



Item: 10

Education, Learning and Housing Committee: 13 November 2024

Empty Homes Support Scheme.

Report by Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.

1. Overview

- 1.1. The Local Housing Strategy 2024, the Empty Homes Strategy and the Essential Workers Housing Strategy set out an objective to bring private sector empty homes back into use. Accordingly, an Empty Homes Support Scheme has been developed. It is proposed that a housing loan be made available, subject to Council loan conditions, in order to bring empty homes back into use provided the properties are subsequently available for let by essential workers.
- 1.2. Latest published [statistics](#) show that there are an estimated 1,125 empty homes across Orkney, across all Council Tax categories including unoccupied exemptions, long-term empty homes and second homes. This is approximately 10% of all Orkney's dwellings and much higher than the Scottish rate of 4%.
- 1.3. The Council has an Empty Homes Officer who provides information and advice to empty homeowners to support them to bring empty homes back into use.
- 1.4. In the current context of very high levels of housing need and the need to attract essential workers to Orkney, the proposed Empty Homes Support is intended to incentivise more homeowners to bring their empty properties back into use for use in the private rented sector, targeted for onward lease to essential workers.
- 1.5. A recent Scottish Government Audit of Empty Homes across Scotland showed that the most common reasons for homeowners not bringing empty properties back into use are financial barriers, practical reasons (including finding contractors to do the work), market factors and family attachment to the property.
- 1.6. Advice and information will be provided to assist owners of empty homes to bring their empty properties back into use. The proposed Loan Conditions include a provision that the Homeowner/Borrower registers as a private sector landlord in line with the legislation and let their properties to private tenants targeted to essential workers, through a Private Residential Tenancy.

- 1.7. It is proposed that the Council should make available an Empty Homes Loan to incentivise action to bring the property back into use. The loan will be up to a maximum of £25,000 per property to bring the property up to the statutory Repairing Standard. The loan must be repaid within 5 years, with conditions attached for its use for 10 years. The loan allocation will be funded by an agreed commitment from the Strategic Reserve Fund, with this budget limiting the number of loan applications.
- 1.8. The policy will be reviewed five years from approval, or before as required, for example if funding for the scheme were fully allocated. Detailed procedures will be developed as required.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that members of the Committee:
 - i. Note that approval of the Empty Homes Support Scheme does not confirm any right of access to Council funding.
 - ii. Approve the adoption of the Empty Homes Support Scheme, attached at Appendix 1, subject to funding being approved.
 - iii. Instruct the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing to submit a report, to the Policy and Resources Committee, regarding funding required to implement the Empty Homes Support Scheme.

3. Background

- 3.1. To reflect the importance of bringing empty homes back into use, the Orkney Empty Homes Strategy introduced an Empty Homes Officer to support private sector homeowners to bring their empty properties back into use. A total of 70 properties have been reported by the Council to the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership as being brought back into use with assistance from the Council's Empty Homes Officer, since the financial year 2016/17 (this figure may be slightly higher than quoted as there have been periods of time without a dedicated empty homes officer keeping track).
- 3.2. Through the development of the Essential Workers Housing Strategy and the Local Housing Strategy, it has been recognised that some owners of empty homes may need additional incentives to bring homes back into use. These incentives could be financial, combined with non-financial incentives of support from the Council through information and advice provided by the Empty Homes Officer to enable homeowners to let out their property to target essential workers. This may be of particular interest to those owners of empty homes who may lack confidence in

letting in a context of increasing regulation in the private rented sector, and the recent introduction of regulation in the short-term let market.

- 3.3. A recent [Scottish Government Audit of Empty Homes in Scotland \(2023\)](#) identified the key benefits of bringing empty homes back into use:
- maximising housing supply, especially in pressured markets.
 - lower refurbishment costs compared to new build costs.
 - quicker additional supply than new build.
 - contribution to regeneration and the local economy and removing the blight of empty homes.
- 3.4. The same Scottish Government study showed opinion from local authorities and empty homeowners that the barriers in bringing empty homes back into use are:
- financial barriers – lack of resources and affordability to undertake repairs.
 - practical reasons / contractors – difficulty in finding firms to undertake works.
 - market factors – investment in the property is unviable.
 - Personal reasons – attachment to family property.

4. Experience Elsewhere

- 4.1. There are currently five Scottish Local Authorities who provide grants and loans for bringing empty homes back into use – all are rural authorities being Angus, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway, Perth and Kinross and Scottish Borders Councils. The grants/loans vary up to approximately £20,000. In addition, 17 Local Authorities used the Scottish Government Empty Homes Loan Scheme. However, this scheme is no longer open to new funding claims.
- 4.2. Perth and Kinross Council makes the most use of grant/loan powers with over 200 properties being brought back into use using grant. Their scheme has a budget of between £200-300k per annum and priority groups are housed in former empty homes where financial support is provided. By comparison Argyll and Bute used a grant/loan scheme for 17 homes being brought back into use over the last 10 years (around two per year).

