



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage

Addressing Vacancy and Dereliction

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Vacancy context



- Issue of vacancy not unique to Ireland. Various reasons – urbanisation, depopulation of villages and towns.

- Some reasons for vacancy:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• legal issues,• illness/moving to nursing home• between tenancies / for sale• economic decline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• anticipation of higher house prices• second residences• inability to afford renovations• desire to keep a property in the family• unwillingness to use or sell property
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- Some level of vacancy is needed – allows mobility, changes in circumstance (jobs, migration, renovation works).
- Why take action? – Need for housing. But also, breathe life into areas of cities, towns and villages and rural areas and supports environmental objectives.

Policy context

- Addressing vacancy and making efficient use of existing stock – key objective of Government:
 - Pathway 4 of Government's housing strategy – *Housing for All*, sets out 22 actions to address vacancy (with further actions added).
- Other policies: Our Rural Future, Town Centre First.
- Bringing vacant properties back into use provides homes, supports the rejuvenation of cities, towns and villages, while also contributing to environmental objectives.
- Addressing vacancy will feature in the new Housing Plan being developed

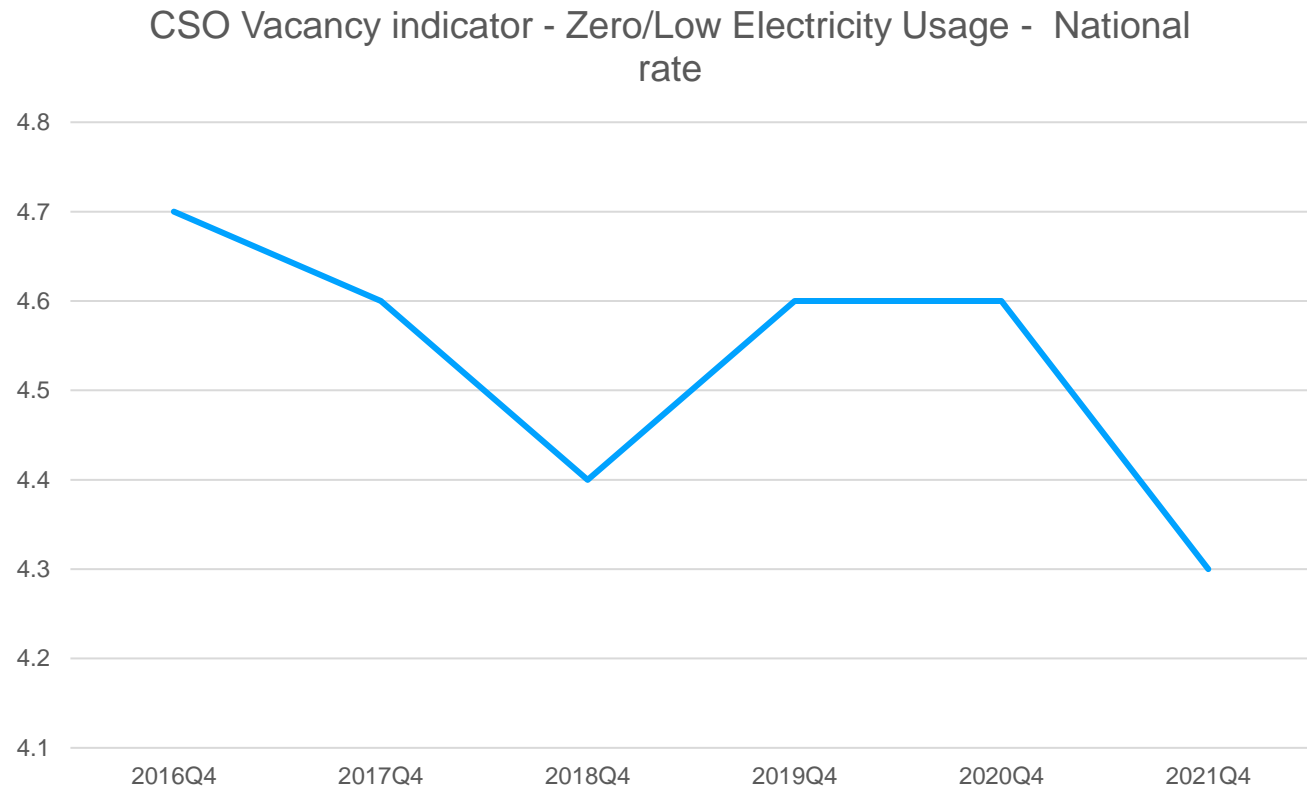
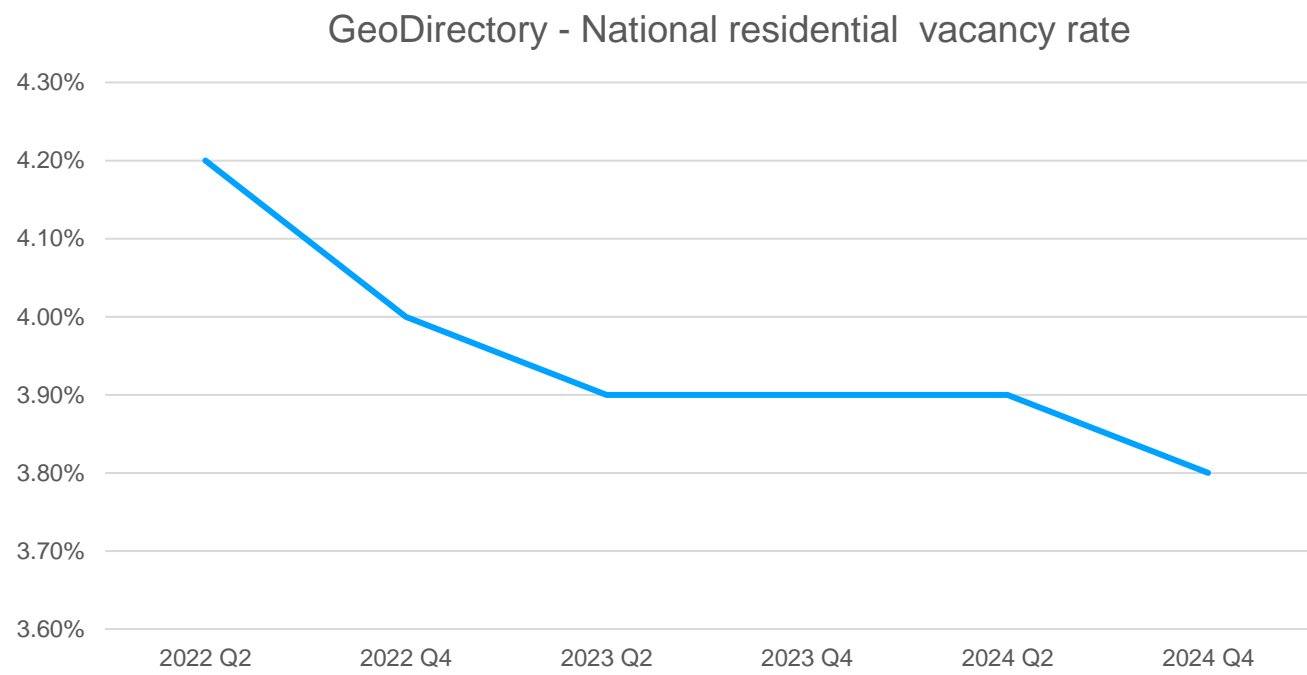
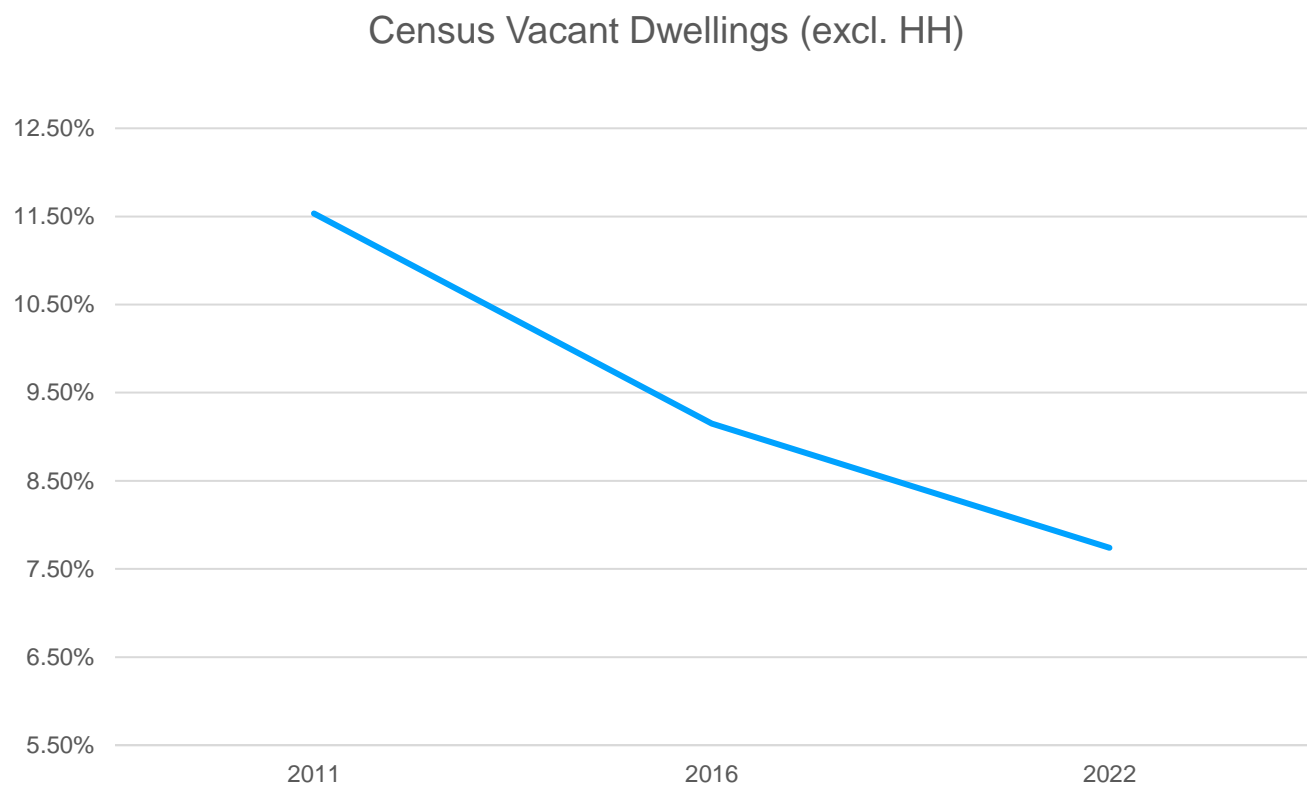


