

CLlr Christine Ambrose Smith
Representative on Outside Bodies June 2026

Sanctuary Housing

I am currently one of the District Councillor representative of East Cambs District Council, appointed to sit on the local board of Sanctuary Housing, a Housing Association holding the majority of HA properties within East Cambs

Sanctuary is a large national company, a housing and care provider based in Worcester, and maintains an office in the Ely area.

Nathan Barlow is the local senior Sanctuary officer. Nathan has a small team of Housing Officers who each have responsibility for a locality within the district.

The board meets quarterly, usually via Teams under the chairmanship of Nathan, and the attendance includes myself and Cllr Alan Sharp, East Cambs Housing Officers, Tenant representatives, and other interested parties.

Nathan will present and discuss the agenda items, papers provided to members prior to the meeting. These cover the number of properties available for let (at a specified moment in time, as this changes daily), the backlog of repairs to properties, and the number of properties which are long term voids (as they require extensive work and renovation for a number of reasons, including safety).

This latter group peaked following the Covid 19 lockdown and Sanctuary struggled initially to make headway with these due to tradesmen availability, parts and material shortages. Renovation times have now picked up and the numbers and times of each void, reducing.

A decision was taken to concentrate on the properties in need of minor or less major work which could be turned around within a short timescale. The overriding concern is that properties must be safe, both structurally and in terms of electrical & gas compliance. This does not include cosmetic work to the property.

Sanctuary have a policy of installing kitchens and bathrooms for instance where there is a firm expectation that spare components will be readily available for a considerable period of time to ensure quick and easy replacement of these. Where previous tenants have installed their own kitchens & bathrooms they are required to receive prior agreement that these fulfil the criteria needed.

The turnaround time for these properties compares well with Sanctuary's baseline and averages across the national company.

We also receive information regarding rent arrears, and again, this area holds up well against the national figures.

There are many instances where tenants expectations are not met, but again this is being worked upon. Tenants are encouraged to report problems with their homes to a central call centre, where details are taken, a reference number given and the expectation is that tenants are kept informed of progress.

Without wishing to excuse shortcomings, Sanctuary are dealing with a huge number of properties and tradesman availability (a person turning up with the correct spares, able to carry out the repair and not just someone turning up to assess the job). If previous job times slip, this can mean a wasted day for the tenant, who could have been helped by a phone call advising of this.

In the private sector these things also happen all too often.

District Councillors often receive requests from HA tenants within their wards, for interventions with Sanctuary, to unlock a problem or timing.

Members can only contact the appropriate Sanctuary Housing Officer, requesting information or lobby on behalf of the constituent. Members cannot demand that this or that be carried out. Quite often there is a reason for the perceived problem which might involve another authority, or some other difficulty.

We are encouraged to submit all contacts with the local Sanctuary office via the team Secretary for consistency reasons, currently this is:

sandra.pitcher@sanctuary.co.uk

Sanctuary runs a Sustainable communities programme:

'We directly invest around £1.4 million each year. We invest through a combination of charitable grants and community development advice and support via local community groups and charities. We aim for our investment to be led by our customers and communities. This helps us to contribute in a sustainable way, by helping people to realise their aspirations and by building local capacity for communities to drive change for themselves.'

You can find out more in our [Community Investment Strategy](#) or contact community@sanctuary.co.uk

I hope that this report/overview is useful