

What is the Role of Community-led Housing Solutions in Reducing Empty Homes in Wales?



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Empty Homes are a wasted resource

Long term empty homes

27,000 private sector

1,400 social housing sector

(Senedd, 2019)



Community-led Housing Definition

“Any housing scheme involving communities that are taking a leading role in providing housing solutions for people in need.”

(Wales-Co-operative Centre, 2019)

Research Aims



To understand the challenges of bringing empty homes back into use



To understand current approaches to reducing empty homes undertaken by local authorities



To identify any learning that can be taken from housing organisations that have adopted community-led housing solutions to bring empty homes back into use



Primary Research –
semi structured
interviews



Secondary Research –
practice examples



Qualitative – capture
participants
experiences



Quantitative –
thematic review

Mixed
Methods
Approach

Participation

**Housing
Associations**

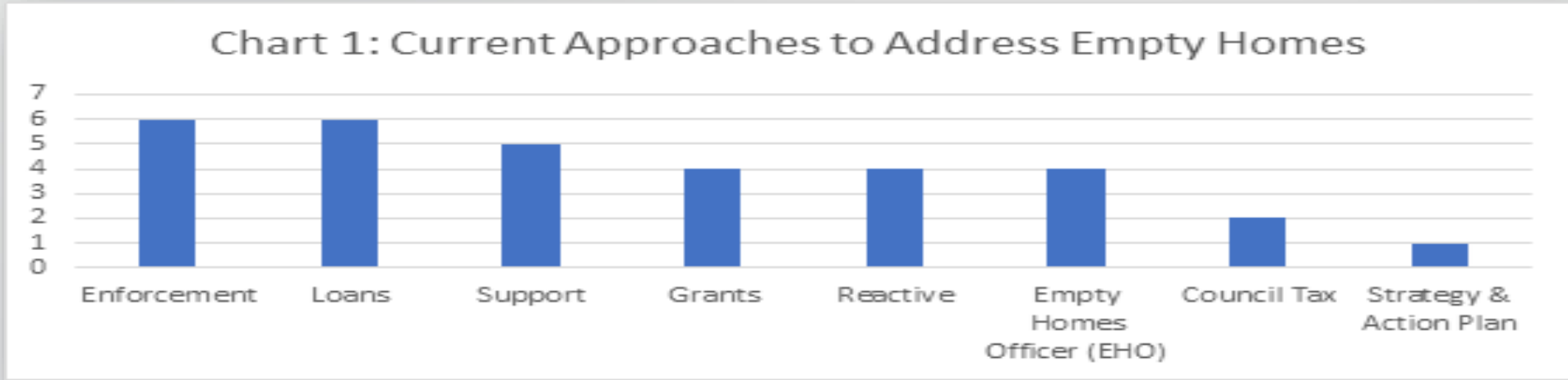
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**Local
Authorities**

7



Local Authority Perspectives



Reactive:

“Mainly reactive, very little proactive because the resource isn’t there”

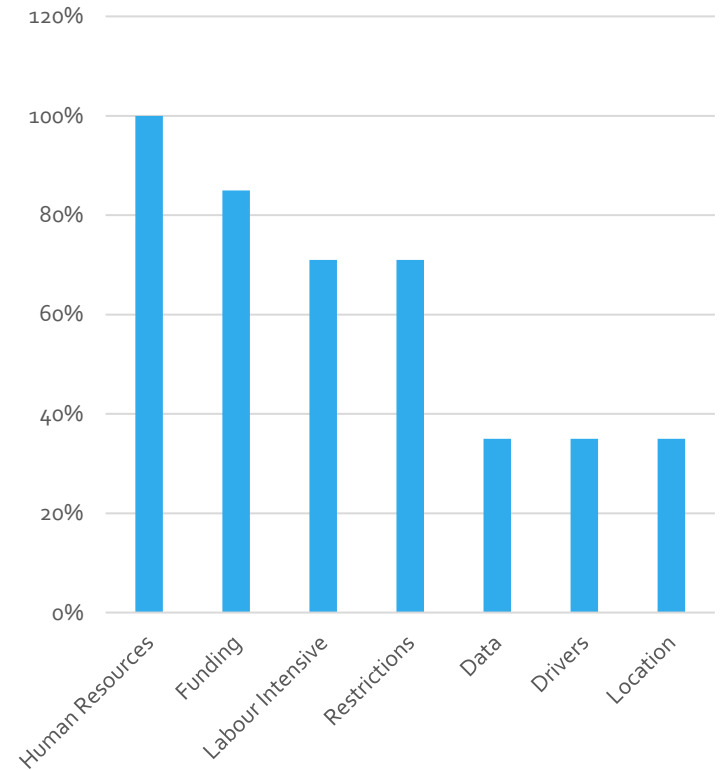
Enforcement:

“We do enforcement, although probably not as much *as we should do*”

"Resource, that's the key one if you haven't got the people on the ground to do the work that's a big barrier."

