

## Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

### Flagship Projects Discussion Paper

#### **Introduction**

This paper is meant to spark discussion around the possibility of involvement of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership with 'Flagship Projects' to bring back into use key visible empty homes across Scotland.

#### **Flagship Projects**

The project brief behind the Empty Homes Coordinator post suggested the post holder would be involved in 'Flagship Projects' or 'High Profile properties'. This involvement could mean one to one advice and problem solving with council officers and/or taking on some of the negotiation with owners and other stakeholders.

This suggestion came originally from David Ireland, Chief Executive of Homes from Empty Homes in England. He suggested that to have some key successes bringing back into use some high profile or well recognised empty properties can spur greater interest in empty homes work among the public.

This is no doubt true. Some high profile empties in Scotland being brought back into use would do much to demonstrate the possible and get not only the public but other local authorities excited about what they can do in their own area. However, following the completion of the baseline report and initial conversations with councils it has also become clear that Scottish local authorities are starting from a very low level of activity and do not seem able at this time to identify key properties.

The first guide for councils being produced by the project is on Data Collection, as this is the stage at which most Scottish councils find themselves. They are beginning the exercise of collecting data to identify where the empty homes are in their area and who owns them.

The idea of flagship projects has been raised with council officers in the Empty Homes Coordinator's initial meetings with them. None of them were able to identify any properties at the moment. It may be that as officers develop their own approaches to empty homes work that they may take up the offer of intensive one on one support on a particular problem or high profile case.

→ ***The Group are asked to offer suggestions for other sources of flagship projects, e.g. private sector.***

The work plan for the Empty Homes Coordinator indicates that flagship projects are to be identified in October/November 2010. However discussions with councils would seem to indicate that that timescale is premature.

If this project is to be successful the support offered by the Empty Homes Coordinator has to flow from feedback from members of the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network. In

addition officers are in danger of being overwhelmed by information if they are asked to do too much too quickly.

The offer to assist councils on flagship projects might be better received in a few months time when councils have gone through the initial exercise of compiling their own databases of empty homes in their area.

It is therefore proposed that a letter be sent out to members of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership in January 2010 offering a 'Flagship Project Consultancy Service'. Councils could be offered a set number of project hours of the Empty Homes Coordinator's time with details of possible tasks that could be undertaken by the Empty Homes Coordinator. This could be described as a learning exercise and in exchange council officers could be asked to give regular updates to the network on the progress of their project. By making the offer a concrete offering of time focused on a particular project and by setting a deadline for response we may be more likely to generate a positive response.

→ ***The Group is asked to discuss the issues and proposals raised in this paper and offer advice to the Empty Homes Coordinator.***