

19th July 2024

Ms Ariane Burgess MSP
Convener, Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Email: localgov.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Ms Burgess,

HOUSING EMERGENCY

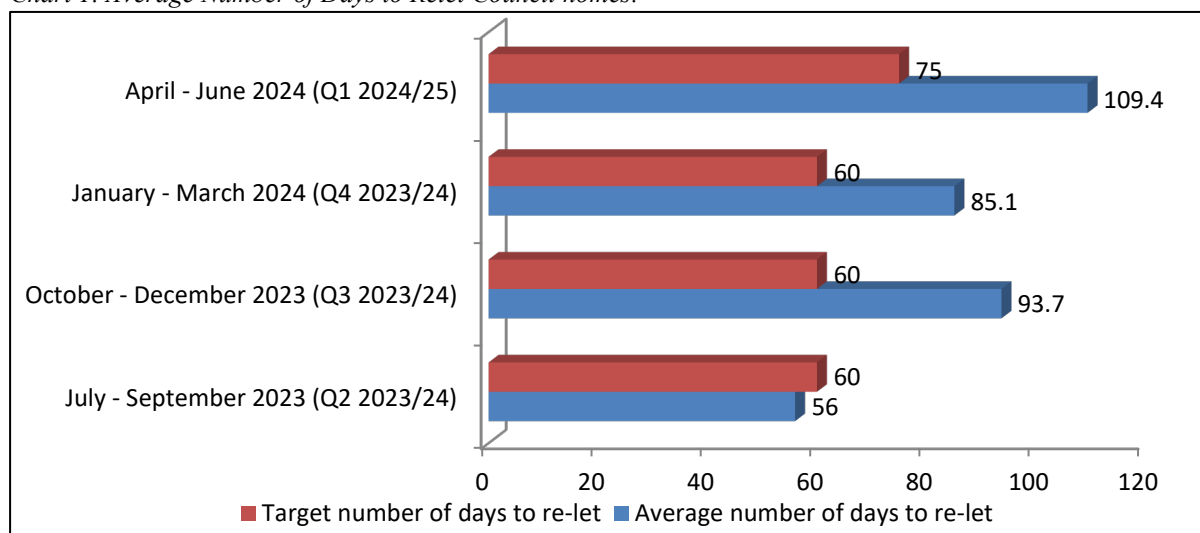
Thank you for your correspondence dated 28 June regarding the above. I have spoken with the appropriate Council officers and can advise as follows:

The Council's open market purchase scheme continues to play an important role in increasing affordable housing supply since its implementation. Buying on the open market in East Dunbartonshire allows the Council to target high demand property types that are difficult to address through new development such as family homes in Lenzie, Bishopbriggs, Bearsden and Milngavie, where land values and a limited supply mitigate against building larger affordable homes. Growing the housing stock also allows the Council to reduce instances of homelessness across the authority. During 2019/20 and 2022/23 of the properties let by the Council through open market purchase, 67% of these homes were allocated to those on the Council's homelessness list.

The Housing Service works closely with Property Maintenance teams to ensure that vacant properties are returned as fit to let as soon as possible and is a priority in reducing void rent loss to the Council. The average time to relet houses has increased due to a number of long-term voids being returned to Housing for allocation and the increase in the number of properties acquired to add to Council stock through open market purchase extending void turnaround times. Chart 1 below shows this increase in the average time to relet and the particular impact that is evident from October 2023 to June 2024.

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Chart 1. Average Number of Days to Relet Council homes:



The Council also targets the purchase of properties within mixed tenure blocks. This helps the Council meet its Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing (EESH) requirements, improving energy efficiency and so helping reduce fuel poverty. During the period 2017 to 2022, there were 81 open market purchases that had a positive impact on meeting housing need in the local authority area. The additional Rental off The Shelf purchases (ROTS) funding received from the Scottish Government in recent years has enabled the Council to subsidise the purchase of more affordable homes for rent and has proved fruitful in helping increase housing supply across East Dunbartonshire.

The Council's approved Housing Capital Plan 2024/25 has allocated further additional budget for open market purchase and the criteria for purchase will be broadened to encompass privately built homes. While market conditions remain competitive in certain localities, house prices have stagnated in other areas that may present additional opportunities to purchase more homes. The Council is considering a campaign focused specifically on properties that are the last remaining in private ownership within a largely Council owned block. This will assist in the targeting of SHQS and maintenance more generally. There are approximately 130 of these properties across the Council area.

The Housing service reported 19 properties defined as 'unlettable' in our 2023/24 Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) for various reasons including major works to be carried out, held for demolition, held for decant and a property previously utilised as multi occupancy temporary accommodation is to be sold on the open market and the funds used to reinvest in other housing in areas of high demand. The preference is also to move to more self-contained housing to address homelessness and aid tenancy sustainment.

I trust this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

ANN DAVIE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE