



Annual Report 2017-18

June 2018



0344 515 1941 | emptyhomes@shelter.org.uk

Summary

The aim for the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP) is to encourage private sector empty properties back into use. We do this in a number of ways: offering advice to individual owners; supporting a network of empty homes practitioners in councils and other bodies; and developing policy and practice ideas.

Over the last year, the Partnership has overseen 742 homes brought back into use, bringing the total to 3216 since the Partnership was set up in 2010-11.

This is against a Scottish-wide total of 37,135 homes empty for more than 6 months. Over the last three years it is clear, that there has been a reclassification of properties, with the reported number of empty homes rising by around the same level as the reported fall in the number of second homes.

A total of 20 councils now have dedicated empty homes officers in post. New arrivals this year have included Inverclyde and Orkney Islands. A critical lesson from the last few years is having local dedicated staff is central to tackling empty homes effectively and in the round, so the report looks at ways in which the number of dedicated officers can be extended still further and secured within budgets. One of our recommendations is to earmark for empty homes work a small part of the extra income gained by levying a higher council tax charge on longer term empty homes. With 26 councils now applying the additional council tax levy, we believe this is entirely feasible.

Finally, the report looks at the mix of tools which are available for empty homes work, including advice, best-practice sharing loans and other funding and enforcement powers. On advice, as well as the day to day work of empty homes officers, the national Empty Homes Advice Service provided advice to 446 callers in the year past. As in previous years, the lack of effective enforcement powers is very much unfinished business.

This is the final annual report at the end of a 3-year contract running from April 2015 - March 2018. The SEHP have received additional funding and will look to expand the team and focus on new priorities.



Highlights from the Year



742

Council reported number of empty homes brought back into use through direct intervention with the owner



20

The number of councils that have an Empty Homes Officer



26

Councils now applying the Vacant Dwelling Council Tax Levy



4

Local projects completed with another 16 units of affordable housing



446

Enquiries to Empty Homes Advice Service



46.1m OTVs

Media work this year has resulted in 46.1m Opportunities to View stories and messages about empty homes



2

New Kickstarter Projects to seed fund another 2 Empty Homes Officers to commence soon



Jackie Kay

Scots Makar specially composed and delivered a beautiful reading of *“Round the Empty Houses”* at our conference

Recommendations at a glance

Below are the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership's key recommendations to ensure the success to date in bringing empty homes back into use across Scotland is developed further and rolled out more widely across the country. We feel these key recommendations are crucial to ensuring that empty homes work in Scotland continues to play a central and cost-effective part in national and local housing strategies.

Staff Resources

- Mainstream funding from Councils for local Empty Homes Officer in all of Scotland's local authorities, preferably on permanent contracts.

Funding

- Councils should earmark a proportion of the Vacant Dwelling Council Tax Levy to fund an empty homes service.
- The Scottish Government and Local Authorities should introduce a financial incentive to support property owners to assess the feasibility of projects. We suggest a £3m, 3-year, Empty Homes Feasibility Fund.
- There should be research carried out into the need for Repairs & Renovations grant assistance including energy efficiency measures.

Strategies

- All councils should have a local empty homes strategy with a target number of empty properties to be brought back into use each year.
- Councils should look at empty homes work holistically to understand where the empty properties are and how they can tie in with other strategic objectives.

Enforcement

- Legislation should be brought forward for a Compulsory Sale Order power for vacant and derelict land and buildings.



Table of Contents

Summary	3
Highlights from the Year	4
Recommendations at a glance	5
Background	9
Introduction	10
Methodology	11
Funding and Resources for Empty Homes Work	12
Dedicated Staff Resources	12
Shared Services Pilot	13
Case Study	13
Kickstarter Grants	14
Vacant Dwelling Council Tax Powers	14
Empty Homes Loan Fund	15
Rural and Islands Housing Fund	16
Local Projects Service	16
Case Study	17
Bringing Empty Homes Back Into Use	18
Data Collection	18
Interventions	18
Case Study	19
Strategies	20
Enforcement Powers	22
Sharing Best Practice	23
The Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network	23
The Annual Scottish Empty Homes Conference 2017	24
Workshops	25
Best Practice Group	25
Empty Homes Advice Service	26
Case Studies	27
EHAS best practice work with the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network	27
Partnership Working	28
Staff Training	28
Media Work	29
Funding Recommendation	30
Progress on Project Milestones	31

Background

The Scottish Government's review of the Private Rented Sector in 2009, identified the need for more focus on empty properties. Increased supply was to be achieved partly through new private rented provision and partly by action to bring private sector empty homes back into use.

A national post was funded in 2010 to set up the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP).

An early analysis showed little strategic approach to empty homes work, so the SEHP focused on selling the benefits of private sector empty homes work as well as laying the foundations in terms of tools, guides, best practice sharing and help for local authorities 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, advice on discounts, discretion on council tax increased levy
- 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

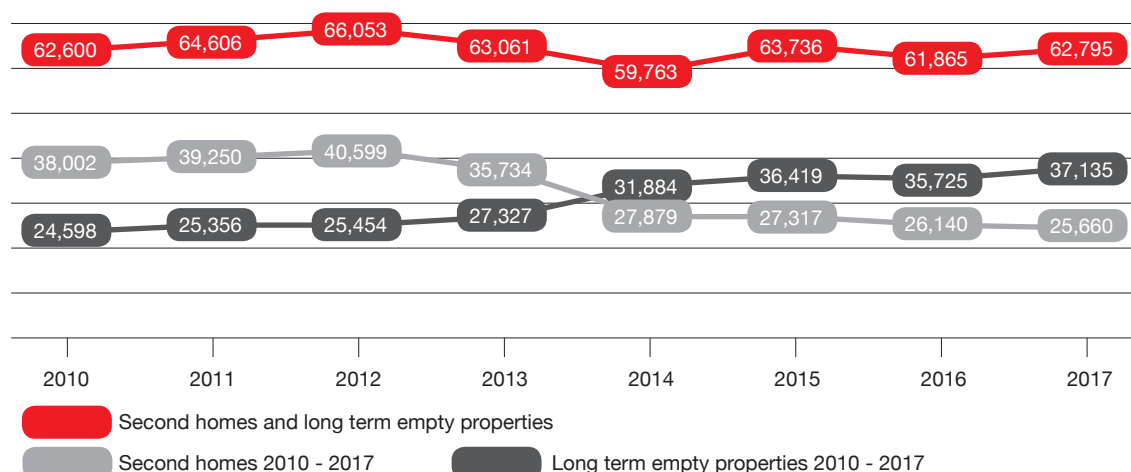
In 2015, the SEHP expanded and launched the empty homes advice service as well as recruiting a local projects manager.

In 2018, the SEHP received increased funding from the Scottish Government to expand the core staff team and to support the strategic aim of encouraging and supporting more councils to focus and invest in empty homes work. This increased funding will allow for an increased grant giving function to develop more Kickstarter and Shared Services projects, a dedicated empty homes policy function to develop innovative practices and approaches to bringing empty homes back into use and an expanded digital and Empty Homes Advice Service provision. By the end of the next three year contract, we would like to see Empty Homes Officers operating in all 32 local authorities.

Introduction

The most recent estimates suggest there are 37,135 long-term empty properties in Scotland. Upon face value, this number appears to be increasing year on year, however on closer analysis, it reveals that councils went through a reclassification process of second homes and empty homes which reflects the change in number. This is likely due to the introduction of the Vacant Dwelling Council Tax Levy on empty homes in 2013.

Empty Homes 2010 - 2017



What do we mean by long term empty property? Any privately-owned property that is recorded as empty for over 6 months on council tax records. Reports are returned by councils to Scottish Government for empty properties over 6 months and over 12 months.

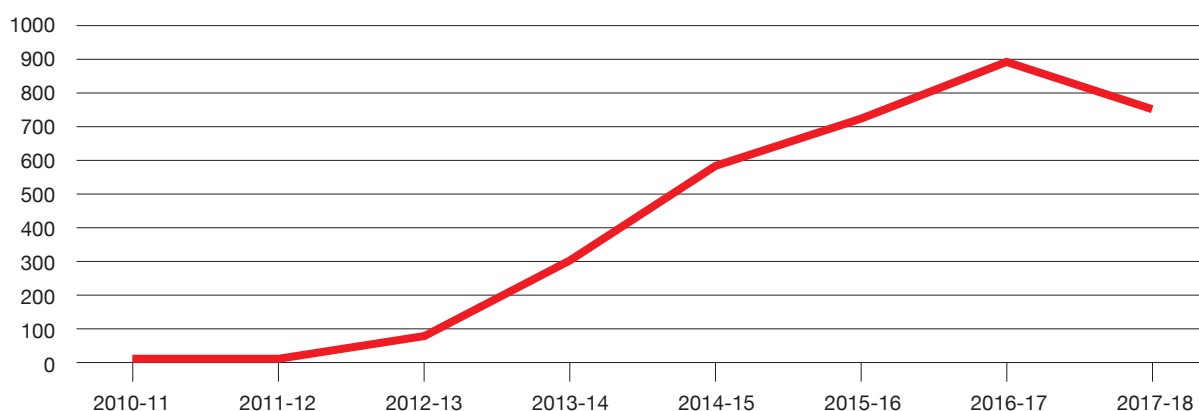
Even bringing a proportion of these back into active use would represent an important cost-effective contribution to new supply.

