

West Dunbartonshire Council

Department of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services

Remedial Plan

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WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL
Housing Regeneration and Environmental Services

Housing Services Remedial Plan

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Minister for Communities has agreed to the Council voluntarily providing Communities Scotland with a remedial plan based on the requirements of Section 74 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
- 1.2 This remedial plan is required to ensure that the Council has a clear strategy in response to housing demand and supply. The strategy will inform the development of a plan to substantially reduce the level of empty houses owned by West Dunbartonshire Council.

2. Vision

- 2.1 As part of the Council's wider regeneration strategy, the Council's vision is to provide high quality affordable housing and services which meet the needs of the community.
- 2.2 This vision will be implemented within a strategic framework which recognises the social and economic benefits of keeping empty homes at the lowest possible level.

3. Objectives

- 3.1 The Council's objectives are to:
- develop a clear strategy which addresses housing demand and supply issues within West Dunbartonshire
 - provide evidence of a strategic and coherent plan to reduce empty houses, and evidence its effectiveness, which will be presented at the full inspection of the housing service by Communities Scotland in 2008/09
 - prepare an Asset Management Plan for its own housing stock
 - implement an effective short and long term plan to ensure that its empty homes are reduced and kept to a level consistent with best practice

4. Achieving the Objectives

- 4.1 The Council will address the issues raised in the Director of Regulation and Inspection's letter of 18 December 2006 to West Dunbartonshire Council's Chief Executive (appendix 1) as follows:

- commission a Housing Needs and Supply Study (HNSS) to provide a robust analysis of housing demand and supply
- commission an analysis of current processes relating to empty homes. This will include recommendations to improve performance in the management of empty homes
- commission the production of an Asset Management Plan which will include plans for meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard
- establish a clear strategy based on the HNSS and associated work
- establish an action plan incorporating long term sustainable targets and short term early action
- establish an associated plan including a risk analysis for related services which affect demand and the sustainability of tenancies
- establish a financial plan which will set out resource gains from the strategic action plan on empty homes and be aligned to operational management targets
- use the strategy as a basis for improving service delivery
- ensure that the strategy is part of the Corporate Plan
- provide evidence of a performance management framework linked to the corporate priority and operational management targets
- establish a monitoring framework
- establish clear links between the strategy and the Local Housing Strategy, Standard Delivery Plan and any future application to join the Community Ownership Programme
- ensure that actions within this framework are in line with the Council's Best Value Improvement Plan

4.2 The Council will also:

- inform and be informed by the West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership's Regeneration Outcome Agreement and other related strategies
- build on its 15% stock condition survey of 2005 with a further survey in 2007/08
- consult the West Dunbartonshire Strategic Housing Forum on the findings of the HNSS

5. Work Programme

5.1 An action plan to progress the commitments shown at "Objectives" above is shown at appendix 2.

5.2 There are 3 phases shown in this plan (indicative dates only):

- Information gathering: April-November 2007
- Strategic Plan Preparation & Approvals: Dec 2007 - April 2008
- Implementation of proposals: from April 2008

5.3 It is anticipated that there will be overlaps within these phases and it the Council's intention to progress specific actions as they arise, where this is likely to produce an "early win".

6. Ensuring Delivery

6.1 Overall structure

A Member/ Officer Working Group was established by the Council to facilitate the preparation of the remedial plan. Members of this working group were:

- Six Elected Members
- Chief Executive
- Acting Director of Housing Regeneration and Environmental Services (Housing and Regeneration)
- Head of Housing and Property Services
- Managers of Operations and Strategy

The remit of this working group concluded on the submission of the remedial plan to Communities Scotland, and in view of the Local Government elections in May 2007 it will be necessary to review the role of Elected Members after the new council is in place.

6.2 Staff

The Acting Director of Housing Regeneration and Environmental Services (Housing and Regeneration) is the lead officer for the preparation and implementation of the remedial plan and the Manager of Strategy will co-ordinate its implementation. The Head of Housing and Property Services and Manager of Operations will also have key roles in this process.

