

Dear Ms Burgess,

## **Housing Emergency**

I write to you in response to your letter dated 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2024 which was directed to my Chief Executive in relation to Fife's Housing Emergency and, specifically, void and unlettable properties.

I have noted that you are not looking for specific figures but the context behind Fife's Voids Service Improvement Plan and the links to the Housing Emergency.

I can confirm that Fife took the political decision to declare a Housing Emergency at Fife Council on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2024. The main reason for declaring a Housing Emergency was in response to the significant reduction in the national Affordable Housing Budget, but Council also took account of a range of systemic pressures and challenges across the housing sector as identified by the Scottish Housing Regulator. I have attached a copy of the Motion for your information.

Since that time, the Council's Executive Team have taken the following actions;

- Established a Housing Emergency Programme Board which is Chaired by the Executive Director and brings together a range of representatives from across the Council and appropriate partnerships. This Board is currently meeting fortnightly.
- Developed a high level Housing Emergency Action Plan based around 3 main themes of Maintaining Affordable Housing Supply, Making best use of existing properties and Housing access and enhancing prevention of homelessness. This was approved by Cabinet Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> June. Engagement with the Housing Minister and relevant SG officials is ongoing at political and officer levels.
- Organised and delivered a series of events, including a comprehensive Housing Summit through our strategic Fife Housing Partnership. Further events are being planned over the late summer / autumn period with a focus on innovation, acceleration and transformation.
- Established a series of reviews which include extensive reviews of the Transitional and Phase 3 / 4 Affordable Housing Programme. This also includes a review of the HRA Capital Plan. The review of the AHP is linked to reviews of RSL business and development plans. This is due to be reported to Cabinet Committee in September to evaluate the impact of the budget reduction and outline potential investment options and the future of property acquisitions policy. The latter is still subject to a lack of clarity around the £80m announced by Scottish Government by former First Minister Humza Yousaf.
- Initiated a review of the housing allocations policy and system through a Member Led Task and Finish Group. The Board has also commissioned a series of 6 provocative and challenging reports which cover the high level themes with a view to identifying innovation and priority actions. This is part of an ongoing service improvement agenda and linked to the Housing Service's Pathway to Improvement and Service Change Plans. Other areas of focus are around long term empty homes, making best use of stock (including regeneration priorities) and stock investment priorities.

Prior to the declaration of Housing Emergency, the management of social rented homes was the subject of our People and Communities Scrutiny Committee and a focussed Voids Service Improvement Plan. The Service Improvement Plan sought to address pandemic related issues and improve the efficiency of housing turnover to meet homelessness and wider housing needs.

- By developing a Partnering arrangement with Utilita we have been able to address a large number of the sector wide utilities issues landlords continue to report
- Housing Services refocussed policy and compliance focus through structural change and this was linked to a streamlining of works commissioning within our Building Services Teams underpinned by robust quality assurance and enhanced partnership arrangements
- Reset our Voids Relet Standard with a specific focus on the co-ordination of component replacement works, implementing a 4 Disciplines of Execution approach to performance management across the housing management and repairs aspects of the change of tenancy process. This has created a formal weekly focus on technical and letting voids.
- Enhanced financial and performance accountability using a Voids Governance Approach, linking to broader political and officer level structures.
- Reset contractual management arrangements with primary service delivery partners to ensure accountability with a commitment to improve performance and standards.
- Improved the relationship between the management of mainstream empty properties and properties diverted to provide temporary accommodation
- Provided a focus on housing management processes where properties could be unavoidably empty for different management purposes (for example, decants)
- Refreshed LEAN approached to process improvement, examining all aspects of the processes for efficiency and reaction to customer / staff feedback.

We have reached a point where the number of empty properties at any given time largely reflects standard turnover and performance has dramatically improved over the last year. This improvement is hidden to some extent by around 60 properties that were returned to use last year following extended void periods. We are not confident that extended letting voids have largely been eliminated although there are issues with certain types of stock (for example, retirement housing with limited amenities etc). We are also still working to address demonstrable inefficiencies in the system (for example, properties vacant due to Environmental Checks for Public Protection reasons)

This improvement is necessary to support the operation of Fife's Transfer Led Approach to housing allocations and meeting homelessness needs. Fife Council has consistently viewed transfer led allocations as a way of delivering the best

response to tenant's in housing need and increasing opportunities to meet the range of statutory and priority housing needs.

As part of the Housing Emergency Response, the following actions are being taken;

- Focussing on a very small number of longer term voids (around 30) which are subject to major repairs (due to fire, flood or structural issues) or environmental issues (land or estates issues) and are improving our project management approach to bring these properties.
- Structures are also being considered to assess the potential for enhanced tenant engagement pre-termination / exit to further improve the co-ordination and commissioning of works during the void period.
- Enhancing approaches to property acquisitions and ensuring these are converted into usable social rented sector homes as quickly as possible.

Fife's improvement journey will continue to be monitored and reported through People and Communities Scrutiny Committee but I hope this is the context that you were looking for and, should you require any further information, please let me know.

Yours sincerely

**Gavin Smith**  
**Service Manager, Housing Access and PMO for Fife's Housing Emergency**

## **Administration Motion to Council on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024**

### **Housing Emergency**

Council notes with great concern the extreme pressures on housing and homelessness in Fife;

- that despite the approval of a medium-term Homelessness Strategy 2024-2027 and the progress made over recent months in reducing void turnaround times, with reprovisioning of temporary accommodation and in increasing the number of properties available for relet, the number of households assessed as homeless and waiting for a tenancy and the number of families with children in temporary accommodation remains worryingly high;
- that like other local authorities across Scotland, Fife faces difficulties in meeting its statutory duties in regard to homelessness;
- pressures on the Housing Revenue Account that required a 5% rent increase;
- that Fife did not receive any of the additional £2m revenue funding for temporary accommodation announced by the Scottish Government prior to December 2023.
- the significant cut of 26% in the national Affordable Housing Programme made by the Scottish Government that will impact on the Council's own new build affordable housing programme, and the lack of additional capital funding as a consequence of the UK Budget.

Council therefore agrees to declare a Housing Emergency and requests the Head of Housing to work with partners to bring forward a Housing Emergency Action Plan to the Cabinet Committee in June, to supplement and accelerate already agreed actions and to address the Housing Emergency in Fife.

Council also calls on the Scottish Government to reverse its decision to cut the affordable housing programme budget by 26%.