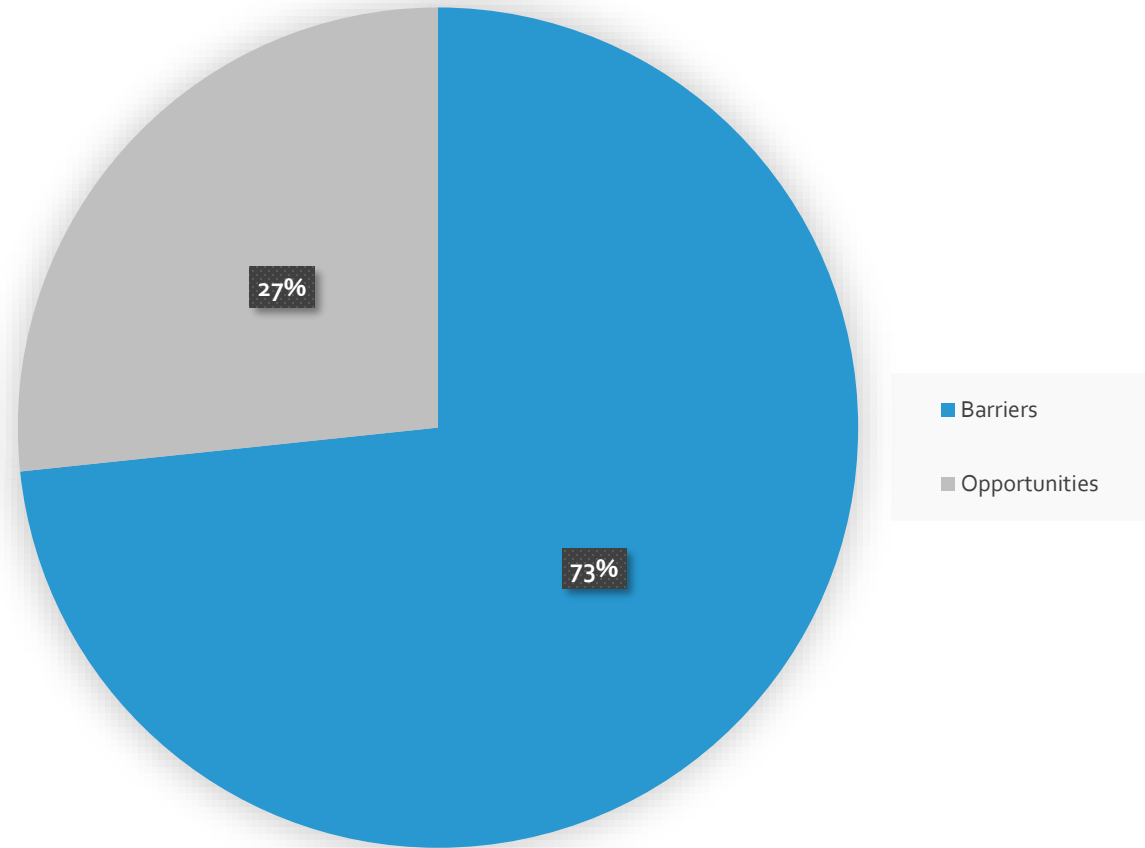
"The funding to be able to offer new initiatives and new things"

Chart 2: Barriers to Addressing Empty Homes



Impact of COVID-19

Chart 3: Current experience of COVID19



“Everything got cancelled because of COVID

Our work is triaged now, so any planned work has pretty much stalled”

“we have a communication plan and we will go out into the community and talk about it, obviously we can’t at the moment”

“No decisions made yet on grants...we are still working from home and we are not allowed to do any visits at the moment.”

