



scottish
emptyhomes
partnership



SCOTTISH EMPTY HOMES PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26



Contact Us

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

Shelter Scotland, Second Floor South Office Suite,
The Tun, 4 Jackson's Entry, Edinburgh EH8 8PJ

Empty Homes Advice Service

0344 515 1941
emptyhomes@shelter.org.uk

National Empty Homes Matchmaker

To view empty homes for sale, or to list an empty home through our Matchmaker service, visit:
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FOREWORD

Against the backdrop of a continuing housing emergency, there is growing recognition that bringing existing homes back into use must be part of the solution. Throughout 2025/26, we have seen a clear step-change in both the scale of activity and the level of commitment across the country in addressing empty homes.

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP) has been proud to play a central role in supporting and driving this progress. Through increased investment from the Scottish Government, we've seen strengthened partnerships, and the expansion of dedicated empty homes services, empty homes work has grown into a key housing intervention.

As a team, SEHP has also undergone a period of transformation with these new resources allowing us to expand our reach, strengthen our support services, and pursue ambitious new initiatives. We've seen councils establishing services for the first time (Midlothian Council), re-establishing dedicated services (Moray Council) and many more expanding their teams, growing our network of Empty Homes Officers (EHOs).

Through partnerships with third sector organisations, we've been able to design and test approaches to increase the number of homes that are brought back into use. With projects like our CPO Hub being led by the legal team at Aberdeenshire Council and keyworker projects through Argyll and Bute and SOSCH, we can focus on social and affordable housing. We will continue to engage with the sector and partners across Scotland and beyond, ensuring that best practice is shared and receive so that work on empty homes continues to be impactful.

While there is still much more to do, the past year has created the foundations for what can be achieved through collaboration, investment and a shared commitment to making better and more strategic use of our existing homes. As we look ahead, our focus will be on embedding

learnings, building on emerging successes, and ensuring that empty homes continue to play a meaningful role in addressing Scotland's housing emergency and help government and councils meet the demand for social and affordable housing. ■



Tahmina Nizam
National Manager, SEHP

About The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP) is dedicated to bringing Scotland's approximately 44,500 long-term empty homes back into use. Against the backdrop of a housing emergency, we know that every home matters.

Established in 2010, we work with local authorities, as well as directly with property owners and other organisations, to identify, support and resolve situations where homes are lying empty. The partnership is funded by the Scottish Government and hosted by Shelter Scotland.

As well as providing support for Empty Homes Officers across Scotland's councils and a range of projects, we directly operate the Empty Homes Advice Service and a National Empty Homes Matchmaker, linking potential buyers with empty properties. ■

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual report provides a review of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership's activities over the period of 2025/26, while also looking forward to developments, milestones and projects in the year ahead.

Firstly, it explores in detail at the prevalence of empty homes across Scotland, the challenges in bringing these empty homes back into use and the reasons behind Scotland's 44,500 empty homes becoming empty and remaining empty.

It also celebrates the 2,285 empty homes brought back into use in 2025/26 - a record figure since the beginning of the SEHP's work in 2010, and an 11 percent increase on the previous year. It considers the positive role played by the expansion of local, dedicated empty homes services across the vast majority of local authorities and looks towards the SEHP's work in promoting and providing active support for the appointment of Empty Homes Officers (EHOs) in councils across Scotland.

This review also recognises the transformative change that has taken place in the work of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, enabled by the Scottish Government's investment of £2 million in the partnership and its work at the start of this financial year. This includes £750,000 designated to support the Strand 2 expansion of EHOs in local authorities, and a further £700,000 to support our Strand 3 kickstarter projects and initiatives, looking at a range of innovative ways to work with partners and bring empty homes back into use.

This funding has also supported the continued growth and success of the SEHP's core and in-house services such as the Empty Homes Advice Service and the National Matchmaker for empty properties, which started its operation as a truly Scotland-wide stand-alone service this

year. It has further enabled us to build on the work of the Empty Homes Framework, and work with councils to create a more strategic, data-led approach to prioritising and managing work on empty properties.

However this report also presents a challenge. As we continue to face a critical housing emergency in Scotland with growing numbers of people in temporary accommodation, tens of thousands of homes remain empty, and properties continue to fall into vacancy. This report looks at how progress can continue to be driven forward at an increasing pace and how government at all levels can play a part.

As an organisation, we also look forward to our aspirations for in the year ahead. This includes continued growth and expansion of our work. We will also be hosting the 15th annual Scottish Empty Homes Conference in Glasgow in October 2026 – bringing together those from all parts of Scotland and across the sector – which will be held alongside another annual Scottish Empty Homes Awards. We will, alongside partners from across the UK and internationally, be marking the second World Vacant Homes Day – recognising the global dimension to tackling empty homes and the lessons that we can learn from around the world. ■



THIS YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS

 **2,285**
homes back in use, the
highest number ever

 **15,240**
homes in total
returned to use since
2010

 **11%** increase in
homes brought back
to use since 2024/25

 **25** local authorities
published or developing
an empty homes
strategy

 **4** local authorities
expanding their empty
homes service

 national
matchmaker service
launched in December
2025

 over **4,000** active
cases with empty
homes services

 **513** contacts on
advice service

 **12** properties
registered on
matchmaker

 **93** buyer enquiries
on matchmaker

BACKGROUND

Our objectives

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership was established after the 2009 review of the Private Rented Sector identified that considerable numbers of Scotland's empty homes could be used to increase housing supply.

In 2023 we commenced Phase 2 of our work with a new aim and updated strategic objectives. These reflect both the progress that has been made towards the establishment of empty homes services in every local authority in Scotland, and the need to encourage local authorities to integrate empty homes work within a wider assessment of housing need, supported by an evidence-based framework of data, policies, objectives, action plans and resources.

2025 has seen further expansion and development of our work, with a more structured support for local kickstarter projects directly tackling empty homes issues, while continuing to deepen our offer of support to EHOs and local authorities.

Our vision

Our vision is that privately owned empty homes do not remain empty for 12 months or more without good reason.

Our aims

Our aim is to support bringing empty homes back into use where possible by meeting our five key strategic objectives:

Objective 1 - To effectively allocate funding and deliver projects on empty homes across Scotland.

Objective 2 - Increase the number of local authorities taking a strategic approach to bringing empty homes back into use.

Objective 3 - Produce guidance and tools to assist local authorities.

Objective 4 - Support the network of dedicated empty homes officers through the provision of training and best practice sharing.

Objective 5 - Run the Scottish Empty Homes Advice service and the National Matchmaker Service. ■

ABOUT OUR DATA

Data used throughout this report is derived from a number of sources, including the SEHP's own survey data, compiled from regular returns by local authorities. A number of minor technical changes were made to how these data are collected by the SEHP this year.

The definition of "empty homes advice/assistance" was clarified to include all instances in which successful contact with an owner was made, except when contact is made with an empty homeowner and their home is already advertised for sale or rent (or on track to be advertised for sale/rent) and no additional advice is needed. It will, however, include cases where the home is already advertised for sale or rent, but additional advice or information is provided to help facilitate the sale or rent.



We also clarified the definition of an "active case" beyond where an EHO or equivalent had made contact with a homeowner, or vice-versa, within the past 12 months. The updated definition indicated that councils may include cases in which the EHO has been proactively pursuing a homeowner even if the homeowner has not yet been engaged. This should include active engagement and exclude approaches like generic mailings.

Other data sources include the Scottish Government's annual statistical publication *Second Homes and Empty Properties in September* which includes information sourced from council tax base returns collected annually from local authorities by the Scottish Government and the National Records of Scotland's *Households in Scotland* dataset. ■

THE CHALLENGE OF EMPTY HOMES

The work of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership takes place against the backdrop of an acute housing emergency declared by the Scottish Government in spring 2024. Across Scotland, a shortage of housing supply is having a devastating impact on families and other types of households and pushing up the cost of living, particularly in areas where demand is high or construction of newbuilds presents difficulties.

Addressing Scotland's housing problems will require targeted action from all levels of government, business and the third sector. Empty homes have a vital part of play in delivering the right homes in the right places for people to live.

Homes at the heart of places

Empty homes can be a serious contributor to increasing supply in some of our most popular and densely populated communities. Whether it is small rural villages, or within city centres, addressing empty homes can have a noticeable impact on local supply – while providing a foundation for regeneration and revitalisation.

Improving communities

Empty homes can be a blight on communities and neighbours. All too often, empty homes are poorly maintained – with consequences for neighbouring properties. Even when a home is detached, poorly maintained empty properties can become unsightly, overgrown or a home for vermin.

Too often, empty homes can also be targeted for theft, vandalism, fire-raising and other forms of antisocial behaviour. This can have a considerable detrimental impact on neighbours and wider communities, including often having a very

tangible effect on the value of nearby properties.

A proactive approach toward these empty homes within communities can conversely encourage positive behaviours – including motivating owners to sell or rent, or to bring a property back up to standard

A sustainable future

Bringing empty homes back into use can be a more sustainable way of providing additional housing and in most cases compares positively to the level of carbon emissions created by new build construction. Reducing this embodied carbon – emissions caused by construction or demolition – has been an increasing focus in home supply.

Bringing an empty property back into use can also be an opportunity for improving energy efficiency for the long-term, with retrofitting and improvements helping to improve energy performance and drive down costs to residents.

It can also support heritage aspirations, bringing older and valued properties within villages, towns and cities into use and preventing them from deteriorating or being demolished – and maintaining the fabric of our traditional built environment. ■

Quick Facts

There are over **44,500** empty homes in Scotland

In **2025-26**, there were 19,004 households in temporary accommodation, including **10,715** children.

