

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Officer – Supply, Distribution & Property
Chief Officer - Housing and Communities****Housing and Communities Committee
23 August 2023**

Subject: Progress to re-let empty council house properties**1 Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with an update on progress to improve on the approach to re-let of empty council house properties.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Committee note the contents of the report and progress to date.

3 Background

- 3.1 Members are aware of the service challenges faced by housing and building services teams during and following the covid pandemic, where significant types and levels of work could not be undertaken. In relation to empty houses (also known as voids) this resulted in a significant backlog of work and exceptionally high numbers of properties requiring to be refurbished, repaired and re-let.
- 3.2 Following a review of the re-let process from end to end, an improvement plan is in place with various actions across housing and building services.

4 Main Issues

- 4.1 It is a key priority of Housing and Building Services to ensure the numbers of empty properties are minimised given the significant impact on the housing options for tenants and families, notwithstanding the potential loss of income.
- 4.2 As reported to members previously, the total number of empty properties in August 2022 was approximately 380 and this number reached a peak of 425 in November. This included those empty properties which require significant major works. This is in comparison to the pre-covid numbers which were below 150 at any given time.
- 4.3 As well as the ongoing actions contained within the over empty properties improvement plan referred to in paragraph 3.2, it was very clear that the rising numbers of empty properties was a significant concern. This became a significant priority which in turn required a focused plan to urgently address this and reduce the numbers. As a result, to support this, the following key actions were agreed and undertaken:
- the development of a visual dashboard lead by the integrated housing management system (IHMS) team with live management data and a weekly report available to chief officer(s);
 - a joined up approach to information sharing using a single source of data management from IHMS between housing and building services teams and weekly meetings to review progress, identify issues and take immediate action;

- the re-allocation of resources within building services to ensure maximum capacity and input into this priority;
- the revised categorisation of empty properties to allow understanding of scale and complexity of work and in turn allocation of resources;
- weekly meetings with Chief Officer and BS management team to review and scrutinise progress;
- the appointment and management of back up contractors as required to support capacity.
- the engagement of contractor “Help to move” to provide additional support in tackling the (national) issue of utilities supplies.

4.4 During the period from August 2022 until July 2023, at total of 762 empty properties were received and referred to Building Services for repair. The current position as at 7 August is as follows:

• Operational properties with building services (including 17 extensive works)	136
• Ready to let with housing services	40
• Major works empty properties	51

4.5 Although positive progress has been made in reducing the overall number of empty properties, the challenges remain and there is much work still to be done to ensure a return to a sustained pre-covid position. Progress will continue to be tracked, monitored and reported through the Housing and Building Services management teams and to committee members through service delivery plans / performance plans.

5 People Implications

5.1 There are no people implications with this report.

6 Financial & Procurement Implications

6.1 There are no procurement implications with this report.

6.2 While there are no financial implications with this update report for noting, the overall costs have increased due to the number of empty properties requiring to be refurbished. However, it is anticipated that there will be a reduction in costs in line with continuous positive progress and elimination of the backlog. This will be monitored and reported within the budgetary control report to committee members.

7 Risk Analysis

7.1 There are no risks with this update report for noting, however in relation to the improvement plan, actions must continue to be monitored and managed, otherwise there is a risk that the numbers of empty properties will not reduce sufficiently and timeously and costs will continue to rise.

8 Equalities Impact Assessment

8.1 An equalities impact assessment is not required with this report.

9. Consultation

9.1 Consultation has taken place with appropriate services.

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1 The timeous re-let of empty properties is a significant priority and supports the successful delivery of the strategic priorities and objectives of the Council.

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Date: 7 August 2023

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Appendices: N/A

Background Papers: N/A

Wards Affected: All