

ITEM No ...2.....

REPORT TO: NEIGHBOURHOOD REGENERATION, HOUSING & ESTATE MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE – 28 OCTOBER 2024

REPORT ON: EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

REPORT BY: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT NO: 282-2024

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks approval of the Council's Empty Homes Strategy for Dundee which sets out and consolidates the measures for bringing empty homes back into service.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Committee approves the contents of this report and remits the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services to continue with the work and efforts currently being exercised to bring empty homes back into service which provides the benefit of additional residential properties being made available.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no financial implications arising for the Council as a direct result of approving this report.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 A privately owned property that has been vacant for 6 months or more is classed as an empty home. In addition to the loss of housing, empty homes can also attract antisocial issues such as vandalism, fly tipping, graffiti and break-ins, and in turn, place an unnecessary burden on the resources of the local Council as well as the emergency services.
- 4.2 Dundee City Council employs 1 part-time (0.5FTE) Empty Homes Officer whose specific role is to identify properties that have been empty for over 6 months and which have the potential for being brought back into good quality housing which can provide much needed residential accommodation.
- 4.3 The Empty Homes Officer will liaise with colleagues in Finance to identify from Council Tax records which properties have been empty for more than six months and will thereafter contact the owners and can offer information, assistance and support for the purposes of bringing the properties back into residential housing.
- 4.4 There are a number of benefits to the community and the owners in bringing empty homes back into service and these include:
- The potential for providing a form of accommodation for someone in housing need.
 - The general condition of the property will not deteriorate as quickly if it is occupied.
 - Savings to the owner if they choose to rent or sell the property.
 - The outlook of a neighbourhood can improve and reflect on local house prices.
 - The local economic benefits attached, for example improved spending in local business.
- 4.5 In the periods where Dundee City Council has employed an Empty Homes Office, a total of 132 properties which have lain empty and have since been brought back into use and have provided valuable residential accommodation for the families now occupying them. In 2023, the Empty Homes Officer for Dundee City Council received the award of Empty Homes Rising Star in recognition of the efforts and success to-date from the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership ([Awards | Scottish Empty Homes Partnership](#)) .

- 4.6 The steps and approach which have been so-far taken with the empty homes initiative are set out on the Council's webpage. This information includes a note of General Guidance and contact details. The approach has now been consolidated and documented into a formal Strategy in-line with the Guidance provided by the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership.
- 4.7 In compiling this Strategy, a formal consultation exercise was carried out over a four-week period and the consultees included Shelter, Homes for Scotland, Scottish Empty Homes Partnership and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Also included in the consultations were a range of organisations that attended the recent Housing Event held by DCC Housing in Discovery Point on June 26th this year. The finalised version of the Strategy includes feedback from the consultation exercise.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report has been subject to the pre-IIA screening tool and does not make any recommendations for change to strategy, policy, procedures, services or funding and so has not been subject to an integrated impact assessment. An appropriate senior manager has reviewed and agreed with this assessment.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 6.1 The Council Leadership Team were consulted in the preparation of this report and agree with its content.
- 6.2 External consultees include Shelter, the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 None.

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Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

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30 September 2024



Dundee City Council
Private Sector Services Unit

Empty Homes Strategy



2024-2027

Working in partnership with the
Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

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1 Introduction

Dundee City Council is pleased to present this Empty Homes Strategy covering the period 2024 - 2027.

This document has been compiled in conjunction with the framework and template as provided and recommended for use by the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership.

This Strategy seeks to:

- set a clear target for further reducing the number of empty homes in Dundee over the next two years and thereafter in line with the future updates to this strategy.
- support homeowners in bringing empty homes back into use, increasing local housing stock options and meeting housing needs.
- enable housing regeneration, placemaking and neighbourhood improvement activity which improves community safety, environmental quality and housing standards.
- raise awareness of the issues of empty homes across the general community.

Within this Empty Homes Strategy, empty homes have been classified using the following definitions:

- **Long term empty properties.** These are dwellings that have been empty for 6 months or more and are liable for council tax
- **Unoccupied exemptions.** These are properties which are empty and exempt from paying council tax, for example, properties which are unfit for habitation.

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 can therefore pose the potential for significant financial loss.