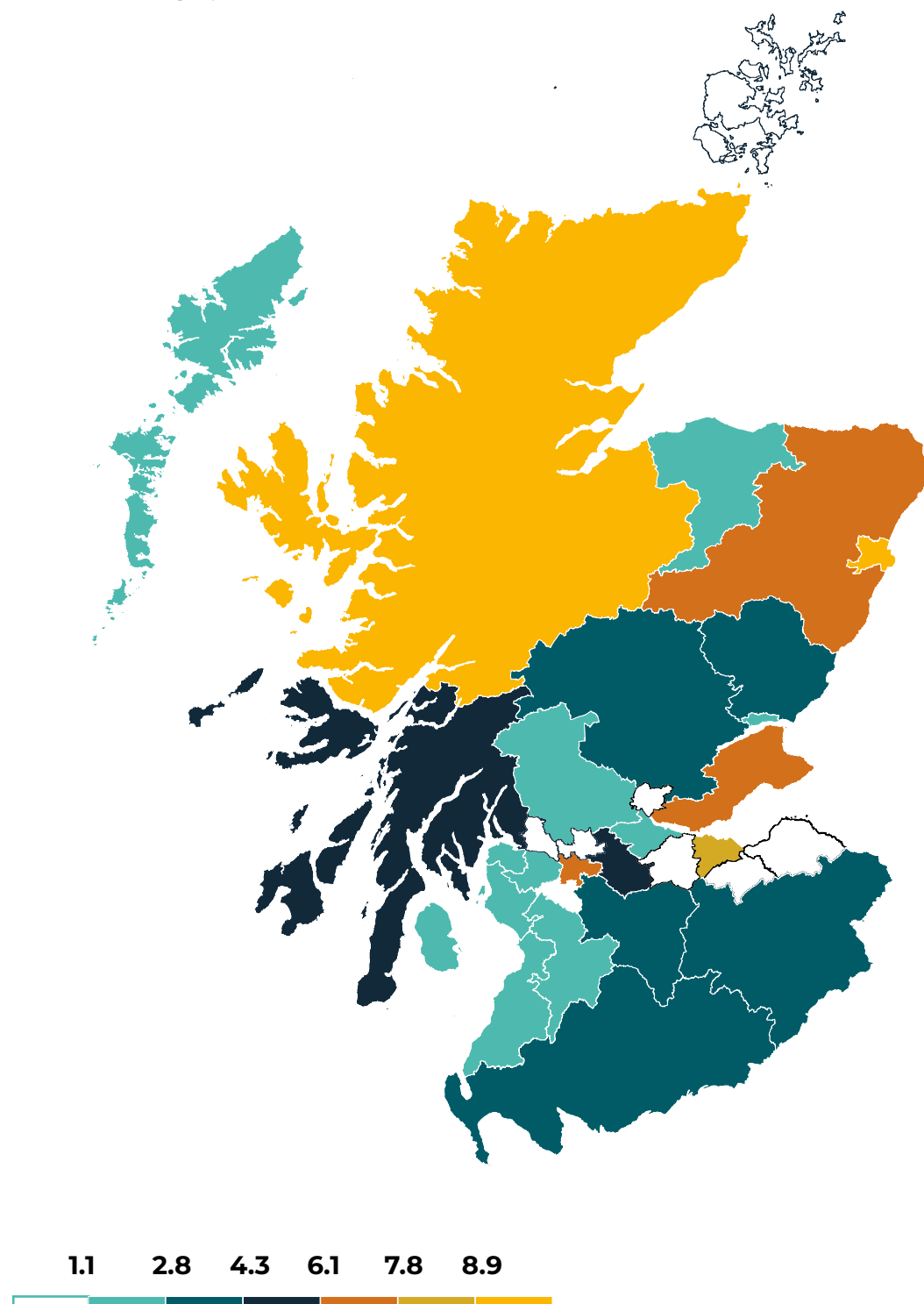
35,002 households in Scotland were assessed as homeless.

4,115 reported sleeping rough in the past three months.



PREVALENCE OF EMPTY HOMES BY LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA

There were 44,453 homes empty for 6 months or more in Scotland. Of these, 32,337 were classed as long-term empty (residential properties liable for council tax that had been empty for 12 months or longer).



Map showing long term empty homes across Scotland by percentage



LOCAL AUTHORITY	EMPTY HOMES	TOTAL HOMES	% OF HOMES EMPTY	% OF SCOTLAND'S EMPTY HOMES
Aberdeen	6,124	125,828	4.87%	13.78%
Aberdeenshire	2,896	123,367	2.35%	6.51%
Angus	1,383	58,435	2.37%	3.11%
Argyll & Bute	2,460	49,697	4.95%	5.53%
City of Edinburgh	3,080	266,309	1.16%	6.93%
Clackmannanshire	160	25,295	0.63%	0.36%
Dumfries & Galloway	1,750	76,535	2.29%	3.94%
Dundee	939	76,780	1.22%	2.11%
East Ayrshire	469	60,045	0.78%	1.06%
East Dunbartonshire	252	48,273	0.52%	0.57%
East Lothian	464	53,502	0.87%	1.04%
East Renfrewshire	36	410,63	0.09%	0.08%
Falkirk	653	76,942	0.85%	1.47%
Fife	2,550	183,686	1.39%	5.74%
Glasgow	3,009	327,869	0.92%	6.77%
Highland	3,969	124,812	3.18%	8.93%
Inverclyde	546	39,926	1.37%	1.23%
Midlothian	447	44,858	1.00%	1.01%
Moray	765	47,471	1.61%	1.72%
Na h-Eileanan an Iar	678	15,254	4.44%	1.53%
North Ayrshire	825	70,256	1.17%	1.86%
North Lanarkshire	2,452	161,228	1.52%	5.52%
Orkney	325	11,833	2.75%	0.73%
Perth & Kinross	1,479	76,762	1.93%	3.33%
Renfrewshire	857	91,736	0.93%	1.93%
Scottish Borders	1,490	60,064	2.48%	3.35%
Shetland	497	11,667	4.26%	1.12%
South Ayrshire	933	56,953	1.64%	2.10%
South Lanarkshire	1,459	159,662	0.91%	3.28%
Stirling	604	43,214	1.40%	1.36%
West Dunbartonshire	290	46,198	0.63%	0.65%
West Lothian	612	85,453	0.72%	1.38%

