

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Chief Executive and Depute Chief Executive
to Cabinet
of 28th October 2025**

Subject: Empty Homes Strategy 2025-2030

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet agreement to the revised Empty Homes Strategy for the period 2025-2030, which sets out new proposals to maximise the number of empty homes brought back into use across South Ayrshire.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1.1 Approves the revised Empty Homes Strategy and actions for the period 2025-2030 (detailed in Appendix 1); and**
- 2.1.3 Request that Members are kept updated annually on progress against this Strategy via the Service and Partnership Performance Panel.**

3. Background

- 3.1 In September 2011, South Ayrshire Council was awarded funding by the Scottish Government to develop an Empty Homes Revolving Loan Fund, with the aim of bringing empty properties back into use as affordable housing for rent. The Council developed its first Empty Homes Strategy following approval of this funding and the strategy was agreed by the Council's Leadership Panel in November 2011.
- 3.2 Since this time, South Ayrshire Council has been actively working with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, (funded by the Scottish Government and Co-ordinated by Shelter Scotland), to implement the Empty Homes Strategies and support initiatives to assist owners in bringing their properties back into use. Over the course of the last strategy 2018-2023, and through 24/25 148 empty properties have been brought back into circulation aided by support and assistance from our teams.
- 3.3 A review of the Council's current Empty Homes Strategy commenced in late 2024. This review identified the need for more assistance for owners to bring their properties back into use as well as more incentives for developers to take on empty homes' projects. The current initiatives will remain in place to provide a wide range of options in bringing back empty properties with the addition of new initiatives highlighted within the strategy which will complement existing offers.

- 3.4 A consultation was sent out to empty homeowners as well as developers on the matchmaker scheme who look to take on empty home projects. These stakeholders were asked what their main barriers are which included a lack of knowledge/funds in carrying out repairs for owners and developers were reluctant to take on certain projects due to tax implications and found it difficult to engage with owners of these properties. The Empty Homes Strategy 2025-2030 looks to address these issues with new initiatives including grant funding and trying to work with developers with repair to rent and repair to manage schemes.
- 3.5 The revised strategy places more emphasis on maximising the use of empty properties to meet local housing needs and achieve strategic objectives set within the Local Housing Strategy. As well as considering new approaches, the revised strategy will continue to build on work and effort placed on identifying empty properties, tracking down and contacting absent owners, publicising the benefits of making use of empty properties, and encouraging people to take advantage of the options on offer to facilitate the process.

4. Detail

- 4.1 Members are asked to consider and approve the revised Empty Homes Strategy 2025-2030, as detailed in Appendix 1, and receive updates on progress against the actions via the Services and Performance Partnership Panel.
- 4.2 The Empty Homes Strategy 2025-2030 sets out how the Council will tackle empty homes in the private sector and highlight the issues associated with them. It builds upon the activity and interventions which have succeeded in bringing empty homes back into use during the life span of the previous strategy.
- 4.3 This Strategy outlines how the Council and partners will work collaboratively over the next 5 years to proactively tackle the impact of empty homes on communities, neighbourhoods, homeowners, and residents across South Ayrshire.
- 4.4 The Strategy defines how the National legislative framework offers mechanisms which can assist empty homes activity and intervention including enforcement action, advice, assistance, and investment.
- 4.5 A priority of the strategy is ensuring South Ayrshire Council achieves wider strategic objectives set out by our Local Housing Strategy and others, aimed at supporting resolutions to issues faced by other Council services such as Anti-Social Behaviour, Building Standards, Environmental Health and Council Tax.
- 4.6 The Strategy is supported by 13 actions which focus on improving the opportunities and support available to owners, consider new initiatives which will help in achieving our goals of returning empty properties back into the housing system.

5. Legal and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report. The revised strategy and new proposals can be delivered from the initial funding provided by the Scottish Government.

7. Human Resources Implications

- 7.1 There are no human resource implications as a result of this report. New initiatives will be managed by the Policy Officer with responsibility for Empty Homes and the Accommodation Assistant for Social Letting Service.

8. Risk

8.1 *Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations*

- 8.1.1 New risk(s) has/ have been identified and assessed in line with the Council's risk management process as follows:

- Previously identified repayment of Empty Homes Loan should the property fail to have a tenant in it for rental income.

This will be managed within existing operational activities and reference to the status of mitigations will be available through the Corporate Policy, Strategy and Performance Risk Register.

8.2 *Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations*

- 8.2.1 The risks associated with rejecting the recommendations are that the Empty Homes Initiative could be prohibited in its efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing with South Ayrshire. This in turn will have an increase on pressure to access good quality homes within South Ayrshire.

9. Integrated Impact Assessment (incorporating Equalities)

Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) considers the following areas:

- Public Sector Equality Duty, Human Rights and Fairer Scotland Duty;
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);
- Sustainability, climate change and biodiversity;
- Potential impact on older people;
- Rural communities;
- Health and wellbeing;
- A trauma informed organisation; and
- The Promise.

- 9.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment has been carried out on the proposals contained in this report, which identifies potential positive and/ or negative impacts and/ or areas that require further consideration. The IIA Summary Report is attached as Appendix 2 which includes information on any mitigating or follow-up action

required. Details of consultation that has taken place can be found in section 13 of the report.

A copy of the fully completed IIA can be accessed here [Empty Homes Strategy .xlsm](#)

10. Sustainable Development Implications

10.1 **Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** - The Scottish Government Gateway has been contacted regarding this plan, policy, programme or strategy, and it has been determined that an SEA will not be pursued.

11. Options Appraisal

11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

12. Link to Council Plan

12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to Priority 2 of the Council Plan: Live, Work, Learn (Housing – Everyone can find a good quality home that they can afford, that meets their needs and is an area where they feel safe and connected).

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13. Link to Shaping Our Future Council Yes No x

13.1 Not applicable.

14. Results of Consultation

14.1 There has been public consultation on the contents of this report engaging with empty homeowners and developers and investors on our matchmaker scheme. This consultation fed into the development of new incentives and shaped the strategy. Attached as Appendix 3.

14.2 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Kilbride, Portfolio Holder for Buildings, Housing and Environment and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

14.3 Consultation has taken place with the Empty Homes Partnership and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

15. Next Steps for Decision Tracking Purposes

15.1 If the recommendations above are approved by Members, the Service Lead, Housing Strategy & Regeneration will ensure that all necessary steps are taken to ensure full implementation of the decision within the following timescales, with the completion status reported to the Cabinet in the 'Council and Cabinet Decision Log' at each of its meetings until such time as the decision is fully implemented:

<i>Implementation</i>	<i>Due date</i>	<i>Managed by</i>
Implement the new Empty Homes Strategy	31 st December 2025	Service Lead, Housing Strategy & Regeneration

Background Papers Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028 - [SAC Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028](#)

Housing Need & Demand Assessment 2021-2026 - [SAC HNDA 2021-2026](#)

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Date: 1st October 2025.

Empty Homes Strategy Report 2025-30

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Introduction

South Ayrshire Council are pleased to introduce its Empty Homes Strategy for 2025-2030. The strategy sets out how the Council will tackle empty homes in the private sector and highlight the issues associated with them.

There are approximately 45,000 long term empty properties throughout Scotland¹. There are currently over 800 properties in South Ayrshire that are registered as being empty according to Council Tax data. Of these 800, over 400 of these properties are currently liable for 200% Council tax levy, meaning that they have been empty for at least 1 year.

The term Empty Homes in this strategy is defined as long term empty properties and unoccupied exemptions. Long term empty properties are dwellings that have been empty for 6 months or more and are liable for Council tax. Unoccupied exemptions are properties which are empty and exempt from paying Council tax. These are often properties that have been empty for less than 6 months and the owner is claiming the 6-month unoccupied Council tax rate. In August 2025, the Council had 96 properties exempt from paying Council tax.

1. Empty homes - Second homes and empty properties in September 2024 - gov.scot

What we Achieved

As we look ahead, It's important to reflect on the progress made under our previous strategy. The following table highlights the main actions implemented and the impact they had.

