

Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

Strategic Empty Homes Framework Guidance

February 2023

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Appendix 1: Strategic Empty Homes Framework Template

Appendix 2: Useful Links

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1 Foreword

Arneil Johnston were commissioned by Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP) to assist with developing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework that will support and enable local authorities to achieve a more strategic focus in relation to empty homes work.

Founded in 1996, Arneil Johnston is the longest standing and successful specialist housing consultancy in Scotland. Over the past 26 years, Arneil Johnston has worked with every Scottish local authority and over 70 Registered Social Landlords and have been instrumental in helping local authorities with their approach to strategic planning across a wide range of housing policy agendas. They also have substantial experience in developing housing-led regeneration strategy and delivering a range of related services including financial modelling, strategic advice, stakeholder consultation and delivery planning.

This Strategic Empty Homes Framework is advisory guidance and aims to assist local authorities develop and improve their approach to empty homes strategy with a view to enabling as many empty homes as possible to be brought back into use through the development and implementation of a Strategic Empty Homes Framework.

It is for each local authority to decide on its approach to empty homes. As this guidance is advisory, local authorities should consider applying approaches. However, it is for each authority to decide how and what they take forward. There is no requirement to implement this guidance. A local authority may decide to adopt the approaches in full, in part, or not at all.

This document provides a clear guide to developing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework based on the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership's (SEHP) aim and objectives. The SEHP aim is to bring as many privately-owned empty homes back into use as possible in Scotland by achieving the following five objectives:

- Encourage every Council in Scotland to have a dedicated Empty Homes Officer
- Support the national network of Empty Homes Officers
- Encourage registered social landlords, community groups and other private bodies to engage in empty homes work
- Encourage Councils to mainstream empty homes work
- Deliver the Scottish Empty Homes Advice Service.

These objectives assist local authorities to bring empty homes back into use and this guidance offers a template framework to develop an appropriate strategic approach. The guidance has strong links to Local Housing Strategies, Corporate and Community Planning to enable alignment with local authority priorities such as increasing housing supply, neighbourhood regeneration and town centre strategies. It is therefore recommended that those responsible for developing and implementing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework start with reading the Local Housing Strategy, Corporate Plan and Local Outcome Improvement Plan to ensure alignment and identify shared opportunities to mainstream empty homes activity.

2 Purpose and Scope of Guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to assist local authorities to develop and implement a Strategic Empty Homes Framework. Ongoing consultation and engagement through the Empty Homes Officer Practitioner Network has highlighted that Empty Homes Officers would welcome guidance and support to:

- raise awareness of empty homes activity and the positive impact it can have in helping achieve Local Housing Strategy and Local Outcome Improvement Plan priorities
- elevate the status of empty homes on the Corporate and Community Planning Policy Agenda
- help set out the principles of a business case for investment in empty homes
- assist in developing a robust evidence base that can be used to support bidding for appropriate resources and provide recent housing insights
- develop and nurture opportunities for engagement, participation, and collaboration with partners, stakeholders, and residents
- create and deliver a clear, concise, and easy to read strategic document that sets out priorities for tackling empty homes
- set clear outcomes that demonstrate resource capacity and delivery responsibility

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership outlined the scope for this advisory guidance as follows:

- consider findings from SEHP Consultation Events with local authority Empty Homes Officers and key stakeholders and use these findings to inform the development of the framework (Appendix 1)
- establish how empty homes priorities link to Local Housing Strategy and other Council priorities
- understand the challenges and barriers in bringing empty homes back into use through development of a robust evidence base
- create guidance that provides a guide to layout and an example Action Plan, accompanied by a supporting slide-pack which showcases key evidence and issues (Appendix 2).

2.1 SEHP Consultation Feedback

SEHP Consultation with Empty Homes Officers and key stakeholders in November 2022 was described as ‘extremely positive’ with participants providing a wealth of knowledge and experience to contribute to this guidance document. Discussions around what a good Strategic Empty Homes Framework would look like included:

- the importance of collaboration with partners, stakeholders, and residents
- the need for extensive and inclusive consultation
- the importance of an evidence-based approach to empty homes strategy informed by recent housing insights
- the need for a forward looking and delivery focused approach to a strategic framework
- the value of highlighting principles such as prevention, collaboration, and innovation in developing local priorities and strategic objectives
- the delivery of a clear, concise, and easy to read strategic position statement that will set out priorities for tackling empty homes

- the definition of clear outcomes, with evidence of resource capacity and delivery responsibility.

Further consultation took place in January 2023 with participants asked to consider the development process associated with producing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework. This included discussion on engaging strategic partners to assist with delivery of empty homes outcomes, delivering an evidence base to support evidencing key priorities, building the resource framework and tackling local challenges.

Key outcomes from this workshop stressed the importance of:

- gaining and maintaining support from partners and stakeholders
- keeping partners and stakeholders informed and involved in the development, delivery, and implementation of the framework.

Participants were asked to develop a pitch to promote partner and stakeholder buy in. Key messages and techniques in engaging stakeholders which emerged from this exercise include:

- ‘Pitch at their pocket’: emphasise the financial benefits of tackling empty homes
- anticipate the response/concerns of stakeholder audiences and tailor arguments towards shared objectives
- demonstrate what resources are already available to support empty homes work
- detail how a proactive approach to empty homes works in practice
- highlight how tackling empty homes offer a place-based solution to local problems.

From this exercise it is clear that there are opportunities for Empty Homes Officers to engage with external and internal partners and stakeholders, as well as becoming more actively involved in existing forums and working groups on Local Housing Strategy development and the delivery of corporate priorities. These engagement channels will help to build relationships and create opportunities for EHOs to promote bringing empty homes back into use as a mainstream housing and corporate objective.

3 How to use this guidance

A strategic approach to bringing empty homes back into use can provide Empty Homes Officers with an opportunity to align and focus the work they do with wider priorities such as increasing housing supply, meeting housing need, reducing homelessness, improving town centres, and supporting housing-led regeneration.

Empty Homes work is a continuous process, which is constantly evolving and developing, informed by evidence of empty homes and the wider housing and community priorities for each local authority. To support Empty Homes Officers to pursue and develop an Empty Homes Strategic Framework, this guidance sets out practical advice and recommendations on each stage of the development process. Each step provides minimum expectations on the outcomes that could be achieved, and the insight needed to enable Empty Homes Officers to make informed decisions on investment.

This guidance offers Empty Homes Officers a framework of recommended practice to help bring empty homes back into use which will be relevant across all local authority areas in Scotland.

The extent and nature of resources that local authorities devote to empty homes and the degree of resource needed to achieve delivery of successful outcomes will depend on the size and complexity of individual local authorities. It is therefore for each Empty Homes Officer to consider how to use this guidance in the context of their own local authority.

Empty Homes work involves having sound understanding, informed thinking and the ability to take effective action, all guided by individual operating context of each local authority. Whilst advisory recommendations may apply to all local authorities, the practical ways in which they could be applied will vary widely. The most effective Empty Homes Officers will concentrate on the outcomes that really matter to their local authority, focusing their energies into those issues.

3.1 Outcomes of developing and implementing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework

This guidance is intended primarily for Empty Homes Officers within local authorities. Historically empty homes may have been considered as operational activity; however, a much wider partnership approach is required to achieve success, building on the insight and knowledge of all housing, planning and environmental professionals. Local authorities should be assured of having a robust process and be well informed to be able to make decisions that set the strategic direction for investment strategies in empty homes.

This Strategic Empty Homes Framework offers Empty Homes Officers the opportunity to develop a holistic assessment of empty homes based on up to date, comprehensive and reliable information.

This information should inform systematic analysis of empty homes as well as demonstrate the impact and benefits of bringing empty homes back into use. The evidence assembled will support Empty Homes Officers to understand how empty homes activity can be improved so that interventions to manage empty homes can be tested and targeted.

3.2 Existing knowledge

There is likely to be a wealth of existing knowledge and information in relation to empty homes within each authority. This may include an Empty Homes Register as well as information held both internally and externally about empty homes.

Collating, managing and monitoring this information should be a key priority to ensure relevant, accurate and up to date information is maintained in relation to empty homes. It is beneficial for the Strategic Empty Homes Framework to make reference to the existing knowledge and work that has been done to date. This could take the form of providing case studies that highlight both successes and ongoing challenges. It is important that the framework flows and is targeted towards the intended audience. Inevitably, there is a balance to be struck in terms of resources available to complete this task and the amount of detail that can be provided. The use of photographs and visual aids as well as statistical evidence will help focus minds on the scale of challenges faced and the impact of empty homes on local communities.

Ultimately, the insight offered by this approach to empty homes should support informed decision making. Understanding the scale, location, challenges, and relative costs as well as benefits and added value offered by bringing empty homes back into use, will enable Empty Homes Officers to measure and mitigate any risks associated with empty homes activity.

Existing knowledge will help develop and populate the evidence base chapter of the Strategic Empty Homes Framework as well as informing the Action Plan.

There are excellent examples of case studies, including the recent publication by Scottish Empty Homes Partnership 'Why Empty Homes Matter', which can be found here:









<https://emptyhomespartnership.scot/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FINAL-Why-Empty-Homes-Matter-March-2022.pdf>

3.3 How to Develop a Strategic Empty Homes Framework

Whilst this guide offers a framework of advisory practice, it has been structured to provide a step-by-step process which details the sequence of activities that Empty Home Officers can take to develop a Strategic Empty Homes Framework.

Each suggested step in the strategy development process is outlined below including a reference to the specific Chapters of this guidance, which offer practical assistance and support with planning, design, and delivery.

This step-by-step approach also provides the structure for a Strategic Empty Homes Framework template document, which local authorities can use as the basis for developing an effective written strategy. The template should therefore be used in parallel with this advisory guidance and is available in Appendix 1: Strategic Empty Homes Framework Template.

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Step 1: Setting out the policy agenda for Empty Homes</p>  | <p>Set out the policy context (both nationally and locally) that either supports or benefits from tackling Empty Homes. This is instrumental in defining where shared policy agendas could be used to develop partnerships or mainstream activity</p> <p>Guidance on how to achieve Step 1 is set out in Chapters 5 and 6 of this Guide</p> |
| <p>Step 2: Building the Empty Homes evidence base</p>  | <p>Build the evidence base which sets out the scale of empty homes to be tackled as well as the extent and nature of opportunities and challenges to be faced. This evidence is crucial identifying where empty homes activity could be targeted to achieve greatest impact</p> <p>Guidance on how to achieve Step 2 is set out in Chapter 7 of this Guide</p> |
| <p>Step 3: Map existing Empty Homes activity and key challenges</p>  | <p>Further develop the empty homes evidence base by mapping the extent and nature existing local projects and initiatives, as well as the barriers and challenges which should be overcome through strategy activity</p> <p>Guidance on how to achieve Step 3 is set out in Chapters 8 and 9 of this Guide</p> |
| <p>Step 4: Set Strategic Aim and Objectives</p>  | <p>Set and agree a strategic aim and objectives informed by consultation outcomes and evidence of the need for intervention at a local level. Setting this framework is essential in harnessing partnership and resource commitments to support the development and delivery of the Empty Homes Action Plan.</p> <p>Guidance on how to achieve Step 4 is set out in Chapter 10 of this Guide</p> |
| <p>Step 5: Stakeholder consultation and engagement</p>  | <p>Whilst the extent and nature of consultation will depend on the appetite for stakeholder engagement within each local authority, carry out informed discussions with partners on local priorities for action, partnership and investment. Using the empty homes evidence base will be crucial in engaging partners and informing the debate</p> <p>Guidance on how to achieve Step 5 is set out in Chapter 11 of this Guide</p> |
| <p>Step 6: Develop an Empty Homes Action Plan</p>  | <p>Develop an Empty Homes Action Plan that schedules the activity, partnership and interventions to be taken across partners to achieve the aim and objectives of the strategy</p> <p>Guidance on how to achieve Step 6 is set out in Chapter 12 of this Guide</p> |
| <p>Step 7: Map implementation and delivery resources</p>  | <p>Set out a clear understanding of resources available to deliver the Action Plan, enabling investment to be prioritised to tackle key challenges and to meet local targets</p> <p>Guidance on how to achieve Step 7 is set out in Chapter 13 of this Guide</p> |
| <p>Step 8: Monitor progress and evaluate the impact of tackling Empty Homes</p>  | <p>Design a framework that will allow progress in tackling empty homes to be monitored and impact on households and communities to be evaluated</p> <p>Guidance on how to achieve Step 8 is set out in Chapter 14 of this Guide</p> |

4 Strategic Empty Homes Framework Guidance

4.1 Empty Homes Recommended Practice Principles

The following chapters provide guidance, ideas and examples of how to develop and present a Strategic Empty Homes Framework. There will already be significant information available from internal and external partners and stakeholders that will be of assistance in developing the framework. Identifying the organisations, departments, teams and individuals who can assist with the tasks ahead will be essential to successfully co-producing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework.