5. Proposed Empty Homes Support Scheme

- 5.1. The proposed Empty Homes Support Scheme is attached at Appendix 1.
- 5.2. Should the proposed scheme be approved, detailed procedures will be developed by the Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance covering the marketing of the loan, the information, advice and support available,

the application process, the nature of the loan and repayment requirements, the conditions and monitoring and enforcement.

For Further Information please contact:

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Implications of Report

1. Financial

- This report is seeking approval of a policy through the relevant Service Committee. The policy, the proposed Empty Homes Support Scheme, will require funding to be identified. Given current budget pressures, and the requirement for a sustainable financial position, any new commitments may be difficult to achieve. Detailed financial implications on the operation of the policy will be provided when funding is considered.
- All expenditure must comply with the Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders, and officers may not incur expenditure in any financial year which cannot be met from the approved revenue and capital budgets.

2. **Legal** - Detailed procedures will be developed between officers in Housing, Finance and Legal services in order to implement the Scheme. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 enabled Councils to use grants or loans to improve housing conditions in their area. The funding agreement is capable of being secured over properties in respect of any debt arising from the loan agreement. The enforceability of any ancillary conditions may be limited by the fair and reasonable test.

3. **Corporate Governance** – Not Applicable.

4. **Human Resources** – The Empty Homes Support Scheme is an action identified in the Local Housing Strategy and the Essential Workers Housing Strategy which aims to help address shortages of essential workforce across Orkney. In relation to implementing the Empty Homes Support Scheme, this will be undertaken within existing staff resources, with the loan funded through the Strategic Reserve Fund (subject to Policy and Resources Committee Report).

5. **Equalities** – An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached at Appendix 2 to this report.

6. **Island Communities Impact** – An Island Communities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached at Appendix 3 to this report.

7. **Links to Council Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Council Plan strategic priorities:

- Growing our economy.
- Strengthening our Communities.

- Developing our Infrastructure.
 - Transforming our Council.
- 8. Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities:
- Cost of Living.
 - Sustainable Development.
 - Local Equality.
- 9. Environmental and Climate Risk** – Bringing empty homes back into use makes a positive contribution to the sustainability agenda due to fewer resources being used to bring an empty home into use compared to a new build home.
- 10. Risk** – Risk of loan default will be managed through conditions attached to the loan, and detailed procedures developed by officers as outlined in section 2 (Legal) above.
- 11. Procurement** – No implications.
- 12. Health and Safety** – No implications.
- 13. Property and Assets** – No implications.
- 14. Information Technology** – No implications.
- 15. Cost of Living** – The scheme will assist empty homeowners with their cost of living by bringing an asset back into use and should assist potential tenants by improving the housing options available to retain and attract essential workers to the islands.

List of Background Papers

- Housing Need and Demand Assessment 2023.
- Local Housing Strategy (2024-2029).
- Essential Workers Housing Strategy 2024.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Proposed Empty Homes Support Scheme Policy.
- Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment.
- Appendix 3 – Island Communities Impact Assessment.



Private Sector Empty Homes Support Scheme

November 2024

Version Control

| Document Reference. | Rev. | Issue Date. | Reason for Issue. | Reviewer. | Sign. |
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| HDPOL149 | Draft | 22/10/2024 | New Policy | Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing | |
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Section 1: Private Sector Empty Homes Support Scheme – Context and Policy Objectives

1.1. Rationale for an Orkney Empty Homes Support Scheme

The Orkney Islands Council Empty Homes Support Scheme is introduced as part of the Council's Essential Workers Housing Strategy 2024 (EWS), the Local Housing Strategy (2024-2029), in the context of the Council existing Empty Homes Strategy (2018-2023) and the relevant legislation.

The Essential Workers' Housing Strategy recognises that housing shortage in Orkney results in difficulty to attract and retain key workers, and other essential workers required to support the Orkney Islands' existing and future communities, including delivery of essential public services and to support the local economy. The challenges of recruitment and retaining essential incoming workers is experienced across sectors. Collaboration with public and private sectors will help achieve flexible and sustainable housing solutions to meet a range of needs, and to provide the economies of scale necessary in a relatively small community to achieve the best value housing options.

The Orkney Empty Homes Strategy sets out the need to increase focus on bringing empty homes back into use. The Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (2023) showed that 10% of all dwellings in Orkney – equating to 1,201 empty properties across all categories including unoccupied exemptions, long-term empty homes and second homes. Latest published statistics show a similar position of 1,125, still at 10% of all Orkney dwellings. This is much higher than the Scottish rate of 4% across all categories of empty homes.

