

SCOTTISH EMPTY HOMES PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2013-14

Summary

At the start of last year the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership set out a number of priorities for 2013/14. These priorities have been developed over this past year and will be reviewed in this report.

The specific priorities and milestones for 2013/14 are set out in Appendix A. In line with activities and priorities in previous years there are three themes running through these priorities and milestones which will be used to structure this report.

- Increased funding and resources for empty homes work
- Bringing empty homes back into use
- Sharing best practice

This year has seen a great number of strides with empty homes work bedding in and maturing on a wider scale across the country. There are more empty homes officers than ever in councils across Scotland and a clear relationship has been demonstrated between having dedicated empty homes staff and councils reporting long term empty homes brought back into use. This year has also seen its challenges. Short term contracts in the shared services projects have led to recruitment and retention issues and projects across the country have struggled to attract empty home owners to empty homes loan fund offers. The successful work of empty homes officers in councils where a holistic empty homes service is offered has also drawn a stark contrast between local authorities with an empty homes service and those without and the resulting disparity of help available across the country for owners and communities affected by long term empty homes. Just over half of councils now have a dedicated empty homes officer, a long way from where the project began in 2010 when there were no empty homes officers, but also a long way away from full coverage across Scotland.

Highlights from the year include:

- Councils have reported 278 empty homes brought back into use through direct intervention with owners.
- The number of councils with an Empty Homes Officer has increased from 15 to 16.

- 18 Councils have reported that they are currently using their powers to remove vacant dwelling council tax discounts and 15 have said they have increased council tax above the standard rate of 100% for dwellings that have been vacant for over a year.
- 21 councils have set themselves targets for bringing private sector empty homes back into use.
- Extension of all existing Shared Services Projects and establishment of the Lanarkshires Empty Homes Shared Service Project.

We have repeated our survey of Scottish Empty Homes Network Officers and Empty Homes Lead Officers this year and this report draws heavily on that survey as well as the wider work of the Partnership over the last year. The report concludes with a section on continuing barriers and recommendations and a look to the year ahead.

Graph 1: Visual summary showing progression of highlighted figures since the start of the Scottish Empty Homes Project

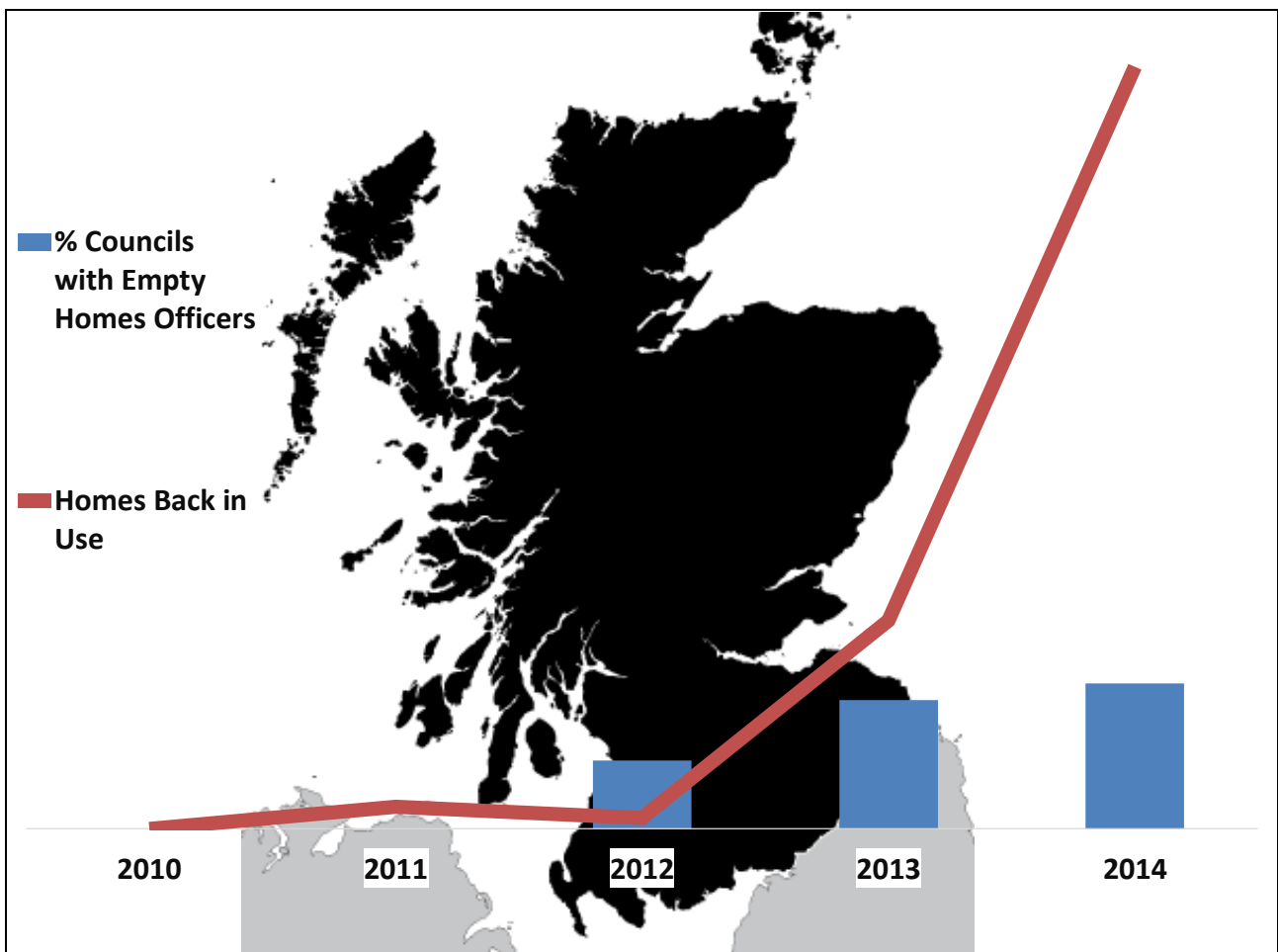


Table of Contents

Summary	1
Introduction	4
Background	4
Methodology	6
Increased funding and resources for empty homes work	7
Dedicated staff resources	7
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shared Service Pilots	8
Funding for incentives and enforcement measures	9
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vacant Dwelling Council Tax Powers• Empty Homes Loan Fund• Funding levels	9 10 11
Bringing empty homes back into use	14
Data Collection	14
Report Empty Homes Website	16
Strategies	17
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local Housing Strategies• Other strategies	17 18
Empty homes brought back into use 2013/14	18
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Empty Homes Targets• Use of interventions• Enforcement• Partnership working	19 20 21 22
Sharing Best Practice	23
The Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network	23
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Scottish Empty Homes Conference 2013• The Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network Seminar 2014	24 24
Staff training	25
Best Practice Group	26
Barriers & Recommendations	27
Staff resources	27
Funding	28
Enforcement powers	29
Progress on Project Milestones	31
The Year Ahead	32
Appendix A: Year 4 Priorities	33
Appendix B: Year 5 Priorities	35

Introduction

This is the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership's Annual Report for 2013-14. This report follows on from and refers back to the Baseline Report produced by the Partnership in August 2010 as well as the Partnership's 2010-11; 2011-12; and 2012-13 Annual Reports. The Baseline Report gave a starting snapshot of where councils in Scotland were with regards to private sector empty homes work. It drew on information gathered through initial meetings with councils by the Empty Homes Coordinator, as well as a questionnaire on private sector empty homes work conducted in 2009 as part of the Scottish Government's Private Rented Sector Review. The next three year's Annual Reports drew on wider surveys of the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network which repeated some of the 2009 questions. The same survey was repeated this year.