This guidance provides clarity on how to achieve an effective approach to tackling empty homes aligned to a framework of advisory practice principles as follows:

- Empty Homes Officers should ensure consultation and engagement activity with all relevant stakeholders and partners in the development of a Strategic Empty Homes Framework
- the national and local policy context surrounding empty homes should be considered in developing the Strategic Framework
- an understanding of links to Local Housing Strategies and local authority plans should enable alignment of empty homes priorities with wider policy agendas
- a robust evidence base should be developed that defines, measures and quantifies the scale of empty homes and enables targeted investment to tackle key issues
- understanding of the challenges and barriers to tackling empty homes should be clearly established to support informed decision making on activity and investment
- clear aims and objectives should be set to direct and guide empty homes activity in a way that maximises resources and community impact
- resource capacity to enable delivery of the Empty Homes Action Plan should inform decision making on investment
- continued monitoring and evaluation of the impact of empty homes activity is essential in tracking progress and providing assurance of best value and community impact.

These principles do not provide a prescriptive blueprint for empty homes activity, which would be unlikely to work across the very diverse range of local authority contexts. For some Empty Homes Officers, the practice principles could raise a wide variety of relevant issues and for others it could allow time and effort to be concentrated on the challenges and barriers that matter most in their area.

The principles provided are intended to support Empty Homes Officers to respond, review, develop and continuously improve their approach. What is most important is that Empty Homes Officers apply practice principles in an honest and transparent way, considering the evidence available and determining the challenges and action required before reaching any conclusions.

Before detailing the approach to achieving each advisory principle in Chapters 5 to 14, the guide sets out exactly what is meant by empty homes and how Empty Homes Officers should build a strategic approach to tackling the local challenges associated with bringing empty homes back into use.

4.2 What is meant by Empty Homes?

It is important to define what an empty home is for the purpose of developing a Strategic Framework. Councils classify some properties in their area as long-term empty, unoccupied, or second homes for the purposes of calculating council tax liabilities. These terms are defined as follows:

- **Long term empty properties.** These are dwellings that have been empty for 6 months or more and are liable for council tax. The most recent figures published by the Scottish Government show that there were 42,865 long term empty properties in Scotland in 2022.; or
- **Unoccupied exemptions.** These are properties which are empty and exempt from paying council tax. The most recent figures published by the Scottish Government show that there were 47,156 unoccupied exemptions in Scotland in 2022. There is no requirement for a property to have been empty for more than 6 months before it can be included in this category.
- **Second homes.** Homes which are furnished and lived in for at least 25 days in a 12-month period but not as someone's main residence. The most recent figures published by the Scottish Government show that there were 24,287 second homes in Scotland in 2022

A Strategic Empty Homes Framework should focus on long term empty properties and set out approaches that can be taken to bring properties back into use. However, it is important to note that unoccupied exemptions may include properties where the previous owner has died and properties that have been repossessed. As such, a Strategic Empty Homes Framework may also set out approaches for bringing these properties back to use.

Several sources can be used to identify and track long term empty properties, and these are detailed further in Chapter 7.

Properties can become vacant for a variety of reasons, understanding these and the potential solutions to bring them back into use is fundamental in tackling this challenge. Reasons can include:

- households' ability to manage mortgage or debts
- low demand and over supply of housing within an area
- investment as an asset or future development
- unwillingness to become a Private Landlord
- need for major repairs or refurbishment and lack of resources
- access issues
- planning restrictions
- inheritance and ownership difficulties
- the property forms part of a business.

Empty homes can cause significant challenges not only for owners but for residents in their community, local authorities, and other relevant stakeholders. There can be significant disrepair and blight which has a negative impact on the local environment and quality of life for neighbours. This includes community safety problems, vandalism, fly tipping, arson, anti-social behaviour as well as removing often viable homes from the local housing stock where there is housing need.

For owners, empty homes can have considerable financial impacts in terms of lost rental income, mortgage payments, Council tax, insurance, maintenance and security. Empty Homes therefore pose potential for significant financial loss.

From a wider community perspective, empty homes can cause a negative appearance in terms of place, undermine regeneration efforts, prevent common works from taking place and lower the value of nearby properties. Furthermore, properties inactive within the housing market do not contribute to economic activity within the community and do not help with homelessness prevention or meeting housing need.

In order to reduce the negative impact of empty homes within communities there needs to be committed partnership approaches to bringing homes back into use and to them becoming occupied.

Developing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework demonstrates the scale of local commitment to bringing empty homes into use by identifying and understanding the challenges within a local authority area and outlining potential interventions.

There are significant economic and financial benefits for local authorities, owners, landlords and residents in bringing empty homes into use, including their contribution to:

- increasing housing supply to meet housing need
- reducing homelessness by increase supply of affordable housing
- assisting local authorities and Registered Social Landlords to work towards Net Zero Targets and carbon savings through the retrofitting of existing properties as an alternative to new supply
- reducing neighbourhood complaints and the improved deployment of resources
- reducing requirements for Police and Fire Services to attend empty homes
- financial returns for owners in terms of realising asset value or generating rental income
- improving aesthetic appearance and sense of place within a community
- progressing common works to improve housing standards across other homes.

5 National and Local Context

A Strategic Empty Homes Framework should set out the wider national policy agenda for empty homes including legislation, guidance, policy priorities and outcomes. Detailing the legislative framework will offer clarity on the powers and duties placed upon local authorities, as well as the mechanisms which can drive empty homes activity including enforcement action, advice and assistance and resourcing. Furthermore, mapping out the national policy context provides an opportunity to showcase the contribution of empty homes in meeting housing need, tackling climate change, enabling regeneration and placemaking, and supporting the economy.

Chapter 5 provides a guide to the current statutory requirements in relation to empty homes and details the national policy and strategy framework, which supports the empty homes agenda.

5.1 Statutory Requirements

Local authorities have several statutory requirements to fulfill, with those that relate to bringing empty homes back into use as follows:

- Local Government Finance (Unoccupied properties etc.) (Scotland) Act 2012. This allows local authorities to charge increased Council Tax on certain homes that have been empty over a year
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2011 which places a duty on local authorities to develop Local Housing Strategies (LHS)
- Local authorities' duties to homeless people including a statutory responsibility to anyone threatened with, or experiencing, homelessness
- House Condition (Housing (Scotland) Act 2006, Section 10) creates duties to have in place a Below Tolerable Standard Strategy, Housing Renewal Area Policy, and Scheme of Assistance Strategy
- Tackling the effects of Climate Change – Section 44 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009
- Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019 introduces a new statutory target for reducing fuel poverty. The target is that by 2040, as far as reasonably possible, no household, in any Local Authority area, in Scotland is in fuel poverty; and, in any event, no more than 5% of households, in any local authority area in Scotland are in fuel poverty. No more than 1% of households in Scotland should be in extreme fuel poverty.

Recommended Practice Principle: Setting out Legislative and Regulatory Requirements

Empty Homes Officers should ensure they are familiar with statutory requirements that relate to empty homes work. It is also beneficial to keep up to date with legislative changes and any new policy requirements.

5.2 National Context

Setting out the national context for empty homes in terms of legislation, guidance, policy priorities and outcomes is important within any Empty Homes Strategic Framework. The national context shows how the empty homes agenda is both influenced and can contribute to a framework of

strategic ambitions around housing, place, community, net zero and the Scottish economy. An example of the type of material that could be used to set out the national context is provided in Chapter 6.

Whilst there are currently no statutory requirements for local authorities regarding empty homes, the Scottish Government are keen to encourage empty homeowners to bring properties back into use and in particular to increase affordable housing supply in Scotland to tackle shortages in this sector.

Empty homes have an important role to play in helping to deliver the right homes, in the right places for people in Scotland. The Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 strategy sets out an ambitious vision of what housing should look like over the next two decades and a plan on how to achieve this vision. Bringing empty homes back into use will help deliver all priorities of the Housing to 2040 strategy as follows:

1. More homes at the heart of great places

- Help to meet demand for affordable housing in areas of most need
- Contribute to regeneration and revitalising of town centres, villages and rural communities

2. Affordability and choice

- Contribute to Scottish Government's ambitions of delivering 110,000 affordable homes over the next ten years
- Ensuring as wide a range as possible of property types and tenures across Scotland

3. Affordable warmth and zero emissions homes

- Help drive down carbon emissions caused by housing and housing construction
- Assist with reduced heating and operational carbon emissions through retrofitting for improved energy performance

4. Improving the quality of all homes

- Support renovation of empty homes and return them back to use
- Improve quality of housing stock and aesthetic appearance within communities

Furthermore, National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)¹ Policy 9 'Quality Homes', encourages the promotion and delivery of homes across different tenures and by a range of providers. It also puts an emphasis on sustainability and opportunities for tackling climate change, as well as adopting the approach of building reuse. NPF4 therefore promotes the sustainable reuse of buildings such as empty homes.

Within NPF4 Policy 9 'Quality Homes' there is recognition and encouragement for a significant contribution to housing targets to be made by existing empty homes, or buildings not currently used for residential purposes, being returned or converted to use as homes. This provides an opportunity to consider how bringing housing back into effective use through remodelling and rehabilitation of existing properties could be promoted through Local Housing Strategies and Local Development Plans.

¹ <https://www.transformingplanning.scot/media/2832/policy-9-quality-homes-pdf-199kb.pdf>

There are currently eleven National Outcomes² describing what the Scottish Government wants to achieve, which were reviewed in March 2021 as follows:

- Children and Young People
- Economy
- Fair Work and Business
- International
- Communities
- Education
- Health
- Poverty
- Culture
- Environment
- Human Rights

Through addressing the issue of empty homes local authorities can contribute to delivery of several National Outcomes. Table 6.1 provides further clarity and ideas on how bringing empty homes back into use contributes to each of these:

| National Outcome | Empty Homes Contribution |
|---|--|
| Communities: We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe | Tackling empty homes improves community safety, encouraging greater levels of resident occupation to reduce security risks and enhance neighbourhood quality |
| Fair work and business: We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone | Empty homes can contribute to fair work and local business agendas through job creation, spend on materials and resources, learning and development of a skilled workforce and increasing the number of households accessing services, amenities |
| Economy: We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy | Assisting and enabling empty homeowners to bring their properties back into use, provides greater housing choice, improves the aesthetic appearance of communities, and can contribute to making communities more robust and resilient through investment, job creation and greater local spend |
| Environment: We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment | Refurbishment and retrofitting have significantly less impact on the environment and carbon emissions than newbuild housing activity. Empty homes can contribute to increasing housing choice and supply whilst reducing impact on consumption and production. Bringing empty homes back into use safeguards properties at risk by allowing works to be carried out not only for that property but others where there are communal repairs. Ensuring properties are protected and lived in increases housing supply and provides a better environment for those who wish to live in communities in the future |
| Poverty: We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally | Empty homes that are brought back into use can contribute to increasing the supply of affordable housing and therefore assist in tackling the poverty agenda. |

Table 5.1: Empty Homes impact on achieving National Outcomes

² National Performance Framework: National Outcomes, Scottish Government

5.3 Local Context

A Strategic Empty Homes Strategy Framework, separate to, but supporting Local Housing Strategies should provide an effective and efficient use of resources by targeting and aligning activity to wider housing priorities. This framework can support local authorities to recognise the usefulness of developing effective practices and partnerships to guide the delivery of empty homes activity.

Through partnership working there are significant opportunities to establish or enhance a range of potential mechanisms to encourage and assist owners to make their properties a home available for letting or for sale. Understanding the local context and priorities will help inform the approach to be taken in the Strategic Empty Homes Framework. It is important to set out links to other strategic plans and how empty homes can contribute to delivery of priorities for the local authority and the communities within it.

In addition to the Local Housing Strategy, an Empty Homes Framework will require to take account of other cost cutting local authority plans and strategies such as:

- Local Development Plan
- Strategic Housing Investment Plan
- Private Sector Strategy
- Scheme of Assistance
- Financial Inclusion Plan
- Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan
- Temporary Accommodation Strategy
- Locality Plans
- Local Outcome Improvement Plans
- Corporate Plans
- Economic Development Plans.

There is a wealth of contextual information, including statistics about population projections, household projections, dwelling estimates, housing need and demand, homelessness, stock condition within the wider local planning framework that can help build the evidence base used to target and resource empty homes activity. Furthermore, the wider plans outlined above provide an opportunity to understand the strategic objectives and ambitions within each local authority and how bringing empty homes back into use can help tackle some of the challenges identified.

Recommended Practice Principle: The national and local policy context surrounding empty homes should be considered in developing the Strategic Framework

Empty Homes Officers can use national and local policy context to provide examples and present evidence to demonstrate how tackling empty homes in their local authority area could contribute to meeting national and local priorities. This includes how empty homes activity can inform, influence and improve local communities across a range of priorities identified both nationally and locally.

This advisory guidance provides an outline of how empty homes work can contribute to these agendas whilst raising the profile of empty homes and demonstrating the value of the work being carried and the contribution being made.

Examples include:

- increasing housing choice and supply by bringing empty homes back into use
- strengthening neighbourhoods by improving visual appearance, safety and sustainability
- contributing to Climate Change commitments and movement towards Net Zero
- assisting in alleviating fuel poverty and affordability challenges through retrofit and increasing supply of affordable homes
- improving stock condition and the safety and amenity of communities.

6 Understanding the links to Local Housing Strategies and wider local authority plans

Chapter 6 provides an overview of Local Housing Strategies and the wider local authority planning framework. It provides information and a reference point to enable Empty Homes Officers to make links between the Strategic Empty Homes Framework and the wider local and corporate plans. Crucially, this chapter details how Local Housing Strategies, Corporate and Community Plans link to empty homes work, so that Empty Homes Officers can:

- elevate empty homes activity on the local planning agenda
- engage partners in supporting empty homes activity/delivering actions
- make the local case for scarce public resources.

6.1 Local Housing Strategy

A Local Housing Strategy (LHS) is at the heart of the arrangements for housing and planning through its links with Local Development Plans and its strategic role in directing investment in housing and housing related services.

It sets out a strategic vision for the delivery of housing and housing services and the outcomes that partners seek to achieve to meet housing need. There is a requirement to address several key requirements and duties in relation to housing supply, housing need and demand, homelessness, stock condition, refurbishment and demolition, specialist housing, private sector housing, energy efficiency, fuel poverty and housing's contribution to meeting net zero targets. More specifically, empty homes are a key area that should also be addressed within an LHS.

The LHS is the framework for delivering all housing related statutory duties and policy priorities at a local level. Typically, the overarching themes of an LHS include:

- new housing delivery
- preventing and addressing homelessness
- specialist housing and support including enabling independent living and meeting the needs of particular groups including ex-armed forces personnel, key workers and gypsy travellers
- fuel poverty, energy efficiency and climate change
- house condition and quality
- private sector housing.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2011 places a duty on local authorities to develop Local Housing Strategies (LHS), informed by an assessment of housing need in their area. The primary purpose of the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (HNDA) is to provide the evidence base to inform the LHS and development plan in relation to Housing Supply Targets i.e. the number of new homes to be built in a local authority area. The development of an LHS should be part of the local authority's approach to inclusive growth, supporting the development of sustainable communities and drawing on place-based approaches to deliver positive community outcomes.

Within the 'Housing Delivery' theme, local authorities are expected to provide a summary of the extent and nature of housing to be delivered over the period of the LHS. LHS Guidance requires analysis to set out estimates of need and demand, housing supply, flows across the housing

system and between tenures. It outlines the distinctive issues (including any challenges) for housing and housing related services together with an explanation of how these are currently being addressed and what plans there are to address these in future. It also sets out information on the extent and nature of the private rented sector together with information on any local issues that have been identified. An LHS should also explain the local authority's approach to supporting new and existing neighbourhoods based on placemaking principles, including an explanation of the nature and function of town centres and where local authorities may be using the 'Town Centre First Principle' to guide investment decisions.

In terms of empty homes, the LHS guidance³ recommends setting out the circumstances in which the local authority will consider the use of CPOs as a pro-active tool to bring forward housing and regeneration and tackling empty homes. Furthermore, the guidance sets an expectation that the Local Housing Strategy will provide information on the extent of empty properties in the local area. The LHS should detail planned activity for bringing these homes back into use (e.g. employing an empty homes officer and using empty homes loans/grants), as well as its intended impact in addressing local housing need. The LHS Guidance also recommends local authorities set out how increased income from Council Tax generation from empty homes will be used to support housing delivery and investment in tackling empty homes.

The LHS Guidance states that the Local Housing Strategy should include a target for the number of empty homes to be brought back into use over the lifetime of the LHS and for this to be reflected in the LHS Outcomes Action Plan.

Empty Homes plays a key role in delivery of good outcomes across other key themes within a Local Housing Strategy. These are explained further below by setting out how specific policy agendas align to empty homes objectives and create shared priorities which can help to mainstream empty homes activity. Chapter 9 provides a detailed overview of the evidence that is typically available to support empty homes work and how Empty Homes Officers should gather and collate it.

Preventing and addressing homelessness: bringing empty homes back into use, particularly in areas where there is significant pressure on affordable housing, can increase housing supply and help to alleviate housing system pressures. Furthermore, the prevention work carried out within local authorities can help to prevent some properties becoming empty in the first instance through advice, assistance and support provision. Rapid rehousing is a key approach to assist local authorities towards ending homelessness. Local authorities have prepared and are now delivering Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans⁴ since 2019, Empty Homes Officers should consider the references, actions and commitments within their local authority's RRTP in relation to empty homes.

Specialist Provision: Providing affordable and suitable accommodation for households with particular needs can be a challenge for local authorities. Bringing the right type of home in the right location back into use to enable independent living is one-way empty homes can help meet outcomes relating to specialist housing provision and the needs of households who have particular housing needs. Local authorities are required to prepare a Strategic Housing

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-housing-strategy-guidance-2019/-Pages 33-34, 8.24-8.28, and recommendations E, F and G>

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/rapid-rehousing-transition-plans-annual-report-2020-21/>

Investment Plan⁵ annually. This plan outlines proposals in relation to new housing supply including investment in empty homes. There may be opportunities for Empty Homes Officer to work closely with colleagues to identify and assist in bringing empty homes back into use in relation to specialist provision. This could also be linked to the Housing Contribution Statement⁶ as it sets out how the Health & Social Care partners intend to work with housing services to deliver its outcomes, which could include identifying and sourcing suitable accommodation for households with specialist requirements, which this could include empty homes.

Fuel Poverty, Energy Efficiency and Climate Change: Bringing empty homes back into use can contribute to addressing fuel poverty, improving energy efficiency, and tackling climate change. There are also significant benefits in relation to carbon capture via refurbishment/retrofitting approaches in comparison to newbuild CO2 emissions. There is often advice, assistance and potential funding available to help support homeowners make their properties more energy efficient through Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies⁷ and HEEPS: ABS⁸ projects. In some cases, this could help owners financially to bring an empty home back into use, although it should be acknowledged that funding eligibility often focuses on occupied properties.

Stock Condition: Empty homes within both the private and social rented sectors can contribute to poor or deteriorating housing conditions. The House Condition theme requires local authorities to set out their approach to tackling disrepair and Below Tolerable Standard housing. Bringing empty homes back into use can tackle disrepair for individual properties but can also enable communal works to progress, preventing deterioration in communal homes.

Local authorities are required to set out their Scheme of Assistance and provide an explanation of how it will improve standards in private sector housing. Empty homes owners can benefit from local authority Scheme of Assistance opportunities to help bring empty homes back into use and fund adaptations and repair works. Having said this, it should be acknowledged that the Scheme of Assistance framework in many local authorities currently focuses primarily on occupied dwellings, offering limited, if any, funding opportunities for empty homes.

6.2 Community Planning

A Community Planning Partnership (or CPP) is the name given to all those services that come together to take part in community planning. There are 32 CPPs across Scotland, one for each Council area. Each CPP focuses on where partners' collective efforts and resources can add the most value to their local communities, with particular emphasis on reducing inequality.

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/strategic-housing-investment-plan-ship-guidance-note-mhdgn-2022-01/pages/content-of-the-ship/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-advice-note/pages/8/>

⁷ [https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-heat-energy-efficiency-strategies-delivery-plans-guidance/#:~:text=Local%20Heat%20and%20Energy%20Efficiency%20Strategies%20\(LHEES\)%20are%20at%20the,energy%20efficiency%20planning%20and%20delivery.](https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-heat-energy-efficiency-strategies-delivery-plans-guidance/#:~:text=Local%20Heat%20and%20Energy%20Efficiency%20Strategies%20(LHEES)%20are%20at%20the,energy%20efficiency%20planning%20and%20delivery.)

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/home-energy-efficiency-programmes-energy-efficient-scotland-delivery-report-2018-2019/pages/3/>

Community participation lies at the heart of community planning, and applies in the development, design and delivery of plans as well as in their review, revision and reporting. CPPs and community planning partners must act to secure the participation of communities throughout.

As part of this, they should make sure that everyone involved is clear about what they have agreed to do and who is responsible for doing what.

CPPs are responsible for producing two types of plan to describe their local priorities and planned improvements:

- Local Outcomes Improvement Plans, which cover the whole council area
- Locality Plans, which cover smaller areas within the CPP area, usually focusing on areas that will benefit most from improvement.

Empty Homes and their impact on communities as well as the benefits of bringing empty homes back into use, crosses several community planning themes such as building stronger communities, community safety, environment, work and enterprise, regeneration and community involvement. It is therefore important to understand the role of empty homes in helping to deliver local outcomes and to ensure there is empty homes representation within the CPP to create a partnership approach to bringing homes back into use.

6.3 Corporate Plan

A local authority Corporate Plan serves as the local authority's strategic framework for action. It is prepared based on an organisation-wide approach and is designed to meet the needs of each individual local authority. It should be prepared on an inclusive basis, involving consultation with internal and external stakeholders. The Corporate Plan takes account of resources available, constraints and sets out the key strategic objectives. These objectives are then translated into more detailed supporting strategies and activities.

Bringing empty homes back into use can be developed as a supporting strategy in relation to increasing housing supply, placemaking, community safety, regeneration and economic development. Demonstrating the role empty homes can play in assisting local authorities to achieve some of the key objectives within the Corporate Plan can raise the profile of empty homes, ensure partnership buy in and identify future projects for partnership working.

Empty Homes Officers should identify lead officers responsible for Corporate Plans within their authority and discuss how bringing empty homes back into use can help achieve corporate priorities. Identifying deliverable actions in relation to empty homes that contribute to Corporate Plan objectives will be an important part of developing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework within each authority.

6.4 Achieving Net Zero and Climate Change Strategy

The Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan 2018-2032 (Securing a Green Recovery on a Path to Net Zero) sets out the approach to achieving the aim that emissions from heating all buildings across Scotland will reach zero by 2045.

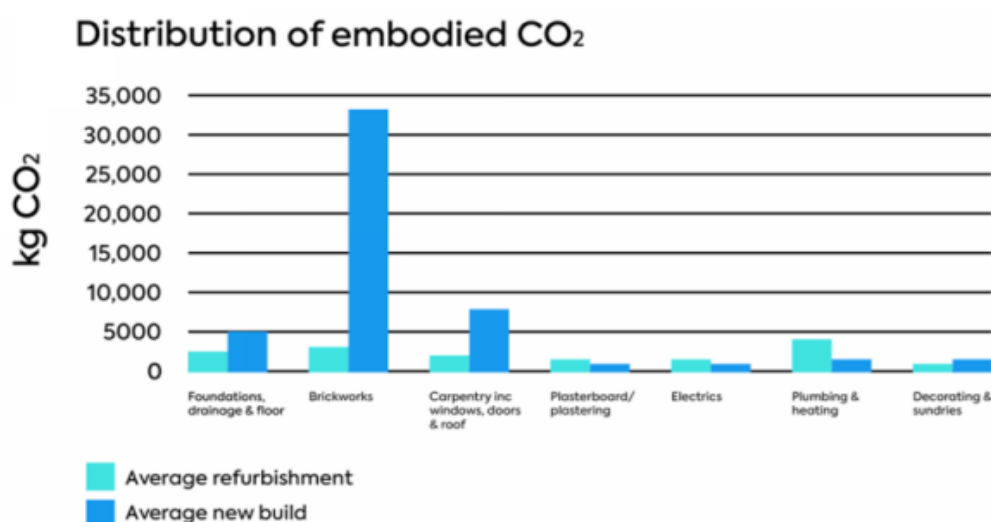
Scotland's public sector bodies have a strong leadership role in delivering the transition to net zero. Strengthened legislation requires public bodies to report on their targets for achieving zero direct emissions and reducing indirect emissions, and to report how spending aligns with

emissions reduction. Bringing empty homes back into use can make an obvious contribution to this agenda and therefore should be included in any local net zero strategies or actions plans developed at a corporate level in each local authority.

Bringing empty buildings back into use contributes to the climate change agenda in several ways, including:

- achieving net zero targets
- carbon reduction
- retention of buildings and properties
- refurbishment and retrofit.

A Strategic Empty Homes Framework should make a case for preserving buildings and tackling the climate emergency by considering bringing local homes back to use as a first-choice option, thereby reducing embodied CO₂ emissions that can be just as damaging to the environment as operational CO₂ emissions in existing housing. The Graph 6.1 below from World Habitat 'New Tricks with Old Bricks'⁹ shows embodied CO₂ emissions in new buildings compared to refurbishments.



Graph 6.1: Distribution of embodied CO₂

Bringing empty homes back into use can make a strong contribution to the net zero strategies of local authorities. Corporate climate change strategies should acknowledge this impact and align opportunities and activity with empty homes strategies wherever possible including activity to:

- support owners of empty homes to bring them back into use as zero emission housing
- consider introduction of compulsory rental orders and compulsory sale orders to sit alongside CPO powers enabling local authorities to bring empty homes back into use
- incentivise social housing providers to take on long term empty homes as part of targets to increase affordable housing supply

⁹ <https://world-habitat.org/publications/new-tricks-with-old-bricks/>

- make funding available for affordable housing in relation to purchase, refurbishment and retrofitting.

