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# Empty Homes Grant Scheme evaluation: full report

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## Empty Homes Grant Scheme evaluation full report

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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## **Glossary**

### **Chargeable empty properties**

Chargeable empty properties are residential or commercial buildings that are unoccupied and unfurnished for a specified period, and for which local authorities may impose a council tax or business rates charge. These properties are considered “chargeable” because they attract a financial liability, often intended to encourage owners to bring the properties back into use or to compensate for the loss of revenue from unoccupied buildings.

### **Empty and unfurnished**

A chargeable empty property is a property that has been empty (unoccupied and substantially unfurnished) for at least 6 months and is listed as a domestic property for council tax purposes. In order to qualify as a Chargeable empty property, a property must have been valued and banded by the Valuation Office Agency and entered on the Council Tax Valuation List. For the purposes of the grant, the property must have been listed as a domestic property for a minimum of 12 months to qualify.

### **Empty Property Loan Schemes**

Property Loan Schemes are financial assistance schemes provided usually by local authorities or government programmes, offering interest-free or low-interest loans to owners of properties that are currently empty (unoccupied & substantially unfurnished), to bring them back into use. This could mean renovating, repairing, converting empty residential or commercial buildings into homes, or improving them so they meet safety / habitability standards. (Also see Houses into Homes loan scheme below.)

### **Empty Property Premiums**

Empty Property premiums (also called Empty Homes or Long-Term Empty premiums) are extra charges added to Council Tax for residential properties that are empty/unoccupied or used only periodically (e.g. second homes)

## **HM Land Registry**

The HM Land Registry is the official government department (for England and Wales), that records information about the ownership of land and property. In this document the Land Registry is used to check records to confirm ownership of properties and help establish eligibility.

## **Housing Act 2004**

The Housing Act 2004 empowers local authorities to tackle empty homes through Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs)<sup>1</sup> but these are legally complex and only used sparingly, making grant schemes a preferred approach. The Act introduced, among other measures, a new system of regulation for landlords and letting agents in the private rented sector and reformed the law on homelessness.

## **Houses into Homes loan scheme**

Empty Property Loan Schemes are financial assistance schemes provided usually by local authorities or government programmes, offering interest-free or low-interest loans to owners of properties that are currently empty (unoccupied & substantially unfurnished), to bring them back into use. In Wales, one of the main programmes is known as Houses into Homes (Empty Homes Loans) under the Welsh Government.

## **Leasing Scheme Wales**

Leasing Scheme Wales (LSW) is a Welsh Government funded programme, managed by local authorities, which gives private landlords or owners of empty homes the opportunity to lease their property to the council for a fixed term. The aims are twofold: to increase the supply of good quality, long-term affordable housing in the private rented sector; and to help property owners/landlords by offering them guaranteed income and less risk.

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<sup>1</sup> Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) allow local authorities to take over management of long-term empty residential premises. The aim of EDMOs is to bring empty private sector property back into use but can only be sought where a property has been empty for two years and requires an authority to give the owner at least three months' notice of the intention to apply for an order.

## **Local Authority Officers**

In this document Local authority officers refer to those members of staff at each local authority that are responsible in some way for the Empty Homes Grant Scheme.

## **Local Connection**

Local Connection eligibility criteria are additional criteria employed by certain local authorities. These criteria determine whether applicants have strong links to the area and are in place to aid local communities and to ensure local residents are prioritised in accessing this limited resource. 'Local Connection' eligibility criteria apply to the following areas: Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Swansea (Gower Ward).

## **Manage Homes and Places Portal**

As part of the Welsh Governments Social Housing Management web pages, clients are encouraged to register and use this online portal. The Manage Homes and Places portal can be used to: manage information about social housing grant applications; propose new affordable housing schemes; and update Programme Delivery Plans.

## **National Empty Homes Grant (EHG) Scheme**

The National Empty Home Grant Scheme is a Welsh Government initiative aimed at addressing the issue of long-term empty homes in Wales. The scheme provides financial assistance to homeowners and prospective owners to renovate empty properties, thereby increasing the availability of affordable housing and revitalizing communities. The total funding for the scheme is £50 million, which is expected to help bring approximately 2000 empty homes back into use.

## **Net Zero Wales**

The Welsh Government Net Zero Strategic Plan (2022) sets out 54 initiatives that will be assessed and reviewed in 2025 and 2030. This Strategic Plan brings together evidence from across the Welsh Government to outline their priority decarbonisation initiatives. It is part of an ongoing process that identifies opportunities to reduce their carbon footprint and monitor progress in alignment with net zero.

## **New Warm Homes Programme: Policy Statement**

The New Warm Programme: policy statement is a Welsh Government policy framework published in June 2023. It outlines the Welsh Government's long-term ambition and approach for improving the energy efficiency for homes in Wales, particularly targeting

those in or at risk of fuel poverty, and aligning with its climate (net zero) objectives, (outlined above).

### **Prosperity for All: Economic Action Plan**

Prosperity for All: The Economic Action Plan is a Welsh Government strategy document, first published in December 2017, to guide economic development in Wales. It is meant to be a long-term plan (initially for 2017 to 2021) to grow Wales's economy in a fair, inclusive, sustainable way.

### **RCTCBC Officers**

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) Officers refer to those members of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme Team that oversee and administer the scheme.

### **Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016**

The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 is Welsh legislation intended to modernise, simplify, and standardise the law around renting homes in Wales. It replaced a number of older laws governing tenancies and licences with a single, unified legal framework.

### **StatsWales**

StatsWales is the Welsh Government's free to use online repository for statistical data about Wales. It provides detailed official statistics in many areas: population, economy, education, health, environment, transport, public spending, etc.

### **Schedule of Rates**

A Schedule of Rates is a contractual document that specifies predetermined unit prices for various tasks, materials, or services within a project. It serves as a pricing framework that facilitates the valuation of work based on actual quantities executed. A Schedule of Rates enables systematic budgeting, invoicing, and adjustment of costs without the need for renegotiation of individual prices.

### **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is a law in Wales that promotes working together to improve the Welsh environment, economy, society and culture. This Act is about ensuring that future generations of Welsh society have at least the same quality of life as that experienced at time the Act was implemented.

# 1. Introduction

## Background to the study

- 1.0 The number of long-term empty properties<sup>2</sup> in Wales is an ongoing concern for the Welsh Government. Census data (2021) revealed that approximately 6.1% of dwellings in Wales were unoccupied. These properties are not only a lost resource; they also exacerbate socio-economic and environmental issues by taking up space for affordable housing and contributing to urban blight. [Research \(Shelter Cymru, 2021\)](#) shows that living next to an empty home can devalue a property by up to 18%.
- 1.1 To help bring up to 2,000 empty homes back into use in Wales, the Empty Homes Grant (EHG) Scheme (hereafter ‘the scheme’) was introduced in January 2023. A £50 million fund was established to help homeowners renovate long-term empty properties, bringing them back into use as a habitable property. Individuals, local authorities, registered social landlords and community housing groups can apply for funding. The fund was originally split over two years (£25 million in 2023 to 2024, and £25 million in 2024 to 2025), but to acknowledge completion timescales, a reprofiling exercise saw £19 million moved from the 2023 to 2024 budget to 2025 to 2026, with the last point at which applications can be accepted to the scheme now being 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 (TBC).
- 1.2 All 22 local authorities were invited to participate in the scheme, with a 10% financial contribution required to do so. Seventeen authorities<sup>3</sup> are currently taking part, with each given an allocation of the budget based on the number of chargeable empty properties<sup>4</sup> in their area. The scheme is designed to form part of local authorities’ existing empty homes strategies.

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<sup>2</sup> Defined as properties that have been unoccupied for six months or more.

<sup>3</sup> Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend; Caerphilly, Carmarthenshire; Ceredigion; Conwy; Denbighshire; Gwynedd; Merthyr Tydfil; Monmouthshire; Neath Port Talbot; Pembrokeshire; Powys; RCT; Swansea; Vale of Glamorgan; Ynys Mon.

<sup>4</sup> Chargeable empty properties are residential or commercial buildings that are unoccupied and unfurnished for a specified period, and for which local authorities may impose a council tax or business rates charge. These properties are considered “chargeable” because they attract a financial liability, often intended to encourage owners to bring the properties back into use or to compensate for the loss of revenue from unoccupied buildings.

- 1.3 The scheme is administered by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) on behalf of the Welsh Government, with eligibility based on the following criteria:
- the empty home must be located within one of the 17 participating local authorities
  - the home must be registered as vacant (unoccupied/unfurnished) and have been vacant for at least 12 months before the application date
  - applicants must be current/prospective homeowners who plan to live in the empty property as their primary and sole residence for a minimum of five years following the completion of grant-funded work. They must contribute 15% (capped at £3,750) towards the cost of the works
  - funding is only provided for work deemed eligible by a local authority surveyor, and all identified work must be completed to ensure the property is free from hazards. Only essential repairs required to make the property safe, secure, and free from category 1 hazards will be considered.
- 1.4 Certain areas have additional local connection criteria. For instance, applicants in Ceredigion must have lived in the area or an adjoining community for a continuous period of five years or demonstrate a need to reside there to provide or receive substantial care to or from a close relative who meets the same residency condition.

### **The evolution of the scheme**

- 1.5 The scheme has evolved from other Welsh Government initiatives aimed at bringing vacant homes back into use, including the Houses into Homes and Empty Property Loan Schemes, which provide interest-free loans (repayable over a maximum of five years) to fund renovations and/or conversions of empty properties.
- 1.6 While these schemes have helped improve housing supply and quality in Wales, their success in reducing the number of empty properties in Wales was and, in some areas, continues to be constrained by the requirement to repay the loans in full within a set time period, potentially deterring some property owners.
- 1.7 Recognising these constraints, the Empty Homes Grant Scheme was launched as a more accessible alternative, providing non-repayable grants of up to £25,000 per property for the renovation of empty properties.
- 1.8 The Valleys Taskforce Empty Property Scheme pilot played an important role in shaping the scheme. It was launched in 2019 to tackle the issue of empty homes in

the South Wales Valleys by providing financial assistance to private homeowners, landlords, and developers to refurbish vacant properties. The Taskforce contributed £10m to the scheme, enabling each applicant to apply for a grant of up to £20,000, and by September 2020 it had received more than 600 applications.<sup>5</sup> Building on its success, the Welsh Government expanded the initiative nationwide, increasing funding and broadening access to help address housing shortages across Wales.

### **The schemes' place in the wider policy context**

- 1.9 Bringing empty homes back into use fits into the Welsh Government's broad housing and regeneration approach, particularly in relation to tackling housing shortages (repurposing existing properties is a priority in this respect), improving living standards, preventing homelessness, and supporting decarbonisation.
- 1.10 The scheme contributes to the objectives outlined in Prosperity for All: Economic Action Plan which emphasises good quality which emphasises good quality, affordable housing as an area that can make the greatest potential contribution to long-term prosperity and well-being. In addition, by funding essential repairs and energy efficiency improvements, the scheme supports the '[Net Zero Wales](#)' commitment and the Welsh Government's long-term ambition to improve the energy efficiency of Welsh homes. By bringing more empty homes back into use, the scheme also supports the aim to 'increase housing supply, availability and accessibility in the social and private sector,' as outlined in [Ending Homelessness in Wales: A high level action plan 2021 to 2026](#).
- 1.11 More generally, bringing empty properties back into use contributes to the [Programme for Government](#) well-being objective to 'Make our cities, towns and villages even better places in which to live and work;' and to several of the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) goals (including a prosperous Wales, a more equal Wales, and a Wales of more cohesive communities). Also, the Act mandates that public bodies in Wales must take action to ensure sustainable development to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, as exemplified by the scheme.
- 1.12 While participation in the scheme to date is encouraging, with 17 of the 22 local authorities in Wales (over 75%) actively taking part, the Welsh Government is keen to understand how efficient the scheme is, and whether it is as impactful as it can

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<sup>5</sup> [The Valleys Taskforce, 2016-2021: a final report](#)

be in bringing homes back into use. Moreover, participating local authorities and unsuccessful applicants have raised some problems with the scheme, including around the eligibility criteria.

- 1.13 Using the primary goal of reducing the number of empty homes and increasing housing availability across Wales as a basis, the overarching priority of this process and impact evaluation was to identify the main facilitators and barriers that influence the scheme's effectiveness by:
- understanding barriers to application (e.g. the eligibility criteria)
  - understanding what factors or changes could increase the number of eligible applications and increase the rate of successful applications in the future
  - exploring how many applications have translated into completed works; and understanding the reasons for withdrawals.
- 1.14 This has enabled the provision of evidence-based recommendations for improving the scheme's administration and outcomes, ensuring it is as accessible, effective, and impactful as possible.
- 1.15 The main challenge of the evaluation has been to isolate the impact of the scheme on reducing the number of empty homes in Wales from the impact of other policies, initiatives, measures, and enforcement action<sup>6</sup>. It has thus been important to determine, as far as is possible, the extent to which bringing empty homes back into use can be solely attributable to the scheme or whether there were other contributory factors; and whether the scheme facilitated or accelerated renovations or whether they would have occurred anyway. Thus, a contribution analysis-style approach to the evaluation has been adopted, using secondary, quantitative, and qualitative data to build a robust argument about the scheme's contribution to observed outcomes, while acknowledging that other influences like government policies, broader market trends and conditions, and economic factors (like interest rates and mortgage availability) may have played a role.

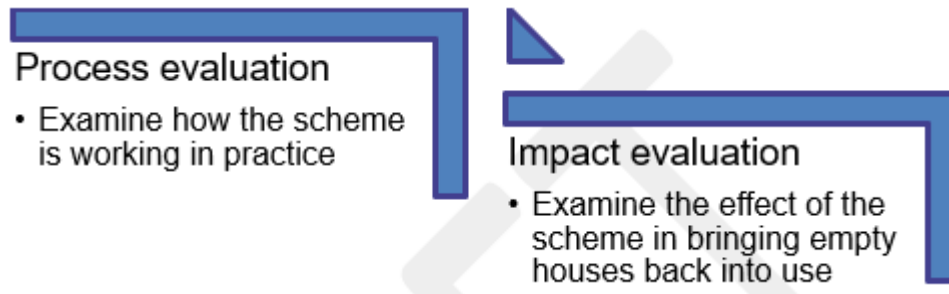
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<sup>6</sup> The Housing Act 2004 empowers local authorities to tackle empty homes through Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs), but these are legally complex and only used sparingly, making grant schemes a preferred approach.



## 2. Methodology

- 2.1 A two-phase process and impact evaluation was undertaken to understand the implementation of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme and its effect (so far) on reducing numbers of empty homes in Wales. The evaluation had two main objectives and associated research questions, applied across both phases.



- 2.2 To meet these objectives, the following methodology was used.

### Phase 1: Data review

- 2.3 During Phase 1, ORS undertook a comprehensive review of available datasets to inform the evaluation. Firstly, the number of empty homes grant applications was considered, along with a breakdown of the reasons for successful and unsuccessful applications. Secondly, ORS has considered the rate at which applications translate into completed works and the associated reduction in the number of empty homes in Wales.
- 2.4 A systematic secondary data analysis of the application and work completion data provided by the Welsh Government was conducted. The review includes descriptive overall statistics, a comparative analysis (differences across local authorities), and a time-series analysis (application and completion trends over time).

### Phase 1 and 2: Focus groups with local authority officers

- 2.5 To capture the voices of the local authority officers working on the scheme, focus groups were undertaken during May and July 2025. ORS (in collaboration with the Welsh Government) developed semi-structured topic guides<sup>7</sup> including a set of core questions that were sufficiently flexible to enable researchers to probe on points specific to individuals. In addition, bilingual information sheets and privacy notices were developed to ensure participants were fully informed about the research and its objectives and how their data would be used.

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<sup>7</sup> See Annex 1 to 3

- 2.6 ORS conducted three focus groups to gather the views of participants regarding how the scheme is working in practice and to consider its effect in bringing empty houses back into use. To maintain confidentiality and encourage open discussion, separate focus groups were held with those who administer the scheme (RCTCBC officers) and those working for local authorities. Local authority participants were invited to take part via an email sent by the administrative team at RCTCBC. The option to participate in Welsh was made possible by the presence of ORS' Welsh-language researcher at the focus groups.
- 2.7 Seven of the 17 participating local authorities attended focus group one, which examined how the scheme is working in practice, whilst eight of the participating local authorities attended group two, where the impact of the scheme was considered. Focus group two was conducted with a cross-section of members of the RCTCBC administration team.
- 2.8 With permission, ORS made digital recordings of the focus groups to produce detailed notes for analysis. Contacts were assured of confidentiality, and that their views would be used for no purpose other than this study.
- 2.9 In addition to the focus groups, to ensure as comprehensive an evidence base from local authority officers as possible, a bilingual online call for evidence form was distributed to those not available at the time of the online sessions. This formed part of the Phase 1 data collection phase and was sent to participating local authorities in July 2025.
- 2.10 Six completed responses and 13 partial responses to the call for evidence were received across the local authorities that participate in the scheme. Multiple responses were received from some local authorities. Not every participating local authority chose to take part in either the focus groups or the call for evidence.

## **Phase 2: Applicant survey methodology**

- 2.11 A survey for applicants to the scheme was available online between 9 July 2025 and 27 July 2025. The survey was developed by ORS in collaboration with representatives from the scheme administrators at RCTCBC Council and the Welsh Government. The aim of the survey was to assess the process of applying for the scheme and its success so far. In particular, it sought to gather applicants' views on:
- how the process of applying for the grant is working in practice

- how the process of applying could be improved
- what works well and what could be improved about the scheme
- the scheme's success in reducing the number of empty homes.

2.12 Anyone who had applied for the Scheme since January 2023 (when the scheme started) and 8 July 2025 (and had consented to further communication from the RCTCBC relating to providing feedback on services received) was eligible to take part. A link to the survey was sent out via email to all eligible respondents on the scheme database held by RCTCBC. A prize draw to win one of four cash prizes (£250, £150, or two £50 prizes) was included as an incentive to take part. In total, 1,213 email invitations were sent, 12 of which were returned as undeliverable. 139 responses were received, including partial responses (12) where the respondent dropped out before completing the full survey (answering up until at least question 4), giving a response rate of 12%.

### **Analysis and reporting**

- 2.13 The focus groups were transcribed and thematically analysed by ORS researchers using a code frame to extract the main findings. Excel was used to organise the data into overarching and sub-themes. Once the final analysis was complete, an internal meeting was held to enable the whole review team to share and discuss the emerging findings from the analysis, including common themes and specific views.
- 2.14 The applicant survey data was processed in SPSS and excel and subsequently analysed by ORS researchers to identify main findings. The results based on all 139 responses have been presented in this report through charts and tables with associated text commentary.
- 2.15 The main findings from the primary fieldwork, as well as the findings from the data review, are summarised in this report. Names, specific organisations and identifying comments have been removed from the verbatim comments to ensure anonymity.

### **Data limitations and interpretation**

- 2.16 Designed to complement the quantitative data gathered through the data review and questionnaire, the focus groups with local authority officers and RCTCBC administering officers were intended to consider a relatively small cohort of participants' experiences of and views on the implementation and impact of the scheme. As such, the qualitative feedback reported here, while comprehensive, should not be seen as statistically representative.

- 2.17 Moreover, the views expressed by officers in the focus groups and interviews reflect participants' individual perceptions. ORS cannot arbitrate on the correctness or otherwise of views when reporting them, and this should be borne in mind when considering the findings.
- 2.18 Regarding the survey, it should be remembered that a sample of applicants, and not all applicants to the scheme, has been surveyed. As previously noted, a link to the online survey for applicants was sent out to respondents via the Empty Homes Grant Scheme database. It is recognised that this does not include everybody who has applied to the scheme, however, it reflects a range of applicants who have had recent engagement with the application process.
- 2.19 In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are necessarily statistically significant. Where differences between sub-groups (i.e. age, sex, date of application) have been highlighted as significant, there is a 95% probability that the difference is real and not due to chance. Differences that are not said to be 'significant' or 'statistically significant' are indicative of a possible difference only.
- 2.20 In order to test whether apparent differences between sub-groups are statistically significant, statistical tests (z-tests) have been applied. These consider the sizes of the samples that are being compared and the level of confidence we need to have in our testing. In line with standard social research practice, we have used a 95% confidence level. In other words, we can be 95% certain that the difference has not occurred by chance.
- 2.21 As the survey cannot be considered to be fully representative of all applicants to the scheme, the text refers to 'respondents' throughout the report, as opposed to 'applicants'.
- 2.22 Where percentages do not add-up to 100 and proportions of charts may not look equal, this is either due to rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' categories, or multiple answers to specific survey questions.
- 2.23 In some cases, the grouped result referred to in the text is not equal to that of the individual results (shown on the charts) which make up the grouped figure. This is due to rounding.
- 2.24 Data labels on charts for results of 2% or less have, in some cases, been excluded for presentational reasons.

2.25 Owing to small sample sizes when results are broken down into sub-groups on some questions, caution should be exercised when making inferences from these results. Throughout the report, wherever there is reference to results based on fewer than 20 responses, the number of respondents, as well as the proportion, is noted in the text commentary. Base numbers are included on all charts. Where results are based on less than 20 responses, it is not possible to carry out reliable significance testing.

### 3. Data Review

#### Overview

- 3.1 To place the scale of empty homes in Wales in context, we will firstly consider the current number of properties that are potentially chargeable. A chargeable property is one that has been empty for at least 12 months and must be substantially unfurnished. These properties can be charged a premium on their Council Tax. Data on properties that have been empty for 12 months or more are collected by councils across Wales and are published annually on StatsWales.
- 3.2 The most recently published data covers Council Tax records for financial year (hereafter FY) 2025 to 2026, published in January 2025. Across the whole of Wales, there were 22,558 long-term empty homes which are potentially chargeable. This is down from a peak of 25,701 properties in FY 2021 to 2022 but is very similar to the figures for FY 2022 to 2023 and FY 2023 to 2024.
- 3.3 A figure of 22,558 empty homes is around 1.5% of the total dwellings for Wales and is the equivalent to more than all additional dwellings completions in Wales for the period 2020 to 2024, which numbered 20,305 new homes<sup>8</sup>. As noted in Chapter 1, Census 2021 data revealed that approximately 6.1% of dwellings in Wales were unoccupied, but this included many properties that were only temporarily not in occupation. It should also be noted that not all long-term empty properties will be such due to repair issues. Probate and other factors will account for many long-term empty properties.

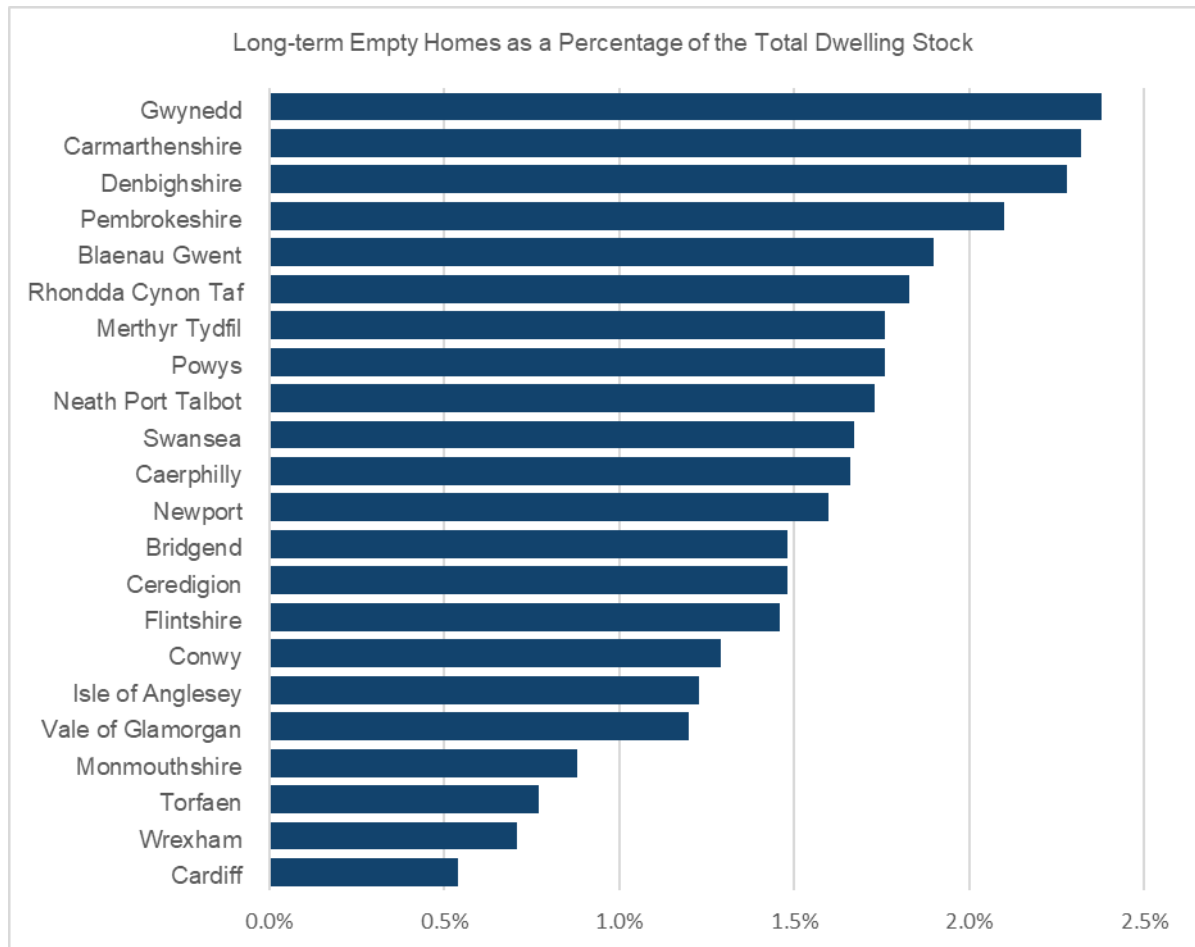
#### Main findings

- 3.4 Figure 3.1 shows that the local authority with the highest level of long-term empty properties is Gwynedd at 2.57% of its stock; and the lowest is Cardiff at 0.57% of its total stock. As also noted in Chapter 1, all 22 local authorities were invited to participate in the grant scheme, but only 17 agreed to do so. It is noticeable that the five who did not - Cardiff, Flintshire, Newport, Torfaen and Wrexham - are among the areas with lower rates of long-term empty properties.

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<sup>8</sup> [New dwellings completed by area, dwelling type and number of bedrooms](#)

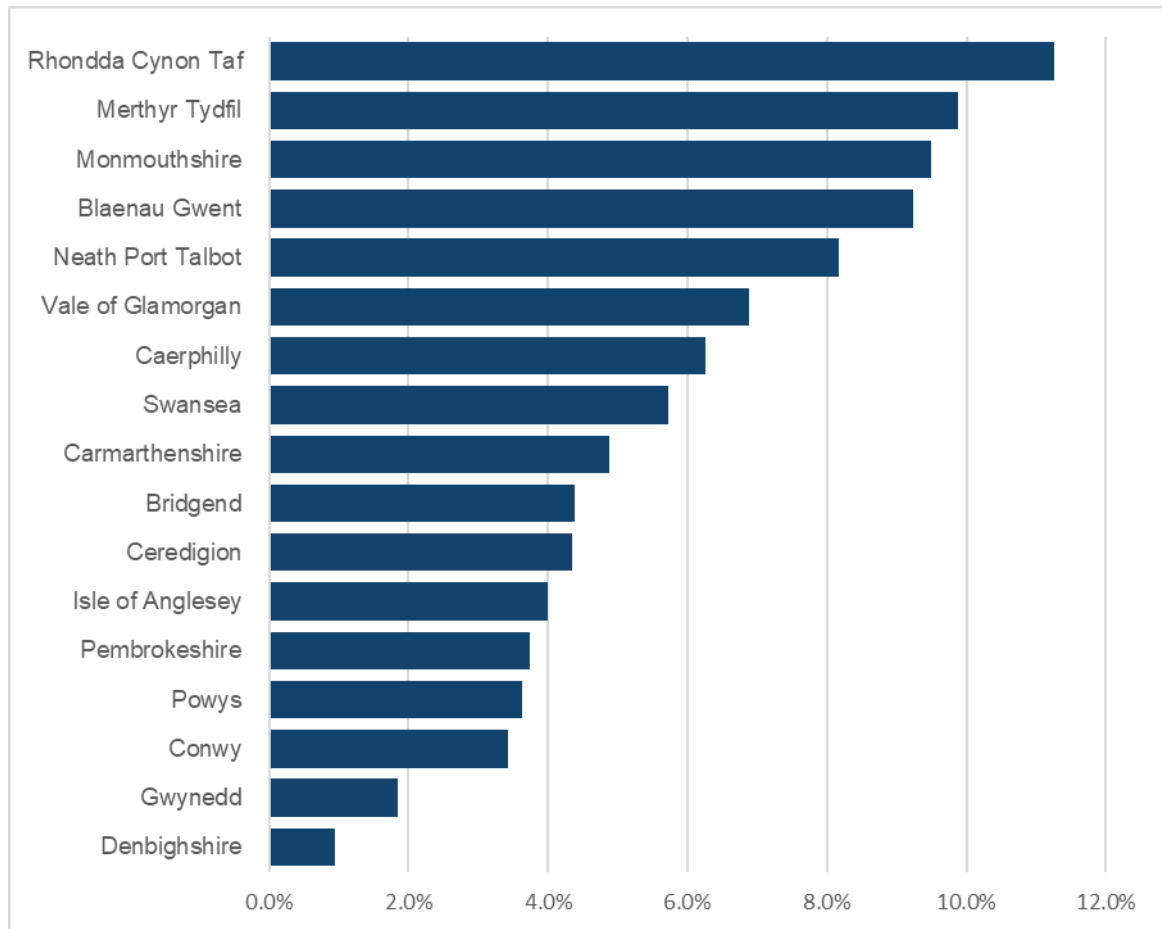
**Figure 1: Long-term empty properties as a share of the total dwelling stock**



Source: StatsWales - chargeable empty and second homes, by local authority (number of dwellings), January 2025

- 3.5 As of early April 2025, the Empty Homes Grant Scheme had received 2,692 applications, of which 1,058 were considered valid. Figure 3.2 shows the number of valid applications in each local authority as a percentage of the number of long-term empty properties in the area. The five local authorities who have not taken part in the scheme have not been included in the chart. On this measure, Rhondda Cynon Taf has received valid applications equivalent to over 11% of the long-term empty homes. However, for many of the local authorities, the level of valid applications is below 5% of their current long-term empty stock, so potentially these areas could attract far more applications.