Action	Progress
Initiate Contact with 100% of Owners of Properties Registered as Long Term Empty in South Ayrshire Council Tax System.	Each year every empty home owner is lettered and invited to complete a survey to determine the reasons for their property being empty and what can be done to assist.
Establish Empty Home Working Group, to include internal and external partners.	The Empty Homes Working Group is well established and meets quarterly. It includes members from various council services and looking to expand.
Return 20% of long term empty properties back to use by 2022/23.	97 empty homes have been brought back into use equating to 20% of the 470 baseline empty homes figure in the previous strategy. These properties have all had direct involvement with the Empty Homes Officer.
19 properties back into use per annum.	This goal has been achieved.



Strategic Vision for Tackling Empty Homes in South Ayrshire

This Empty Homes Strategy sets out how the Council and partners will work together over the next 5 years to proactively tackle the impact of empty homes on communities, neighbourhoods, homeowners, and residents across South Ayrshire.

To achieve this, the following vision has been set for the Strategic Empty Homes Framework:

“To work alongside partners and stakeholders to assist owners in bringing their properties back into use. To monitor and update the advice and incentives available to empty homeowners to ensure that these remain suitable to the changing environment and legislation”.

This vision provides the overarching strategic objective for empty homes in South Ayrshire. It sets out what the Council and partners want to achieve in tackling empty homes and reflects the level of ambition agreed with delivery partners. It also reflects the strategic aim of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership to *‘bring as many privately-owned empty homes back into use as possible’*.

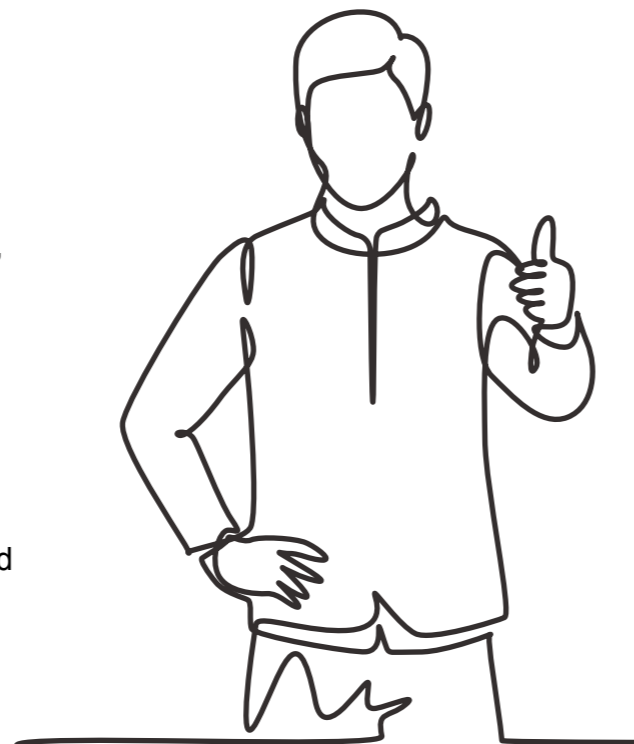
Aims

The previous strategy, 2018-2023, set the foundation for empty homes work with the following aims.

- To increase the supply of affordable housing
- To improve the condition of private sector housing
- To make a positive impact on alleviating homelessness
- To contribute to the sustainability of the community

This strategy will build on these aims to provide advice and assistance to owners of empty properties to bring them back into use. In doing so, the strategy will:

- Set a clear target for reducing the number of empty homes over the course of the strategy.
- Support homeowners to bring empty homes back into use, increasing local housing options and meeting housing need.
- Enable housing regeneration, placemaking and neighbourhood improvement activity which improves community safety, environmental quality, and housing condition.
- Make a positive contribution to the building reuse and repurposing agenda aligned to the Council’s wider ambitions for tackling climate change.
- Raise the profile of empty homes across Community Planning and Housing Strategy to maximise investment, partnership commitment and innovation in tackling empty homes.
- Support the Council’s strategic objectives in relation to homelessness prevention in line with our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.



National Policy & Legislative Context for Empty Homes

There is a rich and diverse policy context for tackling empty homes in Scotland, which supports the delivery of empty homes activity and influences the contribution that empty homes can make to national, local and community objectives.

It is important that this Strategy supports and helps deliver national housing outcomes and targets, whilst also reflecting the local needs and strategic priorities set out by South Ayrshire Council and wider partners.

The Empty Homes Strategy defines the contribution that empty homes can make to local strategic priorities and meeting the targets set out in Scotland’s first national Housing Strategy: ‘Housing to 2040’. The national and local strategic framework that supports and enables the delivery of the Empty Homes Strategy is set out in more detail below.

Statutory Requirements

There are no statutory requirements for local authorities in relation to Empty Homes however, several other statutory requirements placed on South Ayrshire Council relate directly or indirectly to bringing empty homes back into use, as follows:

- Local Government Finance (Unoccupied properties etc.) (Scotland) Act 2012. This allows local authorities to charge increased Council Tax on certain homes that have been empty over a year.
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2011 which places a duty on local authorities to develop a Local Housing Strategy (LHS) which set out the local authority’s and local partners’ vision for the supply of housing across all tenures and types of housing provision.
- Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 cites local authorities’ duties to homeless people including a statutory responsibility to anyone threatened with, or experiencing, homelessness.
- House Condition, Housing (Scotland) Act 2006, Section 10 creates duties to have in place a Below Tolerable Standard Strategy, Housing Renewal Area Policy and Scheme of Assistance Strategy
- Tackling the effects of Climate Change – Section 44 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009
- Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019 introduces a new statutory target for reducing fuel poverty. The target is that by 2040, as far as reasonably possible, no household, in any Local Authority area, in Scotland is in fuel poverty; and, in any event, no more than 5% of households, in any local authority area in Scotland are in fuel poverty. No more than 1% of households in Scotland should be in extreme fuel poverty.







This legislative framework offers mechanisms which can assist empty homes activity and intervention including enforcement action, advice, assistance and investment.



The National Policy Context for Empty Homes

The national policy context places the empty homes agenda within a framework of strategic ambitions around housing, place, community, net zero and the Scottish economy. Whilst there are currently no statutory requirements for local authorities regarding empty homes, the Scottish Government is keen to encourage empty homeowners to bring properties back into use and in particular, to increase affordable housing supply in Scotland to tackle shortages in this sector.

There are currently eleven National Outcomes describing what the Scottish Government wants to achieve. By proactively tackling empty homes and bringing them back into use, the Council and partners can contribute to delivery of several of these as shown below:

National Outcome	Empty Homes Contribution
Communities: We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe. 	Tackling empty homes improves community safety, encouraging greater levels of resident occupation to reduce security risks and enhance neighbourhood quality.
Fair work and business: We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone. 	Empty homes can contribute to fair work and local business agendas through job creation, spend on materials and resources, learning and development of a skilled workforce and increasing the number of households accessing services, amenities.
Economy: We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive, and sustainable economy. 	Assisting and enabling empty homeowners to bring their properties back into use, provides greater housing choice, improves the aesthetic appearance of communities, and can contribute to making communities more robust and resilient through investment, job creation and greater local spend.
Environment: We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally. 	Refurbishment and retrofitting of empty homes has significantly less impact on the environment than new build housing activity because of the levels of embodied carbon involved in demolition and rebuilding. Bringing empty homes back into use safeguards properties at risk by allowing works to be carried out on them and adjoining properties.
Poverty: We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally. 	Empty homes that are brought back into use can contribute to increasing the supply of affordable housing and therefore assist in tackling the poverty agenda. Where properties are located in a town centre, or within walkable distance, such development will reduce non-housing costs and support the affordable living agenda.
Health: We are healthy and active 	The mental and physical wellbeing of people who live in the same street as an empty home can be adversely affected particularly if it becomes the focus of anti-social behaviour. People living in areas with high levels of long-term empty homes back to use can help people to rediscover a sense of place and remove the negative stresses and risks to physical health that living next door to an empty home can cause.

Empty homes have an important role to play in helping to deliver the right homes, in the right places for people across Scotland. The Scottish Government's Housing to 2040S Strategy sets an ambitious vision of what housing should look like over the next two decades and a plan on how to achieve this vision.

Bringing empty homes back into use will help deliver all priorities set out in the Housing to 2040 strategy as follows:

Affordable warmth and zero emissions homes:

- Help to drive down carbon emissions caused by housing and housing construction.
- Assist with reduced heating and operational carbon emissions through retrofitting for improved energy performance.