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

This Empty Homes Strategy focuses on long-term empty properties (6 months or more), setting out the approaches that the Council will take to bring homes back into use. It should be noted however that unoccupied exemptions may include properties which may have sensitive circumstances, e.g. where the previous owner has died and/or properties that have been repossessed. The Strategic Empty Homes Framework also sets out the appropriate approaches for bringing these properties back to use.

This Empty Homes Strategy can therefore deliver significant economic and financial benefits to Dundee City Council, communities, local businesses, owners, landlords and residents by contributing to:

- enhancing housing supply to meet housing need.
- reducing homelessness by increasing housing options.
- reducing neighbourhood complaints and the avoidable deployment of public resources.
- reducing requirements for Police and Fire Services to attend empty homes.
- Providing a financial return for owners by 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 adjacent and nearby homes.

2 The Legislative and Policy Context for Empty Homes

There is a wide policy context for tackling empty homes in Scotland, which supports the delivery of empty homes activity and influences the contribution that empty homes can make to national, local and community objectives.

It is important that this Empty Homes Strategy supports and helps deliver national housing outcomes and targets, whilst also reflecting the local needs and priorities set out by community planning and housing market partnerships.

This Empty Homes Strategy is set within the wider Community Planning and Local Housing Strategy framework for the Council and its partners. The Strategy defines the contribution that empty homes can make to local strategic priorities and meeting the targets set out in Scotland's first national Housing Strategy: 'Housing to 2040'. The national and local strategic framework that supports and enables the delivery of the Strategic Empty Homes Framework is set out in more detail below.

2.1 Statutory Requirements

There are a number of statutory requirements placed on Dundee City Council, with those that relate directly or indirectly 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 for over a year. In Dundee, such properties may be liable for 200% council tax.
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2011 which places a duty on local authorities to develop a Local Housing Strategy (LHS) which sets out the local authority's and local partners' vision for the supply of housing across all tenures and types of housing provision.
- 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.
- Under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003, enforcement action can be taken by the local authority where a building has fallen into a dangerous condition.

This legislative framework not only places powers and duties on Local Authorities but offers advice and assistance which can reduce the number of empty homes.

National Policy Context for Empty Homes

The national policy context places the empty homes agenda within a framework of strategic ambitions around housing, place, community, net zero and the Scottish economy. Whilst there are currently no statutory requirements for local authorities regarding empty homes, the Scottish Government is 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.

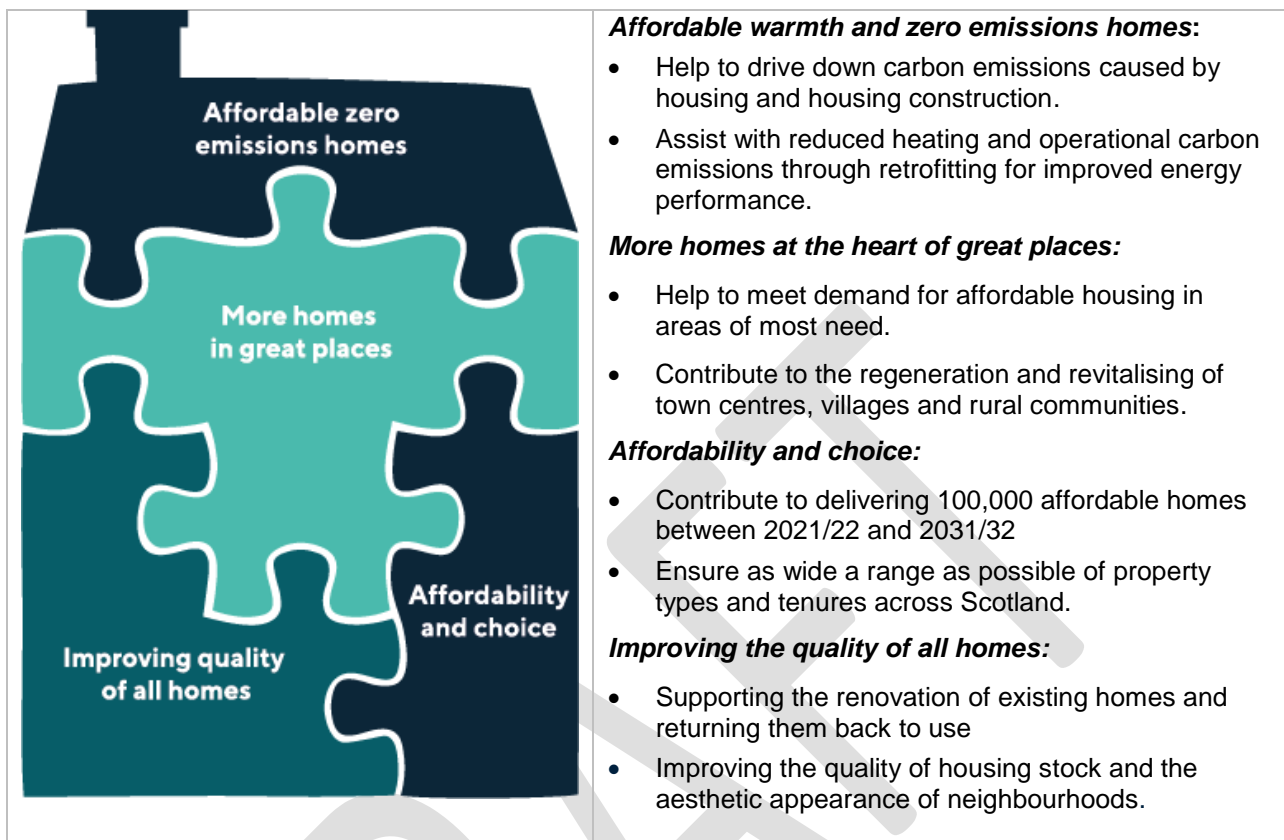
The National Outcomes listed below describe what the Scottish Government wants to achieve. By proactively tackling empty homes and bringing them back into use, the Council and partners can contribute to the delivery of these as show below.