Figures from Scottish Government and NRS based on Council Tax data from September 2025



REMOTE, RURAL AND ISLAND COMMUNITIES



The renovation of this former croft house on the Isle of Lewis, completed with the support of the empty homes service at Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, demonstrates some of the challenges of rurality and island renovation.

As is typical on remote and island communities, the number of available tradespeople were often limited – and those who were present could command higher prices and often had longer lead-in times for work. Transferring equipment and building materials by sea often meant increased costs and logistical difficulties.

Harsh winter weather on the islands reduced the length of the build season, while Covid lockdowns and unexpected difficulties with utilities connections caused unforeseen setbacks.

However, with support of the local EHO and the

help of VAT discounts, 15 years after initial planning permission was sought, this historic croft house was returned to full use as a warm and welcoming home, equipped to modern standards of insulation, heat and energy efficiency.

“In rural areas empty homes strategies can help revive and sustain fragile communities”

Bringing empty homes back into use: an audit of privately owned empty homes in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2023)

Remote rural areas have some of the highest concentrations of empty and second homes in



Scotland. In these areas in particular, empty homes often exist side-by-side with unmet housing need. Specific problems with empty homes exist in Scotland's island communities, with certain islands considerably more impacted than others.

Communities in these areas can often be more fragile and face multiple challenges not seen in more urbanised areas, from restrictive housing markets to difficulties accommodating additional new build capacity. Work to renovate and bring homes back into use can also be hampered by higher costs, accessibility and shortage of local trades to carry out work.

Addressing empty homes has featured as a significant part of the Scottish Government's proposals in the February 2026 National Island Plan and has also been an area of particular focus in the Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan.

The expansion of empty homes services at local authority level has been vital in building a local knowledge-base and supporting local authorities to target resources effectively and in a way that is responsive to local needs. Individual projects have shown what can be achieved at community level and demonstrate how tackling empty homes can help to address wider challenges in remote, rural and island communities – such as recruitment and retention of staff in key public services like healthcare and education. ■



WHY HOMES BECOME AND REMAIN EMPTY

There are a wide range of reasons why homes become empty and each can present different challenges in bringing properties back into use successfully. While limited, data available in the adjoining table covers some 3,335 cases of properties becoming empty and 2,662 cases from the workload of EHOs around Scotland where homes have remained empty.

One of the most common causes behind a home becoming empty is a major life event, such as the death of the homeowner or a move into long-term residential or medical care. While these events are often unavoidable, support and intervention can help with returning the property to use.

Homes that are empty for longer may be more difficult or costly to bring back into use, poten-

tially suffering from long-term neglect and the consequences of a lack of maintenance. The cause of continued vacancy can often be far removed from the original reasons for a house falling empty – and present an additional set of challenges to owners, communities and policy-makers.

The profile of homes brought back into use has changed over time, with a larger proportion of very long-term empty homes (over 5 years) being brought back into use than when data was first collected by the SEHP in 2018/19.

EHOs across Scotland are actively engaging with owners of empty properties, taking both targeted and broader approaches – such as the use of automated letters at relevant council tax trigger points. ■

Spotlight: Hoarding

Hoarding behaviours are a common feature in the caseload of empty homes services across Scotland. These behaviours are often a significant contributing factor in homes becoming and remaining empty.

At its most extreme levels, hoarding can make a home uninhabitable by itself. However it is commonly associated with other issues including poor mental health of the occupant, vulnerability, neglect of property maintenance and many of the spill-over effects that empty homes experience such as damage to neighbouring properties and infestations.

In March 2026, the SEHP held a session with the Hoarding Academy, an Edinburgh-based social enterprise that specialises in exploring and understanding hoarding behaviour. It presented to EHOs and others on how hoarding behaviour could be approached and managed, examples of successful interventions and the effective transdisciplinary action that can be taken by responsible agencies.

