

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **HOUSING COMMITTEE – 31 JANUARY 2001**

#### **VOID MANAGEMENT**

##### **Director of Homes and Technical Services**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise members of progress made in improving voids administration performance and to submit proposals for dealing with the problem of low demand housing within specific communities in East Ayrshire.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Housing Committee of 8 November 2000 approved a short term action plan for improving voids administration performance and a series of medium and long term proposals as part of a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the problems of low demand housing in East Ayrshire. Members also noted that further reports on progress would be submitted by the Director of Homes and Technical Services on a regular basis.

#### **3.0 IMPROVING VOIDS ADMINISTRATION PERFORMANCE**

- 3.1 The department has acted quickly to implement the agreed action plan and there is already some evidence to suggest the success of actions taken to improve day to day voids performance. Particular effort has been made by area teams in concentrating resources on houses which can be easily let and in reviewing the letting process to identify issues which are obstructing improved service performance. These have included policies and procedures which, for example, restrict access to council house waiting lists for those who owe monies to this or other Councils or who are applying to be re-housed in East Ayrshire from out-with the area.
- 3.2 Revised management guidance has now been issued to staff which puts the emphasis on accepting applicants onto the waiting lists and establishing debt repayment schedules with those applicants who owe either rent, former tenants arrears, or council tax arrears to East Ayrshire Council. These revised arrangements, which are supported by improved links with council tax and housing benefit, have been discussed and agreed with the Director of Finance.
- 3.3 Area housing teams have now appointed dedicated officers to chase progress on voids and to liaise with contractors to reduce delays. These actions supported by improved weekly and monthly monitoring reports for senior managers, have led to a reduction in the number of empty council houses to 813 (at period 9).

3.4 This has reversed the trend of increasing voids noted from period 5. However much work remains to be done and greater levels of success achieved in reducing void numbers before this problem can be regarded in any way as solved. The department will continue to focus on its own performance and seek to build on the modest improvements achieved so far, through early implementation of the remainder of the action plan.

#### **4.0 LOW DEMAND HOUSING**

4.1 Members have agreed the framework of a comprehensive strategy to deal with the problem of low demand housing in East Ayrshire including where appropriate improved targeting of housing expenditure to areas at risk, new local lettings initiatives, demolition, and stock transfer.

4.2 Recent research carried out jointly by the department and Scottish Homes has focused on the collection, analysis and interpretation of data on housing markets within East Ayrshire. The resulting document – The Local Housing Systems Analysis ( LHSA) – uses data largely drawn from the Council’s Housing Plan 1998 –2003, Community Care Plan 1998 – 2001, Local Housing Needs Survey 1998 and East Ayrshire Local Plan 1999. In addition the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan 2000, the Register of Sasines and other data sets have been used to inform the report which in turn will be used by the department to:

- Influence and inform future planning documents including the Council’s Housing Plan;
- Inform future investment plans including the Council’s Housing Investment Strategy and the Joint Council / Scottish Homes Strategic Investment Plan for East Ayrshire.

4.3 The LHSA provides clear evidence to show that demand for housing is strongly influenced by changes in population and household formation rates. In East Ayrshire, according to General Register Office (Scotland) projections, the rate of decline in population is projected to be 10.2% between 1996 – 2013, well above the national average of 1.6%. The GRO forecast a significant drop in projected population in both the 0-15 and 16-64 age groups in East Ayrshire compared to the Scottish average. At the same time, increases in the numbers of older people are expected to be considerably above the national average for the same period.

4.4 It is forecast that most of the population loss will be in the South (particularly the ex mining communities) and more rural parts of East Ayrshire and this corresponds with the evidence of population decline in those areas over recent decades. In terms of households projections, the local rate of growth from 1996 – 2010 is projected to be significantly lower than the Scottish average. The local rate is in decline from previous periods with a specific decline in the number of households with children, and a large rise in the number of single person and older households. These changes, together with forecast changes in the local economy, will have an impact on all local housing markets and both the social rented and owner occupied sectors.

- 4.5 The social rented sector comprises around 40% of the total housing stock in East Ayrshire. 34% of total stock is owned by the Council although this number will continue to decrease over time as a result of future right to buy sales. Within the Council sector, around 43% of the stock are flats with the majority of the remainder, terraced properties.
- 4.6 Economic forecasts suggest that owner occupation may not be a realistic option for many households and therefore there will be a substantial number of individuals who will continue to rely on the social rented sector to meet their housing needs. Population and household projections suggest that these needs are changing, and the projected increase in the numbers of older people will increase the demand for suitable accommodation and support services. This will be considered in future housing planning, policy and investment strategies. However, the department has also provided evidence which substantiates the argument that there is a low demand for flatted properties in many communities and general low demand for council housing in a number of communities in the south and in some parts of Kilmarnock.