The development of a Strategic Empty Homes Framework should offer opportunities to influence and develop commitments within the corporate climate change strategy at a local level. This could include working with partners to create strong corporate policy links that will assist in making a case for investment in empty homes work.

Identifying opportunities and creating a robust evidence base that can demonstrate the benefits as well as cost and CO2 emission comparisons of housing re-use, retrofitting and regeneration; will highlight the importance of empty homes work and the contribution this can make to corporate climate change strategies.

6.5 Property Acquisition Schemes

There are several local authorities across Scotland with successful property acquisition schemes. The schemes can contribute to meeting housing supply targets by bringing empty homes back into use. This can be a cost-effective and economic method of meeting housing need within communities. The Scottish Government in some instances contributes grant support to support the purchase of homes, this is particularly effective in areas where there is existing stock as it can increase supply, improve stock condition and help sustain and enhance local communities. There is significant evidence that the cost of properties plus repair/refurbishment costs is less than half the cost of typical newbuild in the current market.

Where local authorities work in partnership and take a co-ordinated approach with other public sector bodies, private owners, private rented sector landlords and community planning partners, there can be considerable progress in bringing empty homes back into use. Property Acquisition Scheme are an example of successful joint working initiatives across Scotland.

Property acquisition schemes provide Empty Homes Officers with an opportunity to work in partnership with social landlords, owners and the wider community to increase housing choice and housing supply and at the same time address potential issues around amenity and property condition.

It would be beneficial for a Strategic Empty Homes Framework to highlight areas of need and demand for social housing alongside the scale and location of empty homes that could potentially be available to meet this need. A property acquisition scheme could be seen as making a viable contribution to increasing housing supply, particularly in areas with limited land supply for newbuild housing.

Recommended Practice Principle: Understanding the links to Local Housing Strategies and wider local authority plans

This guidance provides an opportunity for Empty Homes Officers to review their local authority's current Local Housing Strategy and wider corporate planning framework to identify opportunities for aligning shared strategies and mainstreaming empty homes work.

Highlighting the important role empty homes can play in meeting wider priorities and outcomes is essential in helping raise the profile of empty homes and identifying and agreeing investment priorities for the future.

7 Building the Empty Homes Evidence Base

Creating a robust evidence base is an essential element of developing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework. It provides a profile of empty homes across the local authority area as well as information in relation to tenure estimates, housing need and demand, homelessness, the private rented sector and stock condition. This evidence base should offer an understanding of the scale of empty homes as well as the challenges faced in bringing them back into use.

Paragraphs 7.1 to 7.8 provide examples of the information that could be collected and presented within a Strategic Empty Homes Framework to evidence the scale of empty homes, pressures on social housing, homelessness, private rented sector and stock condition position. Appendix 2 provides a reference with useful links to data sources that have been referred to within this chapter.

As a guide to the sources referred to throughout this chapter, the following data table has been provided which outlines whether data is held national or locally and how regularly it is published. For local data, details are provided of who may hold this information and whether established reporting systems are already in place to curate the data. Furthermore, it details whether research, data assembly and/or analysis may be required to build evidence on empty homes.

| Data Required | National or Local | Publishing Timescales | Who holds data | Is data assembly /analysis/ research required? | Who else may require this data and hold it |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| Council Tax Records - Length of time property empty - Exemptions - Discounts | Local | As required | Council Tax Teams | Yes | Empty Homes Officer |
| NRS Small Area Statistics: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/small-area-population-estimates-2011-data-zone-based/mid-2020 | National | Annual | National Records Scotland | Yes | Empty Homes Officer/Strategy Teams |
| NRS Household Estimates: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/households/household-estimates/2021 | National | Annual | National Records of Scotland | Yes | Empty Homes Officer/Strategy Teams |
| Scottish House Condition Survey: https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-house-condition-survey-local-authority-analysis-2017-2019/ | National | 3 Years | Scottish Government | Yes | Empty Homes Officer/Strategy Teams |

| Data Required | National or Local | Publishing Timescales | Who holds data | Is data assembly /analysis/ research required? | Who else may require this data and hold it |
|--|-------------------|--------------------------|---|--|---|
| Scottish Households Survey: https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-household-survey-publications/ | National | Annual | Scottish Government | Yes | Empty Homes Officer/Strategy Teams |
| Local Surveys <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stock Condition - PRS - Empty Homeowners - Neighbourhood - Local Housing Strategy - HNDA | Local | As required | Local Authority | Yes | Property Services Strategy Team Private Rented Sector Team |
| Social housing empty properties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Landlord Reports - Charter Data https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance/statistical-information | Local | As required (Annual ARC) | Local Authority Scottish Housing Regulator | Yes | Strategy Team/Housing Operations |

| Data Required | National or Local | Publishing Timescales | Who holds data | Is data assembly /analysis/ research required? | Who else may require this data and hold it |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------|---|--|---|
| HNDA - Housing requirements - Rents - Affordability - Specialist Provision https://www.gov.scot/publications/centre-for-housing-market-analysis-list-of-guidance/ | Local | Annual | Scottish Government Centre Housing Market Analysis CHMA Data Pack | Yes | Strategy Team Centre Housing Market Analysis |
| Social Rented Stock https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance | Local | As required (Annual ARC) | Local Authority Scottish Housing Regulator | Yes | Performance Team |
| Social Rented Lets https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance | Local | As required (Annual ARC) | Local Authority Scottish Housing Regulator | Yes | Performance Team |
| Housing Applications https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance | Local | As required (Annual ARC) | Local Authority Scottish Housing Regulator | Yes | Performance Team |

| Data Required | National or Local | Publishing Timescales | Who holds data | Is data assembly /analysis/ research required? | Who else may require this data and hold it |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------|---|--|--|
| Income Data | National | Annual | Scottish Government Centre Housing Market Analysis | Yes | Strategy Team |
| Local authority rents https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance | National | Annual | Scottish Housing Regulator Local Authority | Yes | Empty Homes Officer/Strategy Team |
| RSL rents https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance | National | Annual | Scottish Housing Regulator RSL | Yes | Empty Homes Officer/Strategy Team |
| Market Rents https://www.gov.scot/publications/private-sector-rent-statistics-scotland-2010-2022/documents/ | National | Annual | Scottish Government Centre Housing Market Analysis | Yes | Empty Homes Officer/Strategy Team |
| Local Housing Allowance | National | Annual | Scottish Government | Yes | Empty Homes Officer/Strategy Team |
| Specialist Housing Provision https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance | Local | As required (Annual ARC) | Scottish Housing Regulator Local Authority RSL | Yes | Strategy Team |

| Data Required | National or Local | Publishing Timescales | Who holds data | Is data assembly /analysis/ research required? | Who else may require this data and hold it |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------|--|--|--|
| Specialist Housing Requirements https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance | Local | As required (Annual ARC) | Scottish Housing Regulator Local Authority RSL | Yes | Strategy Team |
| Scheme of Assistance | Local | As required (Annual ARC) | Scottish Housing Regulator Local Authority | Yes | Private Sector Team |
| Private Rented Sector | Local | Annual | Private Landlord Registrations | Yes | Private Sector Team |
| Stock Condition (Urgent Disrepair and BTS) https://www.gov.scot/collecti ons/scottish-house-condition-survey/ | National | 3 Years | Scottish House Condition Survey | Yes | Empty Homes Officer/Strategy Team |
| Stock Age, Type and Size https://www.gov.scot/collecti ons/scottish-house-condition-survey/ | National | 3 Years | Scottish House Condition Survey | Yes | Empty Homes Officer/Strategy Team |

Table 7.1: Data sources which could be used evidence the current position on empty homes

7.1 Profiling Empty Homes

There are several data sources that can be used to profile empty homes within a local authority, these include:

- Council Tax Records
- NRS Small Area Statistics on Households and Dwellings
- NRS Households Estimates
- Scottish House Condition Survey
- Scottish Household Survey
- Local Surveys

To understand the levels of ineffective housing stock (i.e. homes which are not in use and do not meet housing need on a permanent basis), the NRS Household Estimates¹⁰ provides us with local authority level information for Tables 1 to 7 and Scotland wide for Tables 8 to 11:

Table of Contents

Contents of this spreadsheet and links to each worksheet.
This worksheet contains one table.

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| Table1 | Table 1: Household estimates for Scotland by council area, June 1991 to 2021 [Note 1] [Note 2] [Note 3] |
| Table2 | Table 2: Number of dwellings in Scotland by council area, September 2001 to 2021 |
| Table3 | Table 3: Average household size for Scotland by council area, June 2001 to 2021 [Note 5] [Note 6] |
| Table4 | Table 4: Dwellings by occupancy in each council area, September 2021 [Note 1] |
| Table5 | Table 5: Second homes in each council area, September 2011 to 2021 [Note 1] [Note 7] |
| Table6a | Table 6a: Vacant dwellings in each council area, September 2011 to 2021 [Note 1] [Note 7] |
| Table6b | Table 6b: Unoccupied exemptions in each council area, September 2011 to 2021 |
| Table6c | Table 6c: Long-term empty homes in each council area, September 2011 to 2021 [Note 1] [Note 7] |
| Table7 | Table 7: Characteristics of dwellings by council area, December 2021 [Note 10] |
| Table8 | Table 8: Occupied and vacant dwellings by Urban Rural classification, September 2021 [Note 11] |
| Table9 | Table 9: Characteristics of dwellings by Urban Rural classification, December 2021 [Note 10] [Note 11] |
| Table10 | Table 10: Occupied and vacant dwellings by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile, September 2021 [Note 12] |
| Table11 | Table 11: Characteristics of dwellings by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile, December 2021 [Note 10] [Note 12] |
| Data for figure 1 | Data for figure 1: Cumulative change in households, dwellings and population, 2001-2021 |
| Data for figure 2 | Data for figure 2: Percentage change in the number of households and population by council area, June 2001 to 2021 |
| Data for figure 4 | Data for figure 4: Proportion of dwellings that are vacant, with unoccupied exemptions, long-term empty and second homes, September 2011 to 2021 |
| Data for figure 5 | Data for figure 5: New build completions (October, 20021 to 2021 and annual increase in number of dwellings (September, 2002 to 2021) |

In separate publications, NRS also publish small area data on households and dwellings which would support analysis of ineffective stock within a local authority.

An example of how this could be presented is provided below using Scotland data, however, this can be replicated for each local authority:

¹⁰ <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/households/household-estimates/2021>

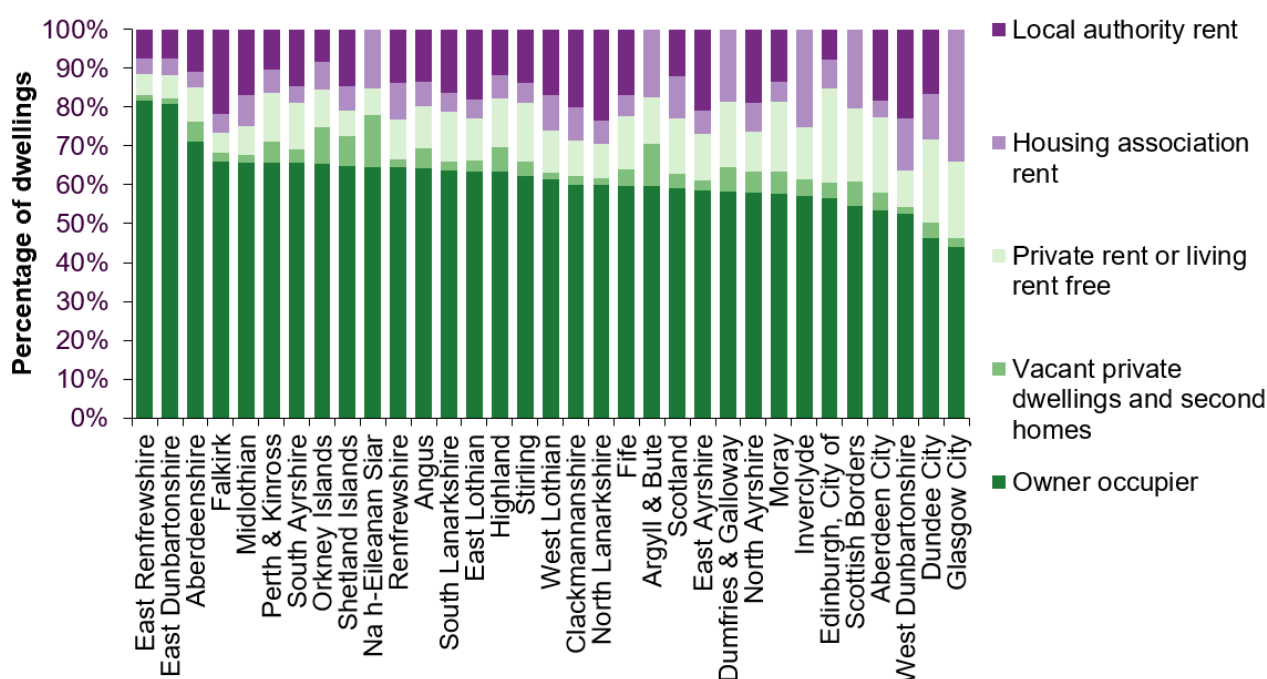
| In-effective Housing Stock | Scotland |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Total Dwellings | 2,674,993 |
| Occupied Dwellings | 2,562,668 |
| Second Homes | 23,990 |
| Long-term Empty Dwellings | 43,766 |
| Dwellings with Unoccupied Exemptions | 44,569 |

Table 7.2: In-effective Housing Stock Scotland (NRS Household Estimates published June 2022)

It is useful to also outline the tenure split of housing stock within a local authority to understand the distribution of stock across all tenures.

