

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Communities, Housing & Public Protection Committee
DATE	05 September 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Aberdeen City Empty Homes Update Report
REPORT NUMBER	COM/23/256
DIRECTOR	Gail Beattie/Andy MacDonald
CHIEF OFFICER	David Dunne/Jacqui McKenzie
REPORT AUTHOR	Mel Booth
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on progress in relation to the service the Council provides in relation to empty homes.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Note the progress made in relation to the service the Council provides in relation to empty homes, including how they are brought back into use.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 In October 2020, Committee agreed to fund the Empty Homes Officer post on a permanent basis and in October 2022, Committee agreed to fund a second Empty Homes Officer post using Council Tax funds. Both Empty Homes Officers work with owners of empty residential properties to bring them back into use. Since the service was created, 683 empty properties have been brought back into use.

- 3.2 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.

- National recognition when the service won the “Best Use of Data to Inform Empty Homes Practice” award in March 2023. This builds upon the success from previous years which includes Best Empty Homes Service in 2021 and the Empty Homes Officer being a finalist for the “outstanding individual award” in 2022.
- Working with Aberdeen Foyer to bring empty homes back into use for young people who may otherwise have been homeless, by developing a project that is currently pursuing funding to renovate empty properties to provide low-cost accommodation for young people.
- Working with Police Scotland and Scottish Fire & Rescue Service to tackle long-term empty and derelict properties and attend partnership meetings to deal with long-term empty properties that are causing a blight on the community.
- Ongoing work with genealogists to identify owners of residential properties which has now been extended 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, Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, Scottish Housing Network 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.

3.3 Table 1 below shows the number of properties brought back into use since the service was introduced. The target in 2022/23 was for 150 properties to be brought back into use, which has been exceeded.

Table 1: Number of Empty Homes Brought Back into Use 2018/19 – 2022/23

Year	Number of Properties brought back into use
2018/19	7
2019/20	50
2020/21	139
2021/22	262
2022/23	225
Total	683

- 3.4 The empty homes brought back into use are across all parts of the city. Table 2 below shows the numbers brought back into use by postcode in 2022/23.

Table 2: Location of Empty Homes Brought Back into Use 2022/23 by Postcode

Postcode	Number of Properties brought back into use
AB10	55
AB11	43
AB12	2
AB14	5
AB15	9
AB16	12
AB21	7
AB22	7
AB23	2
AB24	48
AB25	32
Total	225

- 3.5 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 Officers' caseload shows that in 2022/23, the Council Tax levy was applied and backdated to long term empty properties to the sum of more than £47,500. 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.
- 3.6 In addition, the total value of long-term empty properties brought back into use through direct engagement with the service in 2022/23 was more than £362,250. Since the service was created, the income generated by bringing long-term empty properties back into use is over £820,000.

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.	L	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.	H	The Empty Homes Officers work with owners of long-term empty properties to bring them back into use.

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.	H	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.

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	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 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.
Regional and City Strategies	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 for Empty Homes Policy. Integrated Impact Assessment - Empty Homes.docx
Data Protection Impact Assessment	DPIA completed for Empty Homes Service.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Aberdeen City Empty Homes Policy, Operational Delivery Committee 16 September 2021. [Empty Homes Policy - report.pdf \(aberdeencity.gov.uk\)](#)
- 10.2 Aberdeen City Empty Homes Update Report, Operational Delivery Committee 31 August 2022. [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Operational Delivery Committee, 31/08/2022 10:00](#)

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 None

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Mel Booth
Title	Senior Housing Strategy Officer
Email Address	mebooth@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Tel	01224 523252