Why homes become empty (of 3,335 known cases)		Why homes stay empty (of 2,662 known cases)	
Death of an Owner	38%	Awaiting grant of confirmation	4%
Owner moved into hospital, residential care or long-term detention	4%	Legal dispute	2%
		Property inherited, no action taken	5%
		Owner in long-term care or detention	3%
Repairs and Renovations			
Renovation/Repairs	38%	Repairs ongoing	28%
		Repairs stalled for financial reasons	4%
Rental issues			
Rental tenancy ended	11%	Currently advertised for sale/rent	6%
Repossession issues			
Home repossessed	1%	Repossession pending	1%
Sale issues			
Owner moved without or prior to sale	9%	Owner waiting on right time to sell	2%
Former second home	3%	Owner unwilling to rent/sell	5%
		Owner unsure of end use	5%
Owner engagement and other			
		Difficulty establishing owner	2%
		Difficulty locating owner	6%
		Difficulty engaging with owner	10%
Other	24%	Other	12%

Chart 2

Length of time homes were empty before being back in use

Year	6-12 months	1-2 yrs	2-5 yrs	5-10 yrs	10+ yrs
2025/26	27.70%	28.49%	23.28%	12.21%	4.60%
2024/25	29.57%	29.15%	24.89%	10.29%	6.09%
2018/19 (First year these figures were collected)	14.72%	18.53%	19.68%	5.76%	2.22%



OUR YEAR: A STEP CHANGE IN EMPTY PROPERTIES

Graph showing the number of homes brought back into use since SEHP started

Number of homes

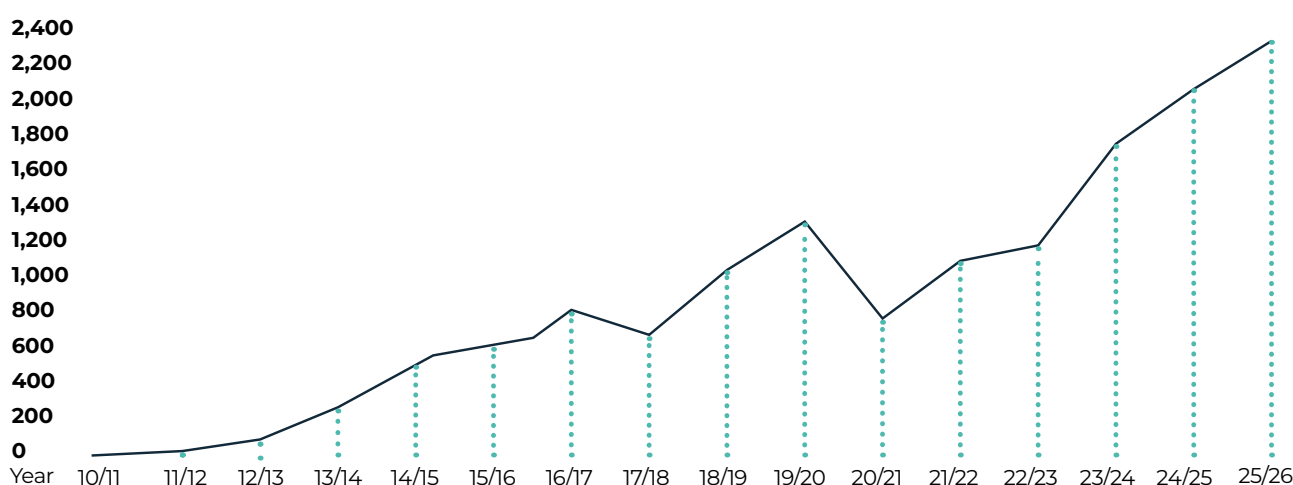


Table showing how recorded properties are brought back into use

EHO advice/assistance	Buybacks	Loans/grants	CPO
89.10%	8.71%	1.84%	0.13%

2025/26 has brought a step-change in the approach to empty homes, while also showing record performance in the number of empty homes brought back into use. Our survey's figure of 2,285 homes brought back into use represents not only the highest total since the beginning of the partnership, but also an 11 percent increase on the previous year. This has been driven by increases in homes brought back into use across 13 local authorities.

Following the 2023 independent audit Bringing empty homes back into use: audit of privately owned empty homes, the Scottish Government

has increased its investment in empty homes work with a view towards building a more targeted, proactive and strategic approach to tackling the issue.

This has included a funding package from 2025/26 of £2 million, £750,000 of which will be utilised to support the expansion of EHOs in local authorities and a further £700,000 invested in individual projects to support partners, including local authorities and those in the third sector with targeted initiatives to bring empty homes back into use.

This substantial support has also enabled the

growth and development of the partnership's internal services, including the Empty Homes Advice Service, the new National Matchmaker service and the support and resource offering provided by the partnership for EHOs.

The table above indicates that, in the vast majority of cases of homes being brought back

into use, the main intervention has been advice, assistance and support by an EHO. However buybacks continue to increase and the Scottish Government's work to reform Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) presents enormous opportunities for new approaches in coming years. ■

SEHP Best Practice Events

In January and March 2026, the SEHP hosted two in-person EHO best practice events in Glasgow and Perth.

These events bring together EHOs from around Scotland to share their experiences, discuss ways of working and hear more about developments in the sector. They are also one of several opportunities for informal networking and feedback to the partnership. The SEHP is committed to holding more of these events in the future, complementing the numerous remote sessions we offer throughout the year.

The event in March saw an update session on the Compulsory Purchase Order Hub – a project being supported by the SEHP - and how EHOs can get involved.

WORKING WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Local authorities across Scotland have continued to work with the SEHP in setting-up and expanding their empty homes services and developing an increasingly strategic approach to addressing the problem of empty homes in their areas.

