

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Acting Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development (Housing & Regeneration Services)

Housing, Environment & Economic Development Committee: 9 January 2008

Subject: Evaluation of Performance on the Management of Empty Homes

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report presents the results of the recent external evaluation of the Council's performance in the management of empty homes, and proposes an action plan to address the findings of the report.

2. Background

- 2.1** The Remedial Plan for Housing Management Services was agreed by Council at the meeting held on 25 April 2007. As part of the Remedial Plan, a study was commissioned to evaluate performance on the management of empty homes.
- 2.2** Following a tendering exercise, this work was awarded to Heriot-Watt University and the Housing Quality Network.
- 2.3** In carrying out the evaluation, the team from Heriot-Watt University and the Housing Quality Network analysed published and unpublished statistical data, reviewed procedure documents, carried out on site field work, carried out in depth interviews with key staff, held focus group meetings, held in depth interviews with external stakeholders and met with Communities Scotland Regulation and Inspection division.
- 2.4** The research was carried out between June and August 2007 and a report was produced setting out findings and recommendations. (The report is attached at Appendix 1).

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The main findings of the evaluation are:
- The Council has recorded major improvements in the efficiency of the void re-let process with average re-let times on 'not low demand' properties being cut by over 50% in the past 2 years.
 - West Dunbartonshire Council's 'not low demand' average re-let time for 2006/07 was similar to the Scotland wide norm.
 - Faster re-letting has contributed to a void rate reduction of 50% in the past 5 years generating £1.4m per annum theoretical savings in void rent loss.

- Simultaneously reducing void re-let intervals and void rates entails letting backlog of old voids which tend to depress the average re-let interval (as defined for KPI purposes).
- Still some (limited) scope for further reduction in void re-let times remain through potential efficiencies from pre-allocation, focussing activity on voids judged re-lettable and action to promote tenancy sustainment.
- Pushing void properties through system faster has been prioritised over service quality from customer perspective.
- Poor cleaning standards for ready to view properties.
- Substantial proportion of void repairs deferred until post let period
- Concerns over voids repair contract management in terms of value for money under contract in force up to June 2007, the usefulness of monitoring data on performance against 10 day target for void repair work and uncertainty as to how void repair unit costs compare with those of other social landlords.
- Successful local initiatives have recently helped reduce the overall incidence of stock classed as 'low demand' (reduced for 26% in 2005/06 to 19% in 2007/08).
- Important deficiencies in analytical capacity to monitor and evaluate void management performance.
- Scope for improving linkage between housing strategy and operations in relation to determining whether properties in areas affected by low demand should be re-let.

3.2 The report makes 19 recommendations. These recommendations have been incorporated into an action plan detailing the management comments, actions, resource implications and timescales. (The action plan is attached at Appendix 2).

3.3 Some of the recommendations contained within the report are contingent on the findings of the other studies underway as part of the Remedial Plan agreed with Communities Scotland and these are identified within the action plan.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 To take forward the recommendations contained within the report, it will be necessary to recruit a Project Officer to carry out the recommended work in reviewing the allocation policy and to investigate choice based lettings and to recruit a Data Analyst to address the deficiency in the analytical capacity to monitor and evaluate void management performance .

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The additional costs associated with the introduction of the 2 new posts at the current pay level amounts to £71,000.

5.2 Provision has been made for these posts within the HRA draft estimates for 2008/09.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** The most significant risk is that the evaluation forms part of the Remedial Plan agreed with Communities Scotland and if the Council does not implement the Remedial Plan satisfactorily, Scottish Ministers may appoint a manager to exercise housing and related functions.
- 6.2** There is a risk that by failing to implement necessary improvement actions void performance deteriorates and rental income is lost.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** The Evaluation of Performance on the Management of Empty Homes identifies significant areas of improvement in performance and also makes recommendations for further improvements in performance. The evaluation forms part of the Remedial Plan for Housing Management Services agreed with Communities Scotland and approved by Council.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1** **The Committee is asked to note the findings of the Evaluation of Performance on the Management of Empty Homes attached at Appendix 1 and agree the Action Plan attached at Appendix 2.**

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Irving Hodgson
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Date: 14 December 2007

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Appendices: Appendix 1 Heriot Watt University and the Housing Quality Network – Evaluation of Performance on the Management of Empty Homes

Appendix 2 Evaluation of Performance on the Management of Empty Homes Action Plan

Background Papers: Council 17 January 2007; Communities Scotland
Inspection of Housing Management Services

Council 28 February 2007; Communities Scotland
Inspection of Housing Management Services

Council 25 April 2007; Communities Scotland
Inspection of Housing Management Services

Wards Affected: All