The Annual Housing Statistics¹¹ provides this information at local authority level in Chart 7 which is provided below (Graph 7.1):

Chart 7: Tenure estimates by local authority area in 2019 show that the rate of owner occupation varies from 84% in East Renfrewshire to 45% in Dundee City



Graph 7.1: Tenure Estimates by Local Authority

It also provides a table with the % Tenure Split for each local authority area.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-statistics-2020-2021-key-trends-summary/documents/>

| Geography | % Local Authority Housing Stock | % of RSL Housing Stock | % of PRS Housing Stock | % of Owner Occupied Housing Stock | % Vacant or Second Homes |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Local Authority | | | | | |
| Scotland | | | | | |

Table 7.3: Tenure Split by Local Authority and Housing Market Sub-Area (NRS Household Estimates published June 2022)

Providing some contextual information around the tables to explain what they mean will be helpful within the Strategic Empty Homes Framework. For example, where there are high proportions of private rented sector properties then this could mean a greater incidence of empty homes if rental markets are slow.

In addition to understanding the scale and nature of empty homes it is useful to understand the mixed tenure challenges and poor condition of properties in relation to empty homes. Working closely with the team(s)¹² who administer Scheme of Assistance, Missing Share Powers¹³ and manage Private Landlord Registrations will provide an opportunity to access data that will support findings in terms of scale, volume and impact of empty homes.

The key information in this section is likely to be available from Housing Strategy or Private Sector Housing Teams. It is important to create a list of data requirements and the likely sources of this data within the local authority, this will help Empty Homes Officers source data that is not readily available from published sources.

7.2 Long Term Empty Homes

Understanding long term empty homes from local authority Council Tax data often provides the most up to date and accurate position. The data can usually identify properties that have been empty for up to 6 months, up to 12 months and over 12 months by year, postcode and Council Tax band.

This provides an opportunity to triangulate this data with information on housing pressures, homelessness, and stock condition in order to develop a targeted approach that will bring properties back into use in the areas most needed and those properties causing most blight within communities.

The Strategic Empty Homes Framework should set out the number of long-term empty homes by sub-area to provide an overview of the position across the authority and a comparison to the Scotland wide position. This can be compiled to show information for housing market areas or intermediate data zones using NRS Small Area Data.¹⁴

¹² Most likely to be Property Team, Private Sector Team or Strategy Team

¹³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2014/14/notes/division/3/6>

¹⁴ [Mid-2020 Small Area Population Estimates for 2011 Data Zones | National Records of Scotland \(nrsotland.gov.uk\)](https://nrs.scot.nhs.uk/mid-2020-small-area-population-estimates-for-2011-data-zones/)

| Geography | Long Term Empty Homes | Unoccupied Exemption | Second Homes | Total Stock | % Long Term Empty Homes |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| Local Authority | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 1 | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 2 | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 3 | | | | | |
| Scotland | | | | | |

Table 7.4: Private Long Term Empty Properties

Information can also be used to identify areas that have a higher proportion of a local authorities long term empty homes than they do of its total housing stock, to show areas most affected by empty properties.

| Geography | Long Term Empty homes | Total stock | % of homes that are long-term empty homes | % of local authority housing stock | % of local authority long-term empty homes |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|---|------------------------------------|--|
| Local Authority | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 1 | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 2 | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 3 | | | | | |
| Scotland | | | | | |

Table 7.5: % of Local Authority Long-term Empty Homes

There is also a need to identify, from this information, the number of empty properties that are either receiving Council Tax discounts, have had discounts removed and/or an empty homes surcharge applied, and properties that may be exempt from council tax. This information will be available from Council Tax colleagues.

| Discount/Exemption Criteria | No. Empty Homes | % |
|--|-----------------|---|
| Long term empty properties 10-50% Discount | | |
| Discount removed and/or increase applied | | |
| Unoccupied Exempt Properties | | |
| Total | | |

Table 7.6: Discounts and Exemptions

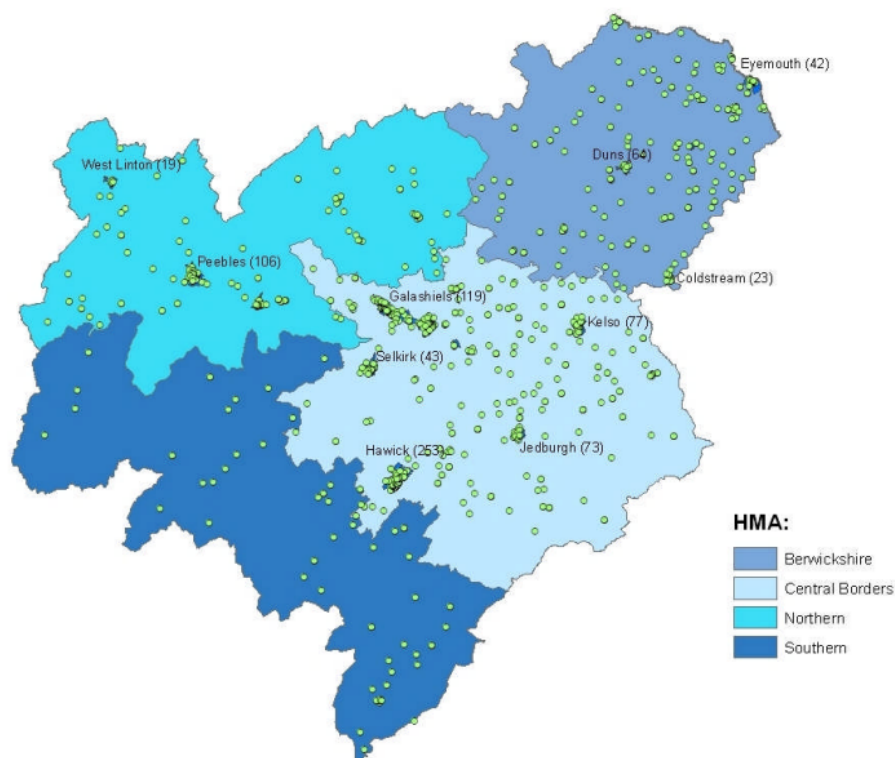
If information is available over 3–5-year periods, then this could be presented to demonstrate any trends in relation to in-effective housing stock.

| Geography | Long Term Empty Homes Year 1 | Long Term Empty Homes Year 2 | Long Term Empty Homes Year 3 | % Increase/decrease Year 2 | % Increase/decrease Year 3 |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Local Authority | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 1 | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 2 | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 3 | | | | | |
| Scotland | | | | | |

Table 7.7: Number and % of Long-term Empty Homes by Local Authority and Housing Market Subarea

Data can be analysed through use of maps to demonstrate concentrations of long-term empty homes. This is a highly effective visual aid and can be used as a tool to demonstrate where to target action and investment. A good example of this can be seen in Scottish Borders Empty Home Strategy as outlined in Map 9.1 below:

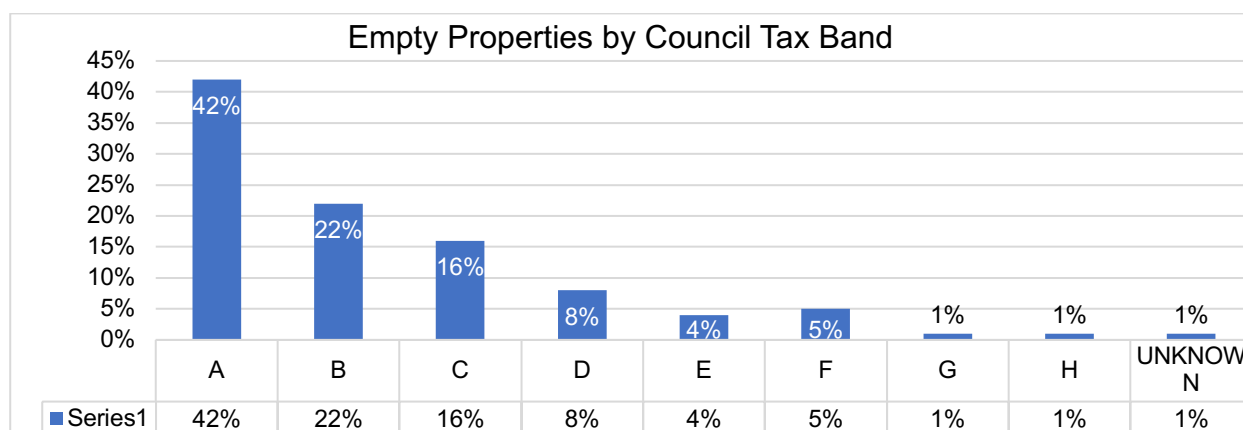
Figure 1: No. of long term properties in the Scottish Borders



Source: SBC Revenues and Benefits (Nov 11)

Map 7.1: Scottish Borders Long Term Empty Properties (Scottish Borders Empty Homes Strategy)

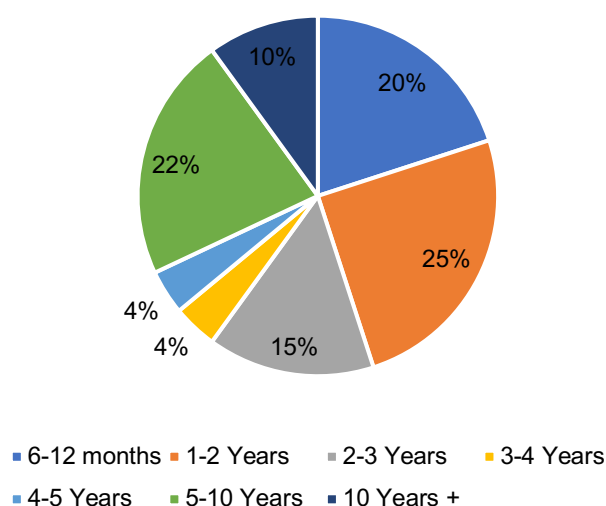
It may also be useful to consider the proportion of empty homes within each Council Tax Band. Graph 7.2 below provides an example of what this could look like. It should be noted that this data requires to be sourced at a local level as it is not nationally published. Nationally published figures give breakdown of council tax bands for all properties (occupied or vacant). NRS Small Area Data shows this at sub-area levels within each local authority.



Graph 7.2 Empty Properties by Council Tax Band

This will highlight the property sizes most likely to be empty within the local authority and provides an indication of the potential costs, need and feasibility of bringing such properties back into use.

The longer that properties have been empty for, the more the condition of the property may deteriorate, and the harder it can be to return them to use. Other difficulties, such as tracing owners, are also more common in properties that have been empty for several years. For these reasons, it is also worthwhile considering the length of time that properties have been empty for. The chart and table below provide an example of a visual for this analysis.



Graph 7.3: Empty Property Timescales (Private Sector)

| Length of time empty | No. Empty Homes | % |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----|
| 6-12 months | 200 | 20% |
| 1-2 Years | 250 | 25% |
| 2-3 Years | 150 | 15% |
| 3-4 Years | 400 | 4% |
| 4-5 Years | 40 | 4% |
| 5-10 Years | 220 | 22% |
| 10 Years + | 100 | 10% |

Table 7.8: Empty Property Timescales (Private Sector)

While unoccupied exemptions include properties which are empty and unfurnished for less than 6 months, and some other homes empty for less than six months, the term also covers properties that are empty due to the owner being in long term care, the property being repossessed, and the death of the previous owner. A breakdown of the reasons why unoccupied properties are exempt from council tax within a local authority provides an indication of the likelihood of the property returning to use or remaining empty without EHO intervention. Table 7.9 below provides an example of what this table could look like.

| Property Description | No. Empty Properties |
|---|----------------------|
| Dwellings last occupied by persons living or detained elsewhere | |
| Deceased owners | |
| Dwellings empty under statute | |
| Dwellings awaiting demolition | |
| Dwellings for occupation by ministers | |
| Repossessed dwellings | |
| Dwellings of persons made bankrupt | |
| Dwellings occupied by severely mentally impaired persons | |
| Dwellings of people in prison | |

Table 7.9: Exemption Classifications

It is recommended that Empty Homes Officers establish appropriate data sharing arrangements with Council Tax Teams to meet GDPR requirements. It is reasonable for an Empty Homes Officer to request the following dataset from Council Tax Teams to help develop and inform their evidence base:

- empty property addresses (including postcodes)
- properties identified as in receipt of a discount and what this is
- properties where an empty homes council tax surcharge has been applied.
- properties identified as exempt and their classification

- start date for property becoming empty
- property Council Tax Band.