## **5.0 PROPOSALS FOR ACTION**

- 5.1 The department has now concluded an initial analysis of the low demand areas and, having taken account of the reasons for low demand, submits the following proposals for the committee's approval. If agreed in principle, the department will consult with the individual tenants affected and the appropriate community groups, prior to the commencement of any works.

### **5.1.1 NEW FARM LOCH**

- 5.1.2 The maisonette blocks at Finlayson Drive (1,3 & 5), Lindsay Drive (1 & 3), and the deck access blocks at 48 MacDonald Drive, 19 Sutherland Drive & 7 MacBeth Walk exhibit a number of structural and ongoing maintenance problems which require significant investment to resolve. Vandalism and anti-social behaviour cause continuing problems and have resulted in little or no demand from prospective tenants. This type of property is generally unpopular and taking all factors into account, including the anticipated cost of improvement, it is considered that the 104 maisonette flats in these buildings should be demolished. It is recommended that all future letting be suspended and, after appropriate consultation, plans be developed to re-house existing tenants. Thereafter the buildings should be demolished and the ground re-instated to improve the amenity of the wider area, and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.
- 5.1.3 The maisonette blocks at MacKendrick Place (1,3), MacBeth Drive (1,2,3,4), and MacEwan Place (2,4,6) exhibit significant dampness problems in all blocks. Major roof repair / replacement is necessary together with other works to make the blocks more attractive to prospective tenants and increase demand. It is recommended that a full technical appraisal of works required, including costings, be prepared for consideration in future capital improvement programmes.

- 5.1.4 The maisonette blocks at Kerr Road (1-9) exhibit a number of estate management and tenancy related problems. There is a need for improved security both within the blocks and in the surrounding area to address the concerns of existing, and prospective, tenants. It is recommended that a local community safety initiative be developed in partnership with the local police and other partners, with funding set aside from the HRA Capital Budget to improve security.
- 5.1.5 The three blocks in Fraser Walk were the subject of major investment by the council in the mid 90's. Despite improvements in the condition of the buildings, there are a number of estate management and tenancy related problems in the area. There is a need to improve safety in the blocks and surrounding areas to help reverse the decline in demand for these flats. It is recommended that a local community safety initiative be developed, including the introduction of a concierge type service, in partnership with local police and other partners.
- 5.1.6 The maisonette blocks in Sutherland Drive (35 – 37) are blighted by major drug related problems in adjoining private properties. This has led to little or no demand for any vacancies within the buildings. It is recommended that the department supports any possible police action to tackle drug crime in the area.

#### **5.2.1 ONTHANK**

- 5.2.2 There is little or no demand for the bed-sit accommodation in Bankend Place. The buildings themselves are subject to vandalism and attract considerable anti-social behaviour in the adjoining area. A large number of the bed-sit flats are presently empty. It is recommended that all future lettings of the bed-sits be suspended, and after appropriate consultation, the existing tenants be re-housed elsewhere. Thereafter the 16 bed-sit flats should be demolished and the ground re-instated to improve the amenity of the wider area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.
- 5.2.3 The bed-sit flats in Thorn Terrace include a high number of empty flats and there is little or no demand amongst prospective tenants. The Thorn Terrace area itself is generally popular but many of the bed-sits have been vacant for more than six months and many are in poor condition. It is recommended that all future lettings of the bed-sits be suspended, and after appropriate consultation, the existing tenants be re-housed elsewhere. Thereafter the 32 bed-sit flats should be demolished and the ground re-instated to improve the amenity of the wider area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.
- 5.2.4 The housing in Mossie Place / Gainford Place is in low demand. The general area is regarded as drab and unattractive and would require considerable improvement if housing demand is to be increased. It is recommended that an option appraisal scheme be prepared, with costings, for property and environmental improvement in the area.
- 5.2.5 A significant number of vacancies are now being reported in the Burnfoot Place area and there is little or no demand for housing. It is recommended that a scheme be designed and costed to provide a local environmental improvement project to improve the local amenity and generate increased housing demand.

### **5.3.1 ALTONHILL**

- 5.3.2 The three storey tenement block in St Maurs Place is almost empty with only one tenant remaining. The building itself is in an extremely poor condition following fire and vandalism. There is no demand from prospective tenants. It is recommended that the existing tenant be re-housed to allow demolition of the block of 9 flats and the ground to be re-instated to improve the amenity of the wider area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.

