

Report of the Assistant Director – Housing and  
Community Safety

## **Empty Property report**

### **Summary and Recommendation**

1. This is an information paper only to provide an update on the work we have been doing around empty properties in the private sector and what we are planning to do in the short term to understand the recent rise in the number of empty homes.
2. Reason: Members have asked for a report to be brought as there has been a rise, albeit a small one and the number of reported empty properties is still low in comparison both to the regional and national picture.

### **Background**

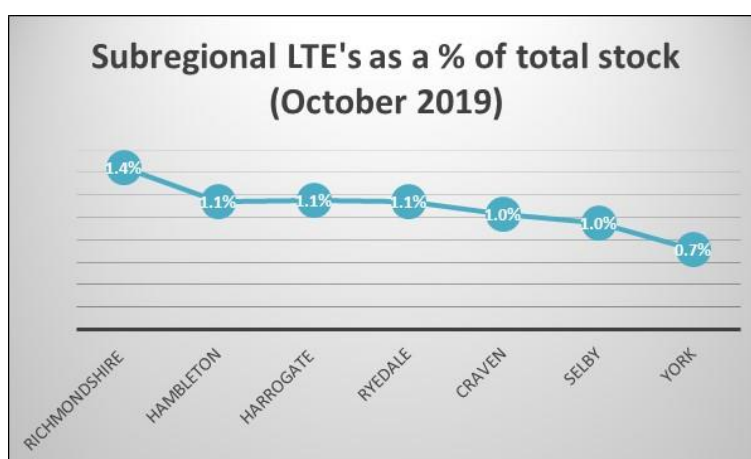
- 3 Our Private Sector Strategy 2016/21 strategic aim 4 “maximising the existing private sector housing stock” outlines the type of work we carry out in relation to empty homes. It recognises that we have very few empty properties especially in comparison to other councils.
- 4 The primary source of empty property data comes from the annual nationally collected return known as the CTB/1. Every October a wide range of statistics are collected and submitted by our Council Tax colleagues including empty property figures. It is a snapshot in time of the number of empty properties on the council tax data base as being empty. Critically the information is collected for a different purpose i.e. information on empty properties is simply an accident of the billing process, rather than the intention of it. Council tax staff ensure residents are billed accurately based on the range of rates and exemptions (and now also Premium’s) available, not manage empty property data.
- 5 Revenues staff decide whether a property should be classified as empty for council tax purposes based on whether or not a property is ‘substantially furnished’. Where they have been ‘empty and unfurnished’

for 2 years or more they apply an Empty Property Premium (currently charged at 100%)

- 6 The tables below compares the number of empty properties both sub – regionally and with similar unitary cities nationally