National Outcome	Empty Homes Contribution
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
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
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
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.
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 the 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
Health: We are healthy and active	The well-being of people who live in the same street as an empty home can be adversely affected as the condition of the house deteriorates and it becomes the focus of anti-social behaviour. Bringing empty homes back to use can help people to rediscover a sense of place and remove the negative stresses and risks to physical health that people living next door to an empty home may face.

Table 3.1: Empty Homes impact on achieving National Outcomes

Empty homes have an important role to play in helping to deliver the right homes, in the right places for people across Scotland. The Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 strategy sets 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 set out in the Housing to 2040 strategy as follows:



Furthermore, the new National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)¹ Policy 9 'Quality Homes', encourages the delivery of homes across different tenures and by a range of providers. In doing so, it places 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 remodeling and rehabilitation of existing properties could be promoted through our Council's LHS and Local Development Plan.

2.2 The Local Policy Context for Empty Homes

Dundee City Council's LHS is at the heart of the arrangements for housing and planning through its links with the Local Development Plan and its strategic role in directing investment in housing and housing related services.

Our LHS sets out a strategic vision for the delivery of housing and housing services and the outcomes that partners are seeking to achieve to meet housing need. The LHS sets out the approach to increasing housing supply, meeting housing need and demand, preventing and alleviating homelessness, delivering specialist housing, improving private sector housing condition and energy efficiency, addressing fuel poverty and

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

delivering the housing contribution to meeting net zero targets. More specifically, the LHS defines tackling empty homes as a key area for action, partnership and investment.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (CE Act) introduced a requirement for all local Community Planning Partnerships (CPP) to prepare and publish a Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) which: sets out the local outcomes which the CPP will prioritise for improvement to reduce inequalities and add maximum value to each community, and; identifies smaller areas within the local authority area which experience the poorest outcomes, leading to Locality Plans to improve outcomes on agreed priorities for these communities being prepared and produced. In Dundee, the Local Outcome Improvement Plan is called the City Plan.

The vision for Dundee City Council's City Plan is that:

- Dundee will be a caring city which has tackled the root causes of poverty and delivered fairness in incomes, education and health.
- Dundee will have a strong, creative, smart and sustainable city economy with jobs and opportunities for all.
- Dundee will be a greener city, made up of strong communities where people feel empowered, safe and proud to live.

The City Plan includes the following strategic priorities:

- Dundee will be a more attractive place to live and work with excellent education provision, leisure facilities, transport links, good quality housing and employment opportunities
- Communities will have an enhanced sense of pride, identity and influence, resulting in improved quality of life and satisfaction with living in the area.
- Mental health of our citizens will improve through accessible community supports.
- All residents will have pride in Dundee and a sense of identity and belonging to the area.
- Dundee will have a stable population with reduced areas classified as in multiple deprivation.
- Sustainable transport will be more accessible, and it will be easier to get around Dundee.

3 Evidencing the Need to Tackle Empty Homes in Dundee City Council

This Strategic Empty Homes Framework has been informed by a clear understanding of the extent and nature of empty homes across Dundee City Council and their impact on neighbourhoods, communities, homeowners and local residents. To achieve this, an evidence base has been developed by the Council detailing the number and types of empty homes across the City, as well as important contextual information on tenure estimates, unmet housing need, the incidence of homelessness, the role of the private rented sector and housing condition and quality issues.

This evidence base provides us with a strong understanding of the scale of empty homes as well as the challenges faced in bringing them back into use. This analysis is crucial to informing our decisions on how partnerships, investment and innovation should guide empty homes activity and interventions. Our analysis of empty homes arising from this evidence, is detailed below:

3.1 Profiling Empty Homes

Table 3.1 details the scale of ineffective housing stock within the City and provides a helpful measure of the number of homes which are not in use and are not contributing to meeting housing need on a permanent basis.

Ineffective Housing Stock	Dundee City Council
Total Dwellings	75,839
Long-term Empty Dwellings	1,067
Dwellings with Unoccupied Exemptions	1,671

Table 3.1 shows that empty homes, both 'long-term empty dwellings' and 'dwellings with unoccupied exemptions', account for 3.6% of all dwellings in Dundee City Council

3.2 Long Term Empty Homes

Table 3.2, sets out how levels of long term empty and unoccupied dwellings within Dundee City Council compare with levels in Scotland as a whole.

Geography	% of dwellings long term empty (all)	% of dwellings long term empty (12 months+)	% of dwellings unoccupied exempt	% of Scottish Housing Stock	% of Scottish vacant housing stock
Dundee City Council	1.4% (1,067)	0.6% (485)	2.2% (1,671)	2.81%	2.31%
Scotland	1.7% (46,217)	1.05% (28,280)	1.75% * (47,293)		

*Total number of dwellings in Dundee 75,839. Total number of dwellings in Scotland 2,701,104.

While unoccupied exemptions include properties which are empty and unfurnished for less than 6 months, local authority dwellings awaiting demolition, and some other homes empty for less than six months; the term also covers privately owned properties that are empty due to the property being repossessed, the death of a previous owner, the owner being in long term care or detention, dwellings last occupied by charitable bodies, dwellings empty under statute and some other privately owned homes that have been empty for six months or longer.

If brought back to use, these properties may contribute towards delivery of national policy outcomes and LHS priorities. However, there is a high likelihood of them remaining empty without the intervention of our Empty Homes Officer.

3.3 Housing Need and Demand

Empty homes activity contributes to increasing housing supply to meet the demand for affordable and market housing in Dundee City Council. Bringing empty homes back to use can also support our council to; meet its statutory duty to the prevent homelessness wherever possible and to mitigate the impact of homelessness where it cannot be prevented; increase provision of specialist housing units across categories such as wheelchair, amenity and sheltered. Where the private rented sector plays a large part in market housing provision, long term empty homes may be of interest to private investors. Equally where supply has outstripped demand for privately rented properties, former rental properties may be of interest for buyback or acquisition schemes.

A comprehensive list of information is used to inform development of the Local Housing Strategy, the main input is the Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) which was published in November 2022. Key points from the HNDA are:

- Dundee has experienced minimal population growth at 2% between 2000-2019. In terms of population projections, the population in Dundee is projected to change by less than 1% across the period 2018-43.
- 2018 based population projections suggest that between 2018 and 2028, the population of Dundee City is projected to decrease from 148,750 to 148,350. This is a decrease of 0.3%, which compares to a projected increase of 1.8% for Scotland as a whole.
- Dundee is expected to have a 4% increase in the number of households between 2021 and 2043. 2018 based household projections suggest that Dundee's household numbers will increase slightly between 2018 and 2028 from 70,337 to 71,581.

- According to Scottish Government income estimates for 2018, the median income in Dundee in 2018 was £24,440. It is the lowest median income within the Tayside partner area.

Housing affordability levels is a concern across the country, with many more people stating they are experiencing serious financial difficulties. Housing solutions for lower income households need careful consideration as most options, even at entry level, can be unaffordable.