While empty homes work will not solve Scotland's housing supply issues alone, it is an important part of a holistic solution to cost-effectively provide local housing and to actively maintain our existing assets as well as regenerate communities.

Some councils report back to the SEHP that the council tax system is not effective at providing a baseline on empty homes data. While council tax is a good place to start to compile a database, it is good practice to supplement this with other sources. This further highlights the need for a dedicated empty homes officer to analyse and confirm the empty homes situation in each Local Authority.

Over the last eight years the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership has provided support to local authorities across Scotland to bring empty homes back into use making a significant annual contribution to housing supply.

Number of homes back into use



In 2017-18 alone, 742 empty properties were reported to be brought back into use following positive and direct intervention with the owner.

As well as providing much needed homes for 742 households this increase in locally available housing stock represents exceptional value for money as it can meet many of a council's strategic objectives. It is important to highlight the numerous notable benefits to Local Authorities of investing in empty homes work:

Increase in housing supply

- Community regeneration
- Town centre renewal
- Restoring confidence in local markets
- Discouraging anti-social behaviour
- Reduced carbon emissions
- Sustaining fragile communities

In terms of housing supply, every property back into use is a home. While not all the empty properties are brought back into use as affordable housing, making best use of our existing local assets and resources ensures that local supply is increased to assist with local housing need.

This Annual Report from the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership is structured around the following strategic priorities of the Partnership:

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

It also includes a summary report on the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership's progress against targets, and commentary on the ongoing barriers and recommendations for empty homes work in Scotland.

Methodology

This report draws on data collected from two important annual surveys sent in April this year to key empty homes stakeholders and practitioner groups across Scotland. The first survey was sent to members of the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network to capture views about the Scottish Empty Homes Network and Partnership. 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 attempts to capture a snapshot of private sector empty homes practice in Scotland.

These surveys have been repeated in April/May each year since the formation of the SEHP. This year, we had a survey response rate with 28 councils responding, though not all respondents answered every question.

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
- Research included in our previous reports

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 and funding for incentives and enforcement measures.

Dedicated Staff Resources

Year	Number of councils with an empty homes officer (spending more than 25% of their time on this work)
2017-18	20 Councils with an Empty Homes Officer
2016-17	19 Councils with an Empty Homes Officer
2015-16	17 councils with an Empty Homes Officer (a further 2 councils have an officer spending 10% or less of their time on Empty Homes work)

Around 5 new officers started during last summer, and another 1 started in October of last year.

N.B. two of the officers were direct replacements for officers who had left their post recently whilst another was filling a vacancy that had been empty for around two years.

We deliberately ask the question: “Does your council have an Empty Homes Officer?”, separately to the question about what percentage of staff FTE the council has. This is in order to reflect the important role of a dedicated Empty Homes Officer. Whether the officer is 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 year, we have included any local officer that spends more than 25% of their time on empty homes work as “dedicated”, although the majority reported back as 50% or more FTE.

Based on the numbers of properties reported to be brought back into use, the SEHP evidence that a full-time focus appears to be a key indicator of how effective and engaged a council is in bringing empty homes back into use.

95% of properties back into use where there is an Empty Homes Officer



When we asked the question, “what would encourage more empty homes back into use in your local authority?” where there is no dedicated officer, the message back from stakeholders was consistent, with a sample of these responses below:

- “Carrying out the job full time. It is currently only one of a number of different parts to my job. All with different priorities.”
- “Need a permanent funding commitment which would allow a long term action plan to be put in place to reduce the number of empty homes.”

The SEHP is in progressed discussions with two new Local Authorities and it is anticipated a further two empty homes officers will start soon with support from Kickstarter Funding.

Recommendation

Mainstream funding for local Empty Homes Officer in all of Scotland’s 32 Local Authorities, preferably on permanent contracts

Shared Services Pilots

This was the original model for delivering seed funding to organisations to begin Empty Homes Officer posts. This model involved 2 or more organisations coming together to part-fund a dedicated post, along with grant funding from the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership. The intention of seed funding is to provide local evidence of the need and benefits of an empty homes service. The desired outcome is that councils will continue with shared service arrangements or hire their own full time Empty Homes officer at the end of the seed funding.

The organisations in most cases tended to be neighbouring local authorities, such as in the first shared services project, the Homes Again Project. This was a large partnership featuring five local authorities, Fife, West Lothian, East Lothian, Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway, sharing two Empty Homes Officers between them.

However, latterly, the SEHP have encouraged housing associations to become involved, such as in the cases of Glasgow and Inverclyde (see below). This has evolved from neighbouring authorities tackling the problem together to more of a local focus, albeit still involving partner organisations pooling resources to tackle the issue.

West Dunbartonshire and Renfrewshire

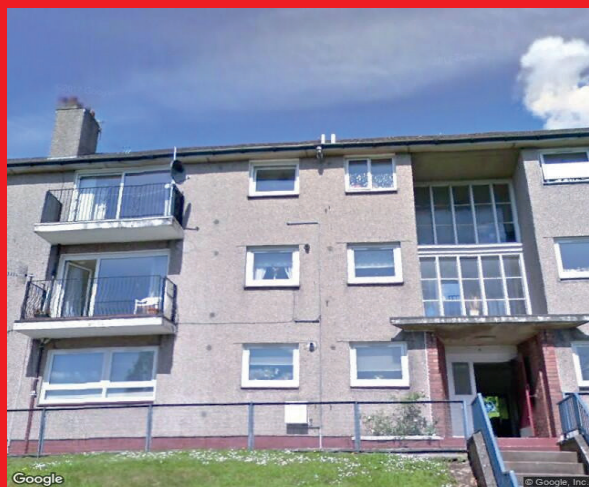
The Homes Again West Dunbartonshire/Renfrewshire Project began in August 2012. It involves one Empty Homes Officer shared between the two councils. The original Empty Homes Officer who started in this post has since moved on to a new role in West Dunbartonshire Council. However, positively, the two councils mutually agreed that there was a continued need for an Empty Homes Officer in their areas and subsequently appointed a new Empty Homes Officer, Karen Rae, who started work in West Dunbartonshire in June 2017 and in Renfrewshire in February 2018. The Empty Homes Officer has made a positive start in post with several properties brought back into use, and her shared learnings from each council enhance her post.

This continuation extends the longest running continual shared services project in Scotland.

Case Study from West Dunbartonshire

The owner had purchased the property but wanted to know what funding was available to refurbish the property. The EHO was able to help, and the main action was helping the owner to access VAT reduction and other discounts.

The owner contacted the EHO after purchasing the property. A meeting was arranged and the owner



was interested in the empty homes loan fund. Information about this was given to allow the owner to look over the conditions etc. When the owner got back in touch she had decided not to pursue the loan as she had managed to get private funding. Discount leaflets were issued to assist in the renovation of the property. The property was let in January 2018.

The owner said she felt that although she had decided the loan was not for her, the EHO's advice and assistance had been very helpful. She is now considering purchasing further empty homes and has joined the matchmaker scheme and will keep in touch with the EHO.

Case study details supplied by Karen Rae, Empty Homes Officer, West Dunbartonshire Council

Glasgow

The Glasgow Shared Services Empty Homes Project ended in August 2017. The project was a partnership between Glasgow Housing Association, Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership. In this time, the project reported back nearly 400 properties back into use across the city.

In October 2017 Glasgow City Council appointed a dedicated, full-time Empty Homes Officer, Alison McLavin. This step towards mainstreaming empty homes work in the council is the intention behind seed funding, demonstrating the need and value of empty homes work. The council have also indicated that more resource may be added to continue and even expand this work in future.

Dundee and Angus

The Dundee/Angus Empty Homes Project began in December 2015 with one full time Empty Homes Officer shared between Dundee City and Angus Councils, with additional funding from the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership. This two-year funded phase of the project came to an end in December 2017.

The Empty Homes Officer, Sean Maxwell, was working in a both urban and rural setting with different local priorities in each area. He successfully worked towards both councils' strategic objectives and they agreed to continue funding the project between them, for a further 16 months to March 2019.

In testament to his detailed analysis, engagement with owners and making a difference to empty homes work, Sean Maxwell was awarded the prize for Outstanding Individual at the Scottish Empty Homes Conference in 2017. The project was also nominated as finalist in the Best Use of the Media and Outstanding Service categories.

Inverclyde

This shared service started in 2017, between River Clyde Homes, Inverclyde Council and the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership. The new Empty Homes Officer, Barbara Crichton, started work in May 2017 and has started to bring some long-term properties back into use.

This project is unique, because it is the first time that the primary employer of an Empty Homes Officer has been a housing association, in this case River Clyde Homes. This offers the potential for many new and innovative solutions to the problem of empty housing in Inverclyde, which may take time to develop.

Orkney Islands

The most northerly empty homes practitioner, Rachael Bowes, was appointed as part-time Empty Homes Development Officer in June 2017. This project is a collaboration between Orkney Islands Council, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, and the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership. This project faces an array of challenges, including a proportionally high number of empty homes and the disparate geography of the islands. This combined with the inflated cost of upgrading older stock on the islands and the shortage of tradespeople has meant the empty homes officer must carefully prioritise and look at alternative available solutions.

One of the unique aspects of this project is the aim to work with as many community groups as possible, with a focus especially on the outer islands. Apart from helping to mitigate some of the geographical issues facing the Empty Homes Development Officer, this has the added benefit of communities having greater control over the housing stock in their area.

Kickstarter Grants

The Shared Service pilots have been a success to date but it is recognised that this model may not be appropriate for every council, particularly those who have not yet taken up funding for a post. The geographical challenges for a shared service as well as conflicting local priorities led to the opportunity for councils who have not had seed funding before to apply for a more flexible Kickstarter grant.

The Kickstarter Grant funding model is offered on a shared basis between SEHP and the local authority. This gives the council greater control over the officer's time but does require a higher level of initial investment from the partner.

Two new councils have committed to recruiting a dedicated empty homes officer using the Kickstarter model. Aberdeen City Council hope to have an officer in place by autumn as does the Western Isles Council. Both councils will have unique challenges for the officer and the SEHP will provide advisory and networking support to both for the next two years.

Vacant Dwelling Council Tax Powers

From the 1st April 2013, Scottish Government introduced new legislative changes to remove the empty property discount and charge an increased levy of up to an additional 100% extra council tax on long term vacant properties that are not subject to any of the stated exemption categories¹. This power was added as a result of the Local Government Finance (Unoccupied Properties etc.) (Scotland) Act 2012.

The spirit of the legislation is to unlock empty properties and while the additional revenue is not ringfenced, the original relevant guidance in May 2013 states quite clearly:

"This greater flexibility is intended as an additional tool to help local authorities encourage owners to bring empty properties back into use, both to increase the supply of housing for those who need homes and to reduce the blight on communities caused by houses being left empty and allowed to fall into disrepair. The council tax increase could be used as part of a wider approach to tackle long-term empty homes including support and guidance to owners and provision of loans or grants if available."

¹ The Council Tax (Variation for Unoccupied Dwellings) (Scotland) Regulations 2013

New supplementary guidance was issued by the Scottish Government on 9th April 2018. This supersedes the previous guidance issued by the Scottish Government on 31st March 2015 and adds to the original guidance issued in May 2013.

Of particular note in the guidance is this paragraph from section 8 which encourages councils to use the increased charge with discretion promoting a carrot and stick approach;

“Any other circumstances where the owner has agreed with an Empty Homes Officer to take positive steps to re-occupy their property and it is in the view of the Empty Homes Officer that a time-limited council tax increase “holiday” would encourage the property to be brought back into use sooner.”

According to our research, this year 26 councils are applying the vacant dwelling council tax powers with 24 applying the full 100% increase at this point. Two councils are charging 150%. Of the 6 remaining councils who do not currently use this power at all, we know anecdotally from speaking to our contacts that at least half are having internal discussions about introducing the power and we believe that most of the remaining councils will have introduced this charge within the next two years.

From the responses we received, we can report back that 7 councils currently use some of the increased levy to fund or part fund an empty homes service.

Recommendation

Councils should earmark a proportion of the Vacant Dwelling Council Tax Levy to fund an empty homes service

Empty Homes Loan Fund

The Scottish Government made available £4m for an Empty Homes Loan Fund in 2012. The fund aims to support a range of projects to bring empty homes back into use as affordable housing, with half of the fund particularly targeted at renovating empty homes in rural areas. All funding was provided as loans with 60% of the funding to be paid back by 2019/20.

The loan fund was awarded to 17 organisations and has been successful in some areas and unsuccessful in others. In many cases, where the loan fund has been successfully given out, the money has been given to large projects which renovate a single building into multiple units of affordable housing, for instance the Glengate Hall project in Angus. This approach is different from giving the loan fund monies out to seven different owners renovating seven different buildings, but Angus Council have managed to spend the rest of their original loan fund monies too. Due to the success of this, the Council took the decision to continue with their own empty homes loan fund.

The model which has tended to predominate until recently has been loan-to-let, where the owner agrees to let out their property at affordable rates, normally for a minimum of five years. Increasingly, alternative models are being sought to try and target the money more effectively in local areas. At least two councils have agreed to introduce a 'Loan to Sell' option which would require the owner to sell the property at affordable rates rather than let. In other areas, strong demand for a 'Loan to Occupy' model has been shown, although this has yet to be put into practice.

Some councils have reported that there are barriers to the existing loan fund, and there are some trends:

- The loan fund condition of letting the property at affordable rates is not attractive to a private owner in a strong rental market
- The terms of the loan can discourage an application
- The bureaucracy attached to the loan application
- Although the loan is interest free, legal fees and charges to administer the loan can make this finance option uncompetitive

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership does not consider the loan fund to be the option for every empty home owner, however, does believe that some councils could take a more targeted approach to utilising the funds. The Partnership developed a best practice guide in November 2017 with the following key findings that increase the uptake of the loan fund:

- Raising awareness of the empty homes loan fund through press releases
- Sharing good news stories across various channels
- Ensuring the organisation have easily accessible details of the loan fund on their website
- Targeting the loan fund to properties that may find the loan terms attractive

Rural and Islands Housing Funds

The Rural and Island Fund (RIHF) opened in Spring 2016, and was originally a three-year rolling fund, running until 2019, but has now been extended until 2021. In September 2016, the Scottish Government announced the expansion of the Fund specifically to support increasing affordable supply for Island communities. The fund is made up of 90% grant funding and the remainder in loan funding, which has made the fund far more attractive to potential bidders, and also includes a feasibility funding element. The rolling element of the fund, as opposed to a strictly limited bidding window of a few weeks, has greatly helped organisations such as community groups to apply for the funding, as they are not often able to put a bid together quickly for a short bidding window.

The funds have two parts:

- a main fund that offers capital support (grants and loans) for direct provision of new affordable housing, and refurbishment of existing empty properties
- a small fund that contributes to feasibility studies

To date 31 applicants have been referred by the Scottish Government to the Partnership, for guidance with their applications and further assistance beyond. Not all of these applicants have gone on to apply for the RIHF as for some it has not been the best fit for the kind of project that they are undertaking, but those applicants have still received support to identify alternative sources of funding. For those who have gone forward with the fund, assistance has ranged from helping with the application form, to arranging shadowing visits to other local projects to see how such a project can work in practice.

Local Projects Service

The Local Projects Service was launched in April 2015 and exists to provide support for local multi-unit empty homes projects. This support is available to all types of organisations from local authorities to community groups and developers.

The support on offer includes:

- help to identify viable one off multi-unit projects in your area
- sourcing funding and assisting you to secure it
- liaising with third parties and bring interested partners together
- producing a project plan and providing assistance right through the process until the project is delivered

There is no restriction on the kind of empty property being brought back into use, provided that the intended end use is residential.

As of 1st April 2018, three projects supported by the Local Projects Service had been completed with a fourth completed on the 2nd April. The projects that have completed so far are:

- Former St Stephens Primary School, Blairgowrie
- Chance Inn, Inverkeillor
- YMCA Glenrothes (2 separate properties)
- Former Care Unit Conversion, Scalpay

These three projects have so far delivered a combined total of 16 units of affordable housing, with two more in the pipeline from YMCA, this time in Kirkcaldy.

