

# Empty homes: the case for changing direction and delivering differently

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16th April 2014

## Supervisors:

- John Hughes - Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
- Dr Lisa Scullion - University of Salford, Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit
- Dr Phil Brown - University of Salford, Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit
- Dr Marie Griffiths - University of Salford, Salford Business School

## Empty Homes Background

- Almost 625,000 empty homes nationally and a 1.8m shortfall in social housing
- Greater Manchester reflects national picture with 44,000 empty homes and 100,000 social housing waiting list
- Empty homes receiving unprecedented political support after high profile campaigns
- Govt. committed £100m to Affordable Homes Programme to return 3,300 empty homes back into use by 2015
- Support in place, but many owners not accessing help

## Empty Homes Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP)

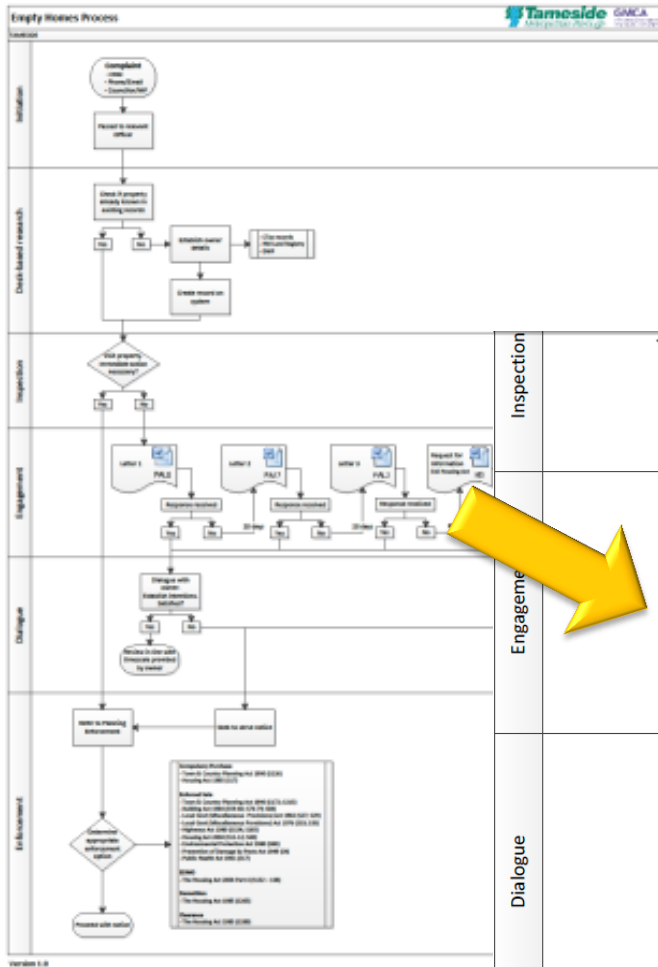
- Funded by the Technology Strategy Board
- Partnership between Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) and University of Salford's Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit
- Facilitating transfer of academic research and skills to develop and embed a new engagement strategy with empty home owners

## Empty Homes Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP)

- KTP seeks to understand barriers preventing empty home owners returning their properties back into use
- Looking at owners from a community engagement perspective
  - Understanding the behaviours, characteristics and service needs of owners
- Using research to develop an engagement toolkit
  - Exploring new routes to engagement

