



Glasgow City Council
City Administration Committee

Item 8

28th November 2019

**Report by Councillor Kenny McLean, City Convener for
Neighbourhoods, Housing and Public Realm**

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EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

Purpose of Report:

To advise Committee of the proposed Empty Homes Strategy for Glasgow.

Recommendations:

That Committee:

- consider the content of this report.
- approve the Strategy and Action Plan.

Ward No(s):

Citywide:

Local member(s) advised: Yes No consulted: Yes No

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Scottish Government has made a commitment to increase housing supply, in addition to making best use of existing housing in its policy document, Homes Fit for the 21st Century.
- 1.2 A House of Commons Briefing Paper published in 2018 noted that high levels of empty properties are recognised as having a serious impact on the viability of communities.
- 1.3 One of the central themes in Glasgow's Housing Strategy 2017-22 <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=4584&p=0> is 'Increasing the supply and improving the quality of housing available to Glasgow's people and one of the strategic priorities is to 'Manage, maintain and improve the existing housing stock.' Action 18 within this priority is to 'Identify and take action to bring long term empty homes back into use over the life of the strategy.'
- 1.4 The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership has introduced 'the Empty Homes Value Tool' which assesses the impact and value for money of bringing empty homes back in to use. This highlights nine broad areas where costs and missed opportunities arise when properties are lying empty for a long time. https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1219415/Empty_Homes_Value_Tool.pdf.
- 1.5 The strategy was considered by the Neighbourhoods, Housing and Public Realm City Policy Committee on 19th November 2019 and has been referred to this committee for approval.

2. Context

- 2.1 There are various reasons for individual properties falling into the category of long term empty. The most common are :
 - Mortgage Default/Repossessions
 - Deceased Owners
 - Property Title issues
 - Untraceable owners
 - Land Banking
 - Personal Choice
 - Properties which have fallen into a poor state of repair.
- 2.2 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 enables local authorities to use Council Tax records to identify vacant residential properties and bring them back into use. The Local Government Finance (Unoccupied properties etc) Act 2012 gives local authorities the power to vary the amount of council tax levied against empty homes to encourage owners to bring them back into use. From 1st April 2018 a 100% premium can be charged on homes which have been vacant for more than 12 months and are not being marketed for sale or let.

- 2.3 Glasgow is currently the only local authority to alert home owners prior to the application of the premium charge. From April 2019 to September 2019 our Empty Homes Officers notified 433 home owners of the impending surcharge up to 8 weeks before it was due to be applied.
- 2.4 The number of properties lying empty across Scotland for 6 months or more totaled 39,110 as at December 2018. 24,471 of these properties had been empty for more than 12 months. In Glasgow, as at August 2019, the number of long term empty homes being vacant for 6 months or more and excluding second homes totaled 2,687. (All figures sourced from Council Tax records.)
- 2.5 Glasgow's Housing Strategy sets a target of bringing 475-570 long term empty homes back into use over the lifetime of the strategy. As of 30th September 2019, exactly the halfway point of the 5 year strategy, a total of 380 long term empty properties have been brought back into use, the majority of which have been for social rent.

3. Aims of the Strategy

- 3.1 Seven key aims are identified in the strategy:-
- Deliver the Scottish Government's vision that no homes are left empty for significant periods of time
 - To increase the availability of housing stock to meet demand and provide good quality accommodation for those who need it
 - Offer home owners information and advice which will help bring properties back into use
 - Provide support for the delivery of key housing strategies and work closely with partnering Registered Social Landlords(RSLs)
 - Tackle environmental blight and improve the amenity of neighbourhoods
 - Safeguard the interests of owners within tenement properties to facilitate common repairs work
 - Identify opportunities for suitable housing for particular groups such as larger families, homeless people and those with a variety of support needs.

4. Action Plan Delivery

- 4.1 The actions in the strategy will be delivered through our two Empty Homes Officers who are located within DRS Housing and Regeneration Services. They will be tasked with bringing 200 and 250 empty properties back into use annually over the 3 year period of the strategy.
- 4.2 Our service will establish best practice in terms of developing a priority list/ programme for empty properties where action is needed. The Empty Homes Officers will further develop our existing database and prepare a checklist/information fact sheet for owners of empty homes.
- 4.3 Research carried out by YouGov for the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership identified that 46% of adults in Glasgow would not report an empty home in their area while 15% were not sure who they would report this to. To address

this, the service will launch a city wide media campaign to highlight the negative impact of empty homes and update the Council's website to make it easier to report empty homes.