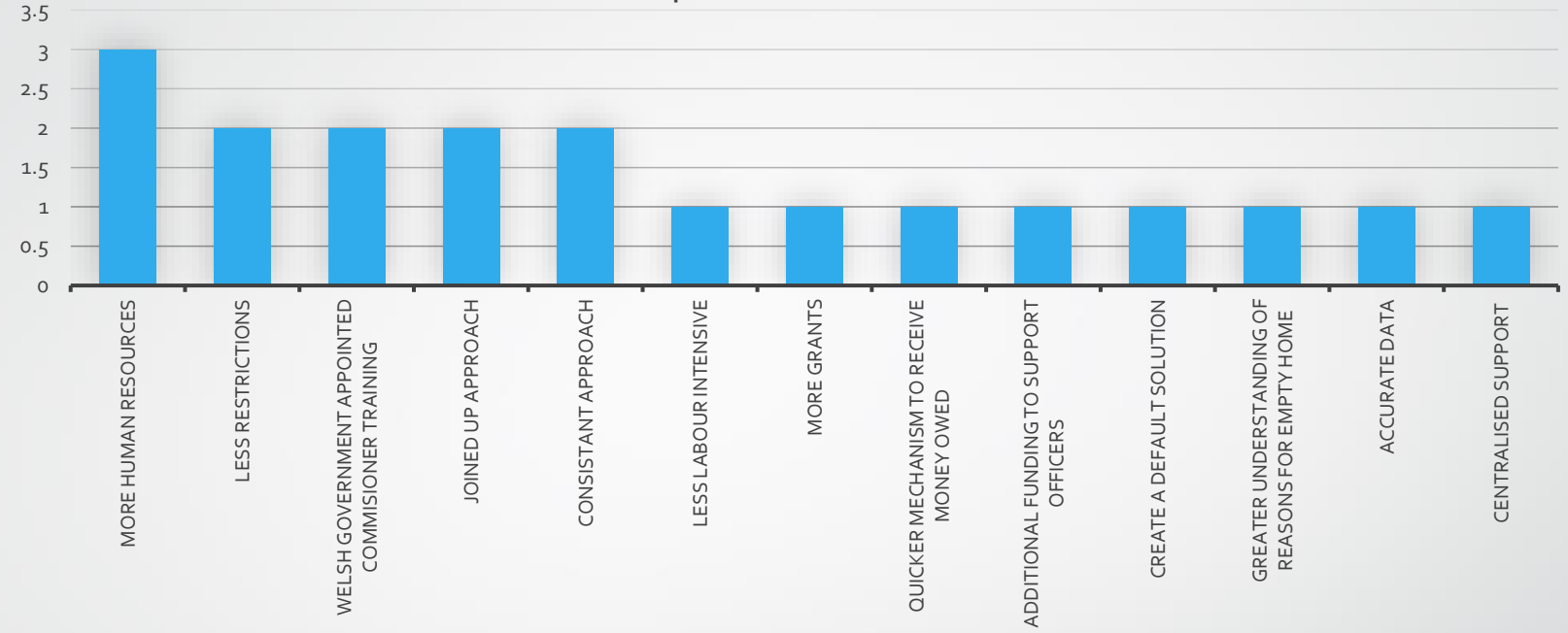


“This time has been quite a benefit to us”


“It has given us the opportunity to relook at everything, do some good housekeeping, and making sure that everything is in order and using that time to contact people.”

“We have found that quite a lot of people are more available now during Covid and are willing to start talking”

Chart 4: Solutions to Barriers




Solutions



“Number one is that we get some funding to provide a dedicated Empty Properties Officer”

“I am the Empty Homes Officer, there isn't a team there is just me and I get roped into other stuff as well that aren't empty homes”

“ We have the powers, but we haven't got the legal expertise sometimes to see it through, what it really needs is funding for legal skills and stuff like that to assist”




“We need to try and get more grants, we are running out of grants, last year’s grants we ran out by June and that was from the start of the financial year”

“Simplifying processes”

“Easier access powers to bring that property back into occupation”

“money is held as charges in these properties and what we need is a quicker mechanism to release that money back to the councils”



“The Welsh Government have got a bit of a drive on empty properties at the moment as well, so they commissioned an expert to give us all training”

“I think the Welsh Government could do more in terms of centralised specialist support for empty properties”

“Its just helping with the resources and creating opportunities; it is making sure everything is joined up”

86% of respondents had no experience of community-led housing solutions in addressing empty homes

Respondents were keen to understand more about community led housing solutions

"We are not adverse to it and we would like to support an initiative, but it really is led by those community groups, so it's not something you can impose on anybody"

"It requires a few people in a community deciding that they want to do something first and then they come to us for support"

