

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Operational Delivery Committee
<b>DATE</b>	31 August 2022
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Aberdeen City Empty Homes Update Report
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	CUS/22/153
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Andy MacDonald
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Derek McGowan
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Mel Booth
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1.1.1

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on progress in relation to empty homes.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Note the progress made in relation to empty homes.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Bringing privately owned residential properties back into use can be challenging as it requires the owner to be willing to engage and work with the Empty Homes Service. Operational Delivery Committee approved an [Empty Homes Policy](#) in September 2021 to support this work and instructed the Chief Officer – Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to provide an annual update report on empty homes.
- 3.2 This built on and consolidated the work undertaken by the Empty Homes Officer recruited on a two-year temporary basis in October 2018, to reflect the changing requirements of empty homes across the city and to ensure empty homes are brought back into use. This post was initially funded on a 50:50 basis with kick-starter funding from the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership. In October 2020, City Growth & Resource Committee agreed to fund the Empty Homes Officer post on a permanent basis using Council Tax Second Homes funds.
- 3.3 The Aberdeen City Empty Homes Policy sets out the detail on how the Council will work with owners to help them to bring privately owned empty residential properties back into use. The aims of the policy are to:

- Work with owners of empty homes to bring them back into residential use.
- Work with owners of empty homes to match existing housing supply with housing demand in the city through the Matchmake to Rent and Matchmake to Sell schemes.
- Ensure there is a coordinated approach between Council services to tackle empty homes.
- Continue to raise awareness of issues relating to empty homes in Aberdeen City.

3.4 Some of the highlights of the work carried out by the Empty Homes Service include:

- Continuing success with 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.
- National recognition when the service won the Best Empty Homes Service award in 2020 which recognises the team that has made an outstanding contribution to reducing the number of empty homes
- Aberdeen City Council’s Empty Homes Officer was a finalist for the “outstanding individual award” at the Scottish Empty Homes Conference in 2022.
- Working with Aberdeen Cyrenians to bring empty homes back into use for people who may otherwise have been homeless, through their “Settled Homes for All” project which is the establishment of a social lettings agency.
- Working with genealogists to identify owners of residential and non-residential long term empty properties.
- Working with Police Scotland and Scottish Fire & Rescue Service to tackle long-term empty properties and attend partnership meetings to deal with long-term empty properties that are causing a blight on the community.

3.5 The table below shows the number of properties brought back into use since the Empty Homes Officer was recruited.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Properties brought back into use</b>
2018/19	7
2019/20	50
2020/21	139
2021/22	262
<b>Total</b>	<b>458</b>

- 3.6 The empty homes brought back into use are across all parts of the city. The table below shows the numbers brought back into use by postcode.

<b>Postcode</b>	<b>Number of Properties brought back into use</b>
AB10	79
AB11	60
AB12	16
AB14	3
AB15	47
AB16	27
AB21	14
AB22	8
AB23	2
AB24	135
AB25	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>458</b>

- 3.7 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. Analysis of the data in relation to the Empty Homes Officer's caseload shows that the Council Tax levy was applied and backdated to long term empty properties to the sum of more than £460,000. In addition to this, there is an additional 100% Council Tax levy applied to each long-term empty property on an ongoing basis until the property is brought back into use.
- 3.8 If additional staffing resources were available, this sum could be much higher. Therefore, a report is to be submitted to City Growth & Resource Committee in September 2022 requesting that Council Tax second homes monies are used to recruit a further Empty Homes Officer on a permanent basis to build on the success of the Empty Homes Service in bringing so many properties back in to use and allow resources to focus on long-term empty residential properties in the city centre which has the highest concentration of long-term empty homes in the city. This will also help support the aims of the City Centre Masterplan.

#### **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	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	The number of empty homes affects the supply of housing.	The Empty Homes Officer works with owners of long-term empty properties to bring them back into use.	L	Yes
<b>Compliance</b>	Not applicable			
<b>Operational</b>	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.	The Empty Homes Officer works with owners of long-term empty properties to bring them back into use.	L	Yes
<b>Financial</b>	Not applicable			
<b>Reputational</b>	Failure to work with owners to bring empty homes back into use may harm the Council's reputation when the property causes housing blight.	A cross service group to deal with long standing empty homes has been established.	L	Yes

<b>Environment / Climate</b>	Bringing existing homes back into use has a positive impact on carbon reduction. Failure to effectively implement the policy may result in supply of housing that is not necessary.	The Empty Homes Officer works with owners of long-term empty properties to bring them back into use.	L	Yes
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## 8. OUTCOMES

<b><u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u></b>	
	<b>Impact of Report</b>
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>	The proposals within this have no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.
<b>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</b>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	The proposal within this report supports the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 1 – 10% increase in employment across priority and volume growth sectors by 2026. Carrying out repairs and maintenance to homes contributes to the local economy by keeping people in work.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	The proposal within this report supports the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 11 - 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 14 – Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions by 42.5% 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.
<b>Regional and City Strategies</b>	The proposals within this report support the Aberdeen City Local Housing Strategy by increasing the supply of housing.

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Full impact assessment completed.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	DPIA completed.

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Aberdeen City Empty Homes Policy, Operational Delivery Committee 16 September 2021. [Empty Homes Policy - report.pdf \(aberdeencity.gov.uk\)](#)

## 11. APPENDICES

11.1 Not applicable

## 12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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