Local Projects Case Study – Coldstream Community Trust

The Local Projects Manager (LPM) started working with this project in September 2016 as they were referred via the Scottish Government, whilst applying for the Rural Housing Fund. The local Community Trust were interested in renovating a number of different properties in the village, however had settled on Keith House, a majestic former manse house right in the centre of the village. This property had been empty for around ten years and was in a very poor condition, being completely open to the elements in several parts of the property.

The Trust were hoping to purchase the property from the current owner, who was unable to take on the mammoth task of renovating the property himself. They applied to the Scottish Land Fund for assistance in purchasing the property and were hoping to use the Rural Housing Fund to pay for the repair and renovation of the property. The LPM provided advice and assistance in terms of making an application to the Rural Housing Fund, and also helped to speak to the owner of the property to ensure both parties were as fully informed as possible during the process of negotiating the purchase.

The project was successfully awarded Scottish Land Fund monies in March 2018 and the Trust are now progressing with a purchase of the property.



Feedback from the chairman of the Trust has been positive as detailed below:

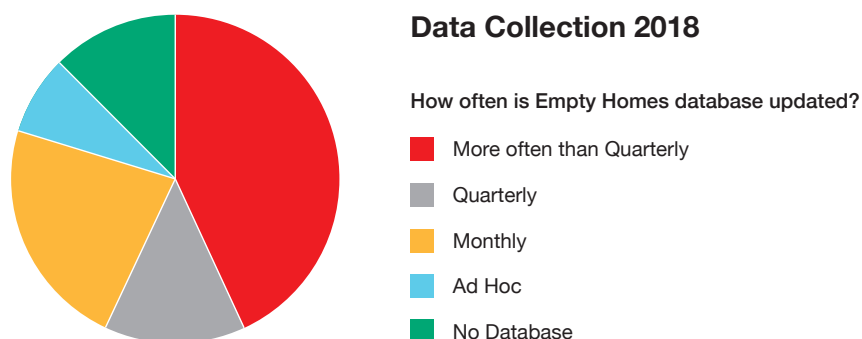
"Gavin has been a great help, advising us and the current property and I don't think we would have been in the current position without SEHP help, or the SBC team. Having this advice has helped us obtain the support of our local housing association, BHA Homes."

Bringing Empty Homes Back Into Use

Data Collection

In order to establish a baseline of empty homes and allow for detailed empty homes work, data collection is key. This will enable the council to determine the number of empty homes, map them by location and bring them back into use with a focus on strategic objectives.

There has been significant progress in data collection since the Partnership was first established with all councils bar three providing an extract of empty homes data from council tax records to form an updated empty homes database. One council advised that they “*don’t have the staff resources to maintain/compile*”, another said the “*database does not differentiate between long term empties and second homes*” and the third said “*but I can get access to empty homes data from Council Tax records (Via manager) and I am developing one*”.



This shows that councils are now updating their empty homes databases regularly which is an important indication of more in depth empty homes work. A subsequent question we asked is how many use mapping support to scrutinise data in relation to local development plans.

32% of councils that responded advise that they map empty homes work to scrutinise data in relation to local development plans.

We asked the network what their access to further information held by the council is like. This is important as much of the information can help the empty homes officer identify tailored options and prevents working in silos. We received a response from two thirds of the Network to this question and these comments were all positive. This suggests more joined up working taking place in the council but we are unable to make assumptions for the third that did not respond.

Recommendation

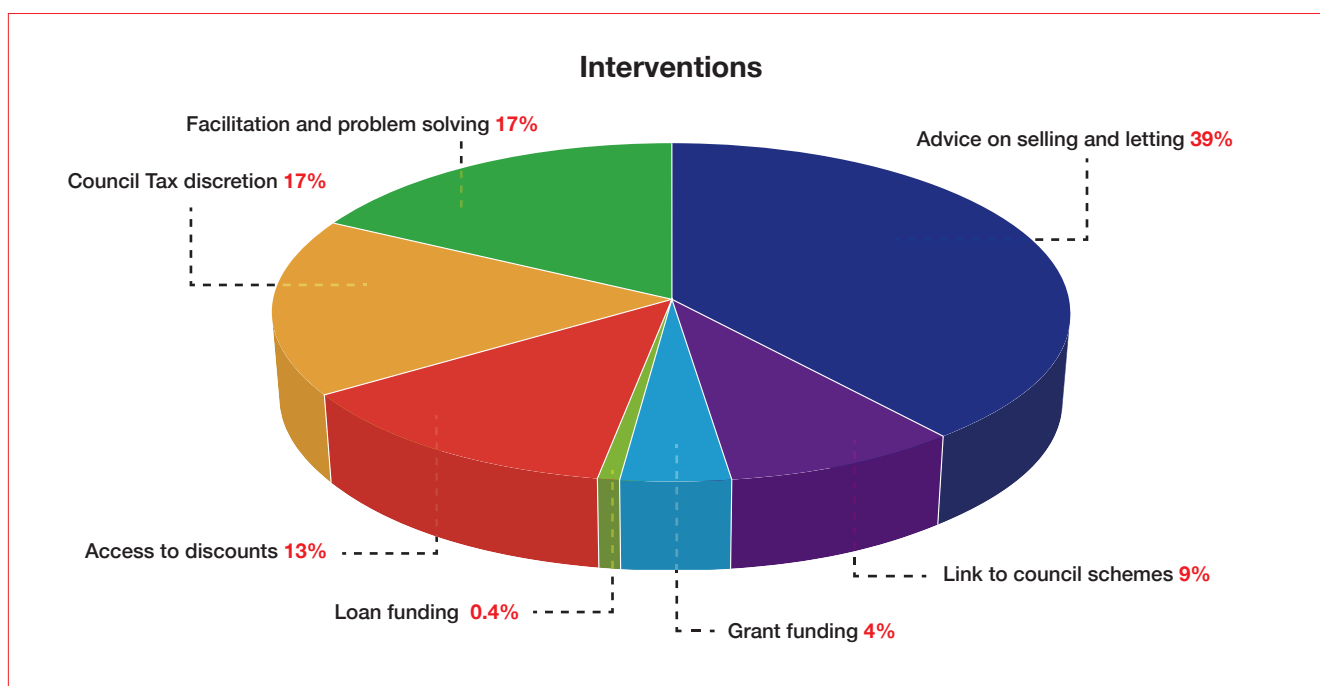
Councils should look at empty homes work holistically to understand where the empty properties are and how they can tie in with other strategic objectives

Interventions

The SEHP asks in the survey to lead officers, what key action was taken to bring a property back into use. The responses are varied and in some cases, it is difficult to assess whether the advice given was what directly impacted the property being brought back into use. However, the responses below illustrate that as with previous years ‘soft touch’ measures such as advice, information, facilitation and problem solving continue to be responsible for the vast majority of cases brought back into use in Scotland.

This evidences the need for an empty homes officer, that has the time to support owners and give quality advice and options. In total, around 95% of cases nationally were brought back into use with soft measures.

Last year, we noted that cases brought back into use via council tax discretion had increased exponentially, up to 12% where previously it had been in the low single figures. This has increased again this year, albeit more marginally, now up to 17%.



Case Study - Advice and Information



The property owner first got in touch in August 2017 after the property had been marketed for over a year for sale but with very little interest.

The main reason the property was empty was because the owner had their property on at a higher sale price than those in the surrounding area due to works done throughout the property.

The owner had moved into their partner's home and had carried out improvements with a view to maximising the return on the eventual sale of the property. They had considered renting it out however were concerned that they would not

have enough time to become landlords and manage the property.

