

Empty homes:

From Wasted Empties to Hope for the Future

Brigid Carey: Director AEH

Action on Empty Homes

Action on Empty Homes campaigns for more empty homes to be brought into use as affordable housing for people in need. We:

- ☐ Raise awareness of the waste of long-term empty homes
- ☐ Campaign for changes to national policy
- ☐ Support local communities in transforming their neighbourhoods
- ☐ Promote fabric-first retrofit of empty homes to address fuel poverty and climate change
- ☐ Provide advice for those seeking to bring empty homes back into use
- ☐ Research and develop ideas for bringing long-term empty homes back into use for those in housing need

Increasingly, we're ensuring that tackling the empty homes is understood as central to a wide range of policy issues beyond housing, particularly public health and well-being, local economic development, and climate and environmental issues. We collaborate with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, Architects Climate Action Network, colleagues in Wales and through our Global Empty Homes Network.

Our influence

Action on Empty Homes influences national government policy:

- ❑ The creation of **Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)** powers for councils (*from 2004*)
- ❑ The **reduction** of the rate of **VAT** charged on **empty homes renovation work** (*from 2007*)
- ❑ The **New Homes Bonus** being applied to long-term empty properties returned to use (*2010*)
- ❑ **Removing automatic Council Tax discounts** on empty properties (*from 2013*)
- ❑ Government funding of **National Empty Homes Programme** (*2012-2015*)
- ❑ The **Second Homes Tax** on furnished homes not used as a sole or main residence.
- ❑ **Planning permission** will be required for future **short-term lets/Airbnbs** (*2024*)
- ❑ **Registration Scheme** to acquire the first official national **data on short lets/Airbnbs** (*2024*)
- ❑ Council tax legislation to apply **tax premiums to homes left empty for just one year instead of two** (*2024*)

Change is possible!

The scale of wasted homes

The official numbers from November 2025:

- ❑ Long-term empty homes 303,143 up over 50% since 2016
- ❑ 51.5% rise since the National Empty Homes Programme ended
- ❑ All vacants [*excludes* second homes] 754,320 **UP** 28% since 2016
- ❑ Total official vacancy 1,022,433 incl. 268,153 '2nd homes' that haven't switched to pay business rates
- ❑ The number of long-term empty homes has risen 51.5% across England as a whole in the period since 2016. They have more than doubled in London - rising by a massive 138%
- ❑ The vacancy level of 1 in every 24 homes empty is now *identical in London and the North East*
- ❑ Regions exhibit rises very variably, the North East and North West show the least increase
- ❑ The South West is the most vacant region with one in every 21 homes out of use
- ❑ The West Midlands is the least vacant region with one home in every 29 currently out of use

The regional picture - 2025

Regional breakdown of rising numbers of long-term empty homes 2016 [base] – 2025 [most recent data]:

North East:	Up 11%	[long-term 18,164; total vacancy 52,699] - 2025 rise: 7%
North West:	UP 9% (after a 0.19% drop to 2024)	[long-term 42,606; total 137,158] – 2025 rise; 10%
Yorks & Humber:	Up 28%	[long-term 33,293; total 102,169] – 2025 rise: 12%
East Midlands:	Up 39%	[long-term 26,475; total 80,834] – 2025 rise: 9%
West Midlands:	Up 54%	[long-term 32,585; total 92,254] – 2025 rise: 15%
Eastern England:	Up 93%	[long-term 32,081; total 112,074] – 2025 rise: 14%
London:	Up 138%	[long-term 47,287; total 161,116] – 2025 rise: 23%
South East:	Up 76%	[long-term 42,099; total 155,579] – 2025 rise: 17%
South West:	Up 58%	[long-term 28,553; total 128,550] – 2025 rise: 18%

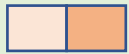
Wider impacts:

Housing affordability

The Guardian



Can buy, can rent



Can't buy, can rent: 'rent trap'