In 2020, 59 of the 188 (31%) of Dundee data zones were in the top 15% most deprived areas, this was an increase of 4 from the 55 data zones in 2016. There are only three local authorities who have a higher percentage of data zones in the 15% most deprived category (Glasgow, Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire).

Dundee City Council manages 12,635 houses including 1622 sheltered houses, of which 59 are adapted for wheelchair use. There are a total of 8918 houses managed by Housing Associations in the City giving a total social rented portfolio of 21,553 houses at 31st March 2024. As at 31st March 2024 there were 7,453 applicants on the housing register for Dundee City Council and it's Common Housing Register partners (Hillcrest, Caledonia, Abertay HA)

Preventing and Addressing Homelessness

Homeless presentations in the City have been fairly constant at around the 1400 level for the past decade.

There were 1430 new homeless applications made to Dundee City Council in 2022/2023. This was approximately a 3% increase from the previous year and a 2% increase from the baseline position. However, this needs to be considered in the wider context of increasing levels of homelessness throughout Scotland and unprecedented pressures on housing.

The proportion of households' not containing children is currently at 79% compared to 71% in 2017/2018. This appears to be a result of an increase in the number of applications from households without children and a decrease in the number of households with children rather than a large increase or decrease from one cohort.

Single males continue to be the most common household group and make up approximately half of all applications. The proportion of applications from single females has increased from 21% in 2017/2018 to 25% in 2022/2023. There has been a significant percent change in applications from both 16-17 year olds and applicants over 60 years of age.

As the vast majority of presentations from this group are due to being asked to leave or a relationship breakdown with parents, we have made some changes to this pathway for 2022/2023 in recognition of this increase to focus more on prevention and conflict resolution.

There were a total of 1472 cases closed during 2022/2023. For those where there was a duty to rehouse by Dundee City Council, 786 were rehoused into a Scottish Secure Tenancy and 52 in the private rented sector during 2022/2023. As a proportion of all outcomes 76% of applicants where an outcome was recorded secured settled accommodation.

Private Rented Sector

The Local Housing Allowance across Dundee (£571) averages at 30% less than the costs of market rents (£744) and as a result 6 in 10 households cannot afford to rent privately when applying a 25% income to rent ratio and 5 in 10 cannot afford to rent privately applying a 30% income rent ratio.

Private rent prices rose to an average of £800 in April 2024, an annual increase of 11.4% from £718 in April 2023. This was higher than the rise in Scotland (10.0%) over the year. According to Citylets, average private rents in Dundee have increased on average by 36.9% in the last three years to 2024 and rents average at £879 at quarter 1 of 2024

4 Local Action, Challenges & Barriers in Tackling Empty Homes

As well as evidencing the need to tackle empty homes in our Council, the Strategic Empty Homes Framework builds upon the activity and interventions which have succeeded in bringing empty homes back into use; as well as specific local challenges and barriers to tackling empty homes.

This Strategy therefore builds on successes that have been achieved by projects and initiatives within our Council, as well as innovation in empty homes activity across Scotland, other parts of the UK and elsewhere as the basis of piloting or programming future activity.

4.1 Empty Homes Projects and Initiatives in Dundee City Council.

Key Commitments:

Continue to provide tailored and targeted advice and assistance to empty home owners to bring properties back into use.

Continue partnership working with relevant services to identify and engage with empty home owners throughout Dundee (Private Sector Services Unit; Council Tax; Scottish Empty Homes Partnership).

Continue to promote the benefits of returning empty homes back into residential use to registered landlords.

Consider the introduction of new initiatives aimed at bringing empty properties back into use, including both residential and commercial space.

Consider the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders for empty residential properties where appropriate.

Consider the use of empty homes work in support of future regeneration projects. Increase the number of empty homes brought back into use using the Dundee Property Matchmaker Scheme – which aims to help prospective buyers and sellers of empty properties find each other more easily.

Develop and implement a pilot Private sector enhancement project in a selected area to comprehensively tackle housing and environmental conditions of social issues.

Other initiatives include providing:

- Guidance regarding VAT discounts.
- Assistance in securing merchants discounts.
- Assistance with requesting discretion from Council Tax surcharge
- Advice on renting and becoming a Private Registered Landlord
- Advice on selling through an estate agent.
- Advice on selling using alternative methods.

- **Property Matchmaker Service** which aims to connect prospective buyers and sellers of empty properties.

The Council currently operates an Open Market Acquisitions Programme which aims to purchase properties from the market to be utilised for Affordable Housing.

