



Glasgow City Council

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

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

Contact: Duncan Thomson Ext: 78452

Item 3

23rd April 2024

Update on the Empty Homes Action Plan

Purpose of Report:

To update on the progress of the Glasgow's Empty Homes Action Plan.

Recommendations:

That Committee

1. consider the contents of this report.
2. note that Glasgow's Empty Homes strategy and action plan have been incorporated within the Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028 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

1. Background and Strategic Context

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 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. [FINAL-Why-Empty-Homes-Matter-March-2022.pdf \(emptyhomespartnership.scot\)](#)
- 1.3 [A review of Glasgow's Empty Homes Strategy 2019-2022](#) was approved by the Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration City Policy Committee on 30th May 2023.
- 1.4 Glasgow's Empty Homes strategy and action plan is now incorporated within the [Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028](#) which was approved by the City Administration Committee on the 18th May 2023.

- 1.5 Statistics obtained from Council Tax records across Scotland in December 2023 identified a total of 46,217 properties empty for 6 months or more, with 28,280 of these properties being empty for 12 months or more.
[Housing statistics: Empty properties and second homes - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/housing-statistics/empty-properties-and-second-homes)
- 1.6 At 29th February 2024 Council Tax records showed that there was a total of 2641 non-exempt long term empty homes in Glasgow, lying empty for more than 6 months with 1652 of these being empty for more than 12 months.
- 1.7 The Scottish Government announced in 2023 that councils will be able to raise the amount of council tax paid on second homes with a view to help increase housing availability. This gives 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. Council Tax records as at 29th February 2024 showed that 442 properties were recorded as second homes.

2. Housing Priorities and Empty Homes Action Plan (EHAP)

- 2.1 Residential Repurposing and Empty Homes is identified as one of the 10 strategic and crosscutting critical success factors for delivering housing priorities outlined in the Local Housing Strategy (LHS).
- 2.2 The Glasgow City Centre Living Strategy (2024-2030), which has been incorporated into the Local Housing Strategy, contains 6 key objectives two of which are:
 - To increase the city centre's population from just over 20,000 to 40,000 by 2035.
 - To find productive outcomes for vacant commercial space, with a particular focus on upper floors.

The repurposing of vacant buildings and former office accommodation for housing in the City Centre is a key action within the EHAP. A Housing Sub-Group has been established and a number of potential housing sites have been identified. Letters have been sent to a number of owners, who have vacant premises/buildings, to explore opportunities for bringing their properties back into use.

A pilot project has been identified to repurpose vacant upper storey former office accommodation for residential use. The Council is providing financial support to a partnering RSL (Registered Social Landlord) to acquire and convert the building for residential use.

- 2.3 The Empty Homes Team continue to work successfully with RSL partners in acquiring empty flats or shops that can be converted into housing in pre-1919 tenement properties, which are preventing common repairs from being carried out and are causing environmental blight. Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) will continue to be promoted where there is no opportunity to acquire a property on a voluntary basis. Committee authority has been obtained to promote a further 10 CPOs across the city since our last report in May 2023 bringing the total number up to 65. Of this total 34 CPOs have been completed.
- 2.4 An important delivery tool is the ability to align the Strategic Acquisition Programme priorities with Empty Homes outcomes. NRS Housing Services Acquisition strategy has been reviewed to enable Registered Social Landlord (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.
- 2.5 The Strategic Agreement between the Council and Wheatley Group includes commitments to a targeted area-based approach to tackling empty homes in Wheatley Group areas of operation by accessing acquisition funding to support empty homes and repurposing projects. The first CPO promoted for the Wheatley Group was objected to and subject to a hearing. A decision is awaited from the Scottish Government on the confirmation of the CPO.
- 2.6 Closer working between Empty homes officers, Housing and Environmental Health colleagues has helped tackle properties which were causing environmental blight and impacting negatively on neighbourhoods. In one severe case Environmental Health were able to serve notice on the last known owner of an empty property, which facilitated the removal of abandoned cars from a driveway, waste and overgrown shrubbery from front and back gardens. This has enabled Empty Homes officers to bring a RSL partner on board and a CPO will now be promoted over the property. This family house will be brought back into use for social letting.
- 2.7 Following a review of all RSL long term empty properties over 6 months the numbers as of 19th March have substantially reduced and are currently sitting at 462. Over 60% of these properties (295) are having repair works carried out or are requiring works to be carried out. Empty Homes officers

will continue to work with all RSLs so that solutions are found for bringing all empty properties back into use.

