

Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

QUARTERLY ACTIVITY REPORT – SEPTEMBER 2010

Introduction

This is the first of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership's Quarterly Activity Reports for submission to the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership Advisory Group.

The report will seek to give the group updates on the significant areas of work of the partnership including engagement with council, publicity of the project, activity in the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network, and other outputs of the project. Headings below are drawn from the first work plan for the project (see appendix A).

Highlights

- Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network up and running – 35 members and growing.
- Reportemptyhomes.com website given the go ahead – 11 councils committed to using the site so far.
- Interest in the project is strong among councils – meetings held or in the diary with 22 councils.
- Baseline Report to be published ahead of 30th September Advisory Group Meeting
- Guide to Data Collection and Information in final proofing stages, due for publication end September.

Initiate and sustain effective advisory group process

The Advisory group has been established and a first meeting was held on the 23rd June 2010. At this meeting suggestions were taken for additional members to be invited to

the group. We know have two new members, one representing Historic Scotland, and one representing COSLA (from an urban authority). Full membership of the group is now:

- Gerry Begg (Scottish Borders Council) – COSLA
- Shelia Brown (Glasgow City Council) - COSLA
- Elaine Bradley – Scottish Government
- Douglas Munro – Scottish Housing Best Value Network
- Sarah-Jane Laing – Scottish Rural Property and Business Association
- Derek Logie – Rural Housing Service
- Karen Robertson – Historic Scotland
- Gavin Corbett – Shelter Scotland

The group is due to meet again on the 30th September.

Promote project to key partners

As indicated in the highlights section above there has been considerable work done in the first four months of the project to promote the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership to partners.

Initial meetings between the Empty Homes Coordinator and council staff have been held (or are scheduled) with 22 councils (see appendix B). These meetings have resulted in:

- Higher awareness of the aims of the project and the assistance available to councils through the Empty Homes Coordinator.
- Information has been gathered on current practice in Scottish councils and assessments made of where assistance and information can be of help.
- Nominations to the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network.
- Interest expressed in the reportemptyhomes.com website.
- Council officers have begun the process of requesting information on vacant dwellings from their council tax colleagues.
- The suggestion by Shelter Scotland of an amendment to the current Housing Bill to enable greater ease of information sharing within councils (see paper on 30th September Advisory Group Agenda).
- Input given by the empty homes coordinator to one council's Draft Empty Homes Strategy.
- Input given to several councils on their Scheme of Assistance and potential offers of advice and information for empty home owners.

Meetings with other key partners have also taken place or been scheduled including meetings with:

- Linstone Housing Association
- Aberdeenshire Rural Enabler

- Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
- Scottish Association of Landlords
- Orchard and Shipman
- The Improvement Service
- General Registrars Office for Scotland
- Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Service

These have resulted in offers to speak at conferences or put information in newsletters; new members to the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network; potential locations for the project media launch; useful contacts and data; the opening of discussions between Linstone Housing Association and Renfrewshire Council about a specific private sector empty home of concern to Linstone.

Presentations and papers have been given to a number of groups in order to promote the project to key partners:

- Scottish Housing Best Value Network (SHBVN) – 24/06/2010
- Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO) – 13/08/2010
- COSLA Community Well-being and Safety Executive Group – 19/08/2010
- Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland, Health and Housing Course – 08/09/2010
- Agreement to give a workshop at the Scottish Rural & Islands Housing Conference – 21/10/2010

These presentations have resulted in useful contacts for the project, including new members to the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network; request for a briefing on the project from an elected member; wider awareness of the project at different levels within councils and within different specialisms (i.e. environmental health).

Trade press and other media work has been ongoing with information on the project featuring in:

- Scotland National Rural Network Gateway Website
- Inside Housing
- RICS Newsletter
- SRPBA Newsletter
- Edinburgh Evening News (letter to the editor)
- Third Force News
- CIH Scottish Housing Matters

This has resulted in raised awareness of the project and some interest from a firm of Chartered Quantity Surveyors in offering free project scoping services to councils.