More homes at the heart of great places:

- Help to meet demand for affordable housing in areas of most need.
- Contribute to the regeneration and revitalising of town centres, villages and rural communities.

Affordability and choice:

- Contribute to delivering 110,000 affordable homes between 2021/22 and 2031/32
- Ensure as wide a range as possible of property types and tenures across Scotland.

Improving the quality of all homes:

- Supporting the renovation of existing homes and returning them back to use
- Improving the quality of housing stock and the aesthetic appearance of neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, the new National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Policy 9 'Quality Homes', encourages the delivery of homes across different tenures and by a range of providers. In doing so, it places an emphasis on sustainability and opportunities for tackling climate change, as well as adopting the approach of building reuse. NPF4 therefore promotes the sustainable reuse of buildings such as empty homes.

Within NPF4 Policy 9 'Quality Homes' there is recognition and encouragement for a significant contribution to housing targets to be made by existing empty homes, or buildings not currently used for residential purposes, being returned or converted to use as homes. This provides an opportunity to consider how bringing housing back into effective use through remodelling and rehabilitation of existing properties could be promoted through the South Ayrshire Council's Local Housing Strategy and Local Development Plan.




Local policy context for Empty Homes

The Empty Homes Strategy helps South Ayrshire Council achieve wider strategic objectives set out by our Local Housing Strategy, Strategic Housing Investment Plan, Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, and the Council Plan as well as providing resolutions to issues faced by other Council services such as Anti-Social Behaviour, Building Standards, Environmental Health and Council Tax.

The table below shows links to each strategic Council plan and how the Empty Homes Strategy helps to achieve specific outcomes.

Council Strategy/Policy	Strategic Objective	Empty Homes Contribution
Local Housing Strategy 2024-2029: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Delivery Placemaking Healthy Homes and Fuel Poverty 	HS5 - Access to the private sector is promoted.	Empty Homeowners often look for advice and assistance in renting their property out. The Empty Homes Officer can assist with finding a tenant through a tenant finder scheme or by engaging with the social letting service to rent the property out on behalf of the owner. Sweat Equity is also explored in suitable cases giving a tenant the opportunity to rent privately and complete necessary repairs to a property.
	HS6 - Owners are encouraged to bring their long-term empty homes back into use.	The Empty Homes Initiative provides advice and assistance in order to bring empty homes back into use depending on the owner's intentions. The initiative can help owners; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sell properties that are not in a 'market ready' state through the Matchmaker Scheme. Rent their properties by providing the Empty Homes Loan and renting the property out through the Social Letting Service Move back into their property by providing advice on repairs, merchants discounts and where appropriate VAT discounts on qualifying repairs and materials. Renovate properties by matching up to contractors who would like to project manage properties
	PM2 - Housing works collaboratively with appropriate services and local people to address complex issues within local areas.	Empty Homes are often empty due to complex situations including family breakdown, mortgage issues or mental health issues. When left empty for a long time they can be detrimental to a neighbourhood's aesthetics. The Empty Homes Initiative will help to engage with owners by tracking down next of kin or responsible parties to bring these issues to their attention to find a positive resolution.
	HH2 - Properties in the private rented sector meet the Repairing Standard and Landlords/owners are meeting their legislative responsibilities.	Landlords with long-term empty homes can access advice and assistance to bring their properties up to the repairing standard to bring them back into use.

	HH4 - Homeowners, landlords and tenants are aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to property condition and are supported to uphold them.	The Empty Homes Officer will engage with homeowners who are not upkeeping their property and causing detriment to the neighbourhood in an attempt to bring their property up to a standard and back into use. We will engage with Environmental Health and Building Standards, where appropriate to ensure that the properties are not causing a further risk to the public.
	HH6 - Repair, Improvement and adaptation advice and assistance is available to homeowners and tenants across South Ayrshire.	The Empty Homes Initiative provides practical advice and assistance in repairing properties and will link in with other services to assist with this including Disabled Adaptations and Missing Shares where appropriate.
South Ayrshire Council Plan 2023-2028: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priority Two - Live, Work, Learn, Sustainability, Climate Change and Biodiversity 	Housing - Everyone can find a good quality home that they can afford, that meets their needs and is in an area where they feel safe and connected.	Bringing long term empty properties back into use increases the number of available homes in South Ayrshire. If these properties are to be made available for sale or rent, then it potentially frees up affordable housing elsewhere. Empty Homes are often found in well-established communities, therefore bringing these properties back into use provides people with an opportunity to remain in their communities.
	Sustainability, climate change and biodiversity - The Council aims to both fulfil and show leadership in relation to our statutory climate change, sustainability, and biodiversity duties across all our services, decision making and work with partners. We have committed to be net zero by 2045 and to adapt to the already locked in impacts of a changing climate. In doing so we aim to ensure a just transition for people and nature, supporting ecological recovery and wellbeing, reducing inequalities and creating sustainable, liveable places where people are connected to nature, climate literate and understand the natural systems we rely on, are supported to develop green skills and can work in a fast-evolving local green jobs market, travel less overall and make active and sustainable travel choices first.	Recent evidence has suggested that building new homes creates more than three times the level of greenhouse gas emissions (50 tonnes) than renovating an empty property (15 tonnes). Bringing empty homes back into use presents an opportunity to increase the supply of housing without the detrimental impacts of greenhouse gas emissions ² . More properties can be brought back into use in places where there are established communities where people want to live rather than new builds in unestablished areas creating more harmful emissions. Empty homeowners are encouraged to explore sustainable practices when renovating homes such as sustainable materials for insulation and upcycling as well as zero/low emission heating system. 

2. <https://emptyhomespartnership.scot/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/COP-26-Empty-homes-and-the-environmental-emergency.web-copy.pdf>

<p>Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2024-2029:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Theme: Place-Working together to improve our places to help people and planet thrive. <p>Community Safety</p>	<p>Safer Communities: We will work in partnership to reduce violence and antisocial behaviour in South Ayrshire by working with our local licenced and hospitality trade, schools, and local communities helping make South Ayrshire a safer place to live. We will work in partnership to reduce all forms of violence against women and girls.</p>	<p>Empty homes can often attract anti-social behaviour in the form of unlawful entry, vandalism, fire raising and fly-tipping. All of which are detrimental to neighbourhoods and communities. The Empty Homes Initiative emphasises that the best way to keep a home safe and secure is having it occupied and looked after. The advice and incentives that are available through the scheme help owners to bring their properties into use and alleviate anti-social behaviour.</p>
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Profile of Empty Homes

Why are homes empty?

The reason for properties being empty can vary. This strategy aims to work with owners whatever the reason that their property is empty and provide advice and assistance to bring the property back into use. Understanding the reason that properties are empty helps to inform the strategy and allows us to tailor incentives to tackle the issue. In a recent consultation with empty homeowners, they were asked for the reason their property is empty. This consultation received a 10.44% response rate and the reasons for empty can be shown below in figure 1.

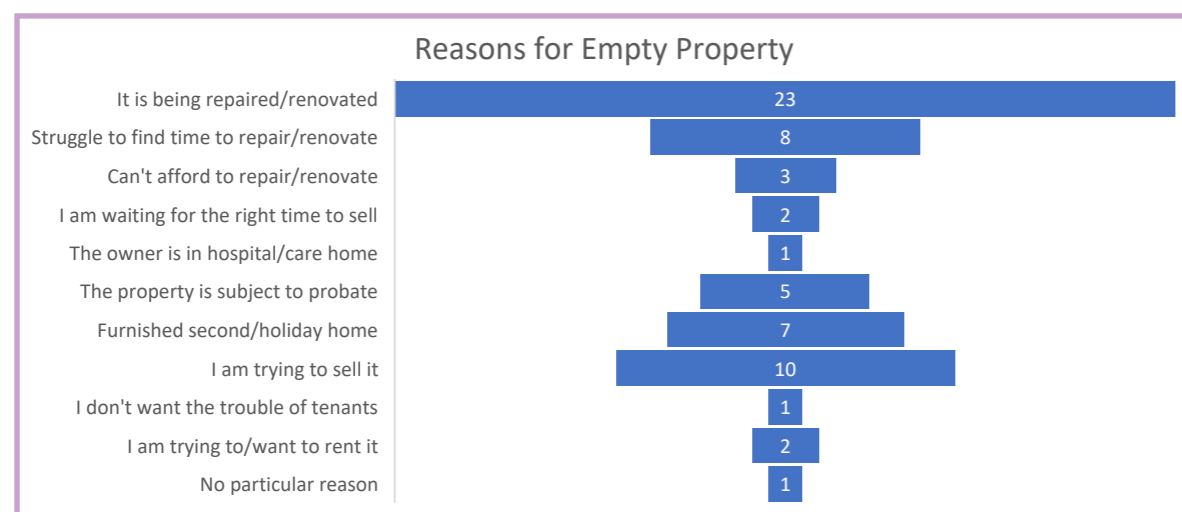


Figure 1 – Reason for property being empty for more than six months

The largest number of respondents (26%) advised that they are currently repairing/renovating the property. These properties would benefit from Empty Homes intervention by the Empty Homes Officer who can provide advice and assistance on the repairs and offer a letter entitling the owner to the VAT discount if appropriate.

