

Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

Scottish Empty Homes Partnership Advisory Group

13th January 2011

Shelter Scotland
Scotiabank House

Minutes

Present: Gavin Corbett, Shelter (Chair)
Kristen Miller, Empty Homes Coordinator, Shelter
Karen Robertson, Historic Scotland
Gerry Begg, COSLA (Scottish Borders Council)
Sheila Brown, COSLA (Glasgow Council)
Derek Logie, Rural Housing Scotland
Sarah-Jane Laing, Scottish Rural Property and Business Association

Apologies: Douglas Munro, SHBVN
Elaine Bradley, Scottish Government

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

- Paper on taxation information proposals has been passed to the SRPBA taxation group who have agreed to prepare a paper. This task has been designated to Ernst & Young. Sarah-Jane to pass on accountant's contact details to Kristen so she can provide him with further clarification.
- Kristen contacted the Scottish Government to clarify to what extent there is scope to alter the vacant dwelling discount between private housing and RSL stock. The officer at Scottish Government declined to offer legal advice to councils, thus in effect council's must make their own assessment. However information supplied by Jenni Craig at Scottish Borders Council indicated that their council had looked into this and had determined it was not possible.
- **Action Point:** Kristen to follow up when the vacant dwelling council tax amendment to the Housing Act will be commenced.
- Noted that there is no Scottish Government commitment to extend the Rural Homes for Rent Scheme to empty homes as suggested in the last meeting minutes.

2. Quarterly Activity Report

- Kristen ran through the highlights of the last quarter.
- Sarah-Jane commented that the media coverage of the launch had been very good.

3. January to June 2011 Workplan (See Appendix B of Quarterly Report)

- It was suggested that the next publication guide, instead of a 'Funding Guide' should be titled 'Financing' or 'Making it Work'. As an annex there could possibly include smaller guides and resources for owners.
- The next Empty Homes Officer Network seminar is currently planned for 30th March at Victoria Quay in Edinburgh and will cover incentives and enforcement. Sheila told the group that Glasgow Council is currently using CPO's and Brian Parr may therefore be a good person to approach to speak.
- Lobbying the Scottish Government for specific funding will also be added to the workplan.

4. Seminar Update (See Appendix E of Quarterly Report)

- Kristen presented the feedback from the first Scottish Empty Homes Network seminar.

5. Practical Projects Update

- The Practical Projects Help Service is a redraft of the Flagship Projects encouraging local authorities to work directly with the Empty Homes Coordinator to bring an empty property back into use.
- There was a suggestion that a message needs to be conveyed to councils that they can play a variety of roles. Their role in the project could be awareness raising and dispelling myths, for example around VAT. A possible information sheet in this vein was suggested.
- The group put forward several potential sources of practical projects for investigation.
- The group also considered that it would stimulate contact with councils by interested parties if there was a list of 'empty homes' contacts in each council available on the Shelter website.

Action Point: Kristen and Sheila to have a discussion about possible projects in Glasgow

Action Point: Kristen and Karen to have a discussion around a possible project with Historic Scotland.

Action Point: To ask LA's permission to make a list of LA Empty Homes contacts on the Shelter website.

6. Proposal to Government – Oral Update and Discussion

- Gavin and Kristen met with the Scottish Government to discuss the possibility of giving greater funding emphasis to empty homes work. This has come in response to the £100 million put aside for Empty Homes work in England.

Action Point: Gavin and Kristen to share paper with the group once completed.

7. AOB

- Sheila mentioned that the FOI requests carried out on public bodies by the partnership had not yielded the results for Glasgow she had hoped for.

Action Point: Zoe to circulate data that was received and send out further FOI requests to Scottish Water, MOD and National Rail.

- Sheila had a couple of issues with the Report Empty Homes website that there was no requirement for an address and the automated map can be miles away from the actual location. Kristen advised that council officers should ask those reporting for clarification of addresses.

Action Point: Kristen to check if there are any issues with the mapping software.

- An update was given on the current debate in England about tightening the requirements for progressing an Empty Dwelling Management Order. There are no plans to recommend bringing in such a power in Scotland but the partnership may re-visit this at a later date.

8. Dates of next meetings

- Wednesday 27th April – 10.30am
- Wednesday 24th August – 10.30am
- Wednesday 23rd November – 10.30am