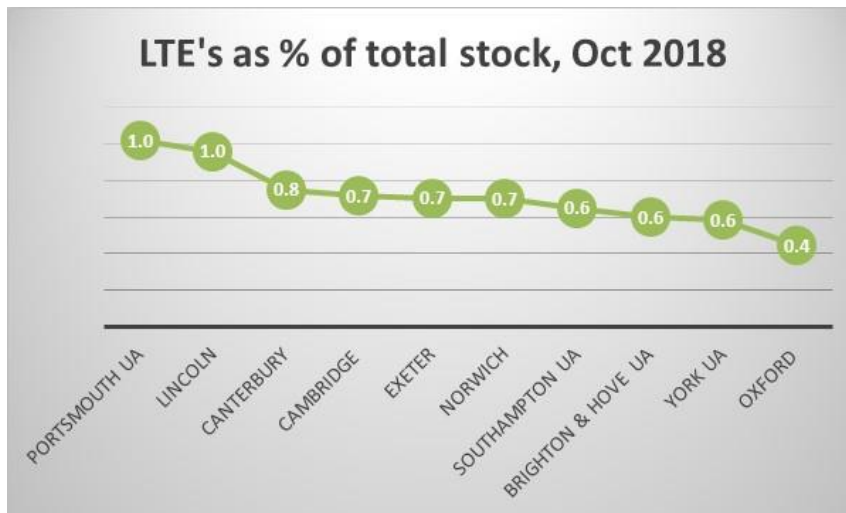
### Sub Regional

Authority	6mths < 2 years	2 years + (Premium)	Total LTE	Total Housing Stock	LTE's as % of total stock
Richmondshire	194	147	341	23646	1.4%
Hambleton	293	188	481	42235	1.1%
Harrogate	618	220	838	72956	1.1%
Ryedale	250	47	297	26115	1.1%
Craven	214	69	283	27584	1.0%
Selby	229	152	381	40038	1.0%
<b>York</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>90983</b>	<b>0.7%</b>



### National

Authority	Total LTE 2018	Total Stock 2018	LTE's as % of total stock, Oct 2018
Portsmouth UA	939	92188	1.0
Lincoln	437	45621	1.0
Canterbury	511	68125	0.8
Cambridge	410	57413	0.7
Exeter	400	56858	0.7
Norwich	462	66139	0.7
Southampton UA	701	107861	0.6
Brighton & Hove UA	779	130005	0.6
<b>York UA</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>90629</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Oxford	270	60974	0.4



- 7 However previous audits carried out by the team have found this unreliable source data, the last audit completed April 2018 found that 40% reported as being empty were in fact occupied/
- 8 Since the last audit we haven't focused on maintaining the accuracy of the data because the numbers have remained low but instead have focussed our limited resources on two key areas of work:
  - Encourage owners of privately owned empty homes to bring them back into use.
  - Target owners whose empty homes cause a significant detrimental impact to the neighbourhood.
9. In addition the role has been supporting homeowners who live in properties but have allowed them to fall in such disrepair that often such properties have been reported as being dilapidated and not occupied. This type of work is very intensive as it normally requires the coordination of a wide range of agencies to support the homeowners however the benefits are that it reduces the pressure on other key services namely adult social care and the NHS as well as improving the property and the neighbourhood

### **Next steps**

- 10 Members have identified that they need to fully understand whether the recent reported increase in numbers is real and significant and if so is there an opportunity to use the wide range of interventions from advice/financial support to enforcement to bring them back in to use and the cost of resourcing that action Therefore in the next three months we intend to carry out a full audit of the private empty properties to establish if they are

empty. We will update Council tax records and our own records to ensure that we have information which targets properties with the most suitable intervention. The intention is to bring back a report to executive at the end of March with the outcome of this piece of work and provide members with options how they want to take this matter forward.

- 11 In addition we are working with Council Tax colleagues to improve the quality of the data held. One initiative currently in the final stages of planning seeks to utilise the services of a private research company who use a range of research tools to cleanse/improve empty data, so that our records present a more accurate picture of the empty property situation in York.

### **Consultation**

- 12 Internal Council tax colleagues

### **Council Plan**

- 13 The provision of the HMO licensing service contributes directly towards the council plan outcomes of:
  - a) Creating Homes and World class infrastructure
  - b) Open and Effective Council Effective
  - c) A better start for Children and Young People
  - d) Good health and Wellbeing

### **Implications**

- 14 The report is for information only and there are no other implications at this stage for the following:

**Financial.**

**Human Resources (HR).**

**Equalities**

**Legal**

**Crime and Disorder**

**Information Technology (IT)**

**Property**

**Other**

## Risk Management

15 The risks are low at the moment.

### Recommendation:

16. That Members comment and note on the contents of this report to inform development in this area.

Reason: To comply with CYC scrutiny processes and procedures.

### Contact Details

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#### Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Tom Brittain  
Assistant Director of Housing and  
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**Report**  **Date** 12/112019  
**Approved**

**Wards Affected:** *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

### Abbreviations

CTB- Council Tax benefit

LTE – Long Term Empty

NHS- National Health Service