## Current Engagement Practices

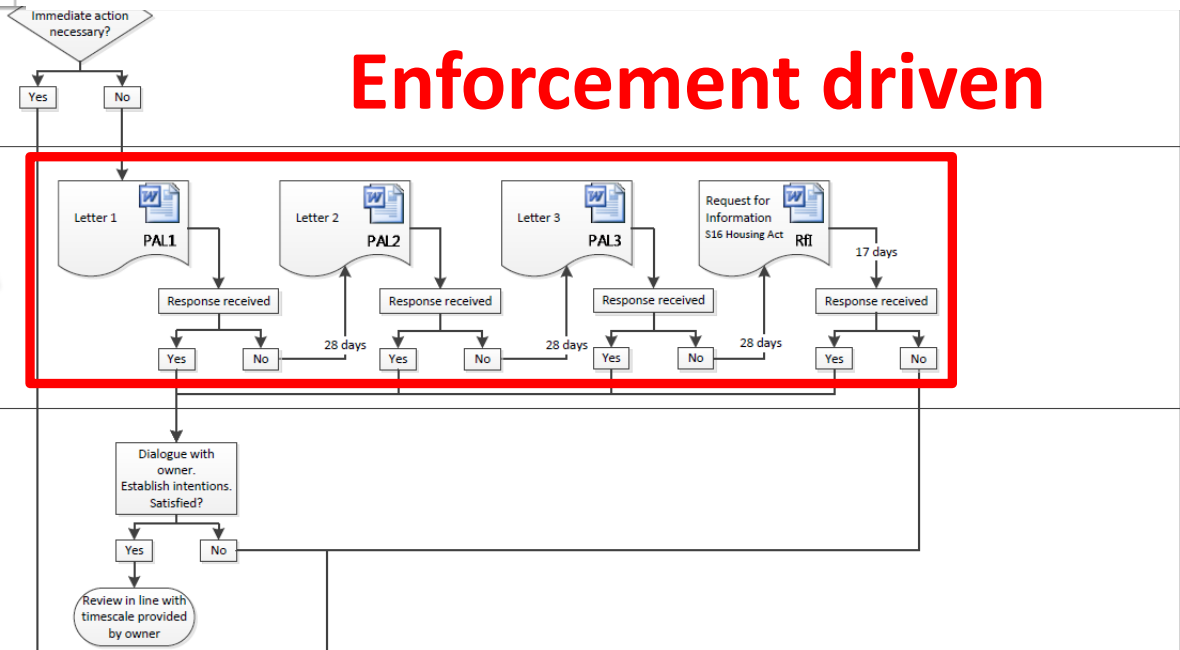
- Council often the sole broker between empty home owners and available support
- Current service designs are built around enforcement
  - Responsibility lies with Environmental Health Officers
  - Authorities responding reactively to problem of empty homes
  - Enforcement alienates and disengages owners
  - Communication is not targeted



## Current Engagement Practices

- Formal processes, letter-driven
- Does little to capture attention and encourage discourse

## Enforcement driven



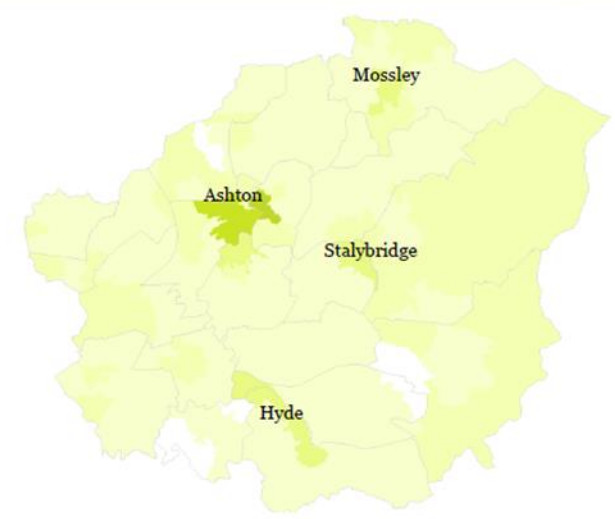
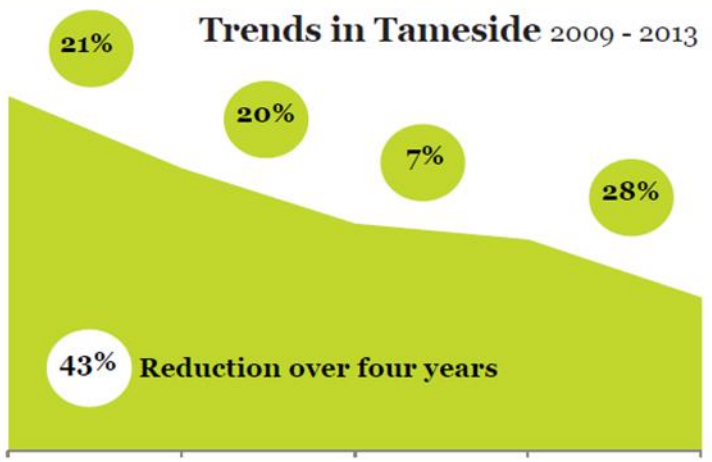
# Empty Homes Data Dashboard

100,000 social housing waiting list **25,000 long-term empty homes in Greater Manchester**



