



**Glasgow City Council**

**Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration  
City Policy Committee**

**Report by George Gillespie, Executive Director of  
Neighbourhoods, Regeneration and Sustainability**

**Contact: Jennifer Sheddan Ext:**

**Empty Homes Strategy 2019-22 Review**

**Purpose of Report:**  
To provide an overview of the delivery of Glasgow's Empty Homes Strategy 2019-22 and to outline priority Empty Home Actions for 2023-28.

**Recommendations:**  
That Committee

1. consider the contents of this report.
2. note that actions in relation to Empty Homes will be integrated through the new Local Housing Strategy 2023-28 with an annual update on progress being presented to Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration City Policy Committee.

Ward No(s): Citywide:

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

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## 1. Background

- 1.1 [Glasgow's Empty Homes Strategy 2019-2022](#) was approved by the City Administration Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019.
- 1.2 The 2019-22 strategy identified 7 key aims:
  - 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 Landlords (RSLs)
  - Tackle environmental blight and improve the amenity of neighbourhoods
  - Safeguard the interests of owners within tenement properties to facilitate common repair works
  - Identify opportunities for suitable housing for particular groups such as larger families, homeless people and those with a variety of support needs.
- 1.3 The strategy contained an ambitious 20 point Action Plan which set out a target of 200-250 empty homes to be brought back into use, annually, over the lifetime of the strategy and target over 100 properties for compulsory purchase over the 3 years.
- 1.4 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 enables local authorities to use Council Tax records to identify long-term empty homes and bring them back into use. Glasgow's Empty Homes Officers work closely with Financial Services to identify these properties and to share relevant information.
- 1.5 The Local Government Finance (Unoccupied Properties etc.) (Scotland) Act 2012 gives local authorities the power to vary Council Tax for long-term empty homes. Glasgow applied a 100% premium charge in Council Tax from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 on homes which have been lying empty for more than 12 months and are not being marketed for sale or let.

## 2. Key Successes: Empty Homes Strategy (2019-2022)

- 2.1 The council now has a dedicated team of three Empty Homes Officers who are located within NRS (Housing Service). The team has set up a comprehensive database and increased the number of referral routes and

reporting outcomes. Our [website](#) has also been updated to provide contact information for owners seeking advice on empty homes and to make the reporting of empty homes easier.

2.2 The most common reasons for properties being categorised as long term empty 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.

2.3 Glasgow’s Empty Homes Strategy 2019-2022 set a target to bring 200-250 empty homes back into use of the period of the strategy and despite the delivery of the programme being severely hampered by the pandemic, 677 homes have been brought back into use from April 2019 to March 2022.

2.4 The table below sets out the number of homes brought back into use by financial year and length of time empty.

| <b>DURATION</b> | <b>2019-2020</b> | <b>2020-2021</b> | <b>2021-22</b> | <b>2019-22</b> |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| < 6 Months      | 0                | 0                | 0              | 0              |
| 6-12 Months     | 0                | 0                | 0              | 0              |
| 1-2 years       | 0                | 2                | 59             | 61             |
| 2-5 years       | 272              | 88               | 108            | 468            |
| 5-10 years      | 34               | 24               | 56             | 114            |
| >10 years       | 17               | 10               | 7              | 34             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>    | <b>323</b>       | <b>124</b>       | <b>230</b>     | <b>677</b>     |

2.5 Since 2019, Committee has given approval to promote 55 Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) across the city. 40 CPOs have now been progressed or confirmed. In 13 other cases a Housing Association has acquired the properties on a voluntary basis and for the remaining 2 properties the promotion of the CPO prompted owners to either sell or occupy the property. In many other instances the indication from officers that a CPO action may be progressed has achieved a positive outcome in bringing the property back into effective use.

2.6 The promotion of CPOs remains a key action moving forward as it is an effective power available to local authorities to help bring long term

properties back into use. While the pandemic has clearly impacted on the delivery of this element of the programme the process for taking forward CPOs can be costly, complex and resource intensive. On average the process is currently taking 56 weeks to secure the order from Scottish Ministers following committee approval. Scottish Government confirmed that there had only been 9 successful CPOs in the 3year period 2016-2019 for the whole of Scotland. Since 2019 Glasgow has had 29 CPOs confirmed with a further 11 being progressed.

- 2.7 Empty Homes Officers have worked closely with partnering Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) across the city to bring empty properties back into use for social housing. This has been achieved through engagement activity with RSLs and other partners, and through the targeting of properties in designated priority areas or which meet wider strategic outcomes such as the provision of affordable family housing. All acquisitions are supported by the Strategic Acquisition Programme, funded via the Council's Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP).
- 2.8 A review has now been completed of all RSL long term empty properties. Following productive discussions with RSLs, measures have been or are now being put in place to address any barriers to bringing properties back into use. The Empty Homes team will monitor timescales for bringing this housing stock back into effective use.
- 2.9 Of the 20 actions identified within the Empty Homes Strategy 2019-22, all actions have been delivered or have become business as usual activity which will continue. An outstanding outcome from one of the actions is regarding Compulsory Sales Orders (CSOs) on which there has been no progress on legislation to introduce CSO and this will continue as an action the Empty Homes team will pursue with partners in the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership.

