

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

16 SEPTEMBER 2014

ITEM 6 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR D EVERITT TO COUNCILLOR R D BAYLISS

People desperate for accommodation and on NWLDC housing waiting list are upset and angered to find many vacant properties empty with no work taking place. I like other Council tax payers are appalled at the revenue that is being lost to this council by this unacceptable situation. Please state which three properties have been vacant for the longest period and when you expect them to be let.

How much revenue was lost to this council this month from empty properties.

RESPONSE FROM COUNCILLOR R D BAYLISS

There are currently a higher number of properties empty which require considerable work to bring them up to the void lettable standard, a standard we have developed with our involved tenants. For those properties included in the Decent Homes Improvement Programme, we have been undertaking the works whilst the properties have been empty to minimise the disruption for new tenants and maximise the funding from the Homes and Communities Agency.

Our void turnover as a percentage of our stock is 8% which is slightly lower than the housing sector average of 10%. At 1 September 2014, there were 270 properties vacant, with the respective details being as follows.

56 are currently undergoing repair works prior to them being offered for reletting through the Choice Based Letting (CBL) advertising process. This includes properties requiring extensive damp, and/or asbestos work which is completed by specialist contractors.

38 are with Kier or Lovell undergoing Decent Homes improvements.

21 are awaiting inspection either prior to repairs being ordered, or prior to them being advertised for letting after repairs are completed.

57 are with Housing Management and are moving through the process of being advertised and let to new tenants.

98 are in Sheltered Housing Schemes with no demand from eligible home seekers (these include Greenacres, Wolds Court and Westgates schemes).

The three properties which have been vacant for the longest period are:

- 13 Wolds Court
- 21 Greenacres
- 13a Hood Court

In 2011 the Housing Service completed a review of the corridor style sheltered housing scheme to assess the investment needs and levels of demand for all of the buildings. Three schemes were subsequently identified as being surplus to requirements and in July 2011, Cabinet approved the recommendation for the schemes to be decommissioned. The three schemes were Woulds Court, Greenacres and Heather House.

Two of the properties which have been vacant for the longest period are within a decommissioned scheme (13 Woulds Court and 21 Greenacres). 13a Hood Court is a very small bedsit flat for which there is no demand from any eligible elderly applicants.

Our approach to the future of our empty and low demand sheltered housing schemes has been developed and will be reviewed by the Director of Housing when he joins the team later this month.

The amount of rent loss for August was £43,162.08 which equates to 3.2% of the gross rent. An allowance is made within the annual Housing Revenue Account budget to reflect the predicted level of rent to be lost from vacant properties.

I wish to reassure Members that the current level of void properties is reducing, and actions have already been taken by officers to ensure we find new tenants as promptly as possible when works are completed.