**Empty Homes in Tameside**  
 2009: 2,093  
 2013: 894

2012-13 **28%** ↓  
**437 new cases**



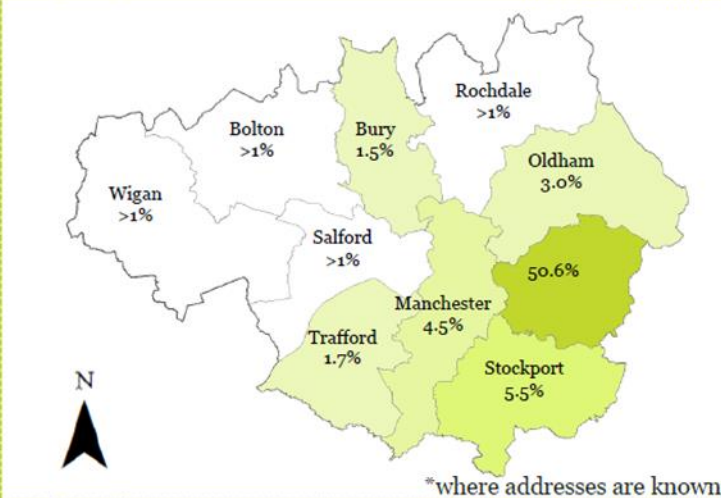
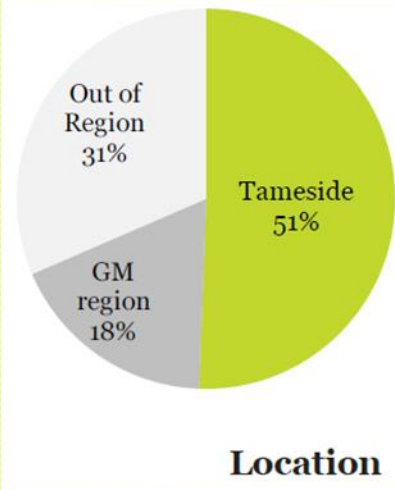
2012-13 782 returned to use (84% long-term empties)

## Tameside Empty Home Owners\*



## Empty Home hotspots in Tameside Apr-2013

density of empty homes



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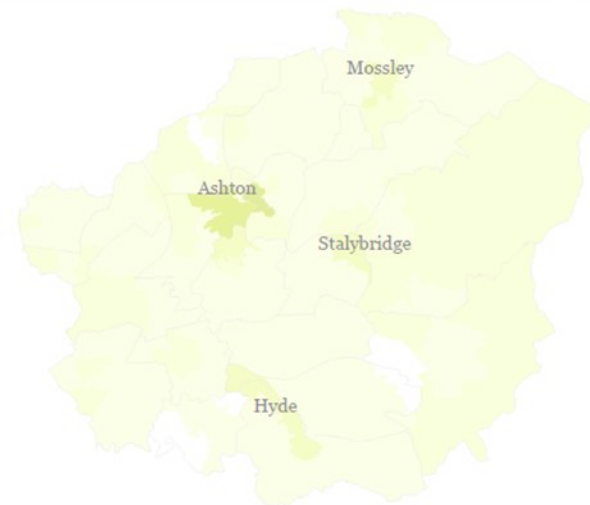
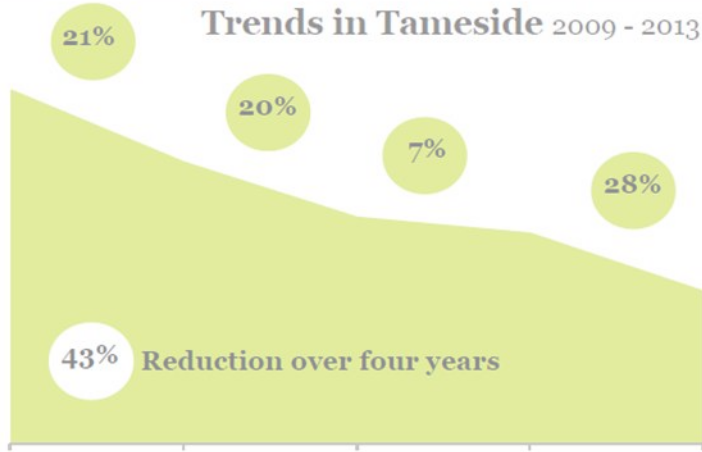
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## Empty Homes in Tameside