**Figure 2: Valid applications for the Empty Homes Grant Scheme as a percentage of all long-term empty homes**

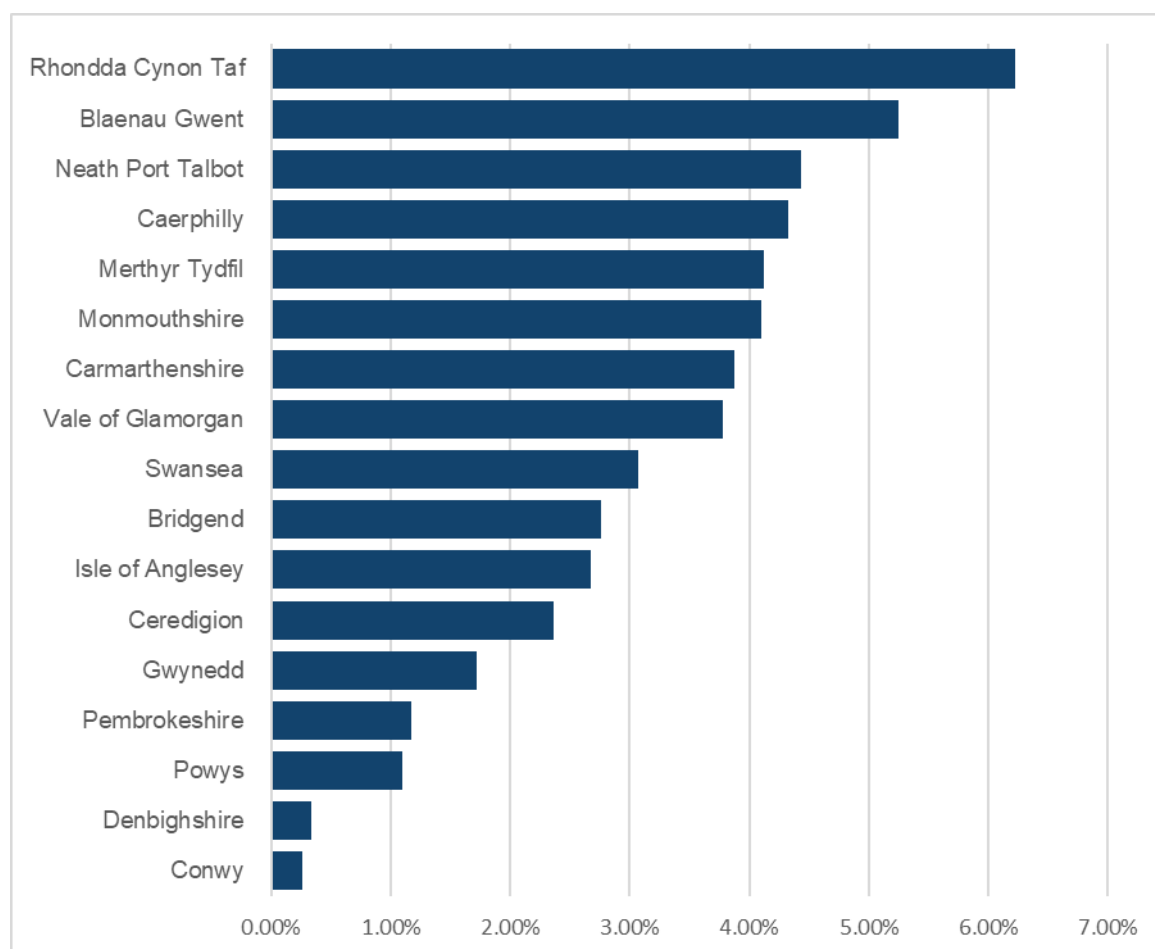


Source: StatsWales - chargeable empty and second homes, by local authority (number of dwellings), January 2025; Welsh Government Empty Homes Grant management information, April 2025

- 3.6 As of April 2025, not all valid applications had been processed or accepted. In total, 582 properties had been approved, with the total value of the grants amounting to £13.2 million, with an average value of a grant being over £22,500.
- 3.7 Approved grants amount to 2.6% of all current long-term empty homes in Wales, so this only represents around 1 in 40 long-term empty properties having so far been approved for funding. The highest rates of approval in Wales are in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Blaenau Gwent, where more than 1 in 20 properties have received funding.



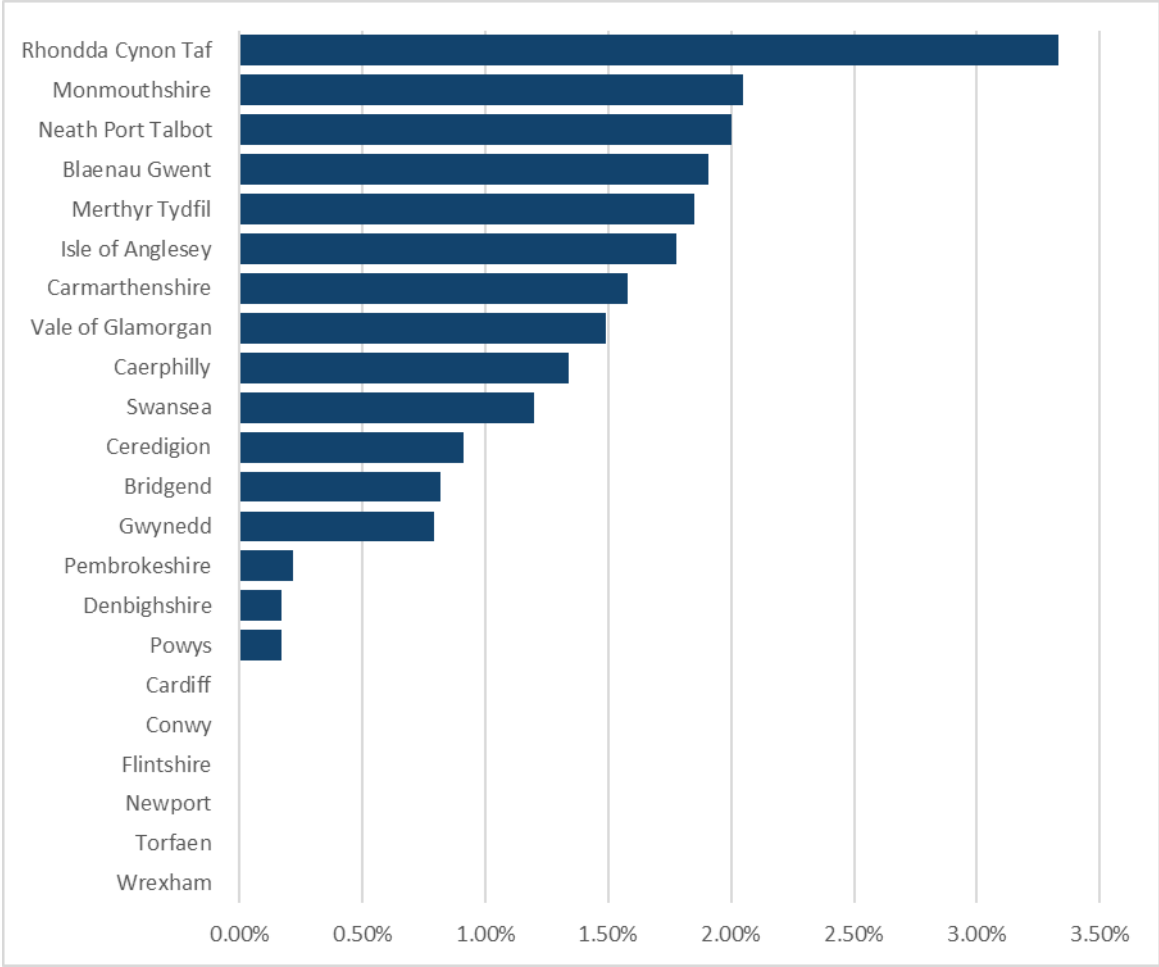
**Figure 3: Accepted applications for the Empty Homes Grant Scheme as a percentage of all long-term empty homes**



Source: StatsWales - Chargeable empty and second homes, by local authority (number of dwellings), January 2025; Welsh Government Empty Homes Grant management information, April 2025

- 3.8 341 of the approved schemes were still to be completed in April 2025, so only 241 had reach the point of completion. The completed properties received grants worth £5.4 million and represent around 1.1% of all long-term empty homes in Wales. The highest level of completions was in Rhondda Cynon Taf at 3.3% of all long-term empty homes.
- 3.9 To place these figures in context, based on the valid application rate for Rhondda Cynon Taf, if 10% of all current long-term empty properties in Wales were to receive the equivalent of £22,500 in funding each, this would amount to 2,256 properties and the value of the grants would be just over £50 million. This level of delivery would be compatible with the overall budget of the scheme and with the level of applications seen in the areas where the scheme has been most heavily supported.

**Figure 4: Completed Empty Homes Grant Scheme properties as a percentage of all long-term empty homes**



Source: StatsWales - Chargeable empty and second homes, by local authority (number of dwellings), January 2025; Welsh Government Empty Homes Grant management information, April 2025

4. Quantitative Findings - Applicant survey

Survey of applicants to the Empty Homes Grant Scheme

Overview

- 4.1 This section of the report considers the views and opinions of applicants to the Empty Homes Grant (EHG) Scheme obtained via a survey which was available online between 9 July 2025 and 27 July 2025. Full details on the methodology used and information on how to interpret the data is included in chapter 2: Methodology.
- 4.2 In total, 139 responses were received, and the findings are reported below. Tables 1 to 11 show the profile characteristics of all respondents to the survey. Please note that the percentages may not always sum to 100% due to rounding.

Profile tables

Table 1: Number of survey responses by applicant type

Applicant type	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Homeowner	131	94
Prospective homeowner	7	5
Local Authority	0	0
Registered Social Landlord	0	0
Community Housing Group	1	1
Total	139	100

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)

- 4.3 The vast majority of respondents to the survey were homeowners (94%) or prospective homeowners (5%). There was one response from a community housing group.

**Table 2: Number of survey responses by Local Authority applied to**

Local Authority applied to	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Isle of Anglesey County Council	4	3
Gwynedd Council	6	4
Conwy County Borough Council	5	4
Denbighshire County Council	2	1
Powys County Council	12	9
Ceredigion County Council	4	3
Pembrokeshire County Council	8	6
Carmarthenshire County Council	11	8
City and County of Swansea	22	16
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council	8	6
Bridgend County Borough Council	1	1
The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council	7	5
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	15	11
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	6	4
Caerphilly County Borough Council	15	11
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	5	4
Monmouthshire County Council	8	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)

- 4.4 Survey responses were received from applicants to all 17 participating local authorities in Wales. The local authorities with the highest number of responses were the City and County of Swansea (22), Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (15), Caerphilly Borough Council (15), and Powys County Council (12).

**Table 3: Number of survey responses by month of application**

Month of application	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
January 2023	5	4
February 2023	2	2
March 2023	0	0
April 2023	5	4
May 2023	7	5
June 2023	4	3
July 2023	3	2
August 2023	3	2
September 2023	5	4
October 2023	8	6
November 2023	6	5
December 2023	3	2
January 2024	4	3
February 2024	2	2
March 2024	11	8
April 2024	8	6
May 2024	6	5
June 2024	9	7
July 2024	4	3
August 2024	3	2
September 2024	6	5
October 2024	1	1
November 2024	5	4
December 2024	2	2
January 2025	1	1
February 2025	6	5

March 2025	11	8
Not Known	9	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)

- 4.5 There was a good spread of survey responses across each month of application between January 2023 and March 2025, with 68 respondents saying they started their application in 2023 to 24 (January 2023 to March 2024) and 62 respondents saying they started their application in 2024 to 25 (April 2024 to March 2025). The month of application is not known for nine respondents. Respondents who applied between 1 April and 9 July 2025 were also invited to take part in the survey; however, this was not accounted for when the survey questions were agreed. Therefore, the cases where the application date is 'not known' could either be because the respondent was unsure of the date, or that their application date was after March 2025.

**Table 4: Number of survey responses by sex**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>% of total respondents</b>
Male	51	41
Female	74	59
Not Known	14	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)

**Table 5: Number of survey responses by age**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>% of total respondents</b>
18-24	4	3
25-34	36	29
35-44	30	24
45-54	25	20
55-64	21	17
65-74	8	6
75+	1	1
Not Known	14	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)

**Table 6: Number of survey responses by number of adults in the household**

<b>Number of adults in household</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>% of total respondents</b>
One	42	34
Two	65	52
Three or more	18	14
Not Known	14	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)

**Table 7: Number of survey responses by number of children in the household**

Number of children in household	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
None	86	68
One	21	17
Two	13	10
Three	6	5
Not Known	13	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)

**Table 8: Number of survey responses by working status**

Working status	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Full-time student, including on holiday or half term	2	2
In any paid employment or self-employment, even if away temporarily, on leave or off sick	107	86
Doing unpaid work for a business that you or a relative owns	1	1
Unemployed and looking for work	1	1
Unable to work because of long-term sickness or disability	5	4
Retired	5	4
Looking after home or family	1	1
Doing something else	2	2
Not Known	15	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)



**Table 9: Number of survey responses by physical or mental health condition lasting or expecting to last for 12 months or more**

Physical or mental health condition lasting or expecting to last for 12 months or more	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Yes, and ability to carry out day-to-day activities reduced a lot	4	3
Yes, and ability to carry out day-to-day activities reduced a little	14	11
No	105	85
Not Known	16	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)

**Table 10: Number of survey responses by ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	115	93
White - Roma	1	1
White - Eastern European (e.g. Polish, Latvian, Ukrainian) - please specify	1	1
White - Any other White background - please specify	2	2
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	1	1
Asian or Asian British - Indian	1	1
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	1	1
Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background - please specify	1	1
Not Known	16	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)

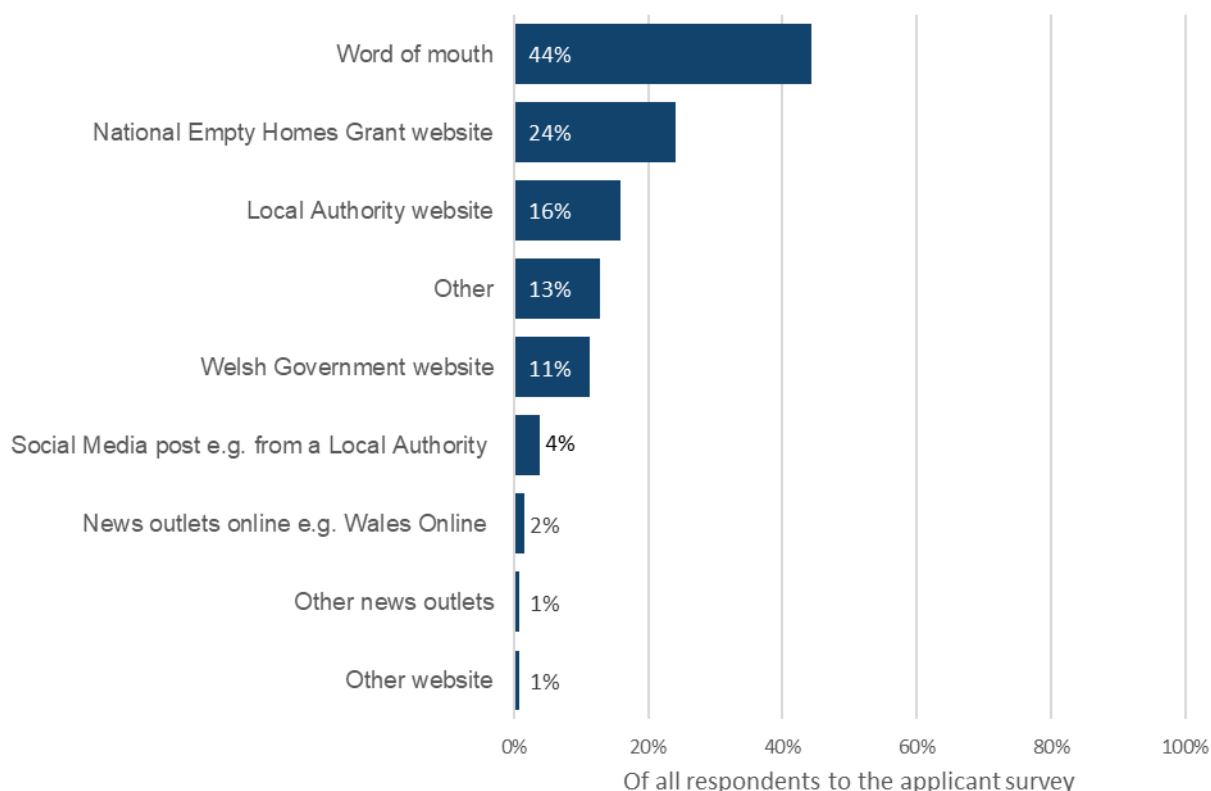
**Table 11: Number of survey responses by homeownership prior to current property**

Homeownership prior to current property	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Yes	74	60
No	50	40
Not Known	15	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (139)

## Main Findings

### Accessing the scheme and the application process

**Figure 5: How respondents first found out about the scheme**

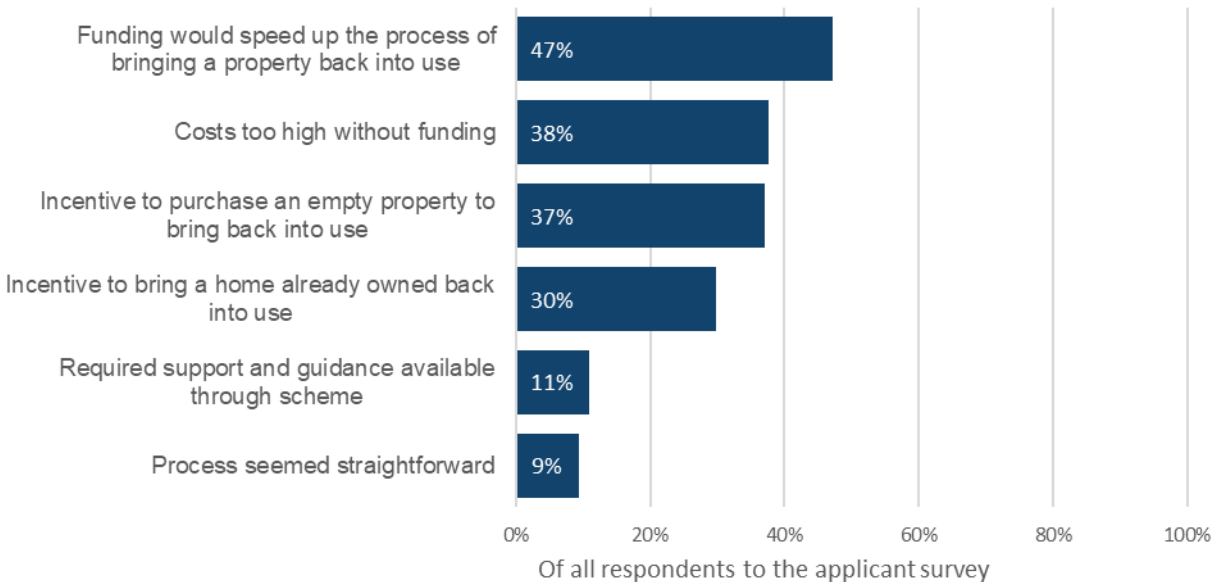
Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (133). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 153

Source: ORS

- 4.6 Over two fifths (44%) of respondents said they found out about the scheme via word of mouth, while around a quarter (24%) found out via the National Empty Homes

Grant website, 16% via a local authority website, and around 1 in 10 (11% - 15 respondents) via the Welsh Government website (Figure 5). Other sources (13% - 17 respondents) mentioned included letters sent directly by local authorities, and speaking to professionals such as solicitors, estate agents, surveyors and architects.

**Figure 6: Reasons for choosing to apply for the Empty Homes Grant**



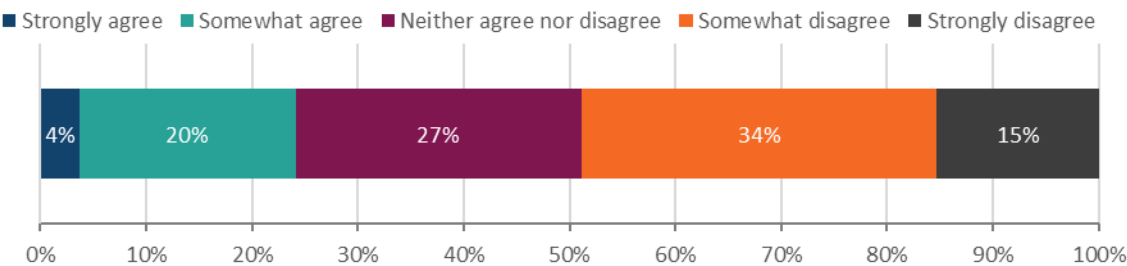
Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (138). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 237

Source: ORS

4.7 Respondents gave a range of reasons for choosing to apply for the grant (Figure 6). The top three reasons were that funding would speed up the process of bringing a property back into use (47%), costs are too high without funding (38%), and that it was an incentive to purchase an empty property to bring back into use (37%).

**Promotion of the scheme**

**Figure 7: Level of agreement that the scheme is well promoted**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (137)

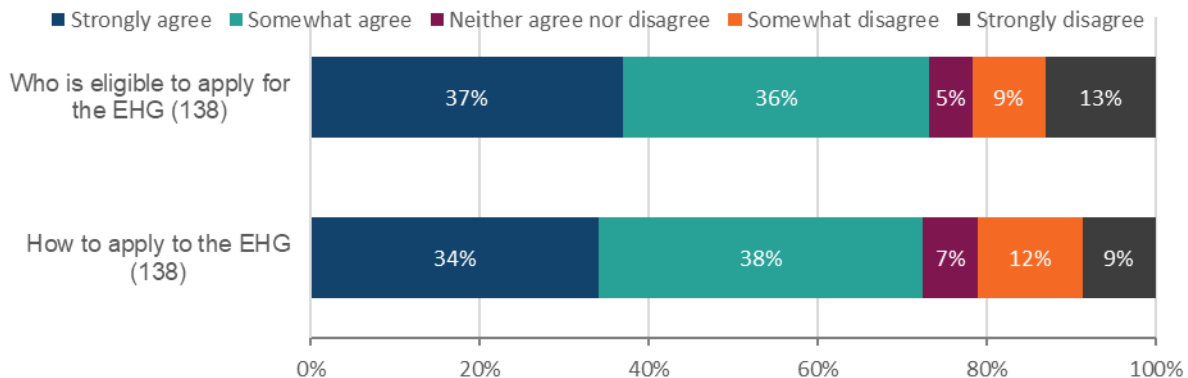
Source: ORS

- 4.8 Around a quarter (24%) of respondents agreed that the scheme is well promoted (Figure 7); however just over a quarter (27%) neither agreed nor disagreed and almost half disagreed (49%).
- 4.9 Those aged 25 to 34 years (69%) and those who were not homeowners prior to purchasing their current property (61%) were significantly more likely to disagree that the scheme is well promoted when compared with all respondents considered as a whole.
- 4.10 When asked for suggestions on how the scheme could be better promoted to new applicants, 82 respondents provided at least one. The most frequently given suggestions were that the scheme could be promoted by estate agents (30%), that there should be more advertising other than via social media (28%), more advertising via social media (23% - 19 respondents), and that the scheme should be promoted by local authorities (13% - 11 respondents). It was also mentioned that the scheme needs to be easier to understand (13% - 11 respondents).
- 4.11 Those who mentioned advertising via social media suggested using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to share case studies including before/after renovation photos. Additional suggestions around social media included encouraging recipients of the grant to share their progress and experiences online using a tailored hashtag to spread awareness organically, developing partnerships with influencers, and making use of community Facebook groups and local authority-run social media campaigns. Other forms of advertisement (other than via social media) suggested by respondents included television and radio adverts, posters, billboards, and leaflets, in addition to utilising community-based channels such as council websites, council tax bills, and council newsletters and emails.
- 4.12 Respondents noted the role of estate agents, solicitors, and local councils in informing potential applicants (e.g. buyers of derelict or empty properties or anyone currently paying empty home council tax) about the scheme. Several respondents also highlighted that contractors, surveyors, and mortgage advisors could be effective partners in raising awareness.
- 4.13 Despite the question asking for suggestions on how the scheme could be better promoted, some respondents used this opportunity to report finding the process confusing or inconsistent, noting that insufficient guidance at the outset sometimes led to delays or missed deadlines. Others felt that local authority staff could be more

supportive and proactive, suggesting that clearer step-by-step guidance and a single point of contact would make the scheme easier to navigate. Additional suggestions around general improvements to the scheme included providing clearer, more accessible information and support throughout the application process, specifically around eligibility, timescales, and documentation

### Completing the application

**Figure 8: Level of agreement that it is clear and easy to understand...**

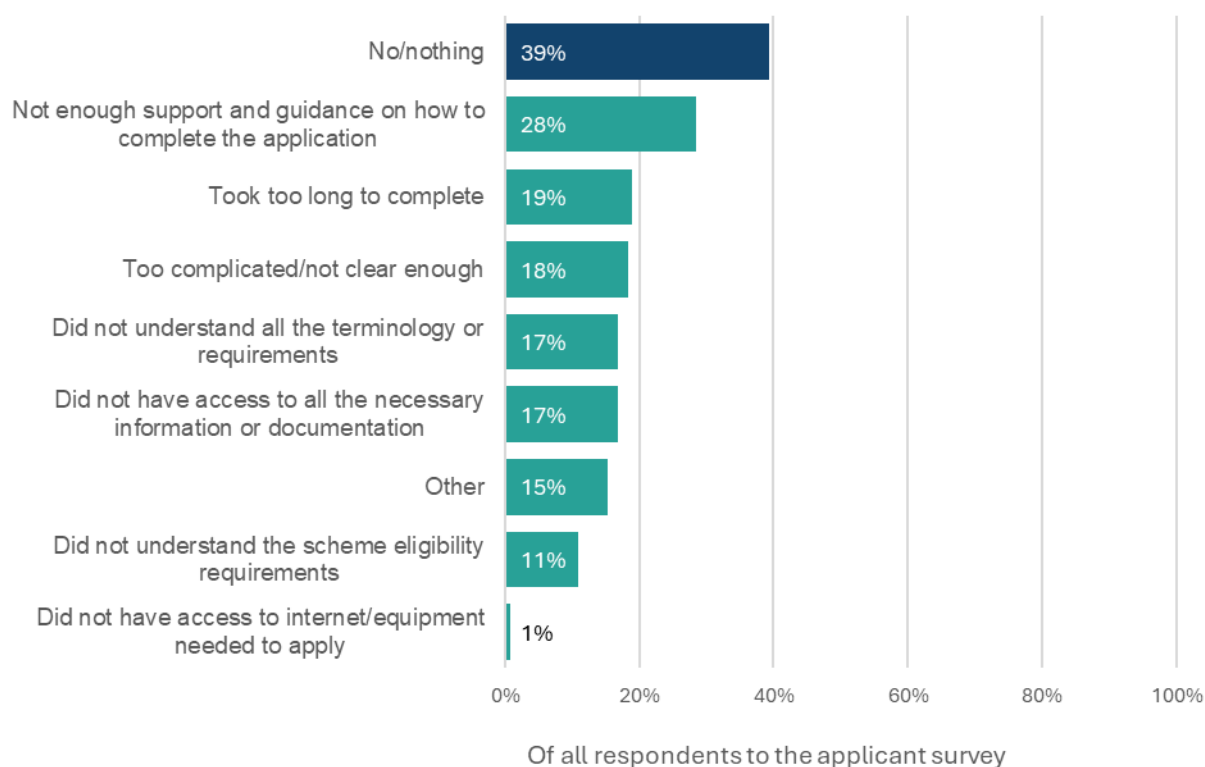


Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to these questions (Number of respondents shown in brackets)

Source: ORS

- 4.14 The majority (over seven in ten -73%) of respondents agreed that it was clear and easy to understand who is eligible to apply for the grant (Figure 9) with 37% strongly agreeing. 5% (seven respondents) neither agreed nor disagreed while just over a fifth (22%) disagreed that the eligibility criteria were clear and easy to understand.
- 4.15 In terms of how to apply for the grant (Figure 8), again the majority (over seven in ten - 72%) agreed that it was clear and easy to understand how to do so, 7%(nine respondents) neither agreed nor disagreed, and around a fifth (21%) disagreed.
- 4.16 Those aged 35-44 years were significantly more likely to agree (87%) that it was clear and easy to understand how to apply for the grant when compared with all respondents considered as a whole, while those aged 55 years+ were significantly more likely to disagree (40%).