The different sections of this document are grouped under three themes which encompass the priorities set out for 2013-14 in last year's Annual Report.

These are:

- Increased funding and resources for empty homes work
- Bringing empty homes back into use
- Sharing best practice.

The report will end with several sections which include the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership's progress against current project milestones, commentary on ongoing barriers and recommendations for empty homes work in Scotland and the project's Year 5 outcomes and milestones.

Background

There are over 23,000 long term (6 months or more) private sector empty homes in Scotland according to council tax records.

Work on empty homes can achieve positive outcomes with regards to:

- Housing Supply
- Community Regeneration/Town Centre Renewal
- Sustaining Rural Communities
- Restoring Confidence in local property markets
- Discouraging Anti-Social Behaviour (due to fire/vandalism/fly-tipping of empty properties)
- Climate Change and Sustainability

Work on empty homes also represents value for money. The Empty Homes Agency in England has estimated that the cost of refurbishing an empty home is between £6,000 and £25,000. The average cost of a new build home in Scotland is £100,000 or more. And of course when you are bringing an empty home back into use, the infrastructure and local services will already be in place.

Empty Homes cannot solve housing supply issues alone, but they can be part of a holistic solution to provide local affordable housing and to regenerate communities.

The Scottish Government 2009's review of the Private Rented Sector identified the need for a national post to support councils who wish to pursue empty homes work. The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership was established to help councils and their partners pursue work to bring private sector empty homes back into use. The project is funded by the Scottish Government and hosted by Shelter Scotland.

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership began work in June 2010 with a two year lifespan. The project has been extended three times and is currently funded until March 2015.

Since June 2010 much work has been done across the country to promote the value of private sector empty homes work, share best practice from across the UK and help councils to develop policies and processes to bring private sector empty homes back into use.

The process promoted by the partnership has several interlinked steps:

- 1) data collection – finding out where the empty homes are and who owns them
- 2) prioritising – which empty homes to spend time/resources on to meet council goals
- 3) advice and information – providing signposting advice to empty home owners as standard, how to rent, how to sell, how to refurbish
- 4) negotiation – more involved pro-active engagement with owners to encourage them to bring their property back into use
- 5) incentives – using council schemes such as Private Sector Leasing (PSL), rent deposit guarantee, empty homes loans, or grants to encourage owners to bring their property back into use
- 6) enforcement – where all else fails and the property is still presenting an issue for the community, using enforcement to encourage or force an empty home owner to bring their property back into use.

For the first two years of the Partnership's work councils were largely focused on steps 1-3, but over the last two years with the employment of more empty homes officers in more councils there is now a greater proportion of councils actively engaging in steps 4 & 5 and a small number of councils beginning to look at the use of step 6.

2012/13 saw the biggest leap in the amount of staff resources allocated to empty homes across Scotland. This year staff resources have continued to increase. We are pleased to report that there are now 16 councils with some form of dedicated empty homes staff, either full time or as part of a shared services project with further moves in other councils to allocate more staff time to empty homes work. Indeed a small number of these 16 councils have more than 1 member of staff dedicated to empty homes work. In previous reports we have identified this issue as crucial to finding solutions to entrenched issues with long term empty homes and this remains the case. It is still the key to unlocking more empty homes.

Methodology

The baseline report referred to above drew heavily on survey data collected for the March 2009 Private Rented Sector Review. For the 2010-11 Annual Report, we created two new surveys, which repeat some of the questions asked in this previous survey, as well as expanding it to collect more and different information in order to measure the progress of the Partnership.

The first survey was distributed to all members of the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network. It was intended to capture views about the Scottish Empty Homes Network and Partnership as well as views on desired changes in Scottish policy with regards to private sector empty homes.

The second survey, sent to the lead officer for empty homes work in each council, broadly covered the topics addressed in the different sections of this document and is an attempt to capture a snapshot of private sector empty homes practice in Scotland.

These surveys have been repeated in April/May each year since. This year, out of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities we received responses from 28 (though not all respondents answered every question).

Within this document the Private Rented Sector Review 2009 will be referred to as the PRS Review 2009 survey or the 2009 survey. Reference will also be made to our 2010 Baseline report, our 2011; 2012 and 2013 surveys and the survey carried out this year will be referred to as the 2014 survey¹.

¹ Scottish Empty Homes Partnership Baseline Report and Annual Reports for previous years can be found on the Shelter Scotland website in the Empty Homes section. Go to: http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing_policy/empty_homes/scottish_empty_homes_partnership

In addition to the data collected through these surveys, this report will also draw on a range of other material including:

- Information collected through meetings with Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network members
- Feedback forms submitted at Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network events
- Information available through the Report Empty Homes website
- Research included in our previous reports

Increased funding and resources for empty homes work

Measures of progress in this strand of work can be broken down into two sections:

- Dedicated Staff Resources
- Funding for incentives and enforcement measures

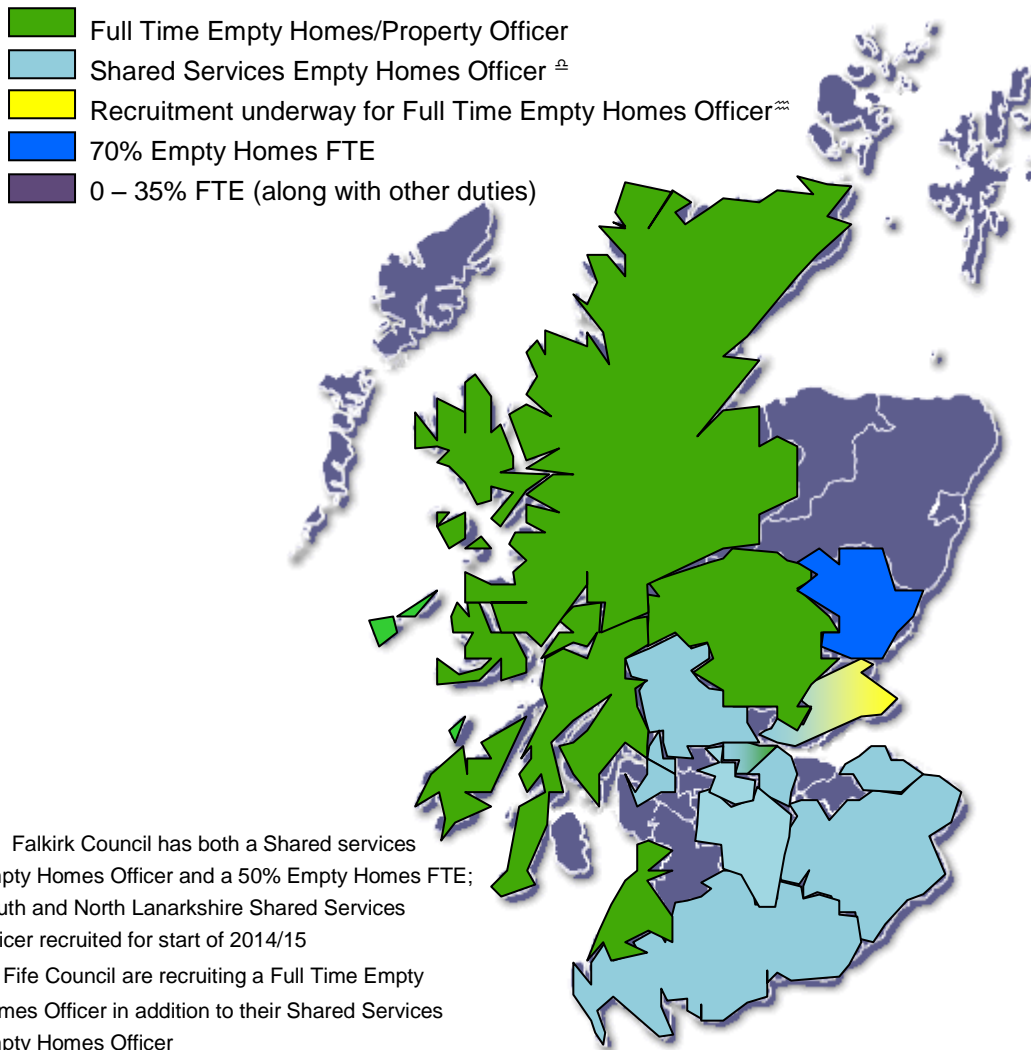
Dedicated Staff Resources

Last year we reported a marked increase in the amount of staff resource dedicated to empty homes work in Scottish Councils. This year the upward trend has continued. Last year 15 councils had an Empty Homes Officer (either full time or as part of a Shared Services Project). This year 16 councils have an Empty Homes Officer either full time or as part of a Shared Service Project. We deliberately asked the question ‘Does your council have an Empty Homes Officer?’ separately to the question about what percentage Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff the council has in order to reflect the important role of a dedicated Empty Homes Officer. Whether they are full time for one council or full time across a number of councils as part of a shared service project the important distinction is that they are focused full time on empty homes work. This full time focus anecdotally appears to be a key indicator of how effective and engaged a council is in bringing empty homes back into use.

Table 1: % FTE Empty Homes Staff 2014

% FTE	# of Councils
0%	2
1-5%	3
15%	2
20%	1
33-35%	4
40%	1
50%	5
70%	1
100%	4
100%+	1

Graph 2: Dedicated Empty Homes Staff in Scotland 2013/14



Shared Services Pilots

This year the original Homes Again Shared Services Project (Fife, West Lothian, East Lothian, Scottish Borders, Dumfries & Galloway) was extended to a third year, now fully funded by the member councils. The Homes Again – West Dunbartonshire/Renfrewshire Project is currently in its second year and the Forth Valley Empty Homes Shared Services Project was extended to a second year to cover Stirling and Falkirk (Clackmannanshire was part of the first year of the project). Funding was also secured for the establishment of a fourth Shared Services Pilot – the Lanarkshires Empty Homes Project. The Lanarkshires Empty Homes Project involves one full time Empty Homes Officer shared between South and North Lanarkshire Councils with line management from the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership and funding from the 2 member councils and Scottish Government.

Funding for Incentives and Enforcement measures

This year has seen several developments with regards to funding available to councils for the purposes of providing financial incentives to empty home owners and to pursue enforcement measures. A number of councils have begun to use the new vacant dwelling council tax powers. Additionally some councils are now in receipt of Scottish Government Empty Homes Loan Fund money. There are also a few councils financing empty homes loans and grants through other means.

Vacant Dwelling Council Tax Powers

One way councils can raise money to pursue private sector empty homes work is through varying the council tax discount on long term empty properties. Previously councils had the power to vary this discount between 50% and 10%. This power was added to as a result of the Local Government Finance (Unoccupied Properties etc.) (Scotland) Act 2012.

The Local Government Finance (Unoccupied Properties etc.) (Scotland) Act 2012 was commenced in April 2013. The Act and the associated regulations give councils the power to remove this discount altogether after a property has been empty for 1 year and in addition, to charge up to 100% extra council tax on long term vacant properties that are not subject to any of the stated exemption categories².

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership has consistently argued that councils taking advantage of these new powers should recycle at least a proportion of the revenues collected to develop their empty homes offering to owners, in order to provide the needed balance of carrot and stick that will bring more empty homes back into use. It is of course for individual councils to have internal discussions about where any revenue raised is allocated but these new powers do at least provide an opportunity for new money to be raised that could be allocated towards empty homes work.

In this year's survey when asked if councils had removed the vacant dwelling council tax discount for dwellings empty over a year, 18 councils said they had removed the discount and a further 2 said they would be doing so next year.

We also asked councils if they had used these new powers to increase council tax levels beyond 100%. 15 councils said they had and a further 3 said they intended to do so next

² Exempt properties include those being actively marketed for sale or let for up to 2 years. See [The Council Tax \(Variation for Unoccupied Dwellings\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2013](#).

year. The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership continues to encourage our Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network members to raise the issue with colleagues to make sure their work is on the radar and that they are considered an integral part of discussions about the use of these new powers and where the revenue is to be spent. We have not been able to collect information about where revenues from these council tax increases have been allocated, however based on anecdotal evidence it seems very little of this additional revenue has been allocated for empty homes purposes.

Empty Homes Loan Fund

In 2013 17 projects across Scotland were allocated £4.5m under the Scottish Government's Empty Homes Loan Fund. Projects vary but the majority are run by local authorities or housing associations and all are aimed at bringing long term empty homes back into use for a minimum of 5 years affordable housing. Management arrangements vary across the projects but the vast majority involve a loan to the empty home owner to bring the property up to a lettable standard in exchange for the property being let out at an affordable rate (below LHA rates) for at least 5 years. The offer for owners should be attractive. It involves an interest free loan to improve the property (and sometimes help with project management of this) and the result is a property bringing in a rental income which previously was not and the lowering of other outgoings, such as council tax (which would be paid by the tenant rather than the owner). Despite this many projects have struggled to attract interested owners. Many councils have reported to the Partnership that they underestimated the amount of handholding and 'selling' work that would be needed to attract empty home owners to these schemes.

5 councils reported in our survey this year that they had used loans to successfully bring empty homes back into use. This number included Argyll & Bute Council who run their own empty homes loan scheme outside of the Scottish Government fund but with the same tie to the provision of affordable housing.

Anecdotally the Partnership is aware of an increase in 'pipeline' loan fund work, including an increase in the number of applications currently being considered or near submission. As Empty Homes Officers engage with owners on the various options available to them to bring their properties back into use we expect to see more owners re-considering the loan fund option after exhausting other possibilities.

At the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership's April Seminar event Scottish Government officers announced that the Government was considering the addition of a 'loan to sell' model as an add on to the existing loan fund model. Few details were available but the audience was told that such a model would likely allow for loans to owners to refurbish and sell long term empty properties at affordable prices. The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership is very supportive of this proposal as a way to attract more empty home owners to bring their properties back into use. Such an addition could potentially attract a

wider range of empty home owners to the loan fund scheme, those that are currently wary of becoming landlords or tying themselves into a long term arrangement. Members of the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network and Best Practice Group have been enthusiastic about the changes and say they already have owners in mind to contact about this option if and when it becomes available.

Funding Levels

As with previous years surveys we did not get a high level of responses to our questions about funding available to councils for empty homes work.

Below is a table of the funding we are aware of – including Empty Homes Loan Fund money - that has been allocated by different councils to empty homes work for this year. It is by no means complete and should be taken as a rough sketch of funding across the country rather than the definitive picture. Some of the figures reported by councils may have been reported last year as loan funding or multi-year staff funding arrangements may bridge more than one financial year.

Table 2: Funding Levels for Empty Homes Work Reported by Councils

Council	Empty Homes Funding	Source
Aberdeen City	None	N/A
Aberdeenshire	200k	2 nd Homes Council Tax Discount Money
Angus	Undecided	Potential to receive a portion of 2 nd homes council tax money
Argyll & Bute	£3m for empty homes loans, grants and a full time empty homes officer	Grants - £1.5m from Strategic Housing Reserves Loans - £1.5m from Council Reserves
Clackmannanshire	£75k for Empty Homes Loans £25k for Empty Homes Grants	Empty Homes Loan Fund Private Sector Housing Budget
Dumfries & Galloway	£100,000 for empty homes grants in the Housing Regeneration Area plus funding for Shared Services Empty Homes Officer and Below Tolerable Standard	Section 75 agreement Private Sector Grant Funding

	Grants	
Dundee	No specific budget	Private Sector Housing Grant
East Ayrshire	£250,000 for empty homes loans plus staff time from the Landlord Registration Team	Empty Homes Loan Fund
East Dunbartonshire	None	N/A
East Lothian	£150,000 for empty homes loans plus funding for Shared Services Empty Homes Officer	Empty Homes Loan Fund Private Sector Housing Budget and Scottish Government
East Renfrewshire	No specific budget	N/A
Edinburgh	£750,000 for empty homes loans provided by Link Housing Association Currently conducting a feasibility exercise around resourcing for a full time Empty Homes Officer	Empty Homes Loan Fund
Falkirk	£100,000 for empty homes loans plus funding for Shared Services Empty Homes Officer and an additional 50% FTE member of staff	Empty Homes Loan Fund Private Sector General Fund and Scottish Government
Fife	£150,000 for empty homes loans plus funding for Shared Services Empty Homes Officer plus Full Time Empty Homes Officer currently being recruited	Empty Homes Loan Fund General Housing Fund
Glasgow	£700,000 for empty homes loans in partnership with a number of housing associations including GHA.	Empty Homes Loan Fund
Highland	£800,000 for empty homes loans plus funding for an Empty Homes Officer	£400,000 Empty Homes Loan Fund

		£400,000 Private Sector Housing Grant
Inverclyde	Unknown	
Midlothian	£125,000 for empty homes loans	Empty Homes Loan Fund
Moray	Unknown	
North Ayrshire	£200,000 for empty homes loans	Empty Homes Loan Fund
North Lanarkshire	£700,000 for Empty Homes Purchase Scheme Funding for Shared Services Empty Homes Officer	Affordable Housing Policy & General Fund Non HRA Private Sector Housing Budget
Orkney	Unknown	
Perth and Kinross	£180,000 for Empty Homes Grants and Feasibility Grants plus funding for the Vacant Property Development Officer £44,000 for regeneration	Private Sector Housing Grant Regeneration and Investment Improvement Fund
Renfrewshire	£150,000 for empty homes loans plus funding for Shared Services Empty Homes Officer	Empty Homes Loan Fund Private Sector Housing Grant and Scottish Government
Scottish Borders	£150,000 for empty homes loans plus funding for Shared Services Empty Homes Officer	Empty Homes Loan Fund Housing Strategy Budget and Scottish Government
Shetland Islands	Unknown	
South Ayrshire	£345, 000 for empty homes loans and Empty Homes Officer for 3 years	Scottish Government Innovation and Investment Fund
South Lanarkshire	Funding for Shared Services Officer	Housing Revenue Account
Stirling	Funding for Shared Services Empty Homes Officer (Rural Stirling Housing Association has a separate	Strategic Housing Account and Scottish Government

	empty homes loan fund of £90,000)	
West Dunbartonshire	£150,000 for empty homes loans plus funding for Shared Services Empty Homes Officer	Empty Homes Loan Fund Housing Strategy Budget and Scottish Government
West Lothian	£150,000 for empty homes loans plus funding for Shared Services Empty Homes Officer	Empty Homes Loan Fund Homelessness Strategy Budget and Scottish Government
Western Isles	£155,000 for empty homes loans	Empty Homes Loan Fund

Bringing empty homes back into use

Data Collection

One of the first steps to bringing private sector empty homes back into use is producing a picture of how many empty properties are in a given council and where they are located. It is this data that is the basis of active engagement with empty home owners.

This year according to our survey data and other sources we believe the number of councils keeping a private sector empty homes database has remained steady at 24 with a further 2 councils reporting that they are developing one.

Of the 2 councils who told us they don't hold a database the reasons why were stated as 1) a lack of staff resources to compile and maintain it; and 2) they don't want/need one.

As well as the number of councils collecting data we also ask survey respondents about the frequency with which this data is updated. This can often be a reflection of the level of engagement a council has with empty home owners as a greater engagement requires more accurate and up to date data.

Chart 1 - Data Collection 2009

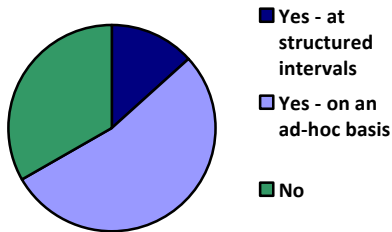


Chart 2 - Data Collection 2011

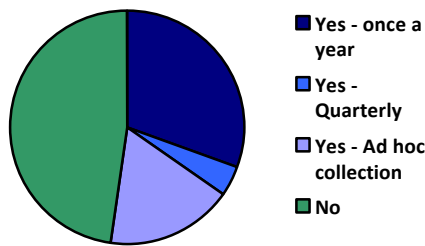


Chart 3 - Data Collection 2012

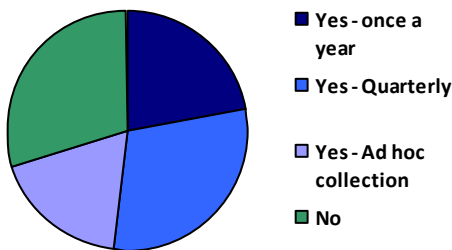


Chart 4 - Data Collection 2013

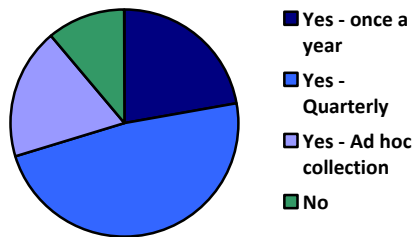
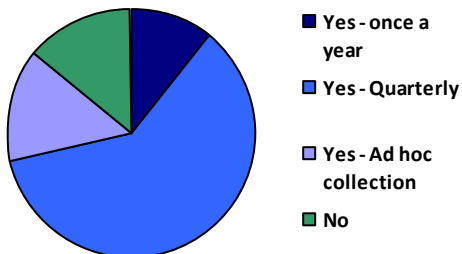


Chart 5 - Data Collection 2014



Once again this year council tax is listed as the main source of data for empty homes databases in Scotland. Other popular sources of information according to the 2014 survey include direct engagement with owners, information from other council departments and data collected through a local survey/questionnaire to empty home owners.

We also asked councils what they use this data for. Some notable results include:

- 17 councils replied that they use this data to send out information to owners about working with the local authority to bring their empty home back into use.
- 16 councils say they use the database as their case management system.
- 16 use it to send out questionnaires to empty home owners.
- 14 use it to prioritise empty homes for pro-active intervention from the council.

These figures are important as they are indicators of the continuation of a more in-depth engagement with empty home owners that we reported last year. It is this in-depth engagement that brings empty homes back into use.

Despite the improvement in data collection and use of data in the past year some issues were still raised in this year's survey relating to data. These ranged in nature but the strongest theme was a mixture of either communication or IT issues resulting in Empty Homes Officers not getting accurate data reports from their council tax colleagues. While it's a common theme, the specific issues at play appear to be particular to the individual councils involved. A second theme was that of a couple of councils not collecting information about the outcome of cases meaning that the officers could not tell what impact their interaction with owners had had.