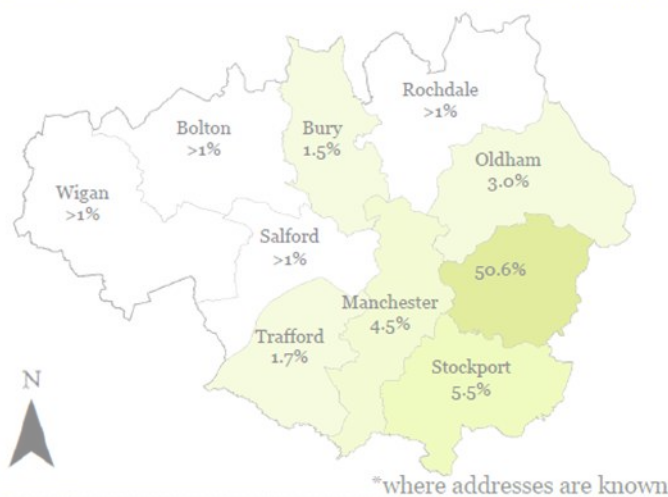
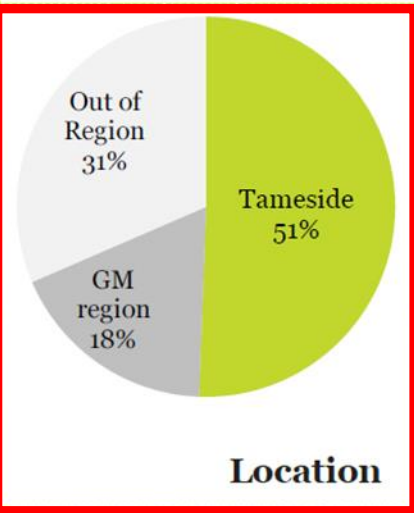
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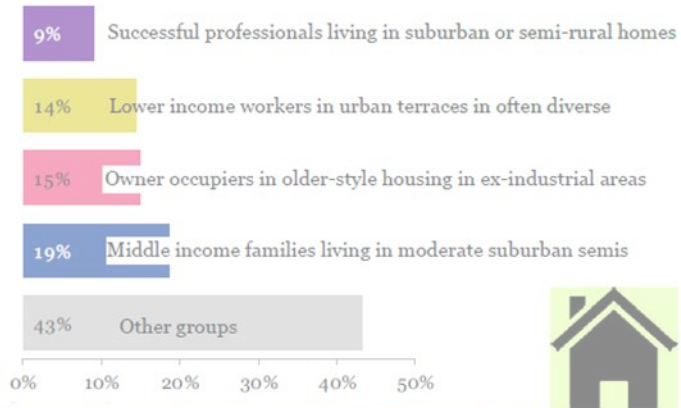


**70% of owners live within GM**

Empty Home hotspots in Tameside Apr-2013  
density of empty homes



## Tameside owner characteristics who reside in GM



(Tameside MBC Council Tax, April 2013)



