

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 current 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.

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 April 2025.
3. Over the Borough the total number of properties in taxation, that have been empty for more than six months is 875, which is a reduction of 81 on the previous figure in April 2025 of 956 properties (included within this are 177 unoccupied but substantially furnished houses). There are also 237 properties that are exempt from taxation. This represents a vacancy rate of 2.7%. This is less than the averages for Lancashire (3.4%) and England (2.8% in 2024).
4. There are currently 163 residential properties in Colne and District Committee area which have been empty for more than six months. There are a further 83 which are exempt from taxation. This represents 1.6% 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 *unoccupied but substantially furnished).

Ward	Over 2 years	Over 6 months up to 2 years	Total
Boulsworth	16	17	33
Foulridge	3	10	13
Horsfield	19	22	41
Vivary Bridge	12	20	32
Waterside	18	26	44
Committee Area Total			163

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 a priority and require action to bring them back into use and we will be targeting these and in appropriate cases seeking to use the appropriate enforcement powers to bring them back into use.
6. The Council has a range of enforcement powers that it can use to try and bring empty properties back into use, for example via a Compulsory purchase order, and this process has been successfully used in recent years to acquire properties in the Borough.
7. A new Empty Homes Officer has recently been recruited to pursue the owners of problematic empty properties within the borough to encourage their cooperation to bring their premises back into use via an initial informal approach, then by more formal methods where necessary.
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.
9. Could the Committee please note, case law exists which implies that the Council should only visit and view properties if a preliminary check, such as from council tax records, indicates it is unoccupied.

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