

East Lothian Council has one of the longest waiting times for a house in Scotland

East Lothian Council has one of the longest waiting times for a house in Scotland, a new report has claimed, with delays of nearly five years.

The average waiting time for social housing in the county is 4.95 years, compared to neighbouring council areas Edinburgh, who have delays of 3.8 years and West Lothian, where people are waiting 2.2 years.

The local authority was among 218 UK councils who responded to an FOI from unoccupied housing insurance experts Alan Boswell Group, who placed the council sixth in a national list of waiting times – with only Aberdeen higher in Scotland with a six year wait.

It found the UK average wait was 2.9 years – however eight of the Scotland's 32 local authorities did not respond to the request for the information.

East Lothian Council also had 307 empty council houses at the time the information was requested although a spokesperson said that figure had been reduced to 228.

A spokesperson for East Lothian Council said: "East Lothian Council declared an affordable housing emergency last year due to the extreme pressure on our social housing sector.

“We have developed an action plan to try to tackle some of the key issues, recognising the huge demand for social housing and lack of availability of one bedroom properties in particular.

“We have also introduced measures across the council to bring empty homes back in to use and our number of void council properties has reduced to 228.

“The situation in East Lothian remains challenging due to various factors including the popularity of East Lothian as a place to live, high demand for and low turnover of social housing and our relatively low rent level for council housing properties coupled with an expensive and relatively small private rented sector. We also note that the figures provided in this report are incomplete as they do not include every Scottish local authority.”

Heath Alexander-Bew, director of Alan Boswell Group, said empty homes along with long waiting times should be an urgent concern for local authorities across the UK.

He said: “Vacant council homes pose risks such as property deterioration and security threats, which impact local governments’ resources and finances. These challenges require urgent attention but once addressed, can turn empty council properties into immediate homes for people on long waiting lists.”

And AI technology experts AIPRM urged councils to look into using artificial intelligence to provide a solution to the housing crisis.

Christoph C Cemper, founder at AIPRM said: “By leveraging AI, councils can analyse applicants’ preferences, past refusals, and housing availability to make smarter, real-time allocation decisions. AI can also help identify patterns in refusals, enabling councils to set reasonable limits on the number of offers an applicant can turn down before reassessing their housing needs.”

He said using technology-driven allocation systems could weed out cases such as one in Aberdeen where an application remained active for 17 years while the applicant rejected 13 house offers.

He said: “By integrating technology-driven allocation systems with clear and fair refusal limits, councils can significantly reduce waiting times and ensure that available homes are occupied faster, benefiting both applicants and local authorities.”

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter