

Councillors row over empty houses

✖ A Green councillor has slammed City Council complacency over the rising number of private sector empty homes and demanded action to reverse the tide.

Councillor Maggie Chapman, who sits on the Council's Housing Committee, made the comments as the committee reflected on an annual report on empty homes today.

The report is part of a commitment secured in 2007 by fellow Green Councillor Steve Burgess for the Council to report annually on empty homes, and actions taken to reduce their number.

The 2012 report (reproduced below) shows that the number of private homes which have been empty for more than 6 months has soared by 64% to almost 1,500 since 2007.

The Greens argue that existing policies are not working and that the City Council needs to be far more radical in its approach. Despite the backing of other opposition councillors, the ruling Administration voted against Councillor Chapman's alternative recommendation which read as follows:-

Delete 8 and insert

1. Notes with disappointment that the number of long term empty private sector homes has risen by 64% over the reporting period since 2007.

2. Believes that a greater focus on empty homes is required to ensure that this trend does not continue.

3. Instructs officials to prepare, no later than June 2012, an action plan for empty homes in Edinburgh which includes the following elements

3.1 Development of an empty homes database, drawing on council tax records with a matrix for prioritising specific

properties and localities; and supplemented by notifications from www.reportemptyhomes.com to which the City Council should sign up at the earliest opportunity.

3.2 A survey of empty property owners to better understand the policies and interventions to which they are likely to respond.

3.3 A system for taking enforcement action on empty property which is causing nuisance or risks to health and safety.

3.4 A package of advice and assistance for owners, including letting options, investment options and linking up with potential buyers.

3.5 Exploration with neighbouring councils ways in which expertise and good practice in dealing with empty homes can be pooled.

3.6 Details of the number of newly-built empty homes which have never been occupied but which have been empty longer than 6 months; and options for bringing these properties into use.

3.7 Appraisal of the means by which the Council will use potential new powers available from April 2013 to increase the maximum council tax levy on long term empty homes from 90% to 200% of the standard rate; and the way in which additional revenue raised can be invested in bringing empty homes back into use.

Councillor Maggie Chapman said:

“Edinburgh has faced a massive rise in the number of private empty homes at the same time as a deepening crisis in affordable housing, yet the best that the City Council can do is offer to send a leaflet to empty property owners advertising existing schemes for renting out property. This is shockingly complacent and places Edinburgh well behind what other Scottish councils are seeking to do.

“Empty homes are the sign of a failed housing market – a wasted opportunity and with a potential for real blight on

neighbourhoods. Edinburgh can and must do more.”

Among the actions Councillor Chapman argued for Edinburgh to adopt are:

1. To join another 26 Scottish councils in signing up to the www.reportemptyhomes.com website which allows members of the public to assist the Council in identifying empty homes.
2. To work with developers to identify newly-built developments which are lying long term empty (but not included in the 1500 above) and ways of bringing them into use.
3. To carry out a survey of empty property owners to understand what mix of policies might best get properties used.
4. To explore how best to use new powers which are expected to be available from April 2013 to increase council tax on empty homes and to use some of the revenue to develop incentives for property use.

[Item 8 – Empty Homes in Edinburgh](#)