

Place & Resources Scrutiny

18 September 2025

Empty Properties Update

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr R Biggs, Property & Assets and Economic Growth

Local Councillor(s):

All

Executive Director:

J Britton, Executive Director for Place Services

Report Author: Jessica Maskrey

Job Title: Head of Assets & Property

Tel: 01305 224332

Email: jessica.maskrey@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public [Choose an item.](#)

Brief Summary:

This report provides a position statement on empty/unused properties. It outlines data in relation to current empty properties, describes the procedures for operational management of empty properties, as well as the strategic processes in place to review empty properties and determine best future use for the council.

Recommendation:

Place & Resources Scrutiny Committee consider the report and comment and make recommendations as appropriate.

Reason for Recommendation:

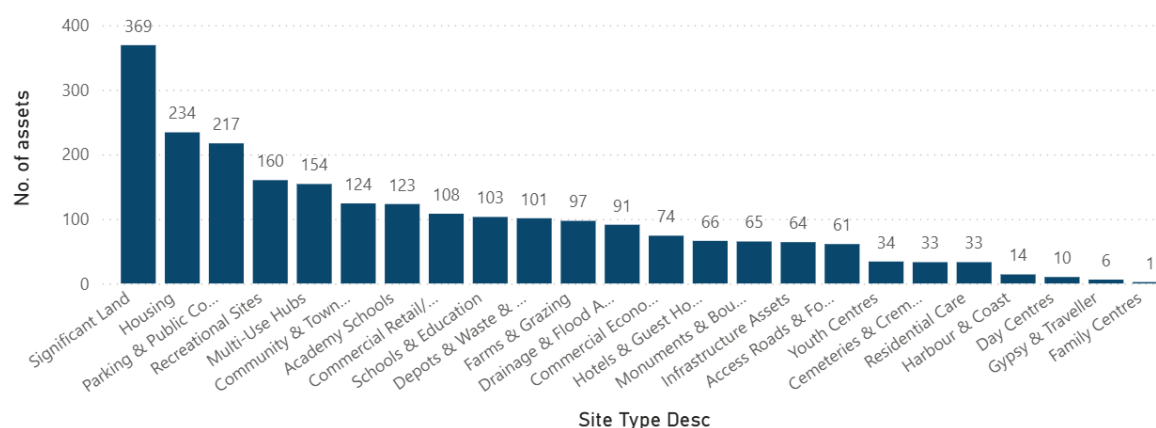
Members have requested the opportunity to scrutinise the data on and the processes relating to empty properties. The report advises of the current data and the systems in place. Comments and recommendations are welcome.

1. Dorset Council Assets

- 1.1. Dorset Council asset register contains 6360 records of which 5,087 are active – meaning that 1273 records refer to sites sold, transferred or given up since the record commenced prior to local government reorganisation. 828 of these assets include buildings. 249 are residential housing properties.

- 1.2. A significant number (3484) of these assets are highways agreements or improvements assets. These include acquisitions made for highways improvements and highway related agreements such as section 278 and section 38 of the Highways Act 1980.
- 1.3. A full list of all Dorset Council assets is included at appendix 1 (addresses of housing properties are redacted for data protection reasons). Information about Dorset Council assets is also publicly available on [DorsetExplorer](#).
- 1.4. A dashboard showing all Dorset Council owned properties and highlighting empty property data is available for members of Place & Resources Scrutiny Committee (a link will be emailed directly to each committee member by 12/09/25). The dashboard contains numerous visuals, such as the one below showing numbers of non-Highways sites.

Assets by type



- 1.5. Property management data and records are held on the council's corporate property database (Civica Property Management – CPM). Housing management records are held on HUUME (housing management software). Whilst the two are separate systems, work has been undertaken by Assets & Property and Housing colleagues to verify the data in both systems.

2. Empty / unused Dorset Council Properties

- 2.1. The number of vacant properties changes frequently from day to day and workflows mean that on some days a significant number of properties leave or join the vacancy list. Additionally, assets can be and are defined in a variety of different ways for different purposes.
- 2.2. As at 10/09/25 115 Dorset council properties are vacant/empty.
- 2.3. Of the above, at 10/09/25 69 are non-housing sites. This represents a vacancy rate of less than 2%. Housing voids are managed slightly differently to other assets and further details are provided in section 2.6.

2.4. These 69 are further spilt into two categories: vacant sites and lettable units (lettable units being units leased out for income).