**Figure 9: Was there anything that made it difficult to complete the application?**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (137). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 227

Source: ORS

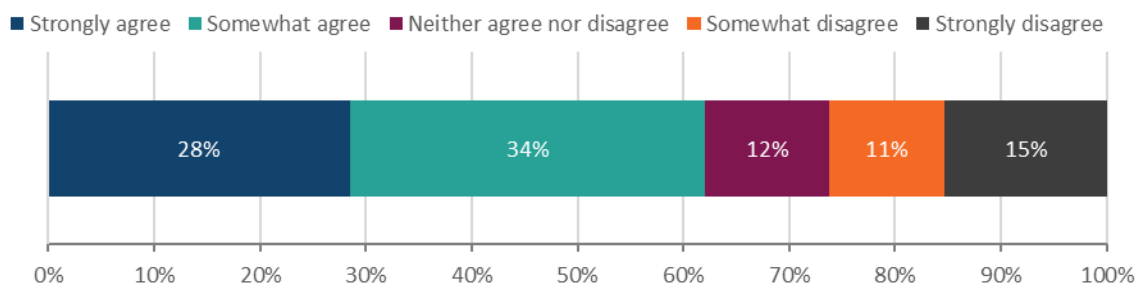
- 4.17 All respondents were asked if there was anything that made it difficult to complete the application (Figure 9). Around two in five (39%) said that there was nothing that made it difficult, however, over a quarter (28%) said that there was not enough support and guidance on how to complete the application. Other frequent responses were that it took too long to complete (19%), it was too complicated/not clear enough (18%), respondents did not understand all the terminology or requirements (17%), or that respondents did not have access to all the necessary information or documentation (17%). Around one in ten (11% - 15 respondents) said they did not understand the scheme eligibility requirements.
- 4.18 In participants' comments, the administrative requirements were described as overly complex and outdated, with references made to the need for wet signatures.
- 4.19 Further comments were made around support, with respondents complaining of contradictory guidance on eligibility criteria and documentation.
- 4.20 Additional feedback cited poor communication and inconsistent administration between local authorities, and challenges obtaining required quotations and paperwork within specified timescales, particularly from the local authority

surveyors. It was suggested that applicants could be given clearer expectations of timescales for grant approval, as well as clarity around the challenges of arranging building work and quotations, from the outset.

### **Accessing the scheme – enablers and barriers**

- 4.21 Seven respondents (5%) applied to the scheme, or accessed information about the scheme, in Welsh. A further six respondents (4%) would have liked to apply in Welsh but did not know that they could or how to. The remaining 91% chose to apply in English.
- 4.22 Of the seven respondents who applied in Welsh, over half (57% - four respondents) agreed that it was easy to understand how to access the scheme in Welsh, however three respondents (43%) neither agreed nor disagreed. This suggests that for 69% of those with a preference to apply in Welsh (nine of 13 respondents), this was not as clear as it could be.

**Figure 10: Level of agreement that access to the scheme is fair to all**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (137)

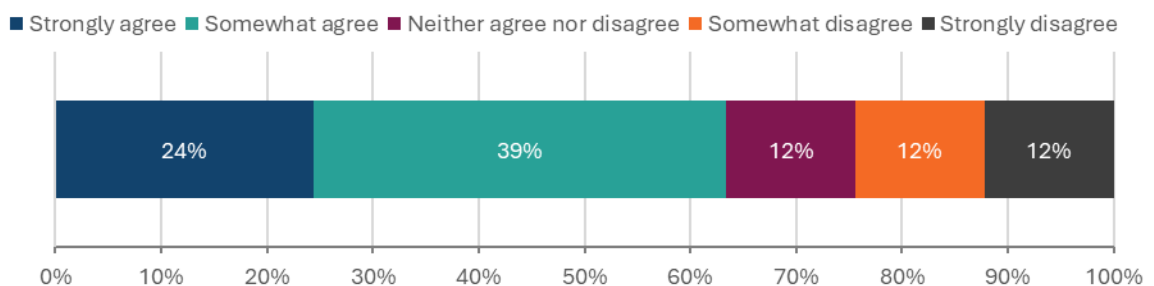
Source: ORS

- 4.23 Over three fifths (62%) of respondents agreed that access to the scheme is fair for all (Figure 10), with over a quarter (28%) strongly agreeing. Just over one in ten (12% - 16 respondents) neither agreed nor disagreed while around a quarter (26%) disagreed.
- 4.24 Those aged 18-34 years (80%) were significantly more likely to agree that access to the scheme is fair to all, while those aged 35-44 years (47%) were significantly more likely to disagree when compared with all respondents considered as a whole.
- 4.25 Of those who did not agree that the scheme was fair to all, the main reasons given for this were that their application was not approved for the grant (41% - 18 respondents), the scheme was too complex or they needed more assistance (34% -

15 respondents), and reasons relating to funding such as having to pay up-front or it being insufficient (20% - nine respondents).

- 4.26 Respondents also highlighted concerns about inconsistent and unclear eligibility rules, for example residency requirements, the duration for which a property has been empty, and whether furniture remained in the property.
- 4.27 Several comments were made around a perceived disparity in access to the scheme based on locality, disposable income, and literacy. This was reinforced with concerns around some councils opting out of the scheme or applying additional local restrictions; financial barriers resulting from the requirement to pay costs upfront; capped awards not meeting actual costs; and the overall complexity of the process and volume of paperwork which some felt disadvantaged those with limited digital or literacy skills.

**Figure 11: Level of agreement that it is easy to access the scheme**



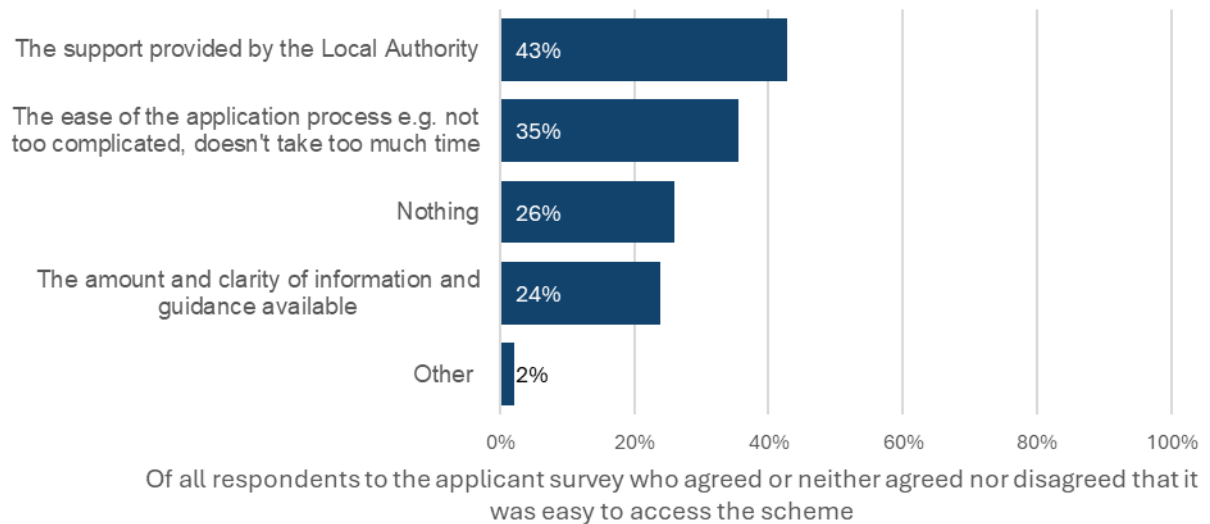
Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (131)

Source: ORS

- 4.28 Over three fifths (63%) of respondents agreed that it was easy to access the scheme (Figure 11), with around a quarter (24%) strongly agreeing. Just over one in ten (12% - 16 respondents) neither agreed nor disagreed. These respondents were asked what, if anything, helped them to access the scheme (Figure 12).



**Figure 12: What, if anything, helped you to access the scheme?**

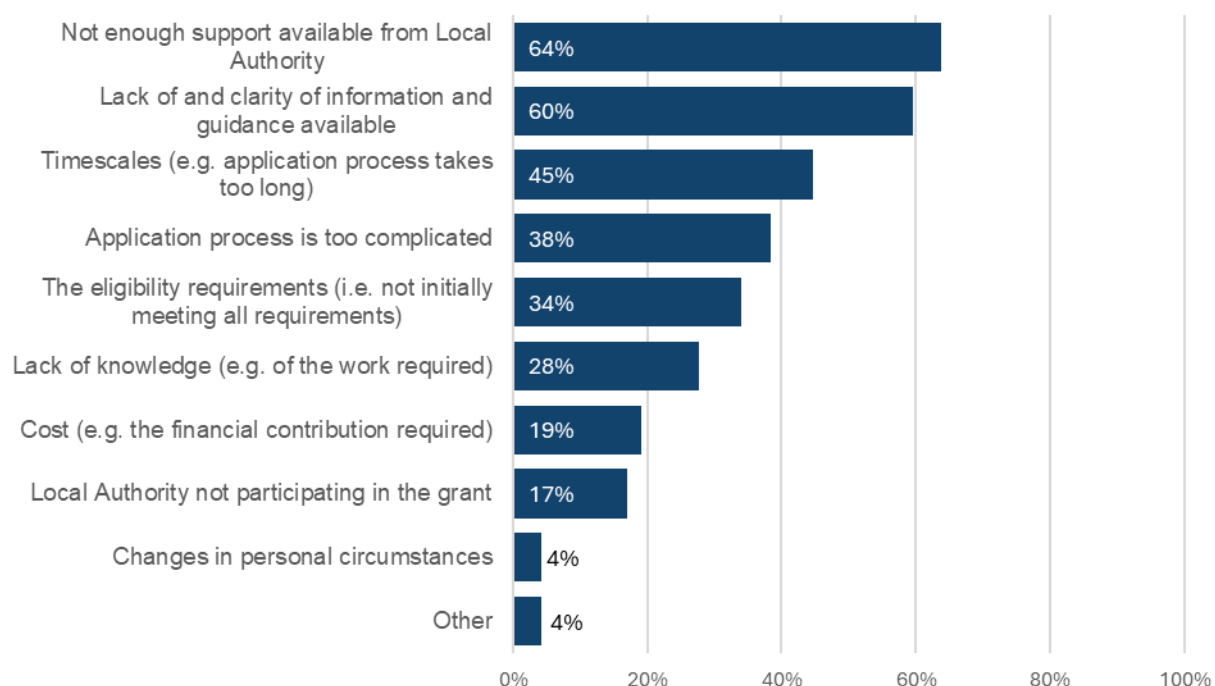


Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (96). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 125

Source: ORS

- 4.29 Over two fifths (43%) of the 96 respondents who gave a response said that the support provided by the local authority helped them to access the scheme (Figure 12) while the ease of the scheme, i.e. that it was not complicated or did not take much time (35%), and the amount and clarity of information and guidance available (24%) were also felt to enable access to the scheme by around a third and a quarter of respondents respectively. Having a dedicated contact at the council who could help with queries and guide applicants through the process was specifically mentioned by a few respondents.
- 4.30 Respondents who applied for the scheme in 2024 to 2025 (74%) were significantly more likely to agree that the scheme is easy to access when compared with all respondents considered as a whole.
- 4.31 It is interesting to note, though, that around a quarter of respondents (26%) felt that there was nothing that helped them access the scheme. Respondents applying to local authorities in southwest Wales (41%) were significantly more likely to say this.

**Figure 13: What, if anything, were the main challenges to accessing the scheme?**



Of all respondents to the applicant survey who disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed that it was easy to access the scheme

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (47). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 147

Source: ORS

4.32 The respondents who disagreed or responded neutrally when asked whether it was easy to access the scheme (47 respondents - 36%) were asked what, if anything, were the main challenges to doing so (Figure 13).

4.33 The most frequently given responses were that there was not enough support available from the local authority (64%) and that there was a lack of clarity around the information and guidance available (60%); while almost two fifths (38% - 18 respondents) felt that the application process was too complicated. These results indicate that while these factors, i.e. support, information, guidance and the ease of the process, were the main enablers for some applicants, they were main barriers for others (Table 12).

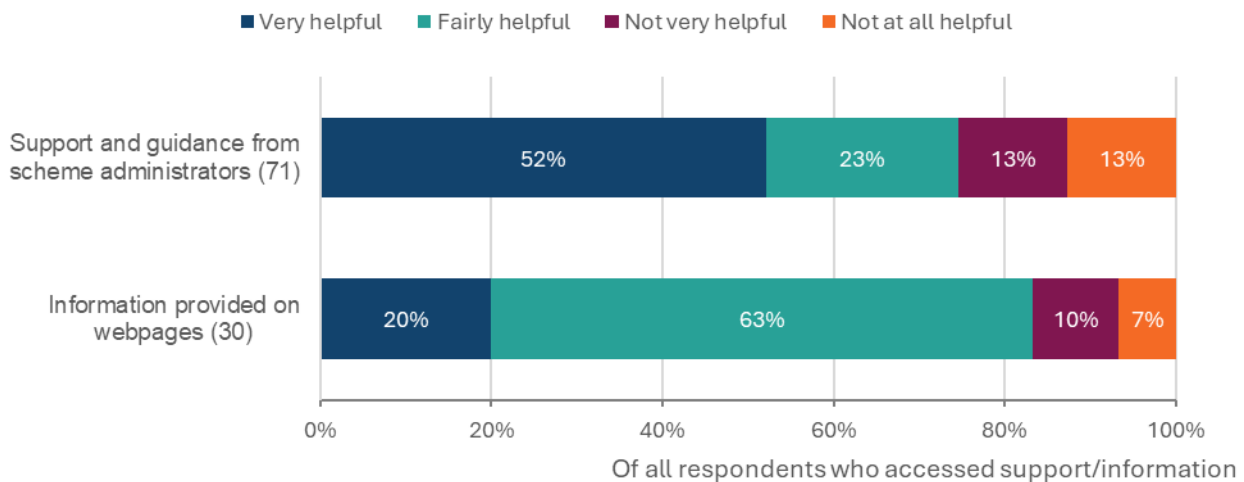
**Table 12: Enablers and barriers to accessing the scheme**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Enabler - Number of respondents</b>	<b>Enabler - % of <u>all</u> respondents</b>	<b>Barrier – Number of respondents</b>	<b>Barrier - % of <u>all</u> respondents</b>
Amount of support available from local authority	41	31%	30	23%
Level of information and guidance available	23	18%	28	21%
Ease of application/not complicated vs application too complicated	34	26%	18	14%

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey (131)

- 4.34 Other challenges/barriers to accessing the scheme included timescales (i.e. application process takes too long) (45%); eligibility requirements (i.e. not initially meeting all the requirements) (34% - 16 respondents); lack of knowledge of the work required (28% - 13 respondents); and the cost or financial contribution required (19% - nine respondents). Close to one in five (17% - eight respondents) encountered issues with their local authority not participating in or closing applications to the scheme.
- 4.35 Respondents who provided further details described a complicated process with many 'hurdles to jump'. Requirements such as having to complete all required work (rather than be able to claim for certain aspects of work) to be able to be able to access the £25,000 grant, as well as not being able to start work until the grant was approved, was considered unachievable for anyone other than developers.
- 4.36 Those who said that meeting eligibility requirements was a barrier (11 respondents) were asked which requirements they did not initially meet. Four respondents said it was the property not being registered as vacant with the authority's Council Tax department, while three respondents said the property did not meet the required definition of being vacant (i.e. being unoccupied and substantially unfurnished), with one respondent specifically mentioning difficulties proving furniture had been removed. The property being vacant for at least 12 months was a barrier for one respondent, and two respondents said there were other specific requirements set by their local authority that they did not meet.

**Figure 14: To what extent was... a) the support and guidance from scheme administrators, b) information provided on webpages, helpful?**



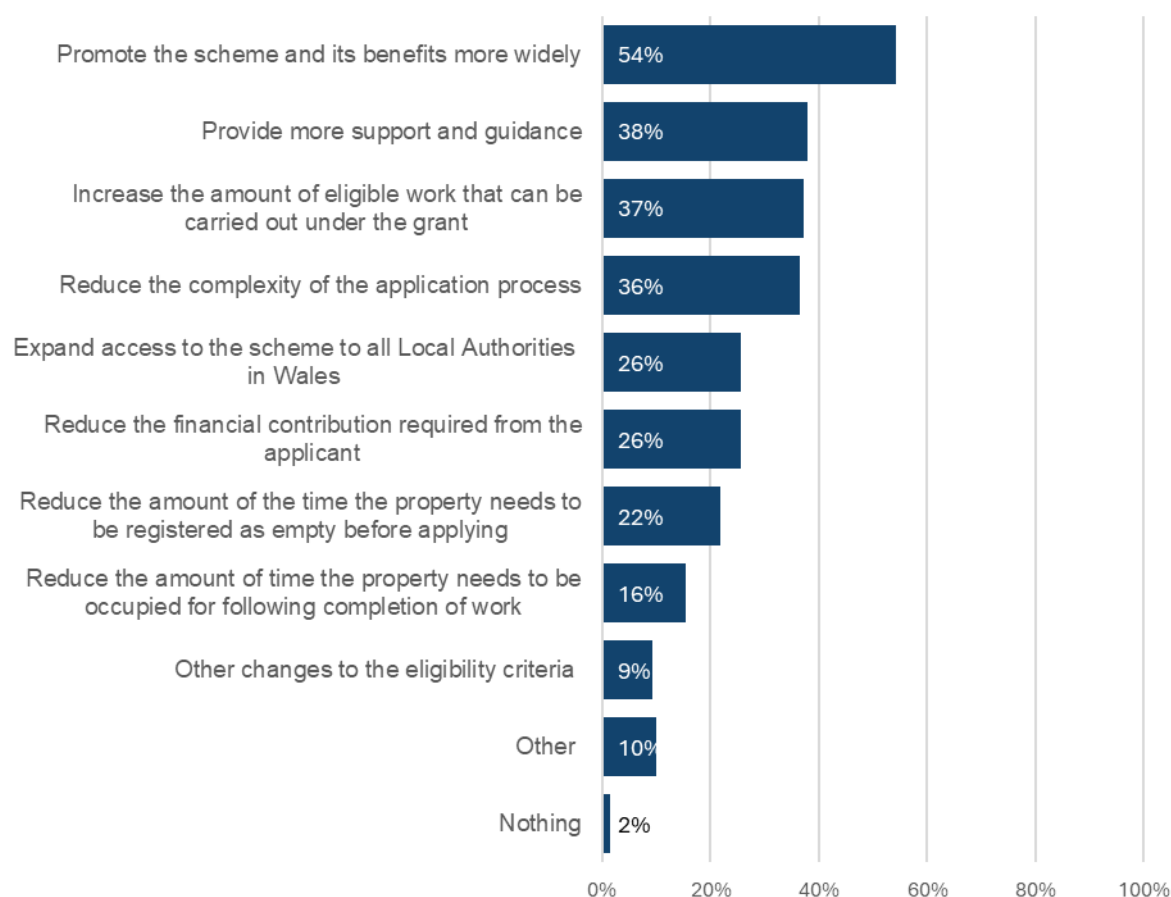
Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to these questions (number of respondents shown in brackets on chart)

Source: ORS

4.37 Over three in five (65%) respondents said they had received some form of support or guidance to help them access or complete their application. More than half (56%) received support or guidance from scheme administrators.

- 4.39 Figure 14 shows that three quarters (75%) of respondents found the support and guidance from scheme administrators either very (52%) or fairly (23% - 16 respondents) helpful. However, a quarter (25%) reported that the support was not very helpful (13% - nine respondents) or not at all helpful (13% - nine respondents).
- 4.40 Around a quarter (24%) of all respondents accessed support or guidance via information on webpages. Figure 15 shows that more than four in five (83%) found this information very (20% - six respondents) or fairly (63% - 19 respondents) helpful. However, 17% found the information on webpages not very helpful (10% - three respondents) or not at all helpful (7% - two respondents).

**Figure 15: What, if anything, could be done to improve access to the scheme?**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (129). Respondents were able to select multiple options – total number of responses: 355

Source: ORS

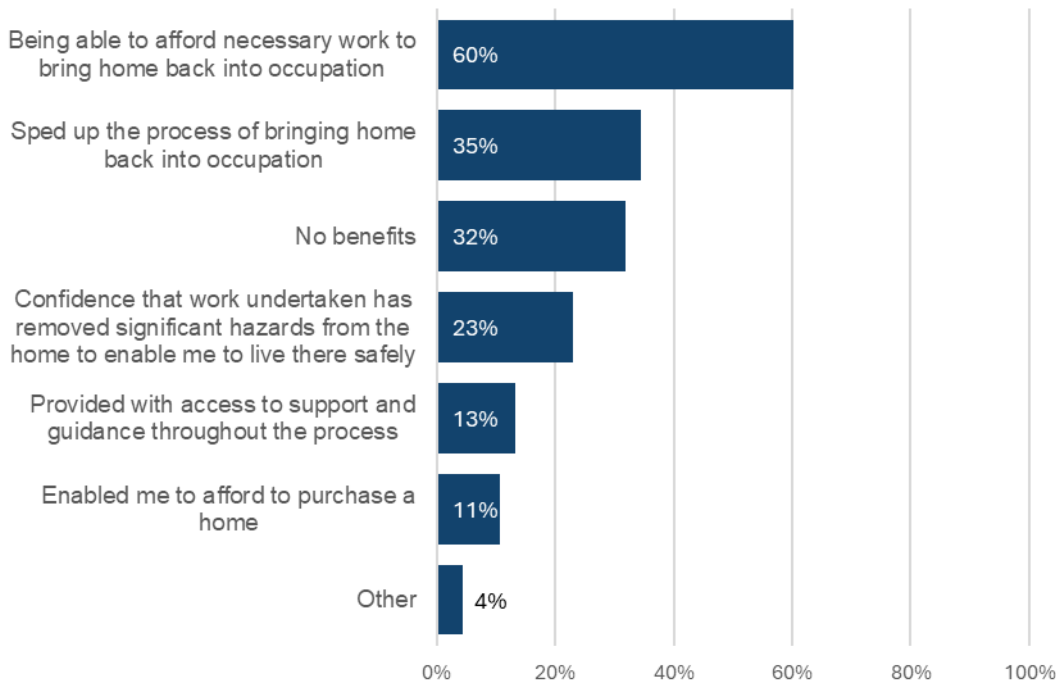
- 4.41 Respondents were asked what, if anything, could be done to improve access to the scheme (Figure 15). Respondents were able to choose multiple options with over half (54%) saying that the scheme and its benefits should be more widely promoted. Over a third of respondents also said that more support and guidance should be provided (38%), that the amount of eligible work that can be carried out under the grant should be increased (37%), and that the complexity of the application process should be reduced (36%).
- 4.42 Around a quarter of respondents would like to see access to the scheme expanded to all local authorities in Wales i.e. to the five local authorities who are currently not participating (26%) and a reduction in the amount of time a property needs to be registered as empty for before applying to be reduced; while over a fifth (22%)

would like to see a reduction in the amount of time a property must be occupied for following completion of work.

- 4.43 Around one in ten (9% – 12 respondents) felt that there should be changes to the eligibility criteria. Examples given included the property needing to be registered for council tax or be unfurnished.
- 4.44 Some respondents gave further comments expanding on their responses to what could be done to improve access to the scheme. Here, respondents stressed the need for clearer guidance throughout the application process to reduce uncertainty, suggesting flow charts, upfront lists of required documents, and application packs outlining stages of approval.
- 4.45 Additionally, concerns were raised around the grant funding not covering realistic costs, particularly where listed buildings, surveyor estimates, and additional requirements inflated expenses, leading some to abandon their scheme applications.
- 4.46 Other suggestions concentrated mainly on improving communication, particularly between the relevant local authority, the scheme administrators and the applicant; reducing the complexity of the process; and speeding up the process and improving timelines. Delays, inconsistent rules, and limited staff capacity were also seen as main barriers, with some describing the application experience as stressful and ‘robotic’. It was felt that addressing these issues, in addition to providing a dedicated local point of contact, would improve access to the scheme.

## Benefits and drawbacks of accessing the scheme

**Figure 16: In what ways, if any, has accessing the scheme benefitted you personally?**



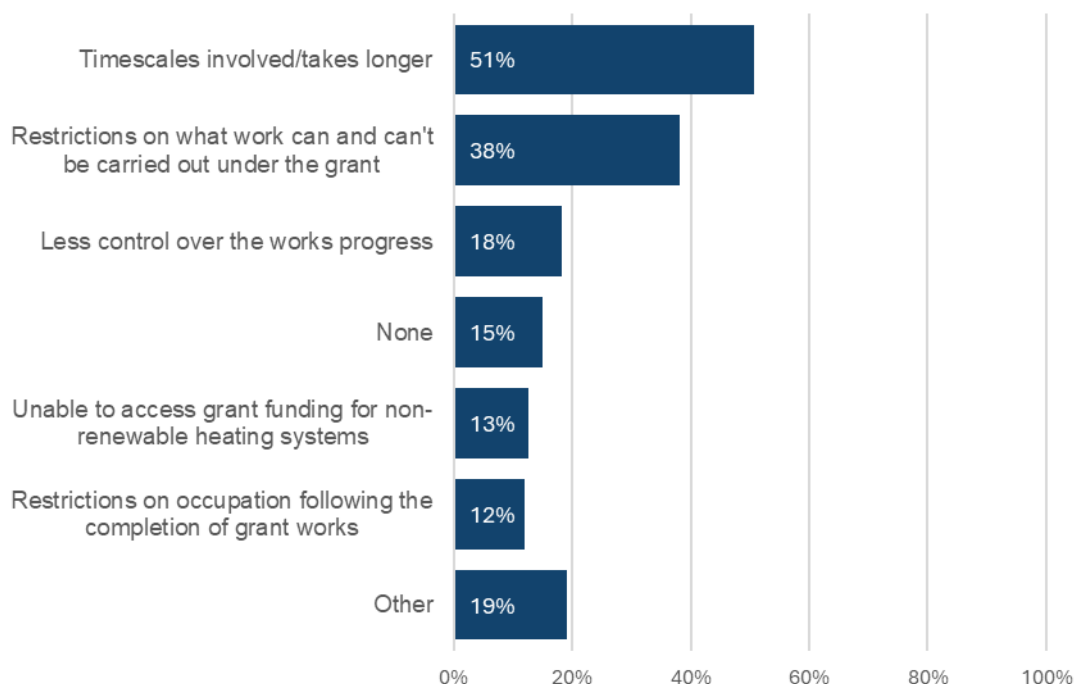
Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (113). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 201

Source: ORS

4.47 Respondents were asked in what ways, if any, accessing the scheme has benefitted them personally and were able to choose multiple options (Figure 16 16). Whilst almost a third (32%) felt there were no benefits to them personally, three fifths (60%) felt that being able to afford the necessary work to bring a home back into occupation was of benefit to them; while over a third (35%) felt that the scheme sped up the process of bringing a home back into occupation.



**Figure 17: What do you feel are the main drawbacks, if any, of accessing the scheme?**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (126). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 209

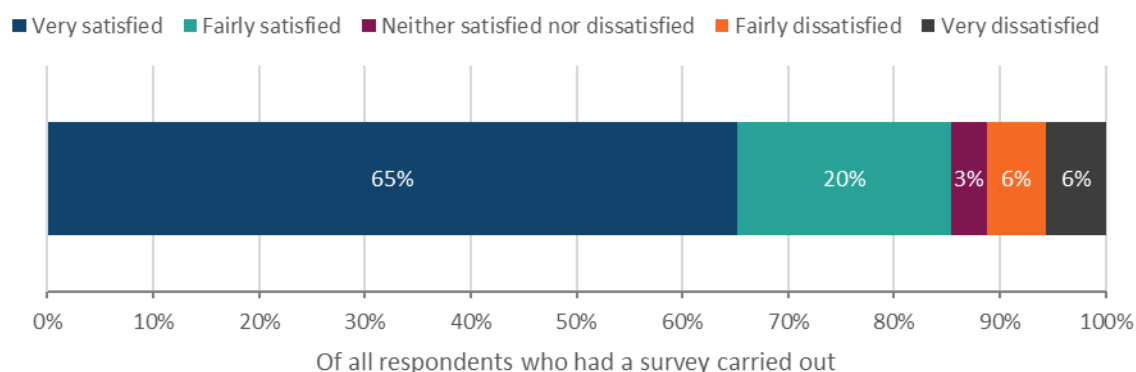
Source: ORS

4.48 Conversely, respondents were asked what they felt were the main drawbacks, if any, of accessing the scheme, and were able to choose multiple options (Figure 17). Whilst 15% (19 respondents) felt there were no drawbacks to accessing the scheme, the most frequently mentioned drawbacks were the timescales involved, that it takes longer to complete works than it would without the scheme (51%), the restrictions on what work can and cannot be carried out under the grant (38%) and having less control over the progress of works (18%).

#### **Local authority survey**

4.49 Almost seven in ten respondents (69%) had a survey carried out by a local authority surveyor. The remaining respondents had either not got to that part of the process yet (17%) or their application had been cancelled prior to a survey being carried out (14% - 18 respondents).

**Figure 18: Satisfaction with the service received from the local authority surveyor**



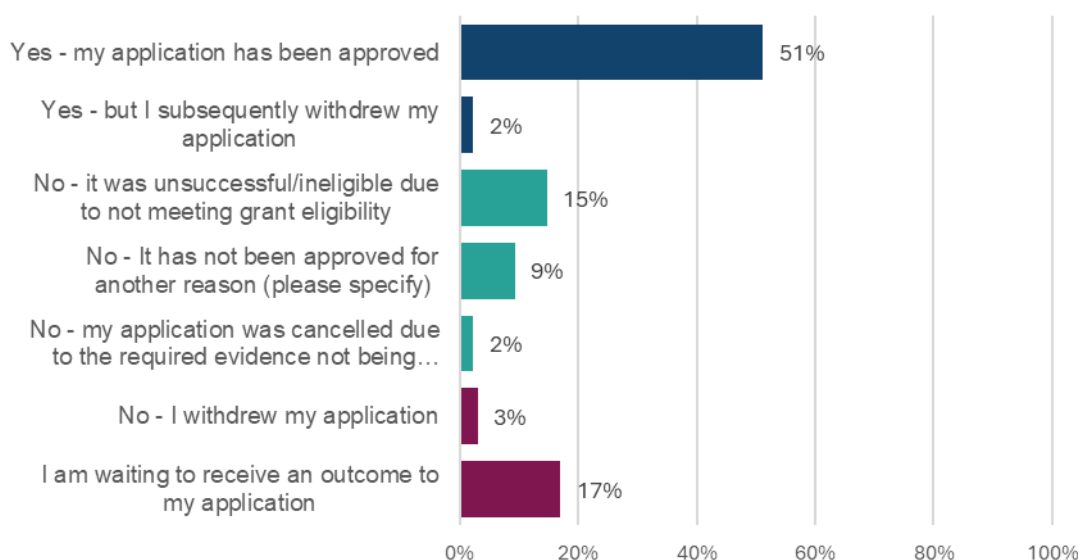
Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (89)

Source: ORS

4.50 Of those who had a survey, over four fifths (85%) were satisfied with the service they received from the local authority surveyor with over three fifths (65%) being very satisfied (Figure 18). Just over one in ten (11% - 10 respondents) were dissatisfied with the service they received and 3% (three respondents) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

### Outcome of application

**Figure 19: Has your application for the Empty Homes Grant been approved**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (129).

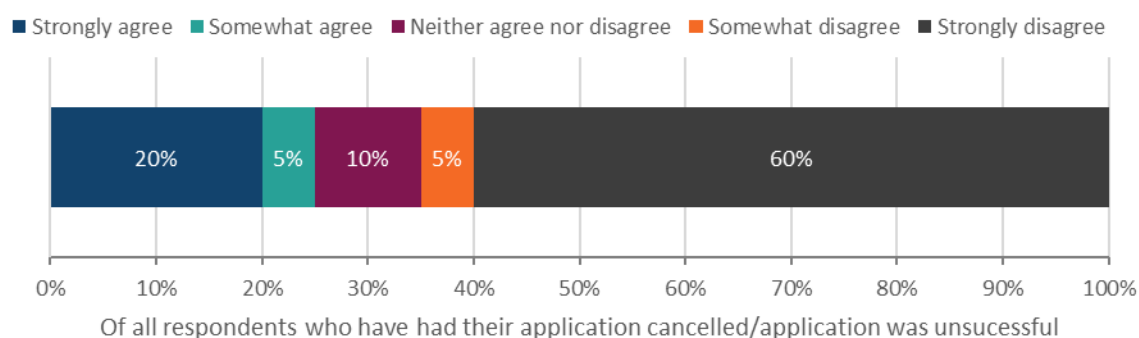
Source: ORS

4.51 Just over half (51%) of respondents had their application approved (Figure 20). Those who started their application in 2023 to 2024 (66%) were significantly more

likely to have had their application approved at the time of taking the survey when compared to all respondents when considered as a whole. A further three respondents (2%) had their application approved but subsequently withdrew their application.

- 4.52 Just under a fifth of respondents (17%) are still waiting for the outcome of their application, and 3% (four respondents) withdrew their application before a decision was made.
- 4.53 The remaining 26% did not have their application approved. For 15% (19 respondents) their application was unsuccessful due to not meeting the grant eligibility, while three respondents (2%) had their application cancelled due to the required evidence not being submitted. Around one in ten (9% - 12 respondents) gave other reasons for their application being cancelled such as the application timing out or funding running out or being withdrawn in some local authorities<sup>9</sup>. Two respondents said they were given no reason.
- 4.54 Those who withdrew their application (seven respondents) were asked why they did so. The most frequently given responses were that the process was taking or would take too long (four respondents); or that the process was too complicated (four respondents). Other reasons included not being able to afford to continue, a change in the amount or type of work required, and no longer wanting to bring the property back into use.

**Figure 20: Level of agreement that they understand the reasons why their application was cancelled/unsuccessful**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (20)

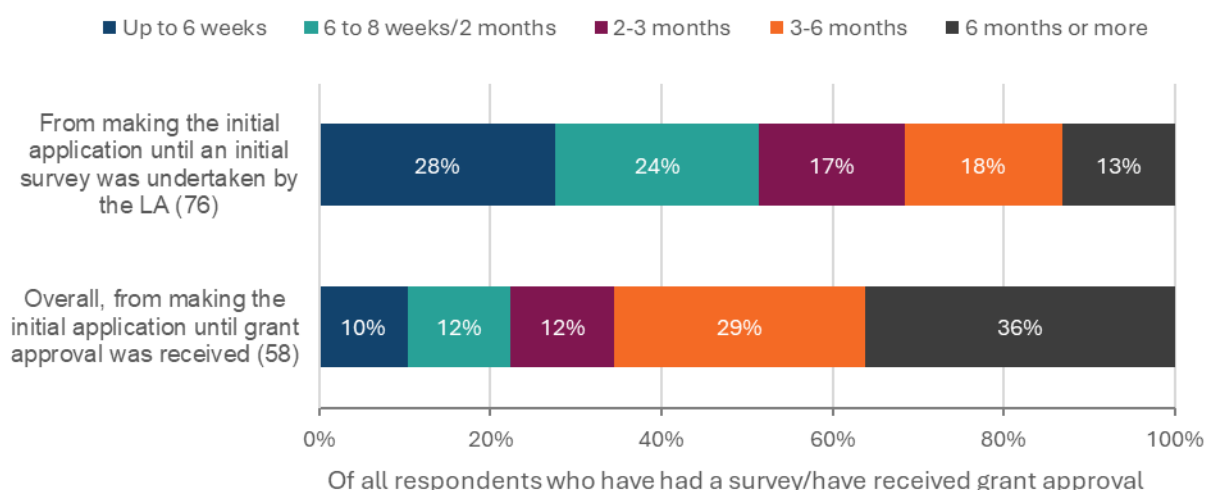
Source: ORS

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that while this was the respondents' perception, in reality applications are never cancelled due to funding 'running out.'

4.55 Those who had their application cancelled or said it had been unsuccessful were asked if they understood the reasons for this (Figure 20). Whilst a quarter (25% - five respondents) agreed that they understood the reasons, with 20% (four respondents) saying they strongly agreed, over three in five (65% - 13 respondents) disagreed, with 60% (12 respondents) strongly disagreeing. Applicants are always given a reason why their application was cancelled or been unsuccessful, therefore these results suggest that explanations given are not always clear. Providing more thorough explanations could help applicants fully understand the reasons their application wasn't approved.

## Timescales

**Figure 21: How long did it take a) from making the initial application until an initial survey was undertaken by the LA, b) overall, from making the initial application until grant approval was received**



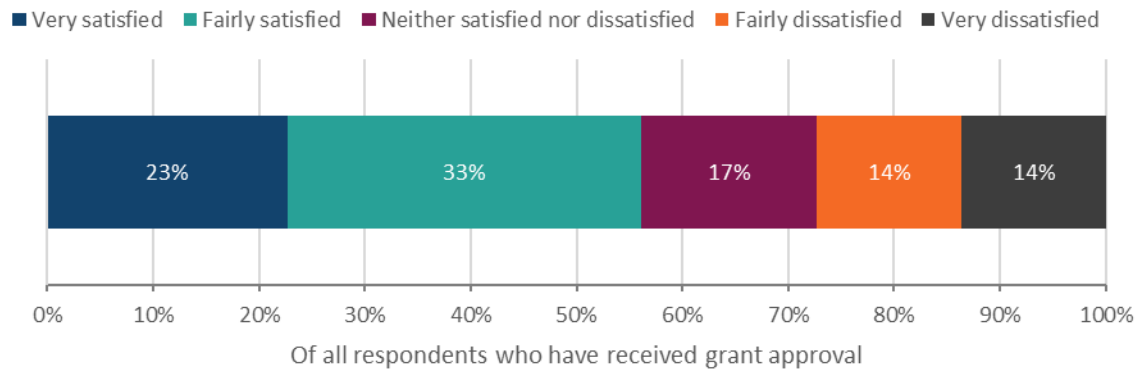
Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to these questions (number of respondents shown in brackets on chart)

Source: ORS

4.56 In terms of timescales, almost three in ten (28%) surveys were carried out in less than six weeks, with more than half (51%) carried out within two months. However, almost a third (32%) took three months or more, with 13% (10 respondents) taking more than six months (Figure 21).

4.57 Overall, for those who had grant approval, over a third (34%) received their approval within three months, and 64% within six months. Over a third (36%) of applications, however, took more than six months to be approved (Figure 21).

**Figure 22: Satisfaction with the time it took for the application to be approved**

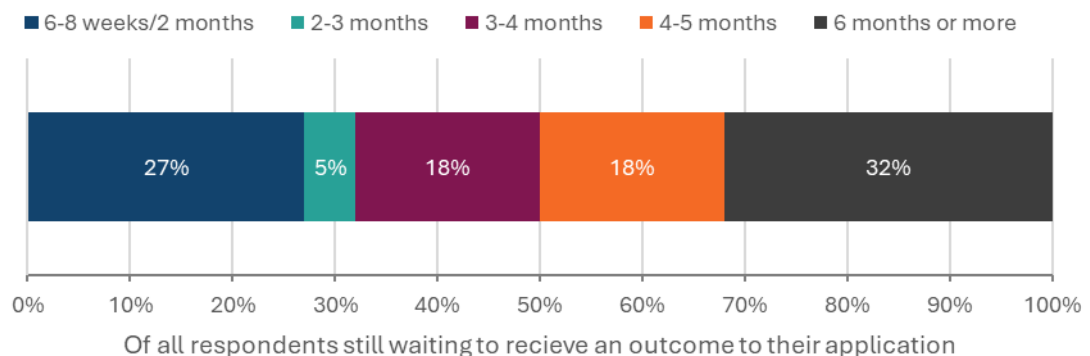


Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (66)

Source: ORS

4.58 Over half (56%) of respondents who have received grant approval were satisfied with the time it took for their application to be approved, with over a fifth (23% - 15 respondents) being very satisfied. Over a quarter (27% - 18 respondents) were dissatisfied with the time it took for their application to be approved, while 17% (11 respondents) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Figure 22).

**Figure 23: Time waiting so far for an outcome to the application**



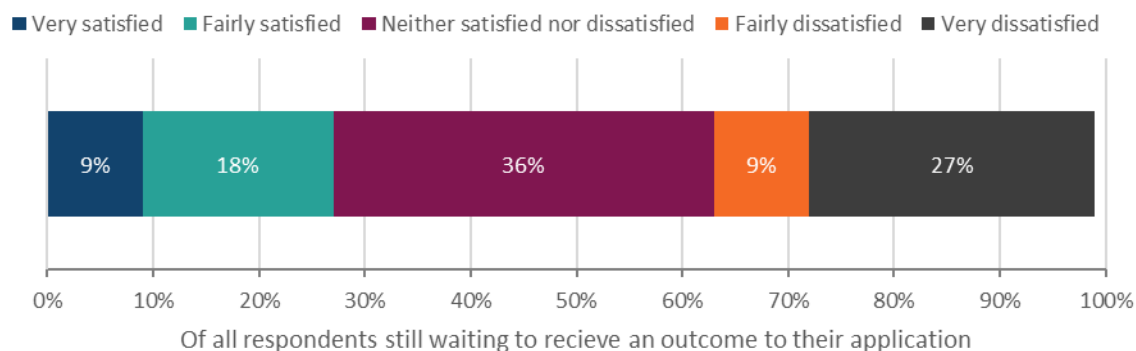
Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (22)

Source: ORS

4.59 Of those still waiting to receive an outcome from their application, over a quarter (27% - six respondents) have been waiting between six and eight weeks and 5% (one respondent) have been waiting two to three months. Under a fifth (18% - four respondents) have been waiting three to four months and a further 18% (four respondents) have been waiting four to five months. However almost a third (32% - seven respondents) have been waiting more than six months (Figure 23).

4.60 Of those still waiting, eight respondents expected to wait up to another six weeks before receiving an outcome and two respondents expected to wait another two months. It is worth noting that 11 respondents said they did not know how much longer it would take.

**Figure 24: Satisfaction with the time the application has taken so far**

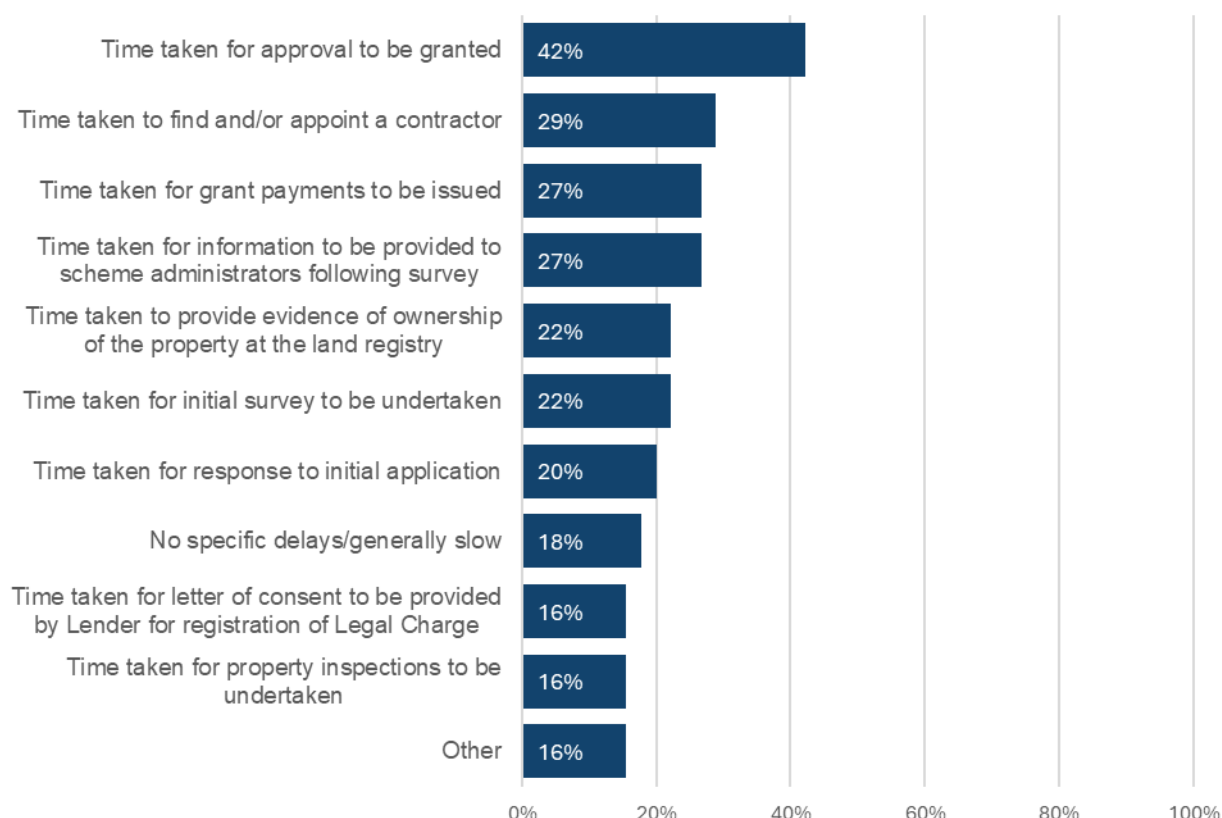


Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (22)

Source: ORS

4.61 Over a quarter of respondents (27% - six respondents) who were still waiting to receive an outcome were satisfied with the time their application has taken so far. Over a third (36% - eight respondents) were dissatisfied with the time their application has taken, while over a third (36% - eight respondents) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Figure 24).

**Figure 25: Have there been any specific periods of delays which has meant that the application process has taken longer than you had expected?**



Of all respondents to the applicant survey who were dissatisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the time taken for their application to be approved / with the time taken so far

Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (45). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 114

Source: ORS

- 4.62 Respondents who were dissatisfied or responded neutrally around the time taken for their application to be approved or with the time taken so far (if they were still waiting) were asked whether there had been any specific delays to the application process. Respondents were able to give multiple responses (Figure 25).
- 4.63 Over two in five (42% - 19 respondents) said that the time taken for approval to be granted meant that the application process took longer than expected. Almost a fifth (18% - eight respondents) said there were no specific delays, and that the process was generally slow.
- 4.64 Specific periods of delay mentioned frequently were the time taken to or for:
- find and/or appoint a contractor (29% -13 respondents)
  - grant payments to be issued (27% - 12 respondents)

- information to be provided to scheme administrators following a survey (27% - 12 respondents)
- provide evidence of ownership of the property at the land registry (22% - 10 respondents)
- the initial survey to be undertaken (22% - 10 respondents)
- a response to the initial application (20% - nine respondents).

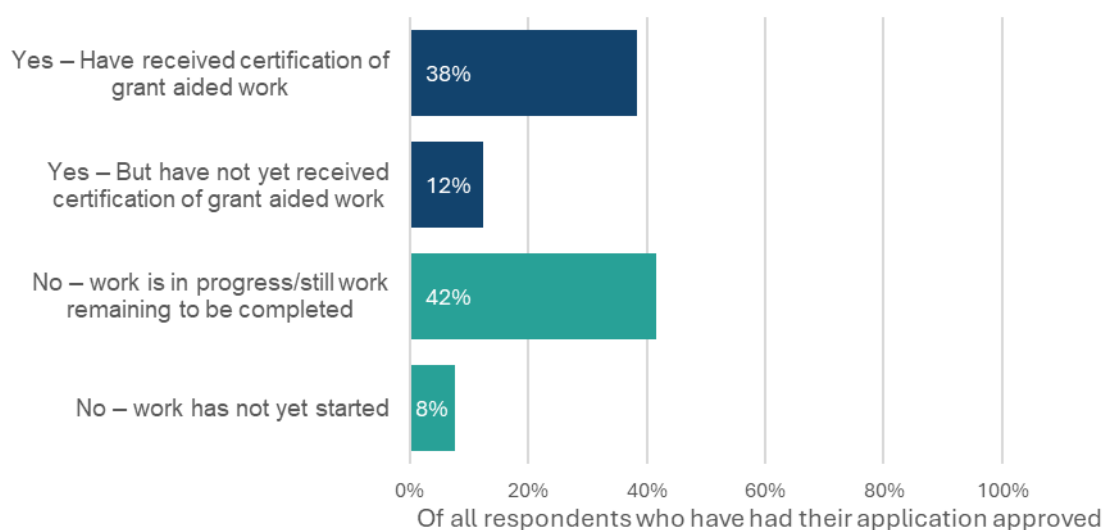
4.65 Around one in six respondents (16% - seven respondents) said that the time taken for a letter of consent to be provided by a lender for the registration of the legal charge was a specific delay and the same proportion (16% - seven respondents) commented on the time taken for property inspections to be undertaken.

4.66 Open text feedback suggested that delays were often compounded by the ongoing discovery of additional requirements at each stage and a lack of upfront information or clear guidance. Some frustrations were also reported around evidence going missing and the unavailability of caseworkers due to leave or sickness. Access to clear templates at the point of enquiry and an upfront checklist of required documents was suggested to reduce delays and improve the clarity of the process for applicants.

### Impact of the scheme

4.67 The survey also included questions designed to assess the overall impact of the scheme as well as what works well and what could be improved.

**Figure 26: Has the work on the property been completed?**



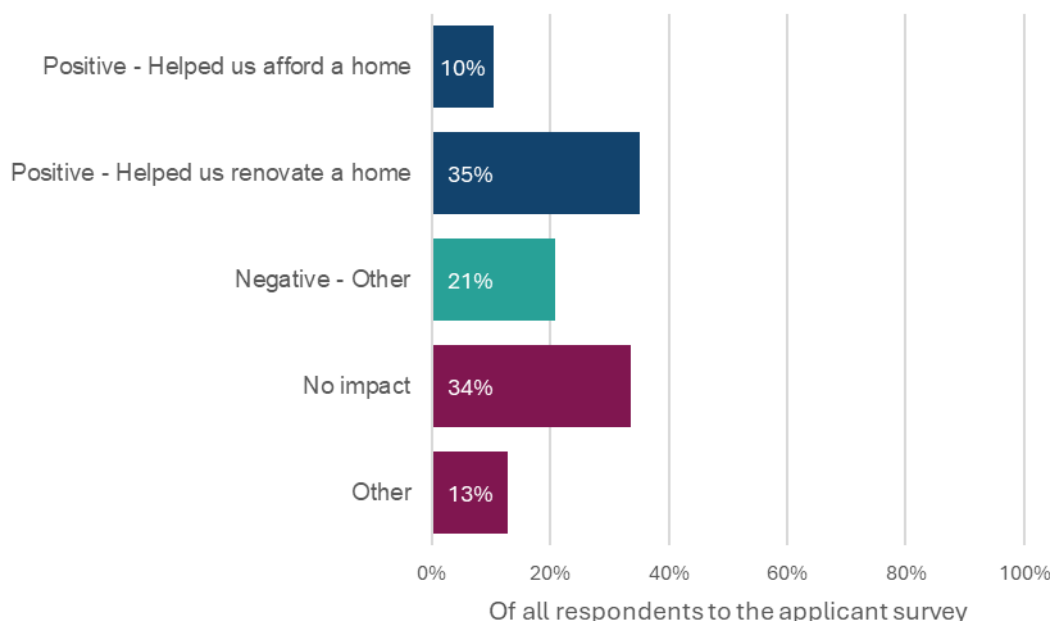
Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (65).

Source: ORS



- 4.68 Almost two fifths (38%) of respondents who have had their application approved have completed work on the property and received certification of grant aided work. Over one in ten (12% - eight respondents) have completed work on the property but not yet received certification (Figure 26).
- 4.69 Over two fifths of respondents (42%) who have had their application approved have not completed work on the property, but work is in progress, whereas 8% (five respondents) have not yet started work.
- 4.70 Of those who have received certification, 96% said the property was currently being occupied, whereas one respondent said the property was not currently being occupied. The reasons for the property not being occupied was that it still needed to be decorated or furnished and that there was other work to be completed that was not included within the scheme. However, the respondent did expect the property to be occupied within the next four weeks.

**Figure 27: What impact do you feel the Empty Homes Grant Scheme has had so far on you/your family personally, and on housing overall in Wales?**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (125). Total number of responses: 141

Source: ORS

- 4.71 Of all respondents to the applicant survey, one in ten (10% - 13 respondents) felt that the Empty Homes Grant Scheme has so far has a positive impact in helping them afford a home, with a further 35% of respondents finding the scheme positive in helping them renovate a home (Figure 27). If only those who have received grant approval are considered (51% - 65 respondents), 15% said that the scheme has

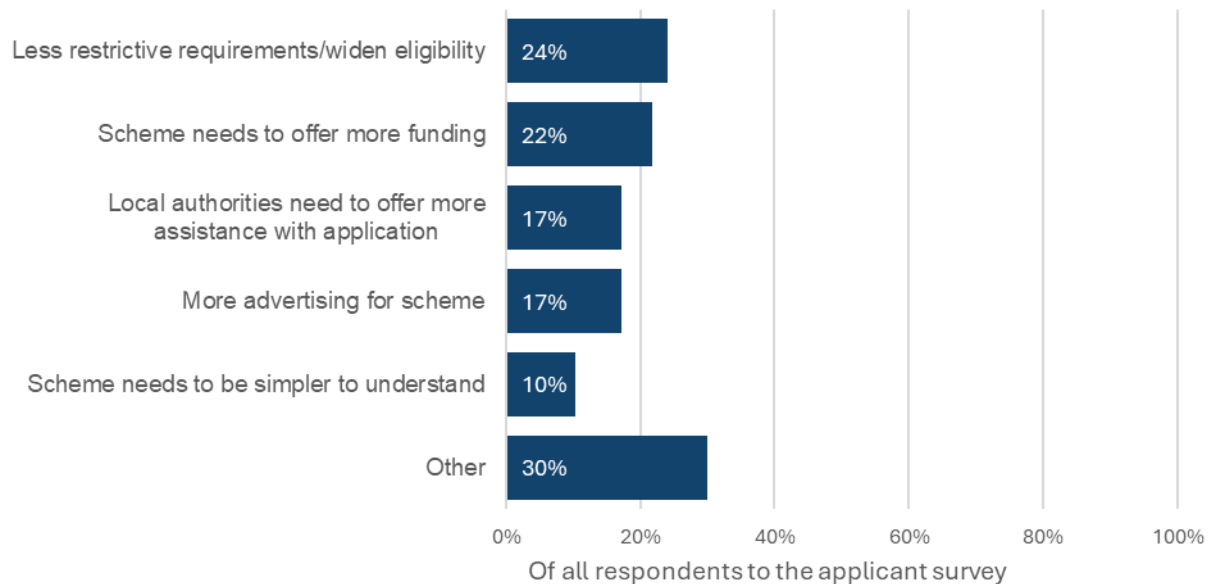
helped them afford a home, while three-in-five (60% - a significantly higher proportion when compared with all respondents) said it has helped them to renovate a home.

- 4.72 Just over a fifth of all respondents (21%) felt that the Empty Homes Grant Scheme had so far had a negative impact, with over a third of respondents (34%) feeling the scheme has had no impact at all. Those whose who had not had their application approved (60 respondents) were significantly more likely than all respondents, when considered as a whole, to say the scheme has had no impact at all (50%), while those who have had their application approved (65 respondents) were significantly less likely to have said this (18% - 12 respondents).
- 4.73 Respondents who viewed the Empty Homes Grant Scheme positively expressed gratitude that it had enabled them to provide safe homes for their families and noted several benefits resulting from the scheme, as described below.
- 4.74 An important theme was the scheme's role in improving home safety and energy efficiency and helping homes re-enter the housing market. Positive community outcomes included bringing derelict properties back into use, fostering a sense of pride and security among residents in their homes, increasing housing availability in the community, and providing first-time buyers an opportunity to access the housing market.
- 4.75 Other positive comments focused on the scheme's function in speeding up work and enabling renovations that would otherwise have taken years. Respondents also valued the financial assistance provided by the grant, which made unaffordable renovations possible and supported long-term planning by helping homes re-enter the housing market.
- 4.76 Those with negative experiences of the scheme consistently reported stress, frustration, and anxiety arising from bureaucratic delays (e.g., slow processes and lack of support), the unclear and complex application process, the need to chase guidance from local authorities, and the rigid restrictions, requirements, and eligibility criteria.
- 4.77 Respondents also frequently cited financial pressures due to the need for upfront payments. Some also reported discrepancies in cost estimates and insufficient grant contributions for necessary work, leaving recipients to absorb extra expenses.

