

Council could buy private student housing blocks to help tackle housing crisis

Private student housing blocks in the city could be bought up by Edinburgh Council to help tackle the city's housing crisis.

The move emerged as councillors voted to suspended council housing allocations, with Edinburgh struggling to meet Scottish Government housing requirements.

This is the second time in less than a year that the council have had to suspend housing allocations, after a similar measure was taken in November last year.

In pausing the council housing allocation policy, and working to bring void council properties back into use, the city hopes to make 120 units available for homeless households every month.

The city is also exploring other avenues for quickly expanding the city's housing stock, including the purchase of existing private housing.

Danny Aston, SNP councillor for Craighentinny/Duddingston, said at the Friday committee meeting that the city was exploring the purchase of a private student housing block to help with the issue.

"So we've [councillors] heard there's a purpose built student accommodation block being looked at," Cllr Aston said. "I've

actually heard a rumour that there's maybe more than one."

It is understood a report set to go before the council's Finance and Resources Committee next week will explore the purchase of ELS house on Gorgie Road, a major private student housing block.

Gareth Barwell, executive director of Place said : "Thanks Councillor Aston. There are some discussions ongoing with some sites as you'd expect, some commercially sensitive discussions. But we are aware of a number of opportunities in the city where we may be able to buy buildings that are either ready or will be ready within the next, I think, six to nine months.

"I think it's an ongoing discussion."

Council officers also said that the city was exploring options for expanding the city's council housing stock more in the medium and long term.

The decision to suspend the allocation of council housing means almost all spaces will now be directed towards people experiencing homelessness, with the exception of people with acute medical needs or awaiting discharge from hospital.

Free council housing units will be used either for temporary accommodation for homeless people, or for permanent tenancies for homeless households.

Figures presented to the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work committee on Friday showed that the city failed to accommodate homeless people on 3,263 occasions in the past year – an increase of 115% over 2023/24.

And in March alone, Edinburgh failed to accommodate 750 homeless households seeking housing, almost 58% of the total number of requests that month.

The situation has been compounded by a recent legal ruling

which forced Edinburgh to stop using hotel and bed and breakfast rooms that did not meet licensing requirements.

Also at the meeting, councillors raised concerns about the impact that suspending the council housing policy could have on existing tenants, as well as those on waiting lists.

SNP councillor Stuart Dobbin, representing the Forth ward, pointed out that around 1,000 families currently in council housing in the city live in overcrowded conditions.

The decision will be reviewed in a meeting near the end of June.