

REPORT FROM: Head of Housing & Environmental Health

TO: Colne and District Committee

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VACANT HOUSES

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the committee on the position regarding vacant houses in Colne and District.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the Committee note the current position with empty houses in their wards.
- (2) That the Committee receive an update report in three months time unless there is a particular issue regarding a property in the Committees area.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) To ensure that empty properties in the borough are managed.
- (2) To ensure that the Committee is kept up to date with the position regarding the empty properties in their area.

ISSUE

1. There are a number of known vacant houses in the Colne and District Committee's wards. These houses are a wasted resource, attract anti social behaviour and detract from the amenity of the area.
2. The Committee have previously asked for regular updates regarding the management of empty properties across their areas. The last update was in July 2024.
3. Over the Borough the total number of properties that have been empty for more than six months has risen from 871 in April 2024 to 883 in October 2024 an increase of 13 properties. This represents a vacancy rate of 2.13%. This is significantly below the average for Lancashire (3.4%) and the average for England (2.8% in 2023). However there are still some problem areas across the borough.

4. There are currently 204 empty residential properties in Colne and District Committee area which represents 1.98% of the housing stock covered by the Committees wards. The table below shows the number of empty properties in each ward for over 2 years and over 6 months up to 2 years (this data includes second homes).

| Ward | Over 2 years | Over 6 months up to 2 years | Total |
|---------------|--------------|-----------------------------|-------|
| Boulsworth | 11 | 26 | 37 |
| Foulridge | 9 | 2 | 11 |
| Horsfield | 20 | 15 | 35 |
| Vivary Bridge | 12 | 38 | 50 |
| Waterside | 21 | 50 | 71 |
| | | Committee Area Total | 204 |

5. The number of vacant houses in the Colne and District Committees wards is below the average for both Lancashire and England. Even though overall numbers are low there are a number of vacant houses in the area that are considered to be a priority and require action to bring them back into use and we will be targeting these and in appropriate cases seeking to use compulsory purchase powers to bring them back into use.
6. Compulsory purchase powers have in recent years been used to acquire properties in the Borough.
7. Losing the Empty Homes Officer from the Environmental Health Residential Team in May 2021 has restricted the amount of proactive work that the team has been able to carry out. The Corporate Plan has highlighted the need for a stock condition survey of the Borough and specifically focuses on empty properties. A better picture of the position will inform a more robust approach to managing empty properties in the area.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: None

Financial: New Homes Bonus is a grant paid to all English authorities in recognition of net additions to effective housing stock in their area. The Bonus is intended to be a permanent incentive paid in respect of new build, conversions, and long-term empty properties brought back into effective use.

Legal: Following a case in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea where the details of empty properties were released resulting in a substantial fine for the authority the decision has been made not to include a list of vacant properties as an appendix.

Risk Management: None

Health and Safety: As empty houses attract anti social behaviour there are potential risks for officers inspecting these houses. However there are departmental risk assessments in place to minimise these hazards.

Sustainability: The reoccupation of empty properties will bring a valuable resource back into use.

Community Safety: Empty houses attract anti social behaviour and fly tipping bringing them back into use will reduce these activities and improve the neighbourhoods.

Equality and Diversity: None

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Empty property addresses by ward. (Exempt information, not for publication (see legal implications). To be taken in Part II of the agenda.)

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None