



Sandwell Council

CASE STUDY

£1.8m additional revenue generated through Empty Properties Review

Sandwell Council generates £1.8m extra revenue and plans to spend the additional funds on valuable services.

Our Empty Properties Review Service identified over 200 properties as occupied, generating significant revenue in just ten weeks.

The Challenge

Reviewing domestic properties registered as being empty is a resource intensive exercise and with around over 1,500 properties registered as being empty for over five months, the Council required an efficient and effective way to review empty properties without placing additional pressure on internal resources.

The Solution

Our payment by results, fully-managed Empty Properties Service is a quick and easy way to generate additional income through the New Homes Bonus. By undertaking the review, Sandwell Council has increased its Council Tax revenue and contributed to the Government's commitment of bringing empty properties back into use.

The Outcomes

The review was successfully completed in just ten weeks and identified 226 properties as occupied when registered as empty. This has enabled the Council to generate an additional £1.8m which can be spent on valuable services for the community.

It is estimated that over 710,000 privately owned domestic properties in England are classified as empty, with nearly 300,000 of these being empty for over six months.

Sandwell chose to seek an external partner to complete the review on their behalf because the reviews can be resource intensive and costly. Northgate Public Services (NPS) was chosen because they were able to offer the right mix of skill and experience, rapid resource deployment and value for money.

As part of the planning process it was decided the review would include all properties that had been declared empty for five months or longer, as this would identify any cases where a Council Tax Exemption should not apply and for which a charge should be made.

Using market leading credit reference data NPS managed the entire process, including all customer contact and system updates.

An initial validation exercise was undertaken by matching Sandwell's Council Tax records against credit reference data. This allowed genuine empty properties to be accurately validated and systems updated, while also highlighting those which were considered to be high risk and potentially occupied. By focussing only on high risk cases the Council's residents were not unnecessarily contacted or inconvenienced.

Following the initial validation, letters were sent to those potentially occupied properties seeking confirmation of the current occupancy status. With a good response rate records were updated and revised bills were issued.

Where the initial letters did not generate a customer response, NPS issued reminder letters and if appropriate, carried out a physical inspection of the property to determine occupancy.

To ensure value for money, NPS completed the review on an attractive risk/reward pricing structure, which meant that there were no up-front fees and payment was only made against properties identified as occupied.

226 properties identified as empty, generating £1.8m for the Council

"We decided to seek an external partner to carry out the review and chose NPS because they were able to offer the right mix of skills and experience, rapid resource deployment and value for money.

The Empty Properties service was quick and easy to complete. There were no up-front fees and we paid on delivery of results. We were impressed by the quality and professionalism of NPS' team who carried out the review. This has helped to bring in extra revenue for the council, which we can spend on valuable services."

Ian Hubball, Revenues and Benefits Manager at Sandwell Council