Around 8% of the respondents are currently trying to sell their property. These properties are likely in a good condition and have been on the market for sale for some time. The Empty Homes Officer can assist with the sale by marketing the property through the matchmaker scheme to find a buyer.

Other reasons such as not being able to afford the repairs/renovations allows us to offer financial incentives such as the VAT discount scheme and empty homes loan funding. It also allows us to design new incentives and schemes for owners to assist them in bringing properties back into use. Owners who do not want the trouble of tenants may be suitable for the Council's Social Letting Service where the Council would manage the property and offer a service to the tenants which is more support intensive to keep the tenant in their property.

Where are homes empty?

Long term empty properties can be found throughout South Ayrshire. However, there are areas where clusters appear in areas of low property prices. Table 1 below shows the Intermediate data zones and the number of empty homes in each area.

Ayr South Harbour and Town Centre has the largest cluster of empty homes. Following this, Carrick South and Ayr North Harbour, Wallacetown and Newton South. These areas all have a mix of tenure with high demand social housing and private properties. Carrick South and Girvan Ailsa is the more rural areas in South Ayrshire and experiences high numbers of long-term empty homes. This can be explained by high migration to urban areas.

	Intermediate Data Zones	Number of LTE Homes	Increase of decrease 2023-2024	% of properties LTE	% of SA LTE homes	% of SA Homes
1	Carrick South	101	+11	3.62%	12.92%	4.91%
2	Ayr South Harbour and Town Centre	100	0	3.08%	12.79%	5.72%
3	Ayr North Harbour, Wallacetown and Newton South	89	-1	2.82%	11.38%	5.56%
4	Troon	53	-3	1.84%	6.78%	5.07%
5	Girvan Ailsa	49	-10	2.71%	6.27%	3.18%
6	Maybole	38	-3	1.65%	4.86%	4.06%
7	Annbank, Mossblown and Tarbolton - the Coalfields	35	-7	1.29%	4.48%	4.79%
8	Barassie	31	-4	1.42%	3.96%	3.84%
9	Alloway and Doonfoot	27	+8	0.98%	3.45%	4.85%
10	Newton North	25	-2	1.13%	3.20%	3.89%
11	Carrick North	24	-7	1.04%	3.07%	4.06%
12	Prestwick West	24	+5	1.17%	3.07%	3.61%
13	Prestwick Airport and Monkton	23	+4	1.44%	2.94%	2.82%
14	Girvan Glendoune	20	+9	1.24%	2.56%	2.85%
15	Belmont	20	-14	0.79%	2.56%	4.45%
16	Dundonald, Loans and Symington	20	+2	0.62%	2.56%	5.68%
17	Lochside, Breahead and Whitletts	17	+1	0.80%	2.17%	3.72%
18	Castlehill and Kincaidston	16	+1	0.79%	2.05%	3.58%
19	Heathfield	14	-3	0.69%	1.79%	3.56%
20	Prestwick East	14	-7	0.55%	1.79%	4.51%
21	Muirhead	11	-4	0.47%	1.41%	4.10%
22	Coylton	8	-8	0.48%	1.02%	2.395%
23	Craigie	8	-3	0.69%	1.02%	2.03%
24	Dalmilling	8	+1	0.63%	1.02%	2.24%
25	Holmston and Forehill	7	-4	0.31%	0.90%	3.98%

Table 1 – Intermediate Data Zones South Ayrshire Empty Homes (National Records of Scotland) 3

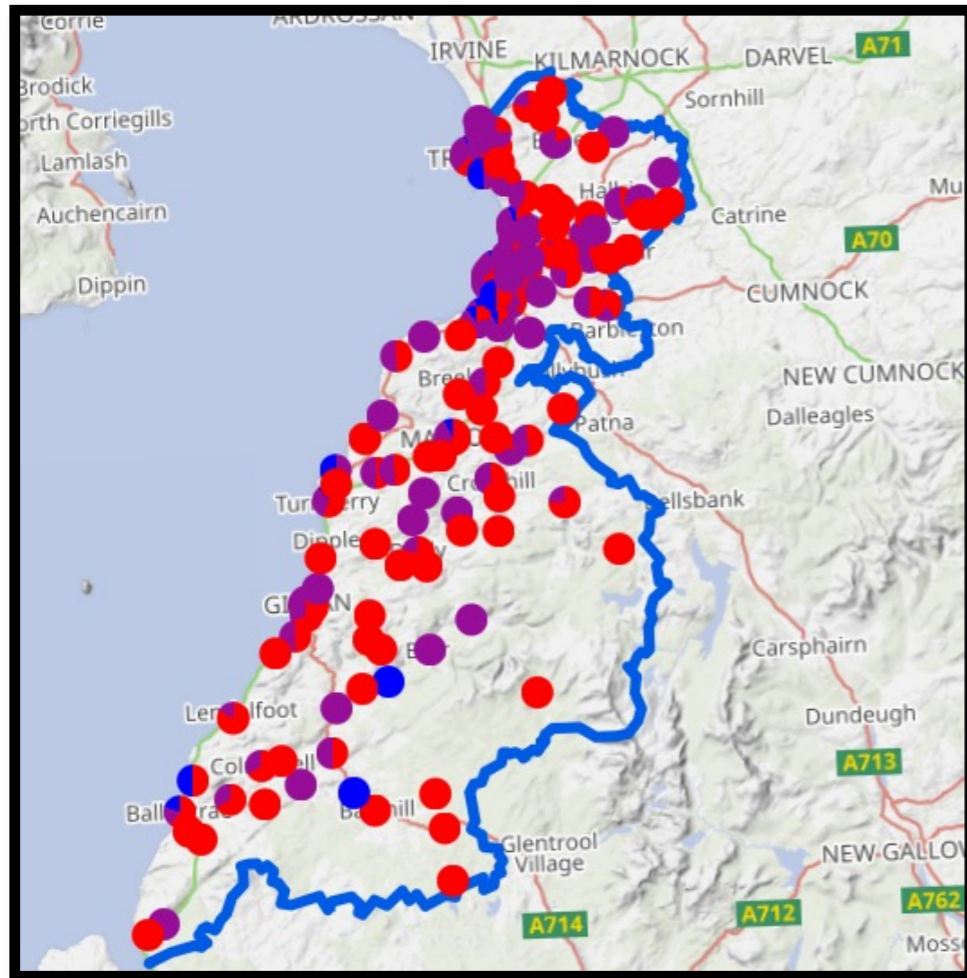


Figure 2 – Map of South Ayrshires Empty Homes

We are also able to narrow down areas further to street level. A GIS map is produced using exiting Council tax data to allow us to target regeneration of empty homes to specific areas and examine where they may be trends. Figure 2 below shows the South Ayrshire area zoomed out and where the Empty Homes are distributed.