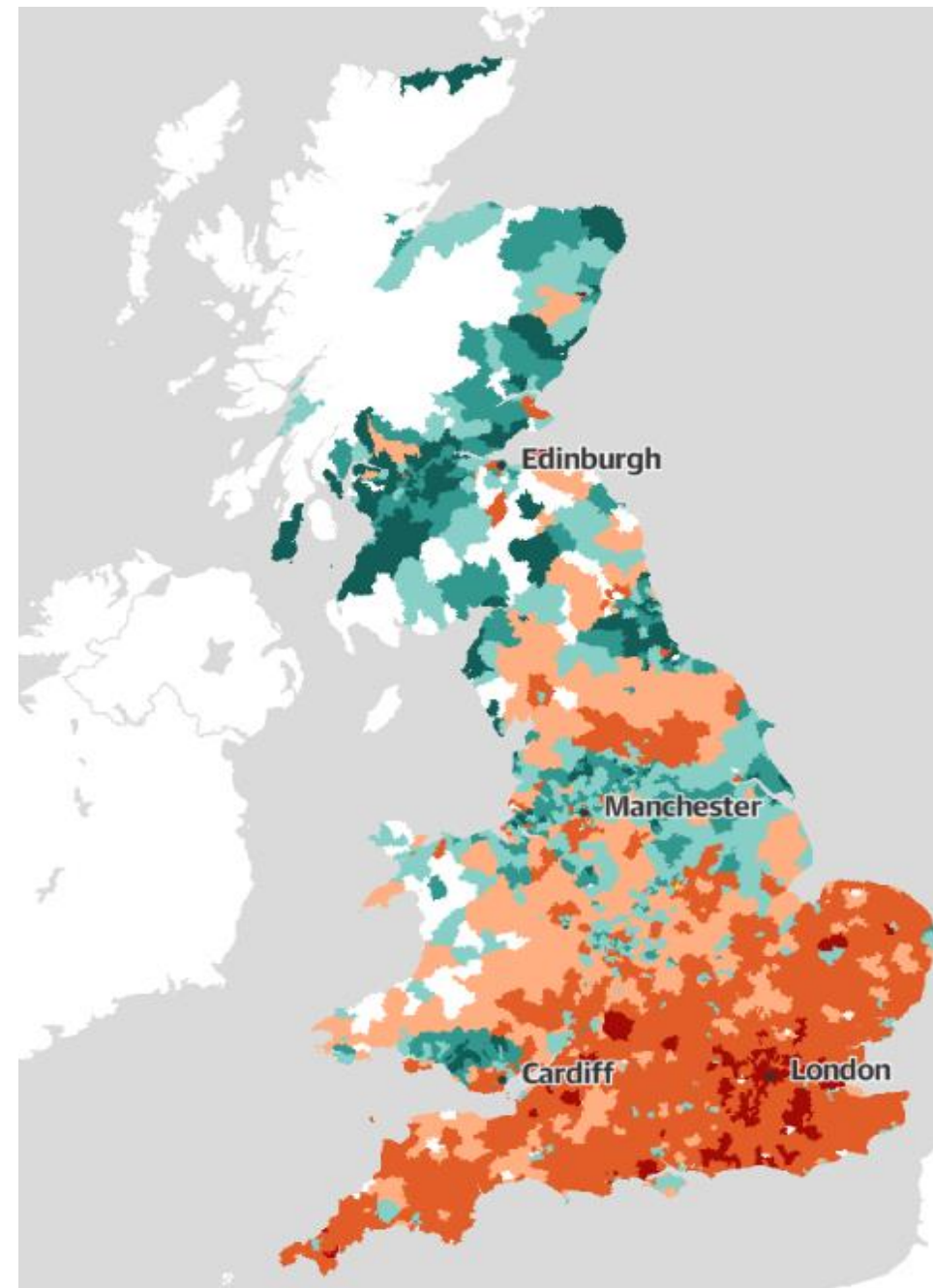


Can't buy, can't rent

Based on typical household income, 48% of postcode districts are 'rent traps'

Further 11% districts can't rent or buy

Hidden impact of gender pay gap?