### **5.4.1 LONGPARK**

- 5.4.2 Longpark exhibits an extremely high vacancy rate with little demand for housing amongst prospective tenants. The general environment needs improved and the council has already agreed selective demolition in the area. Cunninghame Housing Association and Wimpey are jointly building a new housing development adjacent to the council housing stock. The Council and Scottish Homes have commissioned Market Research Scotland to carry out a full consultation exercise in Longpark which will inform a wider action survey and plan which is currently being formulated by both partners and Cunninghame Housing Association. The Longpark Hostel building is now vacant and no future use has been identified. The property itself would require considerable investment and refurbishment before being fit for let, which is not considered feasible at the current time. It is recommended that future lettings in Campbeltown Drive, Kirn Road and Northcraig Road be suspended with the future of the councils housing stock in the area to be considered following conclusion of the planned tenant consultation exercise. With regards to the former hostel building, it is recommended that the block of 16 flats be demolished and the ground re-instated to improve the amenity of the wider area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.

### **5.5.1 KILMARNOCK CENTRAL**

- 5.5.2 The three storey tenement buildings in Montgomery Street and Montgomery Place now contain a significant number of vacancies and there is little or no demand from prospective tenants. The area suffers from problems of vandalism and anti-social behaviour and major structural repairs are required to 39/41 Montgomery Street. These particular buildings are unpopular and demand is unlikely to increase even if investment was made available to remedy the structural defects that have been identified. It is recommended that future lettings in the blocks at 39/41 Montgomery Street and 4 Montgomery Place be suspended and following appropriate consultation, the existing tenants re-housed. The 18 flats should thereafter be demolished and the ground re-instated to improve the wider amenity of the area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.
- 5.5.3 There are a number of tenement type flats, some above shops, in the Dean Street, Witch Road, Orchard Street and Orchard Gardens area. Generally demand is low and there are a number of estate management problems in the area including vandalism. It is, however, considered that there are other options beyond demolition which should be explored. It is recommended that an improvement scheme be designed and costed to upgrade the buildings and surrounding environment to improve security and generate wider interest amongst prospective tenants.

5.5.4 The three storey tenement flats in Fultons Lane suffer from high turnover of tenancies and low demand from prospective tenants. The buildings also evidence significant dampness problems and their proximity to adjoining pubs and shops leaves them vulnerable to anti-social behaviour and vandalism. Again, it is considered that there are options other than demolition to be explored. It is recommended that improvement works to remove the ongoing problem of dampness be continued and that a scheme be designed to improve security and the general environment around the buildings. The area housing team will increase estate management action against known problem families.

### **5.6.1 CUMNOCK AND DOON VALLEY**

5.6.2 The demand for council housing in Auchinleck has been in decline for a number of years due to the loss of local employment opportunities. The main area affected is the Stoner / Hillside Crescent areas which comprise four-in-a-block flats although a smaller number of tenement flats elsewhere are difficult to let. There is little or no demand for these houses. It is recommended that a programme of selective demolition of 56 properties in the Stoner / Hillside Crescent areas and elsewhere in Auchinleck be carried out, with the ground re-instated to improve the amenity of the wider area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.

5.6.3 In general, demand for housing in Cumnock has remained stable with the exception of a number of tenement and other flats particularly in the Barshare area. There is little or no demand for these properties. It is recommended that a programme of selective demolition of 20 difficult to let tenement and other flats within Cumnock be carried out, with the ground to be re-instated to improve the wider amenity of the area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.

5.6.4 New Cumnock has suffered a drastic decline in its population over the last three decades. A significant number of demolitions have been carried out by the council over the last three years but there remain a high number of void properties in the Cairnhill Estate where there is little or no demand for housing. It is recommended that a programme of selective demolition of 66 difficult to let properties be carried out in the Cairnhill area of New Cumnock with the ground re-instated to improve the amenity of the area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.

5.6.5 The demand for housing in Dalmellington has reduced significantly over the last decade or so. A number of properties have previously been demolished by the former Scottish Homes but there remain significant numbers of long-term voids in the Bellsbank Estate for which there is little or no demand particularly in the Dalfarson Avenue, Mossdale Terrace and Eriff Road areas. It is recommended that a programme of selective demolition of 40 long-term difficult to let properties be carried out in the Bellsbank area with the ground to be re-instated to improve the amenity of the area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.

- 5.6.6 Rankinston is a fairly isolated rural community which has suffered de-population over a number of years with the demise of the local deep coal mining industry. There are a small number of properties, particularly located in Kerse Terrace and Littlemill Place, which are regarded as difficult to let and for which there is no demand. It is recommended that there be a programme of selected demolition of 12 long term void and difficult to let properties be carried out in these areas with the ground to be reinstated to improve the amenity of the wider area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.
- 5.6.7 Catrine is another community which has suffered from significant de-population as a result of the loss of deep coal mining in the area. There are a small number of difficult to let properties, comprising flats and some terraced houses, in the Shawland Street area for which there is no demand. It is recommended that these 18 properties in Shawland Street be demolished with the ground re-instated to improve the amenity of the wider area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.
- 5.6.8 Muirkirk has suffered a major loss of population over the last two or three decades again linked to the loss of the deep mining industry. The council has previously carried out a number of demolitions of flats and tenement block within the community but there remains a significant number of difficult to let voids mostly located in the Smallburn Estate but also in the heart of the village. It is recommended that a programme of selective demolition of 40 difficult to let properties throughout Muirkirk be carried out with the ground subsequently reinstated to improve the amenity of the wider area and to facilitate any future development plans for the area.

#### **5.7.1 RICcarton West – Kilmarnock**

- 5.7.2 Members have received previous reports on the problems affecting the Riccarton West estate in Kilmarnock. This council and its predecessor invested heavily to improve the quality of housing and the local environment. These efforts have failed to halt the decline and there is a significant number of empty properties within the area. Recent bad publicity has increased the stigma of the area and this has left no demand for housing in the Barnweil Road, Fleming Street and Maxholm Road areas. The estate suffers a variety of estate management problems including significant vandalism. In view of the level of investments made in the area in recent years, it is considered that options other than demolition should be explored including the possibility of stock transfer. It is recommended that the option of stock transfer should be explored and that discussions now take place on the viability of this proposal with Scottish Homes and other interested external partners.

#### **5.8.1 Galston**

- 5.8.2 Reports have been submitted to committee on the problems in the flats at Castleview Avenue. Major structural and improvement works are required and a recent consultation exercise showed a significant interest amongst many existing tenants in being re-housed elsewhere. A report on this particular scheme is included as a separate item on the agenda for this meeting.

### **5.9.1 GENERAL**

- 5.9.2 Many other communities within East Ayrshire also suffer from the problem of low demand although perhaps not yet to the same degree. This is particularly evident in many communities in the Irvine Valley where there is evidence of pockets of low demand housing. The reasons for this, and the changing patterns of demand for housing generally within the council stock, will require further research. Specific research plans are now being discussed with partners, including Scottish Homes, with the work itself to be carried out over the next few months.

### **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 As previously reported, the majority of actions required to improve voids administration performance can be funded within approved HRA Revenue Budgets. Any additional financial implications arising from implementation of the Council's agreed Action Plan will be submitted to future meetings.
- 6.2 The costs of improvements and demolition's, are likely to be significant and a phased and prioritised approach will be required for implementation of the plan. Proposals targeting action in the low demand areas will be submitted to future meetings of the Housing Capital Sub Committee with a view to these being included within the HRA Capital Programme for 2001 / 2002 and beyond. However, members are asked to note that the department has submitted a bid to the Scottish Executive for additional HRA Capital funding consent, which if successful, would be used to support the council's agreed strategy for further demolition's in the current financial year.
- 6.3 The department will continue to monitor the HRA expenditure in relation to voids with every opportunity taken to improve void performance and to remain within budget without cutting across essential services.

### **7.0 POLICY / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Secure tenants required to be re-housed to allow demolition to proceed would in certain circumstances be entitled to receive home loss and disturbance payment under the terms of the Land Compensation (Scotland) Act 1973 (amended).
- 7.2 In addition, consideration will have to be given to repurchasing owner occupied properties identified in relation to the selection of properties for future demolition.

## **8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 Members are requested to:

- (i) Note and approve the action taken by the department to improve the performance of voids administration:
- (ii) Approve the recommendations detailed in Para 5 of the report.
- (iii) Authorise the Director of Homes and Technical Services to proceed to implement the proposals including the appropriate tenant consultation, and to
- (iv) Note that the Director of Homes and Technical Services will submit reports on progress to future meetings.

James Lavery  
Director of Homes and Technical Services  
(CMcA/AB)

### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**NIL**

For further information please contact Mr C McAleavey, Head of Homes on 01563 – 554876.

Implementation Officer: Chris McAleavey, Head of Homes

**AGENDA**