- 4.78 Some respondents noted that they were still waiting for approvals or had yet to begin renovations. Among these, experiences were mixed. Respondents reported stress, delays, and financial strain, but also expressed hope that the grant would enable them to complete necessary work once received, providing them with a safe home and improving their mental health. Those who felt that the scheme had had no impact were generally people awaiting approval or for work to be carried out.
- 4.79 While the scheme was widely considered valuable, respondents stressed that its impact could be significantly strengthened by streamlining bureaucracy and ensuring processes and timelines are more practical and responsive to renovation needs. Suggestions included simplifying and shortening the process, improving access to support during renovations, and providing clearer guidance and more realistic and flexible timelines. Many highlighted that a nine-month completion deadline was unachievable for the scale of work required on long-term empty or derelict properties.
- 4.80 A few respondents also called for changes around the grant itself, specifically cost estimates that more accurately reflect market rates; greater flexibility in how grant funds can be allocated and ensuring contributions cover essential works like electrics, plumbing, chimneys, and damp proofing. A couple of respondents also suggested removing or reducing the need for upfront payments while several respondents felt that a clearer explanation of associated costs (such as VAT) and long-term financial implications (such as Land Registry charges and repayment conditions) was needed.
- 4.81 It should be noted that some suggestions given by respondents may include aspects already considered as part of the scheme (of which they were unaware). These are still included in the report for transparency but are not taken into consideration when making recommendations.

## Looking to the Future

**Figure 28: What other support do you feel could be made available to help reduce the number of empty properties in Wales?**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (87). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 105

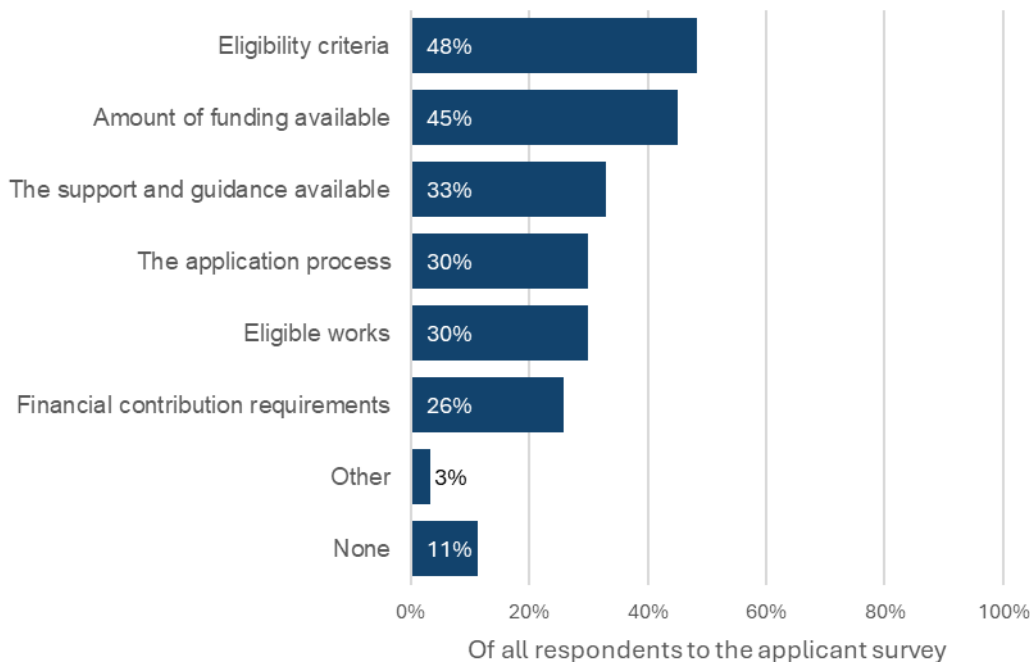
Source: ORS

- 4.82 Just under a quarter of respondents (24%) felt that less restrictive scheme requirements or widened eligibility could help reduce the number of empty properties in Wales, while over a fifth (22% - 19 respondents) felt the scheme needs to offer more funding. Under a fifth (17% - 15 respondents) felt that councils need to offer more assistance with applications and a similar proportion (10% - nine respondents) felt the scheme needs to be simpler to understand, whereas three in ten (30%) gave another reason (Figure 28). It should be noted that respondents were able to choose multiple response options for this question.
- 4.83 Common themes from open text responses included simplifying access to the scheme, providing upfront or flexible funding, clearer communication, and providing dedicated caseworker support. Other suggestions were around scheme administration, for example flexibility around the five-year rule, combining grants and loans for renovations, and providing assistance with high-cost or historic property works; as well as support for young or first-time homeowners and energy-efficient upgrades.
- 4.84 Better monitoring and council verification of empty properties was highlighted, with respondents noting that homes not listed on council tax records should still qualify if

clearly uninhabitable. Some respondents also called for compulsory purchase orders for long-term empty properties, suggesting these could be resold at purchase cost with grant conditions attached.

- 4.85 Many individuals identified links between empty properties and potential wider social benefits, for example, using them to address homelessness and employment needs (e.g., through training schemes for ex-prisoners) or refurbishing them through the council for use as social housing. Other suggestions included removing council tax premiums for genuine renovators (but increasing penalties for deliberate vacancy) and the creation of a national register to improve management, transparency, and accountability.

**Figure 29: Overall, thinking about the Empty Homes Grant Scheme, which aspects do you feel should remain the same in the future?**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (124). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 281

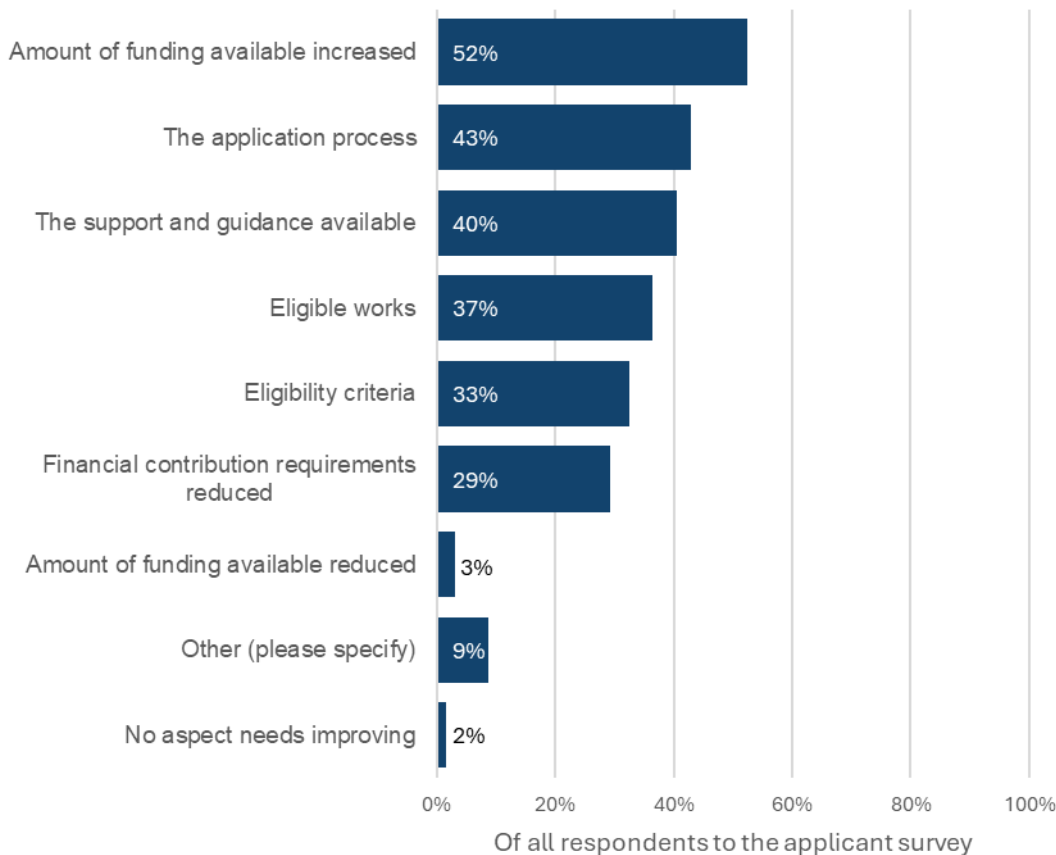
Source: ORS

- 4.86 Respondents were asked overall, when thinking about the Empty Homes Grant Scheme, which aspects they felt should remain the same in the future (Figure 29). Just under half (48%) of respondents felt that the eligibility criteria should remain the same, with less than half (45%) of respondents saying the amount of funding available. Other frequent responses were the support and guidance available (33%), the application process (30%), eligible works (30%) and that the financial

contribution requirements (26%) should remain as they are. It should be noted that respondents were able to choose multiple response options for this question.

- 4.87 Just over one in ten (11% - 14 respondents) felt that no aspects should remain the same.

**Figure 30: Overall, thinking about the Empty Homes Grant Scheme, which aspects do you feel could be improved/should be changed in the future?**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (126). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 312

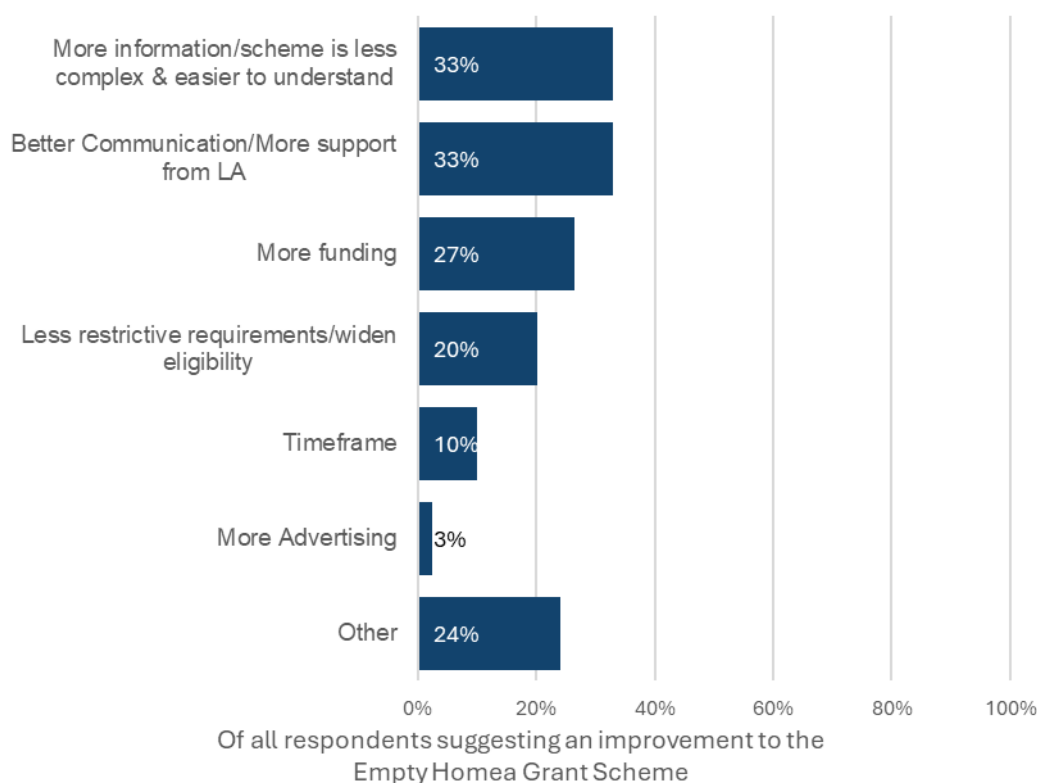
Source: ORS

- 4.88 Respondents were then asked which aspects they felt could be improved/should be changed in future (Figure 30). Over half (52%) of respondents felt that the amount of funding available should be increased; and over four in ten respondents felt the application process could be improved/should be changed (43%). It should be noted that respondents were able to choose multiple response options for this question.
- 4.89 Other suggestions included an improvement or change to the support and guidance available (40%), eligible works (37%), and eligibility criteria (33%) and just under three in ten (29%) felt that there could or should be a reduction to financial

contribution requirements. 3% (four respondents) felt the amount of funding available should be reduced.

- 4.90 However, 2% (two respondents) felt that no aspects needed improving.
- 4.91 The main areas for improvement identified by respondents who suggested changes included accessibility, administration, and eligibility. These respondents felt that eligibility requirements were overly restrictive and processes excessively long despite the tight deadlines. The need for more timely and accessible support was highlighted, including in-person support, timely responses to emails, and clearer guidance throughout the application process. It is important to note, however, that the eligibility criteria and the support and guidance available were also identified by some respondents as areas that should remain the same (Figure 25).
- 4.92 Feedback suggested that the scheme could be more accessible and flexible by allowing qualified family or friends who are not registered limited companies to carry out work; using a customer relationship management system to reduce delays; ensuring applications are assessed fairly; and reconsidering the five-year residency and second-charge requirements to make the scheme more user-friendly. There was also a comment suggesting redirecting the scheme's focus to single homeowners to reduce bureaucratic barriers.

**Figure 31: Can you give more detail on any improvements you feel could be made to the scheme in the future?**



Base: All respondents to the applicant survey who responded to this question (79). Respondents were able to select multiple options - total number of responses: 118

Source: ORS

- 4.93 Of those respondents who suggested an improvement to the Empty Homes Grant Scheme, a third (33%) noted that there could be more information or that the scheme could be made less complex and easier to understand, with the same proportion (33%) noting there could be better communication or more support from local authorities (Figure 31).
- 4.94 Over a quarter (27%) noted that there could be more funding and one in five (20% - 16 respondents) that there could be less restrictive requirements or that eligibility could be widened. One in ten (10% - eight respondents) mentioned timeframes and 3% (two respondents) suggested more advertising.
- 4.95 Just under a quarter (24%) raised something else. Respondents consistently called for a more accessible, transparent, and flexible scheme, with some suggesting a tiered repayment approach when properties are sold within five years. Main themes included simplifying application processes and the associated paperwork, providing clearer guidance on the required documentation and eligible costs at the point of enquiry, and ensuring more proactive communication from local authorities.



4.96 Concerns were raised about the scheme's inflexibility around eligible works, property eligibility criteria, and contractor availability, which led to further delays that prolong project completion. Financial pressures were consistently highlighted, with many again emphasising that grant amounts often fell short of realistic work costs, contributing to debt risks without more upfront support or flexible funding. These suggestions largely reinforced earlier themes, emphasising improvements to the scheme by combining grants and loans, faster processing of applications, providing dedicated caseworker support, and better monitoring of empty properties e.g. through council verification or a national register.

## 5. Qualitative Evaluation Findings - Process

### Overview

- 5.1 This section of the report considers the views and opinions of the local authorities that participate in, and RCTCBC officers that administer, the Empty Homes Grant Scheme on how the scheme has worked in practice. It includes the findings from the local authority focus groups and the call for evidence sent to all councils participating in the scheme.

### Main findings

#### Roles

##### Local authority officers

- 5.2 Local authority officers work within a range of departments in each authority, Affordable Housing and Environmental Health for example. Some are not specifically employed as 'Empty Homes Officers' and for many, their responsibilities under the scheme are a 'bolt-on' to their existing role.

"My involvement with the National Empty Homes Grant sort of echoes what others have said in the group and the fact it is an 'add on' to my actual role."

- 5.3 Where specific Empty Homes Grant Scheme teams do exist, very few described a team comprising more than two officers. Indeed, in several authorities, officers assume sole responsibility for the scheme.

##### RCTCBC officers

- 5.4 Because of the demands of the scheme, it was necessary for RCTCBC to make a request to the Welsh Government to expand its national administration team. This was rectified quickly by the Welsh Government, in January 2024 and the team at RCTCBC felt they now have a dedicated and well-resourced team.

"We were able to recruit more staff to increase our grant process team... If someone wants an update on their grant or if someone needs a bit of support, they are there day to day in and out, moving the grants forward and dealing with them, speaking with the applicants."

- 5.5 The national administration team at RCTCBC described how it now successfully works in tandem with local officers. Indeed, the experience acquired by all officers

whilst working on the Valleys Taskforce Empty Property Scheme means that members of both teams can substitute for each other in times of extra demand.

“I’d say it works well because we’ve administered empty property grants since 2017. So, our existing grant staff have got the knowledge of delivery of those grants. Then the Valleys Taskforce came along as a pilot, and then obviously the national. We set up an independent team on its own, but the existing staff have got the experience of dealing with those grants, so can step in, be it as administrators or technical surveyors. So, there's that crossover. For us, it was business as usual, this is what we do.”

### **The implementation process: enablers and challenges**

- 5.6 It is worth stressing that most authorities considered the Empty Homes Grant Scheme to be both valuable and worthwhile, and its main positives are reported at the end of this section.
- 5.7 However, they acknowledged that, as with any such programme of work, there are issues to be addressed. These are discussed below.

### **Scheme administration**

Local authority officers

- 5.8 Officers highlighted the lack of autonomy each authority has over applications in their individual localities as a consequence of RCTCBC administering the scheme, with a few call for evidence respondents saying they found having no control over when applications are opened or closed especially difficult. Central administration was considered a unique and ‘challenging’ situation, especially when compared to in-house run grant schemes, whereby authorities have all the relevant information available to them at all times.

“[In the past] we ran our own grants. We knew where everybody was up to in the process. So, when people were calling and there was paperwork outstanding, people knew exactly what was what. Now it's a little bit in the abyss.”

- 5.9 This opinion contrasted with the views expressed by RCTCBC officers, which may suggest a lack of effective communication between the different parties. Improving existing two-way communications between RCTCBC as the administrator and participating local authorities would go some way to addressing this.

- 5.10 Linked to access to information, there was a general feeling among officers that the updated property list of those under approval should be shared more frequently than it is currently, preferably monthly. Having updated information more regularly would allow officers a better understanding of their own position in terms of how applications are progressing, allowing planning for the next month of works at a local level. It would also give authorities an understanding of how the scheme is progressing overall and their performance in the broader context of the scheme. It is worth noting that update reports and surveying lists provided to local authorities from RCTCBC are issued no later than every three weeks.
- 5.11 It was also suggested that the extra tier of administration resulting from RCTCBC's involvement in the scheme has led to a somewhat disjointed application process, particularly in terms of explaining it to applicants and dealing with local queries.
- “... That's been quite challenging for us because it's us that people phone if they've got queries ...”
- “We've done grants, we've done loans, we've done the whole shooting match, and it just seems strange that this was another added level of bureaucracy almost, onto a service, where the funding could have come to us direct. We could have targeted the area that we know very, very well.”
- 5.12 Officers felt that dealing with queries around the scheme is made more difficult by capacity issues resulting from small teams and heavy workloads. Some local authorities have even needed to employ agency workers to perform tasks they cannot manage themselves.
- “...We also find then that, we are providing the technical function. Unfortunately, we haven't got any officers who can [deal with this] and we've had to take on agency [workers] to deal with that.”
- 5.13 Indeed, call for evidence respondents noted support from dedicated local technical officers as crucial to the success of the administration and implementation process. They are considered essential in ensuring timely visits to applicants to arrange inspections; providing guidance on how the scheme works; explaining how payments qualify; and explaining the technical aspects of the schedule to contractors so they fully understand the requirements of the work.

5.14 In terms of specific issues, focus group officers and call for evidence respondents cited frustrations around the 'schedule of rates'<sup>10</sup> produced by and locked for use by only RCTCBC<sup>11</sup> (an issue raised in the focus groups and call for evidence responses). For other grant schemes, once approval is given, local authorities can consider and adjust interim valuations, completion payments etc. The inability to do this means officers are left to address and make changes via 'pen and paper' calculations, which was not considered the most efficient way of developing working schedules.

5.15 Moreover, for authorities with 'local connection' eligibility criteria<sup>12</sup> it was said that queries around these are often passed back to local authorities from RCTCBC, despite this being considered 'basic information' regarding the scheme. RCTCBC officers commented that local authorities are responsible for this and agreed to this being passed back to them during inception of the scheme and subsequent operations meetings. They were keen to point out that RCTCB's role is to collate and forward evidence to local authorities for consideration.

"The local connections criteria, that's where it comes back to us each time. And its different officers from RCT that are coming back to me asking me questions on the local connection criteria when really, it's basic information."

5.16 Frustration was also expressed around communication. Many local authority officers said they would prefer any decisions made regarding changes to submitted figures to be referred to them as routine. Increased transparency around why such changes are made is also something officers desired.

"If you're changing something that we proposed, then let us know where you've changed it, don't let us sit there guessing."

5.17 Several call for evidence respondents also stressed barriers associated with only one local authority having administrative authority, including around communication

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<sup>10</sup> A Schedule of Rates is a contractual document that specifies predetermined unit prices for various tasks, materials, or services within a project. It serves as a pricing framework that facilitates the valuation of work based on actual quantities executed.

<sup>11</sup> The main contents of the main schedule template are locked (to maintain data integrity) but there is also a free format section. A separate valuation sheet has been shared for local authorities to consider using, but RCTCBC is not prescriptive that they have to use this.

<sup>12</sup> 'Local Connection' eligibility criteria are additional criteria employed by certain local authorities. These criteria determine whether applicants have strong links to the area and are in place to aid local communities and to ensure local residents are prioritised in accessing this limited resource. 'Local Connection' eligibility criteria apply to the following areas: Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Swansea (Gower Ward).

and information delays and distribution application response times, and contractor costing. Currently, to address these difficulties, there needs to be “a lot of hard work and chasing,” from other local authorities. It was felt that these challenges could, be overcome through better provision of information provision and increased collaboration with RCTCBC.

- 5.18 We would note, though, that one focus group participant was keen to stress that for their authority, any problematic issues or queries have been dealt with positively by the team at RCTCBC. Moreover, several officers disagreed that it should be up to individual authorities to run the scheme at a local level, stating that RCTCBC acting as administrators is both practical and for many authorities necessary, as they have neither the capacity nor the resources to run the scheme themselves.

“The RCT application process is really helpful for us in that we aren't going to worry about... case worker resource or admin resource for that.”

“If the grant administration came on top... that would be us out of the game.”

RCTCBC officers

- 5.19 RCTCBC officers deemed the administrative grant scheme process to be working well, reflected in the low level of complaints or issues raised to them as administrators.

“We've not had many complaints raised, or any issues with the actual process, which I think is positive...”

- 5.20 As part of the Valleys Taskforce Empty Property Scheme pilot, project staff gained experience and expertise in the implementation of the scheme and the application process. Officers consequently felt assured that they were experienced in how to run a scheme successfully; and were confident in their ability to facilitate the Empty Home Grants Scheme on taking on the administrative role in 2023.

### **Eligibility criteria**

Local authority officers

- 5.21 Focus group participants and call for evidence respondents suggested several challenges that arose for applicants around eligibility. These included:

- a lack of clarity around the eligibility criteria of ‘empty, unfurnished and unoccupied for 12 months.’ This can cause delays as it can be difficult to prove and lead to dropout prior to the surveyor stage

- concerns around the financial risks of application
- the average nine months approval period being too short for applicants to arrange contractors for works
- limitations to the scope of work permitted under the scheme (gas boilers are not included for example).

5.22 A few call for evidence respondents said that the eligibility criteria have created a barrier to people accessing the scheme, with many properties falling outside its scope due to failing to comply with the 'empty and unfurnished'<sup>13</sup> category of eligibility, despite being empty.

RCTCBC officers

5.23 RCTCBC officers referred to misunderstandings around eligibility criteria as an acknowledged issue of concern in terms of implementing the scheme. In particular, they referred to a 'disconnect' between what homeowners (actual and prospective) understand the term 'empty' to mean, within the context of the scheme.

5.24 The term 'empty' describes a property that must 'currently be registered with the authority's Council Tax Department as vacant (unoccupied and unfurnished) and have been so for a minimum 12-month period at the date of application,' and officers highlighted that this information is clearly defined on the RCTCBC webpage.

5.25 However, officers felt there is misunderstanding amongst homeowners. Queries are often received in relation to this, especially where anecdotal evidence suggests properties have been long-term uninhabited (for instance it is known that an elderly resident has moved into care accommodation or has passed away). However, proof is required to detail the exact day a house becomes unoccupied and that date constitutes the start of the 12-month 'empty' period, necessary to comply with eligibility criteria as described above.

5.26 Officers acknowledged that this has led to confusion and disappointment amongst homeowners or prospective homeowners trying to access the scheme. As illustrated by the volume of calls they receive on this matter, which can be a challenge for the team.

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<sup>13</sup> The term 'empty and unfurnished' describes a property that must '*currently be registered with the authority's Council Tax Department as vacant (unoccupied and unfurnished) and have been so for a minimum 12-month period at the date of application.*'

“... The level of disappointment and the volume of responses that come back when we give a response, that's challenging ...”

- 5.27 As noted above, there is a description on the RCTCBC website around how properties are assessed. Officers felt that this information needs to be clarified and ‘put out there’ to avoid confusion and misinterpretation in future.

“We don't ask them to provide [evidence], but on the form, it does state it is council tax records that are used to assess this. So, it is available to them. But it's putting it out there, what's the evidence base that we are going to use to assess?”

- 5.28 RCTCBC officers were aware that this is also an issue for other local authorities. The time disparity between a property becoming empty and being officially registered as such can vary significantly and can in turn lead to people being unable to apply for a grant. As a team, the officers said they have limited knowledge of how council tax officers make their decisions, but that this is the criteria they must adhere to, despite their and others’ frustrations.

“... Some of the responses we've had back from officers in the different local authorities around exemptions... so [suggests] the applicant feels they're meeting that [criteria], [but] the property record hasn't been updated to reflect that ...”

- 5.29 The RCTCBC team highlighted that whilst council tax registrations can lead to applications not proceeding, there have been several incidences where after review at the council tax stage, applications have been allowed to proceed. This, it was said, tends to occur where homeowners have provided the relevant information to the council tax office themselves, albeit having to do so without guarantees of success.

“It can work, and we have positive outcomes as well ... With providing evidence back to council tax officers, we can say, ‘We encourage you to explore this, but we cannot confirm if this will be possible or what they will accept if anything.’ So again, we're trying to be helpful but also, we can't guarantee anything, which leaves the applicants in a little bit of limbo ...”



## **The application process**

Local authority officers

5.30 Focus group officers and call for evidence respondents suggested several deterrents and barriers for applicants. These included:

- the complex application process, which means many applicants are lost to the scheme
- the ‘unrealistic cap’ to a maximum grant sum of £25,000, considering rising contractor and labour costs and general economic changes. This makes it difficult for applicants to find appropriate contractors
- a lack of contractors available to do the work, meaning applicants are often reticent to commit at all or alternatively have contractors that they must put on hold until they get approval, which “takes eternity”
- costings from RCTCBC being lower than those estimated by local authorities and contractors, leading to a shortfall which the applicant must pay (often further complicated by applicants failing to understand this).
- a desire from applicants to complete the works on a more “DIY basis without receipts and oversight.”

5.31 In terms of the application process itself, there was a definite sense among local authority officers in the focus groups and call for evidence responses that a lack of set time limits leads to lengthy applications and unnecessary works. To highlight this, focus group participants drew attention to selected applications being ‘live’ for extended periods of time, with some still in circulation from 2023.

“We just haven't got the resources to keep on going and then watch an application sit there... since May 2023, still considered to be a live application ... I had an approval last week, which was a survey I did back in June '23... We can't plan our resources like that. We need to be more efficient with the scheme.”

5.32 A few call for evidence respondents suggested that this causes applicants to withdraw from the process early due to the burden of making mortgage payments on an empty property, while also paying mortgage payments or rent on a current residence.

5.33 Focus group participants also highlighted the amount of unproductive work that was felt to occur, with some estimating that approximately 50% of surveys can be abortive, because of lengthy processes and applicant drop out<sup>14</sup>.

5.34 “There's so much abortive work here. It's a lot of work from a survey function, to go to survey, to measure, to cost, to produce a schedule of works. And then months and months and months pass, and nothing happens for that project. So, it has been a little bit frustrating that we haven't got that element of control. When asked what would encourage more applications and make applications more likely to be successful, local authority focus group participants suggested:

- being more lenient around eligibility
- redefining what ‘empty and unfurnished’ means in terms of eligibility
- being more lenient on unfurnished, with local technical officers being able to give better guidance around this
- procuring a regional list of approved agents to run the scheme on behalf of applicants (although it was not considered possible for local authorities to manage this in-house).

“Something we found that worked was the ability to include agent’s fees on top of the grant so that you've got actual professionals who are administering the grants on behalf of applicants.”

