

Rt. Hon. Matthew Pennycook MP
Minister for Housing and Planning
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Copied to:

Angela Rayner, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Rushanara Ali MP, Minister for Homelessness

Friday, 7 March 2025

Dear Minister,

Unlocking the Housing Our Communities Need: Harnessing the Potential of Empty Homes

We are writing for your support in action to address the UK's housing crisis through further action to address empty and under-occupied homes in our communities.

Lambeth is an inner London borough facing significant and unprecedented housing pressures. Lambeth Council is currently housing 1 in 30 of all households in temporary accommodation in the country, median private rent equals 57% of the median salary earned and we have over 35,000 residents on our social housing waiting list. These pressures create immense hardship for our residents and communities, as well as incredible financial burdens for our Council.

We commend the early steps taken by the new Government to address the significant challenges we face in unlocking the supply of housing required to meet demand. The engagement of your administration with local authorities is highly encouraging, and recent consultations on issues such as the Right to Buy, Compulsory Purchase Orders, and on reforms to the Energy Performance of Buildings Regime are all welcome opportunities for local authorities to shape into the national policy frameworks governing the country's existing housing stock.

As well as building significant numbers of new homes, empty and under-occupied homes offer an important route to unlocking much-needed housing for our residents

from our existing stock. With the right support and collaboration, we can ensure vacant properties or those out of formal tenancy are brought back into full-time use more quickly. This will have direct and immediate benefits to our residents and families who undertake these tenancies, on the neighbours and communities around these empty homes, and can reduce the pressure on public service finances.

In Lambeth we have a high number of empty and void properties and have recently launched our [Empty Homes and Voids Action Plan](#) to articulate the cross-Council work we are undertaking to unlock the opportunities of our empty homes and voids in our borough.

There are a number of actions central government could undertake to bolster the reach and impact of this work, not just in Lambeth but across the country.

1. A National Empty Homes Strategy

We urge the Government to develop and consult on a new National Empty Homes Strategy, providing clear strategic direction on how vacant properties can be utilised to meet essential housing needs.

There has not been a national strategy for this work since 2016 and its return would offer much-needed guidance for local authorities and strengthen the powers and resources available to bring empty properties back into use, enabling councils like ours to take more decisive action.

2. A Short-Term and Holiday Lets Register

We strongly support the concerns and proposals [raised by London Councils in a letter to the previous Minister](#) regarding the impact of short-term and holiday lets on housing supply for permanent housing stock in our boroughs. This is a particular challenge impacting inner London boroughs, where demand for holiday lets is high.

We are in favour of strict planning and regulation on these property types. Opportunities to strengthen our role in managing the volume of these properties including a compulsory register for short-term and holiday lets, stricter zoning restrictions, the introduction of a tourism tax or increased council tax, and a requirement for planning permission to convert properties from residential to short-term let use.

We would also advocate for an expansion of enforcement powers to short-term lets, as current legislation limits action to those classified as residential homes.

These measures would address the growing issue of properties being diverted to short-term rental markets, which exacerbates housing shortages for full-time residents in high-pressure areas like ours.

3. Improved Enforcement Powers

In order to make better use of existing enforcement policy, local authorities need streamlined processes that reduce the resource and financial barriers to undertaking proactive action to return privately owned empty homes back into use. Examples of legislative and policy changes that could be made include:

- Simplifying the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) process and removing 'hope value' from land valuations to allow councils to purchase properties at current use value.
- Streamlining legal procedures for enforced sales, extending timeframes, and increasing funding for these processes.
- Enhancing Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) by simplifying applications, providing financial support for refurbishment, resolving disputes with owners, and strengthening penalties for non-compliance.
- Introducing additional funding, such as through a national empty property grant, for Council's to help bring more properties back into use.
- Council's having primary rights to secure leases on empty properties when recovering money owed.

We welcome the government's CPO consultation and will submit a more detailed response to the department outlining our perspective on this.

4. Devolution of Council Tax Premium Rates

In line with the government's commitment to devolution by default, we believe that the council tax premium rates for empty properties is most appropriately set by local authorities. This flexibility would enable councils to apply higher premiums where necessary and take strengthened action to encourage owners to return homes into occupancy. This would be particularly impactful in areas with high levels of privately owned empty properties, such as in Lambeth.

We are committed to working collaboratively with government to ensure that policies and resources are aligned with the needs of our communities. In no policy area is this more pressing than on housing. These proposals represent practical, achievable steps that would make a tangible difference in unlocking much needed local housing and improving outcomes for residents.

We look forward to hearing from you and to continuing to work with you and your department on these matters.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Danny Adilypour,

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Investment and New Homes,
Lambeth Council

Cllr Dr Mahamed Hashi,

Cabinet Member for Safer Communities,
Lambeth Council