- 2.8 Key Empty Homes Targets identified in Empty Homes Review report submitted to committee on the 30th May 2023 are as follows:
- *'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'*. As at 31st March 2024 Empty Homes Officers have engaged with 1670 owners.
 - *To bring a minimum of 1800 empty properties back into use over the 5 year period of the Glasgow's Local Housing Strategy.'* From 1st April 2023 up to 31st March 2024, 579 empty homes have been brought back into use.
- 2.9 An Empty Homes workshop was held on 9th November 2023. Elected Members, RSL partners and other relevant stakeholders were invited to attend. The Empty Homes Action Plan was discussed with attendees agreeing that the correct priorities had been identified and that the proposed actions within the plan were relevant.

3. Current Position and Next Steps.

- 3.1 Glasgow has a dedicated team of three Empty Homes Officers who are located within NRS Housing Services. The team has set up a comprehensive database and increased the number of 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 [Empty Homes - Glasgow City Council](#)
- 3.2 Over the period of our Empty Homes Strategy April 2019 to March 2022 a total of 677 empty homes were brought back into use. From 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 and following the recruitment of our third Empty Homes Officer a total of 454 empty homes were brought back into use. In the current financial year up to 31st March 2024 a total of 579 empty homes have been brought back into use. The Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028 has set a target of bringing 1800 empty properties back into use over the 5 year period.
- 3.3 A CPO 'Reform Practitioner Advisory group' has now been set up with the first meeting being held on 27th March 2024. Glasgow City Council has been invited to participate on the group and will be represented by a colleague from Legal Services. Public consultation with stakeholders will follow later in the year. The promotion of CPOs remains a key action for

the Council albeit the process for taking these forward needs to be streamlined. In one case where an objection to the CPO was received we are still waiting for a decision after 8 months.

- 3.4 Funding was recently approved for 2 years for the appointment of a new post of Strategic Acquisitions Officer. It is envisaged that one of the key early actions of the new postholder will be to establish a working group with key partners and stakeholders to take forward actions linking the acquisition of properties to bring empty properties back into use for the prevention of homelessness. The postholder will work closely with Empty Homes officers and partnering RSLs across the city to bring empty properties back into use for social housing, targeting properties in designated priority areas and properties to meet the needs of priority groups such as the homeless and larger families. This new post will oversee all acquisitions and co-ordinate funding from the Council's Affordable Housing Supply budget.
- 3.5 Following the audit of RSL long term empty properties, progress has been made with RSLs in encouraging them to take a more proactive approach in terms of empty homes and to identify properties giving cause for concern. Following productive discussions with most of the RSLs concerned, measures have been or are being put in place to monitor timescales for bringing this stock back into effective use.
- 3.6 The Scottish Government has advised that Compulsory Sales Orders (CSOs) are still under consideration. No timescales have been provided in relation to this. Officers estimate that if CSOs are introduced and give local authorities the necessary powers then this could be the solution for up to 50% of the long term empty homes in Glasgow.
- 3.7 Empty Homes officers and Environmental Health colleagues continue to explore opportunities for bringing abandoned long term empty properties back into use while removing environmental blight.
- 3.8 Work is ongoing in relation to the repurposing of vacant buildings/premises within the City Centre and the aim is to identify further properties which would be suitable for conversion and brought back into use for affordable housing.
- 3.9 In terms of other initiatives officers are presently investigating the practicality of introducing grants to owners for bringing empty homes back into use. Further information is awaited from the Scottish Government over their Housing to 2040 commitments before taking forward a pilot.

- 3.10 Officers are looking at a procedure with colleagues in legal services on how a pilot could be progressed if the Council was to enter into a back to back agreement with a 'preferred development partner' following the promotion of a CPO to enable empty properties, where there are barriers to bringing these back into use for social housing, to be brought back into use for owner occupation or at an affordable rent. This also applies to properties which may be targeted for improvement for sale.
- 3.11 Appendix I is attached showing that the progress of the Action Plan.
- 3.12 Further outcomes will be reported back annually through performance updates of the Local Housing Strategy.

