

Report

Report to:	Housing and Technical Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	5 February 2020
Report by:	Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Empty Homes in South Lanarkshire
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of this report is to:-

- ◆ update committee on the empty homes profile within South Lanarkshire
- ◆ update committee on the Scottish Government's position on tackling the problem of empty homes nationally
- ◆ request approval to increase the staffing establishment by 1 FTE Strategy and Support Officer post

2. Recommendations

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the content of the report, be noted;
- (2) that a contractual arrangement be finalised with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP) to utilise kick-starter funding to support the recruitment of a Strategy and Policy Officer (Empty Homes) within Housing and Technical Resources;
- (3) that the proposal to add 1 FTE officer post at Grade 3, Level 2 to the establishment, as set out at section 6, be approved; and
- (4) that additional funding for the post and associated operational budget be provided from the revenues raised from the council tax empty homes surcharge.

3. Background

- 3.1. In a letter to all Scottish Local Authority Council Chief Executives on 20 September 2019, Kevin Stewart MSP, Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning confirmed the Scottish Government's commitment to planning for how our communities should look and feel in 2040. Included in this vision is to ensure every home is occupied and that no homes are left empty.
- 3.2. To contribute to achieving this vision, a network of Empty Homes Officers is continuing to expand across Scotland. These officers are predominately employed by local authorities, supported by the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP) who offer 'kick-starter' funding to local authorities to introduce this type of post.
- 3.3. SEHP exists to facilitate bringing private sector empty homes back into use. Discussions have taken place with them with a view to further developing partnership working with the Council to enhance existing services to help bring empty homes back into use.

- 3.4. During 2019, the Local Government and Communities Committee (LGCC) conducted an inquiry into the issue of empty homes in Scotland. This resulted in a report which highlighted South Lanarkshire Council as having limited provision of assistance to owners of empty homes.
- 3.5. The LGCC also scrutinised the use of discretionary powers available to local authorities to implement a surcharge of up to 100% on the council tax accounts of empty property owners. South Lanarkshire Council implemented these powers in April 2019. The LGCC's report into empty homes reiterates the Scottish Government's position that revenues from the surcharge should contribute to bringing empty homes back into use.
- 3.6. In light of the relative success achieved elsewhere by establishing a dedicated Empty Homes Officer post, it is now proposed to establish such a post for South Lanarkshire.

4. Profile of empty homes in South Lanarkshire

- 4.1. An extract of data in September 2019/2020 relative to unoccupied dwellings, and long term empty (LTE) properties revealed the extent of empty homes in South Lanarkshire.
- 4.2. As of September 2019, there were 1,118 privately owned properties and 72 South Lanarkshire Council properties registered as long term empty (LTE) and 54% of these owners were paying a 100% levy on their council tax.

Table 1. Breakdown of empty property figures by Housing Market Area

Housing Market Area	LTE's	Proportion of Total Housing Stock (%)
Clydesdale	475	0.8
East Kilbride	285	0.8
Hamilton and Bothwell	216	0.7
Cambuslang and Rutherglen	214	0.7
Total	1,190	0.8

- 4.3. LTE homes currently make up 0.8% of the total housing stock in South Lanarkshire which is lower than the national average of 1.5%. The breakdown of empty properties in each housing market area is provided in Table 1.
- #### **5. Role of the Strategy and Policy Officer (Empty Homes)**
- 5.1. The SEHP have agreed that they will contribute financial assistance (50% funding for the first 2 years) for the employment of a Strategy and Policy Officer (Empty Homes).
 - 5.2. This position would be incorporated into the existing structure of the Strategy and Support section and contribute to the strategic objectives for empty homes as highlighted in the LHS and the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP).
 - 5.3. The dedicated officer will also provide a range of services, advice and assistance tailored to the individual needs of each owner who engages with the service and requires an operational budget of £0.020 million per annum.

- 5.4. The revenue generated by the empty home council tax surcharge is currently allocated to the General Service Fund, however, as noted at paragraph 3.6, there is a clear expectation and need for a proportionate contribution from the extra income to support the action on empty homes and be used to assist empty home owners to bring their properties back into use.
- 5.5. The role will also include co-ordinating a cross-Resource working group with representation from other Council services such as council tax, environmental health, anti-social behaviour, legal and landlord registration.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. The next steps are:-

- ◆ subject to Committee approval, the contractual agreement with SEHP for the allocation of 'kick-starter' funding of £51,438 over 2 years for a dedicated Strategy and Policy Officer (Empty Homes) will be finalised
- ◆ the contribution requested from revenues raised through the council tax surcharge will be allocated to the establishment of the dedicated post and further development of the service
- ◆ subject to approval, the recruitment process for a Strategy and Policy Officer (Empty Homes) will commence in February 2020

- 6.2. The impact which is made will be subject to ongoing monitoring and will be reported to Committee as part of the Annual LHS review process.

7. Employee Implications

- 7.1. Employee implications include the recruitment of 1 FTE officer at Grade 3, Level 2. Further information is provided at 8.1.
- 7.2. This post has been graded using the Council's job evaluation scheme and is provided in Table 2.

Table 2 – Annual costs for Strategy and Policy Officer (Empty Homes)

Post Title	No of Posts (FTE)	Grade SCP	Hourly Rate	Annual Salary	Total costs/Officer (including on costs)	Total cost
Strategy and Policy Officer (Empty Homes)	1.0	Grade 3, Level 2-4 SCP 74	£21.25	£38,675	£51,438	£51,438

8. Financial implications

- 8.1. The ongoing cost of the additional post will be £0.051 million recurring, and will require £0.020m for an ongoing annual operational budget. Funding of £0.052 million, will be provided by SEHP, over the next two years to assist with the initial implementation of this service, with the balance met from revenue collected from the levy on empty homes, as noted in 5.3.
- 8.2. The monitoring and reporting arrangements which will be put in place will include a financial assessment of the impact of the revised approach to service.

9. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 9.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy which impacts on the natural environment, climate change or sustainability.
- 9.2. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no strategic environmental assessment is required.

10. Other implications

- 10.1. Establishment of the post will enable the Council to further develop services which will align with the national network and will improve the support the council currently provides to help bring empty homes back into use.
- 10.2. The content of this report will contribute to the evidence to support the requirements of the Annual Assurance Statements.

11. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 11.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no impact assessment is required.
- 11.2. Consultation has taken place with Finance and Corporate Resources on the proposed details within this report.
- 11.3. Consultation continues with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership.

Daniel Lowe

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18 December 2019

Links to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

- ◆ Focused on people and their needs
- ◆ Accountable, effective, efficient and transparent
- ◆ Achieve results through leadership, good governance and organisational effectiveness
- ◆ Make communities safer, stronger and sustainable
- ◆ Improve the availability, quality and access of housing
- ◆ Work with communities and partners to promote high quality, thriving and sustainable communities

Previous References

- ◆ None

List of Background Papers

- ◆ South Lanarkshire Local Housing Strategy 2017-2022
- ◆ Scottish Empty Homes Partnership Survey Response 2019/20
- ◆ Letter from Kevin Stewart MSP, Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning
- ◆ Transcript of evidence from the Local Government and Communities Committee 5 June 2019
- ◆ Letter from the Scottish Government's Local Government and Communities division

Contact for Further Information

If you would like further information, please contact:-

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