Measuring vacancy

- Different measures of vacancy – using different parameters and definitions
- While varying levels of vacancy are indicated in different data sources, the overall trend is downwards and vacancy levels are decreasing.

Census 2022	GeoDirectory Q4 2024	CSO Electricity Consumption – Vacancy Indicator
163,433 (7.74% of housing stock)*	80,689 (average vacancy rate of 3.8%)	National vacancy rate 4.3% at end of 2021 (latest available)
A dwelling is classified as vacant by Census enumerators if it is unoccupied on Census night, it is not used as a seasonal home and it is not usually inhabited by occupants who are temporarily away from home on Census Night.	GeoDirectory is an electronic register of addresses matched to their geographical locations that has been jointly developed by An Post and Tailte Éireann.	January 2023, the CSO released a new vacancy indicator based on low or zero electricity consumption over a year - implying dwellings to be vacant where they have very low levels of electricity consumption over four consecutive quarters

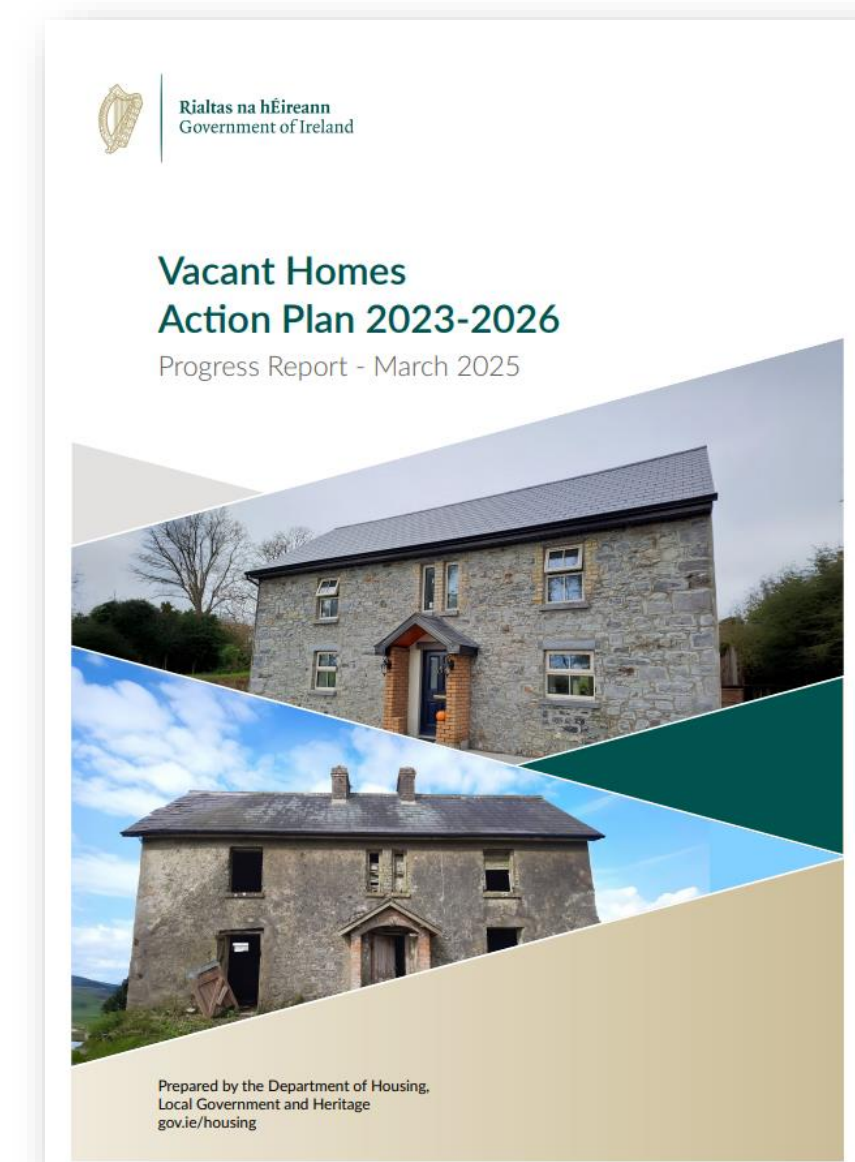
* The CSO note that Census vacancy data should not be used to measure long-term vacancy or the number of properties potentially available for reuse.