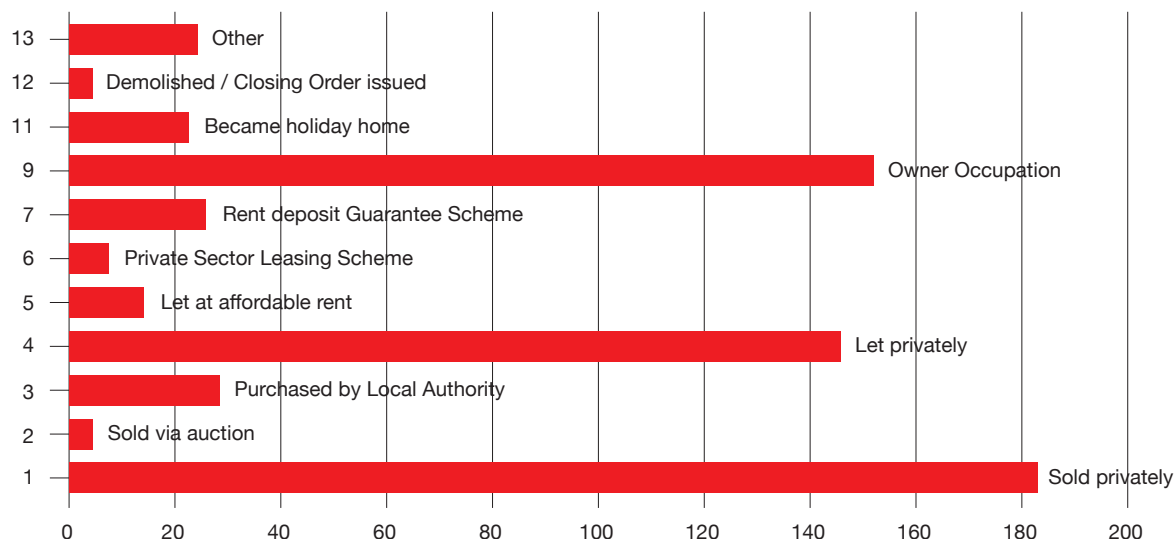
The EHO was able to help, and the main action was advice provided regarding other sale routes and slight reduction of price to promote interest in the property.

The owner was wary of considering selling their former home at auction and opted to speak with their estate agent to look at reducing the sale price. The owner decided to reduce the property cost by a nominal amount to bring the property back to the top of the listings on properties available on an online site.

Outcome: As a result, the property is now owned by a family who moved in shortly after Christmas.

Case study details supplied by Bobby Todd, Empty Homes Co-ordinator, North Ayrshire Council

From the data below, we can see that most properties brought back into use are sold/let privately or moved into. Empty Homes Officers often provide owners with advice on letting out their properties and responsibilities as a landlord which is why the SEHP hosted a PRT workshop this year on the new Private Rented Tenancy. The aim of the workshop was to highlight the new responsibilities and the implications for the landlord.



We asked our officers to tell us the main reasons that properties became and remained empty.

Lack of information /unsure about end use	Unsuccessful Marketing	Motivation	Struggling to finance repairs	Communal Repairs
25%	17%	27%	28%	3%

Struggling to finance repairs is one of the key reasons that properties became and remained empty and 73% of officers would find capital funding for Repairs & Renovations grant assistance including energy efficiency measures useful or very useful. Some of the comments from officers highlighting this are detailed below:

- “Grant or loan funding and especially energy efficiency funding for empty home owners to insert insulation etc.”
- “Most owners’ first question to me is what I can offer financially to help them with works etc. I think that more financial incentives would definitely help more owners bring their properties back into use however I am aware that times are tough and the money isn’t always there.”
- “I am contacted regularly from owners who express financial concerns and renovation are the main factors stopping these properties from being occupied.”
- “Being able to help offer some financial support I think would enable me to bring more properties into use. Especially around Home Energy i.e. new boilers, radiators and windows.”
- “Energy efficiency funding criteria being expanded to include empty homes under renovation.”

The criteria for the grant assistance would have to be based on affordability however more research would be required for how this grant would operate in practice.

Recommendation

There should be research carried out into the need for Repairs & Renovations grant assistance including energy efficiency measures

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

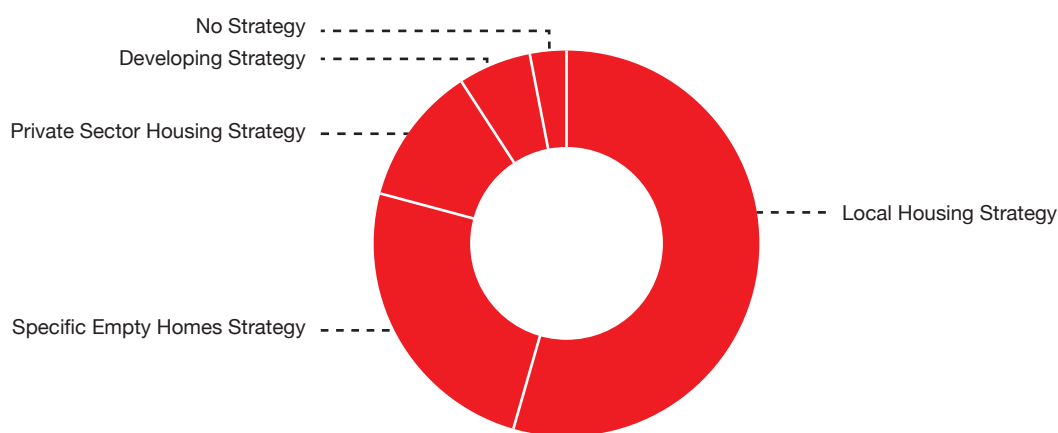
Local Housing Strategies (LHS) form the basis of a council's approach to housing issues, including housing supply, homelessness support and their scheme of assistance. Empty homes work needs a dedicated focus and having this as part of an overall strategy ensures that homes brought back into use are prioritised to help support the council's strategic objectives. 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:

'Unlocking Housing Supply across all tenures'

'Maintaining historic character of town centres'

Much progress has been made since the forming of the Partnership in 2010, where our baseline report found that 16 councils had some mention of private sector empty homes in their local housing strategies. This chart shows us that 20 councils address empty homes in their Local Housing Strategy (LHS) with 2 others currently developing one, 9 councils have a specific empty homes strategy in place as well as the LHS and a smaller amount have specific Private Sector Housing Strategy. 8 councils have a specific target number of empty properties to be brought back into use in their LHS. Compellingly, only 1 council felt no empty homes strategy was required.

Prioritising Empty Homes Work - Strategies



In terms of targets, a wide variety of different answers were given by respondents, reflecting a shift away from the traditional model of line managers setting targets for officers and that being static for several years. One officer noted that they had two separate targets in two different strategies. They listed the higher number as the target they were aiming for however this goes to show the fluidity of the targets set now, and in many cases these are adjusted on a regular basis as staffing levels change and the numbers being brought back into use fluctuate.

Overall, twelve officers listed a target of some kind that they were working towards. Nine of those officers stated that they had a specific target set. One additional officer noted that their target was set by the LHS and not by their line manager. A further two officers said they did not have a target set but nonetheless provided a number for how many empty homes they expected to bring back into use.

Recommendation

All councils have an empty homes strategy with a target number of empty properties to be brought back into use each year.

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, 8 councils indicated they had a specific Empty Homes Strategy or Action Plan in place.

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. The 2016 Programme for Government committed Scottish Government to introduce “interim measures to modernise CPO in advance of legislation” and this year we sought to support councils who are looking to use existing powers by running a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) workshop.

The workshop detailed the process of a CPO, highlighting that although the legislation underpinning it is complex, the process is straightforward. This was followed by case studies of long term empties that have caused a blight on the community, the CPO journey, the role of the empty homes officer and the impact on the council. These cases demonstrated the reasoning and public benefit for the local authority to progress with this enforcement action.

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, timescales and risks of pursuing a Compulsory Purchase Order. New guidance notes were published on the 26th April 2018 to guide Authorities through the CPO process from start to finish. One of the suggestions has been for the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership to receive funding to host a legal solicitor specifically for CPOs that local authorities with smaller legal teams can access.

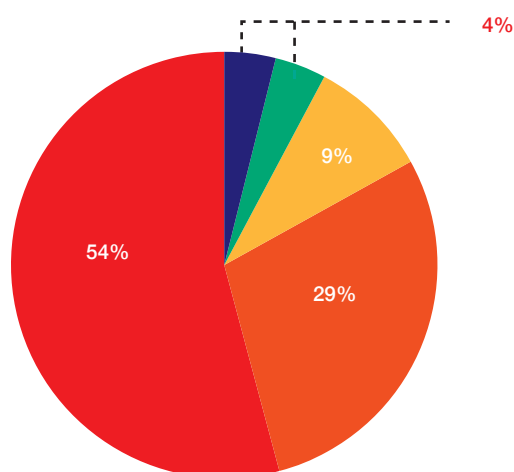
In addition to CPOs, the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership has been calling for Compulsory Sale Order powers. The SEHP is now part of an expert advisory group to explore the opportunities and challenges that a new CSO power presents. Compulsory Sale Orders would be a new legal mechanism available to local authorities to require an empty home that has been vacant or derelict, for an undue period of time, to be sold by public auction to the highest bidder.

We asked our Lead Officers how many ‘no hope’ cases they could identify where they believe the Council would use a CSO Power if available. From the responses we received, officers identified 102 cases that they would consider appropriate for a CSO.

We asked our officers if a CSO power would be useful in bringing empty properties back into use, where 5 is very useful and 1 is not useful.