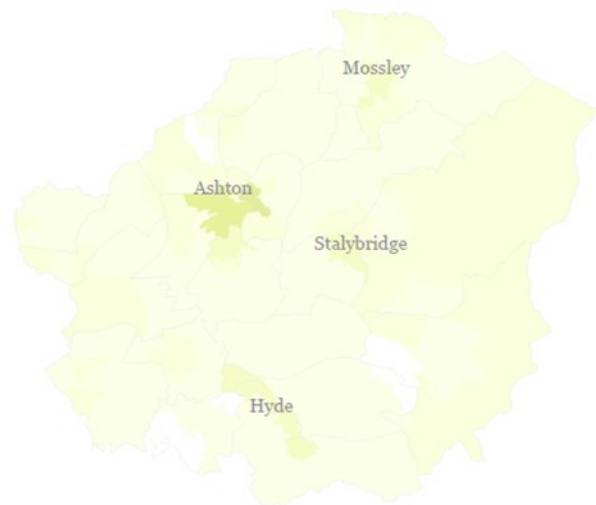
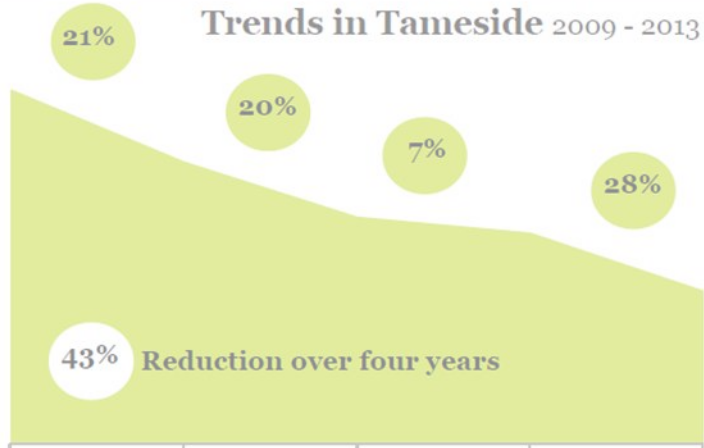
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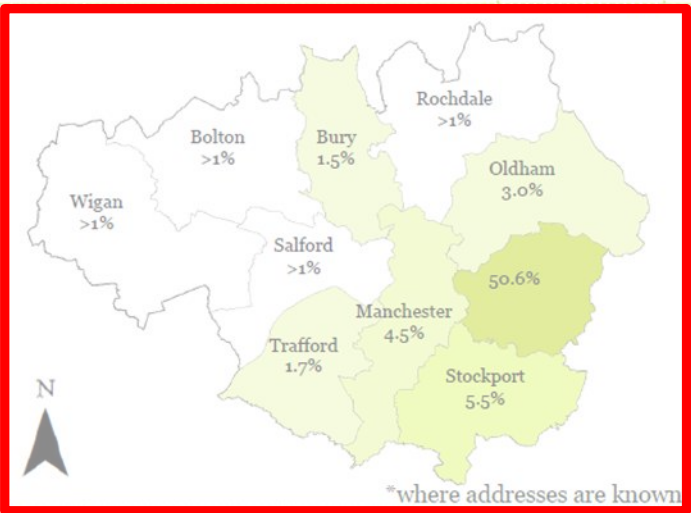
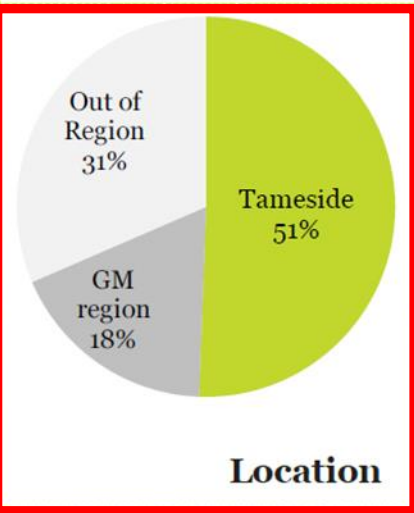
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## 70% of owners live within Greater Manchester

pr-2013



**Mainly in Tameside and neighbouring boroughs**

*(Tameside MBC Council Tax, April 2013)*

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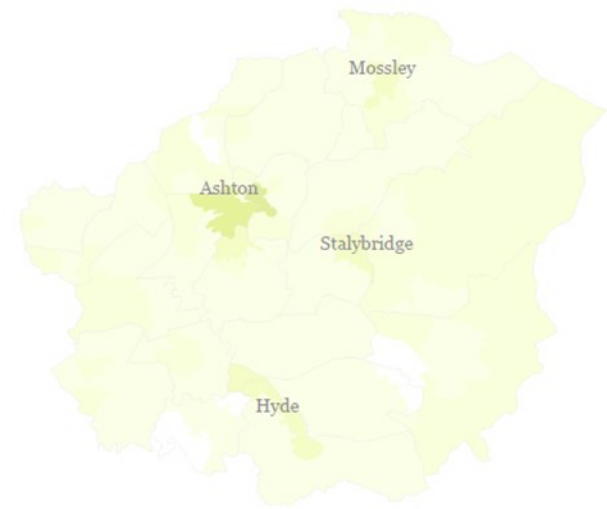
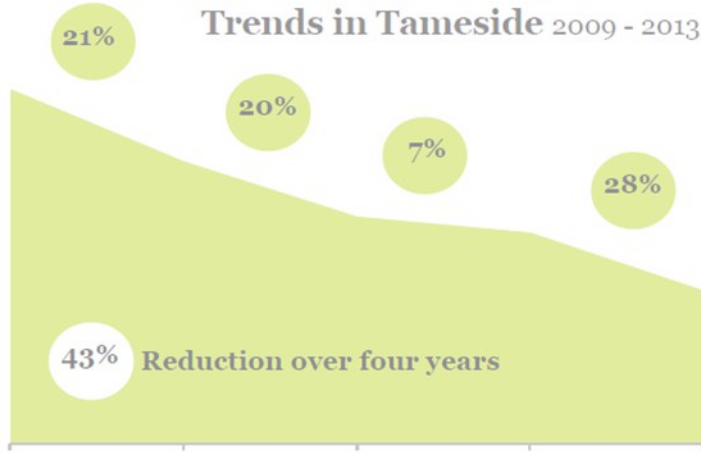
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## Empty Homes in Tameside