To reflect the importance of bringing empty homes back into use, the Orkney Empty Homes Strategy introduced an Empty Homes Officer to support owners of empty homes to bring their properties back into use. A total of 84 properties have been reported by Orkney Islands Council to the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership as being brought back into use with help from the Council's Empty Homes Officer since the financial year 2016-17 (this figure may be subject to error as there have been periods of time without a dedicated empty homes officer keeping track).

Through the development of the Essential Workers Housing Strategy and the Local Housing Strategy, it has been recognised that some owners of empty homes may need additional incentives to bring properties back into use. These incentives could be financial, combined with non-financial incentives of hands-on support from the Council through information and advice provided by the Empty Homes Officer to enable empty homeowners to let out their property to target essential workers. This may be of particular interest to those empty homeowners who are increasingly put off from long term residential letting due to the increase of regulations in the private rented sector, and the recent introduction of regulation in the short-term let market.

1.2. Legal Context

The legal context for bringing empty homes back into use is:

- Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, Section 86.

- Defines the Tolerable Standard for housing, this was later amended in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006, Section 11.
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2006.
 - Defines the Repairing Standard for dwellings. It also gives powers to local authorities designed to encourage and assist owners to carry out repairs and maintenance to their property, including dealing with sub-standard housing through Housing Renewal Areas, Works Notices, Closing Orders, Demolition Notices, Demolition Orders and Maintenance Orders.
- Building (Scotland) Act 2003.
 - This legislation gives Local Authorities the power to serve notice requiring the owner to make their property safe where the building is considered dangerous. It also defines the Local Authority's powers to use Compulsory Purchase Orders where the Council has carried out work under a Dangerous Buildings Notice and cannot trace the owner to recoup the cost.
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, Section 157.
 - Allowed Council Tax data to be used for the purposes of Empty Homes regeneration enabling EHOs to contact owners directly by post.

1.3 Objectives of the Empty Homes Support Scheme

The purpose of the Empty Homes Support Scheme is to contribute to the Council's housing and wider strategic objectives by:

- Incentivising empty home owners to bring their properties back into use and letting their property as a private let to target groups of essential workers.
- Helping to retain and attract essential workers to remain or move to the Orkney Islands by providing more private rented housing options.
- Attracting private landlords to contribute to housing essential workers to help support Orkney's communities and economy.
- Increasing the stock of private rented housing which meets the statutory Repairing Standard and which are managed in line with legislation and regulations.

1.4 Summary

This scheme sets out the aim for the Council to incentivise more empty homeowners to bring their properties back into use into the private rented sector, targeted for essential workers.

Section 2: How the Empty Homes Support Scheme Works

2.1. How the Empty Homes Support Scheme works

The Empty Homes Support Scheme works in the following way:

- An owner that has had an empty home for at least 12 months can make an application for an Orkney Islands Council for financial support through a loan alongside enabling information, advice and support from the Council to enable the property to be brought back into use, including advice to let the property as a Private Residential Tenancy to the target tenant group.
- If the application is approved, the empty homeowner must meet Orkney Islands Council's terms and conditions in addition to the statutory requirements of a loan covering 5 and 10 years respectively (see below).
- Works must be completed to the satisfaction of the Council with a schedule of loan draw down for a maximum of 5 years, set out in the offer of loan aligning to progress of works.
- The owner lets the property as a Registered Landlord to the target group of essential workers (as defined below) for at least 5 years. The landlord will let directly to a tenant through a Private Residential Tenancy.

2.2 Orkney Islands Council Conditions of the Empty Homes Scheme

Council discretionary loans known as Empty Homes Loan would be available for the repair and renovation of empty properties. These loans are subject to Council loan conditions. A specific Empty Homes Loan allocation, funded by an agreed commitment from the Strategic Reserve Fund, will delimit the policy applications.

The undernoted requirements are specific to the Orkney Empty Homes Loan and are **in addition to the statutory loan conditions** outlined in Section 2.3 of this policy and as explained in detailed operational procedures. These additional Orkney Islands Council conditions apply for **5 years** in addition to the statutory conditions. **There is therefore combined statutory and local conditions which apply for a total of 10 years (5 years Council Conditions plus 5 years Statutory Conditions).**

- The property must currently be a long-term empty dwelling (at least 12 months empty normally as identified through the Council Tax Register or other Council/Scottish Government documentation).
- The property must be in a priority area and be a priority type. Priority areas and types will be established by the Council and may change from time to time in line with the demand for housing.
- The level of loan available is a maximum of £25,000 per property and will be used to contribute to ensuring the property meets the Repairing Standard (or successive minimum legal condition standard), and in the case of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) works required to meet the relevant Regulations and Licensing Conditions. In addition, funding can be used for energy efficiency and net zero works as required by relevant Regulations for the private rented sector, but the minimum requirement is to meet the Repairing Standard (that is, the loan cannot be used for energy efficiency/net zero

improvement or HMO requirements if the property does not meet the Repairing Standard). In exceptional circumstances there may be discretion to increase the loan, as set out in procedures and approved by the Head of Finance in consultation with the Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing.

