



Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Template

Before completing the EQIA please have a look at the [Dorset Council style guide](#) and also use the [accessibility checker](#) to make sure your document is easy for people of all abilities to read.

Some key tips

- avoid tables and charts, if possible please provide raw data
- avoid pictures and maps if possible.
- avoid using bold, italics or colour to highlight or stress a point
- when using numbering or bullet points avoid using capitals at the beginning unless the name of something
- date format is dd month yyyy (1 June 2021)
- use clear and simple language
- where you need to use technical terms, abbreviations or acronyms, explain what they mean the first time you use them
- if using hyperlinks, make sure the link text describes where the link goes rather than 'click here' Please note equality impact assessments are published on the Dorset Council [website](#)

Before completing this form, please refer to the [supporting guidance](#). The aim of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is to consider the equality implications of your policy, strategy, project or service on different groups of people including employees of Dorset Council, residents and users of our services and to consider if there are ways to proactively advance equality.

Where further guidance is needed, please contact the Inclusion Champion or the [Diversity & Inclusion Officer](#).

1. Initial information

Name of the policy, project, strategy, project or service being assessed:

Empty Homes Strategy

2. Is this a (please delete those not required):

New Strategy

3. Is this (please delete those not required):

Both internal and external

4. Please provide a brief overview of its aims and objectives:

The new Empty Homes Strategy details how Dorset Council will work towards bringing more long-term empty, abandoned private homes back into beneficial use. During a time of high housing demand, empty homes represent a wasted housing resource. Also, long term empty homes are often a blight to our communities due to a lack of maintenance, break ins, squatting, rubbish, Anti-Social-Behaviour (ASB) and pests.

The strategy aims to use the Councils influence to help and encourage property owners to get their empty houses back into use quickly. In many cases our involvement is highly beneficial to the property owner, who is often overwhelmed by the responsibility of owning an empty property. Our advice, information and assistance is often the motivation required to bring the property into beneficial use, either by sale, renting or living in it themselves.

Where this action is not successful, in appropriate circumstances, the Council can use a variety of enforcement powers to firstly mitigate the impact of an empty home (prevent access, remove overgrowth etc), or as a total last resort, take over a properties management or ownership.

While this is a new strategy, the Council has a track record of successfully delivering this work since 2019. Leaders and operational officers already have a good appreciation of the need to meet our duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty, Equality Act, consider reasonable adjustments to our service delivery and consider the human rights balance between those that own property and the right to keep it empty, balanced against the rights of the community, materially affected by a long term empty home. The service can already draw on many practical examples of applying this approach to our decision making to arrive at safe and legal decisions.

5. Please provide the background to this proposal?

It is a strategic priority of the [Dorset Council Plan 2024 to 2029](#) to provide affordable and high-quality housing. It recognises the importance of increasing the availability of affordable homes to meet the needs of local people, improving the existing housing stock, and ensuring sustainable development. The aim being to improve residents' health, the economy and our local environment.

The vision of the [Housing Strategy January 2024 to January 2029 - Dorset Council](#) is to ensure our residents have access to affordable, suitable, secure homes where they can live well as part of sustainable and thriving communities.

Creating an Empty Homes Strategy is a corporate target of the Council – see (CPLAN (A)-03).

The development of an Empty Homes Strategy forms part of phase 1 of the [Home in on Housing](#) programme to deliver the Housing Strategy. The Home in On Housing project brief goes on to say that ‘Dorset has a strong record of positive work in relation to empty properties. We already offer support to property owners to bring empty homes back into use and will acquire homes, when necessary, affordable, or available. We will refresh our empty homes policies and identify opportunities to enhance our role. The Local Government Association’s Empty Homes Report identifies areas of best practice which should be applied to Dorset, to increase the numbers of empty properties being brought back in to use. This new Strategy will recognise and support our work to bring empty homes back into use. The complex nature of the work means this is a long-term activity but is beneficial to many and continues to be supported.’

Evidence gathering and engagement

6. What sources of data, evidence or research has been used for this assessment? (e.g national statistics, employee data):

The strategy was developed with assistance from Dorset Council’s housing services, adult social care, planning services, conservation, council tax, building control, legal services and the assets team.