In some local authority areas, there may be challenges with social rented stock becoming long-term empty. Examples of this can include out of management stock for scheduled demolition, regeneration projects or renovation projects. While Empty Homes work focuses on privately owned empty homes only, it may be helpful to include details of empty social rented stock within the Strategic Empty Homes Framework as it may indicate wider issues that will limit the potential to return privately owned empty properties to use. This information can be presented in a table and supported by contextual information about stock condition, housing pressures, community safety etc.

| Area | Demolitions | Regeneration | Renovation |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Housing Market Area 1 | | | |
| Housing Market Area 2 | | | |
| Housing Market Area 3 | | | |
| Total | | | |

Table 7.10: Long Term Empty Social Rented Stock

Depending on the scale and nature of this challenge it may be useful to present findings for both Registered Social Landlords and the local authority.

It is helpful for Empty Homes Officers to establish data sharing arrangements with social housing providers that meet GDPR requirements. It is reasonable for an Empty Homes Officer to request the following dataset from Housing Teams to help develop and inform their evidence base:

- address list of empty properties by age, size and type
- properties that are out of management and the reasons for this
- empty properties that are approved for demolition, regeneration and renovation along with timescales for action.

This information is most likely held within Performance or Strategy Teams within local authorities and by Housing Operations Managers or Directors in Registered Social Landlords.

7.3 Housing Need and Demand

The Strategic Empty Homes Framework should set out the overall position in relation to housing need and demand informed by the most recent Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA). This will provide an overview of where there are pressures on housing and demonstrate the level of housing need within the authority. Including a table that demonstrates the need for new housing over the next five years broken down into market and affordable requirements will highlight how bringing empty homes back into use can help achieve this target.

| Years | Market Housing Requirements | Affordable Housing Requirements |
|--------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1-5 | | |
| 5-10 | | |
| 10-15 | | |
| 15.-20 | | |

Table 7.11: HNDA Housing Estimates for Market and Affordable Housing

Empty Homes Officers will be able to find both market and affordable housing requirements in the most current Housing Need and Demand Assessment¹⁵ for their local authority, with this information is usually located in the 'Stock Profile and Pressures' Chapter. The Housing Strategy Team would be the best point of contact if the information is not readily available or accessible online.

7.4 Affordable Housing Pressures

Many local authorities have successful empty home acquisition schemes that contribute to alleviating pressures on social housing. It is helpful for the Strategic Empty Homes Framework to detail evidence of housing pressures, which could include the information outlined in table 7.12 below.

| Area | No. Social Rented Units | No. Available Lets per Annum | No. Applications on Housing Register | Ratio of housing applicants to annual Lets |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Housing Market Area 1 | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 2 | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 3 | | | | |
| Local Authority | | | | |

Table 7.12: Housing Pressures

Presenting housing pressures by Housing Market Area demonstrates where there is most pressure on social housing and therefore provides a robust argument for bringing empty homes back into use in those areas, particularly ex-local authority or housing association properties which can also contribute to improved management and maintenance. This information is available from local authority and RSL performance teams and from Scottish Housing Regulator at a local authority level.

Evidence from the HNDA and Local Housing Strategy should detail the scale of affordability challenges within the local authority, highlighting the need for increasing affordable housing, including bringing empty homes back into use. The data to support and evidence affordability challenges is typically available in published Housing Need and Demand Assessments. This data

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ea99-housing-need-and-demand-assessment-hnda/#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20the%20HNDA,investment%20and%20housing%20related%20services>.

is also made available in the Scottish Government Centre for Housing Market Analysis annual Data Pack which is typically received by local authority Housing Strategy Teams annually.

7.5 Homelessness

Local authorities have a statutory duty in relation to the prevention and alleviation of homelessness and are required to produce a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. Within this Plan there will be considerable information in relation to numbers of homeless applications, households in temporary accommodation, households requiring support along with reasons for homelessness and the settled housing outcomes for households who have presented for assistance.

This information provides an opportunity to understand demands for housing from the most vulnerable in communities as well as reasons for homelessness. It may also detail where local authorities could target or develop initiatives that could prevent homelessness and homes becoming empty. Setting out this information within the evidence base for a Strategic Empty Homes Framework will help identify areas where there is most need and provide an opportunity to determine whether action can be taken to bring homes back into use to meet this requirement. This could be facilitated through schemes such as Private Sector Leasing Scheme or Rent Deposit Guarantee Schemes.

Homelessness information can be obtained from Housing Performance Teams or from Scottish Government Homelessness Statistics.

| | No. Homeless Applications per Annum |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Local Authority | |
| Scotland | |

Table 7.13: Homeless Applications per annum

7.6 Specialist Social Housing

There may be opportunity for empty homes to have a role in meeting specialist housing requirements. Within the Strategic Empty Homes Framework, it would be beneficial to set out the number of specialist units across specialist housing categories such as wheelchair, amenity and sheltered, as well as the number of households waiting for specific types of housing.

This will provide a baseline position in relation to gaps in provision that can be cross referenced with knowledge of empty homes within the local authority. Housing Performance or Strategy Teams will be most likely to hold information on housing stock and lets at Housing Market Area level, however, the stock information is available from the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) Landlord Report. The SHR Landlord Report¹⁶ provides a breakdown of stock by each local authority and Registered Social Landlord for the following categories of housing:

- General Needs
- Sheltered

¹⁶ <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance/statistical-information>

- Very Sheltered
- Sheltered Wheelchair
- Amenity
- Community Alarm
- Wheelchair
- Ambulant Disabled
- Other Specially Adapted.

This should enable a targeted approach to bringing empty homes back into use to meet specialist housing requirements, with the Empty Homes Action Plan a delivery mechanism for achieving this. The table below is an example of how this information could be presented.

| Area | Wheelchair | Amenity | Sheltered | Lets per Annum | Waiting List |
|-----------------------|------------|---------|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| Housing Market Area 1 | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 2 | | | | | |
| Housing Market Area 3 | | | | | |
| Local Authority | | | | | |

Table 7.14: Specialist Housing Provision and Requirements

There are opportunities for owners (including private landlords) to access their local authority's Scheme of Assistance. The Scheme of Assistance provides services to private sector homeowners in terms of assistance with disabled adaptations, repairs and maintenance and may be a mechanism to bring empty homes back into use.

The Scottish Government Housing Statistics¹⁷ provide a reported position for annual grant funding spend and the number of properties assisted by the Scheme of Assistance in each local authority area. The information provides an outline of whether funding delivered disabled adaptations or assistance for disrepair work. There is also information on non-financial assistance such as website hits, leaflets issued, telephone advice and pro-active visits as well as practical assistance.

This data provides a good opportunity to understand how many private sector owners are engaging with local authorities to improve their homes. This information is typically held by Private Sector Housing or Housing Strategy Teams within each local authority. Furthermore, by liaising with the data source holder there is the opportunity for Empty Homes Officers to cross reference whether any of the properties assisted were empty homes and whether this assistance has helped bring the property back into use. Table 7.15 provides an example of how this information could be presented.

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-statistics-scheme-of-assistance/>

| | Total Spend Grant Funding Scheme of Assistance | No. Properties Assisted (Adaptations) | No. Properties Assisted (Works Under Notice) | No. Properties Assisted (Other Assistance) | Total No. Properties Assisted |
|--------------------|--|--|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Local Authority | | | | | |

Table 7.15: Scheme of Assistance

7.7 Private Rented Sector

Providing an overview of the private rented sector (PRS) and how it compares in terms of affordability to social rents, demonstrates the role PRS properties play in meeting housing need locally. In some local authorities the PRS will account for a marginal proportion of housing provision whilst in others it will play a significant role in meeting housing need.

Information on private landlords can be obtained from Private Landlord Registration Teams within local authorities.

| Area | No. PRS Properties |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Housing Market Area 1 | |
| Housing Market Area 2 | |
| Housing Market Area 3 | |
| Local Authority | |

Table 7.16: PRS Properties

To compare and assess rental cost values, PRS rents¹⁸ can be sourced from Scottish Government Private Rented Sector Statistics. Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates¹⁹ tend to be published on local authority websites or can be found on Scottish Government website, with Council Rents and RSL Rents are available from the ARC data²⁰ published by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

This data can provide helpful evidence of housing affordability pressures in each local authority and how far rental opportunities may be a viable outcome for an empty home.

| Rent | PRS | Local Authority | RSL | LHA |
|-----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|-----|
| Local Authority | | | | |

Table 7.17: Rental Comparison

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/private-sector-rent-statistics-scotland-2010-2021/>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-housing-allowance-rates-2022-2023/>

²⁰ <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance/landlords>

Recommended Practice Principle: Building the Empty Homes Evidence Base

Collecting, collating and presenting the suggested evidence within this guidance will help Empty Homes Officers to:

- develop an evidence-based approach to defining priorities in partnership with stakeholders
- align evidence of shared objectives and common agendas at a local level
- inform the design of empty homes interventions or solutions
- highlight and explain key challenges and barriers in tackling empty homes from an evidence perspective
- make the case for scarce public resources to support empty homes investment
- improve action planning informed by evidence based approach.

8 Local Projects and Initiatives

There is opportunity within the Strategic Empty Homes Framework to highlight the successes of projects and initiatives that are either complete or ongoing.

This can be achieved by either the use of case studies, providing an outline of initiatives and projects or a combination of both. Examples of projects and initiatives could include bringing properties back into use using the following mechanisms:

- Property acquisition schemes i.e. purchase of properties from the open market
- Private sector leasing i.e. bringing empty homes back into use to participate in an arrangement where a local authority leases property from private landlord and sublets to people who are in need of housing
- Empty Homes Loan Fund i.e. Scottish Government initiative to support projects that bring empty homes back into use as affordable housing
- Loan to Sell scheme i.e. local authority loan schemes that are available to owners of empty homes to carry out repairs on their properties to bring them up to saleable standard
- Enforcement initiatives (including use of CPOs) i.e. legislative powers that enable local authorities to take enforcement action to purchase empty homes
- HEEPS: ABS schemes i.e. Scottish Government programme delivered by local authorities to improve energy efficiency of solid wall and hard-to-treat cavity wall insulated homes
- Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies i.e. area based planning and programmes aiming to achieve statutory emissions reduction targets, which could include empty homes activity
- Community led schemes i.e. Communities Housing Trust who renovate and convert empty properties into affordable homes alongside communities to meet their needs
- Matchmaker schemes i.e. local authority led scheme that holds a list of potential buyers that can be matched to empty properties available for sale
- Scheme of Assistance projects i.e. financial and non-financial assistance with adaptations and/or repair works to bring empty homes back into use
- Rent Deposit Guarantee Schemes i.e. bringing empty homes back into use to participate in an arrangement where the local authority provides a written guarantee to landlord instead of cash deposit to cover damage
- Third Sector led schemes i.e. third sector led schemes and initiatives to bring empty homes back into use
- Independent living schemes i.e. properties suitable for older or vulnerable people that can be brought back into use for this specific purpose.

Local authorities should be able to demonstrate the successes that have been achieved by projects and initiatives within their area and also from across Scotland, other parts of the UK and elsewhere, to provide examples of what can be achieved or could be aspired to.

The Strategic Empty Homes Framework will benefit from setting these out, as well as detailing future projects and initiatives which will have resource implications and require a partnership approach to delivery which can be outlined in the Action Plan.

Recommended Practice Principle: Local projects and initiatives

There are several opportunities for Empty Homes Officers to lead or assist on the development and implementation of projects and initiatives that will help bring empty homes back into use.

This guidance recommends that Empty Homes Officers work collaboratively with partners and stakeholders to identify priority projects and initiatives that will be most meaningful in their local authority and that will have greatest impact in bringing empty homes back into use.

9 Key Challenges and Barriers

Local authorities will be able to identify several key challenges and barriers through development of the evidence base, their existing knowledge and through use of case studies. The evidence base should also offer opportunities to showcase successful approaches to tackling empty homes. This insight and evidence should be clearly set out within the Strategic Empty Homes Framework.

Example challenges and barriers to bringing empty homes back into use are detailed in Chapter 9.