- The owner may need to contribute their own funding to meet the Repairing Standard in addition to the Council loan.
- Empty Home Loans would not normally be used for, or towards common repairs except for minor repairs e.g. roof work and other works specified in procedures to enable the property to reach the Repairing Standard).
- Dwellings that are improved using the Empty Homes Loan must be made available for private rent. The owner lets the property as a Registered Landlord to the target group (as defined below) for at least 5 years through a Private Residential Tenancy.

2.3 Orkney Islands Council Conditions of the Empty Homes

Dwellings that are improved using the Empty Homes Loan must be made available for a rental level which is affordable for the target tenant group. Affordability of rent will be assessed through an affordability assessment undertaken by the Landlord or their agent for the tenant. In addition, the Council in assessing the loan will ensure the rent is sufficient to cover the loan repayment.

As a guide, rent is typically affordable where rent is up to 30% of net household incomes. As an indication, at Orkney median incomes of around gross £34,000 per annum, most households may be able to afford up to around £600 per month for a 2 bedroom property. Households with higher incomes would be able to afford higher rents, and rents will depend on the type and size of accommodation, and the range of fittings and services offered by the landlord.

- The Empty Homes Loan will be repaid by the owner over a term agreed by the Council and set out in the offer of loan. The period of repayment will be appraised on a case-by-case basis, linked to the level of rent secured, and over a maximum period of loan repayment of 5 years. The Council will aim to minimise the period of loan repayment, while ensuring feasibility and affordability for the empty homeowner.
- If the owner of the empty home fails to adhere to any of the Council's requirements as outlined in this scheme and offer of loan, the owner may be required to repay all or a proportion of the loan **plus** additional interest at a rate to be determined by the Council, with repayment potentially faster depending on the time that has elapsed since the loan was offered and accepted. Repayment is on a sliding-scale as below and will apply from the date of completion of the loan award (i.e. from the date the final payment of loan was made);
 - Within 12 months – 100% repayment plus interest
 - 12 – 24 months – 80% repayment plus interest
 - 24 – 36 months – 60% repayment plus interest
 - 36 – 48 months – 40% repayment plus interest
 - 48 – 60 months – 20% repayment plus interest

- The Statutory loan conditions below apply for a further 5 years, after the initial 5 years of Orkney Islands Council conditions of loan (as above).

2.3. Statutory Loan Conditions

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 states that where loan funding is provided, it will be subject to the following conditions which will apply for a **period of ten years from the date the works have been completed**:

- Condition A is that the house must be used as a private dwelling; but that does not prevent the use of part of the house as a shop or office or for business, trade or professional purposes.
- Condition B is that the house must not be occupied by the owner or a member of the owner's family (within the meaning of section 83 of the 1987 Act) except as that person's only or main residence.
- Condition C is that the owner of the land or premises must take all practicable steps to keep it in a good state of repair.
- Condition D is that the owner of the land or premises must, if required to do so by the local authority, certify that the conditions A to C are, in so far as they apply, being observed.

These Conditions would be legally secured over the properties by the registration of a Standard Security under the Conveyancing and Feudal Reform (Scotland) Act 1970.

Breach of any of these conditions may result in the loan being repaid with additional interest.

The Council may, at any time during the period in which these conditions apply, require the owner to certify that these conditions are being observed.

When the loan has been paid, the Council will arrange for a Notice to be recorded in the Register of Property Deeds, the cost of which is included within the arrangement fee that is deducted from the loan award.

In cases where an Empty Homes Support Scheme Loan has been awarded the specific Empty Homes requirements will also apply for a period of the first 5 years and with the repayment penalty arrangements set out as above. If the owner or members of their family do not wish to reside in the property after the initial 5 years, the property may continue to be let for the target client group in line with the Orkney Islands Council Empty Homes Loan conditions for a further 5 years until the expiry of the statutory conditions period.

2.4. Eligibility and Priority for tenants of private lets where the Empty Homes Loan is used

Priority for tenants living in dwellings improved through an Empty Homes Loan will be given to essential workers required to sustain and develop Orkney's communities and local economy. These may be existing Orkney residents or incoming residents.

Priority will be given to the following workers, ranked in priority as listed below:

- Social care staff – employees of Orkney Islands Council and employees of agencies providing social care services on behalf of Orkney Islands Council.
- Council staff required to deliver essential public services.
- Health staff – employees of NHS Orkney and employees of agencies providing health services on behalf of NHS Orkney.
- Other employees or contractors required to deliver essential public services.
- Construction workers required to support Orkney’s local economy.
- Hospitality workers required to support Orkney’s local economy.
- Other workers that can demonstrate their working status is essential to help sustain Orkney’s communities and local economy.

