# Brent Council scrutinised over unoccupied property purchase



Brent Council in North London has faced scrutiny regarding its recent purchase of a property costing £530,000, which has remained unoccupied for nearly two years. The house, located near Sudbury Town station and divided into two family-sized flats, was acquired in April 2023 as part of the council’s efforts to alleviate the housing crisis within the borough. The council asserts that the refurbishment process has been unexpectedly complex and time-consuming, delaying the availability of the flats.

Leader of the Brent Liberal Democrats and Sudbury Ward Councillor, Paul Lorber, has condemned the decision, labelling it an example of “financial incompetence.” He argued that the problematic state of the property should have been apparent during the initial survey before the purchase was made. Cllr Lorber has been vocal about his concerns regarding the vacant house for over a year and is now calling for an investigation into the council’s property acquisition process, particularly how properties are evaluated before purchase.

The urgency of the situation is underscored by the rising number of families at risk of homelessness in Brent. Council reports indicate that around 150 families seek assistance at the Civic Centre each week, with an estimated 33,000 individuals currently on the housing register. Among these, approximately 2,266 families are temporarily accommodated at a significant cost of £100,000 per day, as detailed by the council's own data.

Cllr Lorber contended that having empty properties in the council's portfolio is “depriving families of a decent home,” estimating that the council has potentially lost at least £50,000 in either foregone rental income or expenses related to temporary accommodation. In light of this, he urges for a systemic review of the process by which the council acquires properties on the private market, including how their conditions are assessed prior to purchase.

In response to the criticism, a spokesperson for Brent Council acknowledged that the purchased property was intended to provide a "safe, secure, and decent home" for homeless residents. They further stated that the house requires extensive refurbishment, which has taken longer than anticipated. The spokesperson reassured that the first of the two flats is nearing completion and will soon be available for residents on the housing waiting list.

The council’s approach includes initiatives through its i4B housing company, which aims to provide affordable, council-owned homes, including housing for key workers. The spokesperson expressed confidence in the projection of delivering 899 affordable homes by April 2026, as part of the New Council Homes Programme.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)