

Falkirk Council submission

I refer to your letter of 28th June, attached for reference, seeking further information on the context to void/unlettable figures in Falkirk, what we are doing to get these properties back into use, and strategies for acquiring and buying back properties.

I have provided a very brief response below but happy to provide further detail

Response

The current number of void properties within Falkirk Council stock is currently c. 50% higher than historical average and before outlining the plans in place to address this it is worth setting the scene.

The backlog of void properties grew for a number of reasons post Covid. There were challenges recruiting and retaining staff within our Building Maintenance Division, a backlog of repairs to occupied properties as a result, and finite capacity in private sector to undertake the work. In addition Falkirk were operating an enhanced 'Void Standard' that included significant decoration.

The Building Maintenance Division (BMD) commenced an external review in early 2024 to enhance capacity and resilience and ensure service met future needs but in addition to that we have/are :

1. Amended the 'Void Standard' at start of June 2023 to significantly reduce decoration while meeting all legal, and health and safety, needs.
2. Increased the proportion of of BMD operatives undertaking repair work on void properties, rather than occupied properties
3. Reviewed key roles to streamline processes and ensure clearer accountability.
4. Closely monitoring the impact of these actions.

In addition we are in the process of completing an application to the Ukraine Longer-Term Resettlement Fund that, if successful, will allow us to bring 11 vacant properties, in need of significant modernisation, back into use.

We have a well-established buy-back programme that has been highly successful, and cost effective, in increasing number of lettable properties. However due to a combination of increased average purchase price, 25% in last 5 years, and a reduction in grant funding, we anticipate a reduction in the number we are able to purchase this year (70 rather than 80).

Kind regards

Paul Ferguson
Snr Service Manager – Housing