# Sadiq Khan calls for doubling council tax on London's 34,000 empty homes to tackle housing crisis



Amid growing concerns over London's acute housing crisis, Mayor Sadiq Khan has called for enhanced powers enabling local councils to impose significantly higher council tax rates on empty properties. During a recent appearance on LBC, Khan articulated his views on the staggering number of unoccupied homes across the capital, suggesting that those who leave their properties vacant as an investment should be subjected to punitive taxation. “I’m not being funny, if you can afford a flat and leave it empty, you can afford double council tax,” he asserted, emphasising that this measure could incentivise homeowners to either rent out or sell their properties.

Khan's remarks follow alarming statistics indicating that there are over 34,000 long-term vacant homes in London—properties that have remained unoccupied for more than six months. This figure, the highest recorded since 2010, has prompted criticism from various quarters, with many declaring it a scandal in the context of an ongoing housing shortage. The estimated combined value of these empty homes exceeds £20 billion, a staggering sum that underscores the potential economic impact of activating these properties for residential use.

The Mayor has called upon the government to allow councils the authority to double council tax rates on these empty homes, a move he believes could effectively dissuade speculative investments by overseas buyers who contribute little to the London housing market. In particular, Khan highlighted areas such as Nine Elms, where luxury properties are often left unoccupied, as prime examples of the disconnection between investment and the pressing need for accessible housing.

Local councils, such as Wandsworth, already have the capability to charge an elevated rate of council tax on empty homes, but current regulations limit these charges to a maximum of double the standard tax. Khan argues that the absence of robust penalties for keeping homes empty is a missed opportunity to alleviate the critical housing shortage experienced by many London residents.

The proposed measures to reform council tax on vacant properties are not merely punitive; they are part of a broader strategy to increase housing availability for young professionals and families, who are often driven out of their communities due to skyrocketing property prices. "We have young professionals stuck in their childhood bedrooms for years on end, lifelong residents being priced out of their own neighbourhoods," Khan lamented. This scenario has even led to the closure of local primary schools, as families are forced to move further afield in search of affordable accommodation.

In response to this housing crisis, Khan is also “actively exploring” the use of green belt land for residential development, a controversial idea that aims to address the increasing demand for housing. The planned changes to council tax on empty properties are expected to generate substantial revenues, with some estimates suggesting an additional £540 million annually for local authorities once implemented. This newfound revenue could be reinvested into crucial public services, thereby enabling a more robust municipal response to pressing social issues.

As the situation evolves, the discourse surrounding vacant properties and council tax reform increasingly reflects the broader societal tensions between property investment and the right to housing. Khan’s proposals, while divisive, are positioned within the urgent need for practical solutions to one of London’s most critical challenges—the need for sufficient, affordable housing for its residents.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2054819/sadiq-khan-some-londoners-council-tax-doubled> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/council-tax-empty-homes-london-property-value-sadiq-khan-b1083057.html> - In May 2023, Sadiq Khan called for London boroughs to have the authority to impose unlimited additional council tax on empty properties to address the issue of vacant homes amid the housing crisis. He highlighted that London's empty homes have a total estimated value exceeding £20 billion, with 34,327 homes classified as 'long-term vacant'—unoccupied for at least six months and substantially unfurnished. Khan's proposal aims to deter absentee international investment and free up housing stock for Londoners. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/council-tax-empty-homes-london-property-value-sadiq-khan-b1083057.html?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/empty-homes-london-long-term-vacant-sadiq-khan-b1073898.html> - In April 2023, data revealed that over 34,000 homes in London were 'long-term vacant,' the highest number since 2010. This situation was described as a 'scandal,' especially considering the ongoing housing crisis. The boroughs with the highest numbers of empty homes included Southwark, Newham, and Barnet. Critics, including Mayor Sadiq Khan, emphasized the need for action to address this issue. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/empty-homes-london-long-term-vacant-sadiq-khan-b1073898.html?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-homeowners-council-tax-empty-properties-b1144468.html> - In March 2024, new regulations allowed London councils to double council tax bills on properties left empty for over a year, reducing the vacancy period from two years. This change aimed to encourage property owners to bring homes back into use and enable local authorities to reinvest the additional revenue into public services. Approximately 34,327 properties in London were classified as 'long-term vacant,' with an estimated value exceeding £20 billion. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-homeowners-council-tax-empty-properties-b1144468.html?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-london-and-westminster-city-council-call-stronger-powers-crack-down-long-term-empty-properties> - In May 2023, Mayor Sadiq Khan and Westminster City Council called for stronger powers to address long-term empty properties in London. They estimated that £20 billion worth of property was vacant across the capital, with 30,000 long-term empty homes. The proposal included devolving powers to local councils to set higher council tax rates on empty homes to deter absentee investment and free up housing stock for residents. ([london.gov.uk](https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-london-and-westminster-city-council-call-stronger-powers-crack-down-long-term-empty-properties?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.benhams.com/press-release/london-property-market/changes-to-empty-home-council-tax-rates-could-generate-an-additional-five-hundred-forty-million-pounds-from-1st-april/> - In March 2024, it was reported that changes to council tax premiums on empty homes could generate an additional £540 million annually from April 1. London had 36,210 long-term vacant dwellings, with an estimated £65.2 million currently collected in council tax. The new rates could potentially double this amount, highlighting the financial impact of empty properties on local councils. ([benhams.com](https://www.benhams.com/press-release/london-property-market/changes-to-empty-home-council-tax-rates-could-generate-an-additional-five-hundred-forty-million-pounds-from-1st-april/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-mayor-doing-about-empty-homes> - The Mayor of London is actively working to ensure that no home remains empty unnecessarily amid the housing crisis. Efforts include encouraging councils to charge the empty homes council tax premium and lobbying the government to allow councils to set this tax at higher rates to make it more effective in bringing empty homes back into use. ([london.gov.uk](https://www.london.gov.uk/what-mayor-doing-about-empty-homes?utm_source=openai))