9.1 Challenges

Some of the challenges faced by local authorities as a result of empty homes include:

- understanding the scale and extent of empty homes across the authority
- ability to trace owners and owner engagement
- ensuring accessible, relevant and accurate information is available to homeowners who want to bring empty homes back into use
- tackling crime, vandalism, environmental and neighbourhood blight caused by empty homes
- safeguarding 'other' owner interests in relation to common repair works
- disrepair and below tolerable standard properties
- financing repairs and maintenance work to bring properties back into use
- addressing wider housing priorities such as housing supply, homelessness, specialist housing need, fuel poverty and climate change and house condition.

9.2 Barriers

Through consultation and engagement with Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, stakeholders have outlined some of the key barriers to developing and implementing a strategic approach to empty homes work, this includes:

- **EHO Capacity:** competing priorities for action and intervention alongside operational responsibilities
- **Resources:** Lack of/limited grant assistance and loan schemes to support investment in empty homes
- **Competing priorities:** Balancing operational workload issues with new projects, initiatives and, reporting requirements
- **Legal complexities:** Challenging cases where owners can't be traced or ownership is in dispute can be extremely time consuming
- **Sharing of information:** Data sharing agreements are not in place and/or there is lack of appetite to resolve data barriers

- **Resource intensive activities for limited outcomes:** Small number of empty homes brought back into use annually compared to costs/time involved in doing so
- **Wider understanding and appreciation of contribution empty homes makes to corporate and community objectives:** Lack of knowledge and understanding of how empty homes links to LHS and wider local authority plans and priorities
- **Lack of awareness of empty homes work and the opportunities for advice and assistance:** Empty homes agenda is not understood by partners, stakeholders and wider public with greater marketing and communication required

It is recommended that a partnership approach to identifying challenges and barriers is pursued as part of the development of a Strategic Empty Homes Framework. Each local authority will be able to set out the challenges and barriers specific to their area, the potential solutions and the partners required for success. This should be clearly communicated within the Strategic Empty Homes Framework.

Whilst this could be taken forward through existing groups such as LHS Steering Groups or continuous improvement groups, Empty Homes Officers may wish to consider, as part of the development of the Framework, setting up a group that will focus exclusively on tackling empty homes, including:

- reviewing the existing evidence base on empty homes
- identifying gaps and information sources
- consultation and engagement with partners and communities on local issues
- identifying priorities and outcomes
- developing and implementing an empty homes strategy Action Plan
- monitoring and evaluating the impact of empty homes activity on communities and shared priorities.

Empty Homes Officers who choose to set up a specific group will have to consider who will be required, what their role would be, how often the group would meet and the remit for the group. This is best agreed in partnership with those involved at the inception stage of the group. Examples of partners and stakeholders with an interest in empty homes work that could be key partners include:

- Housing Strategy Team
- Private Sector Team
- Property Services
- Community Planning Partners
- Anti-social Behaviour Team
- Environmental Services Team
- New Supply Team

Through internal and external consultation, local authorities can gather views on the challenges and barriers faced in each authority.

This can help inform and develop the Empty Homes action plan to deliver the overall aim and objectives. How Empty Homes Officers could achieve effective stakeholder consultation and engagement is set out in more detail in Chapter 10.

Recommended Practice Principle: Key Challenges and Barriers

Empty Homes Officers are recommended to take a partnership approach to identifying challenges and barriers in relation to empty homes work. This approach will enable meaningful discussions to take place with partners who can influence and shape solutions.

Creating a specific working group or ensuring empty homes becomes a standing item on already established groups will be beneficial to Empty Homes Officers in taking forward their agenda and getting buy in from partners and stakeholders to help identify solutions and deliver objectives and actions.

10 Strategic Empty Homes Framework Aim and Objectives

A local authority's overall priorities for housing will be set out within the Local Housing Strategy. Typically, Local Housing Strategy priorities include priorities such as increasing housing supply, improving housing choices, reducing homelessness, meeting particular housing needs, improving housing condition and delivering energy efficiency. All these priorities can be supported by bringing empty homes back into use. It is therefore important that the aim of the Strategic Empty Homes Framework supports these priorities.

Setting an overall aim and objectives for the Strategic Empty Homes Framework in consultation with partners and stakeholders is essential to enable participation and resourcing for delivery in the empty homes Action Plan.

An aim provides an overarching vision for empty homes. This should focus on what needs to be achieved in relation to empty homes and should reflect the level of ambition agreed with partners.

To achieve this aim, there are likely to be a number of priorities based on the main issues that require to be addressed at a local level. Strategy objectives should break down these priorities and specify exactly what needs to be done and by whom and when.

The Strategic Empty Homes Framework will require to clearly set out empty homes aims and objectives. Examples of both are provided below:

Example aims include:

'Work with partners and stakeholders to reduce the number of long-term empty homes by XX% each year'

'Work with partners to bring XX empty homes back into use over the next 5 years'

The aim should be reflective of local priorities, capacity to deliver and the partnerships available to ensure successful delivery.

Objectives can then be set which break down each aim offering more details on what will be done, by whom and when, and providing details of each planned achievement.

Example objectives:

'Develop, maintain and monitor robust empty homes information to improve understanding of scale of empty homes in XXX'

'Raise awareness of the empty homes agenda with internal and external partners and stakeholders to increase the number of empty homes brought back into use'

'Address serious and urgent disrepair and dereliction in empty homes through delivery of advice and assistance to homeowners'.

Scottish Government Local Housing Strategy Guidance 2019 provides a useful outline of SMART objectives and can be found here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-housing-strategy-guidance-2019/documents/>

In order to deliver the aims and objectives there should be a range of activities, projects and initiatives outlined within the Action Plan to enable partners to bring empty homes back into use. Within the Action Plan local authorities should explore the tools at their disposal, including engagement and enforcement activity that could enable empty homes being brought back into use.

Local authorities should also be mindful of Scottish Empty Homes Partnership aims and objectives when setting out a local Strategic Empty Homes Framework. These are:

‘To bring as many privately-owned empty homes back into use as possible by meeting five objectives:

1. **Encourage every council in Scotland to have a dedicated Empty Homes Officer.** We know that more homes are returned to use where owners access advice and information from an Empty Homes Officer who can offer tailored solutions to turn their house into a home again. We want to see a dedicated Empty Homes Officer or Empty Homes Service in every council in Scotland.
2. **Support the national network of Empty Homes Officers.** Empty Homes Officers give advice and information on a range of issues to owners and neighbours of empty homes. We support them with tailored training, workshops and facilitated best practice meetings ensuring that knowledge, expertise and case studies are shared in a supportive and friendly environment.
3. **Encourage registered social landlords, community groups and other private bodies to engage in empty homes work.** A single empty home can cause a nuisance to a community and clusters of empty homes can lead to a spiral of decline. We want to make sure that other organisations recognise the important role that turning empty properties into homes can make in helping them meet their wider aims.
4. **Encourage councils to mainstream empty homes work.** It doesn't make financial sense to allow properties to remain empty and deteriorate, or to ignore the contribution empty homes can make to meeting housing and other social needs. We want every local authority to see empty homes work as a key part of housing strategy, not a standalone optional activity.
5. **Deliver the Scottish Empty Homes Advice Service.** We know the difference that speaking to a dedicated empty homes professional can make to people who are struggling because of an empty home. Where councils don't have an Empty Homes Service or Empty Homes Officer, our Advice Service provides information and support to owners directly so that no one must deal with an empty home on their own.

Recommended Practice Principle: Aims and objectives

A good understanding of how to define and create aims and objectives will be beneficial for Empty Homes Officers. This is important as it will help those involved in developing the Strategic Empty Homes Framework define what needs to be done and how to get there. Aims and objectives help communicate clearly what the goals are and provide a focus that will motivate partners and stakeholders.

It is recommended this is done through consultation and engagement with key partners and stakeholders to ensure alignment of key priorities and expectations, as well as opportunities to work in collaboration.

11 Consultation and Engagement

11.1 Importance of Consultation and Engagement

Early engagement helps to ensure that residents, partners and stakeholders have a greater opportunity to have their say and influence the future of their communities, including bringing empty homes back into use.

As a result, a Strategic Empty Homes Framework should reflect local needs accurately as well as being able to demonstrate the influence that local people have had on the development of priorities and actions.

This may be achieved through consultation and engagement around the development of the Strategic Empty Homes Framework.

Best practice for public bodies for engagement with communities, is set out in the seven National Standards for Community Engagement. There may be opportunity to consider the use of 'Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement' (VOiCE) which has been developed and supported by the Scottish Government to implement the National Standards for Community Engagement. VOiCE is planning and recording software that assists individuals, organisations and partnerships to design and deliver effective community engagement processes.

While this may not be a model followed by all local authorities, it is recommended that a Strategic Empty Homes Framework should at least set out how, when and what engagement and consultation has taken place. The approaches taken could include:

- using a range of media to engage with as wide an audience as possible within local communities and with relevant representative groups including people with or who share protected characteristics
- ensuring the make-up of the local population is accurately reflected and considered in designing consultation and engagement programmes
- recognising that some people's views may not be readily heard by traditional engagement methods and providing opportunities tailored to the needs of hard-to-reach groups.

A Strategic Empty Homes Framework should detail which stakeholders have been consulted during its development and a link provided to appropriate consultation and engagement reports.

11.2 Consultation Relationships and Networks

A significant proportion of engagement activity is likely to take place through existing networks and working groups and be based on continuous dialogue and improvement. Engagement can also be further strengthened with collaboration between partners.

It is important for Empty Homes Officers to develop relationships with key stakeholder such as: the Housing Development/New Supply Team, Capital Programme Team, Housing Strategy Team, Private Sector Housing Team, Energy Team, Tenant Participation Team, Environmental Team and Corporate Services; as they all have a significant role to play in bringing empty homes back into use by working together. There is further scope to build relationships with Registered Social Landlords, private developers and private landlords in order to work in partnership to bring empty homes back into use.

11.3 Consultation and Engagement Opportunities

Empty Homes Officers may wish to consider a co-production approach to ensure an inclusive consultation process. Involving communities, partners and stakeholders at the beginning of the development process empowers those who are impacted by empty homes to have a voice in the process. This approach will allow the framework to be developed “with” and “by” communities rather than “for” them.

Consultation can take a range of forms, including the following approaches and channels:

- surveys (both online and telephone – can be targeted to specific groups or wider stakeholders)
- focus groups (both online and in person which can be targeted to specific groups or wider stakeholders)
- public forums
- targeted forums
- live Q&A sessions
- piggy backing onto existing consultation opportunities.

There may be opportunities to piggy-back onto existing consultation opportunities within each local authority. It is important to identify and contact colleagues responsible for housing related engagement to identify potential opportunities, including:

- Local Housing Strategy
- Tenant Participation Strategy
- Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan
- Private Sector Strategy
- Rent Review
- Tenant Newsletters
- Community Newsletters
- Local Plan
- Economic Development Plan
- Community Planning Groups
- Tenants and Residents Groups
- Community Council.

In developing each consultation channel, it is important to consider at the outset what needs to be achieved from the consultation opportunity, for example:

- gathering views
- seeking feedback
- understanding priorities
- partner and stakeholder perception of challenges
- informing action plan commitments.

Ensuring surveys, focus groups and public forums are developed with this in mind will provide clear outcomes to help inform and develop the evidence base to support the Strategic Empty Homes Framework.

Recommended Practice Principle: Consultation and Engagement

It is important to engage with internal and external partners and stakeholders at an early stage when developing any strategic plan. This helps to ensure good communication and opportunities to build relationships with key delivery partners and stakeholders. It also provides an opportunity for those who wish to participate in developing the Strategic Empty Homes Framework to share their views and experiences so that outcomes are coproduced and decision-making collaborative. It is therefore recommended that Empty Homes Officers build and integrate the following into any Strategic Empty Homes Framework under development:

- evidence of early engagement with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, including communities impacted
- evidence of who and how people, including harder to reach groups, were given the opportunity to become involved
- a summary explaining how the views of people/groups have helped to influence the development of priorities and actions.

11.4 Evidence of Consultation and Engagement

Providing a Consultation Report as an Appendix to the Strategic Empty Homes Framework will ensure partners and stakeholders views are visible, whilst offering an opportunity to demonstrate how these have influenced the development of the framework.

It is also important to ensure continued engagement opportunities are publicised and outcomes recorded. Creating an Empty Homes page on a local authority website is a good way to keep partners and stakeholders updated on engagement events and outcomes. These can then be used as supporting evidence in future Strategic Framework development or updates.

12 SMART Action Plan

The Action Plan template detailed below provides examples of actions that can be taken in relation to empty homes work and bringing empty homes back into use. It is provided as a guide to enable local authorities to develop ideas and options which reflect what they have already achieved but also what they still need to do. This includes local priorities for the period of the Strategic Empty Homes Framework.