Fuel affordability

13.4% (3.26m) Households in fuel poverty

Up 37% since 2021

Highest rate of fuel poverty in solid wall uninsulated homes (22%)

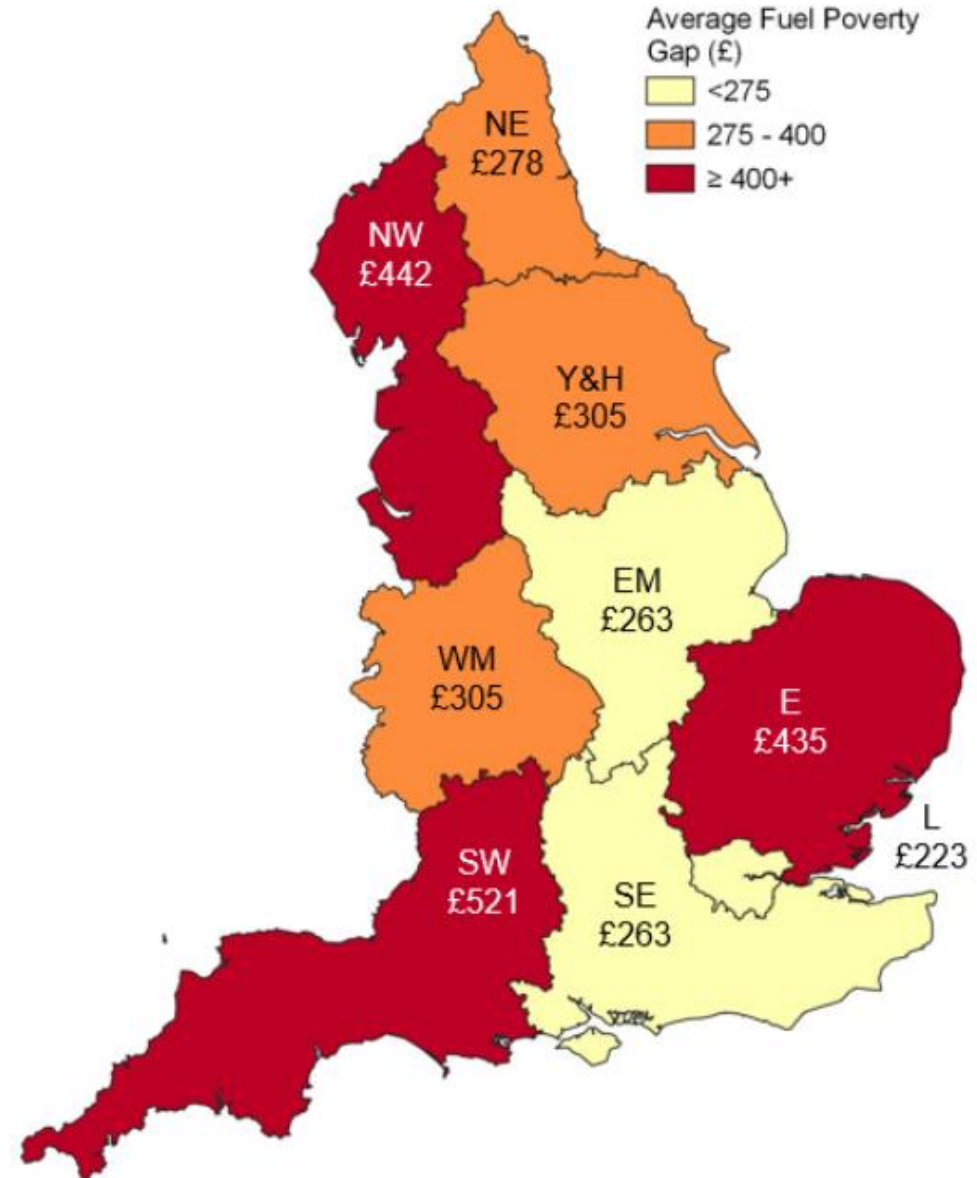
Fuel for heating AND cooling

Pre-1919 housing, average fuel poverty gap: £507

Fuel for cooking - Trussel Trust briefing:
people ..without the fuel to cook the food the foodbank was providing

Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics in England, 2023 (2022 data) - Dept
Energy & Net Zero

The average fuel poverty gap across England by region



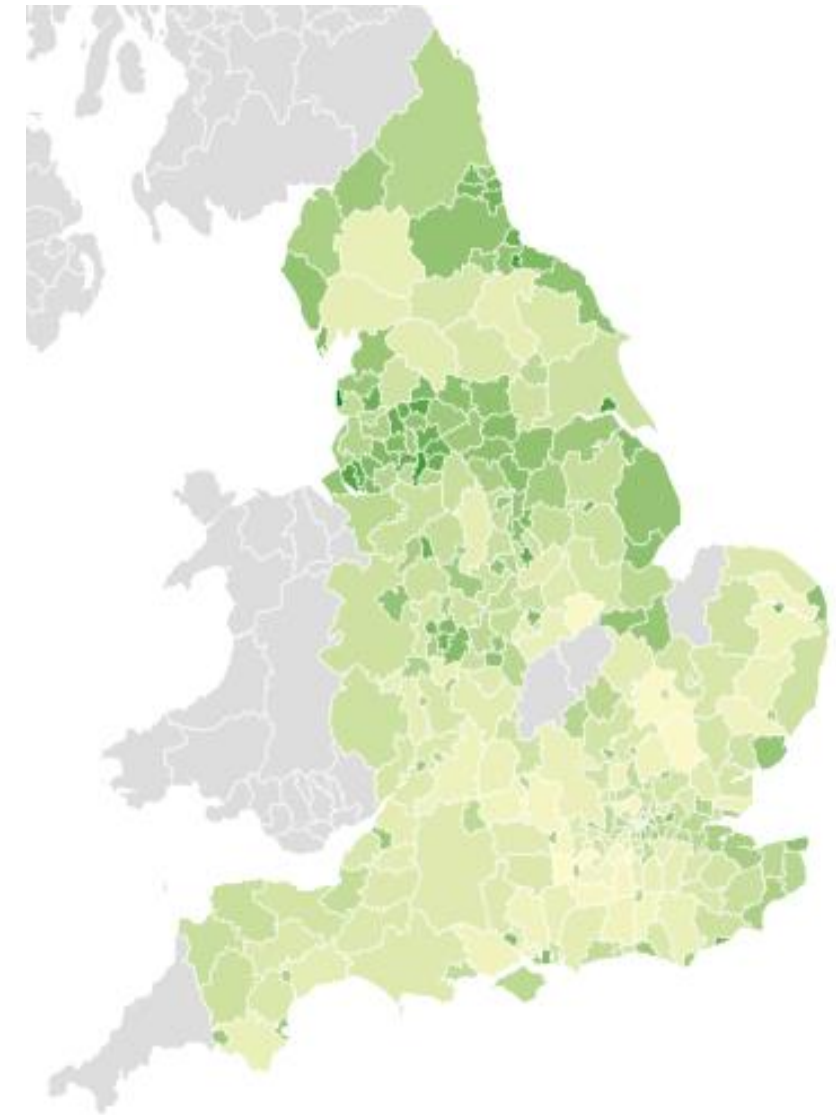
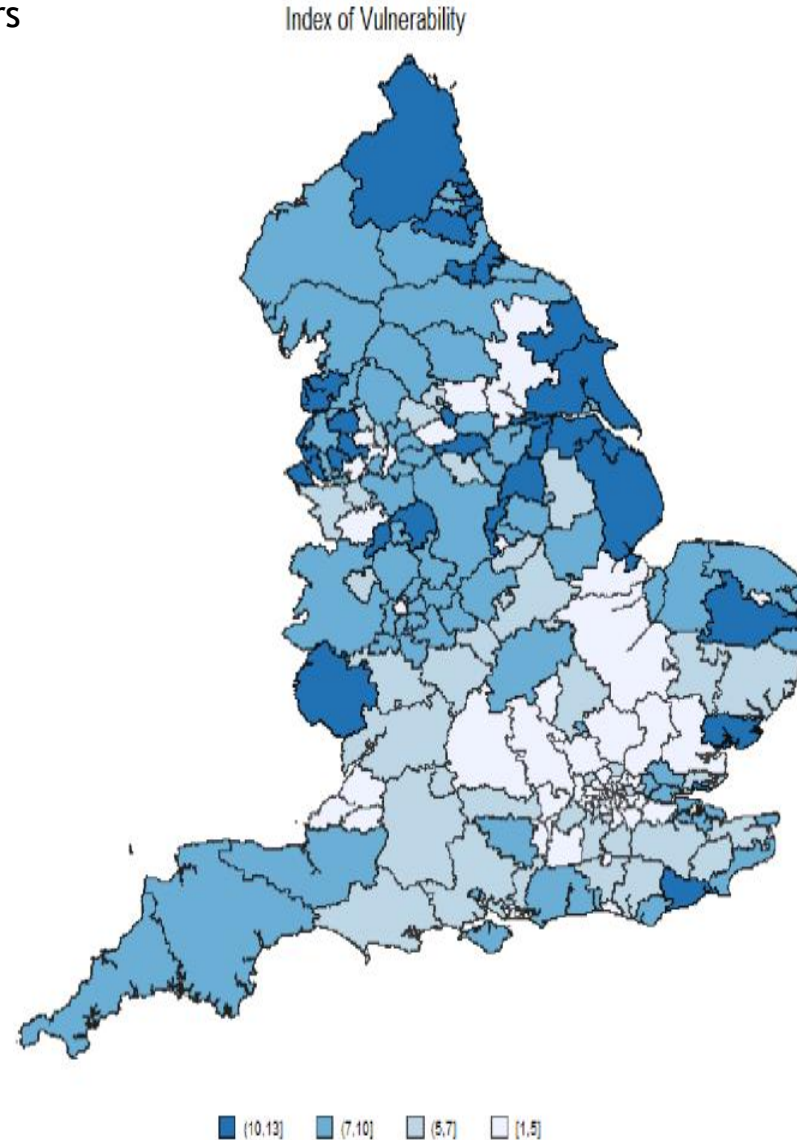
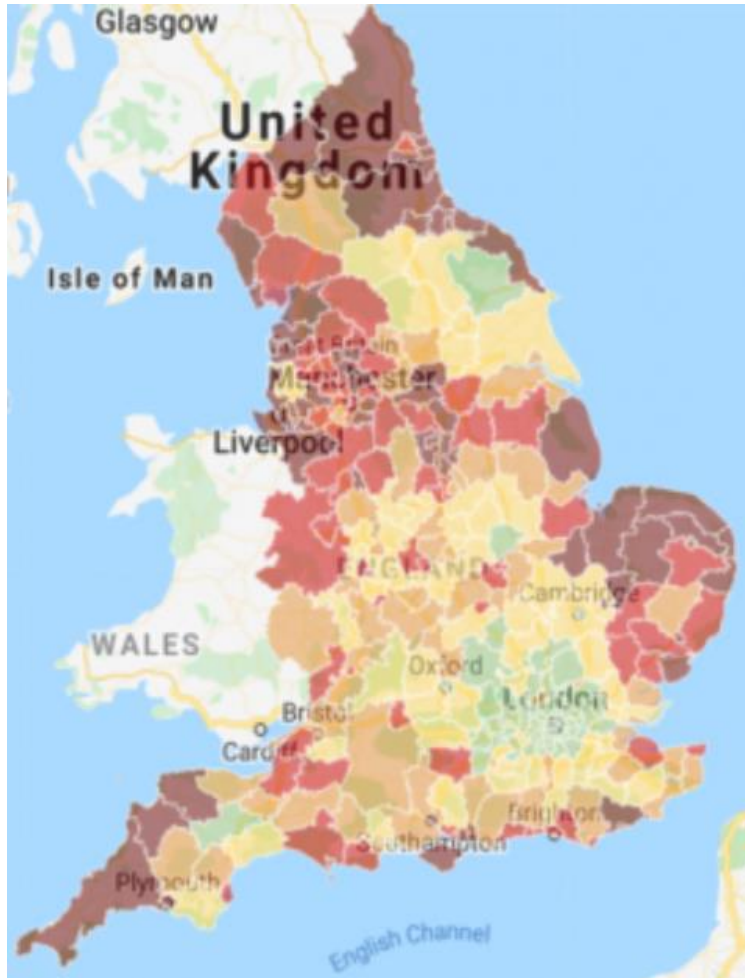
Health impacts

