

# Press release: MPs to debate new legislation to bring long-term empty homes back into use

Measures to equip councils with powers to bring thousands of long-term empty homes back into use will be debated in Parliament today (23 April 2018).

The new legislation will allow councils to charge double the rate of Council Tax on homes left empty for years. Local authorities can currently levy a 50% premium.

Whilst the number of homes empty for 6 months or longer remains substantially lower than when records began in 2004, councils will be handed powers to levy additional charges on homes standing empty for 2 years or more.

The move is one of a range of measures introduced by the government to fix the country's broken housing market, and councils will be able to use funds from the premium to keep Council Tax levels down for working families.

Through an ambitious package of long-term reform and targeted investment, the government is ensuring communities have the homes they need.

Local Government Minister, Rishi Sunak, said:

While we should celebrate the number of long-term empty homes dropping by a third since 2010, there are still 200,000 vacant properties across the country.

This bill hands councils further tools to bring much-needed homes back into use and provide thousands of families with a place to call home.

There are currently just over 200,000 long-term empty dwellings in England, compared to 300,000 in 2010.

The number has reduced since 2013, when councils were given powers to charge a 50% premium on Council Tax bills. The vast majority of councils currently apply this premium on long-term empty homes.

The [Rating \(Property in Common Occupation\) and Council Tax \(Empty Dwellings\) Bill](#) was introduced on 28 March 2018.

The number of homes empty for 6 months or longer remains substantially lower than when records began in 2004, when the figure was 318,642. As of October 2017, the number had fallen to 205,293. The lowest number recorded was in October 2016, when there were 200,145. Councils already have powers and incentives to tackle empty homes.

Through the New Homes Bonus scheme introduced in 2011, councils earn the same financial reward for bringing an empty home back into use as for building a new one. And since 2013, councils have been able to charge a 50% premium on the Council Tax bills of owners of homes empty for 2 years or more. 291 out of 326 councils applied an empty homes premium in 2017 to 2018.

The government has published guidance that makes clear that the premium should not be used to penalise owners of homes that are genuinely on the market for rent or sale.

There are exemptions in place for homes that are empty due to the occupant living in armed forces accommodation for job-related purposes, or to annexes being used as part of a main property.

Also, the Council Tax system provides statutory exemptions for properties left empty for a specific purpose – for example, when a person goes into care. Councils also have powers to apply discounts in cases where homes are empty due to special circumstances – for example, hardship, fire or flooding.

There is a Council Tax exemption for homes which are empty due to probate.

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## **Speech: Remarks by British High Commissioner at the Commemoration of 1994 Genocide in Rwanda**

Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen, First of all I would like to thank Robert, Hypolitte and Zephy for everything that they have done to organise today's events.

This month was the first time I had attended the Genocide Commemoration. I accompanied our Minister for AF to the Gisozi memorial on 7 April. I also attended the Walk to Remember and the event at the stadium and today we had the very moving experience of visiting Ntarama Genocide Memorial Site.

I wanted to share my thoughts and impressions with you and they are set against two experiences. First I visited Rwanda in my first role in the FCO in 1995 when of course the events were still very raw. Secondly I was posted in Bosnia from 2011 to 2015 and visited Srebrenica and the genocide memorial there several times. The scale of Srebrenica was much smaller – about 9000 mostly Bosnian Muslims were killed. But of course if you are a mother or a sister or a wife your experience of deep loss and tragedy is a shared one. At the same time Bosnia is a country that has not reconciled, which is still in huge denial and very ethnically divided. It's a sharp contrast with Rwanda.

My First impressions after visiting the memorial were:

1. The scale of the Genocide against the Tutsi as well as the large number of others killed is something we as foreigners will never really be able to comprehend. I find the scale, the level of brutality, and the rapid breakdown of relationships that made the genocide possible hard to comprehend. But we must understand as much as we can if we are to understand Rwanda today.
2. I am impressed by how this commemoration involves every single member of Rwanda society. Young and old. Survivors and perpetrators. People of different ethnicity and religion. Rwanda can truly be proud of the way it brought its people together to remember and to unite. And I am proud of the role UK has had through organisations, like the Aegis Trust to help that remembrance and commemoration process.
3. And thirdly those of us who are foreigners who come for short periods cannot but be amazed at how Rwanda has moved on and progressed. I can think of no other country in modern history which has taken such steps to emerge from such atrocities and in such a united way.

I wanted to say something about the UK in Rwanda. No Western country in hindsight is proud of its role during the genocide. We frankly did not do enough. For us, as for many countries we did not have representation in the country, but we did not know or care enough. Things have changed. The UK is now a proud partner of Rwanda. I see Rwandan politicians very positive about our development relationship because they know we are now here for the long term. The UK took the decision in the mid-nineties that we were going to invest in Rwanda and stick with it on its journey to becoming a peaceful, successful country.