4 Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

<i>Financial:</i>	Funding required for acquisitions is met from the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget.
<i>Legal:</i>	Support is provided by Legal Services with the promotion of compulsory purchase orders.
<i>Personnel:</i>	Staffing will be met from existing resources.
<i>Procurement:</i>	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 the following 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 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

There is evidence that building a new home creates more than three times the level of

result of this proposal?

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.

5. Recommendations :

Committee is asked to:-

1. consider the contents of this report.
2. note that Glasgow's Empty Homes strategy and action plan have been incorporated within the Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028 with an annual update on progress being presented to Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration City Policy Committee

Appendix 1- Empty Homes Action Plan Progress 2023/2024

Item	Action/Issue	Description	Outcomes	Progress	Timescale
1.	Property Repurposing for the City Centre	The Repurposing of vacant buildings, within the City Centre to bring back into use as housing.	<p>Increase the supply of housing in addition to tackling existing residential empty homes. Links to the City Centre Strategy 2024-2030 and City Centre Living Strategy/LHS 2023-2028.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the residential population of the City Centre to 40,000 by 2035 	<p>A working group has been set up for the Residential Repurposing Action Plan for the City Centre</p> <p>A Housing sub-group has been established.</p> <p>A pilot project for affordable housing within the City Centre is currently being progressed.</p>	Ongoing
2.	Expand our Empty Homes work and align the Strategic Acquisition Programme priorities with Empty Homes outcomes	<p>LHS 2023-28 Action regarding Empty Homes was to review the Empty Homes Strategy and to Expand our Empty Homes work to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> making greater use of compulsory purchase orders, supporting the acquisition of tenements by RSLs, improving the performance of factors and enabling whole-block retrofits commitment to a targeted area-based approach to tackling empty homes in Wheatley Group areas of operation <p>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 such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>The key outcome will be to increase the housing supply by bringing more empty homes back into use at pace.</p>	<p>Since 2019, authority has been sought from Committee to promote 65 Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) across the city.</p> <p>Since 2017 Glasgow has brought back 1865 empty homes. From 1st April 2023 until 29th February 2024, the number of empty properties brought back into use was 541.</p> <p>Funding has been secured to employ a Strategic Acquisitions Officer whose remit will be to work with Empty Homes Officers, Housing Investment, HSCP Homelessness teams and Registered Social Landlords in order to provide a more strategic and targeted approach to the acquisition of properties for social housing to accommodate homeless households across the City. The recruitment is currently being progressed.</p>	2024

Item	Action/Issue	Description	Outcomes	Progress	Timescale
3.	To tackle environmental blight	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 neighbourhoods.	Empty Homes officers will continue to work more closely with Environmental Health, Planning and Building Control colleagues in order to tackle these issues and take corrective action where appropriate.	A recent example of this was a CPO which has been promoted by the Contracts and Property Committee for a semi-detached property at 35 Strowan Crescent which is a long-term empty property causing blight on the neighbourhood. Officers have worked together to address vermin and harbourage issues while also working with partner RSLs in the area in order to take forward a CPO to bring back this property into use as a family home.	Ongoing
4.	Other Initiatives	<p>Officers will continue to explore a range of other initiatives including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pilot for the improvement of empty properties for sale and/or use of other CPO powers to bring back properties into use where there are no RSL partners for 'back-to-back' agreements. • the provision of grants to owners to bring redundant properties back into use • 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. 	The key outcome will be to increase the housing supply by bringing more empty homes back into use at pace.	<p>Officers are currently investigating the practicality of introducing grants for bringing back empty homes and hope to progress a pilot in the future. Officers are also currently looking at a procedure and pilot for working with a 'preferred development partner' to allow empty properties back into use where there are barriers to bringing these back into use for social housing.</p> <p>A CPO 'Reform Practitioner Advisory group' has now been set up with the first meeting being held on 27th March 2024. Glasgow City Council has been invited to participate on the group and will be represented by a colleague from Legal Services. Public consultation with stakeholders will follow later in the year.</p> <p>The Scottish Government has advised that Compulsory Sales Orders (CSOs) are still under consideration. No timescales have been provided in relation to this. Officers will continue to pursue.</p>	Ongoing