

Ariane Burgess MSP
Convener
Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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Dear Ms Burgess

Housing Emergency

I refer to your letter to the Chief Executives of the Scottish local authorities and now reply on behalf of our Chief Executive Alan Russell.

Voids

I can advise we have a housing stock of 12,305 properties. As of today, 1,053 of these are void, with the majority (634) being empty pending their demolition or disposal as part of the council's regeneration and renewal plans, leaving 419 void properties which are at various stages of our void property management processes in preparation for re-let.

Reducing the number of void properties and improving our void turnaround timescale is a key priority for Housing Services and we have recently worked with Savills consultancy to review our void management processes. A key recommendation from this exercise was the implementation of a 'Single Voids Team', bringing together officers from both Housing Services and Building Services under a senior officer's leadership.

The new Single Voids Team has implemented a number of measures to improve performance, including:

- Taken steps to procure a preferred utilities provider – tender documentation will be issued to the market shortly;
- Begun allocations earlier in the void process;
- Examined the potential of providing potential tenants with links via social media to 360° virtual tours of void properties. We are coming to the end of an initial three-month trial and are likely to continue with the procedure;
- Increased the number of pre-termination inspections and included getting early warning of components needing replacement earlier than planned and any work that could be done as reactive repair before termination; and
- Co-located the Single Voids Team at one of our depots.

Whilst we are still in the early stages of driving improvements, I can report that since 26 March 2024 we have reduced the number of voids (excluding those identified for demolition or disposal) from 518 to 419.

There have also been improvements in the average re-let time, as reported to the Scottish Housing Regulator, as follows:

Year	Average re-let time (days)
2020–2021	85.7
2021–2022	66.0
2022–2023	60.6
2023–2024	50.4
2024–2025 to end of April 2024	41.3
2024–2025 to end of May 2024	34.5

Property Acquisition

We have a specific policy of buying-back former Council properties when these become available if that acquisition is beneficial to the Council's overall stock management and the property scores sufficiently highly against the following criteria:

- Type;
- Demand;
- Ability to meet need;
- Ability to meet additional need;
- Contribution to the Local Housing Strategy; and
- Time to repay investment including both acquisition and repairs costs.

To date this financial year, we have identified eighteen properties for possible buy-back:

- Three which we have acquired;
- Three on which we have concluded missives and await dates of entry;
- Five that we rejected as uneconomical due to the acquisition and/or repairs costs; and
- Seven that were sold to others before we could fully assess and get authority to purchase.

In all six cases in which we made an offer the owners approached us direct before advertising their properties. We also have active alerts set up with a number of estate agents who are aware of our buy-back scheme.

These acquisitions are partly funded by Scottish Government grant, where available, and from the proceeds of our disposal of properties which are "last-in-the-block" and at which we therefore have limited ability to ensure that necessary common repairs are carried out – so far this financial year we have identified sixteen properties for disposal and:

- Sold five;
- Accepted offers for another six;

- Marketed another one; and
- Prepared a further four for marketing.

Finally, I can confirm we also participate in the Scottish Government's Mortgage-to-Rent Scheme.

I trust this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Louise Feely
Head of Housing Services