At the end of 2025/26, a total of 28 out of 32 local authorities have now appointed Empty Homes Officers or equivalent. We are on track – and have the expectation – that remaining councils will follow, with the aim of continuing to expand the network of EHOs in 2026/27.

Increasingly, with support from the SEHP, local authorities are looking in greater detail at cre-

ating empty homes strategies and action plans to direct their work.

This has been vital in ensuring that empty homes work meets local priorities and is driven by data, creating a system which can most effectively return the greatest number of homes to use in the places where they are most needed and aligned with other policies like Local Housing Strategies.

In 2025-26, Moray and Midlothian established new empty homes services and appointed EHOs. In Midlothian, this was a new service although benefiting from existing work within the local authority in this area. In Moray, the appointment represented a re-start for a empty homes service. ■



EXPANSION OF EMPTY HOMES SERVICES

“The most effective means of bringing properties back into use is through an EHO being employed to prioritise empty homes action.” - Independent Audit of Empty Homes, 2023

In 2025-26, the vast majority of Scotland’s 32 local authorities were operating an empty homes service and employing empty homes officers (EHOs) in line with their local priorities. Our survey data demonstrate that almost 9 out of 10 occasions where there is support given to bring an empty home back into use, it is the advice and assistance of an EHO. This underlines the conclusion of the Scottish Government’s 2023 independent audit and its emphasis on EHOs as the most effective local intervention in tackling empty homes.

We welcome the investment from the Scottish Government which has enabled SEHP to support more local authorities to start and expand their empty homes service in a way that is tailored to local needs.

In addition to the two new Empty Homes Services in Moray and Midlothian, four local authorities have expanded their services: Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Fife and North Lanarkshire. 14 local authorities now employ at least one full-time equivalent EHO position, with multiple authorities going further.

EHOS SUPPORTING COMPLEX CASES

A house in North Lanarkshire had been the subject of numerous complaints by neighbouring properties to the local authority and was already a standing issue when the council appointed its Empty Homes Officer.

The property was falling into increasing disrepair, with windows boarded up and an overgrown garden – and, as a terraced property, presented a considerable nuisance to its neighbours. The EHO explored a variety of avenues to trace ownership of the property, initially with limited success.

However a name was eventually provided, that linked to an owner who was surprised to find his name and details connected with the property.

When combined with issues he had previously had with banks and lenders, it became clear that he had been the victim of identity fraud.

On behalf of the local authority, the EHO supported the named owner for a period of two years in discussions with the mortgage lender on the property, who eventually accepted he was not responsible for the loan or the property.

With the bank having taken the property into its possession, it was sold at auction – the EHO was already familiar with auctioneer, Auction House Scotland, given their previous interactions with the SEHP. When purchased, the EHO offered further support to the new owner who intended to renovate the property. It was sold again in 2026 and is now back in use as a home.



EXPANSION OF BUYBACK SCHEMES

Local authority led acquisition and buyback schemes have been utilised in a growing proportion of empty homes brought back into use. SEHP survey data shows 4.36% of reported homes brought back into use in 2024/25 were through buybacks, rising to 8.71% in 2025/26.

All most local authorities currently report operating a form of housing acquisition or buyback scheme. However our survey data suggests that there is a different emphasis on empty proper-

ties and variance on how integrated these services are with a council's empty homes service.

Buybacks can help to increase an authority's housing stock quickly – particularly for services like temporary, emergency accommodation where there are considerable pressures across local authorities.



COMPULSORY PURCHASE AND SALE

The partnership has had a long-standing commitment to supporting local authorities in utilising Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) to bring empty homes back into use. Alongside this work, we have supported policymakers in exploring the potential for Compulsory Sales Orders (CSOs) and Compulsory Lease Orders (CLOs) to work alongside existing powers, including close engagement with EHOs, local authorities and other stakeholders.

There have been a small number of notable successes in utilising CPOs for empty homes purposes – but they have been largely concentrated in a relatively small number of local authorities. Over the course of 2025-26, there have been a total of three CPOs utilised successfully, all by Glasgow City Council. The period ended with a further ten CPOs in progress across Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverclyde and Argyll & Bute.



In 2025, the SEHP produced a final report of its CSO Project highlighting the practical case and issues with the creation of a new CSO programme.

The Scottish Government has been in a process of policy development on compulsory purchase reform. A public consultation launched in September 2025 with a view to creating a "simpler, more streamlined, and fairer for all, to help deliver development and new homes" and bringing forward legislation in the 7th session the Scottish Parliament. The consultation also explored the potential for CSOs and CLOs.

We look forward to continuing to contribute to the development of policy in this area and working to support local authorities to engage with this process. ■

PROJECTS

Learnings from Argyll and Bute & HSCP

The Health and Social Care Partnership, responsible for most local health and social care services, are one of the main employers in Argyll and Bute. The rural location has meant that they have constantly faced challenges with staff recruitment and retention, resulting in staff shortages, pressures on service or lack of services.