Report Empty Homes Website

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership fund Scottish local authorities to use the Report Empty Homes website. This website, established in England for several years before adoption in Scotland, allows members of the public to report empty homes in their communities that they are concerned about. The idea is that for councils that are signed up, these reports will go straight to a single lead officer within the council who can then respond themselves or pass the report on to an appropriate colleague. This is useful for both the councils and members of the public because it streamlines the process of reporting empty homes. Previously people may have found themselves passed to a variety of different departments with little clarity about whose responsibility it was to deal with the issue.

For councils the data collected in this way can also be useful in supplementing their empty homes database as not all empty homes will have their council tax status correctly recorded. It also highlights where particular properties are causing additional problems to the community.

To date, 29 Scottish councils have signed up to use the website. This is up two from last year. Over 600 reports have been received in Scotland from the public via the website. These reports are largely organically generated with some peaks in reporting following national television programmes on the subject of empty homes. To date we are not aware of many councils pro-actively marketing the use of the website for reporting. The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership still believes there is a value in having a mechanism by which the public can easily report empty homes to councils but some thinking may be required as to whether additional publicity of this site is needed to make it worthwhile for the partnership to continue to fund.

Each year we ask councils if they have a process for responding to reports and how quickly they respond. Table 3 below shows that 100% of those who responded are actively using the information collected from the site and responding in a timely fashion. Although not all 29 councils signed up to the site responded to this question we believe

these numbers are likely to be an accurate reflection of use of the site overall. All of these numbers are up from last year, most notably there was an increase from 22 to 27 in the number of councils who have a set process for responding to reports from the website.

Unlike in England, where all councils were signed up to the website by the Empty Homes Agency whether or not they had pro-actively decided to join, in Scotland we have taken the approach of seeking active sign up from councils. We believe the fact that the majority of those signed up are responding to reports justifies our decision to seek buy in from councils before signing them up to the site. For the 3 councils who have not signed up to the website, the Empty Homes Coordinator receives any reports received and passes them on to the contact in that council.

Table 3: Council response to reports from www.reportemptyhomes.com

Statement	# of Councils 2012	# of Councils 2013	# of Councils 2014
My council has a set process for responding to reports.	16	22	27
Of which:			
I respond to reports as soon as I receive them	12	16	19
I respond to reports within a set period of time	4	6	8

Strategies

In previous reports we have tried to establish the extent to which councils are prioritising private sector empty homes work. One way of measuring this is to track whether councils have highlighted empty homes work in their Local Housing Strategies, Private Sector Housing Strategy or via distinct empty homes strategies.

Local Housing Strategies

Local Housing Strategies (LHS) form the basis of a council's approach to housing issues, including housing supply, homelessness support and their scheme of assistance. While councils will take their own decisions as to what role empty homes work might play in meeting their goals, it would seem sensible that where empty homes work is pursued, the basis for this work should be found in the Local Housing Strategy. Indeed there is a

strong case to be made for the role that filling empty homes can play in meeting the outcomes that councils have highlighted in these strategies such as:

'increasing the supply of affordable housing'

'to develop mechanisms to improve choice and access to affordable housing across all tenures'

'to stimulate demand in areas that are less popular or have investment needs'

'Promoting a mix of housing tenures and types to meet the needs of all communities'

Starting with the research to compile our baseline report in 2010 we have carried out a desktop review of councils' local housing strategies each year, we have therefore carried out this exercise 5 times so far. Our baseline report found that 16 had some mention of private sector empty homes, rising to 17 in 2011. In 2012 there was a significant improvement, following the refresh of a number of Local Housing Strategies and a repeated desktop review found that 24 councils had some mention of private sector empty homes. This was a very encouraging improvement and we aim to help councils translate the commitments they have set out in these strategies into practical action on the ground. Last year we repeated this exercise again and found that 28 councils had mentioned private sector empty homes work and that these mentions had in many cases become more in depth, including more specific action points and target setting (11 councils included targets, up from 8 in 2012).

This year, the number of councils mentioning empty homes remains at 28, but one more council has now included an empty homes target in their LHS.

Other strategies

There may be other places, either in addition to or underpinning Local Housing Strategies, where councils have articulated a commitment to empty homes work. The most likely places where this could be found are within a council's Private Sector Housing Strategy or in a stand-alone Empty Homes Strategy.

Of those that responded to this year's survey, 6 councils reported inclusion of empty homes work within their private sector housing strategy with a further 3 intending to address it in the next Private Sector Housing Strategy.

In addition, 4 councils stated they had a standalone empty homes strategy and a further 6 councils reported that they are developing an Empty Homes Strategy or action plan.

Empty Homes brought back into use 2013/14

One difficulty for the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership as a capacity building project with no statutory powers to compel reporting is our ability to accurately reflect the number of

empty homes being brought back into use through the engagement of councils with empty home owners. However our involvement with the empty homes shared services projects and links with other officers through the Scottish Empty Homes Best Practice Group has provided us with significant amounts of data from the majority of the most active councils undertaking empty homes work. We are aware our data is likely to still be incomplete but believe it is getting more accurate year on year.

Our best estimate of the number of private sector empty homes brought back into use in the last financial year is 278. This is based on survey data as well as case studies submitted to the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network Knowledge Hub. The councils involved have case notes and other evidence to show that these 278 properties were brought back into use as a result of engagement by council staff with empty property owners. The highest reported number of homes brought back into use by any one council was 60.

In addition to these Scotland wide numbers we have additional data for the Homes Again Project and the Forth Valley Empty Homes Project where Regional Empty Homes Officers are directly managed by the Partnership on behalf of councils. In these projects as well as those properties brought back into use through direct engagement we know of a further 340 active cases that were progressing strongly at the turn of the financial year and we would expect a number of these to be brought back into use over the coming months. We also recorded approximately £90,000 recovered by partner councils as a result of the work of the Empty Homes Officers through data cleansing (where details have been updated by the Empty Homes Officer to reflect the fact that a property currently in receipt of vacant dwelling council tax discounts is not in fact empty and should have this discount removed) and debt recovery work across the two projects.

We are unable to capture these additional figures Scotland wide however we are pleased to see that the increased level of staff resources dedicated to empty homes work across the country is translating itself into numbers of empty homes back into use.

Empty Homes Targets

Last year we reported 19 councils with a specific target for bringing empty homes back into use. This year that number has increased slightly to 21. This number is different to that stated above in the section on strategies as not all of these targets are included explicitly in Local Housing Strategies.

We also once again asked councils how many empty homes they anticipate they will bring back into use in the coming year. 28 councils answered this question. Collectively they anticipated bringing back into use 461 empty homes with figures given by individual councils ranging from 0 to 40.

Use of interventions

In previous surveys we have asked councils about what types of interventions they have used. The table below shows the progression from last year's answers about what types of interventions have been used successfully by councils.

Table 4: Interventions used successfully by councils

Intervention	# of councils who have 'used successfully' 2012	# of councils who have 'used successfully' 2013	# of councils who have 'used successfully' 2014
Writing to owners	5	17	20
Providing advice and assistance	10	20	21
Conducting a survey	6	14	15
Contacting empty home owners as a result of a complaint	10	14	18
Private sector leasing	2	4	2
Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme	5	7	8
Grants	5	4	4
Loans	0	2	5

We also gave respondents to the survey the chance to tell us about what they perceived to be the types of interventions that had been successful for them in a free form box. Here are some of the responses:

'Giving help and advice on letting the property. Providing advice on the VAT incentives to enable them to refurbish their properties. Referring properties to the Deposit Guarantee Scheme.'

'Matchmaker Scheme, Advice and Guidance leaflets, Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme'

'A number of different interventions which include providing information on the following: Selling the property; Renting the property; Repairs; Estate agents; Council run schemes such as Buy-backs; deposit scheme; Matchmaker Scheme & Identifying unknown owners'

'Empty homes loan fund loans.'

'advice on renting/selling, LA taken on as temp accommodation, provided letter to claim VAT discount'

'Empty Homes Initiative Grants £5K per bedroom, Heritage Trust Grants Feasibility Funding'

Enforcement

In this year's survey we asked councils if they had used enforcement as a method to bring empty homes back into use. 4 councils said they had used enforcement successfully. Of the remaining respondents, 11 said they would like to try using enforcement as a tool and a further 9 said they would not be likely to try this. For the 4 councils who said they had used enforcement successfully we asked councils what form this enforcement had taken. We received 2 replies: one 'Town Planning Section 179 notice' and the other 'visit from building inspectors'.

Previous years' reports have highlighted the reluctance of councils to use Compulsory Purchase Powers to bring empty homes back into use. There have been efforts made through best practice sharing to dispel some of the concerns about CPO but, as the answers above reflect, this has yet to translate into reports of more councils using these powers on long term empty homes. This year in order to try to break down the issues with the use of CPO for councils we asked respondents 'What aspects of using CPO do you need more support with?' Here are some of the responses:

'Making them more user friendly so councils legal departments are happier to use them for other reasons than simply acquiring land for developments sites'

'If there were good examples of case studies for CPO undertaken in Scotland this would give us more scope to approach Council to use this tool. How to establish an end user agreement, prior to CPO'

'Funding and simplifying of the process.'

'Presentation to senior officer detailing processes and success with other Scottish Local Authorities.'

We also asked councils what type of enforcement tool they would find useful. Here are some of the responses:

'Something that the Council would be willing to enforce upon the owner that would show they are serious in their goal of bringing empty homes back into use.'

'EDMO's would be a very useful enforcement tool and would complement the loan fund aspirations.'

'A tool that would force the owner to bring problem properties back into use like EDMO's in England'

'Action to repair property where the costs does not fall to the LA if owner/s does not take required action and we have to intervene to undertake works. Legislative framework so owners can be

forced to take action or sell property if it is having an adverse effect on neighbouring properties/community etc'

'Option for council to take temporary ownership of empty home'

'The ability to enforce a sale of a property.'

'Something similar to the management order down in England. CPO for taking ownership of a property is a long and resource intensive process, but taking the management of a property for a set period of time may be useful in some cases.'

'Some enforced sale tool that negates the need for CPO would be useful'

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership continues to believe that a specific Scottish empty homes enforcement tool is needed. We have detailed our proposals for a 'Housing Re-Use Power' to the Scottish Government. Initial consultation on a new empty homes enforcement tool in the Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill consultation received a positive response, however no power was included in the Bill as introduced. Since then our calls for a Housing Re-Use Power have been echoed in the Land Reform Review Group's Final Report 'The Land of Scotland and the Common Good':

"Given the identified need for new housing the Review Group believe that there is significant merit in giving local authorities a HRP [Housing Re-use Power], and that in defined circumstances for particular properties, to address local blight and / or to meet specific local housing need – there is also a case to be made for local communities, or appropriate community body, having a right to trigger the HRP."

Partnership Working

One of the ways the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership seeks to add value for councils is by facilitating relationships and making connections between people, organisations and their shared goals. In this year's survey we asked councils what partners they had worked with in relation to bringing empty homes back into use. Here is what they said:

Table 5: Partnership Working

Partners	# of councils who have worked with them in relation to empty homes
Housing Associations	12
Private Developers	6
Other Councils	12
Community Planning Partners	7
Other private companies	4
Community Associations	5

Links to Housing Associations is one area where much greater partnership working has been observed over the past year. A number of the Empty Homes Loan Fund Projects involve partnership working between Housing Associations and Councils. The Partnership is also aware of a greater number of discussions and formal referral agreements being made between Housing Associations and Councils with regard to empty homes repair and management schemes.

Sharing Best Practice

The Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network

Along with the specific detailed survey to empty homes lead officers, we surveyed the members of the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network to ask them their opinions on the work of the Partnership.

We asked members to rate the usefulness of different types of tools and support provided by the empty homes partnership. Not all respondents answered every question. Here is what they said:

Table 6: Perceived usefulness of Scottish Empty Homes Partnership support

Tool/Support	# stating 'very useful'	# stating 'useful'	# stating 'not useful'
Guides	15	8	0
Report Empty Homes Website	2	8	4
One to one advice from Empty Homes Coordinator	15	8	0
Scottish Empty Homes Conference	12	5	0
Monthly Network Updates	12	7	0
Knowledge Hub	8	12	0
Staff Training	12	7	0
Best Practice Group	9	6	0

The Scottish Empty Homes Conference 2013

This year the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership held its third Scottish Empty Homes Conference in November 2013 as well as a seminar focusing on links between empty homes work and conservation and regeneration work in April 2014.

There were 69 delegates at the Scottish Empty Homes Conference which was held in Glasgow. The focus of the day was on 'sharpening the tools' in the Empty Homes Officer's toolbox and speakers were drawn largely from Scottish councils including Argyll & Bute and the Western Isles.

In our feedback form for the conference we asked delegates if the conference would affect how they deal with the topics raised on the day. 95% of those responding said it would. When asked in what way, we received a number of comments including:

'More determined and encouraged.'

'I will go back to [my council] and ask a number of questions about how we are doing.'

'I've come away from the conference with a number of new ideas to bring empty properties back into use.'

'We are private sector landlords. Will be able to approach councils more going forward.'

'Monitor what is happening in my authority, ask questions at council.'

'Some new ideas.'

Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network Seminar 2014

The seminar, held in April in Edinburgh focused on strengthening the links between empty homes work and two key complimentary areas of work – conservation and regeneration. Speakers and audience members were drawn from both in and outside the field of empty homes work to illustrate successful joint projects where funding and staff resources from different council departments and sometimes different organisations had allowed an empty property to be brought back into use. This event was free to attend and 41 delegates took part.

Feedback on the event was very positive with emphasis being placed on how much delegates had appreciated the chance to meet people from different sectors – sometimes even from within their own council – that they hadn't come in contact with before.

We asked delegates what they found most useful about the day. Here are some of their comments:

'Being able to network with people that have cross over connections with Empty Homes work.'

'networking and information sharing/ presentations'

'That using different funding streams (conservation/housing) requires canny thinking.'

'Extremely useful to see illustrations/ slides of buildings and other projects before and after grant aided investment. Illustrates the benefit of positive intervention.'

'The opportunity for Networking. The speakers addressed issues that could be dealt with in different ways and it was interesting to hear the different approaches and strategies Local Authorities have in dealing with Empty Properties'

Staff Training

Following increases in the levels of dedicated empty homes staff employed by councils, the Empty Homes Coordinator has over the last two years been offering a 1 day induction training course free of charge to all councils, especially where new staff have been employed. The training day includes modules on:

- Introduction to the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership
- Data, priorities & contacting owners
- Working with owners & recording impact
- Developing an Empty Homes Strategy
- Sharing the learning

The course is adapted to suit the needs of individual councils but in all cases seeks to give staff the theory and practical tools to take forward the empty homes process outlined in the 'Background' section of this report and to allow them to achieve the empty homes goals they set for themselves.

The bulk of new staff training was done in 2012/13 however this year (2013/14) staff training has been provided for staff working in the following councils and organisations:

Glasgow City Council

The Highland Council

North Lanarkshire Council

South Lanarkshire Council

Link Housing Association

East Lothian Council

West Lothian Council

Fife Council

South Ayrshire Council

The offer of training will remain open to all councils (or council partners) who are embarking on empty homes work.

