

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

11 October 2022

Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation and Questions from Councillors

Question from: Ms Mel Boyle

To: Cllr Richard Clewer - Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change, MCI, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, Tourism and Health & Wellbeing

Statement

Residents in Chippenham have raised concerns that Social Housing is being auctioned off by Green Square Accord.

Question 1 (22-189)

Is this true?

Response

This would be a question for Green Square Accord.

Question 2 (22-190)

If true, what is the money raised spent on?

Response

This would be a question for Green Square Accord.

Question 3 (22-191)

Over the last 3 years how many social houses have been sold, through Council/Housing Association disposal and also the separate number through Right to Buy?

Response

In response to this question, we do not maintain records of Social Housing disposals across the County (from other Registered Providers).

I can confirm that from the Wiltshire Council housing stock (owned and managed by Wiltshire Council) we disposed of 93 homes to the Right to Buy. We have not disposed of any other Council Homes other than through the Right to Buy. (year by year figures included below).

Year	Sales
19/20	31
20/21	18
21/22	44

Question 4 (22-192)

How are these houses replaced?

Response

The Council has a 10 year Council House Build Programme that aims to deliver 1000 new affordable homes to the Wiltshire Council portfolio. This is (in part) funded through the Right to Buy Receipts received from sales.

Question 5 (22-193)

Over the last 3 years what percentage of social housing has gone to people from outside the County?

Response

During the last three years (01/10/2019 – 01/10/2022) we have completed a total of 4415 lettings. Of these lettings we had 658 applicants – 14.9%, who did not have a defined local connection to Wiltshire by residency. To join the housing register one of the criteria is that they need to have lived in the County for at least two years. However if they have family who have lived in Wiltshire for more than 5 years, or if they are employed in Wiltshire this would give them a local connection but may not live in Wiltshire. We also have clients who would have a connection to Wiltshire through the 'exclusion' group, such as those in the armed forces, those fleeing Domestic Abuse or under witness protection, those who have been placed out of area under statutory duties to accommodate.

So as an example they might have said 'no' to not being resident in Wiltshire because they don't meet the 2 years threshold but still live in Wiltshire so using work or family as a local connection, but there will also be those that don't live in Wiltshire using family or work as the connection and we are not able to report on this detail. To put this in context we know that 474 households of the 658 had a local connection to Wiltshire due to having a family member who has lived in Wiltshire for more than 5 years. We are not able to say of the 474 households how many are living in Wiltshire but for less than 2 years.

Statement

In reply to my question at the last Cabinet meeting about empty homes it was said staffing was not available to look into this until 2023 but not which quarter. In the Climate papers for this meeting it says about the Climate Emergency social media

campaign. Building new houses, destroying valuable farmland and wildlife and the carbon footprint of construction are massive.

Question 6 (22-194)

Could a Climate Emergency social media campaign to get some of the 3,813 empty homes in Wiltshire back into use be considered?

Response

The number of empty homes in Wiltshire is approximately 1.5% of the total number of homes. Approximately 360 (or 0.15% of all Wiltshire homes) are empty long term and this number has been reducing over time. Analysis of homes currently recorded as empty confirm that 75% have been empty for less than a year. Many of these are temporarily vacant whilst they are in the process of being sold or refurbished or are between lets with potential owners and tenants generally wanting to move in as soon as possible.

A general social media campaign is not an effective tool for targeting such a tiny proportion of the population. The council will be writing to long term empty home owners to take a targeted approach to bringing these back into use, but this is not considered a high priority piece of work as previous results have been minimal. As previously explained, there are often complex reasons for properties remaining empty long term.

Council tax rises to 150% after a home is empty for 2 years, so there is already an incentive for homes to be occupied.

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Question from: Dr Celia Beckett

To: Cllr Richard Clewer - Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change, MCI, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, Tourism and Health & Wellbeing

Question 1 (22-195)

Please can you advise us on what basis you decided on the location and size of the sites selected in the Trowbridge area. Was the decision based on any of the following?

1. How many people/families were on the council housing waiting list
2. The employment opportunities in the area
3. The availability of health and community services to meet the needs of the new housing.

Response

The council has a legal duty to have an up-to-date Local Plan and this allocates land to meet future housing needs.

There are many considerations to take account of before land is allocated in Trowbridge or elsewhere. This includes the land's availability for development, infrastructure (such as transport and schools), any environmental constraints to development and the availability of local services and facilities. The process is also subject to community consultation where people are invited to share their thoughts. Where there are insufficient facilities, or where improvements are needed, consideration is given to whether those impacts can be mitigated by securing additional facilities through the planning application process.