The challenges of identifying the right contact – particularly within large employers like HSCP, managing property availability with employee moving or starting dates have meant that the process has become more streamlined. Additionally, linking this project to the council's broader strategy means there is funding available through their Strategic Housing Fund to cover the cost of renovations.

The flexibility of the project in working with private homeowners looking to sell or rent, housing association voids and NHS owned properties has allowed responses to be tailored to local needs and available housing. This includes providing advice and assistance with moving into private rented tenancies, positively impacting service staffing. The work carried out so far has increased the project visibility, leading to landlords reaching out to the council and re-engaging if their property becomes vacant.

The SEHP has continued to partner with a number of organisations and individual projects, supported by the funds provided by the Scottish Government. In each case, these projects look to further the cause of returning empty homes to use, but in many cases promote additional activities such as supporting vulnerable young people, promoting skills development, acting as an anchor for wider regeneration in communities or making properties brought back into use available for affordable rent.



Our projects supported over this period have included:

→ Keyworker Housing, Argyll & Bute

Addressing the challenges around access to housing for keyworkers in rural areas, this project aimed to bring 20 homes back into use across the area to house keyworkers. This builds on the previous phase of the project (see case study for more details). Early focus of the project is in reaching out to potential employers to establish partnerships, identify housing needs and begin scoping suitable properties.

→ Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) Hub

Offering specialised advice, legal casework services and specific training to local authorities on the use of CPOs, with the aim of increasing the number brought back into use through this mechanism. Hosted by Aberdeenshire Council with the support of the Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators. The early focus of this project includes launching resources for non-specialists and working with councils to identify potential CPOs.

→ Youth Homelessness and Skills Building

This partnership project with Fife Council and Rock Trust combines bringing empty homes back into use to tackle youth homelessness and supporting them with renovation skills, building confidence, employability and stability. Contributing to the council's acquisition program and increasing the supply of high-quality and affordable homes, SEHP is funding part of this multi-year project. Early focus of the project will be on finding young people to participate in renovations, identifying potential homes, establishing service level agreements and leasing model.

→ South of Scotland Community Housing (SOSCH) Keyworker Housing

Building on recent work in the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway - where SOSCH built a process and tools to support local authorities to identifying local keyworkers - and expanding suitable housing solutions to include empty homes. The early focus will be on identifying lessons learnt and any changes that need to be made for this next phase in partnership with South Lanarkshire and South Ayrshire councils.

→ Blue Triangle Housing Association

Working with five local authorities across central Scotland, the project will acquire and renovate empty properties. Aiming to bring 24 homes back into use to increase social and affordable housing stock, early focus of the project is in identifying suitable partners and properties.

→ Case Management and Prioritisation Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire Project

Streamlining empty homes work continues to be a challenge that this project aims to address by creating a systems that can be used across multiple local authorities. Renfrewshire Council will be creating a template to allow case prioritisation using council tax record and GIS dashboard. West Dunbartonshire Council will be developing an end-to-end case managements system that is compatible with existing council tax systems. Early focus of this project includes identifying councils be involved during the development phase as well as building the systems. ■

THE EMPTY HOMES ADVICE SERVICE

The SEHP continues to grow the Empty Homes Advice Service, providing public-facing support for inquiries about empty homes issues. Our three main audiences are owners, neighbours, and those seeking to buy empty homes. We offer free, impartial advice, by phone or email including

Options for owners seeking to bring their home back into use

Funding advice - reduced rate VAT, grants or loans (if available)

Council Tax

Dealing with disrepair and blight caused by empty homes

Buying an empty home

The launch of the new website has also enabled the advice service to more easily provide, and keep up to date, useful online information for its key audiences.

Key Stats

513 enquiries (highest to date)

78 enquiries from owners of empty homes (up from **75** the previous year and **54** the year before)

114 neighbour enquiries (decrease from 140 last year)

We continue to focus on driving engagement via social and other media, recognising this engagement as the most impactful in getting properties back into use. Reports from neighbours play a key role in empty homes work, enabling the identification of empty properties to local authorities where self-reporting has not occurred. This triggers engagement work by EHOs and potential action by other council departments like Building Standards and Environmental/Public Health. A key aspect of our support in these cases is our impartiality, and we can reinforce or challenge council approaches, where appropriate. ■

A member of the public reporting a leaking oil tank in the garden of an empty home to us following their report to the council and no further action been taken. We reached out the council, citing the relevant legislation, resulting in a site and contact made with property's owner.



THE NATIONAL MATCHMAKER SERVICE

The launch of the National Matchmaker - empty property owners being matched with potential purchasers and providing advice to people on finding an empty home to bring back into use - was a key milestone for the partnership. With a soft launch in December 2025 and fully launched with TV ad and media in January 2026, we received 93 buyer enquiries. The new launch contributed significantly to the 300 enquiries we received for the year, a large increase on previous years.

We were already running a service which acted solely as a referral mechanism for the 15 local matchmaker schemes operated by local authorities. The creation of a National Matchmaker has allowed the SEHP increase the availability of the service to the whole country and offer direct support in more cases. An added benefit is that it enables EHOs to be made aware of empty homes where there is a willingness to sell. The platform also encourages owners to sell to councils in order to increase social housing supply.