Do you think a CSO Power would be useful in bringing empty homes back into use?

1 Not useful 2 3 4 5 Very useful



54% responded very useful and 29% reported useful.

Recommendation

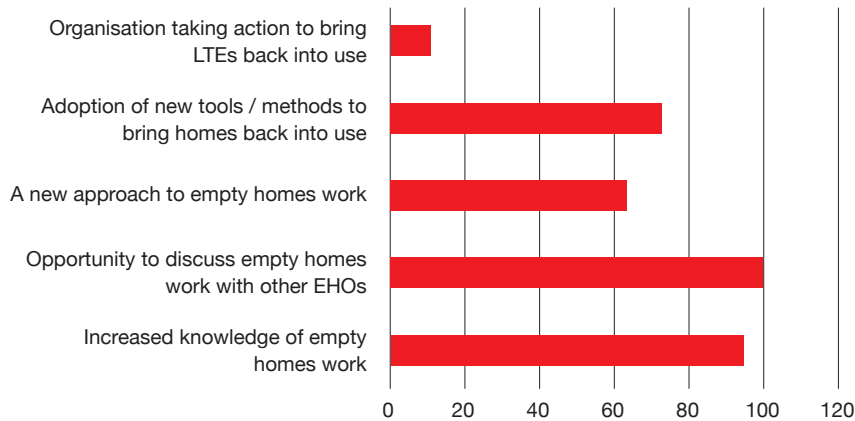
Legislation should be brought forward for a Compulsory Sale Order power for vacant and derelict land and buildings.

Sharing Best Practice

The Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network

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

How involvement with the SEHP has influenced officers' work

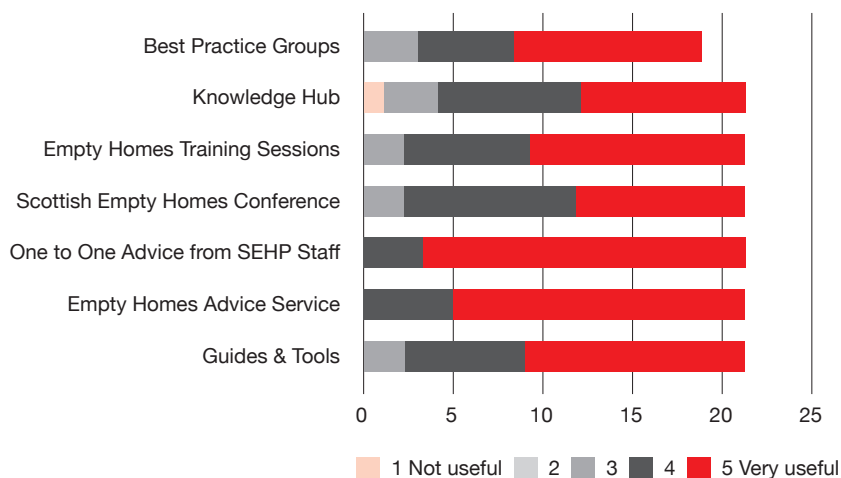


We asked the officers how involvement with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership has influenced their work, ticking all boxes that apply. The main message from the Network is that it has increased their knowledge of empty homes work and given them the opportunity to discuss empty homes work with other officers. The ability to share information and best practice is important to the officers as per a quote on the survey; "Particularly useful is knowledge of other more experienced officers in different areas. Someone can always provide advice and suggestions for improving our service".

There is a call for grant funding to support owners to carry out repairs, with 50% of the Network saying this would enable them to bring more private sector homes back into use. A third of these respondents suggested grant funding for energy efficient measures which are currently not available to empty home owners.

We asked members to rate the usefulness of different types of tools and support provided by the Partnership. Not all respondents answered every question however it should be noted that most support was rated as useful or very useful. One positive comment was "I think all of the existing tools are extremely valuable. I think we have all the support we need and more." However, the Partnership is clear in its aim of continuous development and is looking at the comments and feedback highlighted to inform future workstreams.

Usefulness of tools and support



Notably, when asking for improvement that can be made, there have been a high number of comments on the Knowledge Hub. This is an online platform used by SEHP to share knowledge, exchange ideas and discuss best practice.

The platform went through a significant upgrade last year which has made it difficult for officers to navigate and find the required resources. The Partnership will plan to ensure that a solution is put in place.

The Annual Scottish Empty Homes Conference 2017

The seventh annual Scottish Empty Homes Conference “making best use of our assets” was held in November in Glasgow. The venue was The Lighthouse, a beautiful repurposed building now brought back into use as a gallery and conference venue in the city centre. The event looked to inspire, educate and remind practitioners and stakeholders of why empty properties start with us, and how together we can make the change.

The event was well attended with over 80 delegates from Scotland, England and Eire, ranging from elected members and officers, to private landlords, housing associations and community groups.

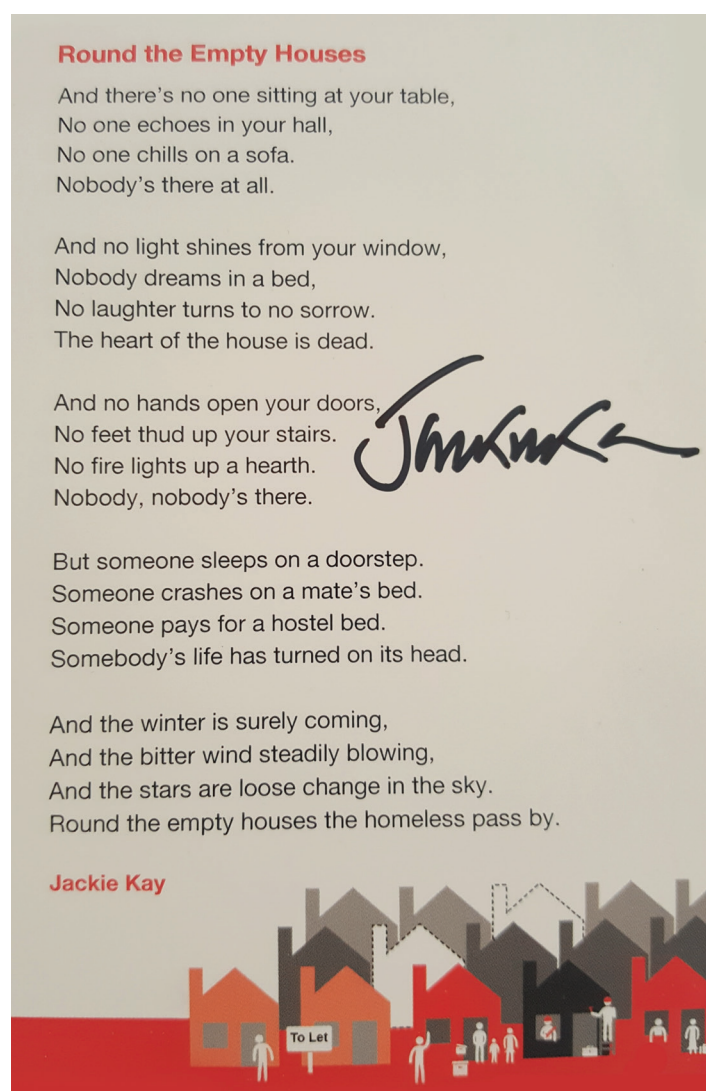
In the morning, we had the keynote address from the Scottish Government Minister for Local Government and Housing, MSP Kevin Stewart who revealed the finalists and winners for the “Howdens Empty Homes Champion of the Year” awards. This was a particularly difficult choice for the Advisory Board due to the record number of nominations received across the 5 categories, the quality of nominations and the innovative empty homes work taking place across Scotland.

https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/empty_homes/champion_of_the_year_awards_2017_finalists

The Housing Minister announced a doubling of the funding for the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership from 2018 until 2021. This is a testament not only to the hard work of the Partnership itself, but also to the work of the officers around the country who have made the Partnership so successful over the last few years.

There was an inspirational reading from Scots Makar, Jackie Kay, who wrote a poem specifically for the conference ‘Round the empty houses’. This was a highlight for many and provided a little bit of time to reflect after some specialist workshops.

Teresa Bray from Changeworks closed the conference with detail on the need for greater energy efficiency and how renovation of empty homes could contribute towards that aim.



Compulsory Purchase Order Workshop

The CPO workshop was attended to capacity, with representation from 16 Local Authorities. Presentations were from Scottish Government and Falkirk Council legal team highlighting cases of empty homes that caused a blight on the community where CPO had been a suitable solution. EHAS adviser followed up with detailed notes and a narrative of the Workshop for those unable to attend. Feedback has been incredibly positive “very useful session, relatable case studies and good to share info. Hopefully more LA’s will take CPO’s on board as a tool to move on empty properties that are ‘stuck’”.

Private Rented Tenancy Workshop

All officers advise owners on privately letting their property to bring it back into use. The aim of this workshop was to ensure that officers are confident when advising and also to answer any outstanding queries. The workshop was well attended with good feedback.

Best Practice Group

The Scottish Empty Homes Best Practice Group (BPG) has been in existence for nearly five years, holding its first meeting in August 2012. This evolved into two separate groups, one held in the Central belt and another in the North to allow for representation across the country.

The groups are open to staff with a stake in empty homes work with its core delegate being front facing empty homes practitioners based within local authorities. Both groups are well attended and are dedicated to the discussion of topical empty homes issues impacting on the day to day work of members, emerging issues, themes and trends as well as the exchange of best practice lessons.

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. Members are encouraged to contribute and lead on agenda items and have discussed topical issues, such as the launch of the new Private Residential Tenancy and its effect on empty homes work. This identified a gap to the SEHP who subsequently hosted a PRT Workshop to meet the Network’s needs.

A number of guest speakers, both internal and external, have been invited along to present at Best Practice Groups, including the Data Protection Manager for Shelter, people finding company Fraser & Fraser, and Auction House Scotland.

These guests have provided valuable insight into their various areas of work, to help officers understand better some of the processes that can affect empty homes, and have allowed officers to ask them open questions, again allowing officers the opportunity to challenge any practices which they feel may be problematic.

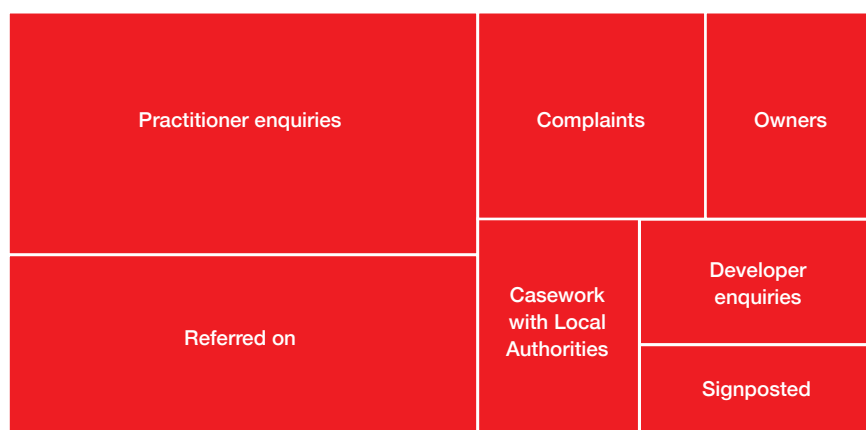
Positive feedback has been received on the usefulness of the group. 84% of the respondents rated the Best Practice Groups as ‘very useful’ or ‘useful’.

Empty Homes Advice Service

Since its launch in 2015, the Empty Homes Advice service (EHAS) has been a definitive success. The service is available to anyone to call/email to report an empty home and is often the first point of contact for anyone with an interest in empty homes work.

The empty homes adviser has specialist knowledge and can provide advice to owners and neighbours who are concerned about an empty property. The adviser can work collaboratively with empty homes practitioners, private sector teams in councils and other organisations.

Breakdown of calls to the Empty Homes Advice Service



This year, the empty homes adviser has provided advice to 446 callers.

There are several routes for enquiries once open. The Empty Homes Adviser can give first level advice and refer on to a local empty homes service, where one exists.

For straightforward cases this is the end of the Adviser's involvement as an Empty Homes Officer will take the case forward. For some more complicated cases, or for council areas where an Empty Homes Officer is not in place, the Empty Homes Adviser will work with the council contact (usually in the private sector housing department) to explore approaches. In a smaller group of cases the Empty Homes Adviser will work with the owner to pursue the case to a conclusion.

In both of these later scenarios the aim is to share best practice and to create a demonstration case that helps make the case for establishing or increasing the empty homes service in that council. 8 properties have returned to use with assistance of the empty homes adviser within the 2017-2018 reporting period. The adviser continues to form and build relationships with empty homes contacts in councils and others throughout Scotland, by jointly working and supporting casework where there's a new, partially or non-resourced empty homes service.

The Empty Homes Adviser also supports a Scotland wide empty homes network and plays a key role in coordinating best practice sharing and networking for the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network (SEHON). Interacting with the network of empty homes partners and delivering the empty homes advice service work hand in hand. New members are a constant of the SEHON and the empty homes adviser is available to them and established members to respond to queries and best practice sharing. Sharing information and best practice is also supported through The Knowledge Hub (KH), a secure online platform where members connect, discuss and exchange knowledge and feed in calls for content practitioners want to look at during regular best practice meetings.

The EHAS Adviser keeps an ongoing relevance and accuracy check on the SEHP resources for new and established empty homes practitioners. The practitioners often highlight stumbling blocks and themes to the EHAS adviser, this and the demonstration cases show first-hand the challenges faced by empty home practitioners. This shapes the training requirements for the network and the EHAS adviser directly contributes to this material.

Feedback on the resources that the adviser has worked on independently has been consistent. In our survey we asked the Network "what can be done to improve our existing tools and can you suggest additional support tools which would be useful in future?" we received various comments including the one below.

"Continually update templates - Energy efficiency template - Frances must have spent hours and hours updating this leaflet/ template, which was absolutely fabulous and helpful."

Case Studies from the Empty Homes Advice Service

Back to use - West Lothian: Empty 19 months

Who Called – Owner

Issue – A refurbished bungalow with fully accessible disabled access lying empty. The owner had refurbished this property for her elderly mother to a high standard who had sadly passed away the year before. The owner is particularly keen for the property to provide housing for a person requiring an accessible home due to their own family member's experience of requiring this to leave long term hospital care.

Advice and Assistance – The EHAS adviser referred the owner to West Lothian Council lead contact and included information about WLC previous calls for properties suitable for the Private Sector Leasing Scheme. The EHAS adviser engaged directly with the local authority and the property was cascaded around to the private sector housing colleagues.

Outcome – The Council's Private Sector Leasing Scheme contacted the owner directly and both parties agreed to adding the bungalow to this service, initially to meet the high demand for accessible short-term homelessness lets with the expectations that a suitable tenant will be identified for it to be a long-term home for them via their choice-based lettings policy.

In progress – Aberdeen City

Who Called - Owner

Issue – Owner had previously let the property for several years and when the tenant left she put the property on the market for sale. The property is now stalled in a depressed market for both rental and sale. She had seen coverage of empty homes in the media and expressed an interest the property matchmaker scheme should it be available in this area.

Advice & Assistance – The EHAS adviser informed the owner of timescales for the Aberdeen Empty Homes project coming on stream and linked her in with the established lead contact for empty homes work with the local authority. This property serves as an example of a local market trend caused in part by the economic downturn impacts on the area. The adviser worked with the owner and established that due to the current market conditions her first preference would be to provide the property to the council's private sector leasing scheme. The second option would be obtaining a sale on the open market despite current conditions and the least favoured option would be to revert to renting the property again for an interim period. The adviser and owner discussed a plan of action towards these goals.

Outcome – The owner thanked the EHAS adviser for helping to explore options and current barriers to her situation and said that it's provided her with increased motivation. She triggered a written request for her property to be considered for the private sector leasing scheme while at the same time increased her contact and expectations from the selling agents. There was scrutiny of available price points for properties on market for sale and rent in locality as well as considering other sale routes such as auction.

EHAS best practice work with the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network

E.G. Resource: Property Matchmaker schemes which provide help to sell or buy empty properties in participating area.

Information sharing and networking – EHAS is often the first contact point for property developers with an interest in empty homes work. Adviser can discuss the work of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership and connect them with empty homes officers for local authority areas where these exist. A benefit of the EHAS service is being able to capture developers interested in building a portfolio of properties for renovation prior to sale or rent. EHAS can inform them of local empty homes schemes as well as other local resources such as private sector leasing and the rent deposit guarantee schemes – where available.

With the new PRT, EHAS has been keen to signpost developers acting as Landlords to the free Shelter Scotland online learning modules on the private rented sector and PRT. Being an initial contact for enquiries and a central contact for the network members participating in the MM scheme, the EHAS adviser has been able to share information and be part of the response to these issues for the network in real time. This includes clarity on expected conduct from potential buyers.

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 external partners they had worked with in relation to bringing empty homes back into use.