Liaison relationships have been established between the Empty Homes Coordinator and the Shelter Cymru Empty Homes Project as well as with Homes from Empty Homes (formerly the Empty Homes Agency). This has included a phone meeting with Shelter Cymru and phone and face to face meetings with David Ireland, the Chief Executive of Homes from Empty Homes in England. Both organisations can and have been called on for advice, examples, materials and contacts. It is expected that these relationships will continue to be useful to the project. The Shelter Cymru Empty Homes Project is winding down, however staff will be remaining at Shelter Cymru and continuing with a lessened role in empty homes work, thus their expertise will not be lost.

The national media project launch is still in development. This has been pushed back on the schedule due to difficulties finding a suitable setting for a photo call that would encourage attendance by the Minister for Housing and Communities. Originally intended for the end of September it is now expected that the launch will take place in early October and dates will be circulated as soon as possible to advisory group members.

Develop initial baseline of current and possible future practice

The advisory group helpfully provided comments on the baseline report which has now been finalised and will be circulated to the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network and published on the Shelter Scotland web page ahead of the 30th September Advisory Group meeting.

Adapt reportemptyhomes.com website for Scotland

11 councils have requested to be connected to the reportemptyhomes.com website to date. This is considered to be a sufficient number to justify funding of the necessary website adaptations to allow these connections to take place. It is expected that further councils will connect to the website in time.

A price is currently being negotiated with David Ireland from Homes from Empty Homes who administers the site and employ the website developers, My Society. Once this is completed the website development should be complete within a matter of weeks.

Investigate current methods by which LAs hold data on empty homes

The initial thinking of this strand of work was to produce a paper about what current practice is with regards to data collection on empty homes in Scotland. Throughout the course of writing the baseline report (which covered this aspect) and speaking to councils it became apparent that what was needed was a guide to data collection and information.

Thus a guide, detailing sources of information both to identify empty homes and owners of empty homes has been produced and is in the final stages of proofing. It is hoped this will be published in electronic format at the end of September.

This is intended to be the first in a series of guides for councils and their partners on key issues with regards to empty homes work. Specific topics will be determined by suggestions from the Scottish Empty Homes Officer network. Potential topics might be: sources of funding; incentives; use of enforcement; early intervention and prevention.

Establish forum of lead officers with responsibility for empty homes

The Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network has now been established on the Communities of Practice for Public Service website. Advisory Group members have all received invitations to join and should be able to access the site.

Discussion at the last advisory group pointed towards the SHBVN website as a good home for this network, however after discussions with SHBVN it became clear that it would not be possible to invite non-council members if we used their site. Thus we opted for the cost free option of the Communities of Practice for Public Service which has provided us with the functionality required and the ability to invite members from a wide range of organisations.

The network has 3 facilitators, Kristen Miller (Empty Homes Coordinator), Zoe McGuire (Shelter Policy Assistant) and Andy White (Western Isles Private Sector Housing Manager). The network currently has 35 members and more are expected. Members include council officers from housing, strategy and environmental health, as well as representatives from the rural housing service, a housing association, a national park, and the Scottish Government. See appendix C for the latest activity report from the network which gives details of the membership as well as their join dates and last date of access to the site.

The network site has capability for discussion forums, a library, events calendar, shared documents (for joint editing), and blogs. The discussion forums are still in their infancy and need encouragement. Various plans for this are in motion, including the Empty Home Coordinator's blog and the issuing of a monthly network newsletter to highlight key developments and give tips to members on how to use the site.

Investigate idea of flagship projects

The idea of flagship projects has been raised in the various meetings held with councils. A paper on this issue is on the agenda for the 30th September Advisory Group meetings.

Develop library of best practice/guides

The library of best practice is housed on the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network site. The Library of best practice, case studies and press clippings is being regularly added to and Zoe McGuire, Shelter's Policy Assistant is undertaking a project to make the library easier to navigate so that members can find what they are looking for quickly.

Any guides or other materials produced by the Partnership will be added to this library.

Plan initial Empty Homes Officer Network Event

Plans are beginning for a November Seminar event for the Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network to coincide with National Empty Homes Week in England. This will take place in the last week of November and is intended to look primarily at data collection and information issues. Speakers have been invited from Welsh and English Councils.

**Empty Homes Coordinator
Workplan: June 2010 – Dec 2010**

Objective	Activity	Timescale	Progress/Comments
<p>Initiate and sustain effective advisory group process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First meeting 23rd June: agree remit/workplan/reporting arrangements. • Advisory group to be used to provide direction and focus to project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First meeting 23rd June • Ongoing thereafter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First meeting held 23/06/10. • Next meeting scheduled for 30/09/10 • Two new members identified: Karen Robertson, Historic Scotland & Sheila Brown, Glasgow City Council (for COSLA)
<p>Promote project to key partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation to SHBVN 24 June • Visits to key LAs and partner organisations • Trade press; presentations to events and forums • Develop liaison relationships with England and Wales • Consider need for project specific brand • Plan national project launch • Plan empty homes officer network event for autumn 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation to SHBVN 24 June • Initial visits to key LAs and partner organisations by end of August 2010 and ongoing thereafter • Interview for Inside Housing for publication July • Other press and forums ongoing • Develop liaison relationships with England/Wales by end August 2010 • Paper to 23rd June Advisory Group on project specific brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presented to SHBVN 24/06/10 • Meetings held with officers from 18 councils. • Phone Meeting held with David Ireland, Director EHA, 08/06/10; Face to face meeting 03/08/10. • Phone Meeting held with Fiona Robertson and John Pritchard, Empty Homes Project, Shelter Cymru, 17/06/10, plus ongoing contact. • Meeting held with Adele Fraser, Linstone

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Project Launch in September 2010 • Empty Homes Officer network event by end November 2010 	<p>Housing Association.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various newsletter articles being published: Rural Gateway, RICS, SFHA, CIH. • Piece in Inside Housing 13/08/10 • Presentation to ALACHO 13/08/2010 • Presentation to COSLA Community Well-being and Safety Executive Group, 19/08/2010 • Presentation to Public Health and Housing Conference 08/09/10 and agreement to present at Rural Housing Conference 21/10/10 • Location being finalised for September Media launch
Develop initial baseline of current and possible future practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrogate SG review data • Sign up to and participate in NAEPP • Develop baseline document including measurable indicators 	Baseline Document to be completed by end August 2010.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed up to NAEPP • Final draft of baseline circulated to advisory group for comment 19/08/10.
Adapt reportemptyhomes.com website for Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with councils to develop administrative system for logging reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure necessary systems in place for key interested councils to engage with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial conversation had with EHA about adaption of website.

	<p>of empty homes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with EHA and My Society over adapting site • Organise launch with media manager and project partners 	<p>website by September 2010</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with EHA and My Society over adapting site by end July 2010 • Launch of website to coincide with national project launch September 2010 • Information to all councils about how to engage with the website if desired by mid August 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website discussion paper to 23rd June Advisory Group meeting • Taken initial views form councils about website. • Letter to Heads of Housing 27/07/10 • Follow up email to Heads of Housing with deadline of 10/09 • 11 councils committed to using the website.
<p>Investigate current methods by which LAs hold data on empty homes</p> <p>Establish forum of lead officers with responsibility for empty homes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop key contacts in each LA and investigate data holding methods • Use exercise as a means of establishing forum of lead officers with responsibility for empty homes • Produce initial paper setting out findings and examples of good practice • Set up network home base on the web (various options) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper on data holding methods by end August 2010 • Empty Homes Network online home base by September 2010 • Initial network members identified by September 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First draft prepared. • Letter to heads of housing asking for nominations to network 27/07/10. • Network established on Communities of Practice in Public Service website. Current membership 35, with several others identified but not yet registered.
<p>Investigate idea of flagship projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion paper to advisory group • Soundings taken from network members • Identification of possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Paper to Advisory group for September 2010 meeting including views of network members and identification 	