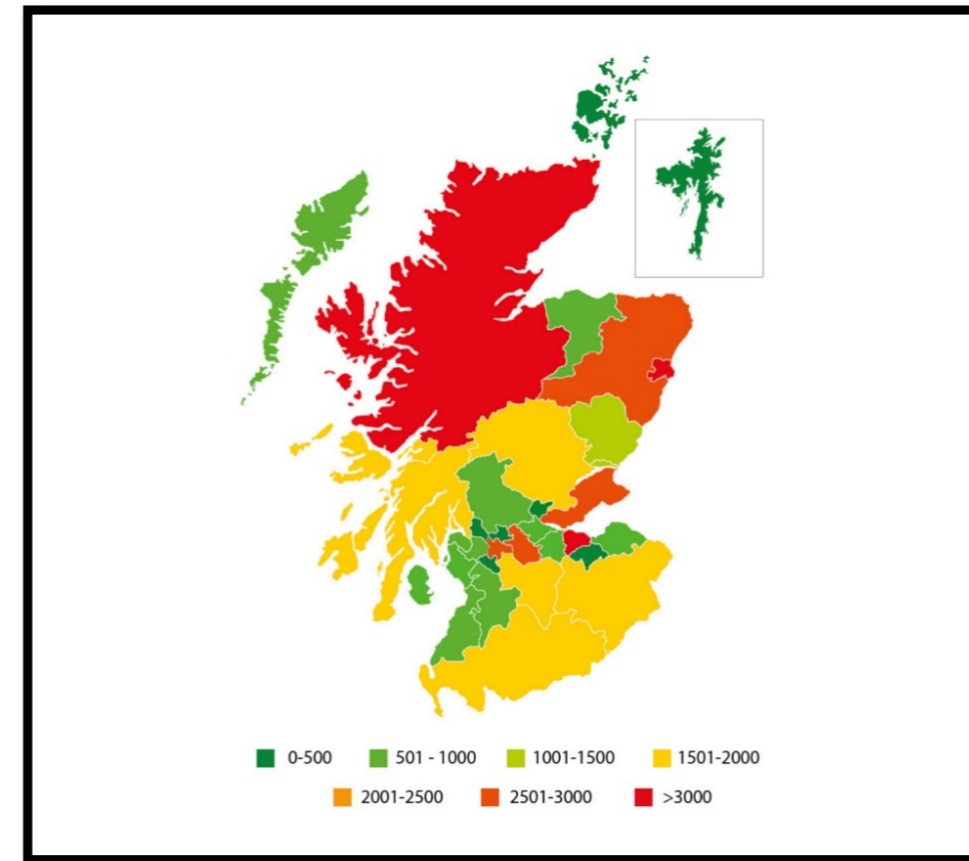
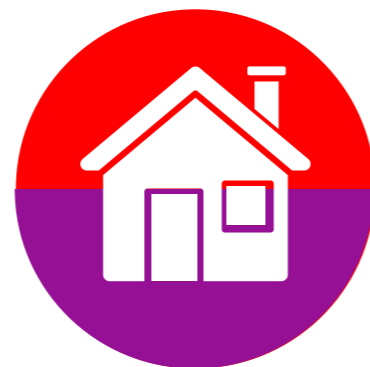


Figure 3 – Scotland's Empty Homes

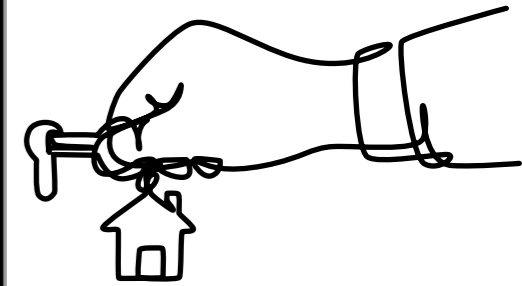


Table 2 below shows how we compare to other landlords in number of empty properties.

Local Authority	%of Scotland's Homes	% of Scotland's Empty Homes	Total Homes	Tootal Empty Homes
South Ayrshire Local Authority	2.08%	1.94%	56,697	846

There are approximately 44,000 empty properties in Scotland. South Ayrshire has 1.94% of Scotland's Empty Homes (846). Figure 3 below shows where the highest number of empty homes are throughout Scotland. We can see that South Ayrshire has relatively low numbers compared to further north of the country.

3. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/households/household-estimates/small-area-statistics-on-households-and-dwellings>



Strategic Approach

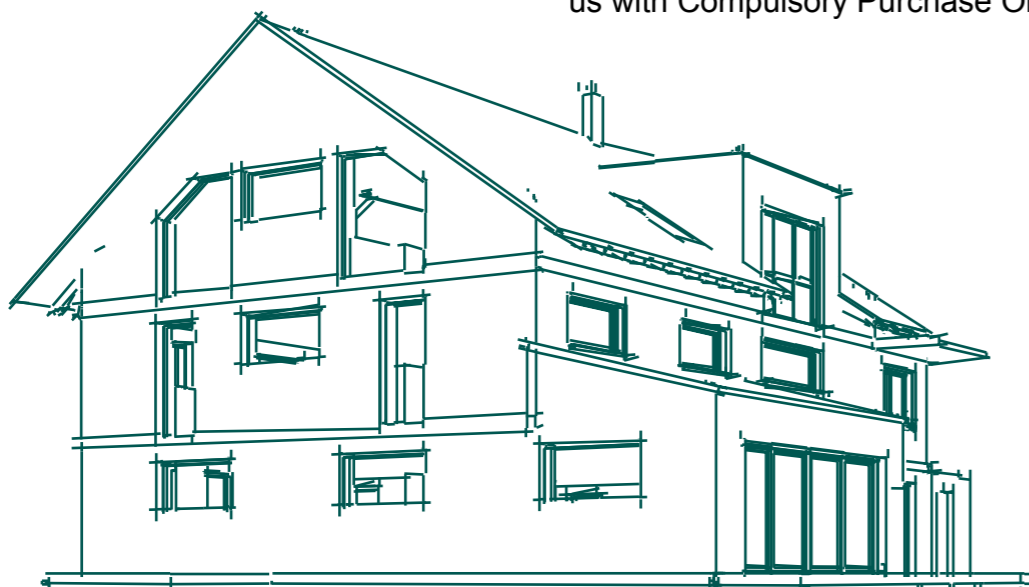
As identified in figure 1 above, there are many reasons that homes are currently empty. As well as the reasons listed above, there can be other reasons that can cause properties to remain empty for longer due to difficult solutions such as:

- Owner is deceased and the property remains in probate – This can be a difficult situation as it can involve a long legal process to determine who the beneficiaries to the estate are.
- Mortgage Default/Repossessions – When an owner falls into mortgage arrears the banks or lenders can repossess the property to put it back up for sale.

It is important to understand these reasons and devise the best options to address these complex issues. In many cases, tackling empty homes is not done in isolation by the Empty Homes Officer. It is important that other Council services are aware of the Empty Homes Strategy and how they can contribute to bringing properties back into use. Through the development of the previous strategy, an Empty Homes Working group was set up in South Ayrshire involving relevant Council services to discuss developments in the sector and discuss difficult cases.

The Empty Homes Officer works alongside Council services highlighted below, through the working group to assist in achieving collective objectives and find resolutions to empty homes:

- Anti-social Behaviour – As previously mentioned, Empty Homes can attract anti-social behaviour and result in increased calls to the service from concerned neighbours and members of the public.
- Building Standards – When left for a prolonged period of time, empty properties can deteriorate and cause a danger to the public.
- Environmental Health - We work with Environmental Health colleagues in a similar way to Building Standards and for similar reasons. Long term empty properties can attract fly tipping and can also result in overgrown gardens.
- Council Tax – The bulk of our information on empty properties comes from our colleagues at Council Tax. We engage with them initially to find owners details and apply the levy or discretion from the levy as an enforcement tool.
- Community Safety – Our colleagues in Community Safety work alongside Anti-Social Behaviour where there has been unlawful access to empty properties.
- Legal Services – When developing new incentives, colleagues at Legal Services will assist in the development of these to give a legal perspective. Legal Services will also assist in any questions we have regarding complex cases and what we may be able to do. Moving forward, legal services will help us with Compulsory Purchase Order cases.



Local Action, Challenges & Barriers in Tackling Empty Homes

As well as evidencing the need to tackle empty homes in South Ayrshire the Empty Homes Strategy builds upon the activity and interventions which have succeeded in bringing empty homes back into use; as well as specific local challenges and barriers to tackling empty homes.