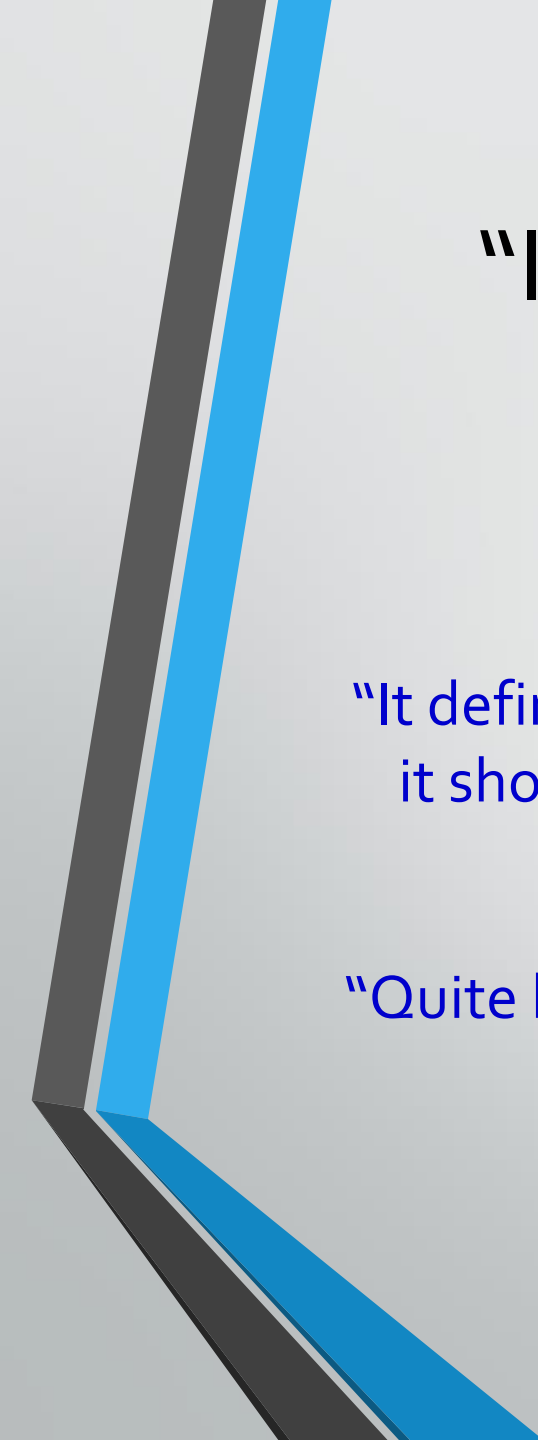
CLHS
Effectiveness



63%



32%



“I haven’t had any experience of that but would be interested in learning more”


“It definitely can be the solution and it should be part of the package”

“Engaging local people will raise the profile which is a benefit”

“Quite bespoke but definitely should be part of the picture”

“Sounds really good, I would love to be involved in learning more”

“Absolutely the way forward”



“We will need funding for it”

“Not particularly effective on a large scale”

“Will never be the driver behind all empty homes, because it’s got to come from that group”

Solutions




Resources

“I feel it would just put added pressure on local authorities who haven't got extra resources”

“I don't know how it could be successful as the tools we have are inadequate for us at the moment”

“It's down to capacity, it would be really good if we could do it”

“Making sure that we have got all departments there, all the skills there to enable us to do what we need to do”



“It’s all there, we just
need to join it all up
and get to work

Joined up Approach



Housing Association Perspective

Housing Association 1

- “We worked with (the local authority) to look at different options for that block”
- “They were just completely unlettable at the time”
- “We funded it through low-cost loans through the council so there was a really good bit of partnership work there”
- “We offered a lot of training and support (to the co-operative) in the beginning because we had a lot of tenants who had not been involved in co-op’s before
- “It’s a fantastic project and we are four years in now to being a fully mutual co-operative”

Housing Association 2

- “It’s a bit of a rough time in terms of this as the plans that we did have, have kind of gone out of the window a bit with the pandemic”
- “We have... around 300-400 of empty properties which are basically beyond economical repair”
- “In terms of community-led initiatives in trying to get empty homes full, it’s not something that we have...done so much as a focus previously, it’s very much something that we want to do”

Local authority partnerships

- Local authorities as enablers
- Cost-effective solution
- Minimised risk

Effective aspects

- The community it creates
- Tenancy sustainability
- Efficient void turnovers
- Low cost repairs

Learning

- Set up as stand alone organisation
 - Members have full control
 - Takes a lot of time and resources
- Setting up a similar governance structure as housing association did not work – specific works
 - Need to be flexible around peoples busy lives and let something natural happen
 - Be understanding and listen
 - Set clear expectations of tenants and organisation at beginning



Case Studies

Funding

- Respondents acknowledge the funding they receive from Welsh Government
- Concern that there is not enough money to address empty homes – funding running out
- Limited funding makes it difficult to offer new initiatives
- Housing Association 1 see local authority as an enabler – enabling coming from local authority funding model

Resources

Inconsistent

Labour
intensive

Targets

Reactive

Learning

Enforcement

Inconsistent

Enforced Sale

Empty Dwelling
Management
Order

Council Tax
Premium

Responsive

Location

Rural

Accessibility

Financial
Viability

Urban

Welsh
Government

Recommendations



- Welsh Government to place an emphasis on community-led approaches as a strand within its forthcoming National Empty Homes Action Plan, detailing the resources available to help grow the approach.
- Local authorities to publish their empty homes strategy detailing activities aimed at increasing use of community-led approaches
- Welsh Government to commission and roll-out training available to all staff focusing on bringing empty homes back into use
- Welsh Government to host a seminar each year focusing on sharing the learning from projects that have used community-led approaches to bring empty homes back into use
- Local authorities to develop a common framework for reviewing and improving how opportunities for communities to take action in partnership to address empty homes are communicated locally

Thank you for
your attention

Any questions?

