

Briefing Note for Scrutiny Committee January 2014

Empty Council Properties

1. Introduction

1.1 The Council owns around 5,400 rented properties within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and 350 leasehold properties. Most of the leasehold properties are equity share bungalows for the elderly. Around 200 of the equity share properties are owned by the General Fund (GF) rather than the HRA.

2. The numbers of empty homes

2.1 The overall annual turnover is around 4.5% and the majority of homes are re let within 20 days of becoming vacant. There are no homes capable of being re let that have been empty for more than 6 months.

2.2 A small number of homes are not re let as they require very extensive works to make them habitable. For these homes consideration is given to a range of options as outlined in the Council's Asset Management Policy adopted in 2013.

2.3 Homes currently in this category empty for more than 6 months number 3 which represents 0.05% of the total stock.

2.4 There are also some homes that are being held empty as part of a larger redevelopment project in line with the Council's Asset Management Strategy 2012. Currently homes empty for more than 6 months under this category under number 5 (0.08% of stock)

HRA Rental homes empty for more than 6 months

High repair cost being considered for appropriate action	3	Sawston (2) and Shudy Camps
Held as part of a redevelopment project	5	Longstanton and Gamlingay (4)
Total	8	

2.5 It can take a few weeks to market and complete the sale of the equity share properties. Some of these are the responsibility of the equity share owner to sell. Those owned by the GF are sold on by the Council and on average it takes 7 months to sell (19 sales completed during 2013).

2.6 At the time of writing the numbers of equity share properties unsold for more than 6 months, representing around 0.1% of the stock, are as follows:

Equity Share Properties Unsold

GF owned	2	Bourn and Harston Both unsold for over 2 years Sales had been agreed on both but fell through for various reasons.
HRA owned	4	Cottenham, Longstanton, Swavesey & Histon. Average time empty 13 months One under offer & sale proceeding
Total number unsold after 6 months	6	

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The Council has a very fast turn around of homes as soon as they become vacant and very low number of empty homes (0.2% of total stock).
- 3.2 The only homes that remain empty for more than 6 months are a small number which require extensive works or for which a major redevelopment is planned. The asset management strategy and asset management policy is therefore working well to meet the needs of the Council and the District.
- 3.3 A small number of equity share properties can take over 6 months to sell. The development of the Council owned property company may offer some new options for addressing the sale of equity share properties and this shall be considered as part of the pilot scheme underway and reported back to the Council in 2015.

Stephen Hills
Director of Housing