of completion of the works and will be secured as a charge on the property. Such assistance is only available owners with leasehold or freehold interests in the property where there is sufficient equity in the property to repay the advance at the time of the works being approved by the council. The applicant may choose to fund works in excess of £5,000 themselves.
- 1.23 Successive applications for each property are permitted subject to the maximum grant not being exceeded in any 5 year period.
- 1.24 That the property is let for 5 years.

- 1.25 If successive applications are made and the sum of the applications in any 5 years exceeds £5000 then assistance will only be provided with a legal charge for the full amount advanced unless the applicant chooses to fund the excess over £5,000 themselves.
- 1.26 That it is a condition of the grant that the scheme of work must result in the property being brought up to the decent home standard including all category 1 HHSRS Hazards being addressed. The council in some cases will require category 2 hazards to also be addressed.
- 1.27 Works that would not be eligible include:
  - a. Work to non habitable or temporary structures such as conservatories, garages, porches unless they present a category 1 HHSRS hazard. In such circumstances a financial case would need to be made to repair rather than demolish.
  - b. Remedial work following damage, neglect or DIY disasters unless they present a category 1 HHSRS hazard.

### **Empty Homes Repair and Manage Assistance**

Provides an option for owners to lease their property to the council or an agent nominated by the council and have it repaired and improved to a standard suitable for letting. The council or a named agent would manage the property for a set period of time using the rent to pay for the repairs and letting costs throughout the period of lease. Each offer of assistance would be negotiated on a case by case basis. A running account would be maintained by the council or named agent. Any surpluses returned to the owner. The property would at the end of the lease period be returned to the landlord in the improved condition ready to sale or let.

The cost of refurbishment should not exceed £20,000. The property would be let at the local reference rent.