6.3 Finance

£220,000 has been committed in the 2007/08 HRA capital programme to carry out further house condition surveys, to undertake a housing needs analysis, a study on performance relating to empty houses, and the production of an asset management plan. The strategic plan and action plan when completed in early 2008, will inform the HRA revenue and capital estimates for 2008/09.

7. Risk Assessment

7.1 The Council requested that a remedial plan be submitted to Communities Scotland on a voluntary basis, and this has been accepted by the Minister for Communities. There is no risk associated with not complying with the requirements of Section 74 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

- 7.2 If the remedial plan is not approved by Communities Scotland there is a risk that they will consider statutory intervention. This is considered to be a low risk since there has been external guidance and consultation with Communities Scotland during this process, and since the content of this plan reflects the Council's desire to address the issues of concern raised by Communities Scotland.
- 7.3 While a considerable amount of work will be undertaken to achieve the objectives identified in section 4 of this plan, consultants will be commissioned to undertake the key elements. This approach will ensure that other related housing services will not be diluted, therefore it is considered that there is a low risk of this work having a negative impact on these services.

8. Tenant and Resident Consultation

- 8.1 The Council has consulted tenant and resident associations in the preparation of this plan. A general view was that there was a need to consider voids at an estate level in the context of the negative impact created for prospective tenants by the general condition of areas. Specific issues raised related to :

- methods of securing void properties
- condition of gardens
- removal of household furniture and effects
- void house re-let standards
- cleanliness of void houses
- enforcement of tenancy conditions
- house allocation policies
- tackling anti social behaviour
- the impact of sold property on the activities of housing services

As indicated at 5.1 above, the Council is commissioning consultants to review void house processes. The brief for the consultants will include the requirement to consider the issues specific to void houses raised by tenant and residents and in addition consultants will be required to obtain the views of prospective and current tenants on these issues.

The Council's housing allocation policy is under review and the consultation period for this review will be taking place in April 2007 and therefore will inform both the review and the strategic plan.

The Council has been pro-active in obtaining the views of residents on Community Wardens and anti social behaviour issues with survey results reported to the appropriate Council Committees in recent months. In addition, Blake Stevenson consultants have been undertaking an evaluation of the Council's Community Warden Scheme and a report will be submitted to the appropriate Committee of Council after the Local government election in May 2007. This data will also inform the strategic plan.

Tenants and residents will be consulted on the Strategic Action Plan.

9. Monitoring Framework

9.1 Communities Scotland

The remedial plan will last for approximately 12-18 months starting from April 2007.

Communities Scotland will monitor the remedial plan quarterly for the periods:

- May-July 2007
- August-October 2007
- November-January 2008
- February-March 2008
- May-July 2008
- August-October 2008

Communities Scotland will also review progress against all recommendation at the end of the first year and at the end of the period, followed by a full inspection of the housing service in 2008/09.

9.2 Elected Members

Due to the local government elections in May 2007 it will not be possible to report on Elected Member involvement in monitoring progress until after that date.

9.3 Departmental

A departmental working group chaired by Acting Director of Housing Regeneration and Environmental Services comprising senior officers of the department will meet 6 weekly to review progress of the plan and the ensuing actions.

10. Summary

- 10.1 The Minister for Communities has agreed to West Dunbartonshire Council submitting on a voluntary basis a remedial plan for its housing management function. The Council has demonstrated within this document its commitment to addressing the issues raised, and how it will respond to the specific requirements presented by Communities Scotland.

Remedial Plan: Project Plan

Appendix 1

	Communities Scotland Requirements	Comments	Work	Timescale	Resources
1	Prepare Remedial Plan	A remedial plan will be prepared on either a voluntary basis or under section 74 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. A review of the plan by external advisors will be sought.	Prepare draft plan	by 09/03/07	In-house
			Prepare final plan	by 30/03/07	In-house
			External review of plan	by 13/04/07	Critical friend
2	Consult with Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) and other service users before submission of remedial plan	Show evidence of service users views throughout the plan. Consultation will be undertaken including a meeting with RTOs	Arrange consultation meeting	08/03/2007	In-house
			Consultation feedback closing date	by 22/03/07	
			Report to Communities Scotland on tenant input to Remedial Plan by Remedial Plan submission date	by 30/04/07	In-house
			Advise Communities Scotland by Remedial Plan submission date	by 30/04/07	In-house