5.35 In the call for evidence responses, several respondents felt that separate administration processes for each local authority would reduce the challenges applicants are currently facing under one centralised process. Other suggested changes and solutions included:

- increasing the approval period from nine to twelve months to ensure enough time for contractor availability
- quicker application approval processes to avoid financial stress for applicants
- providing applicants the opportunity to apply for an interest-free loan to cover any funding shortfalls
- council assistance for applicants struggling with documentation.
- council assistance for applicants seeking quotes for works

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that actual figures may be different as this is the perception of the participant and not linked to any official data.

- allowing applicants to find their own competitively priced quotes for works.

#### RCTCBC officers

- 5.36 RCTCBC officers were keen to note that the application process is quick, easy and bilingual for those who need it and that they provide additional support to complete the relevant information if required.

“We did have... a lot of practice with the Valleys Taskforce Empty Property Scheme. We used a similar online process and paper-based process. We have tweaked it where we thought, ‘Do we need to ask that question?’ Is it required to make it as quick, concise and as succinct as possible, just to get in the main detail.”

- 5.37 In general, officers felt that most applications are successful and proceed without incident, especially where applicants understand the criteria and adhere to the guidance given.

“We have lots of successful grants that have no issues. People understand the terms, the conditions, they follow the guidance we've offered, and it goes smoothly.”

- 5.38 Indeed, according to officers, applicant understanding is crucial to successful applications: where understanding of grant eligibility and the process is good, the route to a successful grant application is more straightforward. To facilitate this, great effort has been made by administrators to make sure that the process is as simple and easy to understand as possible.

“From my perspective, it's ensuring that the applicant reads the information, the letters, the terms and conditions. We tried not to send reams and reams of paper. We tried to simplify it and make the language easy to read as well.”

- 5.39 This, it was felt, aids understanding, avoiding the issue of applicants starting works prior to their grants being approved and subsequently finding themselves in a difficult financial situation, with some needing to access loans to complete renovations.

“It's important for the applicants to understand it and read the terms of the grant and not start work until the grant's been approved. I think when people are moving into an empty home or looking to purchase, they're very excited and they want to start work straight away.”

5.40 It was also felt that well-developed communication skills, coupled with the detailed knowledge of administration staff and those at local authorities, aids the application process and allows for any pitfalls to be identified early and dealt with accordingly.

“Staff that are dealing with these clients, both admin and surveyors, obviously they're experienced and they're passing this on. They've come across issues before and obviously they tried to reiterate those and deal with them before it becomes a problem.”

5.41 Despite this, officers stated that there are still applicants that expect a higher level of supervision that they, as administrators of the scheme, cannot give.

“It's reiterated a number of times but unfortunately you do occasionally get the clients who expect us to project manage. So then if they've got disputes on site, they want for us to liaise immediately on the disputes. But we try to step back and advise only.”

5.42 The letter detailing the schedule of works was described as a difficult point in the application process. Feedback suggests that applicants can get overwhelmed with the level of detail this must contain; that is, an itemised, fully costed schedule of works to take to contactors for comparable pricings. In addition, the letter's covering page also details a timeline of when certain things need to be done, which can be off-putting and confusing for applicants.

“Alongside that goes out a covering letter, again very detailed, detailing what you need to do and where to contact if you need any help. The number of times the team, the administration office, get responses back, stating ‘Sorry what do I need to do?’

5.43 Officers noted that this stage of the process is complicated by a time limit. From issue of the letter, applicants have 28 days to returning the requested information. This can often cause concern, but officers emphasise that where possible they will try to help applicants experiencing difficulties adhering to this time frame by extending this period (within reason).

“We constantly iterate it's time limited funding; we want to support you to be able to access the grant, but we can't hold it indefinitely with no progress. It's not in our interest; it's not in your interests.”

5.44 Officers suggested that for these reasons, this initial stage is where they experience most dropouts. Moreover, there is often a mismatch between what applicants thought they could use their grant for and what must be done according to official regulations.

“People often apply with an expectation of what they want done to the house. Sometimes we don't provide exactly what they want, they may have an avocado bathroom suite but if it's functioning then obviously that suite stands. We're not going to replace something just because they don't like the colour!”

5.45 Officers certainly agreed that there is delicate balance between ensuring properties meet regulations and building standards and managing the expectations of applicants. Often, safety measures mean that larger portions of the grant must be used to make a property safe and habitable, which can be in opposition to how an applicant envisaged using it. Managing expectations was described as a challenge and officers cited this as the point at which applicants often decide that they would rather proceed without the grant and withdraw from the scheme.

“Some people only apply for certain items but then the survey goes in and identifies damp, or some dry rot and the schedule escalates because of what we got to do, the client then says, ‘Well, I didn't expect that much work to be done to the property. I only wanted a roof and a bit of rendering.’”

5.46 In addition, officers reiterated that they are constantly challenged by the fact that many applicants cannot understand the financial disparity between what needs to be done to make a house safe and habitable in comparison to the value of the grant.

“The challenge that we get is that we are looking at the £70K, to make sure that that property is safe and habitable and the hazards are being removed. And I think people struggle with that. Like, ‘Why should I have to do that volume of work or do it within your timescales when you're only going to pay out 25K?’”

5.47 Officers felt that there are multiple points in the process at which it is explained to applicants that it is “not possible to pick and choose,” what works are actually carried out. Officers were keen to point out that for example the structural integrity of the property would always be prioritised over the installation of the more aesthetic requests such as, “somebody getting their bifold doors.”

5.48 However, it was understood that as lay people they may not understand the terminology used.

“They get that communicated both verbally, face to face and with a letter explaining on site. They may be a non-technical layperson and perhaps cannot visualise the extent of the work. So, obviously people are not understanding, and that's sometimes where the schedules dramatically increase, but our work has to be done because I can't sign it off at the end if there is a hazard still remaining in the property and it makes it unsafe.”

5.49 That said, it was felt that these issues are responsible for a very small proportion of failures within the application process. Officers were keen to state that more applicants understand the process and go on to have successful grant applications, than do not.

5.50 Indeed, the most frequent reason for applications not being valid is related to properties not being registered as officially empty for 12 months, as discussed previously. It was also highlighted that whilst applicants may withdraw from the scheme, in some instances the homeowner will continue their property renovations without the grant. This is still a positive outcome in terms of bringing empty properties back into use.

### **Other implementation issues**

Local authority officers

5.51 Call for evidence respondents highlighted several financial challenges, including securing the initial local authority contribution required for Cabinet approval. Changing financial situations for local authorities could, it was said, exacerbate this issue. Furthermore, the monitoring of VAT and non-VAT contractors within an application and ensuring alterations are made when contractors change during the process has been complex for staff, as it becomes more of an accounts/finance task.

RCTCBC officers

The scheme's annualised budgets were considered a barrier to implementation. Previously, budgets for the Valleys Taskforce Empty Property Scheme were had not allocated in this manner; and whilst RCTCBC administrators, have the relevant experience, it is not the preferred model to use for the scheme because of grant processes and timescales. It was also necessary to undergo a budget re-profile: the

fund was originally split over two years (£25 million in 2023 to 2024, and £25 million in 2024 to 2025), but to acknowledge completion timescales, a reprofiling exercise saw £19 million moved from the 2023 to 2024 budget to 2025 to 2026, with the last point at which applications can be accepted to the scheme now being 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 (TBC) . Officers considered it impossible to spend the money allocated in one year, especially since it is expected that applicants will take 12 to 15 months to spend their grants.

“I think on reflection, having an annual allocation is not the preferred way. Yes, you can overcome it but it's more work for everyone. It's more difficult to manage, you need extra resources, more reports going to your cabinet... and then to get approval.”

- 5.52 Concern was also expressed around the extent to which total scheme spend and completed applications are considered indicators of success. Officers highlighted that if, over a period of a year, only completed applications are considered, low numbers could be considered of limited value. However, if ‘commitment’, (i.e., the numbers of grants being processed), was also to be considered, numbers would be far higher.

### **Support and guidance for applicants**

Local authority officers

- 5.53 Several focus group participants had no knowledge of any information or guidance available to applicants.

“In all honesty we have no idea... It's been made very clear to us that RCT deal with the applicants. It is their administration, the grant, we are there specifically in a surveyor capacity only.”

- 5.54 Others mentioned the RCTCBC webpage as the main point of reference, in particular the video available on the site. One authority gives a brief synopsis of information when receiving enquiries around the scheme, before signposting people to the RCTCBC webpages.

“We don’t have the information; we just do a brief synopsis when we get a general enquiry and link the website”

- 5.55 Specifically, it was said that clarity over the applications process and understanding the approval letters was thought to be lacking. While it was acknowledged that the

approval letter stipulates the detail, local authority officers stated that it is not always clear what financial responsibility applicants have, and the level of contribution they must make.

RCTCBC officers

- 5.56 When asked about the support and guidance provided to applicants, officers cited the RCTCBC webpage, which includes written details and a video to support applicants through the process. Step-by-step guidance is given, clearly outlining the milestones that need to be met to achieve a successful application, including council tax checks, a survey for eligibility, and mortgage consent. Support also includes a call-line, where one-to-one help can be offered to aid applications.
- 5.57 When reflecting on whether sufficient support is given, RCTCBC officers said that the video is an addition to previous support, added in response to the large numbers of calls received during the Valley's Taskforce Empty Property Scheme. The video has apparently reduced phone enquiries. Officers struggled to see what they could add at this point to make things easier for applicants, especially given their view that the application form (bilingual online and paper versions) is straightforward.

"I think from my perspective, where we are now... I couldn't see what else we could do. Having that over the phone support, having that online video, and the fact that it is a very simple online process."

### **Promotion of the scheme**

Local authority officers

- 5.58 Promotion of the scheme at local levels is confined in the most part to web pages detailing information, although some call for evidence respondents also referenced council tax literature, phone calls to empty property owners, leaflets, and social media; and one call for evidence respondent stated that within their authority, promotional activities are carried out by a "dedicated empty homes team."
- 5.59 A further couple of call for evidence respondents felt there could be more effective promotion of the scheme in each local authority, targeting empty homes and ensuring constant monitoring of homes' status across local authority areas. They also felt that promotional material could be improved by setting out the scheme's eligibility criteria and instructions on how to apply.



5.60 Officers had little knowledge about national promotions, which was considered strange in light of the success of other schemes following promotional campaigns.

“Considering the promotion that's gone into Leasing Scheme Wales. You can't avoid Leasing Scheme Wales promotion, but the National Empty Homes Grant, it's never come up on my Facebook or anything.”

5.61 However, one participant expressed concerns regarding more dynamic promotion of the scheme, stating that their authority would not be able to cope with more applications than they have at present.

“I would be a bit concerned if it was promoted more due to the... system, we couldn't perhaps cope if there's a flood of applicants ...”

RCTCBC officers

5.62 As a result of the Valleys Taskforce Empty Property Grant Scheme, RCTCBC has been delivering a form of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme as a team since 2017. Building on this success, the team continues to use multiple forms of promoting the scheme, including social media, council tax billing letters, empty property packs, and features in local authority annual newsletters.

5.63 However, it was felt that due to the success of the scheme during its pilot years, promotion on a national level was not as necessary as it has been for other, similar schemes.

“For the national scheme... just building on success over the years, we probably haven't had to do as much targeted promotion... because it has just been a continuous steady stream of applications coming in and we are now over and above our original allocation allocated to us by the Welsh Government, which again just reinforces that demand and that interest in the area.”

5.64 At the launch of the scheme all local authorities were encouraged by the Welsh Government to promote the scheme within their own authority. It was acknowledged that each authority will have differing needs and therefore will choose to use different means of promotion.

“... every local authority is very different. So, I think it does help the local authorities promote the scheme themselves.”

5.65 However, RCTCBC officers were mindful that for some authorities with capacity and resource limitations, promotion is not required to the same extent, if at all. Indeed, it

was acknowledged that some local authorities have concerns around being inundated with applications, creating even lengthier processing timescales.

“If they've only got maybe a handful of surveyors, they don't want to have too much coming in because people were waiting for a long time to have their homes surveyed, which isn't great either for time scales for their schemes.”

- 5.66 Officers suggested that promotion should be kept to a minimum to ensure that these authorities have both the capacity and resources to carry out a quality application process. It was thus felt that having ownership of promotion is very important and is working well for most authorities.

“... That local authorities have a bit of ownership around how the promotion is being done is a real positive in order for them to manage the scheme based on the capacity and resources they have.”

- 5.67 Officers also discussed the effectiveness of promotion, suggesting that for those authorities that are meeting or nearing their allocation, promotion measures had been successful. However, for those authorities where figures are lower, having the autonomy to make their own decisions around promotion allows them to manage a plan locally to drive up applications. Officers also felt that sharing good practice at regular operational meetings has meant authorities are aware of the numerous successful promotion methods others have used.

“It's about sharing good practice about how you promote the scheme with local authorities. So, obviously [explaining], ‘This is what we do in RCT’ and other local authorities may decide to replicate or think of their own ...”

- 5.68 Overall, it was felt that as many of the authorities participating in the scheme are at 80% of their capacity, promotion is working well.

“... The most recent data [from] the 17 local authorities, around 13 [are] at 80% capacity. So, we're not seeing lot of local authorities that aren't getting the applications through. It's telling us the promotion has been working. And there's been some great stuff that's been done. So, I don't see the promotion of the scheme as an issue or a challenge... for any local authorities.”

## **Other specific barriers and enablers**

### **Local authority officers**

- 5.69 When considering barriers to applications, one local authority officer referred to the difficulties one community-led housing organisation is having difficulties in demonstrating it meets the requirements for the scheme and have experienced issues with Land Registry delays.

“They are really struggling to be able to demonstrate to RCT that their constitution meets the need and that's been going ongoing for at least 18 months and not gaining any further sort of progression. It's been a lot of mediation.”

- 5.70 Another officer referred to the number of applications being received for very large properties in what are considered affluent areas. There is concern that these may be simply for the property owners to ‘get up the property ladder,’ and not in alignment with the scheme’s objectives.
- 5.71 Some authorities felt that that the scheme discriminates against contractors that are VAT registered, suggesting they are unable to provide competitive quotes against non-VAT registered contractors within the parameters of the £25,000 limit. Levelling the playing field was suggested, especially since those on the VAT register tend to be larger, more experienced contractors, and so may be more able to complete works in a timelier fashion.

### **RCTCBC officers**

- 5.72 As scheme administrators, RCTCBC officers felt that one of the scheme’s particular merits is that it is a non-means tested, non-repayable grant. It was suggested that in the current economic climate, and in an economy where the number of government grants offered is diminishing, this would be a huge positive for many applicants.

“The fact that this is a grant that you do not pay back and the only criteria really is that the property has to be vacant and empty. There's no other means testing. Most grants are means tested. They look at how much you've got in your bank; how much you earn. This doesn't.”

- 5.73 It was also said that this is one of the easier to access grant schemes currently available in Wales, with significant benefits for those who choose to access it.

“We offer a number of grants, and this is by far the simplest with the least amount of criteria and you don't pay back unless you decide to sell your property within the first five years which most people don't. So, I think that it is a good enabler.”

- 5.74 In terms of specific barriers, RCTCBC officers discussed Land Registry delays. Historically, applicants did not have to be the legal owner of the home before they applied to the scheme. However, it is now mandatory that applicants own the property (or be in the process of purchasing it) at the time of application for the scheme. However, since Covid-19, housing markets have boomed and demand on the Land Registry has increased. Despite reduced delays in more recent years, there are still hold-ups in the time taken to get deeds changed. Officers felt that this acts as a substantial barrier to applicants accessing the scheme; and hinders them as administrators in approving applications.

“... We are now five years on from the peak in 2020. Those timescales have improved but the general timescale of the title deeds being updated is significant and that is having a direct knock-on effect to applicants under the grant.”

- 5.75 To mitigate this and reduce frustration for applicants, officers felt that people should be required to have evidence of ownership on title deeds prior to starting the application process.

### **Moving forward**

#### **Local authorities**

- 5.76 Despite the issues raised above, it was generally felt that the scheme should be retained as it is “a really useful tool for us to use to get empty [properties] back into use.” Indeed, local authority officers were keen to state that despite some administrative frustrations (as reported above), they recognised the value of the scheme, and the role played by RCTCBC in administering it.

“I think the scheme is great and I think it's got so much potential. It's just little tweaks that are needed...”

- 5.77 One call for evidence respondent felt that using a team of local authorities to promote and assist applicants has been an “invaluable” enabler to people accessing the scheme. This has allowed local authorities to provide as many grants as possible.

- 5.78 Another call for evidence respondent highlighted the Energy Crisis Grant in Caerphilly County Borough Council as an “easy to apply and streamlined process” that could help inform the Empty Homes Grant Scheme process going forward.

RCTCBC respondents

- 5.79 The scheme’s delivery model was cited as a positive of the scheme and something RCTCBC officers are keen to maintain going forward. Communication between the administrative team, local authorities, and applicants is felt to work well generally, something the administrative team is particularly proud of.

“Our communication, our partnership working, the data reporting, it's working well. The fact that we've got an experienced team to deliver and implement, and we're seeing positive outcomes. We are getting to see some people living in the homes that were causing lots of issues before, when they were empty.”

- 5.80 In terms of potential changes, one of the main issues raised by RCTCBC officers was around eligibility criteria. While they did not envisage the actual criteria changing, officers acknowledged feedback from local authorities that suggests applicants feel RCTCBC officers are being unhelpful when they cannot progress a grant because of, for example, council tax issues. However, officers noted that council tax does not fall within their jurisdiction and consequently they cannot advise on it. More joined-up working between the administrative team and other departments (like housing and council tax teams) was thus desired.

- 5.81 RCTCBC officers also suggested increasing the overall sum of the grant to reflect the increasing costs of building works, materials and contractor costs in the current economic climate in the post-pandemic period.

“Would there be any benefit to increasing? Does that (£25,000) reflect the current picture still, with material costs, contracted costs? That would be something we would look to really put forward as a recommendation.”

- 5.82 Overall, it was felt that the scheme has adapted and matured to a point where it has developed into an integrated partnership that is working well and is, in the main, enabling successful grant applications.

“I don't think personally we would change the process; we're in a really good position now. I think it seems to be working well. Yes, there's some tweaks

maybe or recommendations we can make... but the actual process I would say it seems to be working well, and the feedback is positive that we receive.”

- 5.83 Finally, respondents acknowledged the problem of empty properties within individual authorities and across Wales as a whole; as well as growing issues like a lack of affordable housing and large numbers of people residing in temporary accommodation. Officers urged the continuance of the scheme to continue in some form, as it was thought to play a crucial part in addressing some of these issues.

“This is one of the schemes that can, in theory, help address these [problems]. So, it's extremely positive. It does take time to see the outcomes from the grant process itself to the work being done to the property to when the person can move in, but it needs to continue... because the issue isn't going away.”

## **6. Qualitative Evaluation Findings - Impacts of the scheme**

### **Overview**

- 6.1 This section of the report will consider the views and opinions of the local authorities that participate in the Empty Home Grant Scheme on the impact and effect of the scheme in bringing empty houses back into use.

### **Main findings**

#### **Meeting the Scheme's main objectives**

- 6.2 Local authority officers felt that the objective of bringing empty properties back into use is being achieved and that this has contributed positively to local authority performance indicator figures. For example, many of the authorities participating in the scheme are at 80% of their funding capacity. It was felt the scheme has generally been advantageous to local authorities as a 'useful tool' that can be offered to residents to get their prospective homes back into use.

"It has been pretty beneficial, I think, to local authorities to have been offered this scheme, just in terms of the support available as a whole."

- 6.3 However, while officers acknowledged the successes of the scheme in getting empty homes back into use, some were keen to highlight that it has not always reached the market sector the scheme was designed to support.

"So, we haven't, for some reason or another, quite reached the target audience that we initially thought that this [scheme] would reach."

- 6.4 Local authority officers suggested that some 'savvy' applicants are taking advantage of the scheme rather than those who actually need the grant. They include people purchasing or owning high value properties; and those who already own a property, rather than those trying to renovate their family home.

"We've experienced a lot of people purchasing their properties, jumping on the scheme, applying for the scheme whilst it hasn't really been targeted for them for one reason [or another]."

- 6.5 One participant also suggested that some properties in their area that had been accepted for the scheme would have ended up back in use regardless of the grant. Consequently, they felt that inequalities in access exist and translate into missed opportunities for certain groups of applicants.

“We've seen a lot of higher value properties and perhaps somebody that already owns a property [applying]. So, we're perhaps missing out on some of those that do really need it, in favour of others... taking advantage of the fact that it's available.”

- 6.6 Other officers agreed with this, feeling that it leads to certain property buyer demographics being disadvantaged in terms of accessing the scheme. Moreover, it was said that certain groups of buyers - first time buyers for example - do not have easy access to the funds necessary to contribute to the scheme<sup>15</sup>.

“It's the younger generation, the first-time buyers, they don't maybe have that capital behind them like others that may have other properties... This puts them at a disadvantage in terms of the contribution and the match funding.”

- 6.7 Local authority officers had envisaged that known, longer-term, more problematic empty properties would have been the prime properties eligible for the scheme. However, they were frustrated that this has not been the case in some areas. Eligibility issues were considered the main cause of this, with some of these ‘target’ properties remaining minimally furnished and therefore not being eligible for the 12-months empty criteria.

“That was one of the frustrations from our point of view, because we are pushing and targeting these people. We're contacting them saying, ‘You have to do something with this property.’ However, we weren't able to access the grant for that purpose. If we're actively pursuing that property because it's problematic, because it's causing nuisance etcetera, we should be able to signpost them to the scheme.”

- 6.8 Despite the issues above, however, concerns were expressed over the prospective loss of the scheme and other accompanying support in future. Currently, support for residents is wide-ranging, with several alternative ways to access funds to renovate properties and get homes back into use. These include schemes like the Houses into Homes and Empty Property Loan Schemes, which provide interest-free loans (repayable over a maximum of five years) to fund renovations and/or conversions of empty properties.

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<sup>15</sup> In Wales, the National Empty Homes Grant Scheme requires homeowners - or prospective homeowners - to make a mandatory contribution of 15% toward the total cost of eligible works, up to a maximum of £3,750.



"I don't think we've ever seen so many schemes. But after this scheme [ends], of course, it will significantly reduce, which is a bit concerning and that I think will have an effect in a few years' time in terms of the support available for buyers."

- 6.9 Local authority officers stated that with the loss of the scheme and others like it, the drive to get empty properties back into use would be lost. Others felt that as the only grant scheme available for owner occupiers, its loss as a tool for getting empty properties back into use would be considerable.

"... This scheme [acts] as a momentum for empty properties; it's really important to getting that momentum."

"This is the only scheme available for owner occupiers now, so we're quite keen to have it continued, because it does sort of fill that gap."

- 6.10 Conversely, one participant had concerns about the scheme being extended in the context of local government finances and the fact that agreed match funding contributions are needed from local authorities. It was felt that in the current economic climate, some local authorities would find this a challenging requirement to fulfil.

"I think my concern is even if the scheme is extended, the pressures in local government at the moment to get [the] contribution would be a very, very difficult challenge and we've already been thinking if we had to find money towards a scheme like this, it's really difficult because of the current financial implications."

### **Effectiveness of scheme - enablers**

- 6.11 On being asked about how successful the scheme has been in their area, some local authority officers described the positive impact the financial help has had on homeowners, especially first-time buyers.

"For the owners it's benefited them greatly to mitigate the costs and to help with the renovation costs, so to them individually it's been very welcomed ... It's also helped the first-time buyers as well."

- 6.12 One participant described how within their locality the grant had been used positively to aid an applicant in very difficult family and financial circumstances. On reaching out to the local authority for help, officers were able to signpost this individual to the Empty Homes Grant. This was considered a positive example of how the scheme has been effective in achieving its aims.

“That is exactly the kind of person that we want to help. They wouldn't have been able to do anything. They are on a low income, on universal credit and [with] a very young baby. They wanted the property to be their permanent home. They're the people that make me happy that we can offer this scheme [to].”

- 6.13 Other officers highlighted positive benefits to communities as a result of previously empty properties being brought back into use. Some of the more long-term and problematic empty properties that have been improved through the scheme are no longer the ‘urban blight’ they once were. This was thought to have a knock-on effect on local communities, encouraging other residents to improve their own homes in line with the renovated properties, and fostering a sense of local pride as a result.

“I think there's definitely an improvement to the street scenes and... what we found as well is that neighbours see the impact and spread the word ... to get others involved.”

- 6.14 While this visual impact was acknowledged in some areas, officers felt it tended to occur in those authorities that had run the scheme for longer, and where applications had run the full course to property completion.

“We have probably had more of an impact because we've been running it for [longer] than some of the others... and it'll take a while now for the ones in this batch to make an impact.”

- 6.15 Officers also stated this was dependent on the area in which properties are located, with those in the more densely populated areas having a more prominent visual impact than those in the more rural areas.

“Our housing profile is very different, and a lot of our properties are rural, detached properties away from the streets. We've only got a few really... and they're not terribly visible because you don't drive past them on a daily basis and notice the change.”

### **Effectiveness of scheme – barriers**

- 6.16 Barriers to effectiveness described by officers included small team size, lack of staff, and even lone Empty Homes officers attempting to cover all aspects of the scheme. One officer reported needing to take on the work themselves that they felt should have been the responsibility of specific roles.

6.17 Officers were also asked what could be done to add to the existing success of the scheme in their locality. Promotion by the Welsh Government was cited as something that would help going forward. While it was acknowledged that local authorities agreed to do their own promotion of the scheme at its initiation in 2023, other schemes were said to receive more national recognition and promotion than the Empty Homes Grant Scheme.

“I know since it was launched the Welsh Government refers to it with a list of local authorities, but I think there could be a bit more on social media, more of a campaign from Welsh Government needed, to be continually publishing [information].”

6.18 There was a feeling that Welsh Government promotion has lost momentum since the launch of the scheme, and while each local authority implements different methods of promotion such as letters, flyers and webpages, they do not have the budget for large-scale advertising at a local level.

6.19 A lack of specific expertise (such as surveyors) within teams was also considered a barrier. This is often mitigated through outsourcing this task, but this is not without problems. Authorities that take this route have found that a lack of understanding of the intricacies of the scheme means external surveyors need a great deal of instruction as to how to conduct the relevant work, compromising efficiency.

“We found that the companies were coming back all the time with questions, not really understanding the scheme, so there was a lot of back and forth in dealing with all those responses while the surveyors got to understand the scheme.”

6.20 One participant said that opening and closing the case schedule can be problematic, as they are not always aware this has happened. This means that on directing the applicant to the relevant website, they have found that the system has been closed, and they were unable to apply. As a result, officers felt frustrated that the work they had done to encourage applicants was lost to them.

“So, we were sending people to the website not knowing that our system was closed, so then you lose [the applicant]. It's hard to engage with people in the first place so when you do things like that they just stop engaging.”

6.21 A suggested solution was to introduce a centrally managed waiting list, so that as an authority they are aware of those who may be interested in applying in future.

“In hindsight I think it would have been quite good to get a waiting list, so we have something on there saying currently it's at capacity, however, please log your interest.”

- 6.22 Some officers described a disjoint in communication between themselves and the administrators, RCTCBC, regarding enquiries received from potential applicants. They suggested that the centralised administration is preventing some individuals from applying, not only for this scheme but also for other potential opportunities.

“Another thing that's been quite frustrating is we don't get the enquiries, so the ones that have made enquiries [to RCTCBC] and don't come through [as applicants], we don't get any information about them. So, it would be beneficial because we could contact those people and see if there's anything else we can offer them.”

- 6.23 Indeed, once it is determined that an applicant is ineligible, there is currently no mechanism in place for RCTCBC to refer them to the appropriate local authorities where support with applications or consideration for alternative schemes could be given. This was considered a missed opportunity for applicants and local authorities alike. Those that had been part of the Valleys Taskforce Property Scheme stated that they were able to do this in the past, but that it is no longer an option.

“We have got liaison officers that would have been able to support these people if we were made aware of them and also, we could have given loans to people that couldn't meet their contribution. But they would have to come and talk to us. Then we could look at the holistic approach to bring that property back into use.”

- 6.24 Another participant suggested the adoption of something like the “Manage Homes and Places” portal that is currently available on the Welsh Government website for those looking for affordable homes in Wales. It was felt that this all-Wales tool could providing a basis for a comprehensive and time-saving option for both applicants and local authorities<sup>16</sup>.

“Why can't we have something similar for the national Empty Homes Grant whereby we can literally have a customer click on a government website, (whether that's local authority or national) and click in their circumstances and they would find which benefits or entitlements they would be able to qualify for.”

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<sup>16</sup> Some local authorities already operate local portals for applicants.

