



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

Galway County Council

Vacant Homes Action Plan 2018-2021



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1. Introduction

Galway County Council's "Vacant Homes Action Plan" has been prepared with reference to Pillar 5 of the Government's document ***Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness***. The Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy 2018-2021 is an overarching strategy which sets out a vision for tackling residential vacancy issues. This Reuse Strategy is informed by Project Ireland 2040 and the National Planning Framework. It is crucial that we reuse existing buildings and reduce vacancy in order to tackle housing supply issues and also to ensure the continued growth and development of our communities in both urban and rural areas.

Circular PL7/2017, which issued in August 2017, as updated by Circular VHU 01/2018, directs local authorities to prepare and adopt a "Vacant Homes Action Plan", to designate Vacant Homes Officers in each Local Authority. Galway County Council has appointed a Vacant Homes Officer in October 2018. Circular PL7-2017 sets out actions to address vacant private housing, including an initial vacancy assessment exercise. The National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy 2018-2021 sets out a table of vacancy actions, identifies The Five Key Objectives, and the Strategy sets out the main actions that will be taken to achieve these objectives.

Objective 1 Establish robust, accurate, consistent and up-to-date data sets on vacancy.

Objective 2 Bring forward measures to ensure, to the greatest degree possible, that vacant and underused privately owned properties are brought back to use

Objective 3 Bring forward measures to minimise vacancy arising in Social Housing Stock.

Objective 4 Continued engagement with and provision of support to key stakeholders to ensure suitable vacant properties held by banks, financial institutions and investors are acquired for social housing use.

Objective 5 Foster and develop cross-sector relationships, collaborating in partnership to tackle vacant housing matters.

There are currently approximately 3,000 applicants with Net Housing need on Galway County Council's Record of Qualified Households, (as of December 2018). The demand for social and private rental properties far exceeds supply.

2. Local context

(i) Census 2016- Central Statistic Office Data.

While Census 2016 provides significant data on vacancy across the county, for reasons of disclosure, individual property addresses cannot be provided which is a significant barrier to determining where the vacant properties identified by the Census are located.

During the course of their work the census enumerators were instructed to speak with neighbours to determine/verify the status of vacant dwellings. They used their record books to keep notes on the occupancy status of a dwelling, or to record why a dwelling might be vacant - such as a 'For Sale' sign in the garden, the owner was in a nursing home, the property was for rent etc. As these notes were for the enumerators' own use and did not form part of the enumeration process they are of mixed quality, but nonetheless they provide some useful additional information on vacant dwellings in Ireland.

The 2016 Census for Galway County has identified a 12.3% vacancy rate.

Total Housing Stock Galway 2016	Vacant Galway Stock	Vacant Holiday Homes Galway	Vacancy rate% Excluding Holiday Homes
78,207	9,646	3,794	12.3%

Census 2016	State - all households	State Vacancy rate %	County Galway Stock	Galway Vacancy Rate%
Total Housing stock	2,003,645		78,207	
Unoccupied-Vacant House/apartment	183,312	9.1%	9,646	12.3%
Unoccupied-Vacant Holiday Home	62,148		3,794	
Total Vacancy rate	245,460	12.3%	13,440	17.2%

Census Year	Population Galway County	Total Housing Stock- Galway County	Vacant Stock inc. holiday homes	% of stock Vacant
2016	258,058	78,207	13,440	17.2%
2011	250,653	77,522	15,066	19.4%
2006	231,670	67,373	13,583	20.1%

(ii) Geo Directory

GeoDirectory was jointly established by An Post and Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) to create and manage Ireland's only complete database of commercial and residential buildings. The figures are recorded through a combination of the An Post network of 5,600 delivery staff working with OSi. Its database and services are used by Central Statistics Office to achieve more accurate census results

The Geo Directory Vacant Homes figures are an analysis of properties where post is deemed undeliverable. The Geo Directory Data Qtr 3 of 2018, identifies **4,849** vacant postal addresses classified as either "residential use" or "residential/commercial use" buildings. This is significantly lower than Census 2016 figures of 9,646 vacant properties in 2016. The table below give the breakdown of these properties by building type.

GEO DIRECTORY	2018	COUNTY GALWAY	
Total Buildings (Residential and Residential / Commercial)	Q3-2018		
BUILDING_TYPE	Number	Number_Vacant	%_Vac
BUNGALOW	20,588	1,864	9
DETACHED	41,386	2,307	6
DUPLEX	140	0	0
SEMI-DETACHED	8,872	267	3
TEMPORARY STRUCTURE	298	64	21
TERRACED	5,595	347	6
Total	76,879	4,849	

The table below sets out areas of Social Housing need, as determined in our most recent Summary of Social Housing Assessment. There are currently approximately 3,000 people on our Record of Qualified Households. This chart reflects the applicants 3 areas of choice, thus identifying areas where there is high housing demand per Municipal District Area.

GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL HOUSING NEEDS 2018		
MUNICIPAL DISTRICT	AREA OF CHOICE	TOTAL
Athenry-Oranmore Municipal District		1093
Ballinasloe Municipal District Total	Ballinasloe North , Ballinalsoe South,	624
Galway City	Galway City East, Galway City West	843
Connemara Municipal District	Connemara North West, Connemara Central, Connemara Islands, Connemara South West, Connemara South East,	919
Loughrea Municipal District	Gort and Environs, Loughrea and Environs, Portumna and Environs	1075
Tuam Municipal District	Galway North, Galway North East, Headford, Tuam	1084
City Applicants with preference for the County Area		1176
TOTAL		6817

3. Pilot Survey- Action to address vacant private housing.

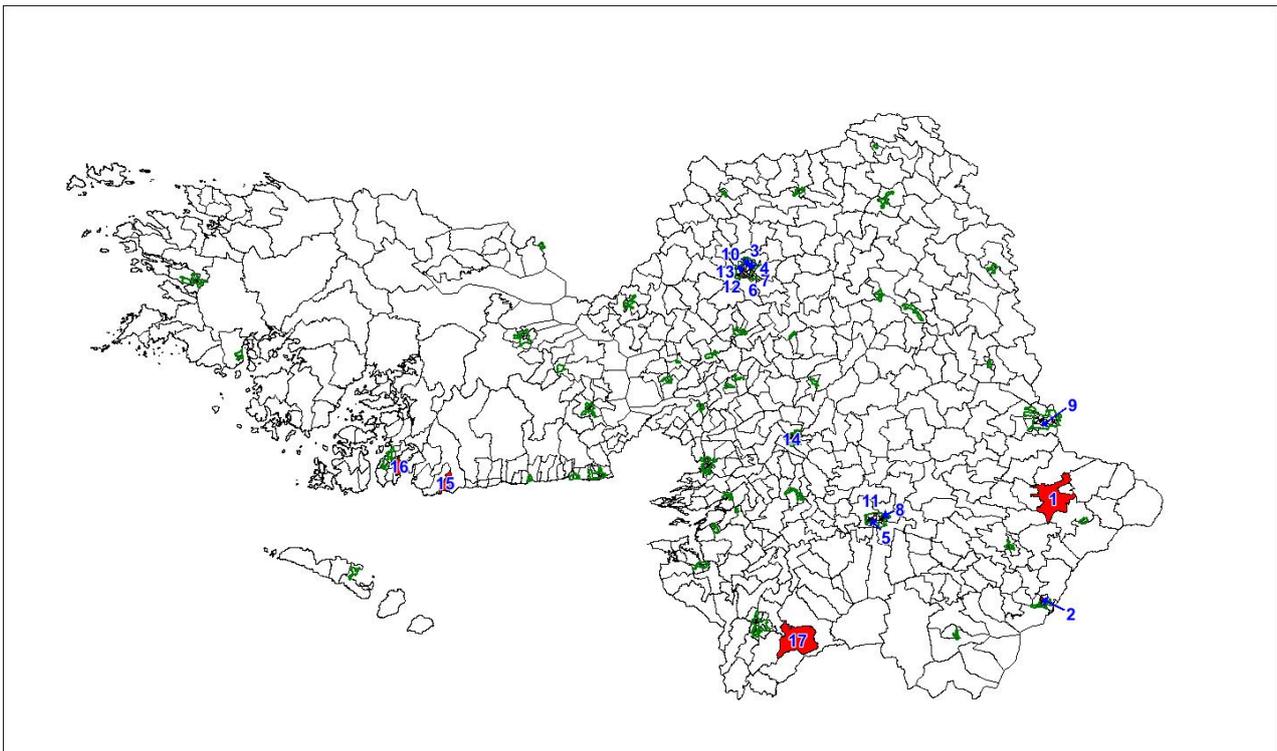
The vacant Homes Unit is rolling out a pilot scheme and developing a Surveyors Instruction/Tool Kit to assist the identification of vacant homes and monitor vacancy levels. Obtaining improved data and deeper analysis of that data will provide the strong evidence base required to guide future policy formation.

In June 2018 a Pilot Field Survey was implemented by the Department (DHPLG), using 6 Local Authorities, to use an agreed methodology for the identification and recovery of liveable homes.

In October 2018 a Local Authority Vacant Homes Officer's Toolkit was piloted by the Vacant Homes Unit in the Department (DHPLG). Galway County Council has just been included in this pilot project, surveying will commence in January 2019.

The DHPLG have identified 17 small area boundaries in Galway County from their selection model. Our GIS section have mapped these areas (see below). 7 of these areas are in the Tuam settlement area, another 3 in Loughrea, 1 in Athenry, 1 in Ballinasloe, and 1 in Portumna.

They will send us on their methodology and tool kit very shortly. Small areas are the finest level of geography for which census results are published with each small area made up of about 100 households. Small areas are used in the sample field survey as they provide the greatest level of data granularity and should also provide cost efficiencies for data collection.



4. Methodology Overview- toolkit for Pilot Vacancy Survey.

Using the tool kit supplied by the Department will ensure a coherent and consistent approach to undertaking the assessment of vacancy.

