



4th September 2008:

The latest selection of news of interest to Empty Property Practitioners. If you want a news item published here or on the website please contact news@naepp.org.uk. If you are not a member of NAEPP and want to join, please create an account by [registering here](#).

Your thoughts on empty homes stats please

NAEPP representatives will be meeting CLG reps on 17th September to discuss the government's plans to revise the collection of empty homes statistics. This is part of the overhaul of local authority Housing Stats returns.

In an email to NAEPP, CLG outlined their proposals as follows:

CLG Proposals: Subject: VACANTS

Data sources/ forms

- HSSA* – section A, Q7
- BPSA* – section E, Q21-26, vacant LA dwellings only
- RSR* (for RSL vacants) – part E
- CTB* – Q12, 14, 15 – exemptions on CTB supplementary

* HSSA=Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix
BPSA=Business Plan Statistical Appendix
RSR=Housing Corporation Regulatory Statistical Return
CTB=Council Tax Base return

Summary of CLG recommendations

1 Drop 'RSL' and 'other public sector' dwellings from HSSA form

Why?

Data quality and duplication (RSL figures) and data not used (other public sector figures)

2 Use CTB data to estimate total vacant dwellings

Why?

Most consistent data source across LAs

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CLG Proposals (continued)

3 Use RSR to estimate RSL long and short term vacant dwellings –

Why?

RSR data felt to be of better quality than HSSA figures.

4 Use BPSA to derive LA vacant dwellings, but combine Q21-23 and Q24-26

Why?

BPSA gives long and short-term vacant dwelling split; combine some questions as more detailed split on length of vacancy not used.

5 Use NROSH to complete RSL and LA vacancy figures when it reaches a high enough level of completion

Why?

Will reduce data burden on LAs in long-run.

Questions for external stakeholders

1. *Which data do you use currently for analysis of vacant dwellings?*
2. *Do you use the data on RSL and other public sector vacant dwellings on the HSSA?*
3. *Do you use all of the data by length of vacancy in section E of the BPSA?*
4. *How do you view the quality of the vacant dwellings data recorded on the HSSA and BPSA?*
5. *Are the above vacancy figures on the HSSA and BPSA burdensome to collate?*
6. *Is the guidance on the forms clear for vacant dwelling data items?*
7. *Do you agree with each of the proposals? If no, why?*

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NAEPP Response

We'd like as much input from members as possible on these proposals, but obviously you will need to be quick in supplying them.

Initial thoughts are as follows:

- We'd like to get a better handle on the CLG consultation process: were you already aware of the CLG questions and had you or were you about to respond?
- We welcome the proposals to reduce the burden on local authorities and avoid duplication of effort (eg relying on Housing Corporation RSR returns for information about RSL properties)
- This applies to Other Public Sector empties, also - but will the information be available from other sources?
- There is no mention of second homes and the issue about how the numbers of them are calculated. We are not likely to agree a proposal that treats all furnished empties as second homes, but we might go with a proposal that all furnished empties that are shown as having been "empty" for longer than say 2 years could be treated as second homes, thus allowing the data to be extracted directly from Council Tax Base data. This could be mapped down to neighbourhood levels.
- We want local authorities to be required to report on their empty homes activity - essentially a statistical return rather than a performance indicator, but broadly similar to BVPI64.

It must be stressed that these are just initial thoughts. **Your input is vital.** CLG's desire and willingness to meet NAEPP is welcomed and gives all NAEPP members the opportunity to influence the eventual outcome.

Probably the easiest way to collect your views is via email. We'll send one out over the next day or so for you to reply to. We would need responses back by Monday, 15th September at the latest.

Empty Homes Agency responds to government housing market package

The Empty Homes Agency has published its response to the government's housing market package and is calling for greater emphasis on initiatives aimed at the country's existing homes.

Their press release is as follows:

"The latest government statistics show over 750,000 empty homes in England made up of a surplus flats built for buy to let landlords, failed private rented properties and homes left empty pending delayed regeneration schemes - yet the package of government measures announced today (Tuesday 2nd September 2008) make no mention of empty homes.

"The Empty Homes Agency is calling on the government to introduce a series of measures aimed at stimulating the market to reuse empty homes, encouraging short-life occupation of temporarily vacant property and enabling councils to tackle the worst long term empty homes.

"1. Slash the cost of renovating derelict empty homes by cutting VAT on repair and maintenance.

"2. Introduce a fund to help local authorities use Empty Dwelling Management Orders to tackle the worst long term empty homes.

"3. Bring back purchase and repair grants to allow housing associations to create new affordable homes out of run down empty property

"4. Require that all surplus publicly owned housing be used for short-life housing or property guardian schemes, and not left empty.

"5. Amend commercial property rate relief rules to allow owners of empty property used temporarily as housing to continue to claim rate relief.

"6. Change the council tax rules to replace the current six-month exemption from council tax and discount for long-term empty homes with a six-month discount.

"Commenting on today's announcement of a new government housing package, Chief Executive of the Empty Homes Agency David Ireland said '*Keeping people in their homes is critical, we certainly don't need any more vacant housing. But government should do far more to deal with homes that are already empty. If they did they would create more homes, more quickly than relying on ailing house-builders to build new ones*'"