REPORT FROM:	Head of Housing & Environmental Health
TO:	Colne and District Committee
DATE:	8th May 2025

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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 January 2025.

3.   Over the Borough the total number of properties (including 233 second homes) in taxation, that have been empty for more than six months has risen from 914 in January 2025 to 956 in April 2025 an increase of 42 properties. There are also 249 properties that are exempt

from taxation. This represents a vacancy rate of 2.2%. This is less than the averages for Lancashire (3.4%) and England (2.8% in 2024).

4.   There are currently 229 residential properties in Colne and District Committee area which have been empty for more than six months. There are a further 63 which are exempt from taxation. This represents 2.22% 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	24	27	51
Foulridge	6	11	17
Horsfield	18	20	38
Vivary Bridge	19	34	53
Waterside	23	47	70
		Committee Area Total	229

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.   Being without an Empty Homes Officer since May 2021 has restricted the amount of proactive work that the team has been able to carry out. We are currently going through the recruitment process for a new Empty Homes Officer.

8.   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: None

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
None

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS
None