Morbidity
BMJ Open (2022)

Mortality rate per 100,000 population from
avoidable causes by local authority 2017-19
(*Kings Fund 2022*)

138 405.1

Indices of Deprivation Mood and Anxiety Disorders
(*MHCLG 2018*)



There are striking correlations between concentrations of long-term empty homes, fuel poverty, and poor health and well-being outcomes

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What's going wrong?

Policy issues:

- ❑ Focus on demand and 'market forces' vs housing need (Shelter report 2026 - *Build up not trickle down*)
- ❑ Lack of ongoing investment in existing stock both social and privately owned
- ❑ Councils not sufficiently resourced to maximise use of stat powers or support vulnerable owners
- ❑ Empty Homes Council Tax Premiums and New Homes Bonus payments are not ring-fenced
- ❑ CIL often doesn't support wider housing and community infrastructure - 'doughnut effect'
- ❑ Local Plans are target-driven not 'right homes in right place'
- ❑ Failures in health and social care policy to incorporate decent housing as central preventive measure
- ❑ Local economic policies don't exploit the value of renovation works, skills and training
- ❑ Opportunities missed to fully retrofit empty homes to deliver new supply of low carbon homes

Empty homes at scale are symptomatic of policy failures across the board

From Wasted Empties to Hope for the Future

Promote the value and push the potential

- ❑ Take a corporate perspective - talk about how bringing empty homes into use delivers against wider corporate objectives:

For people - obvious argument is addressing homelessness but also think about:

- Managing down residential child care costs for 16/17 year olds
- Domestic violence / refuge accommodation
- Accommodation for people with complex needs
- Transfer home from hospital

For local economy

- Opportunities for local traders and new start-ups
- Work experience and training - skills development - esp NEETs
- Communities with residents support local businesses - keep local ££ local



Canopy trainees retrofitting an empty home in Leeds



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With communities:

- Communities care about empty homes - as a waste and as a nuisance
- Community action to bring empty homes into community ownership has a great track record - engage
- Communities can lever in finances and resources not available to councils - empower don't 'use'
- Enable communities to inform and support empty homes strategies - consult BEFORE decisions are made and embrace local voices
- Turn complaints into problem-solving conversations - give useful, informing feedback

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Influencing policy

❑ Join the debate - take the local to the national:

- Sign up for our newsletter via the AEH website to keep abreast of and support our campaigns
- Research and share the positive impacts empty homes could deliver in your area
- Tell us about your ideas for policy change. We campaign and advocate on behalf of the empty homes sector and are often consulted by government.
- Share your work during Empty Homes Week - we love case studies and examples of best practice. We'll endeavour to promote what you're doing
- Sign up for Empty Homes events offered through Finders International
- Follow Empty Homes Week 2026 on our website and on social media, share with colleagues, members and communities

.....Hope for the Future....

Working together -

colleagues, campaigners, advocates and communities

- we can achieve essential change

Following up

AEH mailing list :



[Action on Empty Homes - Take Action](#)

Empty Homes Week 2026



[EHW26](#)

Finders International
Development Hub



[FI Development Hub](#)

Finders International
Empty Homes



[FI Empty Homes Support](#)

Thank you

Please keep in touch

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