	Communities Scotland Requirements	Comments	Work	Timescale	Resources	
3	<p>Undertake a robust analysis of housing demand and supply to establish a clear strategy and action plan</p> <p>Analyse the reasons for low demand to determine how this impacts on empty houses and determine how this relates to the COP and EAF application</p>	It will be necessary to commission a Housing Needs and Supply study (Includes survey of multi storey flat tenants)	Prepare brief	by 20/02/07	In-house	
		The brief will be agreed with Communities Scotland to ensure any new guidance or anticipated guidance is in the brief.	Brief to be agreed with Communities Scotland	by 10/04/07	In-house & Communities Scotland	
		This work will also inform a new Local Housing Strategy which will be required in 2009, and any future application to join the Community Ownership Programme.	Invite tenders from agreed consultants list	by 13/04/07	In-house	
			Tender return	by 04/05/07	consultants	
			Tender evaluation and interviews	by 22/05/07	In-house	
			Tendering Committee	tbc	In-house	
			Award contract	by 08/06/07	In-house	
			Completion of report	by 05/10/07	consultants	
			The Council will also submit a Local Housing Strategy Update in 2007 in accordance with Communities Scotland Guidance. A date for submission to Communities Scotland is awaited but a return date of 2 July 2007 is assumed at this time.	Draft Update	by 01/06/07	In-house
		consultation		by 22/06/07	In-house	
		To Communities Scotland		by 29/06/07	In-house	

	Communities Scotland Requirements	Comments	Work	Timescale	Resources
4	Address current performance on the management of empty houses to achieve more early wins given the impact on many current areas and communities	It will be necessary to commission a study to assess the current void house and allocation process against best practice. In addition the brief will seek recommendations on improving performance in the short, medium and long term. It is expected that this study will help to achieve more early wins.	Create project team	by 26/02/07	In-house
			Prepare brief	by 09/03/07	In-house
			Invite tenders	by 23/03/07	In-house
			Tender returns	by 20/04/07	consultant
			Evaluation & interviews	by 04/05/07	In-house
			Award contract	by 11/05/07	In-house
			Completion of report	03/08/07	Consultant
			Assess requirement for pilot study	by 24/08/07	In-house
5	Prepare an asset management plan for all council stock Asset management plan to include plans for meeting SHQS	It will be necessary to Commission the production of an asset management plan for the council stock in consultation with the corporate Asset Management Strategy Group and in accordance with best practice.	Corporate Asset Management Group meeting	05/03/07	In-house
			Establish project team	by 19/03/07	In-house
			Prepare brief	by 02/04/07	In-house
			Invite tender	by 13/04/07	In-house
			Tender returns	by 04/05/07	consultants
			Evaluation & interviews	by 18/05/07	In-house
			Award contract	by 01/06/07	In-house
			Completion of report	by 03/08/07	Consultants

	Communities Scotland Requirements	Comments	Work	Timescale	Resources
6	<p>Prepare a clear strategy relating to supply and demand analysis and action plan with timescales.</p> <p>To improve the quality of life for existing residents planning should: -incorporate long term sustainable targets -short term early action -identify other services and include in plan</p> <p>Use strategy as basis for improvement to service delivery</p>	<p>The strategy will be prepared following completion of the studies commissioned at points 3, 4, and 5 above.</p> <p>A consultation period has been built into the plan for this work.</p> <p>In addition to Registered Tenant Organisations, members of the Strategic Housing Forum (SHF) will be invited to comment.</p> <p>The action plan will be developed in tandem with the production of the Strategy and will be part of the strategic document.</p>	<p>Complete draft</p> <p>External review</p> <p>Communities Scotland invited to comment</p> <p>Consult tenants & stakeholders including SHF</p> <p>Prepare final plan</p> <p>Seek Communities Scotland's endorsement of final plan</p> <p>Obtain Committee/Council approval</p> <p>Implement</p>	<p>by 25/01/08</p> <p>by 08/02/08</p> <p>by 08/02/08</p> <p>by 08/02/08</p> <p>by 22/02/08</p> <p>by 07/03/08</p> <p>tbc 2008</p> <p>tbc 2008</p>	<p>In-house</p> <p>Critical friend(s) to be agreed</p> <p>Communities Scotland</p> <p>In-house</p> <p>In-house</p> <p>Communities Scotland</p> <p>In-house</p> <p>In-house</p>