Prospective tenants must show evidence of their employment contract to meet these eligibility requirements, assessed by the Registered Letting Agent.

Preference will be given to those seeking permanent or fixed term employment in excess of one year and residence in the Orkney Islands, rather than short-term employment contracts of less than one year.

If employees or contractors are already living in Orkney and are living in unsuitable accommodation, they may be considered for tenancies let under the Empty Homes Support Scheme if they have taken up employment no more than six months previously. Unsuitable accommodation is determined with reference to the homelessness legislation and the Council’s housing allocation policy.

Future employees / contractors can be considered for tenancies let under the Empty Homes Support Scheme from the point at which their contract is confirmed, with accommodation provided from a maximum of one month before the employment contract commences.

2.3. Summary

The Empty Homes Support Scheme provides a financial incentive for empty homeowners to bring long term empty (over 12 months) back into use for the benefit of essential workers required to support Orkney’s communities and local economy. Specific Orkney Islands Council and statutory loan conditions apply for a total of 10 years (5 + 5 years).

Section 3: Implementing the Empty Homes Support Scheme

3.1. Procedures

The operation of the scheme will be governed through detailed operational procedures which will be developed and periodically reviewed by the relevant Heads of Service These will detail:

- Empty Homes Loan application procedures, loan assessment and payment details.
- Offer and conditions of loan.
- How tenants will be prioritised for properties that have been improved through a Empty Homes Loan.

3.2. Working in partnership

There is currently a shortage of housing in many areas of Orkney and there is strong competition amongst individual households for housing, and between employers seeking to secure housing for employees and contracting staff.

Orkney Islands Council will work collaboratively with other public agencies and the private sector seeking to secure accommodation for its workforce, with the aim of maximising economies and scale and benefits to secure a stable workforce to support Orkney's communities and local economy. This will include widescale advertising of the Empty Homes Support Scheme and tenant eligibility.

3.3. Summary

Detailed procedures will be used to run the Empty Homes Support Scheme which may be reviewed periodically, in line with this policy. Opportunities to work collaboratively across public and private sectors will be used to obtain economies of scale to secure housing for incoming workers.

Section 4: Complaints

4.1. Complaints

Complaints may come through various sources in implementing this policy:

- Empty homeowners applying for the Council loan
- Tenants of private landlords.

A complaint procedure is provided in the detailed procedures developed for the Empty Homes Support Scheme. A Registered Letting Agent will have a complaints procedure in place and will manage the relationship between tenants and private landlords.

4.2. Summary

Complaints procedures will be put in place for the various relationships involved in the scheme. The Council has a corporate complaints policy which is available from our website.

Section 5: Performance Management and Policy Review

5.1. Consultation

Consultation on the development of the Essential Workers Housing Strategy, and its various mechanisms including this loan scheme was undertaken through the Housing Market Partnership. The Housing Market Partnership will have a continuing interest in the effectiveness of the scheme through the ongoing review of the Local Housing Strategy implementation.

5.2. Performance Management

The performance of the Empty Homes Support Scheme will be monitored through Local Housing Strategy monitoring framework which will set key performance indicators for each element of the strategy, including the Empty Homes Loan scheme.

5.3. Policy Review

The policy will be reviewed five years from approval of the policy, or before as required, for example if funding is fully allocated.

Detailed procedures required to implement the policy will be reviewed periodically as required by the relevant Heads of Service.

9.4 Summary

Policy and procedures will be reviewed as required, and no more than five years after policy approval.



Equality Impact Assessment

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is to improve the work of Orkney Islands Council by making sure it promotes equality and does not discriminate. This assessment records the likely impact of any changes to a function, policy or plan by anticipating the consequences, and making sure that any negative impacts are eliminated or minimised and positive impacts are maximised.

| 1. Identification of Function, Policy or Plan | |
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| Name of function / policy / plan to be assessed. | Empty Homes Support Scheme |
| Service / service area responsible. | Housing Services |
| Name of person carrying out the assessment and contact details. | Frances Troup, Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing Ext 2450 E-mail frances.troup@orkney.gov.uk |
| Date of assessment. | 22 October 2024 |
| Is the function / policy / plan new or existing? (Please indicate also if the service is to be deleted, reduced or changed significantly). | New for empty homes support |
| 2. Initial Screening | |
| What are the intended outcomes of the function / policy / plan? | To provide a Council loan to help bring private sector empty homes back into use for onward let to essential workers. The Local Housing Strategy 2024, Empty Homes Strategy and Essential Workers Housing Strategy set out an objective to bring private sector empty homes back into use. |
| Is the function / policy / plan strategically important? | Yes. It links to the Local Housing Strategy, Empty Homes Strategy and Essential Workers Housing Strategy all of which set out an objective to bring private sector empty homes back into use. |
| State who is, or may be affected by this function / policy / plan, and how. | Owners of private sector empty homes who require some additional support / incentive to bring their property up to the statutory Repairing Standard and bring their property back into use. In |