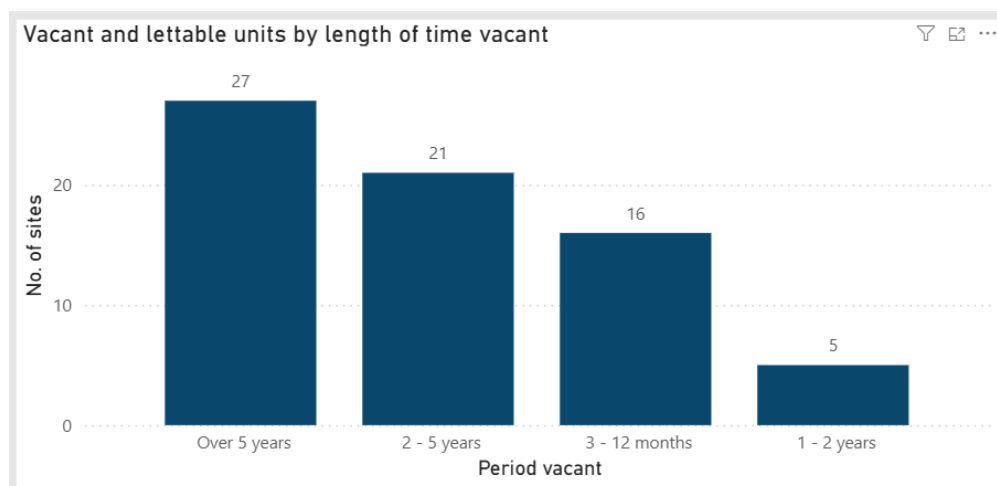
2.5. Non-housing properties

2.5.1. Vacant sites and lettable units are vacant for a number of reasons:

- 27 vacant lettable units of which 22 are in the process of being re-let.
- 24 empty properties which are currently under review to consider future use.
- 14 empty properties held for repurposing (e.g. for reablement / extra care / regeneration opportunities).
- 8 empty properties on the disposals / transfers list (with disposals in progress).

2.5.2. The length of time for a non-housing property is empty varies. The median period is 37 months. This is broken down as follows:

	Median period of vacancy
Vacant lettable unit	25 months
Property held for asset review	35 months
Property held for repurposing	56 months
Property held for disposal	13 months



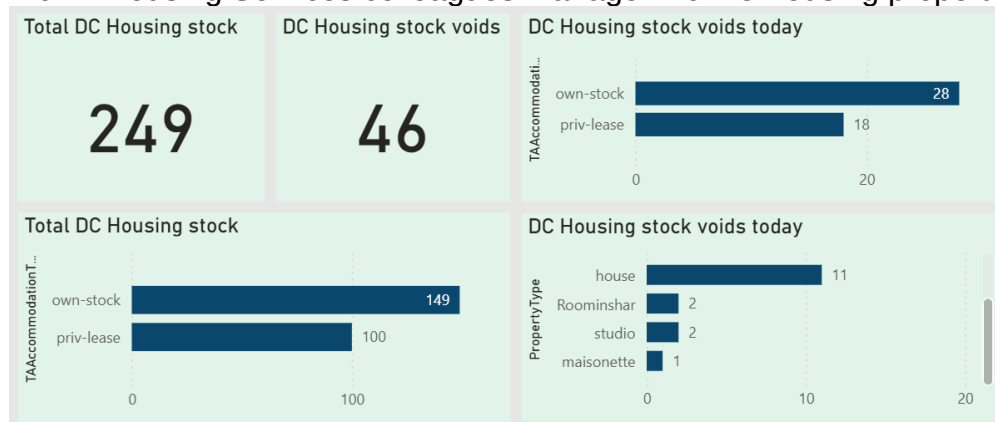
Vacant and lettable units by length of time vacant

Reason Summary	Median of MonthsVacant	Count of Code
⊕ Under Review	35	24
⊕ Being marketed	36	15
⊕ Held for repurposing	56	14
⊕ Disposal	13	8
⊕ Being re-let	25	7
Total	37	68

2.5.3. Further detail concerning the approach to reviewing empty properties is included in section 4.

2.6. Housing Residential Properties

2.6.1. Housing Services colleagues manage 249 DC housing properties.



2.7. As at 10/09/25, 46 DC housing properties are vacant.

2.8. In 2024 Assets & Property and Housing colleagues worked to put in place a new housing voids management process to expediate the turnaround of housing voids following concerns expressed by Members as to the time taken for dealing with housing voids. As a result of this Assets & Property and Housing colleagues worked together to design a new process to expedite the turnaround of voids and particularly the necessary repairs. The process has resulted in improvements to turnaround times.

2.9. Voids are categorised as minor, major or exceptional, depending on the level of repairs required. Turnaround targets (Number of working days) and actual turnaround times for Q1 2025/26 shown are set as below:

	Minor		Major		Exceptional
	Target	Q1 actual	Target	Q1 actual	Target

Key to key (from the point of becoming vacant to a new tenant moving in)	30	44.87	45	73.22	None set – these are properties which require extensive works or complexities, targets are set on a case-by-case basis and monitored as such.
Repairs element	20	21.92	35	33.44	N/a

3. Processes which keep non-housing properties empty

3.1. There are a number reasons for holding empty non-housing properties:

- a lack of capacity within the Strategic Asset Management function has resulted in some delays to asset reviews, however this is being addressed through an improvement plan and associated restructure of Assets & Property. Asset Strategy Business Partner posts are currently being recruited to. These posts will lead the process of undertaking asset reviews (see section 3 below).
- some empty properties have been allocated by the Council for repurposing purposes (e.g. for reablement / extra care / regeneration opportunities) and are held empty whilst plans and work progress to develop the site(s).
- a number of the properties held for disposal are particularly complex property transactions, which can take time to resolve. A dedicated Asset Transfers & Disposals team is now in place, with a focus on driving the council's transfers and disposals programmes.