- 6.25 Officers highlighted the need for increased clarity around eligibility criteria definitions, of 'empty and unfurnished' in particular. They noted that varied understanding across local authorities means some properties - such as those with minimal furnishings left after an owner's death - are excluded from the scheme due to overly strict interpretations. Officers argued that these properties, often in poor condition, are those most in need of support to renovate.
- "Where the owner has deceased and where the furniture doesn't necessarily get removed straight away... often these properties are the ones in greatest need of the support. So, yes, some items of furniture might still be sitting there but the property is not fit for habitation."
- 6.26 It is these cases that prompted officers to call for increased clarity and to suggest that a degree of leniency and discretion on the part of surveyors be permitted. It was hoped that this would ensure properties that have previously been passed over come back into use.
- 6.27 Officers debated the possibility of only allowing lower council tax band properties to be eligible for the grant. Those that made this suggestion felt it would be a way of preventing applicants with high value properties taking advantage of the scheme at the expense of those who need it.
- "In order to help people that actually need the help, if it was aimed at those lower value properties, I think we would get more success."
- 6.28 However, others disagreed, referring to larger former council properties within higher council tax bands as potentially being able to benefit for the scheme, particularly as they are often in a state of disrepair when acquired. Officers felt that access to the scheme would encourage those that purchase such properties to renovate and live in them.
- "[What] we find is some of the council houses, the big ones, are in quite poor repair as they've not been maintained. We don't want to discourage [owners] from going and living in those big properties, as they pay more council tax and that's good for the authority."
- 6.29 One focus group participant highlighted the absence of affordability checks in the current application process, whether conducted by local authorities or RCTCBC. They expressed concern that applicants without sufficient financial resources are at a higher risk of failing to complete the project within the allowed nine-month

timeframe; and suggested that implementing such checks could help reduce this risk by ensuring that grant recipients are financially capable of meeting the scheme's terms and conditions.

“As a part of the application, there's no affordability checks, so we are unaware as the council if they have that contribution behind them, which of course opens up to risk of non-completion.”

- 6.30 Conversely, those applicants with sufficient capital to complete the works are often not in such need of the grant. This, officers felt, brings into question whether the right market sectors are being awarded funds from the scheme. In this respect, officers stressed the responsibility they have in allocating public funds through the scheme.

“... You also have to factor in the fact that if people do have the capital behind them, are they in need of a grant? This is public money, so we have the responsibility to make the best use of it in terms of targeting the long-term empty properties.”

- 6.31 The terms and conditions of the scheme stipulate that all works must be completed within a 9-month period of receiving grant approval. Officers suggested that increasingly applicants cannot meet this requirement. Rising costs and difficulties securing an affordable trades company in the time allotted is problematic for applicants and it was therefore suggested that a 12-month period should be set as standard, in the hope that repeated requests for extensions can be avoided.

“We tend to find that trades can be at a premium and we have on most schemes gone over that nine-month to the point where we've had to offer the full 12-month extension. So, I do question whether or not the actual terms should be, as standard, a minimum 12-months.”

### **Unintended consequences of the scheme**

- 6.32 Payment of the council tax long-term empty home premium was identified by officers as an unintended consequence of the scheme that is problematic for some applicants. Lengthy time periods from grant application to award can mean applicants are paying this premium simply because they are awaiting approval. Officers described applicants suggesting they would have to use their grant to supplement these premium payments, instead of for the works they had initially planned.

“It’s a long process but we seem to have been caught in the crossfire with quite a few appealing empty homes premiums... They’re saying the reason they’re paying the premium is because of delays with the empty homes grants”

“The premium has been an issue for a lot of the applicants. I do get told a lot, ‘You give us money then you take it away,’ and they basically say they’re going to use the money to pay part of the premium, although it’s for their works.”

- 6.33 Similarly, officers discussed the issue of second homes, particularly in relation to council tax status. When a property is registered as a second home, it is subject to a council tax premium; and on being sold, if the second home status is not amended with the land registry, the new owners can be charged this premium even if it is not their second home. Some have, as a result, found this has hindered their scheme application. However, in some cases, after further investigation, it has been proven that the new owners are legitimately accessing the scheme and time elapses whilst the property is re-registered correctly. Officers felt that clearer definitions of second homes and long-term empties are needed to ensure speedier approvals and a clearer pathway to competed properties.

“There has to be a clearer definition just in general in terms of council tax, what is classed as a second home and what is an empty long-term empty property, it’s a bit of grey area for empty homes officers [and] as empty homes officers we can’t deal with second homes.”

### **Outcomes of the scheme**

- 6.34 The scheme was largely supported as a positive experience for local authorities and the applicants that receive monies through it. It was also acknowledged by officers as a ‘useful tool’ in getting empty properties back into use.
- 6.35 Officers were keen to praise RCTCBC for their administration of the scheme, stating that overall, as a team, they are consistent, helpful and responsive, especially considering the large number of authorities they deal with. It was said that, on the whole, management of the scheme is very good, with only minor ‘tweaks’ needed to ensure the scheme runs as smoothly as possible going forward. These have all been reported in this and the preceding chapter.

### **Moving forward**

- 6.36 As discussed previously, local authority officers expressed concern about the scheme ending in future, especially as it is the only one specifically aimed at owner

occupiers. Indeed, as part of the Welsh Government's range of schemes to improve housing in Wales, it was felt the Empty Homes Grant scheme has played a role in getting empty properties back into use and, as one participant stated:

"If this scheme ends, I do question what will become of those properties?"

- 6.37 Similarly, if empty properties are to be returned to use as homes, local authority officers were concerned that support is constantly being reduced for those wishing to do so, with the potential loss of other schemes like the Houses into Homes loan scheme in future.

"My concern is that we're engaging with empty properties, looking for things to offer to encourage [applicants], we've got the stick with enforcement but not the carrot. You've got to give them an opportunity and help them. Soon, if we haven't got many loans and we haven't got the grants, then the offers are a lot less, aren't they? Things are reducing; [there are] less opportunities to offer to people."

- 6.38 Indeed, one officer felt that it is only now, after two years of the scheme being in place, that they are familiar with it, have gained confidence, and have established themselves. It was suggested that if the scheme was to be ended, they would feel somewhat 'cheated.'

"Since this scheme originally came about, it's developed and now we've just started to get our legs where it comes to the structure and enforcement and offering people options. To have those mechanisms taken away feels sort of like we've been cheated a little bit."

- 6.39 In terms of important improvements, local authority officers again stressed the need to address the payment of empty property premiums by applicants awaiting approval to avoid them having to spend money they had put aside to renovate their property to pay these premiums. Applicants were said to find this counterproductive to applying for the grant in the first place.

"We've got increased premiums now across the board and people are saying that the money that they could be spent on the property, on the renovation, is now being spent on premiums... How do they renovate these properties when they're paying so much council tax every month and they're in a bit of a sticky situation really."



6.40 Some officers also felt that removing (or at least reducing) match funding requirements for local authorities in times of financial constraint would help, as having to provide this funding often limits the number of properties that can be supported by each local authority, and in turn how the scheme can be promoted. In particular, smaller councils struggle to offer even a small number of grants. Moreover, take-up of the scheme is often unpredictable, so committing to match funding in advance can be risky, especially if lower uptake means monies are unnecessarily tied up in the scheme. It was said that other schemes do not have this match funding requirement of local authorities.

“For us it's the match funding and that is going to be the same for a lot of local authorities as to whether they can participate again in the future. Most of the other schemes don't have that; yes, they have owner contributions but not the local authority contribution. I think it would be a barrier and that's why some local authorities haven't participated.”

6.41 Changes to match funding requirements could therefore be seen to make the scheme more effective, more accessible, and fairer across all local authorities in Wales.

6.42 Lastly, one focus group participant felt very strongly that despite these issues, the scheme has given them the opportunity to address empty properties in their locality in an inclusive manner, something they embrace wholeheartedly.

“From our perspective we've looked at this as a grant to make empty properties into homes and irrespective of their council tax banding, or their means, we've been taking it and treating it based on the fact that this grant is available as it stands, with the eligibility criteria, so economically it will benefit anybody in the local area. We've kept it broad so that any empty property being brought back into use is a benefit to us as a local authority.”

## **7. Conclusions**

### **Scheme administration**

- 7.1 The scheme's delivery model and communication between the administrative team, local authorities, and applicants were cited as positive aspects of implementation by RCTCBC officers, who reflected on the low level of complaints or issues raised to them as administrators.
- 7.2 This was not wholly reflected in the feedback from local authorities who, despite their overall positivity about the scheme, highlighted a lack of autonomy over applications in their individual localities, and not having all the relevant information available to them at all times. It was also suggested that centralised administration has led to a somewhat disjointed application process, and communication and information delays.
- 7.3 However, we would note that several officers considered RCTCBC acting as administrators to be both practical and for many authorities necessary, as they have neither the capacity nor the resources to run the scheme themselves. Moreover, officers generally praised RCTCBC for its administration of the scheme, stating that as a team they are consistent, helpful and responsive, especially considering the large number of authorities that they deal with.
- 7.4 Though feedback from participating applicants around the administration of the scheme was limited, a few suggested instances of poor communication and inconsistent administration between local authorities. Improvements in this respect would, it was felt, improve access to the scheme and ease the process of applying.

### **Promotion of the scheme**

- 7.5 The majority of respondents to the applicant survey disagreed that the scheme is well promoted. More participating applicants disagreed that the scheme is well promoted than agreed. It was suggested that it could be better promoted to potential applicants through estate agents, solicitors, and local councils; and general advertising on social and more traditional media.
- 7.6 Local authority officers had little knowledge about national promotions, and while they considered this unusual, considering the success of promotional campaigns for other schemes, RCTCBC officers explained that the success of the scheme during its pilot years meant that promotion on a national level was not as necessary as it

had been elsewhere. Moreover, at the launch of the scheme all local authorities were encouraged by the Welsh Government to promote the scheme within their own authority to account for their differing needs and resources. Local ownership of promotion was thus thought to be important by the administrators.

### **Eligibility criteria**

- 7.7 While most participating applicants considered it clear and easy to understand who is eligible to apply for the grant, some highlighted concerns about inconsistent and unclear eligibility rules, for example residency requirements, the duration for which a property has been empty, and what is meant by 'empty and unfurnished.'
- 7.8 Furthermore, over three-in-five applicants whose applications were unsuccessful said they did not fully understand the reasons why. As applicants are always given a reason, this suggests that explanations given are not always clear. Providing more thorough explanations of the eligibility requirements could help applicants fully understand the reasons their application wasn't approved.
- 7.9 This was echoed by the local authority officers, who called for tighter definitions of the scheme's eligibility criteria to avoid differing interpretations and inconsistent application of the 'rules.' RCTCBC officers also acknowledged misunderstandings around eligibility criteria, particularly the 'disconnect' between what homeowners understand the term 'empty' to mean, despite a definition being available on the RCTCBC webpage.
- 7.10 Meeting eligibility requirements was identified as a barrier by some participating applicants, albeit many more felt the eligibility requirements should stay the same than advocated widening them. The most common suggestions for change (offered by both applicants and local authority officers) were around the property needing to be registered for council tax or be completely 'empty and unfurnished' unfurnished.

### **The application process**

- 7.11 RCTCBC officers were strongly of the view that applicant understanding of the grant eligibility criteria and of the application process were crucial to successful applications. To facilitate this, they have made effort to ensure the process is as simple and easy to understand as possible and suggested that that more applicants understand the process and go on to have successful grant applications, than do not.

- 7.12 Local authority officers suggested several deterrents and barriers for applicants, including a lack of clarity around and the complexity of the application process; and the 'unrealistic cap' to a maximum grant sum of £25,000 (considering rising contactor and labour costs and general economic changes). RCTCBC officers and some participating applicants also suggested increasing the overall sum of the grant to reflect the increasing costs of building works, materials and contactor costs in the current economic climate in the post-pandemic period.
- 7.13 RCTCBC officers disagreed that the application process is complex, describing it as quick and easy; with additional support available if required via the RCTCBC webpage and a dedicated call-line. This was echoed by participating applicants, most of whom felt it was clear and easy to understand how to apply to the scheme. Moreover, most participating applicants who had accessed support or guidance from scheme administrators or their local authority had found it helpful, although others made suggestions for improvement around the proactive provision of support and guidance throughout the process, specifically around eligibility, timescales, and documentation. Flow charts, upfront lists of required documents, and application packs outlining stages of approval were recommended.
- 7.14 That said, RCTCBC officers did highlight the challenge of balancing the need for properties to meet building regulations and standards against applicants' expectations in some cases. This can lead to withdrawal from the scheme if the extent of required works is greater than anticipated.
- 7.15 Some participating applicants also raised issues with the applications process, including a lack of support and guidance on how to complete the application; lengthy, complicated and unclear application forms and processes; and a lack of information or documentation. Challenges were also noted in terms of obtaining the required quotations and paperwork within the specified timescales, particularly from the local authority surveyors.

### **Grant approval and completion of works**

- 7.16 Delays to grant approval were noted by many participating applicants. Such delays were not only stressful and frustrating for them in general terms, but also in relation to specific issues like payment of the council tax long-term empty premium. Local authority officers highlighted that lengthy time periods from grant application to

award can mean applicants are paying this premium simply because they are awaiting approval.

- 7.17 Local authority officers also echoed the point that the sometimes-lengthy approval process can be stressful for applicants. They said it impacts the success of applications and impacts contractors who can put on hold for long periods of time.
- 7.18 One of the main issues raised by local authority officers was the stipulation that all works must be completed within a nine-month period of receiving grant approval. This requirement was said to be increasingly difficult to meet due to rising costs and difficulties securing affordable contractors in the time allotted.
- 7.19 Many applicants also highlighted process delays that made it difficult to adhere to the nine-month requirement, most notably in relation to the time taken to find and/or appoint a contractor, for grant payments to be issued, and for information to be provided to scheme administrators following a survey.
- 7.20 Limitations to the scope of work permitted under the scheme (gas boilers are not included for example) were also highlighted by local authority officers and participating applicants. The latter also noted the timescales involved (i.e. that renovations take longer than they would without the scheme) and having less control over works progress as drawbacks; as well as financial pressures as a result of having to make upfront payments, discrepancies in cost estimates, and insufficient grant contributions for necessary work, leaving recipients to absorb extra expenses.

### **Meeting the scheme's main objectives**

- 7.21 The findings from the data review show that the percentage of long-term empty properties for which a valid application has been received varies by local authority. Rhondda Cynon Taf has received most, with valid applications made for 11% of properties. For many of the other participating local authorities, valid applications have been received for fewer than 5% of the long-term empty properties, suggesting that these areas could attract more valid applications.
- 7.22 In total, 582 properties were approved for the EHG between January 2023 and April 2025, with the total value of the grants amounting to £13.2 million (an average value of £22,500 per property). This means that 2.6% - or around 1 in 40 - of all current long-term empty homes in Wales will have been developed by the scheme, if all approved applications progress to completion. To date, 241 of the 582 approved

properties have reached the point of completion, receiving grants worth £5.4 million and resulting in around 1.1% of all long-term empty homes in Wales being brought back into use. This is 12.1% of the eventual 2000 home ambition for the grant scheme, achieved with 10.8% of the grant scheme's £50 million funding. It is important to note that the grant scheme was intended to help bring up to 2,000 empty homes back into use in Wales, and not to address the issue of empty homes by itself. The grant scheme exists within the context of wider efforts, and the Empty Homes Grant Scheme is just one of several interventions.

- 7.23 While the scheme has made some progress in bringing empty homes back into use, there is more that can be achieved. Assuming that the 11% estimated valid application rate demonstrated in Rhondda Cynon Taf is achievable across all local authorities, we could expect a maximum of 2,256 properties brought into circulation, requiring a total of £50 million investment (based on the average grant value). This would be compatible with the overall budget of the scheme but some of the barriers to delivery (discussed below) would need to be fully understood and addressed in order for this to be a realistic expectation.
- 7.24 Three-in-five applicants who have received grant approval said that the scheme has helped them to renovate a home, with some further emphasising that it has enabled them to afford the necessary work to bring a home back into occupation. Applicants also highlighted the scheme's positive impact in speeding up the process of bringing a home back into occupation and enabling renovations that would otherwise have taken years. However, those who had not had their application approved were significantly more likely to feel that the scheme had had no impact at all.
- 7.25 Local authority officers and grant administration officers agreed that the scheme is achieving its objective of bringing empty properties back into use, and that the scheme has been advantageous to both local authorities and residents (first-time buyers especially). They also highlighted community benefits in reducing the 'urban blight' associated with empty homes; and encouraging residents in neighbouring properties to improve their homes in line with renovated ones.
- 7.26 However, there was some feeling among local authority officers that 'savvy' applicants (such as those purchasing or owning high value properties, and those who already own a property, rather than trying to renovate their family home) are taking advantage of the scheme, sometimes at the expense of those who actually

need the grant. This translates into missed opportunities for certain groups of applicants.

- 7.27 Some specific barriers to effectiveness were raised by local authority officers, which included a lack of capacity within teams, a lack of support from senior management, and the current financial situation within local government in Wales as a whole.
- 7.28 The scheme's centralised administration was again highlighted by local authority officers as a potential barrier to effectiveness, as it may be preventing some individuals from applying not only for this scheme but also for other potential opportunities. Specifically, once it is determined that an applicant is ineligible, there is currently no mechanism in place for RCTCBC to refer them to the appropriate local authorities where support with applications or consideration for alternative schemes could be given.

### **Overall thoughts on the scheme**

- 7.29 Despite some administrative frustrations (outlined above) and some concerns about match funding it in times of economic constraint, local authority officers recognised the value of the scheme, and the role played by RCTCBC in administering it. Indeed, it was generally felt that the scheme should be retained as it is "a really useful tool for us to use to get empty [properties] back into use."
- 7.30 Indeed, for RCT officers, the scheme has adapted and matured to a point where it is an integrated partnership that is working well and is, in the main, enabling successful grant applications.
- 7.31 Moreover, applicants themselves showed general support for the scheme in the survey, with most greatly valuing its role in helping them bring a home back into use, which may not have otherwise been possible.
- 7.32 In light of this, concerns were expressed by local authority and RCTCBC officers that the scheme might be lost in future, and as the only grant scheme available to owner occupiers, its loss as a tool for getting empty properties back into use would be considerable.

## **8. Recommendations**

8.1 We make the following recommendations for the future of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme based on findings of this evaluation.

1. The scheme would benefit from being promoted more widely, both at local authority and national levels, especially amongst younger applicants and those who are new to home ownership. Estate agents could play a bigger part in promoting the scheme when selling eligible homes. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube could also be vital tools in marketing the scheme, highlighting real-life experiences of the process and final outcomes.
2. Eligibility requirements and guidance on all aspects of the process should be made clearer and easier to understand at the outset to avoid issues during the application process and to make the application less complicated in general. A checklist of all requirements including required documentation, and clear definitions, should be made available at the very start of the process. This could outline approval stages, specify mandatory documentation such as Land Registry ownership paperwork, and define important terminology, such as 'empty and unfurnished.'
3. Consideration should be given to modifications to the eligibility criteria to increase the attractiveness of the grant and to allow for a swifter application process and a shorter approval period. These could be achieved by:
  - offering broader eligibility criteria (see below)
  - more generous grants
  - and updated thresholds to reflect local housing pressures and living costs.
4. It should be considered whether there could be increased flexibility and less rigidity around eligibility requirements such as the need for properties to be completely unfurnished for the full duration of the required period, which contractors can be used to complete the required works, and any additional specific requirements such as proving a connection to the local authority area.
5. Consideration should also be given to whether the main aim of the scheme is solely to be used as a tool to bring empty homes in Wales back into use or



whether it also has a role to play in making properties more affordable. Where this balance between affordability and returning empty homes to use is required, changes to the eligibility criteria need to reflect this.

6. Employing dedicated staff, and a local point of contact, ideally with the option of in-person support would aid more timely and accessible support for applicants as well as improved communication between all parties. This could also help speed up the overall process with less time waiting for administrative tasks to be undertaken.
7. Ideally, the level, form and quality of support available should be consistent across all participating local authorities with systems in place to facilitate the sharing of best practice.
8. Administrators should also aim, as far as possible, to manage the expectations of applicants in terms of the timescales involved from the outset, and throughout the process, to allow for financial and practical planning.
9. Strengthening collaboration and communication networks between RCTCBC and local authorities to aid transparency and promote partnership and more joined-up working e.g. with local Council Tax Officers.

## **9. Annex 1 – Empty Homes Grant Scheme: Local Authority Topic Guide (Session 1)**

### **Introduction**

Introduction to interviewer and ORS.

The Welsh Government has commissioned ORS to undertake an evaluation of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme. The overall aim of the project is, to understand the implementation of the scheme and its effectiveness and consider possible improvements to the administration and outcomes of the scheme in the future.

As part of this research, we are talking to participating local authorities across Wales to understand how the scheme is being administered in different localities, its success in reducing the number of empty homes in Wales and to assess the barriers and enablers with regards to implementation, delivery, and accessibility.

We will be attending two of these sessions. In this first session we will discuss the process involved in implementing the Scheme, considering application procedures, and any challenges encountered in administration and implementation. Whilst in the following session in July, we will explore the impact of the Scheme since its implementation in terms of its outcomes and effectiveness in different localities.

This Focus Group should last around 90 minutes / this interview should take around 30-40 minutes depending on your answers and will cover:

- Your views on the application process for the Scheme, along with access to and support available to applicants
- Application success and failures
- Administrative and implementations challenges
- Your views regarding how the Scheme is promoted
- Any improvements or alternative approaches you would suggest

If it's ok with you, I'd like to record the focus group for the purpose of writing up only. The recording won't be shared with anyone else, and all feedback will be anonymised. We will not name you or use any direct quotes that could identify you in the report. Your contact details will never be released to any other parties and will only be used by ORS in connection with this research.

ORS will destroy any information which identifies you as an individual (including the recording) within three months of the end of the project. Any information you do provide will be processed by ORS to comply with the UK Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This is outlined in more detail in the privacy notice you should have received before this interview [*\*check they have received this and send again if not*].

Any questions before we begin?

*You have been sent a link for you to join a new meeting that we at ORS are hosting. This allows us to maintain confidentiality and record the meeting securely. Please join us, as your opinion on this scheme is highly valuable to this research.*

## SECTION 1: Introduction

Questions
1) Firstly, please briefly introduce yourself and let us know which local authority you are representing, what your role is, and how you are involved with the Scheme.

## SECTION 2: Applications - Successful/unsuccessful

*We will start by discussing the application process of the Scheme in your local area*

Questions
2) What is your role in the application process? a) What are your views on the process? <i>Probe for: ease/difficulty; length of time taken for application; clarity; fairness]</i> b) What support/guidance is available to applicants with the process? c) Is this support sufficient? If not, what also do applicants need that they are not currently offered in terms of support and guidance?
3) What are the key reasons for/factors that contribute to successful applications?
4) What are the key reasons for/factors that contribute to unsuccessful applications? a) Are there any points within the process where applicants tend to drop out? Why do you think this is?
5) What, if anything, might make successful applications more likely?

### SECTION 3: Administrative/implementation challenges

#### Questions

- 6) What, if any, administrative/implementation challenges have you experienced?  
*[prompt if necessary: financial constraints, resourcing constraints, system limitations]*
- 7) What, if any impacts, have these had?  
*[probe for: ease/difficulty; clarity; fairness]*
- 8) How, if at all, have you been able to overcome them?

### SECTION 4: Promotion of and access to the Scheme

#### Questions

- 9) How do you feel the Scheme is promoted to potential applicants?
  - a) How successful/unsuccessful would you say this is and why?
  - b) Do you think the promotion of the scheme could be improved? If yes, how?  
*[Probe for issues surrounding eligibility, e.g. clearer messages on who can take part, and the details of the scheme]*
- 10) Who tends to apply for the Scheme? Why do you think this is?  
*[Probe for groups they receive more/fewer applications from, so for example owner occupier, private landlord, social landlord, first time buyer?]*
  - a) What, if any, are the main enablers to people accessing the Scheme?  
*[Probe for funding, information/support/guidance available]*
  - b) What, if any, are the main barriers to people accessing the Scheme?  
*[Probe for criteria (including any local criteria), cost, lack of information/support/guidance]*
  - c) How, if at all, could access to the Scheme be improved?

## SECTION 5: Moving forward

### Questions

**11) Moving forward, what elements of the process of promoting, accessing, and implementing the scheme should be retained? Why?**

*[Probe for: eligibility criteria; financial contributions]*

**12) And what elements of the process of promoting, accessing, and implementing the scheme should be changed? Why?**

*[Probe for: eligibility criteria; financial contributions]*

- a) Have you heard anything from someone in another area that made you think, 'I wish we were doing it that way'?
- b) Alternatively, do you have any current schemes which you think this scheme could learn from / align with?

**THANK YOU AND CLOSE**

## 10. Annex 2 – Empty Homes Grant Scheme: RCTCBC Topic Guide

### Introduction

Introduction to interviewer and ORS.

The Welsh Government has commissioned ORS to undertake an evaluation of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme. The overall aim of the project is, to understand the implementation of the scheme and its effectiveness and consider possible improvements to the administration and outcomes of the scheme in the future.

As part of this research, we are talking to participating local authorities across Wales to understand how the scheme is being administered in different localities, its success in reducing the number of empty homes in Wales and to assess the barriers and enablers with regards to implementation, delivery, and accessibility.

In this interview we will discuss the process involved in implementing the scheme, consider application procedures, and any challenges encountered in administration and implementation. In a follow up session at a later date, we will explore the impact of the scheme since its implementation in terms of its outcomes and effectiveness in different localities.

This interview should take around 90 minutes depending on your answers and will cover:

- *Your views on the application process for the scheme*
- *Application success and failures and support available to applicants*
- *Promotion of and access to the scheme*
- *Administrative and implementations challenges*
- *Any improvements or alternative approaches you would suggest*

If it's ok with you, I'd like to record the interview for the purpose of writing up only. The recording won't be shared with anyone else, and all feedback will be anonymised. We will not name you or use any direct quotes that could identify you in the report. Your contact details will never be released to any other parties and will only be used by ORS in connection with this research.

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*Any questions before we begin?*

## SECTION 1: Introductions

Questions
1) Firstly, please briefly introduce yourself and let us know which local authority you are representing, what your role is, and how you are involved with the Scheme.

## SECTION 2: Applications Process - Successful/unsuccessful

*We will start by discussing the application process for the Scheme.*

Questions
2) For those wishing to apply, what is your application process? a) What are your views on this process? <i>[probe for: eligibility criteria; ease/difficulty; length of time to application; clarity; fairness]</i> b) What support/guidance is available to applicants regarding the process? c) Is this support sufficient? If not, what also do applicants need that they are not currently offered in terms of support and guidance?
3) What are the key reasons for/factors that contribute to successful applications?
4) What are the key reasons for/factors that contribute to unsuccessful applications? a) Are there any points within the process where applicants tend to drop out? Why do you think this is?
5) What, if anything, might make successful applications more likely?

### SECTION 3: Promotion of and access to the Scheme

Questions
<p>6) How do you promote the Scheme to potential applicants? <i>[probe for website details, promotional material sent out to LA's etc]</i></p> <p>a) How successful/unsuccessful would you say this is and why?</p> <p>b) How, if at all, could the promotion of the scheme be improved? <i>[Probe for issues surrounding eligibility, e.g. clearer messages on who is eligible, details of the scheme, if eligibility differs according to each LA]</i></p> <p>7) Who tends to apply for the Scheme? Why do you think this is? <i>[Probe for groups they receive more/fewer applications from, so for example owner occupier, private landlord, social landlord, first time buyer?]</i></p> <p>a) What, if any, are the main enablers to people accessing the Scheme? <i>[Probe for funding, information/support/guidance available]</i></p> <p>b) What, if any, are the main barriers to people accessing the Scheme? <i>[Probe for criteria (including any local criteria), cost, lack of information/support/guidance]</i></p> <p>c) How, if at all, could access to the Scheme be improved?</p>

### SECTION 4: Administrative/implementation challenges

Questions
<p>8) What, if any, administrative/implementation challenges have you experienced? <i>[prompt if necessary: financial constraints, resourcing/capacity constraints, system limitations]</i></p> <p>9) What, if any impacts, have these had? <i>[probe for: ease/difficulty; clarity; fairness]</i></p> <p>10) How, if at all, have you been able to overcome them?</p>



## SECTION 5: Moving forward

### Questions

**11) Moving forward, what elements of the process of promoting, accessing, and implementing the scheme should be retained? Why?**

*[Probe for: eligibility criteria; financial contributions]*

**12) And what elements of the process of promoting, accessing, and implementing the scheme should be changed? Why?**

*[Probe for: eligibility criteria; financial contributions]*

- a) Have you heard anything from someone in one of the LA's that made you think, 'I think we should do it that way for all authorities?
- b) Alternatively, do you know of any current schemes run elsewhere which you think this scheme could learn from / align with?

**THANK YOU AND CLOSE**

## **11. Annex 3 – Empty Homes Grant Scheme: Local Authority Topic Guide (Session 2)**

### **Introduction**

Introduction to interviewer and ORS.

The Welsh Government has commissioned ORS to undertake an evaluation of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme. The overall aim of the project is, to understand the implementation of the scheme and its effectiveness and consider possible improvements to the administration and outcomes of the scheme in the future.