I wanted to add a note on the genocidaire case which you will see has been in the news over the last week. Spoke to Foreign Minister and Justice Minister about this over last fortnight. This is a Judicial/technical not political decision. Rwanda asked us to prosecute. Metropolitan Police may decide on conducting preliminary enquiry. I cannot prejudge but I can say that the UK government is extremely keen to see those involved in atrocities face justice

Colleague and friends today

- we remember because it is our duty to remember all those who died
- we unite to ensure these sort of events never happen again
- we renew our commitment to move forward with Rwanda and her long term development and security

So in closing, I would like to thank once again all those who have organised this afternoon, and to everyone for taking part and sharing experiences on what is a painful but hopeful day.

Thank you.

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## News story: New support to help children living with alcohol-dependent parents

New plans announced today by Health and Social Care Secretary Jeremy Hunt will help identify at-risk children more quickly, and provide them with rapid access to support and advice.

The package of measures is backed by £6 million in joint funding from the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Work and Pensions. It is designed to help an estimated 200,000 children in England living with alcohol-dependent parents.

The measures include:

- fast access to support and mental health services for children and their families where there is a dependent drinker
- quicker identification of at-risk children, including those undertaking inappropriate care responsibilities
- the provision of outreach programmes to get more parents successfully through addiction treatment
- early intervention programmes to reduce the numbers of children needing to go into care

Local authorities will be invited to bid for funding by coming up with innovative solutions based on local need, with priority given to areas where more children are affected. Public Health England will be responsible for working with the funded areas to monitor progress.

The package of interventions, totalling up to £6 million, includes:

- a £4.5 million innovation fund for local authorities to develop plans that improve outcomes for children of alcohol-dependent parents
- £1 million to fund national capacity building by non-governmental organisations

The new funding follows government investment last year of £500,000 to expand national helplines for children with alcoholic parents.

Health and Social Care Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

The consequences of alcohol abuse are devastating for those in the grip of an addiction—but for too long, the children of alcoholic parents have been the silent victims. This is not right, nor fair.

These measures will ensure thousands of children affected by their parent's alcohol dependency have access to the support they need and deserve.

Some things matter much more than politics, and I have been moved by my Labour counterpart Jon Ashworth's bravery in speaking out so honestly about life as the child of an alcoholic. I pay tribute to him and MPs with similar experiences across the House who have campaigned so tenaciously to turn their personal heartache into a lifeline for children in similar circumstances today.

The Health and Social Care Secretary has also appointed a dedicated minister with specific responsibility for children with alcohol-dependent parents. Steve Brine MP will lead this work in addition to his role as public health minister.

Public Health Minister Steve Brine said:

All children deserve to feel safe—and it is a cruel reality that those growing up with alcoholic parents are robbed of this basic need.

Exposure to their parent's harmful drinking leaves children vulnerable to a host of problems both in childhood and later in life—and it is right that we put a stop to it once and for all.

I look forward to working with local authorities and charities to strengthen the services that make a real difference to young people and their families.

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## **Press release: Foreign Secretary travels to Toronto for G7 meeting**

Foreign Secretary travels to Toronto for G7 meeting – GOV.UK

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson travels to Toronto for a meeting of Foreign Ministers from G7 countries.



Today and tomorrow (22nd and 23rd April) the Foreign Secretary will be in Toronto for a meeting of Foreign Ministers from the G7 countries. During the summit the Foreign Secretary will discuss issues ranging from gender equality and women's empowerment, to non-proliferation and disarmament, to conflict prevention and stability. For the session on counter-extremism the Foreign Secretary will be joined by Home Office Security Minister Ben Wallace.

Speaking ahead of the meeting, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

I am proud to represent the UK at this meeting of the top economies and international powers in the world. Last week London hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, and later this week I will travel to Brussels for a NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting.

The UK and Canada are the only two countries that are members of all these organisations – evidence not just the closeness of the UK-Canada relationship, but of the UK's influence in the world. Influence that will continue long after we leave the European Union.

The G7 is a group of likeminded partners who work to protect the rules-based international system. I welcome unanimous G7 support in recent week both for the joint UK/US/French action in Syria, and for the UK's response to the terrible poisonings in Salisbury. I look forward to continuing that work in Toronto this week.

- The G7 countries are the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States. The EU, represented by High Representative Federica Mogherini, will also attend the meeting.

## **Further information**

Published 22 April 2018

Thank you for your feedback