

Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

Summary and Recommendations

This report seeks endorsement of work on a joint campaign with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership to highlight the benefits of empty homes work in local areas.

This paper invites Members of the Community Well-Being Board to:

- i. Agree a joint campaign on mainstreaming empty homes work, providing advice and highlighting the benefits of this approach.

References

Previous reports:

- CWB Item - 3.2 Scottish Empty Homes Partnership – March 2019

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Purpose

1. This report introduces a presentation by the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP). SEHP's aim is to encourage empty properties back into use. They do this in several ways: offering advice to individual owners; supporting a network of empty homes practitioners in councils and other bodies; and developing policy and practice ideas.

Current COSLA Position

2. The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership is hosted by Shelter Scotland. The Partnership, formed in 2010, aims to bring privately-owned long-term empty homes back into use.
3. There are 22 councils with empty homes officers, and at least 14 councils with a specific empty homes' strategy – though others may include this within local strategies or rapid rehousing transition plans.
4. COSLA are supportive of the SEHP and their efforts to support local authorities to return empty properties back into use. In March 2019, SHEP presented to the Community Wellbeing Board and set out the ambition to have a dedicated empty homes officer in every Local Authority in Scotland. The Board noted this and the opportunities empty homes work provides and agreed to highlight opportunities to develop this within their own local authority.

What is changing?

5. The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP) plans to develop a resource for councils including information on what causes empty homes, the impact they can have on neighbours and communities and how they can be brought back into use. This will focus on how empty homes work can support local neighbourhood regeneration and economic recovery.
6. The aim of the campaign is to increase awareness amongst local authorities and other stakeholders on how empty homes work can contribute to a wide range of areas positively, as well as increasing housing options. This will take the form of an information campaign called "Why Empty Homes Matter" to raise awareness and outline the benefits of mainstreaming empty homes work.
7. The campaign will be presented in the form of a printed information pack and digital assets and it is intended that these will be launched at the Scottish Empty Homes Conference on Tuesday 1 February 2022.

Proposed COSLA Position

8. It is proposed that COSLA collaborate with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership to deliver "Why Empty Homes Matter" as an opportunity to further develop the work of local authorities on empty homes. The development of the campaign and resources will be carried out by SHEP, with COSLA officers providing advice and guidance on content, audience and distribution. The campaign will also include animated videos and social media assets.

9. The campaign will highlight the benefits of empty homes work, with topics including meeting housing demand, sustaining fragile communities, boosting local economies, building a sense of place, reducing carbon footprint, reviving town centres, and supporting development of 20 minute neighbourhoods.
10. The COSLA logo would be used on the campaign resources and COSLA will share the resources with local authorities and partners and advise SHEP on engaging target audiences. SHEP will be covering to cost of printing and marketing.

Next Steps

11. If agreed, COSLA officers will work with professional advisors and SHEP to provide advice and guidance on the development of the campaign. Draft resources will be shared by officers prior to finalisation, and then launched at the conference on 1st February 2022. It is anticipated that the COSLA spokesperson will be invited to speak at the conference.

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