	projects	of potential projects.	
Develop library of best practice/guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvass network to assess support needs • Populate Empty Homes Network home base web page with best practice examples/guides based on network needs/key stages of empty homes work process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial canvassing of network members by October 2010 • Initial population of web home base by October 2010 and then ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case studies, strategies and examples are being added to the network library on a regular basis.
Plan initial Empty Homes Officer Network Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with network members to develop a useful agenda for an event which enables network members to meet and share experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event to be held by end November 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial planning and invite of speakers underway.
Support Officer Network communications and good practice sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate and participate in email/electronic forum discussions • Encourage involvement of key officers and expansion of the network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning with establishment of the network (September 2010) and ongoing thereafter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network established. • 3 facilitators are Kristen Miller, Zoe Macguire and Andy White (Western Isles Council) • Populating the network site with events, comments, and library items on a regular basis. • Beginning work of encouraging user discussions on the site
Identify and support development of flagship projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As agreed by advisory group following discussion paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October/November 2010 	

Record of Meetings

Council	Contact	Meeting
Aberdeen City	Andy Pitbalo - Private Sector Housing Strategy Officer	05/10/2010
Aberdeen City	Graeme Stuart - Strategist Planning & Policy - Housing	05/10/2010
Aberdeenshire	Elaine Reid - Strategic Development Officer (Affordable Housing)	06/09/2010
Aberdeenshire	Douglas Edwardson - Head of Housing	06/09/2010
Argyll & Bute	Moira MacVicar - Housing Services Manager	28/06/2010
Argyll & Bute	Bill Halliday - Housing Research Officer	28/06/2010
East		
Dunbartonshire	Grant McIntosh - Housing Manager	15/07/2010
East Lothian	Catherine Johnson - Strategic Policy Officer (Private Sector)	09/08/2010
Edinburgh	Gillian Campbell - Strategy & Policy Manager, Services for Communities	30/06/2010
Edinburgh	Rosemary MacDonald - Homeowner Services	30/06/2010
Edinburgh	Martin Macaulay - Housing Strategy	TBC
Falkirk	David Dunbar - Service Manager, Private Sector Housing	08/07/2010
Falkirk	Stephen Murphy - Senior Programmes Officer	08/07/2010
Fife	Elaine Taylor - Private Sector Housing Officer	26/07/2010
Fife	John McArthur - Private Sector Housing Manager	26/07/2010
Glasgow	Steven McGowan	06/08/2010
Glasgow	Sheila Brown	06/08/2010
Glasgow	Alastair Brown - Environmental Health	02/07/2010
Glasgow	Brian Parr - Group Manager Housing Investment - Private Sector	02/07/2010
Highland	Hilary Parkey - Housing Strategy Officer	10/08/2010
Highland	David Goldie - Head of Housing	10/08/2010
Inverclyde	William Rice - Senior Grants Officer, Strategic Housing Team	05/08/2010

Midlothian	Stephen Clark - Senior Housing Strategy Officer	03/09/2010
Midlothian	Anthony Olowoyeye - Housing Strategy Officer	03/09/2010
Moray	Ivor McIvor	TBC
North Ayrshire	Olga Clayton - Head of Housing and Building Services	14/06/2010
North Lanarkshire	Tony Donohoe - Housing Strategy Manager	20/07/2010
North Lanarkshire	Rosemary Hart - Private Sector Development Officer	20/07/2010
Scottish Borders	Gerry Begg - Housing Strategy Team	13/10/2010
Scottish Borders	Donna Bogdanovic - Senior Housing Strategy Officer	13/10/2010
Scottish Borders	Nicola Galloway - Private Sector Strategy Development Officer	13/10/2010
		23/09/2010
Shetland	Allison Christie - Senior Policy Officer - Housing Service	(phone)
South Ayrshire	Kevin Anderson - Private Sector Coordinator	25/08/2010
South Lanarkshire	Mike Wood - Strategy and Development Manager	TBC
South Lanarkshire	Annette Finnan - Head of Area Services	TBC
Stirling	Gregor Wightman - Private Sector Housing Manager	08/09/2010
Stirling	Tony Cain - Head of Housing	08/09/2010
Stirling	Steve Mason - LHS Officer	
West		
Dunbartonshire	John Kerr - Strategy Officer	25/10/2010
West Lothian	Gillian Edwards - Planning and Coordination Officer	23/09/2010
		22/07/2010
Western Isles	Andy White - Private Sector Housing Manager	(phone)