Best Practice Group

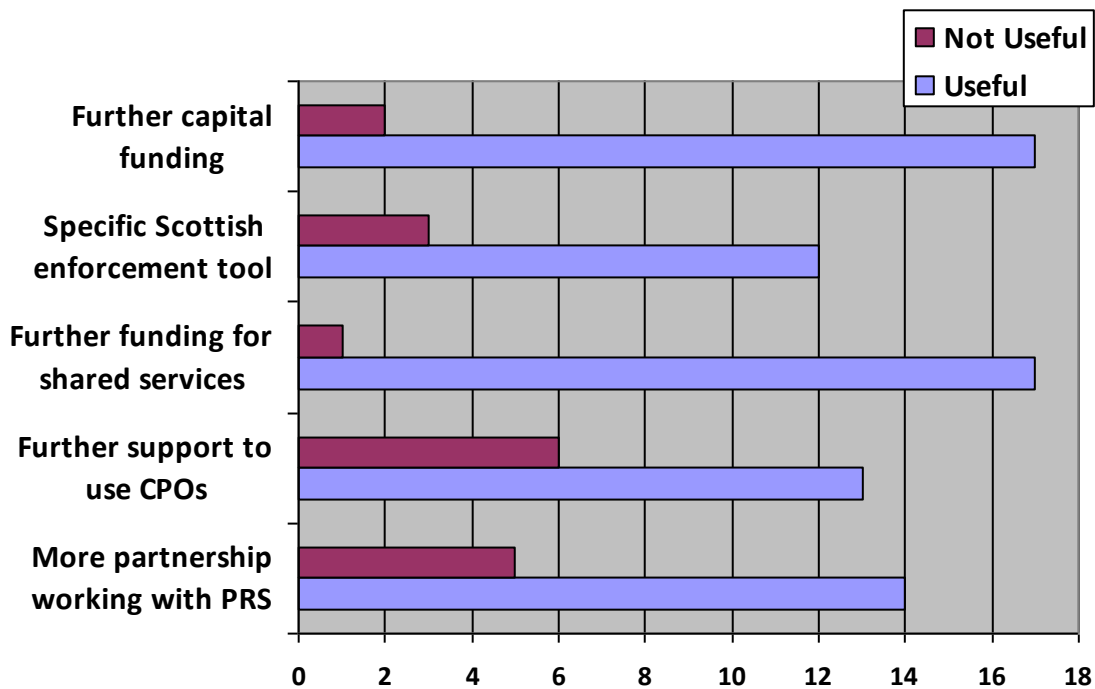
Another response to the increase of dedicated empty homes staff in councils has been the creation of the Scottish Empty Homes Best Practice Group. This group is open to all full and near full-time empty homes staff. The group meets bi-monthly and is dedicated to the discussion of topical empty homes issues impacting on the day to day work of members as well as the exchange of best practice lessons. Recent meetings have covered topics such as selling properties at auction, recording successful interventions and work-shopping individual empty homes cases.

The first meeting of the group took place in August 2012 and membership has steadily grown. There are approximately 12 regular attendees with other members attending as they are able. To date positive feedback has been received on the usefulness of the group (see figures above in Table 6). The group is perceived to provide a much needed forum for exchanging knowledge and practical tips as well as contributing to the cohesiveness of the empty homes professional sector in Scotland.

Barriers & Recommendations

In an effort to identify remaining barriers to private sector empty homes work in Scotland we asked our survey respondents to tell us what they would find useful in increasing their efforts to bring private sector empty homes back into use. These findings along with the evidence from this year's work with councils across the country to develop their empty homes offering has resulted in a list of three areas where we believe more could be done to enable successful private sector empty homes work. These areas are: staff resources, funding, and enforcement powers. These three areas are the same ones that we focused on in this section of previous years' reports, however the specific issues and recommendations have evolved alongside the maturing of empty homes work that has taken place over the past year.

Chart 5: Do you think any of the following would be useful in bringing private sector empty homes back into use?



Staff Resources

Evidence from across the UK shows that value for money is achieved in terms of the levels of empty homes that can be brought back into use where financial incentives for owners are paired with dedicated officers engaging empty home owners with advice and support of a non-financial nature as well. There are currently 11 full time Empty Homes Officers in Scotland covering 16 councils (due to shared services arrangements). These posts began to be established in 2011 with officers bringing on average 30-50 private sector empty homes back into use per year. The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

collects case studies and best practice that show it is the intervention of these officers and their pro-active approaches to working with owners that shifts empty homes back into useful occupation.

In future we would like to see all councils providing a holistic empty homes service that includes useful advice and information, financial support and enforcement as a last resort.

This same message has been promoted by the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership to those councils who are implementing or considering implementation of the Vacant Dwelling Council Tax amendments. We recommended that councils who are using these powers to remove the vacant dwelling council tax discount and charging an increase on these properties should have a dedicated Empty Homes Officer who can provide advice, problem solving and financial incentives to empty home owners in the first instance, prior to them reaching the point where additional council tax charges become due. We believe this holistic package of empty homes measures provides the most balanced and effective approach, by combining the carrot of support with the stick of increased council tax charges.

One issue which has been highlighted in individual empty homes shared service project reports is that of the short term nature of many empty homes staff contracts. This is true not only of shared services posts that run on year to year contracts but also of a number of other empty homes officer posts across the country that are also employed on fixed term contracts. The short term nature of these posts is problematic when it comes to both recruitment of quality candidates and retention of quality staff. The ensuing disruption to empty homes service provision in councils with high staff turnover has a knock on effect on outcomes and numbers of homes brought back into use. In order to both attract and retain skilled empty homes officers these posts need to be offered on a more secure basis in future.

Recommendations:

- All councils should have a dedicated member of staff who can provide pro-active support and advice to empty home owners.
- Councils taking forward Empty Homes Loan Fund projects and/or implementing the new Vacant Dwelling Council Tax Powers should employ dedicated empty homes staff as part of a holistic empty homes service.
- All employers of Empty Homes Officers should consider the benefits of establishing posts on longer term/permanent basis.

Funding

Access to funding for private sector empty homes work and particularly incentives for owners continues to be an issue for councils. This year the £4.5m National Empty Homes

Loan Fund has significantly improved this situation. We also welcomed the £2m Town Centre Housing Fund which aims to bring empty homes back into use as affordable housing in town centres and promote town centre living. However, these existing funds cannot address all aspects of the need for funding for private sector empty homes work.

Work on the development of Empty Homes Loan Fund projects has highlighted the types of empty homes issues that it cannot address, such as empty homes in areas of low demand; empty properties requiring extensive renovations; and empty homes whose end use is expected to be sale or owner-occupation. The first two categories of empty homes are often the ones that community members and elected officials are concerned about and providing some assistance to the final category would likely lead to greater engagement by more empty home owners.

We believe there is a need for further funding to incentivise empty home owners to bring their properties back into use for a variety of end uses.

Along with existing Scottish Government run funds there exists an opportunity for councils using the new council tax powers, to recycle some of this additional revenue for empty homes work, including help, advice, negotiation, incentives and enforcement.

Recommendations:

- Councils should recycle at least part of the vacant dwelling council tax increase revenue for use in other aspects of empty homes work.
- Scottish Government and councils should consider the development of incentive schemes for wider categories of empty homes.