	Communities Scotland Requirements	Comments	Work	Timescale	Resources
7	Prepare an associated plan for related services which affect demand and sustainability of tenancies. Include a risk analysis of other services to demonstrate a firm commitment that their performance will not deteriorate	This will relate to the studies commissioned and the development of the strategy and will form part of the strategy and action plan document	Review current related services in terms of the strategy	As section 6 above	In-house
			Assess impact of commissioned research, strategic path, and input to action plan including risk assessment	As section 6 above	In-house
8	Prepare a financial plan setting out the resource gains from the strategic action plan on empty homes and aligned with operational management targets	This will relate to the studies commissioned and the development of the strategy and will form part of the strategy and action plan document	Identify resource gains and prepare plan in line with the strategic plan	As section 6 above	In-house
9	The Strategy should become an important priority for the Corporate Plan	The key issues and actions determined by the strategy will inform the Corporate and Departmental service plan	Identify key actions and KPIs	by 07/03/08	In-house
			Include in 2008/09 Corporate Plan	tbc	In-house
10	Evidence of a performance management framework linked to: -the corporate priority -the operational management targets	This will be linked with the Corporate Best Value Improvement Plan	Include in action plan	As section 6 above	In-house
11	Use strategy as basis for COP application	The Council agreed at its meeting of 17/01/07 that a report to a future meeting be made on options and recommendations with respect to a further application to join the Community Ownership Programme. The strategy will inform this process	Report to Council on Community Ownership Programme	tbc in 2008	In-house

	Communities Scotland Requirements	Comments	Work	Timescale	Resources
12	Look at any proposed retained stock and how low demand will be addressed in potentially a new context	The strategy will identify options for addressing low demand, including the risks associated with not gaining entry to the Community Ownership Programme.	Include in Strategy	As section 6 above	In-house
		This will be included in the report to Council planned for 2008	Report to Council on Community Ownership Programme	tbc in 2008	In-house
13	Identify Clear links with: -Local Housing Strategy -Standard Delivery Plan -Community Ownership Programme and Early Action Fund -Regeneration Outcome Agreement	The Strategy will be informed and inform the key plans of the Council and its Partners	review plans and identify issues within strategy	As section 6 above	In-house
			Inform updates and revisions of these plans	subject to timetables for these plans	In-house

	REPORTING AND MONITORING	Comments	Work	Timescale	Resources
14	Monitoring framework	Include in action plan	Prepare framework	As section 6 above	In-house
15	Report to Council 17 January 2007	Completed			
16	Comments to Communities Scotland by 30 January 2007	Completed			
17	Communities Scotland to consider comments and Scottish Ministers to decide on final notice by 27 February 2007	The Council has requested that a voluntary process for remedial plan be agreed	nil	Agreed by Communities Minister	
18	The Council decided that a Member Officer Working Group be established to facilitate the preparation of the Remedial Plan and that the Council nominate six members to sit on the Working Group	Elected members nominated to the Working Group and first meeting arranged	Consider draft progress report for 28/02/07 Council Meeting	21/02/07	
			Consider final plan	11/04/08	
19	Report to council		Remedial plan progress report	28/02/07	
			Final plan	25/04/07	
20	submit plan to Communities Scotland			by 30/04/07	
21	Communities Scotland to agree plan or amend			tbc	

	Communities Scotland Requirements	Comments	Work	Timescale	Resources
22	Quarterly reports against objectives to be submitted to Communities Scotland in first year (12-18 month plan)		May-July 2007	by 07/08/07	
Aug-Oct 2007			by 07/11/07		
Nov-Jan 2008			by 07/02/08		
Feb-April 2008			by 07/05/08		
May-July 2008 (tbc)			by 07/08/08		
Aug-Oct 2008 (tbc)			by 07/11/08		
23	Short review at the end of first year by Communities Scotland		Year end April 2008	May 2008	
24	Inspection of Housing Service in 2008/09 by Communities Scotland			tbc	