Scottish Empty Homes Officer Network Activity Report

Generated: 22 Sep 2010

Member name	Job title	Organisation	Join date	Last visit date to this community
Kevin Anderson	Private Sector Co-ordinator	South Ayrshire Council	25-Aug-10	09-Sep-10
Emma Binns	Aberdeenshire Rural Housing Enabler	Rural Housing Service	09-Sep-10	09-Sep-10
Elaine Bradley	Policy Officer	Scottish Government	11-Aug-10	02-Sep-10
Sheila Brown	Housing Strategy Officer	Glasgow City Council	11-Aug-10	26-Aug-10
Steve Clark	Senior Housing Strategy Officer	Midlothian Council	11-Aug-10	11-Aug-10
Gavin Corbett	Policy Manager	Shelter Scotland	19-Aug-10	08-Sep-10
Gillian Edwards	Planning & Coordination Officer	West Lothian Council	02-Sep-10	13-Sep-10
Adele Fraser	Chief Executive	Linstone Housing Association	11-Aug-10	02-Sep-10
Stuart Graham	Public Health manager	City of Edinburgh Council	11-Aug-10	06-Sep-10
Bill Halliday	Research & Information Officer	Argyll & Bute Council	13-Aug-10	13-Aug-10
Catherine Johnson	Strategic Policy Officer	East Lothian Council	16-Aug-10	03-Sep-10
Jennifer Jones	Housing Strategy Officer	East Renfrewshire Council	11-Aug-10	13-Sep-10
Stephen Jones	Compulsory Purchase Orders Policy Manager	the Scottish Government	01-Sep-10	13-Sep-10

John Kerr	Strategy Officer	West Dunbartonshire Council	17-Aug-10	24-Aug-10
Nigel Kerr	Group Manager	Glasgow City Council	08-Sep-10	08-Sep-10
Sarah Jane Laing		srpba	11-Aug-10	11-Aug-10
Derek Logie	Chief Executive	Rural Housing Service	11-Aug-10	24-Aug-10
Martin Macaulay	Senior Project Manager (Strategy)	The City of Edinburgh Council	12-Aug-10	31-Aug-10
Ian Mackinnon	Property Manager	Renfrewshire Council	18-Aug-10	10-Sep-10
Ronnie MacRae	Director	Highlands Small Communities housing Trust	23-Aug-10	23-Aug-10
steve mason	LHS Officer		09-Sep-10	09-Sep-10
Zoe McGuire	Policy Assistant	Shelter Scotland	11-Aug-10	17-Aug-10
Ivor McIvor	Home Improvement Services manager	The Moray Council	11-Aug-10	06-Sep-10
Kristen Miller	Empty Homes Coordinator	Shelter Scotland	11-Aug-10	22-Sep-10
Douglas Munro	Private Sector Support Officer	SHBVN	11-Aug-10	11-Aug-10
Fiona Munro	Housing Policy Officer	Cairngorms National Park Authority	24-Aug-10	24-Aug-10
Stephen Murphy	Senior Programmes Officer	Falkirk Council	07-Sep-	10-Sep-10

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Anthony Olowoyeye	Housing Strategy Officer	Midlothian Council	03-Sep-10	03-Sep-10
Gene Rauch	Policy Planning Coordinator	Clackmannanshire Council	11-Aug-10	02-Sep-10
William Rice	Senior Grants Officer	Inverclyde Council	16-Aug-10	19-Aug-10
Kim Siu	Project Development Manager	Down to Earth Solutions	20-Aug-10	20-Aug-10
Trudi Stevenson	Development & Strategy Manager		11-Aug-10	11-Aug-10
Paul Swan	Housing and Regeneration Manager	CEC	24-Aug-10	24-Aug-10
Elaine Taylor	Housing Officer (Private Sector Condition)	Fife Council	12-Aug-10	02-Sep-10
Andrew White	Private Sector Housing Manager	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	11-Aug-10	22-Sep-10