### **3. Strategic Context for Empty Homes 2023-28**

- 3.1 In March 2021 the Scottish Government published Scotland's first long-term national strategy '[Housing to 2040](#)'.

The priorities identified for empty homes are as follows:

- Work with local authorities to audit empty homes and determine those that should be brought back into use and support the work of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

- To give councils the powers they need to regulate and charge owners appropriately for homes lying empty and ensure that they have the mechanisms to bring them back into productive use
  - Create a support package for homeowners in trouble to help them stay in their home if that is right for them and to prevent homes falling into disrepair or becoming empty in the first place
  - Establish a new fund for local authorities to apply to in order to bring empty homes and potential empty homes back into residential use and convert suitable empty commercial properties in town centres. This fund will be flexible and adaptable allowing local authorities to purchase the homes themselves for use as affordable housing or provide grants to private owners to renovate the home on the condition that the home is rented out at an affordable rent for a set period of time.
- 3.2 In November 2021 in response to the Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 document the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP) in collaboration with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO) published its paper '[Why Empty Homes Matter](#)' the aim of which was to further develop the work of local authorities on empty homes through an awareness campaign to highlight the benefits of empty homes work.
- 3.3 The SEHP published its annual [Impact Report](#) in May 2022 and this supports the use of existing powers such as compulsory purchase orders, however, the report restates the need for further powers for empty homes officers including Compulsory Sale Orders (CSOs) and Rental Orders and that their introduction is needed to prevent homes from being left to deteriorate indefinitely at a time when Scotland desperately needs more homes. The report also encourages councils to have an integrated empty homes strategy that aligns with their local housing strategy which the new Glasgow Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2023-28 will be taking forward.
- 3.4 The Scottish Government has recently announced that it has plans to enable councils to raise the amount of council tax paid on empty and second homes and this will form part of a consultation to help increase housing availability. This could give councils the power to charge up to double the full rate of council tax on second homes from April 2024. This would bring second homes into line with long-term empty homes from next year. A joint consultation with COSLA will also seek views on further powers to charge more than the double rate on both empty and second homes in future years.
- 3.5 Statistics obtained from Council Tax records across Scotland in December 2022 identified a total of 42,865 properties empty for 6 months or more,

with 27,692 of these properties being empty for 12 months or more.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-statistics-empty-properties-and-second-homes/>

- 3.6 As at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 council tax records showed that there was a total of 2698 non-exempt long term empty homes in Glasgow, lying empty for more than 6 months. A further 471 properties were recorded as second homes.

#### **4. Priority Actions Empty Homes 2023-28**

- 4.1 The new LHS 2023-28 is due to be considered and approved by the City Administration Committee on 18th May 2023. The LHS highlights the housing pressures in the city and the importance of increasing the supply of housing across all tenures. The LHS identifies 10 strategic and cross cutting critical success factors which are vital to successfully reaching our housing vision and delivering on our housing priorities. One of these factors is 'Residential Repurposing and Empty Homes' as repurposing empty commercial or other buildings to bring into use as housing will increase the supply of housing in addition to tackling existing residential empty homes. An element of this work has already started with the Empty Homes Team having successfully worked with partners to progress a number of empty shop unit conversions to residential in pre1919 tenements.
- 4.2 The key LHS 2023-28 Action regarding Empty Homes is to review the Empty Homes Strategy and to "Expand our Empty Homes work to include making greater use of compulsory purchase orders, supporting the acquisition of tenements by RSLs, improving the performance of factors and enabling whole-block retrofits" reflecting the commitment in the Glasgow City Council Strategic Plan 2022-2027 (Grand Challenge 4-Mission 1).
- 4.3 Key Actions being taken forward through the LHS 2023-28 include those outlined below.
- 4.3.1 An important delivery tool is the ability to align the Strategic Acquisition Programme priorities with Empty Homes outcomes. The Strategic Acquisition programme will be reviewed to enable RSL partners to better target the acquisition of empty private sector stock for social housing use which delivers on LHS priorities; increasing affordable housing supply in priority areas across the city; enabling investment and facilitating common repairs in tenement properties; providing suitable accommodation for

larger households and homeless persons in areas where there are shortages and limited options for development.

