

## Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

### Website Discussion Paper

#### **Introduction**

This paper is meant to spark discussion around some of the issues involved with adapting the reportemptyhomes.com website for use in Scotland.

#### **reportemptyhomes.com**

Members are encouraged to have a look at the Empty Homes Agency's website for reporting empty homes before the 23<sup>rd</sup> June meeting if they are not already familiar with it. The web address is: <http://reportemptyhomes.com/>

It is already possible to report empty homes in Scotland on this website however the information is not passed to the appropriate local authority as it is in England and Wales. At present people reporting empty properties in Scotland receive an email advising them that the reporting processes to councils are not set up in Scotland and they should contact their local council direct.

A discussion with the Empty Homes Agency has revealed that it should be possible to set up the system for Scotland at fairly low cost.

The process would involve agreeing contact names within councils to receive any reports that come through the website. It would then be up to that contact person to respond to the report in whatever way they determine.

Clearly it would be desirable to have response processes in place before reports begin to filter through to councils. This is unlikely to be possible for all 32 councils before the proposed September launch date of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (or other name as agreed). Indeed some councils may determine that they do not want to be involved with the website at all.

Thus in order to maximise the benefit of extending the website to Scotland and to provide a hook for the national launch it is proposed that the Empty Homes Coordinator identify some enthusiastic early adopters of the website reporting mechanism to take part in the launch. The story could then be that x, y, & z council are now using the website and other councils are invited to join them/the public are encouraged to engage with the website and encourage their council to sign up.

In England, an alternative approach has been taken of identifying named and willing contacts where possible and in all other cases directing emails to the head of the housing department at a given council. This approach has led to varying degrees of engagement with the website from councils – from enthusiastic through to non-responsive.

In Scotland, it may be advisable to develop a more gradual approach, especially in the early months of this project. There is a possibility that if the website were launched nationally with councils' contact details added without their consent this could: a) raise expectations on the part of the public which will not be met; b) slow the development of

relationships between the Partnership and councils that are not ready/willing to take part in the website.

In order to take forward the proposed approach technically all this means is that a mechanism would need to be set up on the website for those councils who have not signed up whereby reports go to a central email inbox. This could be administered by the Empty Homes Coordinator and would send out an automatic reply to the public, informing them that their council has not signed up to the website and that they will need to contact them directly to make their report. As new councils come on board the Empty Homes Coordinator would have the access to change the appropriate contact details to enable this.

There are a number of ways that councils could be approached to participate in the website including:

- Discussions with already known LA contacts;
- Invitation Letter to SOLACE and/or Heads of Housing
- Approach COSLA with request for paper to August Community Well-being and Safety Executive Group

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