

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee
DATE	21 November 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Aberdeen City Empty Homes Update Report
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/24/319
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Jacqui McKenzie
REPORT AUTHOR	Mel Booth
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update members on the progress Council is making in relation to empty homes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 2.1 note the progress Aberdeen City Council is making in relation to empty homes, including how they are brought back into use; and
- 2.2 instruct Chief Officer – Housing to include an update on empty homes as part of the Housing Board bi-annual report, replacing the annual update to Committee.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Empty Homes Officers work with owners of empty private residential properties to bring them back into use. As can be seen from Table 1 below, 780 empty properties have been brought back into use since the service was introduced in 2018. The target of 90 properties to be brought back into use over 2023/24 has been exceeded.

Table 1: Number of Empty Homes Brought Back into Use 2018/19 – 2023/24

Year	Number of Properties brought back into use
2018/19	7
2019/20	50
2020/21	139
2021/22	262

2022/23	225
2023/24	97
Total	780

- 3.2 The empty homes brought back into use are located across all parts of the city. Table 2 below shows the numbers brought back into use by postcode in 2023/24.

Table 2: Location of Empty Homes Brought Back into Use 2023/24 by Postcode

Postcode	Number of Properties brought back into use
AB10	20
AB11	13
AB12	4
AB14	3
AB15	8
AB16	8
AB21	5
AB22	0
AB23	0
AB24	21
AB25	15
Total	97

- 3.3 One of the tools available to encourage owners to bring their empty property back into use is the additional 100% Council Tax levy. An additional Council Tax levy may be charged to properties that have been empty for one year or more without being actively marketed for sale or rent, and two years or more if being actively marketed. The Council Tax levy will remain applied to a long-term empty property until it is brought back into use. Analysis of the data in relation to the Empty Homes Officers' caseload in 2023/24 indicates that £40,000 was applied and backdated to long term empty properties. The additional 100% Council Tax levy will be applied to each long-term empty property on an ongoing basis until the property is brought back into use.
- 3.4 Some of the highlights of the work carried out by the Empty Homes Service over the last 12 months include:
- Continued success working with landlords and letting agents across the city to "match" people from Council housing waiting lists with owners/letting agents of empty private rented sector properties through the Council's Matchmake to Rent Scheme. Aberdeen City Council is the only local authority in Scotland to utilise a matchmaker scheme in this way with Housing Options Officers promoting the properties as a housing option for people who are seeking housing. To date, 113 landlords have accessed the scheme.

- Working with the Heritage & Place Programme (H&PP) which is an area-based funding programme that aims to contribute to the development of vibrant and sustainable places in Scotland, through community-led regeneration of the historic environment. It supports the development and delivery of heritage focused schemes within conservation areas, or alternatively distinctive heritage areas with local authority recognition. It is intended to link this project in, where possible, with the Empty Homes Team to facilitate long term empty properties being brought back into use in the city centre.
- Ongoing work with genealogists to identify owners of residential properties. This relationship has now been extended and has enabled other partners to access the services to include non-residential long term empty properties as part of the partnership working with Police Scotland and Scottish Fire & Rescue Service.
- Being approached by others, including local authorities and Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, as a best practice example, and this is evidenced by the team's regular invitations to external events and conferences to speak about the work in Aberdeen.
- Partnership working with third sector organisations to allow the Empty Homes Team to assist and help combat youth homelessness in Aberdeen City. Discussions have been ongoing regarding how empty homes can be used to assist with those who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

3.5 Work will continue with owners of long-term empty properties and the Empty Homes Team will use all available tools to provide support and assistance to homeowners to encourage them to bring their properties back into use.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Bringing empty homes back into use has a positive impact on carbon reduction. Creating homes from empty properties saves substantial amounts of material compared to building new homes. It also minimises the amount of land used for development and avoids wasting embedded carbon. Where the home is retrofitted to improve energy performance, it can also help to drive down the cost of heating and reduce the operational carbon emitted.

7. RISK

7.1 The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement.

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	The number of empty homes affects the supply of housing.	M	The Empty Homes Officers work with owners of long term empty properties to bring them back into use.
Compliance	Not applicable		
Operational	Provision of housing is a priority for residents of Aberdeen City. Failure to ensure there is an adequate supply may result in more people seeking to be housed by the Council.	M	The Empty Homes Officers work with owners of long term empty properties to bring them back into use and include properties as part of the Housing Options approach through the Matchmake to Rent Scheme.
Financial	Not applicable		
Reputational	Failure to work with owners to bring empty homes back into use may harm the Council's reputation when the property causes housing blight.	M	A cross service group to deal with long standing empty homes has been established and is operational.

Environment / Climate	Bringing existing homes back into use has a positive impact on carbon reduction. Failure to effectively bring empty homes back into use may result in additional homes being built that are not necessary.	L	The Empty Homes Officers work with owners of long term empty properties to bring them back into use.
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8. OUTCOMES

COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN	
Impact of Report	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The proposals within this report contribute to the Partnership's aim to seek to transform our city, making it a better place for people to live, work, raise a family and visit.
Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	The proposal within this report supports the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 2 – Have a 74% employment rate across Aberdeen city- Increasing the number of people in Aberdeen in sustained, fair work by 2026. Having more people in fair employment allows for more ability for repairs and maintenance to homes which contributes to the local economy by keeping people in work and properties in use.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	The proposal within this report supports the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 10 – Healthy life expectancy (time lived in good health) is five years longer by 2026. Living in good quality housing contributes to improved health and wellbeing outcomes.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	The proposals within this report support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 13 – Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions by 61% by 2026 and adapting to the impacts of our changing climate. It takes more than 50 tonnes of CO2 to build an average UK house, therefore bringing empty homes back into use also contributes to carbon reduction through making better use of existing housing stock.

Regional and City Strategies	The proposals within this report support the Aberdeen City Local Housing Strategy by increasing the supply of housing.
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9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	No Integrated Impact Assessment required. I can confirm that this has been discussed and agreed with Jacqui McKenzie – Chief Officer – Housing on 29 October 2024.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	DPIA completed for Empty Homes Service.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Previous committee reports in relation to this are detailed below:

- [CUS/21/189](#) 16 September 2021.
- [CUS/22/153](#) 31 August 2022.
- [COM/23/256](#) 05 September 2023.
- [POL-C-0007](#) 28 March 2024.

11. APPENDICES

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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