We also used data from:

- research and analysis of the local and national housing context
- Local and national council tax data
- Council strategies and plans
- Information from internal and external engagement
- national policies and trends
- best practice research
- housing sector trends
- local housing data
- Government studies and research
- Internal staff workshops

7. What did this tell you?

Empty and abandoned homes are a waste of housing, locally, regionally and nationally. There are signs that the number of long-term empty homes is increasing year on year, just at a time when we need to make the best use of all our existing housing stock. Making sure that as many houses as possible are occupied and not abandoned, will help to reduce development requirements on new greenfield sites and ensure that our existing communities are not blighted.

Action by local councils across the country to deal with long term empty homes varies. There is no legal duty for councils to act, meaning that some do not prioritise this area of work.

Action on empty homes raises a lot of public support, evidenced by feedback from press releases, social media posts and public consultation.

8. Who have you engaged and consulted with as part of this assessment?

Prior to completing the strategy, consultation has taken place with the following stakeholders:

- housing services including housing enabling
 - adult social care
 - planning services
 - conservation
 - council tax
 - building control
 - legal services
 - assets team.
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- Cllr 'Task and Finish' Group
 - Home in on Housing Officer Board
 - Home in on Housing Cllr Board

Consultees were provided with a draft copy of the strategy, a background presentation, given the opportunity for 'questions and answers' and to explore topic areas and finally invited to make comment. Feedback has been considered and the strategy amended where appropriate.

There is no statutory requirement for Councils to have an Empty Homes Strategy. As such there is no requirement for the strategy to be subject to public consultation. The need for an Empty Homes Strategy in part evolved from the [Housing Strategy public consultation \(October 2023\)](#) which informed the [Housing Strategy January 2024 to January 2029 - Dorset Council](#). The Councils Consultation and Engagement Team further advised that as the Housing Strategy was subject to this initial public consultation, it was not necessary to re-consult on the detail of this sub Strategy.

9. Is further information needed to help inform decision making?

No further information is required to inform the strategy.

Is an EQIA required?

Yes

Assessing the impact on different groups of people

For each of the protected characteristics groups below, please explain whether your proposal could have a positive, negative, unclear or no impact. Where an impact has been identified, please explain what it is and if unclear or negative please explain what mitigating actions will be taken.

- use the evidence you have gathered to inform your decision making.
- consider impacts on residents, service users and employees separately.
- if your strategy, policy, project or service contains options you may wish to consider providing an assessment for each option.
- see guidance for more information about the different [protected characteristics](#).

Key to impacts

Positive Impact	• the proposal eliminates discrimination, advances equality of opportunity and/or fosters good relations with protected groups.
Negative Impact	• protected characteristic group(s) could be disadvantaged or discriminated against
Neutral Impact	• no change/ no assessed significant impact of protected characteristic groups
Unclear	• not enough data/evidence has been collected to make an informed decision.

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
Age	Negative/Positive	Older people are at higher likelihood of owning a long-term empty property. This is based on the current officer experience of administering casework. This can be due to changes in housing requirements as people age including for example no longer using a second home, inheriting additional property

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		and/or moving into care or with family. A lack of finances, knowledge and emotional attachment to houses can also play a role. One element of the strategy is to assist empty property owners to bring houses back into use. Owning an empty home is expensive, due to the loss of value of a house from disrepair and charges such as Council Tax Premiums, which can lead to quadruple bills. Helping owners to deal with such properties can significantly assist them to dispose of financial liabilities reducing their financial burdens.
Disability	Negative/Positive	Disabled residents are at higher likelihood of owning an empty home. This is based on the current officer experience of administering casework. This can be due to changes in housing requirements due to disability and care needs. Examples can include moving into care or with family. A lack of finances, knowledge and emotional attachment to houses can also play a role. Some owners of long-term empty homes may lack the mental capacity to make complex legal and financial decisions One element of the strategy is to assist empty property owners to bring houses back into use. Owning an empty home is expensive, due to the loss of value of a house due to disrepair and charges such as Council Tax Premiums, which