The Strategic Framework therefore builds on successes that have been achieved by projects and initiatives within South Ayrshire, as well as innovation in empty homes activity across Scotland, other parts of the UK and elsewhere as the basis of piloting or programming future activity.

Empty Homes Projects and Initiatives

There are several ways in which the Empty Homes Officer can offer a solution to bring empty properties back into use:

- Strategic Buy Backs - The Council operates a buy back scheme where it purchases ex local authority properties that meet strategic objectives. Each property is looked at individually but primarily we look for properties that are in high demand areas and increase ownership of blocks. Each property is considered based on these objectives and a decision is made, there is a limited budget for buy backs each year so not all properties that are ex local authority will be suitable for buy back.
- Empty Homes Loan - The loan scheme is an interest free loan of up to £20,000 that has to be paid back within 5 years. The property must be rented out through our Social Letting Service and let out at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.
- VAT Discount – Properties that have been empty for more than 2 years may be eligible for a VAT discount letter on qualifying buildings and materials. The Empty Homes Officer will confirm with Council tax data on the last date of occupation and write a letter to the owner addressed to HMRC that the owner can give to contractors to be charged a discounted rate of VAT. For properties that have been empty for more than 2 years, VAT is charged at 5%. For properties that have been empty for more than 10 years, VAT is charged at 0%.
- Matchmaker Scheme – Empty property owners often want to sell their property but lack the funds to bring it to a “market ready” condition. The matchmaker scheme markets your property as is to a list of contractors, developers and renovation enthusiasts who are looking for opportunities to purchase property to renovate. These people will either purchase to renovate to then rent out, sell on or live in the property themselves.
- Discount Scheme – The Empty Homes Officer works with many contractors who offer a discount on materials for long term empty properties. Some of these are sourced through the Empty Homes Partnership who have national companies that provide a discount. The Empty Homes Officer will work with.
- As well as the above, the Empty Homes Strategy recognises a need to adapt practices and offer more incentives to owners to allow them to bring their property back into use. As part of our consultation with stakeholders, we are working on the following incentives to bring to the empty homes initiative to tackle empty homes and give owners more options.
- Repair to Rent Scheme – We often find owners are unwilling to sell their property due to emotional attachment or negative equity in the property and have no available funds to bring the properties up to standard to become rentals. The repair to rent scheme would look for developers/contractors/landlords who would take on an empty property as a rental, carry out the necessary repairs and rent the property out keeping a percentage of rental income until an agreed-on time with the owner. After this period, the property would be handed back to the owner in a condition where they could rent it out themselves, live in or sell on.

- Project Management Scheme – Empty homeowners often live out with the local authority and some even in another country. Therefore, the barrier they face in bringing their property back into use is organising repairs and being present to oversee the project. The project management scheme would look for developers/contractors/landlords to work with owners and bring properties up to standard agreed on by both parties.
- Empty Homes Grant fund – Empty homeowners are often asset rich and cash poor. Therefore, they lack the available funds to bring their properties back into use. The grant fund would work alongside the social letting service to fund the works required to bring it up to standard. A standard security would be placed on the title and the property would be rented out through the social letting service at an affordable rate contributing to an increase in affordable housing in South Ayrshire. Terms and conditions would apply.
- Each of these schemes are in their infancy and the development of these schemes will be placed as an action in the strategy's action plan for progression.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

Sections 9 and 10 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 enables the Council to acquire houses for the provision of housing accommodation and allows the Council to do so compulsorily if authorised by the Secretary of State.

Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) are a long and complex legal process. To complete a CPO, the Council must take all reasonable steps to engage with the owner and present a case that the property should be bought compulsorily by the local authority. The owners must be given adequate time to appeal/respond to the CPO and compensation for the property must be made available to the owner to claim.

The Scottish Government is due to release revised guidance to aid local authorities in taking on CPOs. The revised guidance is expected late 2025, following the publication of this guidance the Council will consider the implications for South Ayrshire.

Challenges and Barriers

There are several key challenges and barriers to tackling empty homes in South Ayrshire which require to be proactively addressed by the development and delivery of this Empty Homes Strategy.

Some of the challenges faced as a result of empty homes include:

- Ability to trace owners and owner engagement
- Ensuring accessible, relevant and accurate information is available to homeowners who want to bring empty homes back into use
- Tackling crime, vandalism, environmental and neighbourhood blight caused by empty homes
- Safeguarding 'other' owner interests in relation to common repair works
- Disrepair and below tolerable standard properties
- Financing repairs and maintenance work to bring properties back into use
- Addressing wider housing priorities such as housing supply, homelessness, specialist housing need, fuel poverty and climate change and house condition

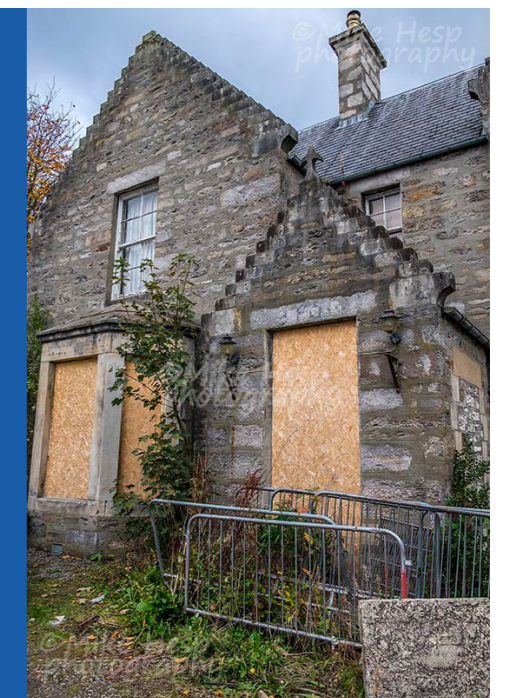
These challenges have been identified through the development of the empty homes evidence base and by engaging with local partners and stakeholders involved in empty homes activity.

Some of the key local barriers to developing and implementing a strategic approach to empty homes includes:

- Empty Homes Officer Capacity: Competing priorities for action and intervention alongside other responsibilities. The Council's dedicated Empty Homes Officer role accounts for 25% of the Policy Officer post within the Housing Strategy & Regeneration team.
- Resources: Lack of/limited grant assistance and loan schemes to support investment in empty homes.
- Legal complexities: Challenging cases where owners can't be traced, or ownership is in dispute can be extremely time consuming.
- Legal or financial constraints: Reluctance or inability to use Compulsory Purchase Orders due to costs involved in purchase or legal resource not available to pursue cases.
- Other legal or administrative processes: Including establishing status of properties subject to repossession proceedings, or obtaining grants of confirmation where owners and next-generation heirs are deceased.
- Access to data: Data sharing agreements are not in place and/or there is lack of appetite to resolve data barriers and/or collection of data within Council is insufficient to support a strategic approach to empty homes work.
- Resource intensive activities for limited outcomes: Small number of empty homes brought back into use annually compared to costs/time involved in doing so.
- Wider understanding and appreciation of contribution empty homes makes to corporate and community objectives: Lack of knowledge and understanding of how empty homes links to LHS and wider local authority plans and priorities.
- Lack of awareness of empty homes work and the opportunities for advice and assistance: Empty homes agenda is not understood or bought into by partners, stakeholders and wider public with greater marketing and communication required to raise awareness and encourage engagement.
- Shortage of tradespeople or materials: Limited availability of building trade professionals or materials leading to delay in completing projects and increased average cost for building and renovation work.
- Socio-economic factors: Large number of systemic vacancies as a result of economic decline/ depopulation/limited employment opportunities etc.

Consultation

Consultation has taken place, starting in late 2024 with buyers on the Council's matchmaker scheme to engage in what barriers they face in bringing empty homes back into use and what they would like to see to make this easier. Internal stakeholders were also part of the engagement to develop this strategy through the Empty Homes Working group to review the objectives put forward for the strategy and advise on the issues they face in their service area relating to empty homes. Empty homeowners were also consulted in the development of this strategy to gauge what barriers they face in bringing their own property back into use and what else would make it easier for them to engage with the local authority.



Empty Homes Action Plan				
The Empty Homes Strategy aims to bring long term empty properties back into use to increase the number of available housing of all tenures. The action plan below shows how the strategy aims to achieve this and in doing so meet wider strategic objectives and national outcomes.				
No.	Action	Baseline	Target	Measures
1.	Annual Survey to empty homeowners to offer assistance in bringing their property into use. Survey will gather information on reasons for empty and inform future policy	10% return rate on surveys issued in 2025	Increase the return rate to 15% per year.	Yearly updates on the number of surveys returned and the owner engagement that has followed this.
2.	Explore options for Grant funding for long term empty homes that meet strategic objectives		Pilot programme for grant funding approved through Council by end of the strategy 2030	Yearly update of the strategy
3.	Develop strategic partnerships with housing associations for purchasing long term empty properties through matchmaking or back-to-back agreement on Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO)	Introductory discussions have taken place with Ayrshire Housing and West of Scotland Housing Association	Develop a process for suggesting potential properties to housing associations and entering into back-to-back agreements for CPOs	Yearly update of the strategy detailing the engagement with housing associations and the number of properties that have been taken on
4.	Empty Homes Working Group with relevant Council services to keep updated on Empty Homes work and developments as well as discuss any problematic cases	The Group currently meets 4 times per year with Environmental Health, Building Standards, Community Safety, Anti-Social Behaviour, Council Tax and Housing Strategy & Regeneration	Continue meeting 4 times per year and expand the group to include other relevant services to promote empty homes work and bring new initiatives to the group	Yearly update of the strategy showing membership of group and any further engagement with other services.
5.	19 Empty Properties back into use each year in line with target set in the Local Housing Strategy	16 properties were brought back into use in 2025	Engage with owners of empty properties offering advice and assistance and develop incentive programmes to encourage the refurbishment of long-term empty homes	Yearly report on the strategy as well as updates on the local housing strategy showing number of empty homes brought back into use through direct involvement of Empty Homes Officer.
6.	Streamline reporting procedures for reporting an empty home	Members of the public currently email various departments or call the central number to report an empty home.	Revamp the Empty Homes website page to include an online form to report empty properties.	Web page to be updated by the end of financial year 2025/26. Yearly updates on the number of visits to the site

7.	Publicise the national housing crisis and what the Council is currently dealing with in terms of homelessness figures. Bring attention to the contribution that empty homes can make if owners work with the Council.	HL1 figures on homeless presentations current homelessness prevention activities including innovative use of Empty Homes Work	Create news articles and social media posts to show how empty homes and owners are contributing to the housing crisis and the potential solutions.	Yearly updates on the strategy
8.	Lobby the Scottish Government for easier CPO legislation to allow the Council to deal with more difficult cases.	Consultation on the CPO reform was put out in January 2025 and July 2025 which the Council have responded to.	Engage with the Empty Homes Partnership for updates on the revised CPO guidance and feed into any consultations around this	Yearly updates on the strategy
9.	Develop a procedure/policy for CPOs including funding required and escalation process with other relevant Council services.	Guidance provided by Scottish Government and Empty Homes Partnership	Develop a procedure/policy based on revised guidance. Seek approval of funds from Council to progress with CPOs that meet strategic objectives.	Look to produce revised procedure for CPOs when revised guidance is published towards the end of 2025. Yearly updates on CPOs will be delivered
10.	Develop new initiatives to assist with bringing empty homes back into use and providing a range of options for homeowners and developers	Proposals detailed in Empty Homes Strategy	Develop initiatives with Council approval by end of this strategy in partnership with relevant bodies and communities.	Yearly updates on progress with new initiatives
11.	Where there are issues around the danger of long-term empty properties/buildings. Work with Council services and partners to reduce the amount of anti-social behaviour in the area.	Anti social behaviour cases and community safety involvement in areas of long term empty homes.	Build on current working practices with services to streamline approaches and enhance opportunities for empty homes processes to be initiated	Yearly updates on empty properties that are causing issues such as dangerous buildings notices or properties where there is unauthorised entries
12.	Work with owners of long term empty commercial units that would be interested in changing it's use to a residential unit.	Information on commercial units held by planning, estates and building standards	Work with building standards, planning and estates to identify empty commercial units that we can target to bring into residential use where it meets strategic objectives for housing need and demand. Develop incentives and initiatives that would encourage these owners to change their use	Yearly update on strategy
13.	Consider the use of private rented sector legislation such as landlord registration as an enforcement power to achieve empty homes strategic objectives	Landlord registration data, long term empty homes property data	Cross reference data to identify landlords who own empty homes with a view to de-registration where the property is considerably poor condition.	Yearly update on strategy

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Making a Difference Every Day

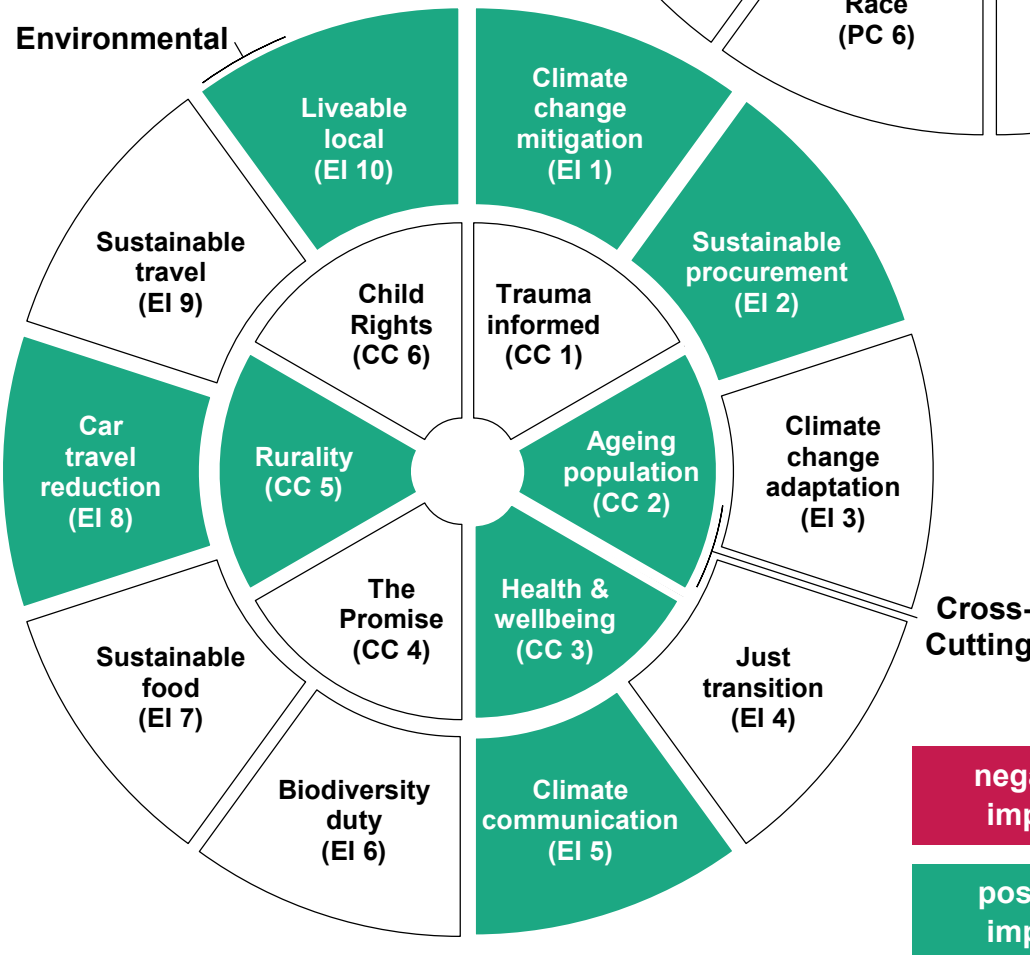
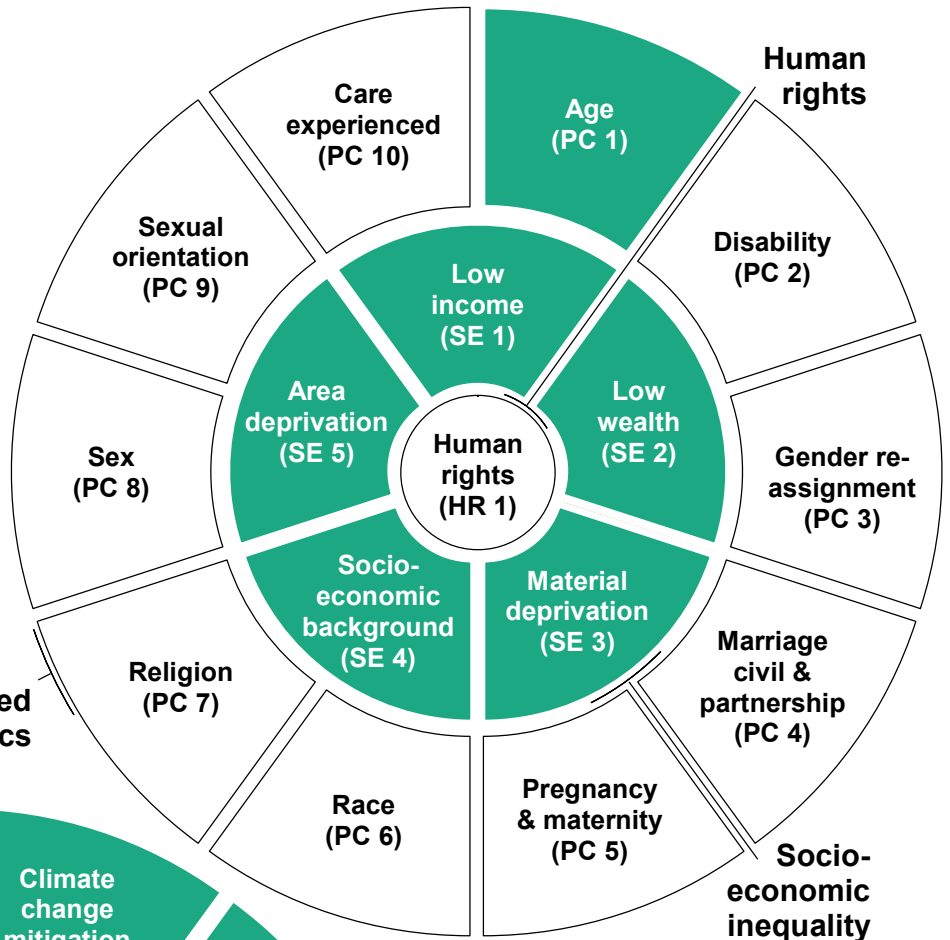
Integrated Impact Assessment Summary Report