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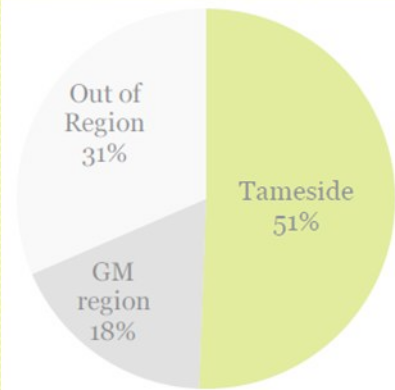
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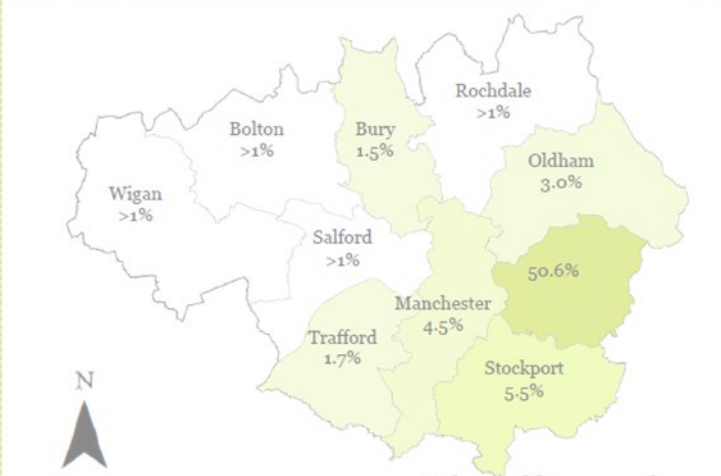


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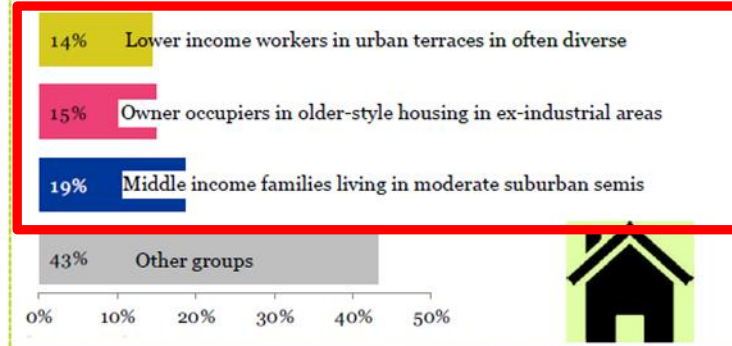
**15% lower income workers**



