

Date 16 July 2024

Dear Ms Burgess

HOUSING EMERGENCY

Thank you for your letter requesting the background to the City of Edinburgh Council's housing emergency declaration. This was declared after a motion by the Convener of our Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee, Councillor Jane Meagher, was heard at full Council on the 2nd November 2023. The terms of the agreed motion are included Appendix 1 to this letter, backed unanimously by full Council.

In response to this declaration, a detailed Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) was developed with citywide partners and approved by the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee on the 27th February 2024. This has been shared with the Housing Minister and Scottish Government officials, and can be accessed through the link below:

<https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/housingemergency>

An important part of our HEAP is reducing the number of void council homes. We have been working diligently to reduce these over the past year, from a baseline of 1464 recorded on the 5th June 2023. As of the 8th July 2024, this has reduced to 1097, a reduction of 367 properties, or just over 25%. Focussing on lettable stock, this is an overall reduction of 28% from a baseline of 1206 to 863. Unlettable stock numbers are more variable and currently number 234.

This has been achieved by establishing an Incident Management Team approach to ensure appropriate focus on void properties, analysing end to end processes and targeting resources including external contractors. Around £6m was invested in void stock during 2023/24 to bring them back in to use.

The City of Edinburgh Council has an Acquisitions and Disposals Policy that allows investment and disinvestment in majority / minority owned blocks, and the table below sets out how this has operated over the last few years to increase our overall HRA stock.

Acquisitions & Disposals Programme Summary			
Year	Acquisitions	Disposals	Net increase
2020-2021	32	18	14
2021-2022	42	33	9
2022-2023	75	28	47
2023-2024	89	49	40
Total	238	128	110

We have also successfully purchased 203 completed homes in 2023/24 from developers. Our own housebuilding programme approved 164 homes (92 for social rent and 72 for mid-market rent) and completed 69 social rented homes in 2023/24. There are 174 new Council approvals (78 for social rent and 96 for mid-market rent) and 89 completions (62 social rent and 27 mid-market rent) scheduled in 2024/2. In addition to this, 374 new Council homes are planned to start on site this financial year (214 for social rent and 167 for mid-market rent).

I hope this information is of use to you, and if any further information is required my officers will be happy to provide this to you.

Yours sincerely

Paul Lawrence
Chief Executive

Appendix 1:

- 1) To note the acute nature of Edinburgh's homelessness crisis, with approximately 5000 households in temporary accommodation, the highest number in Scotland.
- 2) To note the severe shortage of social rented homes, with approximately 200 bids for each property advertised through Edindex and additional pressures for accessible and family homes.
- 3) To also note the impact the lack of accessible homes had on other service areas within the Council, including Health and Social Care.
- 4) To note the increasing pressure within the private rental sector, with the highest rental inflation in the United Kingdom at 13.7%.
- 5) To note additional pressures on the social and private rental sector from the increased demand in accommodating refugees from conflicts around the world, many of these conflicts becoming long term with refugees unable to return home and rightly seeking and being provided with permanent accommodation.
- 6) To note the increased demand from the removal of the local connection rules meaning that anyone in Scotland and, in certain circumstances, people elsewhere in the UK could present themselves as homeless in Edinburgh.
- 7) To note the pressures on the Registered Social Landlord (RSL) sector, with RSLs report finding themselves unable to develop future housing due to the financial constraints of the rent cap and increasing interest rates, meaning that it was impossible for them to set out a rental business plan that would increase future rents in line with costs. This was despite the range of Council efforts to tackle structural pressures including, but not limited to:
 - a) The Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan
 - b) Development of an Affordable Housing Policy
 - c) Development of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan
 - d) Lobbying Scottish government for additional, and targeted, funding.
- 8) To note the importance of collaborative working, and further note the importance of engaging with tenants' organisations and third sector groups involved with homelessness support in order to take a human rights-based approach to future work.
- 9) To therefore, agree to declare a Housing Emergency; agreeing to work with, Council Officers, existing third sector partners, external organisations such as SHAPE, Shelter Scotland and Cyrenians and Health and Social Care partners, with the goal of establishing a Housing Emergency Action Plan to build on and consolidate existing actions.
- 10) To note that other RSL partners were experiencing difficulties, and to express concern at recent media reports that Harbour Homes (formerly Port of Leith Housing Association), which was a landlord of over 3,000 properties and partner of strategic importance, were halting new development and examining other ways to control costs due to rising costs and high rates of interest and inflation.
- 11) To invite contributions from Registered Social Landlords and the Planning directorate to participate, as well as any relevant input from the Planning Convener, Housing Convener, and members of both committees.

- 12) To request progress monitoring regarding the efficacy of the Housing Emergency Action Plan to come to the Housing, Homelessness, and Fair Work Committee through regular updates and agree that the structure and reporting schedule of this additional Plan would be discussed in a workshop environment with the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee to ensure that the Action Plan did not duplicate existing strategies or reporting.
- 13) To request that the council leader write to the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister, the housing minister, the Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel, and Tenants Rights and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, outlining the actions council was taking to address the housing emergency, and seek additional resources to help meet the severe challenges.
- 14) To also agree that, in writing to the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister, the housing minister, and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, the Council Leader also ask that guaranteed resources be made available to accommodate the current unfunded consequences of UK / Scottish Government immigration and asylum policy and outline the need for a coherent partnership approach to be taken to manage humanitarian programmes going forward.
- 15) To agree as well as the actions outlined above to address some of the issues the Council also needed to address significant issues including the 41% drop in the affordable home construction pipeline recorded in the last year, the Council's decision to remove £1.3 billion of investment from the Council House building programme as part of the 2023-24 Council budget and the 10% increase in empty Council properties under the last year with nearly 1,500 Council homes still empty that could have been used to house residents in need.
- 16) To reaffirm that Edinburgh should be a safe and welcoming place for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.
- 17) To recognise that, owing to the climate crisis and war and conflict across the world, there would be an increase in the number of people seeking asylum, and that the UK had a moral duty to welcome people fleeing their homes.
- 18) To recognise that adequate resourcing needed to be in place within the Council to ensure that it could continue to support refugees and asylum seekers to find a safe home in the city.
- 19) To understand that UK and Scottish Government policy regarding refugees and asylum seekers would impact on the number of homeless presentations the Council might experience, and that additional resources would be required to accommodate this.
- 20) To therefore, agree that the needs of refugees and asylum seekers must be integrated in the Action Plan.