

Empty Homes/commercial property

In attendance

Alison Bryce	
Diarmid Hearn	
Eva Milroy*	
Amjad Mirzt	
Helen Houston	
Elaine McGregor	
Paul Daly	SRA policy and communications officer
Mary Williams Edgar	SRA director
Gordon Harrison	SRA director
Sheena Boyd	SRA volunteer
Gavin Leask	Scottish Empty Homes Partnership- speaker

Proceedings

This was a smaller group than expected so, after the presentations from Gavin and Gordon the attendees had an open discussion about issues surrounding Empty Homes legislation/regulation and the operational reality of these. There were comments on difficulties for communities in knowing what could be done, the length of the process as well as practical issues in following the procedures. Discussion also highlighted that there were some successes which seemed to be where the local authority had a dedicated Empty Homes Officer in post – for example in Dumfries and Galloway. It was noted that compulsory sale orders had recently been added to local authority tools in bringing homes back into use. This was a recent amendment to the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill and there was uncertainty whether it has been implemented. It was felt that the introduction of a compulsory sale order (in addition to the recently introduced compulsory purchase order amendment) proposed in a joint briefing by Shelter (Scotland), Scotland's Towns Partnership, Rural Housing Scotland, Scottish Empty Homes Partnership and Community Land Scotland, may well be beneficial.

There was also discussion around how affected properties are identified. It appears that local authorities have lists of empty properties but these might reflect only those included under council tax regulations and so the issue of empty homes may be under represented.

3 key takeaway points

- Lack of clarity in the empty homes/business premises landscape – regulations operationalised (or not) in different ways eg Empty Homes Officer role doesn't exist in every local authority area, sometimes the role is subsumed within another post.
- Complexity of the regulations and length of time to work through the process can put people off or put the process out of reach for some
- There are some examples of good practice, it would be helpful to have a case study type resource to see how things worked (or didn't work) in real situations eg a group in Dumfries Town Centre has been working with Dumfries and Galloway Council's Empty Homes Officer

*Eva and Helen indicated she would be happy to take part in any best practice/case study activity