The Housing Service aim to identify suitable properties on the market for acquisition, to be brought up to appropriate lettings standards and let via the Common Housing Register at Affordable Rents capped by Local Housing Allowance levels.

The acquisitions programme may be able to purchase empty dwellings subject to investigation to determine value for money (purchase and on-going management costs), subject to funds being available. For more information and to discuss the Acquisitions Programme further, visit the housing website.

The Community Impact Initiative is a not-for-profit organisation which uses the renovation of empty homes to help people gain skills, achieve qualifications, connect with others in their community and move towards employment. After 8 years of delivering projects down in Wales, The Cii has received funding from the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership to start an empty homes regeneration project here in Dundee. The multi-year program will regenerate empty homes in Dundee to provide housing for people in need. The Cii will work with local community groups and DCC in order to learn about the community and local need.

Fraser & Fraser are a Genealogist and International probate research company. We have an agreement with Fraser & Fraser who offer a free search & location service for local authorities to help identify absent owners where no records can be found. They can assist with finding a deceased owners next of kin or legal representatives.

4.2 Challenges and Barriers to Tackling Empty Homes

There are a number of key challenges and barriers to tackling empty homes in our Authority which require to be proactively addressed by the development and delivery of this Strategic Empty Homes Framework.

These challenges have been identified through the development of the empty homes evidence base and by engaging with local partners and stakeholders involved in empty homes activity.

Some of the key local barriers to developing and implementing a strategic approach to empty homes 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. Consideration is to be given to the allocation of reinvesting funds from e.g. additional council tax income, into incentives for putting empty homes back in to service.
- **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.
- **Legal or financial constraints:** Reluctance or inability to use Compulsory Purchase Orders due to costs involved in purchase or legal resource not available to pursue cases.

- **Other legal or administrative processes:** Including de-crofting, establishing status of properties subject to repossession proceedings, or obtaining grants of confirmation where owners and next-generation heirs are deceased.
- **Access to data:** Data sharing agreements are not in place and/or there is lack of appetite to resolve data barriers and/or collection of data within council is insufficient to support a strategic approach to empty homes work.
- **Rigid application of empty homes council tax surcharge:** Limited or no discretion to delay imposition of empty homes surcharge where it may enable owner to complete work required to bring property up to habitable standard.
- **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 or bought into by partners, stakeholders and wider public with greater marketing and communication required to raise awareness and encourage engagement.
- **Shortage of tradespeople or materials:** Limited availability of building trade professionals or materials leading to delay in completing projects and increased average cost for building and renovation work.
- **Socio-economic factors:** Large number of systemic vacancies as a result of economic decline/depopulation/limited employment opportunities etc.

5 The Strategic Framework for Tackling Empty Homes in Dundee City Council

This Strategic Empty Homes Framework sets out how our Council and partners will work together initially over the next 2 years to proactively tackle the impact of empty homes on communities, neighbourhoods, homeowners and residents across our Council. Our aim reflects that of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership to 'bring as many privately-owned empty homes back into affordable housing as possible'.

The following specific objectives are used as a basis to achieve the overarching aim of reducing the number of empty homes:

- Support the Scottish Governments commitment to addressing empty homes and ensuring that homes are not left empty for significant periods of time without good reason.
- Provide support for key housing strategies.
- Offer home owners information and advice to help bring their properties back into use
- Increase the availability of housing supply to meet demand and provide housing for those in need.
- Improve amenity of neighbourhoods within Dundee.

6 Empty Homes Action Plan

The following Action Plan has been developed to enable the Council and partners to plan, deliver, monitor and evaluate the impact of empty homes activity. It sets a framework for partnership working and investment that reflects strategic objectives and creates a route map for delivering the aim of the Strategic Empty Homes Framework.

The Action Plan sets out a range of milestones detailing the activity associated with implementation, setting target timescales and details of the lead agency for implementation. The Action Plan, activities and targets will be reviewed annually to ensure partners are able to respond flexibly to changes in need across our Council.

Strategic Objective 1: Support the Scottish Governments commitment to addressing empty homes and ensuring that homes are not left empty for significant periods of time without good reason. A 5-year target of reducing the percentage of overall empty housing stock by 1.2% to 5%.

Strategic Objective 2: Provide support for key housing strategies. The Council's Local Housing Strategy which is due to be reissued in the Winter of 2024, sets out the measures which will be in place to meet this.