Between launch and the end of March 2026, 12 properties were registered and 93 individual enquiries were submitted to owners. Whilst no confirmed sale had occurred by end of March 26, several owners had received formal offers and were in negotiations. We expect registering with the Matchmaker to help owners to achieve other outcomes, such as renovating or renting their properties out, by enabling them to weigh up offers received against other options for bringing their properties back into use.

Hoarding and Homelessness

We were contacted by an empty homeowner whose home had gradually deteriorated to a point that it was not suitable for habitation, due to both general disrepair and hoarding, leading to them receiving temporary accommodation (TA) from their council. However, they were now being threatened with eviction from this accommodation. We worked with colleagues in Shelter Scotland, with the communities team providing support and advice around homelessness, and our team providing advice on empty homes. We were

Working together, we were able to challenge the eviction on the basis that return to their property was unsafe and unlawful. We identified that suitable support had not been put in place to address their hoarding and support their return home, and multiple Adult Social Care referrals being closed before assessment took place. The council were members of the Hoarding Taskforce and therefore committed to take a multidisciplinary and proactive approach. Utilising our contact at the Hoarding Academy and leaning into their expertise, we were established contact with the named lead of the Hoarding Taskforce at the council and recommend a specific support fund and the access route as the client had a lack of funds for clearing of the property.

We were able to advocate for Adult Social Care to reopen the case and commit to fully assessing the client, with the case fully handed over to them. Once support for their primary hoarding and mental health needs are in place and they're ready to discuss options, we have offered to provide advice regarding their empty home ■

SCOTTISH EMPTY HOMES AWARDS

The Scottish Empty Homes Awards are a significant annual milestone for the partnership and the sector, recognising and celebrating the work that has taken place around Scotland to bring empty homes back into use.

The 2026 awards will be held at the SEHP Conference on 29 October. In previous years, we have been overwhelmed by the quality of nominations from across Scotland and the dedication shown by both professionals in the sector and members of the public in transforming empty properties.

Our award categories for 2026 will include

Best renovation: Public

This category acknowledges the work of individual members of the public who have brought a home back into use, looking at the end use and standard of the property after renovation. It also considers indicators like sustainable building practices, materials and finish.

Best renovation: Professional

This category looks at renovations carried out by professionals, either individuals or organisations.

Best use of empty homes to meet social or affordable housing need

This category looks particularly at empty homes that have been brought back into use as social or affordable housing, recognising the

work from individuals or professionals to make this happen.

Best joint working/ collaboration to return an empty home to use

This category recognises and promotes collaborative working between organisations or potentially within large organisations working across departments to return empty homes to use. It acknowledges that often addressing empty homes can be complex and require working beyond existing silos.

Outstanding contribution to empty homes work

This category aims to recognise professionals, whether individuals or organisations, who have made an exceptional contribution to bringing homes back into use – whether as part of an individual outstanding project or as part of longer-term and ongoing work. ■



LOOKING FORWARD

This year has seen a transformational change in how the problem of empty homes is addressed in Scotland. The Scottish Government continues to invest in this work, with the £2 million in funding made available to the SEHP in this financial year being available into 2026/27.

We also welcome the Scottish Government's focus on housing in its 2026 Programme for Government and its commitment to bring forward legislation to "reform and modernise Scotland's compulsory purchase system, to support more effective delivery of development, regeneration and infrastructure projects" in this parliamentary session.

SEHP ANNUAL CONFERENCE

We are looking forward to the SEHP's 2026 annual conference in October in Glasgow. This year's theme, From Problems to Solutions: Building Your Empty Homes Toolkit, underlines the development of the SEHP's work from growing empty homes capacity to empowering and supporting local authorities and communities in tackling empty homes.

This will be the 15th annual Scottish Empty Homes Partnership conference. In addition to a wide range of professionals and practitioners from across Scotland and beyond, we also look forward to hearing from the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing.

The conference has continued to be a unique showcase for the work of the sector, and an opportunity to share learning and expertise. As in previous years, we will also be using the opportunity to announce the winners in each category of the Scottish Empty Homes Awards. We are also grateful once again to our sponsors and exhibitors for helping to support the conference.

From 1 April 2026, previously legislated changes to council tax legislation will come into effect. Among the provisions include a removal of the 100% cap on the council tax premium for empty homes, introducing a default premium of 100% for homes that have been empty for over 12 months. The SEHP will be monitoring the implementation and impact of these changes closely and sharing learning the EHO network, the Scottish Government and other stakeholders.

WORLD VACANT HOMES DAY

A second World Vacant Homes Day is to be held in October 2026, following the success of the first in 2025. This date adds an international dimension to Scotland's empty homes work, recognising the challenges and opportunities that exist around the world.

Started in Ireland in 2025, World Vacant Homes Day has been embraced by the SEHP and other organisations like the Empty Homes Network, as well as across local authorities. We will be inviting councils to use the opportunity to showcase some of their own successes in tackling empty homes locally, while highlighting the Scotland-wide and global dimension.

PROJECTS

Many of the projects being supported by the SEHP in 2025/26 and outlined in this report are at an early stage. We look forward to exploring developments and actions in more detail in 2026/27. ■



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