Local authorities may wish to break the Action Plan down into their agreed themes or objectives. For the purpose of this example the objectives have been aligned with the example objectives set out in Chapter 12.

| Objective 1: Develop, maintain and monitor robust empty homes information | | | | |
|---|--|-----------|--|-----------|
| Action | Milestones | Timescale | Responsibility | Resources |
| 1.1 Develop robust empty homes data base | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify lead person responsible for developing, implementing and maintaining database Review/research required contents of Empty Homes Database Maintain accuracy of empty homes database Establish/review procedures to contact empty homeowners regularly to ensure information is up to date and contact maintained | Year 1 | EHO | EHO Post |
| 1.2 Develop reliable information gathering sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make use of internal and external resources to gather information on empty homes and wider housing stock Continue to develop relationships with internal and external information providers to improve information collected | Year 1 | EHO/Housing/Environment/Stakeholder Engagement | EHO Post |

| | | | | |
|--|--|---------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop/review Empty Homes webpage on Council Website • Carry out Empty Homes Survey | | | |
| 1.3 Monitor trends to identify challenges and progress solutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse data collected to identify trends/challenges and develop appropriate solutions • Work with partners to develop projects and initiatives | Ongoing | EHO/Housing Performance | EHO Post Performance Team |

| Objective 2: Raising awareness of the Empty Homes Agenda with internal and external partners and stakeholders | | | | |
|---|---|-----------|--|--------------------------------|
| Action | Milestones | Timescale | Responsibility | Resources |
| 2.1 Increase awareness of empty homes issues and activity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing awareness raising activities, identify gaps and create list of awareness raising opportunities to be taken forward • Develop and implement Empty Homes Steering Group • Develop and implement communications calendar for awareness raising opportunities • Improve use of local media and corporate communities to promote work in relation to empty homes • Improve/enable online reporting of empty homes • Improve information and advice resources available online • Develop/review materials, including leaflets, posters etc. • Ensure consultation and engagement with relevant partners and stakeholders | Ongoing | EHO Comms Team Housing Strategy Team | EHO Post IT |
| 2.2 Promote empty homes initiatives and projects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement Empty Homes Steering Groups • Develop/review complaints process in relation to empty homes • Develop/review support and information pack | Ongoing | EHO Comms Team Housing Strategy Team | EHO Post Project Funding |

| | | | | |
|---|--|---------|----------------------------------|-------------|
| 2.3 Improve reporting mechanisms for empty homes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop/review online reporting tool • Develop/review procedures for reporting empty homes | Year 1 | EHO Performance Team | EHO Post IT |
| 2.4 Improve engagement opportunities for empty homeowners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Empty Homeowner Forum • Host Empty Homes Q&A Sessions • Develop/review Empty Homes Webpage • Develop/review Empty Homeowner Survey • Develop/review Empty Homeowner Newsletter/Community Newsletter on Empty Homes | Year 1 | EHO Comms Team | EHO Post |
| 2.5 Improve collaborative understanding of empty homes across partners and stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop/review partnership and stakeholder arrangements to improve understanding and commitment to tackling empty homes • Develop and implement Empty Homes Steering Group | Ongoing | EHO Partners Stakeholders | EHO Post |

| Objective 3: Develop effective options and incentives to bring empty homes back into use | | | | |
|--|---|-----------|---|--|
| Action | Milestones | Timescale | Responsibility | Resources |
| 3.1 Ensure effective policies and procedures in place to tackle empty homes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop criteria and matrix for prioritising action to tackle empty homes • Consider feasibility of adopting empty homes action zone to tackle areas with concentrated issues or in areas of greatest housing need • Develop/review policies and procedures to tackle empty homes • Consider penalties and enforcement action available and review processes and appetite for implementation | Year 1 | EHO | EHO Post |
| 3.2 Provide a range of advice, assistance, and support to enable owners to bring empty homes back into use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop/review communications with empty homeowners (including standard letters) • Develop/review support and information pack • Develop and implement communication calendar for empty homes • Develop information guide on VAT Exemptions for Empty Homes • Develop information on current housing standards, planning and building regulations | Year 1 | EHO Private Sector Team Housing Teams | EHO Post Materials, marketing, graphics, comms |
| 3.3 Bring empty homes back into use to meet housing need | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider/Review Empty Home Loan Funds | Ongoing | EHO Housing Strategy Team | EHO Post |

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|-----------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider/review grant funding opportunities • Consider/review Empty Home Matchmaker Scheme • Consider/review Empty Home Acquisition Scheme • Provide advice and assistance to help owners rent out or sell empty homes for use • Develop/Review Private Sector Leasing Scheme • Develop/Review Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme • Work with RSLs to consider options for bringing empty homes into use • Learn from best practice and innovative projects and consider feasibility of adopting pilot project • Review how Affordable Housing Policy could contribute to bringing empty homes into use | | New Supply Team | |
|--|--|--|-----------------|--|

| Objective 4: Address disrepair and dereliction in empty homes | | | | |
|--|---|-----------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Action | Milestones | Timescale | Responsibility | Resources |
| 4.1 Ensure effective processes in place to identify and target empty properties in serious disrepair or derelict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement prioritisation matrix for action on empty homes Improve reporting mechanisms for empty homes (including online) Work closely with Planning and Building Standards to develop processes to target properties in serious disrepair | Year 1 | EHO | EHO Post |
| 4.2 Develop and implement or review Scheme of Assistance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop/review Scheme of Assistance in consultation with partners and stakeholders Explore best practice and opportunities for assisting owners with advice, assistance, practical and financial support | Year 1 | Private Sector Team | PSHG |
| 4.3 Improve enforcement action processes and procedures for bringing empty homes back into use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review investigation techniques and identify improved ways of working Review enforcement action processes and procedures to ensure appropriateness and value for money Identify the full range of enforcement action available and carry out cost benefit analysis of each option | Year 2 | EHO Environmental Legal | Legal fees CPO Costs |
| 4.4 Provide targeted advice and assistance to | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review existing advice and information | Year 1 | EHO | EHO Post |

| | | | | |
|---|---|--------|-----|--|
| homeowners whose property is in serious disrepair or derelict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree definitions for serious disrepair and derelict • Develop advice and assistance | | | Materials, marketing, graphics, comms |
| 4.5 Improve empty homeowner tracing and engagement activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing empty homeowner tracing and engagement activities • Identify best practice and value for money options through working with peers • Develop options for empty homeowner tracing and engagement activities | Year 2 | EHO | EHO Post Tracing Agents Engagement Activity |

Recommended Practice Principle: Action Plan

The Strategic Empty Homes Framework Action Plan should set out the actions required to achieve the overall aim and objectives. The Action Plan should clarify the resources required, timescales and responsibilities of all those involved in delivering the Action Plan.

It is advisory practice for Empty Homes Officers to work closely with partners to develop and implement the Action Plan to ensure a joined-up approach and shared ownership of the tasks ahead.

13 Resources

In developing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework, local authorities should consider the resources that will be required to deliver the Action Plan. The actions that can be delivered should be set out within the context of resources available.

13.1 Delivering the Strategic Empty Homes Framework

The Strategic Empty Homes Framework should set targets that respond to the impact of empty homes on communities and also the contribution that bringing empty homes back into use can have on housing need and demand.

It is useful for local authorities to set out spend and achievements over the past three years alongside proposals for the next year. The table below provides an example of how this information may be presented.

| Average 2018/19 – 2021/22 | | | |
|--|--------|-------|------------------------------------|
| Resource | Budget | Spend | No of Homes Assisted Back into Use |
| Direct Empty Homes staffing costs: Empty Homes Officer | | | |
| Private Sector Team | | | |
| Indirect Empty Homes staffing costs: Finance & Legal Staff | | | |
| Empty Homes Purchase Scheme (AHSP) | | | |
| Empty Homes Purchase Scheme (Council) | | | |
| Affordable Housing Policy | | | |
| Private Sector Housing Grants | | | |
| Scheme of Assistance | | | |
| HEEPS: ABS Programme | | | |
| LHEES Programme | | | |

Table 13.1: Average 3 Year Spend and Income

In developing a Strategic Empty Homes Framework, there needs to be recognition that local authorities are facing significant resource challenges arising from demographic changes, welfare reforms, the regeneration of town centres and communities, improving energy efficiency and

quality standards, as well as the pressures associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and current cost of living crisis.

Despite these significant financial challenges it will be helpful to clearly set out the income generated from empty homes activity, as well as investment.

Table 13.1 above provides an indication of some of the Grant Funding sources available to bring empty homes back into use. This list is not exhaustive and Empty Homes Officers should continue to review funding opportunities to identify new and innovative funding schemes as they arise.

Recommended Practice Principle: Resources

A clear understanding of resources and funding streams available to deliver the empty homes agenda will enable Empty Homes Officers to prioritise investment to tackle the challenges most important within their local authority.

It is recommended that the Strategic Empty Homes Framework clearly sets out the funding available alongside the funding required to meet local targets. This will enable Empty Homes Officers to identify any shortfalls in funding and consider options and opportunities to bridge the gap.

14 Evaluation and Monitoring

Robust evaluation and monitoring arrangements for a Strategic Empty Homes Framework should be established within local authorities. Arrangements could include annual reviews to evaluate progress made on milestones and targets within the timescales outlined in the Action Plan.

Progress should be monitored and reported to demonstrate improvement and achievement and to also highlight any actions which are challenging and may require further review. Chapter 14 provides example text for this element of a Strategic Empty Homes Framework. It would be beneficial to develop and implement a Steering Group with key partners to oversee this work. The Steering Group would be in place to provide advice and ensure achievement of objectives through delivery of the Action Plan.

14.1 Monitoring Methods

The Strategic Empty Homes Framework examines the incidence of empty homes in the local authority area. It proposes a range of initiatives to be developed and actions to be taken that will enable the Council to achieve its target of bringing <<INSERT NO>> of empty homes back into use.

In order to monitor progress and achievements the following monitoring arrangements will be adopted:

- establish a Strategic Empty Homes Framework Steering Group
- six monthly and annual updates of Action Plan
- review of actions not progressed or slow to commence.

14.2 Evaluation

It is important to ensure evaluation of the Strategic Empty Homes Framework is reported to relevant partners and stakeholders as well as internally within the local authority. This evaluation reporting could include:

- demonstrating progress against actions that contribute to the LHS, RRTP, Community Plan and Corporate Plan
- the wider partnership frameworks which are achieving shared or national objectives.

This regular programme of evaluation provides an opportunity to understand:

- progress that has been achieved
- current position
- improvements required

This approach will provide an assessment of the successes and challenges associated with tackling empty homes and provides a good approach to improvement and scrutiny.

Progress reports should be made available and be published on the Council's website with any supporting documents.

Recommended Practice Principle: Evaluation and Monitoring

Empty Homes Officers should evaluate and monitor progress of the Strategic Empty Homes Framework. It is beneficial to do this with partners involved in delivery of the Action Plan and to report progress to the Group overseeing implementation of the Framework.

Empty Homes Officers are likely to be responsible for the systematic and routine collection of monitoring and evaluation data.

It is recommended monitoring takes place on a recurring basis to enable progress and experiences to be documented and used as a basis to inform decision making and learning.

Evaluation should take place less frequently and over the lifespan of the Strategic Empty Homes Framework. It is recommended Empty Homes Officers enlist the assistance of the Steering Group to assess the overall success of the Framework. The evaluation can help inform conclusions and will enable Empty Homes Officers to understand the effectiveness and efficiency of delivering the Framework as well as the impact it has had.

STRATEGIC EMPTY HOMES FRAMEWORK

APPENDIX 1: USEFUL LINKS

Consultation and Engagement

Scottish Government: Good Consultation Guidance

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/foi-eir-release/2019/12/foi-201900009119/documents/foi-201900009119---information-released/foi-201900009119---information-released/govscot%3Adocument/FOI-201900009119%2B-%2BInformation%2BReleased.pdf>

National Standards for Community Engagement

<https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards>

VOiCE

<https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/voice>

National Context

Scottish Government 2009 Review of Private Rented Sector: Volume 4: Bringing Private Rented Sector houses into use

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2009/03/review-private-rented-sector-volume-4-bringing-private-sector-empty/documents/0079338-pdf/0079338-pdf/govscot%3Adocument>

National Outcomes

<https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes>

Local Housing Strategy Guidance 2019

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-housing-strategy-guidance-2019/>

Local Context

Community Planning

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/improving-public-services/community-planning/>

Evidence Base

Profiling Empty Homes

NRS Small Area Statistics on Households and Dwellings

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/households/household-estimates/small-area-statistics-on-households-and-dwellings>

Scottish House Condition Survey 2019 Local Authority Analysis

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-house-condition-survey-local-authority-analysis-2017-2019/>

Scottish Household Survey

<https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-household-survey/>

Affordable Housing Pressures

LHA Rates

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-housing-allowance-rates-2022-2023/>

Stock Figures & Lets per annum by Social Landlord

<https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/>

Homelessness Statistics

<https://www.gov.scot/collections/homelessness-statistics/>

Specialist Social Housing

<https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/>

Stock Condition

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-house-condition-survey-local-authority-analysis-2017-2019/>

Existing Knowledge

Scottish Empty Homes Partnership 'Why Empty Homes Matter'

<https://emptyhomespartnership.scot/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FINAL-Why-Empty-Homes-Matter-March-2022.pdf>