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| | <p>turn it may benefit essential workers by increasing the number of available private sector lets in the area.</p> |
| <p>How have stakeholders been involved in the development of this function / policy / plan?</p> | <p>The involvement of stakeholders has been through the broader area of strategic work which has included the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment and the Local Housing Strategy (which incorporated the Essential Workers Housing Strategy). Both were developed over 12 months January to December 2023 through the Orkney Housing Market Partnership which encompasses the Council's Member Officer Working Group. It comprises a range of stakeholders including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orkney Islands Council Elected Members • Orkney Islands Council - Education, Leisure & Housing; Neighbourhood Services & Infrastructure; Enterprise & Sustainable Regeneration; Strategy, Performance & Business Solutions; Orkney Health & Care. • Orkney Housing Association (OHAL) • UHI Orkney • The Development Trusts' housing consultant • Highland & Islands Enterprise (HIE) • Housebuilders • NHS Orkney • Scottish Government More Homes Division • Scottish Water <p>The Partnership held 8 meetings between January and December 2023 to oversee production of the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment, and then to develop the Local Housing Strategy. This process involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of Housing Strategy topic papers and presentations • Workshops on each topic with a total of 20 break out groups over the development period including a total of 45 stakeholders. Most Partnership members attended multiple workshops. |

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| | <p>The Housing Market Partnership’s work built on wider community consultation led by the Council in late 2021 and early 2022 – ‘Orkney Matters’, with findings feeding into the Housing Need and Demand Assessment, and the Local Housing Strategy development. The focus was on community and place with questions asked on what’s working, what’s not working so well and what would the community like to improve. The engagement was through survey, online consultation, and art workshops for harder to reach groups. This project involved all Council teams including the Housing Service and partner agencies from Orkney’s Community Planning Partnership.</p> <p>The Local Housing Strategy consultative draft was issued for public consultation in January 2024 with a questionnaire to ask for feedback on the housing vision, priorities, outcomes and actions. The consultative draft was disseminated through proactive media engagement with the established network of organisations and community groups including Community Councils and the Development Trusts. Separate consultation took place with the 10 Development Trusts (2 meetings) to ensure the needs of isles communities were understood and built into both the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment and the Local Housing Strategy. Community Councils were also contacted directly to ask them to respond to the Strategy consultation. Findings from the consultation are being reported through the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee in June 2024 and integrated into the final strategy.</p> <p>The Private Sector Empty Homes Support Scheme is one of the actions outlined in the Essential Workers Housing Strategy / Local Housing Strategy with a view to bringing more empty homes back into use and thereby increasing the supply of private sector lets.</p> |
| <p>Is there any existing data and / or research relating to equalities issues in this policy area? Please summarise. E.g. consultations, national surveys, performance data, complaints, service user feedback, academic / consultants' reports,</p> | <p>There is significant research into equality, diversity and inclusion issues in relation to the most vulnerable people in our society and the wider area of housing. This includes, but is not limited to, reports produced by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group in relation to impacts on homeless households and separately the Joseph Rowntree Foundation around housing condition and poverty.</p> |

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| <p>benchmarking (see equalities resources on OIC information portal).</p> | <p>However, Scottish housing legislation and policy including the Scottish Government's Equalities Position Statement and Scottish Housing Regulator's approach to equalities ensure public authorities give due regard to elimination of discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Processes are in place which require that where any negative impacts are identified, action is taken to seek to address and mitigate these.</p> |
| <p>Is there any existing evidence relating to socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome in this policy area? Please summarise. E.g. For people living in poverty or for people of low income. See The Fairer Scotland Duty Interim Guidance for Public Bodies for further information.</p> | <p>There is significant research indicating that low income households living in the social housing sector, private rented sector and some owners, and homeless households suffer socio-economic disadvantage and fuel poverty. This is more acute for rough sleepers although the incidence of this is low in Orkney. The provision of housing or lack of it is recognised as being intrinsically linked to a range of indicators related to health, wealth and educational achievement.</p> <p>The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has produced a range of research focussing on poverty and disadvantage and the links between this and housing and homelessness. Research such as this relates directly to the introduction of the Fairer Scotland Duty.</p> |
| <p>Could the function / policy have a differential impact on any of the following equality strands?</p> | <p>(Please provide any evidence – positive impacts / benefits, negative impacts and reasons).</p> |
| <p>1. Race: this includes ethnic or national groups, colour and nationality.</p> | <p>Some ethnic groups may require access to information, advice and support in particular languages or formats. The Housing Service's Accessibility Policy is specifically intended to address this.</p> |
| <p>2. Sex: a man or a woman.</p> | <p>No specific impact identified.</p> |
| <p>3. Sexual Orientation: whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.</p> | <p>No specific impact identified.</p> |
| <p>4. Gender Reassignment: the process of transitioning from one gender to another.</p> | <p>No specific impact identified.</p> |
| <p>5. Pregnancy and maternity.</p> | <p>No specific impact identified.</p> |

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| 6. Age: people of different ages. | <p>The policy itself would not have a differential impact on different age groups specifically.</p> <p>Different age brackets may have different considerations around considering a housing loan. If for instance an individual is nearing the end of their working life or has retired and may not be in a position to take a traditional loan. Younger people may not wish to take a loan on a second property without additional support. The empty homes loan scheme is intended to try and assist the owners of empty properties who may need additional assistance to bring properties back into use.</p> |
| 7. Religion or beliefs or none (atheists). | No specific impacts identified. |
| 8. Caring responsibilities. | No specific impacts identified, other than those addressed under “age” above or disability below. |
| 9. Care experienced. | No specific impact identified. |
| 10. Marriage and Civil Partnerships. | No specific impacts identified. |
| 11. Disability: people with disabilities (whether registered or not). | Potentially if for instance there were specific communication requirements but The Housing Service’s Accessibility Policy is specifically intended to address this. |
| 12. Socio-economic disadvantage. | Socio-economic disadvantage is likely to lead to difficulties in being able to access a mortgage or loan. The empty homes loan scheme is intended to try and assist the owners of empty properties who may need additional assistance to bring properties back into use. |

3. Impact Assessment

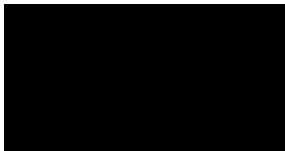
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| Does the analysis above identify any differential impacts which need to be addressed? | Yes, there is a potential greater impact identified as a result of race, age, caring, disability and socio-economic disadvantage. These have been addressed throughout the EQiA. |
| How could you minimise or remove any potential negative impacts? | Our Accessibility Policy can assist with any language barriers / additional assistance in respect of information to be provided in a range of formats. The empty homes loan scheme is intended to try and assist the owners of empty properties who may need additional assistance to bring properties back into use. |

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| Do you have enough information to make a judgement? If no, what information do you require? | Yes |
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4. Conclusions and Planned Action

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| Is further work required? | No. |
| What action is to be taken? | N/A |
| Who will undertake it? | N/A |
| When will it be done? | N/A |
| How will it be monitored? (e.g. through service plans). | N/A |

Signature:



Date 22 October 2024

Name: Frances Troup

(BLOCK CAPITALS).

Please sign and date this form, keep one copy and send a copy to HR and Performance. A Word version should also be emailed to HR and Performance at hrsupport@orkney.gov.uk

Island Communities Impact Assessment

Empty Homes Support Scheme, Housing Services

| Preliminary Considerations | Response |
|--|--|
| Please provide a brief description or summary of the policy, strategy or service under review for the purposes of this assessment. | To provide a Council loan to help bring private sector empty homes back into use for onward let to essential workers. The Local Housing Strategy 2024, Empty Homes Strategy and Essential Workers Housing Strategy set out an objective to bring private sector empty homes back into use. |
| Step 1 – Develop a clear understanding of your objectives | Response |
| What are the objectives of the policy, strategy or service? | To provide additional support / incentive to owners of private sector empty homes to bring them up to the statutory Repairing Standard and bring the properties back into use. |
| Do you need to consult? | No. The development of the essential workers housing strategy has included significant consultation as has the Local Housing Strategy. The Housing Market Partnership has been involved in the development of actions to bring empty private sector properties back into use. A public consultation is not required. |
| How are islands identified for the purpose of the policy, strategy or service? | The empty homes support scheme covers the whole local authority area which includes all the inhabited islands. |
| What are the intended impacts/outcomes and how do these potentially differ in the islands? | <p>To provide additional support / incentive to owners of private sector empty homes to bring them up to the statutory Repairing Standard and bring the properties back into use.</p> <p>The legislative provision is the same in the islands. Levels of supply and demand may differ for private sector provision to essential workers.</p> |