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		can lead to quadruple bills. Helping owners to deal with such properties can significantly assist them to dispose of financial liabilities reducing their financial burdens. Our involvement may also highlight to the owner the availability of financial assistance such as Disabled Facilities Grants – enabling the owner to return safely to a home they originally thought as of unsuitable.
Gender reassignment and Gender Identity	Neutral	The strategy does not specifically impact this protected characteristic. There is some limited evidence that gender reassignment and gender identify can lead to differences in known pronouns/names when compared to historical legal documents such as property deeds and ownership which may not have been amended. While this does not impact our initial engagement and contact with such persons which can reflect their preferred names/pronouns, it may affect the naming/pronouns used on legal notices which will need to follow the detail of foundation legal documents such as the land registry entry
Marriage or civil partnership	Neutral	The strategy does not specifically impact this protected characteristic
Pregnancy and maternity	Neutral	The strategy does not specifically impact this protected characteristic
Race and Ethnicity	Neutral	The strategy does not specifically impact this protected characteristic

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
Religion and belief	Neutral	The strategy does not specifically impact this protected characteristic
Sex (consider men and women)	Neutral	The strategy does not specifically impact this protected characteristic
Sexual orientation	Neutral	The strategy does not specifically impact this protected characteristic
People with caring responsibilities	Negative	Those with caring responsibilities can be at high risk of owning an empty property. In some cases, owners may have to leave their main residence empty, to care for others at another location.
Rural isolation	Positive	Empty, abandoned homes in our rural towns and villages can increase the sense of rural isolation. They are also at high risk of break in, vandalism and squatting. By lessening the impact of empty homes by using powers to secure them, or remove excessive overgrowth, this strategy can positively contribute to reducing rural isolation. By bringing properties back into beneficial use, some of which will be in a rural setting, this strategy can positively contribute to reducing rural isolation.
Socio-economic deprivation	Positive	Lower income residents, who are asset rich and cash poor, can be at higher risk of owning long term empty property. A lack of available funds can make it difficult to progress with the costs of dealing with an empty home. Helping those individuals to deal with an empty property can help to release capital.

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		Owning an empty home can be very expensive for the owner. They can accumulate significant debt associated with repair costs, loss of value of the house, and council tax debt (empty homes can attract council tax premiums of up to 300% - quadruple council tax). Helping owners to deal with their empty homes can assist them in reducing or eliminating these liabilities, which is critical during a time of high and increasing living costs.
Single parents	Neutral	The strategy does not specifically impact this protected characteristic
Armed forces communities	Negative	Armed forces communities are at high likelihood of owning long term empty properties. Posting to other parts of the UK and world for prolonged periods can mean that they leave their main residence empty for long periods.

Please provide a summary of the impacts:

There is the potential for property owners who possess the following protected characteristics to be disadvantaged or discriminated against as part of council action associated with the Empty Homes Strategy.

- Age
- Disability
- People with caring responsibilities
- Socio-economic deprivation
- Armed forces communities

This can be due to changes in housing requirements, sometimes directly linked to those protected characteristics, including:

- no longer using a second home,
- inheriting additional property
- moving into care or with family
- moving to care for others

- a lack of finances, knowledge and emotional attachment to houses
- employment responsibilities
- mental capacity and ability to make complex financial and legal decisions

Action Plan

Summarise any actions required as a result of this EqIA.

Issue	Action to be taken	Person(s) responsible	Date to be completed by
Staff are not fully aware of equality issues when carrying out empty homes work	Staff engaged in this work to attend specific refresher training on the content of this assessment and action plan.	Housing Standards Service Manager/ Team Leader East	Within 3 months of the strategy being adopted
Protected characteristics of empty homeowners are not identified at an early enough stage	Review all letters and forms to ensure that information about protected characteristics are identified at an early stage of the process. Through officer training ensure that the identification of protected characteristics and reasonable adjustments are a routine part of the empty homes response. All data is processed in accordance with our Housing standards and environmental health privacy notice - Dorset Council	Housing Standards Service Manager/ Team Leader East	Within 6 months of the strategy being adopted
Appropriate reasonable adjustments to service delivery are not properly identified and implemented	Amend letters and forms to ensure that information about any adjustments a property owner may need are identified, and any reasonable adjustments implemented at an early stage of the process. Review how we ask property owners how they want to be kept updated, this may include for example only communicating in person or always putting information in writing in an appropriate format.	Housing Standards Service Manager/ Team Leader East	Within 6 months of the strategy being adopted

