

Housing Emergency

In response to your letter dated 28th June which was sent to local authority Chief Executives via email, please find outlined below a response from Clackmannanshire Council's Housing Service.

Void Properties

Clackmannanshire Council had a total of 439 void properties in 2023-24, 342 of these became void within the year and the remaining 97 were carried over from the previous financial year 2022-23.

Refurbishment works were completed to a total of 352 properties in 2023/24 with 87 properties carried over into the current financial year 2024-25.

At the time of writing the total number of void properties currently awaiting refurbishment works and able to be worked on is 45. There are a further 24 void properties which are classed as "void unavailable" or "VUN". 14 of these properties are boarded up awaiting demolition, the other 10 have various issues which have led to the VUN classification, serious structural defect, significant damp remedial works, whole-house refurbishment works.

The table below shows void property numbers at the end of each quarter for last financial year as well as the Q1 data for 2024/25. Improved performance is evidenced by a 24% reduction in the number of void properties carried when comparing Q1 2023/24 performance against Q1 2024/25 performance.

Void Period	Void Number
Q1 2023/24	90 (69 void available)
Q2 2023/24	74 (56 void available)
Q3 2023/24	84 (64 void available)
Q4 2023/24	87 (62 void available)
Q1 2024/25	69 (45 void available)

The refurbishment works required at void period are undertaken by the Council's own internal trades workforce, a small number of additional trades resources have been assigned to working in the void team with aim of reducing down the number of void properties awaiting refurbishment.

Collaborative working between our housing and property service areas is focused on reducing our number of void properties carried and our end to end void turnaround time. Weekly Visual Measurement Board (VMB) meetings take place to review and track performance.

The service aim is to reduce void numbers down to a business-as-usual running rate of between around 40 and 45 properties carried at any one time. Based on our predicted productivity and throughput rate this will provide an adequate number of units that the property and housing teams can safely work across and allows adequate time to support tenants in the sign-up process. Crucial to this is the

processing of Scottish Welfare Fund grant applications, having this funding in place is key to ensuring that tenants have the best possible start in their new home.

The service aim is to develop a risk mitigation plan which will be implemented should void numbers creep beyond the BAU running rate – this will provide an early warning signal enabling intervention action to take place as early as possible.

In 2015/16 the Housing Service employed the services of specialist external consultants Vanguard to review void property process. The Vanguard methodology is based on 'Systems Thinking' as a way at looking at a whole system. It promotes common sense thinking, being able to adapt in the face of change and the elimination of waste in the work processes.

A comprehensive review of the whole process 'end to end' including other parts of the service (who were involved in the process) was undertaken to ensure everyone worked in sync and there were smooth handovers. By making changes to the way we dealt with voids in the 'voids system' we realised real performance improvements, unfortunately after the consultants concluding their work with us, there was some drift away from the operating principles which contributed toward a downturn in performance in this area.

Off the Shelf Property Acquisitions Programme (OTSP)

The council have accelerated our programme of buying properties 'off the shelf' for 2023/24 purchasing 40 properties in the year, this was a 100% increase in number from the previous year (20 units to 40 units). The programme is funded by budget allocated within our HRA Capital Investment Programme and with significant contributions made from the Scottish Government grant funding attributed to this activity.

As part of the HRA Capital Budget for 2024/25 (approved by Council in February 2024) there is provision for purchase of a further 40 units within financial year 2024/25.

This will be subject to review at each quarter to ensure that adequate budget exists to acquire and refurbish properties to this extent. The costs associated with property purchase and refurbishment works have been higher than forecast with our average spend per property in the region of £135,000.

The Service continues to monitor the local housing market for properties which might boost our own stock of suitable accommodation, the process is housing waiting list led with properties identified on the basis of demand and where we lack in a particular type of property within our stock.

A full procurement exercise was undertaken in August 2023 to appoint a suitable multi-trade works contractor to deliver the requirement for whole house refurbishment works in properties bought back from the open market. Whilst our own internal trades workforce have worked to refurbish a number of OTSP properties they do not have the capacity to sustain this over the longer term.

It has taken longer than anticipated to establish an effective working relationship with the contractor and deliver properties to the standard expected by the Service and our tenants within a timescale that is acceptable.

It is important to note that properties issued to the contractor most often require extensive whole house refurbishment works to be undertaken due to a previous lack of maintenance and servicing/testing by private owners. There is very often a need for highly intrusive electrical re-wiring and central heating installation works.

The service requires the property to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and the expectations of our tenants, and the cost of refurbishment works in these types of property can be greater as a result. Electrical tests and gas safety tests have highlighted compliance issues that can only be rectified by national services, not by council employees. An example of a delay was 32 weeks for the movement of an internal gas meter to meet required standards.

I hope that this information is helpful, please get in touch should you require anything further.

Yours sincerely

Andrew

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