

Fife Council submission on the housing emergency, 10 February 2025

I write to you in response to your letter dated 20th January 2025 which was directed to me as a follow up to Fife's previous response in July last year.

In the previous response, I confirmed the structural arrangements that have been put in place to create and develop a Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) Programme Board which is Chaired by the Executive Director for Communities Directorate.

The Board has continued to meet with a focus on short term actions, but also to develop a more disruptive change approach linking to the Council's ongoing No Wrong Door, Place and Digitalisation transformational change programmes. This emphasises the whole Council and Partnership response needed to address the fundamental and systemic issues which contribute to the Emergency environment.

The Programme Board is currently working on a Members Update Report which gives more detail around the approach and progress made. I am happy to share this with the Committee in due course.

In response to the specific issues raised, I have responded to these in turn below;

- **An update on the action taken in your area to tackle the emergency and what progress has been made.**

The Fife focus has largely fallen on the areas within our direct control in relation to new build, property acquisitions, voids management /empty homes and homelessness pressures. However, the HEAP focus has meant that there has been activity to accelerate and boost actions across our Local Housing Strategy Themes. The following statistics relate to the position from the declaration of Housing Emergency in March to the 31st December across key indicators:

- 254 new build affordable homes and 32 acquisitions have been delivered with funding identified to purchase another 20 homes by the end of the financial year
- 54 long-term empty private sector homes have been brought back into use and funding has been identified to further support empty homes initiatives.
- Reduced the average days to relet Fife Council properties from 43.5 to 38.5.
- Constituted a Task & Finish Group to review and simplify the allocations policy with a report due to go to Cabinet Committee in April 2025.
- Delivered 193 Technology Enabled Care solutions and opened an Independent Living Hub in Kirkcaldy.
- Reduced live homeless cases from 1,938 to 1,758 by the end of December and this has reduced further to 1,690 at the end of January.
- Increased the number of live Housing First tenancies from 66 to 92 with work ongoing to increase this to 115 through commissioned services.
- Reduced households in B&B type accommodation from 23.1% to 5.21% in quarter 3 (2024/25) closing two larger hotels and a B&B establishment.
- **What progress is being made in reducing the number of property voids or empty homes, or to increase the acquisition of properties.**

Fife's transfer led approach to housing allocations, together with the new build programme and other measures has meant that the change of tenancy pool (properties progressing normally through the change of tenancy process) has

remained at around 350 properties consistently. This is a strategic measure to boost turnover back to 7-8% to allow a range of priority housing needs to be made. This has meant that a focus on reducing change of tenancy timescales has been vital to managing business indicators. There has been some slippage in Quarter 3 that was largely due to management, capacity and contractual issues rather than attributable to other factors which have been raised through Housing Emergency conversations (e.g. issues with utility suppliers). Fife's Voids Service Improvement Plan makes a commitment to a 20 day turnaround period by the end of the reporting / financial year.

In addition, there are around 40 longer term empty properties that require a project approach to bring back into residential use. These are properties affected by fire, flood, structural damage or similar issue requiring a specialist approach to re-instatement. These properties are monitored through the Voids Governance Group with all improvement actions directed through the governance structure. Further empty properties are decants (technically not empty) or properties that have been identified for improvement (largely sheltered housing reprovioned to retirement housing) or properties agreed for demolition through regeneration initiatives.

The Council has continued to implement the Property Acquisition Policy with 57 properties expected to be acquired in year. This included supplementary funding that the HEAP Board have agreed to redirect from Resettlement Funding as a way of responding to the Housing Emergency but also in response to the potential needs arising through Fife's contribution to the various ongoing resettlement programmes.

Fife has also increased resourcing capacity focussing on long term empty homes in the private sector with the addition of another Long Term Empty Homes Officer. The HEAP Board have redirected £1m of funding to focus on LTEHs and through ongoing work and tests of change, 60 properties are expected to be returned to use in year.

- **Whether you are experiencing a reduction in the numbers of people and children living in temporary accommodation, or who are homeless, as a result of those actions.**

Fife maintains one of the largest resources of temporary accommodation in Scotland and has worked to enhance temporary accommodation options. There has been significant progress in reducing reliance on hotels and B&B type accommodation with 3 premises discontinued in late 2024. Numbers in temporary accommodation and timescales spent in temporary accommodation have remained consistent throughout 2024 but there has been positive progress in significantly reducing temporary accommodation breaches (failure to offer and Unsuitable Accommodation Order) as the year has progressed. The Housing Access Team is predicting that presentation rates will be lower than last year although recognise that this is a fragile position and could change in Quarter 4 if there are further pressures from other areas (e.g. Early Prisoner Release, Resettlement or Asylum pressures or other event).

The number of children in temporary accommodation is decreasing on an ongoing basis with the main drivers for new customers accessing temporary accommodation listed as abusive and non abusive relationship breakdown. Repossession, and other factors, requiring families to leave private rented accommodation is also a prominent factor although process change within homelessness services has reduced that to

some extent. The number of children in temporary accommodation is tracked weekly and Fife is currently optimising £91k of Scottish Government funding provided in November with a focus on reducing this number to around 300 by the end of the reporting year. Locating larger family size housing remains a barrier for a minority, while health and specific needs housing requirements can cause rehousing delays.

- **Details of how you measure progress towards tackling the emergency, including indicators and how these are monitored.**

Fife's Housing Emergency Action Plan Board is currently producing an Update Report using a number of functional (supply, voids, homelessness) indicators as measures of short-term actions. The Board is also committed to regular Elected Member Briefings with the next EMB due to be issued shortly.

While recognising the importance of accelerating actions in the areas listed above, the HEAP Board are developing more radical, transformational and disruptive actions to affect system change in the longer term. These are focussed on the finance and planning system, development of the Place agenda in Fife and the emergence of the No Wrong Door / Whole Systems Approach to meeting the needs of vulnerable households.