As 7 of the small areas proposed are in the Tuam area, the initial vacancy assessment will start in this area.

We then supply the chosen survey area boundaries to DHPLG and they extract the survey points which they make available to me in an app, as part of their Toolkit. It will be a matter of physically visiting the areas, to obtain an accurate up to date picture of the real scale of vacancy in the County.

5. Implementation of Action plan and Summary of Actions.

Galway County Council has been tasked with assessing useable vacant homes in areas of high social housing demand, across its administrative area, and set targets for

bringing the homes back in to use through the Repair and Lease, Buy and Renew Schemes, Long Term Leasing Scheme.

The Galway County Development Plan, pyramid of settlements, (page 40), sets out the Hub Town, County Town and Key Towns in Galway County. Tuam town, and the surrounding settlement area will be prioritised for the vacancy survey. This ties in with the small area in the DHPLG Pilot Survey of targeted small areas.

It is the intention of the DHPLG that the small areas be surveyed over two waves, but at least six months apart. This is necessary to ascertain if or to what extent properties, whilst vacant at some point in time, may be occupied reasonably soon thereafter and therefore could be described as being “short-term” vacant rather than “long term” vacant. The research required to complete the analysis is split into two broad streams

1. The field survey (visual inspections of small areas), and
2. Subsequent desk based analysis

Following the first wave of visual inspections, a desktop analysis will be undertaken to attempt to confirm ownership of properties that are visibly vacant (structural evidence that remedial work will be required, build-up of post, grass uncut, etc.).

The owners will be contacted on the options available to assist in bringing the properties back into use for private or Social Housing purposes, through the Repair and Lease Scheme ,the Buy and Renew Scheme and Long Term Leasing Scheme.

6. Actions to address vacant Social Houses (Voids)

It is Galway County Council’s policy to address its Vacant Social Housing Stock, and bring houses back into use as soon as practicable. We have currently a stock of 2,558 Social Houses. A Social Housing Stock Condition Survey and Planned Maintenance Programme is about to start. This project will ensure that the Council takes a proactive approach to housing maintenance, incorporating an investment programme to upgrade existing stock. This will have a positive impact on vacancy periods. A void can arise through surrender of the dwelling, death of the occupant, transfer of the tenant, or other unplanned events. The rate of re-occupancy will hopefully be improved with the above measures.

A framework for Works Contractors is in place since May 2017, to enhance tender competition and reduce turnaround times. Vacancy periods can increase because of because of allocation refusals or the time taken to get a tenant to accept a tenancy.

Galway County Council is committed to a speedier identification and housing of new tenants by using the Choice Based Letting initiative (CBL). Social Houses, which are ready for letting, are advertised on our website every six week approximately.

Applicants are invited to submit expressions of interest in the properties that suit their needs and in which they are willing to live.

7. **Implementation and Conclusion.**

The aim of the pilot survey being undertaken, is not only to count the number of vacant homes, but also to visually assess the condition of these homes and to focus particularly in areas where there is a high demand for homes, which have vacant or under-utilised houses and that are capable of being brought back into use.

The DHPLG has indicated, that LA participants in the pilot scheme must survey in full, at least 10 of the small areas. The results of the pilot field-based survey will be analysed in late 2019 upon completion of the second wave of the pilot survey, with the outcomes of the survey being scrutinised by the DHPLG to assess whether there would be significant value in rolling out the survey on a national basis. The outcome of the Pilot strategy will inform our action plan and targets.

Galway County Council will be engaging fully in this Pilot Survey, and surveying 10 of the allocated areas, as required, we will also target other areas where Housing demand is acute. We will also be using the website: ***vacanthomes.ie***, and the derelict sites register. We will also use local knowledge, and our own expertise within Galway County Council to target homes that may be recoverable into the housing market.

Actions already taken

Galway County Council has already held public information sessions in both Tuam and Ballinasloe in early 2018 to highlight the Schemes available.

Buy and Renew Scheme: Galway County Council has delivered 4 houses under this scheme in 2017.

Repair and Lease Scheme: Galway County Council has received 75 expressions of interest in this Scheme, with 3 potentially suitable properties at currently at the pre legal stage. 12 properties are awaiting inspection to confirm suitability. There are regular queries being received by the Vacant Homes Officer in this regard.

Long Term Leasing Scheme: Galway County Council has one recent expression of interest in this Scheme, it is at the initial assessment stage.

The Vacant Homes Officer will be a contact point for dissemination of advice, assistance and information on residential vacancy and the schemes available to re-introduce their properties back into use for private or social housing purposes. The options available to reintroduce vacant stock into useable housing stock will be advertised. DHPLG

adverts regarding the below options are being placed in the local papers in December 2018. The following initiatives and schemes will help bring identified vacant units back into use-

- Buy and Renew Scheme
- Repair and Lease Scheme
- Long Term Leasing
- Rental Accommodation scheme
- Housing Assistance Payment
- Compulsory Purchase

Ends.