- 4.4 Our Empty Homes Officers will pilot an initiative with RSLs to identify and target all empty homes within tenement properties in their areas and bring them back into use. Where abandoned/derelict shops are situated on the ground floor of tenement properties these will be investigated for social housing. Through our Acquisition strategy, properties will be identified and funding support will be provided to RSLs for acquisitions in priority areas. This will also help facilitate common repairs.
- 4.5 The Council will use compulsory purchase powers where necessary to bring empty properties back into use for social housing. The strategy identifies a target of 100 empty properties to be compulsory purchased over the three year period.
- 4.6 Current initiatives such as the Matchmaker scheme will be reviewed to see if this could be more effective. Our Empty Homes Officers will also explore the possibility of the Council improving properties for sale following compulsory purchase where there are no local based RSLs. Where owners are identified our Empty Homes Officers will offer them advice on the potential for Vat savings on works required to bring their properties back into use. Significant Vat savings on works costs from 20% to 5% could be achieved on properties which have been lying empty for 2 years. If the property has been empty for 10 years then the works could be zero rated if privately occupied on completion.
- 4.7 The Empty Homes Officers will monitor the progress of the strategy and ensure that targets and Key Performance Indicators are established in order to measure successful interventions and delivery of the Action Plan. Outcomes will be reported back through annual performance updates of our housing strategy.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The Scottish Government is reviewing the use of the council tax levy for long term empty homes, the work of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, funds that support empty homes work, data collection and the work undertaken internationally to bring homes back into use. The Council welcomes this review which is due to be completed by Spring 2020.
- 5.2 A media campaign is needed to highlight the negative impact of empty homes and the Council's website will be updated to make the reporting of empty homes easier.
- 5.3 Glasgow has produced a 20 point Action Plan in order to deliver the aims of our strategy. Ambitious targets have been set for the number of homes we are looking to bring back into use over the 3 years of the strategy. This is supported by an equally ambitious target of the number of compulsory

purchase orders we are looking to promote over the same period. This clearly demonstrates that Glasgow is taking the issue of empty homes seriously.

- 5.4 A number of case studies have been produced as an appendix to the strategy. These highlight best practice and the determination shown by our Empty Homes Officers in bringing empty properties back into use.
- 5.5 To reflect the work that is being carried out on empty homes in the city our Empty Homes Officers have been nominated in the category of Outstanding Service at this Year's Scottish Empty Homes Awards. In addition the service is further nominated in the categories of 'Oldest Long-Term Empty brought back into use' and the 'Best Before and After' empty home.
- 5.6 A monitoring procedure will be put in place and the Empty Homes Strategy will be reviewed in 2022 as part of the development process for Glasgow's new Housing Strategy 2023-2028.

6. Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

<i>Financial:</i>	Any funding required will be met from existing Affordable Housing Supply Budget to fund acquisitions
<i>Legal:</i>	Legal Services will provide support with the promotion of compulsory purchase orders.
<i>Personnel:</i>	Staffing will be met from existing resources.
<i>Procurement:</i>	Works and services where applicable, will be procured from current frameworks which are in place.

Council Strategic Plan: The proposals support the theme:

Resilient and Empowered Neighbourhood

Priority 81-Bring Empty Homes back into use and delivery of homes for social rent.

Priority 85 –Develop a repair and maintenance strategy with registered social landlords and private owners for pre 1919 tenements in the city.

Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:

Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes 2017-22

Yes. This strategy will help deliver key strategic outcomes of Glasgow's Local Housing Strategy which has been subject to an EQIA.

What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?

This will have a positive impact on residents' quality of life.

Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio economic disadvantage.

Housing has a significant impact on health inequalities in Scotland. This will improve the standard of accommodation for residents and help reduce costs for those who will benefit from a social housing tenancy.

Sustainability Impacts:

Environmental:

Delivery of this strategy will improve the amenity of local areas and help remove environmental blight. This will have a positive impact in terms of lower carbon emissions.

Social, including opportunities under Article 20 of the European Public Procurement Directive:

The quality of accommodation and wellbeing of residents will be significantly improved as a result of delivering this strategy.

Economic:

Bringing empty homes back into use will have a positive impact on property values and help stimulate local economies. Where properties are acquired for social housing this will benefit tenants in terms of lower rents.

Privacy and Data Protection impacts:

No data protection impacts identified.

7 Recommendations

7.1 That Committee:

- consider the content of this report; and
- approve the Strategy and Action Plan.