Empty Homes Strategy

Completed by:
Chris Carroll,
Service Lead Housing Strategy
& Regeneration,
Housing Strategy &
Regeneration

Date started: 13/01/25



To be implemented on:
01/11/25
Review date:
01/11/26
Oversight Panel:
Cabinet

negative impact	uncertain / not clear
positive impact	no impact / not applicable

Public sector equality duty

Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation?

Empty Homes Strategy seeks to mainstream equalities in its overarching aims and outcomes, as well as ensuring that any subsequent action points do not disproportionately disadvantage one group or community over another. South Ayrshire Council is committed to eliminating discrimination and stigmatisation and the Empty Homes Strategy will play a positive role in contributing towards this vision.

Advancing equality of opportunity?

The Empty Homes Strategy is inclusive and ensures equality of opportunity to access housing services by all protected characteristics within the Council's communities. The policies, practice and direction of travel within the Empty Homes Strategy will support social inclusion and development of cohesive communities.

Fostering good relations?


The Empty Homes Strategy seeks to take into account the issues facing the various communities living and working in South Ayrshire. By ensuring that communities' voices are heard and taken into account, the Empty Homes Strategy aims to foster good relations with the communities we serve.

Consultation declaration


We confirm consultation has been carried out as part of this process.

Responses Overview Closed


Responses

18 

Average Time

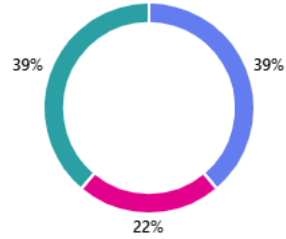
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Duration

48 Days 

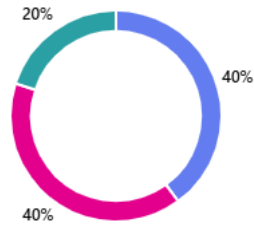
1. Please select the option which best describes you

- Renovating homes is my main source of income. I am interested in most/all empty properties for my... 7
- Renovating homes is a part time job. I renovate homes alongside my other job to make up my... 4
- Renovating homes is a passion project. I don't depend on the income and will choose projects tha... 7
- Other 0



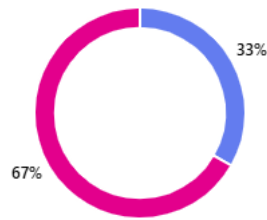
2. What is your intention with empty properties? Select all that apply

- Renovate to rent 12
- Renovate to sell 12
- Renovate to live in yourself 6
- Other 0



3. Do you carry out renovations yourself or use contractors?

- Myself 6
- Contractors 12



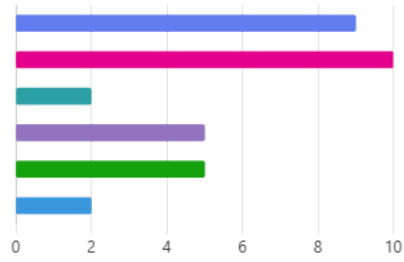
4. Do you use the same contractors each time or different

- I use the same contractors for each redevelopment 6
- I use different contractors depending on the circumstances 6



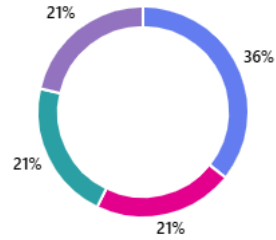
5. What are the barriers for you in renovating empty properties?

● Engagement with owners	9
● Financial margins	10
● Engaging contractors to take on work	2
● Engagement with local authority	5
● Tax implications	5
● Other	2



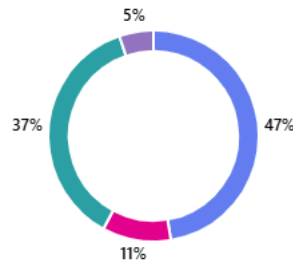
6. Are you aware of the incentives provided through the Empty Homes Scheme - tick all that apply

● VAT discounts	10
● Discounted materials through certain merchants	6
● Empty Homes loan funding	6
● Social Letting Service	6



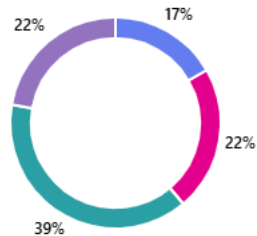
7. Would you be interested in renovating an Empty Home to let through our Social Letting Service? add any comments you feel may be relevant.

● Yes	9
● No	2
● Maybe	7
● Other	1



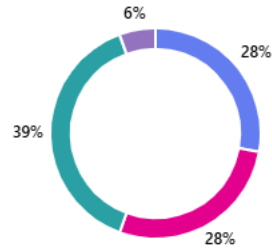
8. **Repair to Rent Scheme** – We often find owners are unwilling to sell their property due to emotional attachment or negative equity in the property and have no available funds to bring the properties up to standard to become rentals. Would you be interested in a scheme where you would take on an empty property as a rental, carry out the necessary repairs and rent the property out keeping 100% of rental income until an agreed-on time with the owner. After this period, the property would be handed back to the owner in a condition where they could rent it out themselves, live in or sell on.

● Very useful & Very interested	3
● Quite useful & Quite Interested	4
● Useful but not interested	7
● Not useful	4
● Other	0



9. **Project Management Scheme** – Empty Home owners often live outwith the local authority and some even in another country. Therefore, the barrier they face in bringing their property back into use is organising repairs and being present to oversee the project. Would you be interested in utilising your expertise and connections to project manage empty homes?

● Very useful & Very interested	5
● Quite useful & Quite interested	5
● Useful but not interested	7
● Not useful	1
● Other	0



10. Do you have any other proposals on how we could work better with you to bring Empty Homes back into use? Please be as descriptive as possible

11
Responses

Latest Responses

- "Provide an information pack highlighting the schemes available e.g. the repair to ... "
- "Full council tax discounts for the entirety of the renovation period. Scrap the terri... "

...

6 respondents (55%) answered properties for this question.