Strategic Objective 3: Targeting homeowners with information and advice to help bring their properties back into use. Where necessary, advise that empty homes may be liable for 200% council tax rates. The on-going remit of the Empty Homes Officer includes a 'live' workload of working with 10% of all empty homes owners, with a view to working towards the lowest number of empty homes possible.

Strategic Objective 4: Increase the availability of housing supply to meet demand and provide housing for those in need. To identify empty homes which are able to meet social housing needs (including particular needs) and bring them back into use using the Council's Open Market Purchases policy or by promoting them to housing association partners for inclusion in the Affordable Housing Investment Programme.

Strategic Objective 5: Improve amenity of neighbourhoods within Dundee. The Council's City Plan sets out a 10-year long-term plan designed to improve a wide range of neighbourhood amenities and is being measured via the associated strategy monitoring provisions.

7 Monitoring Progress and Evaluating Impact

The actions scheduled under each strategic objective will be regularly monitored against the supporting guidance and key Plans and documents.

Whilst there are limited resources allocated specifically to the Empty Homes initiatives, regular reviews take place with the Section Manager and Service Manager to monitor progress and review the data associated with the reduction in the number of empty homes.

7.1 Evaluation

Regular evaluation of progress will provide the Council and partners with an opportunity to understand:

- the progress that has been achieved
- current position
- delivery improvements required.

This approach will provide an assessment of the successes and challenges associated with tackling empty homes and provides a transparent approach to improvement planning and scrutiny. Progress reports will be made available and be published on the Council's website with any supporting documents. Progress will also be reported to Committee as part of the Neighbourhood Service Plan updates.

7.2 Successes To-Date

Between 2022 and 2024 70 empty homes have been successfully returned to service, 27 of which were vacant for more than 2 years and a further 6 are currently on the market.

In 2023, the Empty Homes Officer for Dundee City Council received the award of Empty Homes Rising Star in recognition of the efforts and success to-date with returning back in to useful and meaningful service.

7.3 Case Studies

Case Study 1 – A townhouse on Hill Street had lain empty since early 2014. The Empty Homes Officer made contact with the owner of the property in March 2023. The Empty Homes Officer provided advice and assistance to sell the property via the Empty Homes Initiatives Property Matchmaker Scheme and facilitated contact between the new owner and Building Standards. The property was returned into service in December 23 when it was let to a family.

Case Study 2 – A detached property on Dundee Road had lain empty since March 2020 and was purchased by the current owner in June 2021 with the intention to renovate prior to moving in. The Empty Homes Officer made contact with the owner of the property in July 2022. The Empty Homes Officer provided assistance with a discretion request for the council tax surcharge. Discretion was applied for a period of 5 months which freed up some finances which went towards the renovation costs. The property was returned into service in February 2024 when the owner moved in with his family.

Case Study 3 – A terraced house in Finella Gardens had lain empty since the owner passed away in June 2020. The Empty Homes Officer received a report in May 2023 from a concerned neighbour stating that the property was attracting vermin and anti-social behavior. As the owner had passed away the Empty Homes Officer used a finders service provided by Fraser & Fraser in order to find the heir. Once contact was made in July 2023 and the new owner was informed of the issues they decided to sell the property. The property was returned into service in December 2023 when the sale completed and the new owner moved in.

8 Consultation & Engagement

This version of our Council's Empty Homes Strategy has sought the views and input from our stakeholders, partners and groups/forums which are associated with housing, communities and related matters

A range of partners and groups with which we regularly liaise were invited to comment and provide feedback and a 4-week consultation period was allowed. Such bodies include the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, Shelter, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Scottish Association of Landlords. Specific feedback was requested on the following points:

- In addition to the actions and measures that are followed in liaising with owners of empty homes, what other steps or actions do you think may act as encouragement to return empty homes into service?
- In addition to the areas of empty housing outlined within this strategy, what other sources of property could be looked into for the purposes of providing domestic residential housing?
- What financial support could be considered for being made available to owners to assist with bringing empty homes up to standard for being returned into suitable residential housing?

8.1 Feedback from the Consultation

In general, this draft Empty Homes Strategy was welcomed by the consultees and viewed as a useful process and set of measures for progressing with the on-going work in returning empty homes into useful affordable housing. Feedback from the consultation exercise has been included into the finalised version.