As part of this research, we are talking to participating local authorities across Wales to understand how the scheme is being administered in different localities, its success in reducing the number of empty homes in Wales and to assess the barriers and enablers with regards to implementation, delivery, and accessibility.

As you are aware this is the second of these sessions that we have attended. In this first session we discussed the process involved in implementing the Scheme, considering application procedures, and any challenges encountered in administration and implementation. In this session we will explore the impact of the Scheme since its implementation in terms of its outcomes and effectiveness in different localities. This Focus Group should last around 90 minutes

If it's ok with you, I'd like to record the focus group for the purpose of writing up only. The recording won't be shared with anyone else, and all feedback will be anonymised. We will not name you or use any direct quotes that could identify you in the report. Your contact details will never be released to any other parties and will only be used by ORS in connection with this research.

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**Any questions before we begin?**

## SECTION 1: Introduction

### Questions

- 1) Firstly, please briefly introduce yourself and let us know which local authority you are representing, what your role is, and how you are involved with the Scheme.

## SECTION 2: Meeting the Scheme's main objectives

*We will start by discussing whether the main objectives of the Scheme have been achieved in your local area.*

### Questions

- 2) **Since its introduction in January 2023 to what extent do you think that the Scheme has achieved its main objective to help bring as many empty homes as possible in Wales back into use?**

- a) **What evidence are you aware of, if any, that supports this?**

*[Probe for examples/evidence particularly alluding to successful applications and numbers of grants awarded or those that are open and waiting an outcome because of Scheme]*

## SECTION 3: Effectiveness of the Scheme: barriers and enablers

### Questions

- 3) What, if any, successes have you seen in your area as a result of the Scheme?

- a) How would you explain this?

*[Probe for examples/evidence around successful applications, those awaiting confirmation, housing availability/quality; property value]*

- 4) What are the key reasons for/factors that contribute to the success of the Scheme in your area?

- a) Why do you say this?

- b) What evidence are you aware of, if any, that supports this?

*[Probe for examples/evidence around successful applications, and senior managers in my organisation prioritise the scheme]*

- c) What factors could have contributed to further successes?

- 5) What are the key reasons for/factors that prevent the Scheme from being successful in your locality?

- a) Why do you say this?

- b) What evidence are you aware of, if any, that supports this?

- c) What could have mitigated these factors?

*[Probe for examples/evidence particularly, issues around costings, abortive work, lengthy application process, senior managers at my organisation do not see the scheme as a priority]*

- 6) To what extent do you think the Scheme is accessible to a wide and diverse group?
- a) In your view, who has benefitted most from the grant?
  - b) Are there particular eligibility criteria that support this?  
*[Probe for examples/evidence particularly around definitions of 'empty and unfurnished,' and 'known' empty properties that are not chargeable and any empty properties not currently eligible for EHG]*
  - c) Are there any groups that you think may have found it more difficult to access the scheme, or did not consider applying?
  - d) What changes could be made to eligibility criteria that would help this?
  - e) Do you think the Scheme is targeting the right sector / individuals?  
Why do you feel this?
- 7) What aspects of the Scheme do you think are the most effective?
- a) Why do you think this?
  - b) What evidence are you aware of, if any, that supports this?  
*[Probe for examples/evidence particularly alluding to successful applications]*
- 8) What aspects of the Scheme do you think are the most ineffective?
- a) Why do you think this?
  - b) What evidence are you aware of, if any, that supports this?

## SECTION 4: Outcomes of the Scheme

Questions
<p>9) What has been the overall impact of the scheme in your locality? <i>[Probe for: positive and negative impacts on applicants in the area, impact on neighbourhoods and local communities, impact on local council]</i></p> <p>a) Can you give examples of changes, if any, as a result of the Scheme?</p> <p>b) What evidence are you aware of, if any, that supports this? <i>[Probe for examples of individuals having better quality of life in improved homes, houses being improved as part of the scheme, improvement to communities as a result of improved properties]</i></p>

## SECTION 5: Unintended consequences

Questions
<p>10) What, if any, unintended consequences has the Scheme had?</p> <p>a) If positive, ask: How have these contributed to the success of the Scheme?</p> <p>b) If negative, ask: To what extent are these negative impacts being addressed? <i>[Probe for whether they are being addressed by the LA's or by the administering body]</i></p> <p>11) What, if any, impact has there been on other National or local authority led schemes following the introduction of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme? <i>[Probe for: positive and negative impacts]</i></p>

## SECTION 6: Moving forward

Questions
<p>12) Moving forward, to what extent do you feel the changes you've seen as a result of the Scheme are sustainable in the long term?</p> <p>a) What do you think will happen if/when the Scheme ends?</p> <p>b) What do you think <u>should</u> happen if/when the Scheme ends?</p> <p>13) What suggestions do you have, if any, for improving the grant scheme?</p> <p>a) How, if at all, could the process be made more impactful in your local area?</p> <p>b) How, if at all, could the process be made more impactful nationally? <i>[Probe for: how the scheme could reach more properties that the LA's believe should be eligible]</i></p> <p>14) What, if any, examples do you have of other schemes that have worked differently and had success?</p>

THANK YOU AND CLOSE

## 12. Annex 4 – Empty Homes Grant Scheme: Applicant Survey Questionnaire

### INTRODUCTION

The Welsh Government is currently undertaking an evaluation of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme. The overall aim of the project is to evaluate how the scheme has been implemented and understand the effect of the grant in reducing the number of long-term empty homes in Wales.

This questionnaire forms one part of the evaluation and asks for your views and experiences of applying for the Empty Homes Grant with the aim of understanding:

- How the process of applying for the grant is working in practice;
- How the process of applying could be improved;
- What works well and what could be improved about the scheme;
- The scheme's success in reducing the number of empty homes.

Anyone who has applied for the grant is eligible to take part, regardless of whether the application was successful or not or whether the process has been completed.

This questionnaire is being carried out on the Welsh Government's behalf by Opinion Research Services (ORS), an independent research company.

The questionnaire will take 10-15 minutes to complete and is open until 5:00 pm on 20 July 2025. As a thank you for taking part you are also eligible to enter the free prize draw where you could win £250, £150 or £50. The free prize draw entry form is available on completion of the survey.

The information you provide will be processed and saved on a secure server by ORS. The Welsh Government are the data controller for the survey; however, ORS will remove any personal data provided before it is shared with the Welsh Government. Contact details provided for entry to the prize draw will be collected on a separate webpage and deleted within one month of all prizes being delivered. Neither you nor your organisation will be identified to Welsh Government.

This questionnaire is carried out in accordance with UK Data Protection Regulations (UKGDPR) and the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct. For more information, see [our privacy notice](#).

Please note that you can exit and return to the questionnaire at any time by clicking on the 'save for later' icon at the bottom of each page. However, please be aware that any responses you enter could possibly be used in the analysis even if you don't complete and submit the survey.

Should you have any queries about the questionnaire, please contact Catherine Wall at ORS on [Catherine.Wall@ors.org.uk](mailto:Catherine.Wall@ors.org.uk) or 0800 324 7006. If you would like to speak to somebody at Welsh Government, or if you have any data protection or GDPR queries, please contact the Welsh Government's Housing research branch at [Housingresearchteam@gov.wales](mailto:Housingresearchteam@gov.wales). You can view Welsh Government's privacy notice [here](#), and Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority's privacy notice [here](#)

You can also check that ORS are a genuine research practice by contacting the Market Research Society (MRS) on 0800 975 9596.

## **Section 1: About you**

### **Ask all**

#### **1. Are you/is your organisation a...?**

- A homeowner
- Prospective homeowner
- Local Authority
- Registered Social Landlord (a not-for-profit charity, society or company that has been registered with the Welsh Ministers as a social landlord)
- Community Housing Group

### **Ask all**

#### **2. To which local authority have you applied for an Empty Homes Grant?**

- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
- Bridgend County Borough Council
- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Cardiff Council
- Carmarthenshire County Council
- Ceredigion County Council
- Conwy County Borough Council
- Denbighshire County Council
- Flintshire County Council
- Gwynedd Council
- Isle of Anglesey County Council
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
- Monmouthshire County Council
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
- Newport City Council
- Pembrokeshire County Council
- Powys County Council
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
- City and County of Swansea
- The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council
- Torfaen County Borough Council
- Wrexham County Borough Council

### **Ask all**

#### **3. When did you start the application process for the Empty Homes Grant?**

- January 2023
- February 2023
- March 2023
- April 2023
- May 2023
- June 2023
- July 2023
- August 2023

September 2023  
October 2023  
November 2023  
December 2023  
January 2024  
February 2024  
March 2024  
April 2024  
May 2024  
June 2024  
July 2024  
August 2024  
September 2024  
October 2024  
November 2024  
December 2024  
January 2025  
February 2025  
March 2025

Don't know/Can't remember

## **Section 2: Accessing the scheme and the application process**

### **Ask all**

#### **4. How did you find out about the scheme? Tick all that apply**

Word of mouth  
National Empty Homes Grant website  
Local Authority website  
Welsh Government website  
Other website (please specify)  
Social Media post e.g. from a Local Authority (please specify)  
News outlets online e.g. Wales Online (please specify)  
Other news outlets (please specify)  
Other (please specify)

Don't know/Can't remember

### **Ask all**

#### **5. Why did you choose to apply for the Empty Homes Grant? Tick all that apply**

Incentive to bring a home already owned back into use  
Incentive to purchase an empty property to bring back into use  
Costs too high without funding  
Funding would speed up the process of bringing a property back into use  
Required support and guidance available through scheme  
Process seemed straightforward  
Other (please specify)



Don't know

**Ask all**

**6A. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the scheme is well promoted?**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

**Ask all**

**6B. Do you have any suggestions as to how the scheme could be better promoted to new applicants?**

- No
- Yes - Freetext response – write in

**Ask all**

**7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that it was clear and easy to understand...**

**a) Who is eligible to apply for the Empty Homes Grant?**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

**b) How to apply for the Empty Homes Grant?**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

**Ask all**

**8. Was there anything that made it difficult to complete the application? **Tick all that apply****

- No/nothing (exclusive option)
- Too complicated/not clear enough
- Did not understand the scheme eligibility requirements
- Did not understand all the terminology or requirements
- Took too long to complete
- Not enough support and guidance on how to complete the application
- Did not have access to all the necessary information or documentation
- Did not have access to internet/equipment needed to apply
- Other (please specify)

Don't know

**Ask all**

**9a. Did you apply for the scheme, or access any information about the scheme, in Welsh?**

Yes

No – I chose to apply in English

No – I would have liked to but I didn't know that I could/I didn't know how to

**Ask if Q9a = Yes, Welsh**

**9b. To what extent do you agree or disagree that it was clear and easy to understand how to access the scheme in Welsh?**

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

**Ask all**

**10a. To what extent do you agree or disagree that access to the scheme is fair to all?**

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

**Ask if Q10a = Neither agree nor disagree/Somewhat disagree or Strongly disagree**

**10b. Why do you say that?**

Freetext – Record word for word

Don't know

**Ask all**

**11. Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that it was easy to access the scheme?**

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

**Ask if Q11 = Strongly agree, Somewhat agree or Neither agree nor disagree**

**12. What, if anything, helped you to access the scheme? Tick all that apply**

The amount and clarity of information and guidance available

The ease of the application process e.g. not too complicated, doesn't take too much time

The support provided by the Local Authority  
Other (please specify)  
Nothing (exclusive option)

Don't know

**Ask if Q11 = Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree or neither agree nor disagree**

**13a. What, if anything, were the main challenges to accessing the scheme? Tick all that apply**

Nothing (exclusive option)  
Cost (e.g. the financial contribution required)  
The eligibility requirements (i.e. not initially meeting all requirements such as the property being empty for 12 months)  
Changes in personal circumstances  
Lack of and clarity of information and guidance available  
Lack of knowledge (e.g. of the work required)  
Not enough support available from Local Authority  
Timescales (e.g. application process takes too long)  
Application process is too complicated  
Lack of access to internet/equipment needed to apply  
Local Authority not participating in the grant  
Other (please specify)

Don't know

**Ask if Q13a = the eligibility requirements**

**13b. Which eligibility requirements specifically did you not initially meet? Tick all that apply**

The property being vacant (unoccupied and substantially unfurnished)  
The property being registered as vacant with the authority's Council Tax department  
The property being registered as vacant for a minimum of 12 months  
The property qualifying as a chargeable empty property (empty for at least 6 months, listed as a domestic property and has been valued and banded by the Valuation Office Agency)  
The property being listed as a domestic property for a minimum of 12 months  
Any other additional criteria specific to the Local Authority you were applying to (please specify)  
Anything else (please specify)

Don't know

**Ask all**

**14a. Did you access any support or guidance to help you access or complete your application? Tick all that apply**

- Yes – information on webpages
- Yes – from scheme administrators
- No – I did not access any support or guidance (exclusive option)
  
- Don't know/Can't remember

**Ask if Q14a = Yes – information on webpages**

**14b. To what extent was the information provided on the webpages helpful?**

- Very helpful
- Fairly helpful
- Not very helpful
- Not at all helpful

**Ask if Q14a = Yes – from scheme administrators**

**14c. To what extent was the support and guidance from scheme administrators helpful?**

- Very helpful
- Fairly helpful
- Not very helpful
- Not at all helpful

**Ask all**

**15a. Have you had a survey carried out by a Local Authority Surveyor?**

- Yes
- No – not got to that part of the process yet
- No – application was cancelled prior to a survey being carried out

**Ask if 15a = Yes had a survey carried out by a LA surveyor**

**15b. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received from the Local Authority Surveyor?**

- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Fairly dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

**Ask all**

**16. What, if anything, could be done to improve access to the scheme? Tick all that apply**

- Promote the scheme and its benefits more widely
- Provide more support and guidance
- Reduce the financial contribution required from the applicant
- Reduce the amount of the time the property needs to be registered as empty before applying
- Reduce the amount of time the property needs to be occupied for following completion of work
- Increase the amount of eligible work that can be carried out under the grant

Other changes to the eligibility criteria (please specify)  
Reduce the complexity of the application process  
Expand access to the scheme to all Local Authorities in Wales (5 currently not participating)  
Other (Please specify)  
Nothing (exclusive option)

Don't know

**Ask all**

**17a. In what ways, if any, has accessing the scheme benefited you personally? Tick all that apply**

Being able to afford necessary work to bring home back into occupation  
Enabled me to afford to purchase a home  
Sped up the process of bringing home back into occupation  
Provided with access to support and guidance throughout the process  
Confidence that work undertaken has removed significant hazards from the home to enable me to live there safely  
Other (Please specify)  
No benefits (exclusive option)  
Not applicable – My application is awaiting approval/ was not successful

**17b. What do you feel are the main drawbacks, if any, of accessing the scheme? Tick all that apply**

None (exclusive option)  
Restrictions on what work can and can't be carried out under the grant  
Less control over the works progress  
Unable to access grant funding for non-renewable heating systems  
Restrictions on occupation following the completion of grant works  
Timescales involved/takes longer  
Other (please specify)

**Section 3: Outcome of application**

**Ask all**

**Q18a. Has your application for the Empty Homes Grant been approved?**

Yes – my application has been approved  
Yes - but I subsequently withdrew my application  
No – I withdrew my application  
No – my application was cancelled due to the required evidence not being submitted  
No - it was unsuccessful/ineligible due to not meeting grant eligibility  
No - It has not been approved for another reason (please specify)  
I am waiting to receive an outcome to my application

**Ask if Q18a = No - I withdrew my application or yes – but I subsequently withdrew my application**

**Q18b. Why did you withdraw your application? Tick all that apply**

- Financial reasons – could no longer afford to continue
- Timescales – felt the process was taking/would take too long
- Process was too complicated
- Couldn't meet all the criteria
- Change in the amount or type of work required to bring the property into use
- Change in personal circumstances (please specify)
- Sold the property
- No longer wanted to bring empty property back into use
- Other (please specify)
  
- Don't know

**Ask if Q15a= Yes (Has had a survey)**

**Q19a. How long did it take from making the initial application until an initial survey was undertaken by the Local Authority? Please estimate if unsure**

- Up to 6 weeks
- 6 to 8 weeks/2 months
- 2 to 3 months
- 3 to 4 months
- 4 to 5 months
- 5 to 6 months
- 6 months or more

Don't know/can't remember

**Ask if Q18a = Yes – my application has been approved**

**Q19b. Overall, how long did the process take from making the initial application until grant approval was received? Please estimate if unsure**

- Up to 6 weeks
- 6 to 8 weeks/2 months
- 2 to 3 months
- 3 to 4 months
- 4 to 5 months
- 5 to 6 months
- 6 months or more

Don't know/can't remember

**Ask if Q18a = Yes – my application has been approved**

**Q20. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the time it took for your application to be approved?**

- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Fairly dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

**Ask if Q18a = I am still waiting to receive an outcome to my application**

**Q21a. How long has it been since you started the application process? Please estimate if unsure**

- Up to 6 weeks
- 6 to 8 weeks/2 months
- 2 to 3 months
- 3 to 4 months
- 4 to 5 months
- 5 to 6 months
- 6 months or more

Don't know/can't remember

**Ask if Q18a = I am still waiting to receive an outcome to my application**

**Q21b. How much longer do you expect it to be before you receive an outcome to your application?**

- Up to 6 weeks
- 6 to 8 weeks/2 months
- 2 to 3 months
- 3 to 4 months
- 4 to 5 months
- 5 to 6 months
- 6 months or more
- Expect application to be cancelled/expect to withdraw

Don't know

**Ask if Q18a = I am still waiting to receive an outcome to my application**

**Q22. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the time your application has taken so far?**

- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Fairly dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

**Ask if Q20 or Q22 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, Fairly dissatisfied or Very dissatisfied**

**Q23. Has there been any specific periods of delays which has meant that the application process has taken longer than you had expected? Tick all that apply**

No specific delays/generally slow (exclusive option)

Time taken for response to initial application

Time taken for initial survey to be undertaken

Time taken for information to be provided to scheme administrators following survey

Time taken for approval to be granted

Time taken to find and/or appoint a contractor

Time taken to provide evidence of ownership of the property at the land registry

Time taken for property inspections to be undertaken

Time taken for letter of consent to be provided by Lender for the registration of the Legal Charge

Time taken for grant payments to be issued

Other – Please specify

Don't know

**Ask if Q18a = No - My application was cancelled or No – My application was unsuccessful**

**Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree that you understand the reasons your application was cancelled/unsuccessful?**

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

#### **Section 4: Impact**

**Ask if Q18a = Yes – my application has been approved**

**Q25. Has the work on the property been completed?**

Yes – Have received certification of grant aided work

Yes – But have not yet received certification of grant aided work

No – work is in progress/still work remaining to be completed

No – work has not yet started

**Ask if Q25 = Yes – Have received certification of grant aided work**

**Q26a. Is your property currently being occupied?**

Yes

No

Don't know



**Ask if Q26a = the property is not currently occupied**

**Q26b. Why is the property not being occupied/are there no plans for the property to be occupied? Tick all that apply**

- The property needs to be decorated or furnished
- There is other work remaining to be completed that was not included within the scheme
- Held up by delays in moving from another property
- Personal circumstances (please specify)
- Other (please specify)

Don't know

**Ask if Q26a = the property is not currently occupied**

**Q26c. When do you think the property will be occupied?**

- Within the next 4 weeks
- Within 4-8 weeks
- Within 8-12 weeks
- 12 weeks or more

Don't know

**Ask All**

**Q27. What impact do you feel the Empty Homes Grant Scheme has had so far on you/your family personally, and on housing overall in Wales?**

Freetext response – record word for word

No impact

**Ask All**

**Q28. What other support do you feel could be made available to help reduce the number of empty properties in Wales?**

Freetext response – record word for word

Don't know

**Ask All**

**Q29a. Overall, thinking about the Empty Homes Grant Scheme, which aspects do you feel should remain the same in the future? Tick all that apply**

- Amount of funding available
- Eligibility criteria
- Eligible works
- Financial contribution requirements
- The application process
- The support and guidance available
- Other (please specify)

None (exclusive option)

### Ask All

**Q29b. Overall, thinking about the Empty Homes Grant Scheme, which aspects do you feel could be improved/should be changed in the future? Tick all that apply**

- Amount of funding available increased
- Amount of funding available reduced
- Eligibility criteria
- Eligible works
- Financial contribution requirements reduced
- The application process
- The support and guidance available
- Other (please specify)
- No aspect needs improving (exclusive option)

### Ask if any improvement suggested at Q29b

**Q29c. Can you give more detail on any improvements you feel could be made to the scheme in the future?**

Freetext – Record word for word

### Profiling questions

The following questions tell us more about you and help us to make sure we have captured views from a cross section of people. We recognise that you might consider some of these questions to be personal or sensitive, in which case you are free not to answer them. The information you provide will only be used for ensuring we are getting opinions of a cross section of society, and to see if there are any differences in the views and experiences of applying for the Empty Homes Grant.

**P1a. What is your sex?**

- Male
- Female

Prefer not to say

**P1b. Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?**

- Yes
- No – go to P1c

Prefer not to say

**P1c. Which gender do you identify with?**

- Male
- Female
- Trans male
- Trans female
- Non-binary
- Other (please specify)

Prefer not to say

**P2. Which age group do you fall into?**

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75+

Prefer not to say

**P3. Including you, how many adults aged 18 or over are currently living in your household?**

- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five or more

Prefer not to say

**P4. How many children, aged 17 or under, are currently living in your household?**

- None
- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five or more

Prefer not to say

**P5. Which of these activities best describes what you were doing in the last 7 days?**

**Select paid employment for any form of paid work, including casual or temporary work, or if you are employed but on maternity/paternity/Shared Parental Leave, sick leave or annual leave.**

**If you are a part-time student, please select the option that best describes what you are doing the rest of the time.**

**Doing unpaid work does not include volunteering.**

- Full-time student, including on holiday or half term
- In any paid employment or self-employment, even if away temporarily, on leave or off sick
- On a government sponsored training scheme
- Doing unpaid work for a business that you or a relative owns
- Waiting to take up paid employment already obtained

Unemployed and looking for work  
Intending to look for work but prevented by temporary sickness or injury, 28 days or less  
Unable to work because of long-term sickness or disability  
Retired  
Looking after home or family  
Doing something else

Prefer not to say

**P6a. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?**

Yes – ask P6b

No

Prefer not to say

**P6b. Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?**

Yes, a lot

Yes, a little

Not at all

Prefer not to say

**P7. Which one of the following best describes your ethnic group or background?**

White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British

White - Irish

White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller

White - Roma

White - Eastern European (e.g. Polish, Latvian, Ukrainian) (Please specify in text box)

White - Any other White background  
(Please specify in text box)

Mixed - White and Black Caribbean

Mixed - White and Black African

Mixed - White and Asian

Mixed - Any other Mixed/Multiple background (Please specify in text box)

Asian or Asian British – Indian

Asian or Asian British - Pakistani

Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi

Asian or Asian British - Chinese

Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background (Please specify in text box)

Black or Black British - Caribbean

Black or Black British - African

Black or Black British - Any other Black or Black British background (Please specify in text box)

Other ethnic group - Arab

Other ethnic group - Any other ethnic group (Please specify)

Prefer not to say

**Ask if currently a homeowner or prospective homeowner (Q1)**

**P8. Were you, or had you ever been, a homeowner prior to accessing the scheme/purchasing your current property?**

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Free Prize Draw

Thank you for completing the survey.

After you click the submit button on this survey, you will be redirected to the Free Prize Draw entry form. This means that the answers you've already given will be completely anonymous.

If you would like to participate in the Free Prize Draw, then please answer yes on the separate form and then supply your contact details.

If you would prefer not to participate in the Free Prize Draw, then please answer no on the separate form, or just leave the page or close your browser.

Thank you again for your time.

END OF ORIGINAL SURVEY

REDIRECT

START OF FREE PRIZE DRAW SURVEY

**Free Prize Draw**

If you wish to be entered into the FREE PRIZE DRAW for the chance to win £250, £150 or one of two £50 cash prizes and are happy for ORS to use your contact details to get in touch with you (in the event of you winning), please select 'yes'. You will be asked to submit your contact details below.

If you do NOT wish to enter the free prize draw, please select 'no' or close this browser. You will not be entered into the prize draw.

The winners will be notified via email. Details are available on request.

I would like to be entered into the **FREE PRIZE DRAW** and give my permission for ORS to use my name, postal address, email address and/or telephone number to contact me only if I win.

Yes

No

**If yes:**

In order to enter the **FREE PRIZE DRAW**, please fill in your contact details (name and email address) below:

Name

Email address

**If yes:**

Here are the full terms and conditions for the Free Prize Draw:

Please read these terms and conditions and then submit the form at the bottom of the page to enter the Free Prize Draw

**Promoter's Name and Address**

1. Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ (the "**Promoter**" email address: [housingresearchteam@gov.wales](mailto:housingresearchteam@gov.wales))

**Start Date**

2. Entries for this prize draw will be accepted from **08.00 am on the 9 July 2025** (the "**Opening Date**").

**Closing Date**

3. The closing date for the receipt of entries is **5:00 p.m. on the 20 July 2025** (the "**Closing Date**").

**How to participate**

4. In order to enter this prize draw, the entrant must complete and submit this online entry form by the Closing Date.
5. Entrants must be a person, UK resident or residents of Northern Ireland, over 18 years old, who have applied for the Empty Homes Grant, and not employees (or members of their families or households) of the Welsh Government or employees of agents or suppliers of the Promoter or its holding or subsidiary companies, who are professionally connected with the prize draw or its administration. In entering the prize draw, you confirm that you are eligible to do so and eligible to claim the prize. The Promoter may require you to provide proof that you are eligible to enter the prize draw.

6. Only one entry per person. Joint submissions will be excluded from participation. Entries on behalf of another person will not be accepted.
7. By submitting an entry, you acknowledge that all of the copyright, privacy, publicity and all other rights in and to the entry will be owned by the Promoter. Entrants hereby assign to the Promoter all worldwide copyright and like rights in their entries and waive all moral rights in and to your prize draw entry and otherwise arising in connection with your entry to which you may now or at any time in the future be entitled.
8. Entries received after the Closing Date will not be included in the draw. The Promoter will not be responsible for any entries that are not received by the Closing Date, whether lost, delayed, corrupted or otherwise, and whether or not due to any technical difficulties or malfunctions.
9. Incomplete or incomprehensible prize draw entries will not be eligible for the prize draw.
10. The Promoter will not accept proof of transmission as proof of receipt of entry to the prize draw.
11. By submitting a prize draw entry, you are agreeing to be bound by these terms and conditions. By entering the prize draw, you agree that any personal information provided by you with the prize draw entry may be held and used only by the Promoter or its agents and suppliers to administer the prize draw.

## **Prize**

12. There are four prizes to be won: £250 first prize, £150 second prize, and two £50 third prizes.
13. The Prize is non-transferable and non-refundable.

## **Selection of the Winner**

14. The initial winners of the prize draw will be selected at random by the Promoter by 10<sup>th</sup> August 2025 among all duly received entries by the Closing Date.
15. The decision of the Promoter is final and no correspondence or discussion will be entered into.
16. The Promoter is running this prize draw as part of the Evaluation of the Empty Homes Grant. Promoter must still provide the Winner's surname and county to the Advertising Standards Authority on request to indicate that a valid award took place.

## **Notification of the results and receipt of the Prize**

17. The Winner will be notified after the draw has taken place via the email address given by them in the entry. If the Winner does not respond within 7 days of the email being sent and informs the Promoter that they will accept the prize then the Promoter reserves the right to award the prize to another randomly selected entrant among the

remaining entrants. The Winner will receive their prize within a reasonable time thereafter.

18. The Promoter's prize draw is final.

### **Data Protection**

19. Your privacy is very important to us. In order to facilitate your participation in the prize draw, the Promoter collects the information about you ("Personal Data") that you supply on the online entry form. Your Personal Data will only be used for the purpose of facilitating your participation in the prize draw. Your Personal Data will be kept for no more than one month after all prizes have been delivered and then deleted. For further information on how we handle and what we do with your Personal Data, including if you have consented to us using your Personal Data to send you other communications, please refer to the Promoter's Privacy Notice which is available online.

### **General**

20. Entry to the prize draw is free. No purchase is necessary. By using an internet access for the entry, costs of an internet provider might occur.

21. These terms and conditions shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of England and Wales.

22. All enquiries relating to this prize draw should be made to the Promoter at its address described in Condition 1.

23. Insofar as is permitted by law, the Promoter, its agents or distributors will not in any circumstances be responsible or liable to compensate the winner or accept any liability for any loss, damage, personal injury or death occurring as a result of taking up the prize except where it is caused by the negligence of the Promoter, its agents or distributors or that of their employees. Your statutory rights are not affected.

24. If there is any reason to believe that there has been a breach of these terms and conditions, the Promoter may, at its sole discretion, reserve the right to exclude you from participating in the prize draw.

25. The Promoter reserves the right to hold void, suspend, cancel, or amend the prize draw where it becomes necessary to do so.