Enforcement Powers

A consistent theme in the feedback the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership has received from councils via our surveys and other means has been the desire for more empty homes enforcement tools in Scotland. This year we have sought to support councils who are looking to use existing powers, namely Compulsory Purchase. However, the message we are receiving from councils continues to be that they don't think the existing tools are fit for purpose. They raise with us concerns about both the cost and complexity of pursuing a Compulsory Purchase Order and often cite the desirability of the empty homes enforcement tools in place in England and Wales. There are several powers available in England and Wales which though they bring the least amount of homes back into use (the most are brought back into use through provision of specific advice and information), are effective in providing a fall-back position and a real reason for owners to engage in more positive discussions.

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership have recommended the introduction of a 'Housing Re-use Power' for councils which would allow them to either lease or force the sale of long term empty homes as a last resort and under strict conditions. We would expect the use of such a power to be used at the discretion of councils only after all other options in terms of advice, information and incentives have been offered. Not all councils would chose to use any enforcement power, but what we do know is that for those councils who see enforcement as a necessary part of their empty homes approach, the powers that exist do not appear to be either as accessible or as effective as they would like.

Without an enforcement power that councils can plausibly and effectively use, many negotiations with empty home owners will not bear fruit as there will be no recourse for the council should the owner not wish to engage.

Recommendation:

- Scottish Government introduce an Empty Homes Housing Re-Use Power in Scotland

Progress on Project Milestones

Last year's report set out the milestones agreed between the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership and Scottish Government by which the project would be measured. Below we have sought to track the progress against these milestones.

Milestones	Progress
Provide a minimum of one good practice example of an empty home(s) brought back into use or of initiatives taken by local authorities to tackle empty homes in Scotland per quarter	Last year 170 case studies of empty homes brought back into use were uploaded to the Knowledge Hub website.
Secure commitments from Fife, Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, West Lothian, East Lothian, Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire to continue with shared service empty homes officer model when Scottish Government funding ceases in 2014	The 5 Homes Again Project partners (Fife, Scottish Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, West Lothian & East Lothian Councils) agreed to fully fund the third year of the project at the end of Scottish Government seed funding. The West Dunbartonshire/Renfrewshire Project runs to a different year end and will be discussing extension proposals in due course.
Ensuring additional local authorities have the following specific tools in place by March 2014: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) An empty homes database b) An advice package for empty home owners 	We know from survey data that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The number of councils with an empty homes database has remained steady at 24 b) The number of councils who have successfully used advice and information to bring empty homes back into use has risen from 20 to 21.
Ensuring additional local authorities feature empty homes commitments as a key part of their housing strategies and/or set a target to return additional empty homes to use by March 2014	The number of local authorities featuring empty homes in their local housing strategy remained constant this year at 28. One more council added an empty homes target to their LHS and the number of councils with an empty homes target (whether or not it is explicitly written in an LHS) has increased from 19 to 21.

Number of Scottish Empty Homes Partnership training sessions for all new empty homes staff (councils & housing associations) undertaken in the year	7 induction training sessions were held for staff beginning empty homes work (either dedicated staff or staff assigned new empty homes tasks). In addition a Mental Health Awareness Training Course for Empty Homes Officers was held with 9 attendees.
---	--

The year ahead

The priorities and milestones for the fifth year of activity of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership have been agreed with Scottish Government and are set out in Appendix B. In summary the focus for the coming year will be:

- Continuing support and training for councils
- Promoting holistic empty homes approaches
- Providing evidence of empty homes brought back into use
- Sharing best practice
- Maintaining and increasing dedicated empty homes staffing levels in Scotland.

Year 4 Priorities

The 2013-2014 priorities for the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership are:

- Continue to support the practice community through information-sharing, providing accurate guidance and template tools
- Support the four locally-based shared service empty homes officers to achieve their targets of aiming to bring on average fifty empty homes back into use per officer per year. This includes the three officers directly employed by Shelter plus the officer employed by Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire Councils
- Offer support and training to new empty homes staff across Scotland
- Continue meetings and other regular contact with local authorities, housing associations and other relevant private sector and community bodies to encourage them to carry out work to bring empty homes back into use
- Provide support to local authorities and other bodies who have been awarded or are applying for funding for empty homes projects in developing and implementing their projects, including in particular the implementation of schemes to offer loans to empty home owners to enable them to refurbish and bring their homes back into use.
- Promote the use of a holistic approach to empty homes work to councils implementing an Empty Homes Loan Fund project to encourage wider take up of loans and other assistance to bring private sector empty homes back into use
- Promote the use of a holistic approach to empty homes work to councils who chose to use the new vacant dwelling council tax powers
- Maintain the empty homes network contact database
- Maintain Scottish Empty Homes Partnership web presence on the knowledge hub
- Host a minimum of two empty homes events per year (conference/seminar)

Milestones for success measurement:

Whilst having regard to the achievement of the priorities above, the success of the project will be measured based on the progress during 2013-14 in achieving the targets set out below:

- Provide a minimum of one good practice example of an empty home(s) brought back into use or of initiatives taken by local authorities to tackle empty homes in Scotland per quarter

- Secure commitments from Fife, Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, West Lothian, East Lothian, Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire to continue with shared service empty homes officer model when Scottish Government funding ceases in 2014
- Ensuring additional local authorities have the following specific tools in place by March 2014:
 - a) An empty homes database
 - b) An advice package for empty home owners
- Ensuring additional local authorities feature empty homes commitments as a key part of their housing strategies and/or set a target to return additional empty homes to use by March 2014
- Number of Scottish Empty Homes Partnership training sessions for all new empty homes staff (councils & housing associations) undertaken in the year

Year 5 Priorities

The 2014-2015 priorities for the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership are:

- Continue to support the practice community through information-sharing, providing accurate guidance and template tools
- Support the five locally-based shared service empty homes officers to achieve their targets of aiming to bring on average fifty empty homes back into use per officer per year. This includes the four officers directly employed by Shelter plus the officer employed by Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire Councils.
- In addition to the projects above – support the proposed new shared services project in South and North Lanarkshire should it be agreed.
- Offer support and training to new empty homes staff across Scotland
- Continue meetings and other regular contact with local authorities, housing associations and other relevant private sector and community bodies to encourage them to carry out work to bring empty homes back into use
- Provide support to local authorities and other bodies who have been awarded or are applying for funding for empty homes projects in developing and implementing their projects, including in particular the implementation of schemes to offer loans to empty home owners to enable them to refurbish and bring their homes back into use or convert empty commercial premise into residential use.
- Promote the use of a holistic approach to empty homes work to councils implementing an Empty Homes Loan Fund project to encourage wider take up of loans and other assistance to bring private sector empty homes back into use
- Promote the use of a holistic approach to empty homes work to councils who chose to use the new vacant dwelling council tax powers
- Maintain the empty homes network contact database
- Maintain Scottish Empty Homes Partnership web presence on the knowledge hub
- Host a minimum of two empty homes events per year (conference/seminar)

Milestones for success measurement:

Whilst having regard to the achievement of the priorities above, the success of the project will be measured based on the progress during 2014-15 in achieving the targets set out below:

- Provide a minimum of one good practice example of an empty home(s) brought back into use or of initiatives taken by local authorities to tackle empty homes in Scotland per month
- Secure commitments from Falkirk and Stirling Councils to continue with shared service empty homes officer model when Scottish Government funding ceases in 2015
- Ensuring additional local authorities have the following specific tools in place by March 2015:
 - a) An empty homes database

- b) An advice package for empty home owners
- Ensuring additional local authorities feature empty homes commitments as a key part of their housing strategies and/or set target to return additional empty homes to use by March 2015
- Number of Scottish Empty Homes Partnership training sessions for all new empty homes staff (councils & housing associations) undertaken in the year