LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

CALL FOR VIEWS ON EMPTY HOMES IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

The extent of empty homes and what, in your view, are the main causes of empty homes?

There are over 37,000 long term empty homes in Scotland. This is any property that has been empty for six months or more or 24 months if being marketed for sale or rent. In Aberdeen there are currently 4,303 properties which have been empty for six months or more with 2,750 of those being empty for 12 months and more.

Empty homes exist because of a number of factors, but the most sighted causes or reasons are:

**Finance:** A number of homeowners have their properties empty because they do not have the required finance or cannot access the finance needed to get the property to a state fit for use by themselves or potential tenants.

**Properties under Probate** or legal complications after death of the homeowner: A property under court jurisdiction is at most times unoccupied until ownership of the estate has been verified. The property then becomes long-term empty if the case has been in court for years.

**Lack of direction after Inheritance** or Probate: Many homeowners who have inherited a property may not know what to do with the property after gaining it as inheritance especially if the property inherited is in a state that is not conducive for renting.

**Lack of Knowledge:** Most times, homeowners do not know the financial, economic or public tools and options that may be available to them to help get a property into good use.

**Empty homes as property portfolio** or pension investment: Properties are sometimes bought as an investment for the future to help fund a lifestyle post retirement. In most cases of this nature, there is no short-term vested interest in keeping the property occupied to gain rental income especially if the owners are not local to the area.

**Discouragement from previous experience** from the rental market by landlords: In extreme cases where landlords have had terrible experience with tenants, they are discouraged from having a 3rd party occupy their properties and would rather leave it
empty. This has been seen to happen a lot in recent years where landlords would rather forfeit rental income for what they may refer to as “peace of mind”.

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

No, this generally applies to private sector housing.

Aberdeen City Council sends out a survey to owners of empty properties to help further understand what the issues are in relation to empty homes across the city, as well as to offer support and assistance to owners to help them bring their property back into use.

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

Empty homes do not contribute to the overall housing supply and cannot be used to address housing need and demand

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

The number of empty homes is spread throughout the Local Authority.

Aberdeen City Council has recently recruited an Empty Homes Officer and part of that role involves developing a database that will help identify empty homes in particular areas across the city.

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?

North Ayrshire Council has mapped all their empty properties and can identify areas with large numbers of empty properties.

Aberdeen City Council are working on this which would allow resources to be targeted in areas with the highest concentration of empty homes.

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

Aberdeen City Council has recently appointed an Empty Homes Officer which will be key to working with owners to bring empty homes back into use.

The Empty Homes Officer has found that the tools provided by the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership have been effective training for new officers.
Powers are sufficient to deal with empty homes.

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

Powers are sufficient to deal with empty homes but compulsory sales orders would be beneficial.

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

Yes, there are dedicated Empty Homes Officers with action being taken to tackle empty homes across most local authorities in Scotland.