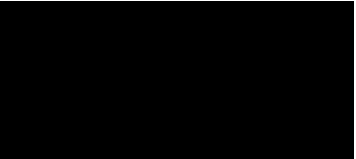
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| Is the policy, strategy or service new? | New, following development of the Essential Workers Housing Strategy / Local Housing Strategy. |
| Step 2 – Gather your data and identify your stakeholders | Response |
| What data is available about the current situation in the islands? | Data around demand for housing across the isles is included in the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment and has been taken forward in the development of the Local Housing Strategy for 2024. The empty homes support scheme is new and while there is data on the level of empty homes and it is known that a higher proportion of these are situated in isles locations, specific data on the likely level of interest in the empty homes support scheme doesn't exist meantime. |
| Do you need to consult? | No. The development of the essential workers housing strategy has included significant consultation. The Housing Market Partnership has been involved in actions around bringing empty properties back into use. A public consultation is not required. |
| How does any existing data differ between islands? | Data around demand for housing across the isles is included in the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment and has been taken forward in the development of the Local Housing Strategy for 2024. The empty homes support scheme is new and while there is data on the level of empty homes and it is known that a higher proportion of these are situated in isles locations, specific data on the likely level of interest in the empty homes support scheme doesn't exist meantime. |
| Are there any existing design features or mitigations in place? | N/A. See above. |
| Step 3 – Consultation | Response |
| Who do you need to consult with? | N/A there is not a need to consult. The development of the essential workers housing strategy / Local Housing Strategy have included significant consultation. The Housing Market Partnership has been |

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| | involved in the development of in actions around bringing empty properties back into use. A public consultation is not required. |
| How will you carry out your consultation and in what timescales? | N/A. |
| What questions will you ask when considering how to address island realities? | N/A. |
| What information has already been gathered through consultations and what concerns have been raised previously by island communities? | N/A. |
| Is your consultation robust and meaningful and sufficient to comply with the Section 7 duty? | N/A. |
| Step 4 – Assessment | Response |
| Does your assessment identify any unique impacts on island communities? | No. |
| Does your assessment identify any potential barriers or wider impacts? | No. |
| How will you address these? | N/A. |
| <p>You must now determine whether in your opinion your policy, strategy or service is likely to have an effect on an island community, which is significantly different from its effect on other communities (including other island communities).</p> <p>If your answer is No to the above question, a full ICIA will NOT be required and you can process to Step 6.</p> <p>If the answer is Yes, an ICIA must be prepared and you should proceed to Step 5.</p> <p>To form your opinion, the following questions should be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the evidence show different circumstances or different expectations or needs, or different experiences or outcomes (such as different levels of satisfaction, or different rates of participation)? | |

| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are these different effects likely? • Are these effects significantly different? • Could the effect amount to a disadvantage for an island community compared to the Scottish mainland or between island groups? | |
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| Step 5 – Preparing your ICIA | Response |
| In Step 5, you should describe the likely significantly different effect of the policy, strategy or service: | N/A. |
| Assess the extent to which you consider that the policy, strategy or service can be developed or delivered in such a manner as to improve or mitigate, for island communities, the outcomes resulting from it. | N/A. |
| Consider alternative delivery mechanisms and whether further consultation is required. | N/A. |
| Describe how these alternative delivery mechanisms will improve or mitigate outcomes for island communities. | N/A. |
| Identify resources required to improve or mitigate outcomes for island communities. | N/A. |
| Stage 6 – Making adjustments to your work | Response |
| Should delivery mechanisms/mitigations vary in different communities? | The legislation is the same across all locations. |
| Do you need to consult with island communities in respect of mechanisms or mitigations? | No. |
| Have island circumstances been factored into the evaluation process? | Yes, island circumstances are always factored into our policies relating to Housing and island circumstances were factored into the development of the essential workers housing strategy / Local Housing Strategy. |

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| Have any island-specific indicators/targets been identified that require monitoring? | No. The empty homes support scheme is new and while there is data on the level of empty homes and it is known that a higher proportion of these are situated in isles locations, specific data on the likely level of interest in the empty homes support scheme doesn't exist meantime. |
| How will outcomes be measured on the islands? | The empty homes support scheme is new and while there is data on the level of empty homes and it is known that a higher proportion of these are situated in isles locations, specific data on the likely level of interest in the empty homes support scheme doesn't exist meantime. |
| How has the policy, strategy or service affected island communities? | Not yet. The empty homes support scheme is new and while there is data on the level of empty homes and it is known that a higher proportion of these are situated in isles locations, specific data on the likely level of interest in the empty homes support scheme doesn't exist meantime. |
| How will lessons learned in this ICIA inform future policy making and service delivery? | N/A. |
| Step 7 – Publishing your ICIA | Response |
| Have you presented your ICIA in an Easy Read format? | Yes. |
| Does it need to be presented in Gaelic or any other language? | No. |
| Where will you publish your ICIA and will relevant stakeholders be able to easily access it? | Orkney Islands Council's Website with Committee Report and Minute on Empty Homes Support Scheme. |
| Who will signoff your final ICIA and why? | James Wylie, Corporate Director of Education, Leisure and Housing – line manager of Frances Troup. |

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| ICIA completed by: | Frances Troup |
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| Position: | Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing |
| Signature: |  |
| Date complete: | 22 October 2024 |

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| ICIA approved by: | |
| Position: | |
| Signature: | |
| Date complete: | |