Table 4: Partnership Working

Partners	# of councils who have worked with partners in relation to empty homes
Housing Associations	9
Private Developers	5
Other Councils	7
Community Planning Partners	3
Other private companies	3
Community Associations	6

Comments from the officers highlight the importance of working with partners, the need for other departments to understand their function and how working together can achieve joint aims.

"I often work alongside other local authorities to learn from best practice. This has helped to improve the empty homes service that is provided and has also played a fundamental role helped in solving difficult / problematic empty homes cases."

"We have worked more closely with internal partners e.g. environmental health and taken referrals from external partners such as Police Scotland. When we had a dedicated EHO earlier this year we also sent surveys to empty home owners and neighbours and were able to gather information from these."

"Briefing information sessions across services to highlight private sector advice service which included empty homes work. Increased engagement has led to increased referrals."

Information sharing between council departments can be invaluable. There is recognition that partnership working is crucial in relation to the success of an empty homes strategy with good links with Planning, Building Control and Council Tax. An excellent example of collaborative working was demonstrated at our 2017 conference by Argyll & Bute Council in their workshop. They highlighted the importance of ensuring that the different council functions meet around a table as part of Area Property Action Groups.

Staff Training

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership offers empty homes induction training sessions to all councils and other organisations who require it. This training is designed to be flexible depending on the needs of the organisation. Along with the formal training the Partnership offers to arrange shadowing days with an experienced Empty Homes Officer in another council.

The one-day induction training currently includes modules on:

- Introduction to the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership
- Data, priorities and contacting owners
- Working with owners and recording impact
- Complaints and enforcement
- Sharing the learning

Whilst the course is adapted to suit the needs of individual councils, in all cases it 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 achieve locally set empty homes objectives and targets. In addition, managers as well as officers are invited to take part in the training in order to better understand the issues their staff are likely to be facing as they start to tackle empty homes work.

This year, training has been provided for staff working in the following councils and organisations:

- West Dunbartonshire Council
- Dumfries and Galloway Council
- River Clyde Homes
- Inverclyde Council
- East Ayrshire Council
- Orkney Islands Council
- Glasgow City Council

Based on continual feedback and evaluation, in 2018 the training that the SEHP offers is being overhauled to provide a more gradual process that places less emphasis on an intensive first day, which some officers have noted can be overwhelming.

We will be introducing Training Pathways, which the officers can work through at their own pace, and can skip sections which are not relevant to their role or focus more time on the sections that they may have to prioritise.

Media Work

One of the key areas of focus for the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership is to increase public awareness of empty homes through use of the media. This media presence is key as it is what drives awareness of existing help for empty home owners and those affected by empty homes as well as what encourages contact with councils and others to push for more universal empty homes services across Scotland.

The SEHP's work proved popular in the media, with several stories generating significant coverage. This year too, the previous raised awareness and profile of the SEHP meant that other people were referencing our work in their media work – which is all part of the aim of the communications strategy.

In total, the following media coverage was generated:

- Opportunities to View (OTVs) = 46.1 million
- Individual media mentions = 121
- Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE) = £106.5K

Funding Recommendation

Access to funding for private sector empty homes work and particularly incentives for owners continues to be an issue for councils. What funding does exist has restrictions on both applicants and end uses for projects. This limits the effectiveness of these funds. The SEHP produced a Funding Recommendations Paper in 2016 based on gaps identified where funding is currently non-existent or hard to source. These gaps are still present and one option presented was a grant based on best practice in Perth & Kinross Council.

Feasibility Funding

The three-year rolling Rural Housing Fund, which is open to empty homes projects, includes an element of feasibility funding to allow potential applicants to fully scope out their projects using experts including architects and structural engineers. A similar fund has been highly successful in Perth & Kinross Council.

The Perth & Kinross Vacant Property Feasibility Fund allocated £132k over 3 years from 2013/14 to 2015/16 to owners of long term empty properties for use towards professional fees such as architects, chartered surveyors and structural engineers. The maximum feasibility grant was initially £5k and needed to be match funded by the owner. The council has now lowered the maximum grant level to £3k with appropriate match funding in reference to the average amount claimed by applicants. Additional flexibility is being considered to raise that maximum for larger projects. According to the Vacant Property Development Team at the council the pot is oversubscribed and only two projects which received funding since it began have not gone on to complete the renovation of their property.

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership believes a rolling Empty Homes feasibility fund would pay dividends in terms of the deliverability of empty homes projects. It would also encourage greater creativity and problem solving for properties with significant issues, such as access. We have proposed a rolling three-year fund at around £3m for Scotland.

Our vision of a national empty homes feasibility fund would:

- Be open to anyone considering renovation or conversion of a long term empty property with a proposed end use of 2 or more residential units.
- Properties should be below the tolerable standard for housing

Eligible fees should include:

- Architect's design drawings
- Quantity surveyor's cost estimates
- Structural engineer's report
- Chartered surveyor's valuation advice or development appraisal
- Undertaking a survey/questionnaire or media work to determine levels of demand in an area that can't be evidenced by housing waiting lists
- Community consultation where appropriate
- And in the case of Social Enterprises, community groups or other non-profit organisations: Consultant's fees for preparing a project/business plan; and a reduction in the unit limit to 1

We believe such a fund would be best run on a rolling basis rather than a closed time framed bidding window. A reasonable amount to allocate to such a fund might be somewhere in the region of £3m over a 3 year period. Based on the Perth & Kinross output we would estimate this amount to result in approximately 2,800 residential units over 3 years. Some of these projects may go on to apply for other empty homes funding offered by local authorities or directly from the Scottish Government. Therefore these unit estimates would not necessarily be exclusive of unit estimates for other funds but equally not all projects will require additional funding.

If central administration is considered an issue for such small scale grants, we think there are two options: 1) to allow local authorities with an empty homes officer to bid for a pot of feasibility funding to be administered locally within a set period of time; 2) to resource the SEHP to be the administrators of this fund.

Recommendation

The Scottish Government and Local Authorities should introduce a financial incentive to support property owners to assess the feasibility of projects. We suggest a £3m, 3-year, Empty Homes Feasibility Fund.

Progress on Project Milestones

The following table is an at-a-glance summary of progress from the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership team against key project milestones over 2017-18:

Objective	Targets for 2017/18	Progress at the year-end
Negotiation of new shared services projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contracts negotiated for 2 new Officer posts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aberdeen City Council looking to finalise contract Western Isles Council looking to finalise contract
Empty Homes Local Projects Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4-6 Local Projects completed by end of financial year 2017/18 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Local Projects completed with 16 units of affordable housing
National Phone & Web Advice Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8-10 cases complete with property back in use by end of financial year that EHAS has facilitated bringing back into use 30-40 Adviser owned cases open at any one time Follow up work with councils on referral cases to contribute to targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empty Homes Advice Service directly influenced 8 properties back into use Ongoing caseload reflects this Ample follow up work with councils
Maintain and Develop Best Practice Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance levels and examples of where engagement in Best Practice Group led to solutions/results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16 average attendees at CBPG 8 average attendees at NBPG
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual survey responses from Network Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses received from 28 Local Authorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SG Milestone: Number of training - sessions given to all new empty homes staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Training sessions delivered to 7 EHO and/or Housing Officers beginning EH work.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-3+ events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conference November 17 CPO Workshop Jan 18 PRT Workshop March 18
Encourage more people, organisations and groups to bring private sector empty property back into use as housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SG Milestone: A significant increase in the number of empty homes brought back into use year on year. Partnership to play a role in reaching SG aim of 1,200 in year 17/18. More community groups, social enterprises and local organisations accessing Local Project Service, attending empty homes events and reporting empty homes brought back into use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 742 empty homes back into use Continued engagement with community groups
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will record Shelter Scotland empty homes OTVs and work to a target of 25 million positive in 2017/18 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OTVs for year = 46.1 M
Encourage councils to “mainstream” empty homes work within existing housing services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SG Milestone: Evidence of additional councils developing an empty homes service including – commitment to empty homes staff; putting tools in place (i.e. database, advice package); including empty homes commitments as key parts of their housing strategies Measure through yearly survey and information gathered from one to one engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 councils employing an EHO Overall increase of 2.5FTE on empty homes work across Scotland

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership is
funded by the Scottish Government and
hosted by Shelter Scotland

shelterscotland.org/emptyhomes

Registered charity in England and Wales (263710) and in Scotland (SC002327)

Shelter Scotland
Scotiabank House
6 South Charlotte Street
Edinburgh EH2 4AW
shelterscotland.org



0344 515 1941 | emptyhomes@shelter.org.uk