Progress to date



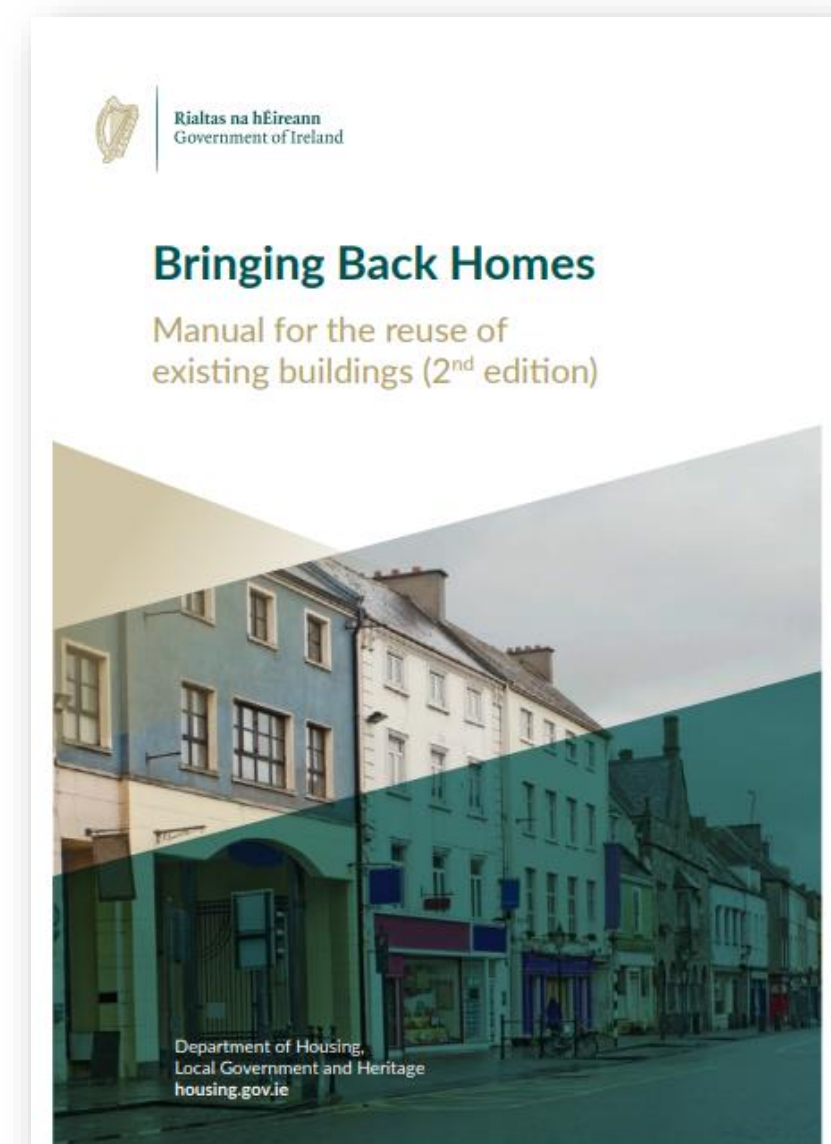
- Vacant Homes Unit in D/Housing, Local Government and Heritage: drive, co-ordinate, support actions in central / local government and support work of Vacant Homes Officers.
- Vacant Homes Action Plan Progress Report 2025 - progress achieved across government in addressing vacancy and further actions to be taken.
- Full-time Vacant Homes Officer in all 31 local authorities.
- Local authorities restructuring / reorganising resources working on vacancy / dereliction.
- Range of schemes & supports in place to support bringing vacant homes into use – Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, Repair & Leasing, Buy and Renew, planning exemptions for change of use.
- Some local authorities successfully using their legislative powers to compulsory acquire vacant and derelict properties to bring back into use
- €150 million Urban Regeneration and Development Fund for local authorities to acquire vacant and derelict properties.



Progress to date cont.



- CPO Activation Programme – a planned and proactive approach to identifying vacant / derelict properties and bring them back into use.
- Local Authority Purchase and Renovation Loan available to first time buyers and fresh starters to cover purchase and renovation works for Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant eligible property.
- Bringing Back Homes Manual 2nd Edition published.
- Town Centre First - town plans developed and support for new town teams.
- Vacant Homes Tax (2023) increased from five to seven times Local Property Tax.
- Vacancy rates declining.



Vacant Homes Officers



- All 31 local authorities have full-time dedicated Vacant Homes Officer (VHO).
 - The Department provides €60,000 of funding to each local authority annually for their Vacant Homes Office / the VHO role.
 - The Vacant Homes Unit in the Department provides guidance and support to VHOs. So too does the Housing Agency
 - VHO network meetings held quarterly
- **Promote, lead and advise**
Internal and external stakeholders, Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, Activation Programme, Repair & Leasing, Buy & Renew
 - **Identify and monitor**
Vacancy data, survey, monitor, activate
 - **Oversee and administer**
VPRG and Activation Programme
 - **Collaborate and coordinate across teams**
Multi-disciplinary team, Town Regeneration Officer, senior management, elected reps, communities, property owners

Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant

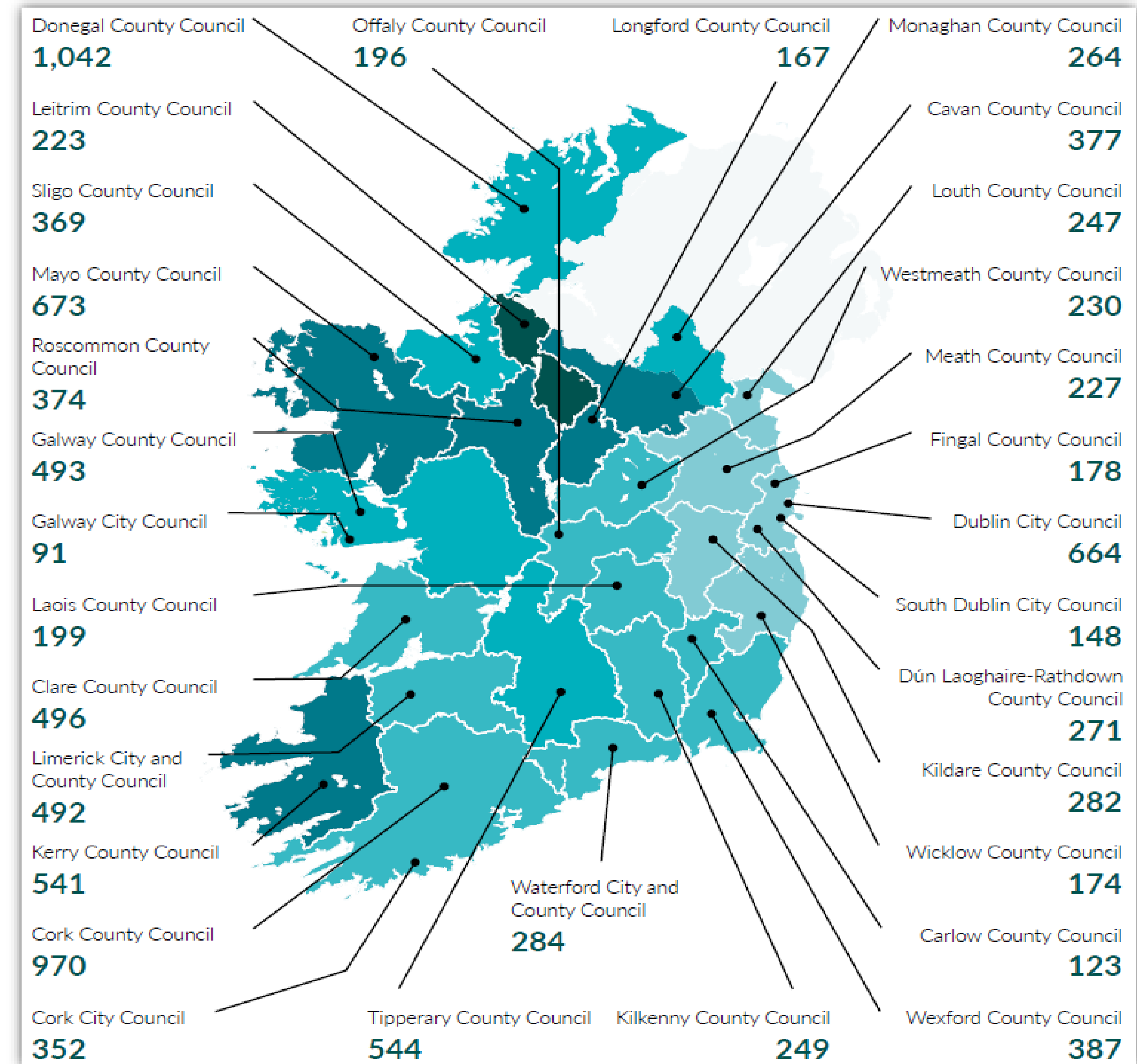
- Launched in July 2022, expanded in May 2023
- Delivered by local authorities – process and decide on applications
- Guidance and support provided by D/HLGH and Housing Agency.
- Max of €50,000 for refurbishment of vacant properties for occupation as a principle private residence or for rent / up to €70,000 where the property is derelict.
- Property must be vacant for 2 years and built prior to 2008.
- Grant available to individual applicants (companies/organisations ineligible).
- Eligible properties - residential, over the shop units, vacant commercial properties (planning exemptions), former public buildings.
- For Rental, tenancy must be registered with the Residential Tenancy Board.

Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant

From July 2022 to end March 2025:

- Applications received – 12,404
- Applications approved – 8,652
- Grants issued – 2,096
- Value of grants issued – €112.5 million

Note: Map shows applications received to end 2024.



Before and after



CPO Activation Programme



- Launched April 2023 - requires a **proactive, planned and systematic approach** to the identification and activation of vacant and derelict properties by local authorities.
- Process starts with identification of vacant and derelict property, then finding and engaging with owners, communicating re the range of schemes / supports in place, encouraging them to use these to bring the property back into use.
- As part of the Programme, guidance and supports are provided for local authorities to use their legislative powers under the Housing Act 1966 and the Derelict Sites Act 1990 to compulsorily acquire vacant and derelict properties, where engagement with owners unsuccessful, to be used for social housing and for sale. Aim is to bring into use as housing
- Requires leadership and coordination of activities and resources in local authority – VHO, Derelict Sites, URDF, Acquisition, Housing, TRO - to support a focused approach to addressing vacancy and dereliction.
- Call 3 of the **Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF)** provides a €150 million revolving fund for local authorities to acquire long term vacant and derelict properties.

Derelict Sites Act, 1990



- Legislation in place to tackle dereliction - Derelict Sites Act 1990.
- Act imposes a general duty **on every owner and occupier** of land to take all reasonable steps to ensure that land does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site (incl property).
- Act imposes a duty on **local authorities** to take all reasonable steps, including the exercise of statutory powers, to ensure that any land within their functional area does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site.
- It includes maintaining a Derelict Sites Register; entering derelict sites on the Register; applying & collecting annual derelict site levies (7% of site value); and acquiring sites, including through compulsory acquisition, where engagement with owners is unsuccessful.
- Total of 1,913 sites / properties on the local authority Registers on 31 December 2023 – does this reflect level of dereliction ?
- Variation across local authorities in use of the Derelict sites Act 1990, with some using it to great effect to **tackle vacancy and dereliction.**

Call 3 of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF)



- €150 million revolving fund for local authorities to acquire long term vacant and derelict properties.
- Fund replenished from the proceeds received from re-sale of the acquired property, allowing local authority to put in place a rolling programme of acquisitions to tackle long term vacancy and dereliction.
- Properties acquired (voluntarily and compulsorily) by the local authority are to be sold by the local authority with limited / no refurbishment works, to be brought back into use.
- Elected members have important role. Under Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001 it is a reserved function of the elected council to approve the disposal of land.
- More than 1,200 vacant and derelict properties have now been identified and approved under Call 3 of the Fund, with an estimated residential yield of over 4,800 homes.

Key Messages



- Addressing vacancy - a priority for Government. Dedicated Vacant Homes Unit and significant funding now in place.
- Vacant Homes Officers play a vital role in local authorities, working with relevant parties across the local authority.
- Addressing vacancy and dereliction requires a proactive, systematic and co-ordinated approach in local authorities. Benefits can be seen e.g. Limerick and Waterford.
- Importance of support from senior management and elected members - driving actions to address vacancy and dereliction and deliver housing.
- Elected members have a vital role to play in supporting local authorities tackle vacancy - invaluable local knowledge & strong community links.
- Re-use of vacant properties can provide life changing benefits for individuals and families as well as bringing new life to our cities, towns, villages and rural areas.

Useful links



- Information on bringing a vacant or derelict property back into use, link: <https://www.gov.ie/vacancy/>
- Vacant Homes Action Plan & Progress Reports: [Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023-2026](#)
- Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, information and scheme documents, link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/f8f1b-vacant-property-refurbishment-grant/>
- Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant statistics, link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/4bbe4-vacant-property-refurbishment-grant-statistics>
- Repair and Leasing Scheme: [Repair and Leasing Scheme \(RLS\)](#)
- Local Authority Purchase and Renovation Loan, link: <https://purchaseandrenovationloan.ie>
- Bringing Back Homes – Manual for the Reuse of Existing Buildings, link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/68a5b-bringing-back-homes-manual-for-the-reuse-of-existing-buildings/>