3.2 An empty properties procedure is in place for non-housing properties, setting out the actions taken to close-down, manage and re-open (if required) an empty property. The procedure is flexed depending on the future use of the empty property, and includes steps taken for the temporary close-down of a property to ensure safe and secure holding of an empty property ahead of repurposing, as well as close-down actions required when an empty property is held for development / disposal / demolition.

3.3 All empty properties are subject to a risk assessment which considers building safety, building compliance and building security. Where the risk assessment identifies a requirement, empty properties are

inspected with full external patrol on a weekly basis. Weekly internal patrols of selected sites are also undertaken. Detailed weekly reports are reviewed by the Facilities Management service, and action taken where required.

4. Reviewing Empty Properties

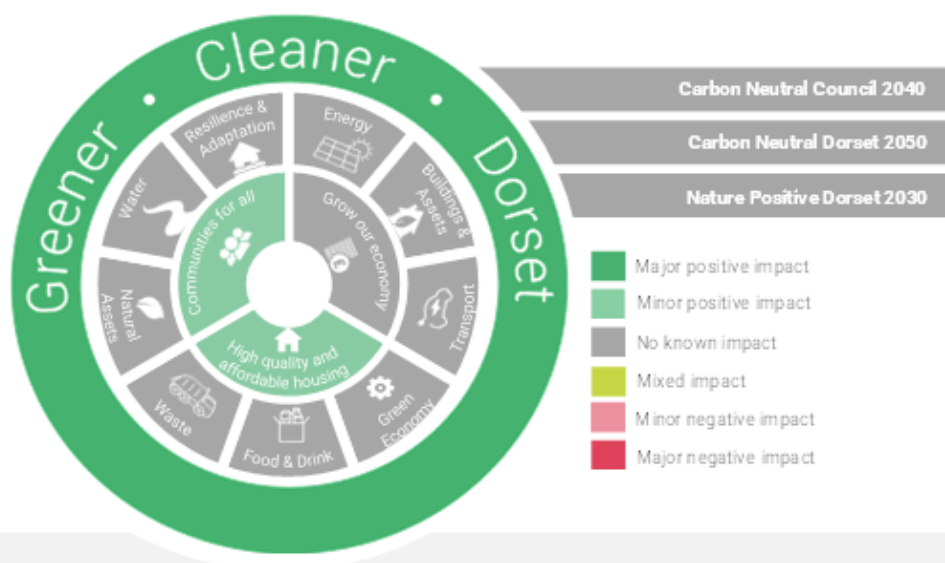
- 4.1. The [Strategic Asset Management Plan 2024-2030](#) (SAMP), approved by Cabinet on 15 October 2024 ([Decision - Dorset Council - Strategic Asset Management Plan 2024 - 2030 - Dorset Council](#)) sets out the council's asset review process.
- 4.2. This process ensures that all council asset classes are reviewed regularly (once every three years) as part of a rolling programme of reviews. The review process identifies options for future use of assets assessing the potential to retain, repurpose, develop or dispose (including asset transfers where appropriate), in line with the council's priorities and the SAMP guiding principles.
- 4.3. Alongside the main asset review process, the SAMP also details a 'rapid asset review' process, which ensures any asset that becomes vacant in between asset class reviews is reviewed at that point in time, with options considered for retention, repurposing, development or disposal.
- 4.4. The asset review set out in the SAMP is designed to reduce the number of empty and underutilised properties being held by the council, and the period of time for which they are empty/underutilised.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Assets & Property hold a budget for the management of vacant / empty properties. This covers holding costs, security, rates and so on. The cost of holding empty properties in 2024/25 was £467,100. This includes costs met through Assets & Property budget, and costs met through service budgets where sites have been allocated for repurposing.

Whilst the asset review process will reduce the period of time properties are held empty, it will also increase the number of properties on the disposal pipeline and therefore being held for disposal (albeit for shorter periods of time). As such it is envisaged savings against this budget will not be possible.

6. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications



Quantitative Impact on CEE targets (if known)

	Unit	Number of units (+/-)
2030 - Natural asset extent & condition	Ha	Unknown
2040 - Operational Emissions	CO ₂ (tonnes)	Unknown
2050 - County Emissions	CO ₂ (tonnes)	Unknown

Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact
Corporate Plan Priorities	Impact
High quality & affordable housing	Minor positive impact
Grow our economy	No known impact

Communities for all	Minor positive impact
Climate and nature crisis	No known impact

7. Well-being and Health Implications

n/a

8. Other Implications

n/a

9. Risk Assessment

- 9.1. HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

10. Equalities Impact Assessment

n/a

11. Appendices

n/a

12. Background Papers

n/a

13. Report Sign Off

- 11.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)