

West Dunbartonshire submission on the housing emergency, 14 February 2025

Thank you for your letter dated 20 January 2025 regarding the Committee inquiry to housing and in particular reference to those local authorities such as West Dunbartonshire Council that have declared housing emergencies.

Please find information below related to West Dunbartonshire Council's declaration and progress made to date: -

How you have defined the housing emergency.

West Dunbartonshire Council declared a Housing Emergency on 1 May 2024. The drivers included

Being unable to fulfil all our statutory duties under homelessness legislation. At the point of the declaration the Council had incurred 68 breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO) following 274 households being placed in Bed & Breakfast Accommodation during 2023/24.

- The cut to the wider Affordable Housing Supply Programme funding of around 24% including West Dunbartonshire Resource Planning Allocation which pushed back a number of housing developments to meet housing need and demand within the local area.
- Increased housing demand with a reduction in capacity to increase housing supply, in particular challenges exist around availability of home for single person households and larger family homes.
- Unprecedented pressure on our HRA finances informed by extreme challenges in the costs of borrowing and historical debt and interest rates, and wider inflation and cost challenges.

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

Following the declaration, we created an action plan with four objectives and 61 specific actions. The four objectives are;

- Deliver and maintain More Homes. Our approach to the delivery of affordable housing
- Make Best Use of Existing Stock
- Enhancing Housing Access and the prevention of homelessness
- Strengthen the Financial viability and capacity of the Housing Revenue Account and associated Housing and Homelessness budgets.

The plan is being overseen by a Housing Emergency Project Board providing robust governance. The Board meets monthly, and quarterly updates are provided to the Housing Committee, latest update can be downloaded [here](#).

The Council hosted a Housing Summit on 10 February, gathering over eighty key and senior stakeholders to discuss further solutions to help end the emergency but also to improve access to housing long term. Further actions from this will then be taken forward and feed into a refreshed action plan.

The Committee is particularly interested in whether measures have been taken, where relevant to your authority, to reduce the number of property voids or empty homes, or to increase the acquisition of properties.

There are actions within the plan related to all the of above areas. Various actions have been taken to further reduce the numbers of voids. The number has reduced from peaks of circa 450 to 165, further reduction to void numbers is anticipated during 2025/26.

We have a full-time Empty Homes Officer and a refreshed Empty Homes Strategy that oversees bringing back some 25 homes back into use on an annual basis. This is closely aligned to our buy back (acquisition) scheme, which has been in operation in West Dunbartonshire Council for several years. The Council supports this scheme through an annual budget of £4m and has a target of acquiring 40 new homes each year. with a focus on larger family homes.

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.

The actions and focus have reduced the number of open homeless cases from 471 to 402. However, the number in temporary accommodation has remained consistent at 273 households.

We have also taken targeted action to reduce the number of children in temporary accommodation. There continues to be a real pressure in this area as we are seeing an increase of larger households presenting. The impact on numbers would have been more significant without these increases.

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

Alongside the creation of the action plan, the Project Board also agreed on a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) linked to the four objectives that would be used as a measure of progress. These KPI's include; number of placements in bed and breakfast, number of breaches of UAO, numbers of children in temporary accommodation, number of lets available, number of active voids, number of empty homes brought back into use and number of acquisitions.

For most of these KPIs progress will be measured by seeing a reduction in the numbers, however with other such as number of lets and acquisitions completed being the ones we want to see an increase.

In summary there has been significant progress made, and further progress is expected through other actions which require more time into 2025 to be delivered. However, real pressures continues particular around budgetary pressures, ongoing increase in demand, further reduction in turnover of properties which mean the emergency cannot be resolved in the short term and needs to be continually reviewed.

The cessation of the current Housing Emergency declaration cannot be solely delivered by housing and homeless services therefore asks on wider services is required along with the enhanced resource allocation.

I trust this covers all the information being requested by the committee and has been useful. Please do not hesitate to contact if you wish for further information or discuss things further.