Property owners do not engage with us following all contact and we are not aware of their protected characteristics. Alternatively, contact is received, and the homeowner does not tell us about their protected characteristics	All property owners to be given standard information about local support and advocacy services at an early stage (including friends and family), including advice about access to financial and legal advice. If intelligence is gathered that a property owner <i>may</i> have a protected characteristic, contact to be made with Social Care to find out if the person is known to them (both within and outside of Dorset). Note - Although Data Protection allows the release of this information where there is a legal basis, this type of information/data sharing has proved problematic in the past. All reasonable efforts made to engage with property owners in person, including where appropriate home visits, including visits outside of the Dorset area. Review the availability and access eligibility of local advice and support services able to assist or advocate for property owners with protected characteristics.	Housing Standards Service Manager/ Team Leader East	Within 3 months of the strategy being adopted
Cases are progressed inappropriately without adequate regard to equality issues, protected characteristics and reasonable adjustments, especially with regard to enforcement action	Where enforcement action is being considered, and a property owner <i>may</i> have a protected characteristic, the case shall be subject to a specific EQIA, taking all relevant factors into account including contact with key persons, professionals, family, advocates, social care etc who may be involved with that person/property.	Housing Standards Service Manager/ Team Leader East	Within 3 months of the strategy being adopted

	Where a property owner has a protected characteristic then enforcement action would only be considered where all other informal attempts to resolve the matter has been exhausted and the property is having a demonstrable impact or nuisance on the surrounding area and residents.		
Property owners with Protected Characteristics associated with gender reassignment and gender identity are addressed inappropriately in legal and other documents	All informal documentation to use property owners preferred names/pronouns. For any legal notices, should the name/pronoun of a property owner differ from that detailed on any primary document (such as the land registry), property owners to be given the opportunity to take steps to amend the original legal documentation. This will then enable legal documents to be issued in the property owners preferred and current legal format. Note – we maybe legally required to serve some notices on the named individual as it appears on the land registry.	Housing Standards Service Manager/ Team Leader East	Within 3 months of the strategy being adopted
Inappropriate enforcement and other action is taken against - Armed forces communities - People with caring responsibilities who own empty properties	Staff engaged in this work to be trained in this content of this assessment. Absence from a main home for the armed forces communities and people with caring responsibilities is often for periods of less than a few years and in those cases, any action would be postponed as a reasonable response. Enforcement action would only be considered where all other informal attempts to resolve the matter has been exhausted and the property is having a demonstrable	Housing Standards Service Manager/ Team Leader East	Within 3 months of this strategy being adopted

	impact or nuisance on the surrounding area and residents.		
A resident has left a house as it is no longer suitable for them, due to a disability and associated access need	Staff engaged in this work to be trained in this content of this assessment. Staff to be aware that they can signpost to appropriate services including adult and children social care, Dorset Accessible Homes Service (DAHS), for possible adaptation advice and financial assistance (Disabled Facilities Grant).	Housing Standards Service Manager/ Team Leader East	Within 3 months of the strategy being adopted.

Sign Off

Officer completing this EqIA: Steve March

Officers involved in completing the EqIA: Chris Monteith, Murray Bodek, Louise Capaldi-Tallon, Gary Messenger

Date of completion: 16.7.25

Version Number: 3

EqIA review date: 30.7.26

Equality Lead Sign Off: James Palfreman-Kay 30.7.25

Next Steps:

- the EqIA will be reviewed by Communications and Engagement and if in agreement, your EqIA will be signed off.
- if not, we will get in touch to chat further about the EqIA, to get a better understanding.
- EqIA authors are responsible to ensuring any actions in the action plan are implemented.

Please send to [Diversity and Inclusion Officer](#)