

Ariane Burgess
Convener
Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Ariane

Housing Emergency

Request for Information on Void and Unlettable Properties and Acquisition/ Buy Back of Properties

Thank you for your email and attached letter dated 28 June 2024 which was received by the Chief Executive. I have been asked to provide the response on behalf South Ayrshire Council.

Void Properties

Managing void properties and working to maximise relets and reduce the relet times is one of the key tasks and priorities for the Council's Housing Service.

Our Housing Service and Property Maintenance Service work very closely to ensure void inspections, any necessary repair work and landlord compliance activities are undertaken as quickly as possible to manage turnover and the relet process for void properties within the Council's housing stock.

As at 30 June 2024, 161 properties were void from the Council's overall 7971 lettable units.

- 138 of these properties are actively being relet by the Council and were at various stages of the void management process
- 2 properties are undergoing major repair work – one is fire damaged, and the other property is undergoing major structural work.
- 1 property is void and the Council has been actively trying to engage with the Utility Provider to provide a meter with an affordable tariff to allow the electric heating system to be commissioned. The property is within an area which is not designated as being 'smart ready', therefore we are experiencing significant challenges in getting this resolved, which is having a consequential impact on the void period for this particular property. This is a regular challenge when dealing with Utility Providers, particularly in rural areas, which are not designated as being 'smart ready'.
- 20 properties are not currently being relet, these void properties are in 'low demand' and need significant levels of investment to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. Officers are currently working on the preparation of an options appraisal for this group of stock.

In terms of offers of housing, the Council is actively giving reasonable preference to homeless households to meet increased levels of demand. In 2023/24, a total of 793 lets were made by the Council, 430 were made to homeless households, this represented 54% of the Council's overall lets. For the first quarter of 2024/25 (1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024), a total of 169 lets were made by the Council and 93 (55%) were made to homeless households.

Buy Back of Properties

The Council is committed to buying back properties and the scheme is well established and is a key element of the Council's approach to increase the supply of affordable housing for rent in South Ayrshire.

Since 2013/14, the Council has acquired a total of 191 properties through buy back. In 2023/24 alone, the Council acquired 37 properties.

In the last approved Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) it was projected that the Council would aim to buy back 30 properties in 2024/25. However, because of the reduction in funding allocated by the Scottish Government to the Council for Affordable Housing Supply, it is anticipated that the projected the level of buy back acquisitions in 2024/25 will need to be reduced to 20.

I hope this information provides assurance to the Government that the Council is actively managing the void process to get the properties back into use, and reasonable preference is being given to homeless households, while also balancing the demand for housing from other groups in housing need.

If you require any further information or would like to discuss any aspect of the response, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Braidwood
Director of Housing, Operations and Development