Location

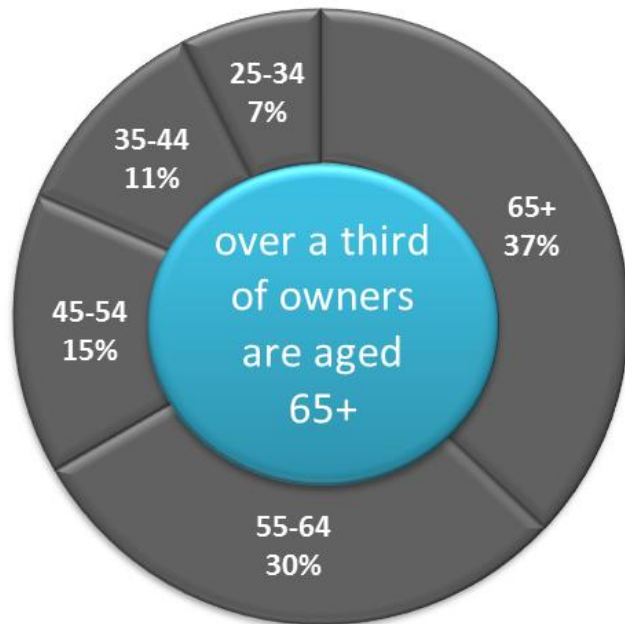


\*where addresses are known

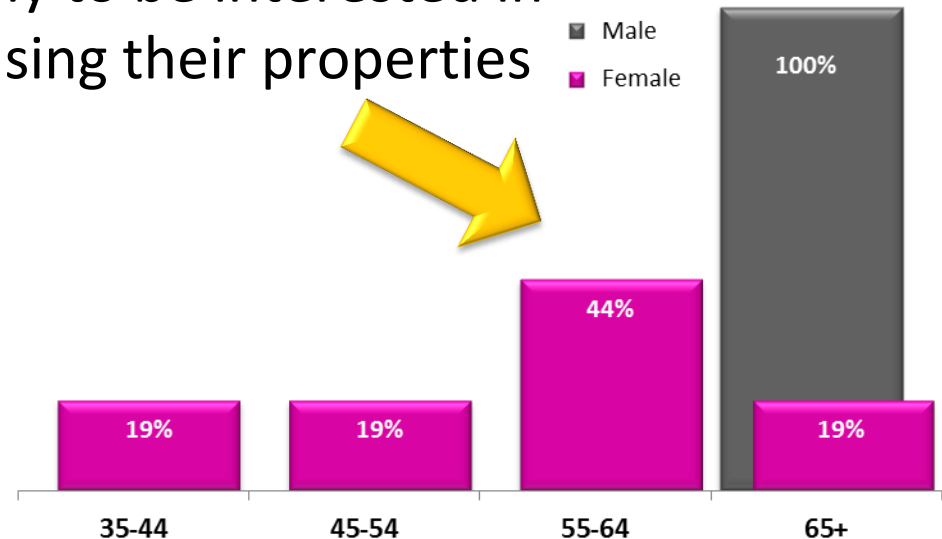


(Tameside MBC Council Tax, April 2013)

## Empty home owner research



Owners aged 55+ more likely to be interested in leasing their properties



N = 36

## Empty home owner research


- Owners are inconsistent and irrational in their decision making
- Ownership is a lonely experience and bad for well being
- Emotional attachment to home
- Cannot afford to sell property
- Property in negative equity
- Do not want 'hassle' of being landlord
- Fear of problematic tenants
- Demand for one-to-one support, with Council acting as a broker with Housing Providers
- Website, social media etc. can play important role for information provision
- Owners then want to talk to officers
- Owners trust the Council as the messenger

## Organisational Barriers

- Need to communicate more effectively
  - More effective use of Council tax information
- A shift in organisational culture is required
- Council's need to be more creative in how they engage, target and tailor support to owners
- Explore alternative service delivery channels
- Need to move towards incentivisation

## Piloting in Greater Manchester

- Traditional engagement material
- Formal, impersonal



**Economic Growth, Investment & Sustainability**

ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE ALDERSHAW DENTON EROVLSHEN DULFELFIELD HYDE LONGDECALE MOSSLEY

**Robin Monk**  
Executive Director

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Denton  
Manchester

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Your Ref Q/EH/Questionnaire  
Our Ref EHLetJune13  
Doc Ref  
Date 05 July 2013

Dear Empty Home Owner,

**Tameside Empty Homes Initiative**

I am writing to you because at 01 April 2013 you have been identified from our Council Tax data base as being the owner of a property that has been empty for 6 months or more. It is possible that your property may have been let or sold in the intervening period in which case; please accept my apologies for having troubled you however I would be grateful if you could take the time to advise me so that I can amend my records.

We have nearly 1000 empty residential properties in Tameside, whilst at the same time a shortage of good quality and well managed affordable housing for local families. We realise that homes are empty for a diverse range of reasons:

- Most empty home owners are trying to sell their properties but market conditions are making this difficult
- You might live outside Tameside and need help finding a tenant and managing the property
- We know that many people may have inherited a property that is in poor condition and are unsure about what to do with it
- You may need access to finance to undertake the necessary repairs that would enable you to bring the property back into use
- Or perhaps you have had a bad experience managing the property yourself.

It could also be the case that you have noticed a substantial increase in your Council Tax bill for your empty property. The decision was taken that an empty property would be subject to a 100% Council Tax charge from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 and should a property remain empty for more than two years it would then become subject to an additional premium of 50%. It may be that you also need advice on housing options in dealing with this situation.

To try and tackle these problems, the Council is working on several initiatives to bring empty properties back into use with two locally based Housing Associations. The first is in

## Piloting in Greater Manchester

- Trialled use of postcard to engage with empty home owners
  - 6% response rate compared with <1% previously



## Contact details:



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