- 4.3.2 On 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023, Committee considered the draft [Strategic Agreement between the Council and Wheatley Group](#) and this includes commitments to a targeted area-based approach to tackling empty homes in Wheatley Group areas of operation through the ability to access strategic acquisition programme funding to support empty homes and repurposing projects. The Strategic Agreement will be considered by City Administration Committee for approval.
- 4.3.3 To address the concerns of owners staying in properties which are affected by empty homes and in order to tackle environmental blight and improve the amenity of neighborhoods, Empty Homes officers will work more closely with Environmental Health colleagues in order to tackle these issues and take corrective action where appropriate.
- 4.3.4 Officers will explore a range of other initiatives including the improvement of empty properties for sale, the provision of grants to owners to bring redundant properties back into use, converting suitable empty commercial properties in town centres to housing and working with the Scottish Government to establish a new fund which local authorities could apply to in order to bring empty homes and potential empty homes back into residential use. Repurposing of empty commercial buildings in the city centre into residential use is a priority for the Council which aligns with the Scottish Government Housing to 2040 priorities for empty homes.
- 4.4 Key Empty Homes Targets will be:
  - 4.4.1 To engage with at least 1500 owners of Long-Term Empty properties annually through a variety of means including the issuing of monthly mailshots to owners.
  - 4.4.2 To bring a minimum of 1800 empty properties back into use over the 5 year period of the Glasgow's Local Housing Strategy.
- 4.5 Glasgow City will hold a workshop on empty homes in 2023. RSL partners and other relevant stakeholders will be invited to attend to advise on how they can assist the Council and contribute to tackling the problem and agree actions which can be taken forward. It is envisaged that agreed actions could be delivered by a working group with clear terms of reference and reporting mechanisms put in place.

- 4.6 Empty Homes outcomes will be reported to Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration City Policy Committee annually through progress updates of the LHS 2023-28.

## 5. Conclusion

- 5.1 It should be noted that no local authority has delivered comparable outcomes to Glasgow City Council in terms of bringing empty properties back into use. Following the recruitment of our third Empty Homes Officer in 2022 we succeeded in bringing a total of 454 empty homes back into use from April 2022 to March 2023.
- 5.2 NRS Officers will continue to provide the evidence to Scottish Government to support the case for additional powers such as compulsory sales orders to help tackle those long-term empty properties where currently it is difficult to find a solution.
- 5.3 The Council is committed to working closely with the Scottish Government to bring down the average timescale for promoting Compulsory Purchase Orders. Over the next 12 /24 months we hope to be able to reduce timescales from the current 56 weeks to between 26-40 weeks depending on the complexities of the case and subject to legal challenges.
- 5.4 Finally, further consideration will be given to how to motivate more owners to bring their empty properties back into use. This may be achieved through local marketing campaigns to highlight the benefits, continuing to forewarn owners prior to a premium charge being applied to their property or offering small grants to help unlock properties that are '*stuck*'. However, it is likely that some owners may only respond to measures such as increases in vacant dwelling council tax levy or the possibility of compulsory purchase being pursued.

## 6 Policy and Resource Implications

### Resource Implications:

*Financial:* Funding required for acquisitions is met from the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget.

*Legal:* Support is provided by Legal Services with the promotion of compulsory purchase orders.



*Personnel:* Staffing resource will be met in line with workload and demand.

*Procurement:* Where applicable, works and services would be procured from current frameworks which are in place.

**Council Strategic Plan:** The measures outlined in the report will contribute towards the following Grand Challenges and Missions.

**Grand Challenge 4 – Enable staff to deliver Essential Services in a Sustainable, Innovative and Efficient way for our Communities:**

Mission 1 – Create safe, clean and thriving neighbourhoods.

**Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:**

*Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes 2021-25? Please specify.* Bringing empty homes back into use is a priority within the Local Housing Strategy is subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.

*What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?* There are no potential equality impacts due to this report.

*Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio-economic disadvantage.* Key policy actions within the report will help tackle housing pressures in Glasgow and support vulnerable groups.

**Climate Impacts:**

*Does the proposal support any Climate Plan actions? Please specify:* Glasgow's Housing Strategy support all five themes identified in in Glasgow's Climate Plan and this report supports the following specific actions:

Action 8: Continue to work with Scottish Government to maximise funding for Area Based schemes to invest in improving energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty in private sector housing.

Action 9: Prepare an investment improvement plan for older (pre1919) tenements and private sector housing.

Action 14: Adopt the local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) which will identify areas suitable for investment in renewable energy generation and heating in the city.

Action 39: Encourage and enable retrofit of all existing owner-occupied housing to EPC level C or above.

Action 41: Upgrade insulation and heating of all building stock in the city.

*What are the potential climate impacts as a result of this proposal?*

There is evidence that building a new home creates more than three times the level of greenhouse gas emissions than renovating an empty property.

*Will the proposal contribute to Glasgow's net zero carbon target?*

Over the course of the housing strategy it is estimated that there will be a saving of 63,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

**Privacy and Data Protection Impacts:**

No data protection impacts identified.

## **7. Recommendations :**

That Committee

1. consider the contents of this report.
2. note that actions in relation to Empty Homes will be integrated through the new Local Housing Strategy 2023-28 with an annual update on progress being presented to Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration City Policy Committee.