LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
CALL FOR VIEWS ON EMPTY HOMES IN SCOTLAND
SUBMISSION FROM GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL

1. What, in your view, are the main causes of empty homes?

The main causes of Empty Homes in Glasgow are related to the following reasons:

- legal issues with the property, such as, the owner/s is deceased and there might be an issue with a transfer of the title deeds
- financial issues - lack of available funds to invest in the required repairs to bring the property back into use or the property is in the process of being repossessed
- owners currently living abroad
- lack of interest in property as it is not their principal home

2. Is this a problem which affects all tenures of housing? Please provide further information to explain your answer.

The issue is mainly owners within the Private Sector as opposed to private landlords as private landlords usually operate as a business and are therefore generally keen to bring the property back into use.

3. What is the impact on communities in areas where there are large numbers of empty homes?

The impact on communities in areas where there are a large number of empty homes are an indication of an area in decline and the following issues are usually experienced also:

- Lack of property maintenance;
- Unkempt gardens and disused backcourts and parking areas;
- Fly tipping;
- A decline in property condition and many of the flats are acquired by private landlords;
- An increase in Antisocial Behaviour.

4. Is the issue of empty homes a problem in particular areas and if so, why?

From a Glasgow perspective, empty properties are a city wide issue and not restricted to a particular area.
5. Are you aware of any areas which have made progress in addressing the issue of empty homes and if so, what other local authorities could learn?

In Glasgow, we have devised an acquisition strategy with local Registered Social Landlords in order to acquire properties in priority areas of the city which has assisted in bringing empty properties back into use for social rent which is also helping to assist homelessness and the regeneration of the areas.

6. How effective are current tools open to local authorities/central government to deal with empty homes? Should they have more powers?

The Council has limited powers for dealing with empty/abandoned properties. If it can be determined that the property is causing a public health nuisance or concerns regarding the safety of the building then the Council will investigate and take the appropriate action.

While local authorities do have compulsory purchase powers, the council would only consider the use of compulsory purchase powers where this was to facilitate a strategic priority.

The Council is currently restricted due to the lack of powers available to deal with empty homes and there requires to be more powers available for Local Authorities in order to deal with bringing empty homes back into use.

7. Should there be more enforcement powers for local authorities/central government to deal with the issue? If so, what could these be?

Yes there requires to be more enforcement powers made available for Local Authorities. The introduction of Compulsory Sales Orders should be implemented as soon as possible as these would enable local authorities to force the sale of a derelict or abandoned property if it has been lying empty for more than 12 months. However, the comments below require to be taken into account before implementing Compulsory Sales Orders as the current proposals fail to meet the council’s aspirations.

- The proposals will still be cumbersome and time consuming to use and it is quite likely that GCC would continue with the use of our CPO powers to tackle this issue even after CSOs are introduced unless the proposal is radically changed.
- The focus is on this being a planning power when this should be housing function forming an important role within our local housing /affordable homes strategy.
• Local Authorities (Housing) must have the discretionary powers to deal with this issue. In some instances GCC (Housing) would be looking to bring in RSL partners to bring stability and effect wider scale change.

Proposals - All CSO’s progressed through public auctions

• This is not an effective mechanism in all cases simply making the property available for sale at auction.
• Local authorities (Housing) should have the power to promote a CSO with a named purchaser (such as an RSL) with a mechanism for the DV to value the property.
• Without any control over this process it is unlikely that local authorities will be able to deliver a satisfactory solution and meet the aspiration of communities. Eg an individual or organisation with a poor ‘track record’ in terms of housing condition/development could buy at auction and instead of alleviating concerns this would simply increase them among local residents.

Legal concerns

If there is a view that no-one is likely to be interested in the property, why would a LA choose to go through this whole process?

• A perceived lack of interest may deter LAs from using this power.
• If the purchaser doesn’t develop the site following a CSO (no timescales are provided), then the Local Authority has the option to buy the site, which puts us back in the same position as a CPO with regard to funding and having to find a development partner creating additional workload for Local Authority.
• More time and effort will be wasted in trying to take matters forward as a further CSO cannot be promoted for 3 years.

8. Is there enough information/data to provide an accurate picture of empty homes in Scotland? If not, how could this be improved?

There is a close working relationship in Glasgow between the Empty Homes Officers and Council Tax Officers to provide an accurate picture of empty homes in Glasgow. Although this is dependent on what information/data has been provided.