

Topic	Empty/Blighted Homes in Pendle
Meeting	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Meeting Date	11 th November 2025
Report Author	Simon O'Hara, Technical Officer, Environmental Health
Directorate	Place Directorate
Lead Executive Member(s)	Councillor Zafar Ali
Wards Affected	All Wards
Public. Part Exempt, or Fully Exempt	Public
Appendices (if any)	None

BRIEFING NOTE

Introduction

Whilst a property remains unoccupied, not only is it seen as a waste of a valuable housing resource, it can also cause social, environmental and economic problems for neighbours and the local community. If houses are left unoccupied for a long period of time they can deteriorate, their value together with that of neighbouring properties, can depreciate, they can attract unwanted anti-social behaviour, for example vandalism and fly-tipping, all of which can have a serious detrimental impact on the local community.

What is an Empty Home?

It is generally accepted that a property is considered to be a long-term empty home if it has been unoccupied for 6 months or longer. They can be found in all areas across the Borough and are not necessarily just the obvious ones that are easily identifiable, for example, those that are 'boarded up'. There are also a large number of homes which naturally become empty for varying periods of time, such as during the refurbishment/ re-letting process or when an owner passes away and probate problems delay the process.

Why do properties become and remain empty?

There are many reasons why properties become and then remain empty, for example:

- The property is difficult to put back into use because of its poor condition
- It is currently under renovation, and this takes much longer than first anticipated

- Some owners do not have the finances, capacity, or necessary skills to manage and maintain their property
- The property has been or is in the process of being repossessed
- Probate issues: Where the owner has passed away, in some cases intestate, leading to a complicated and time-consuming administrative procedure
- The owner is being cared for elsewhere, for example, in hospital or has been moved into a full-time care setting
- The property has been abandoned, and the owner or the next of kin is untraceable
- Property investment: houses are bought and left empty due to speculative investment, to sell on for profit when the housing market improves
- Where the property is adjoined to or forms part of a business premises, and the owner does not wish to rent or sell, such as a flat above a shop
- Emotional attachment associated with a property which was the family home where they spent their childhood, this often leads to a reluctance to deal with the property

Pendle Council Empty Homes Statistics

The Pendle Council Tax records for October 2025 show there was 1362 empty homes that are within taxation, and 372 unoccupied properties that are exempt from tax, e.g. where the occupant has gone into full-time care or has deceased, giving a total figure of 1734 empty homes. The 1362 empty homes within the borough represents a 3.3% vacancy rate of available housing stock, which is lower than the overall figure for Lancashire of 3.4%. Included within the 1362 properties are 206 premises that are listed as unoccupied but substantially furnished / second homes.

Length of time unoccupied	Number of empty properties	Unoccupied but substantially furnished
Empty up to 6 months	470	31
Empty over 6 months up to 2 years	495	41
Empty over 2 years up to 5 years	223	40
Empty over 5 years up to 10 years	101	49
Empty over 10 years	73	45
TOTAL	1362	206

Challenges presented by empty homes

Dealing with an empty home is not always straightforward. Each property, its owner, their circumstances and intentions for the house can all be different. Some individuals will not engage positively with the Council and do not respond to our requests to take action to return their building to a reasonable standard and back into use. They may be unaware or are not bothered that their premises is affecting surrounding properties and neighbourhood.

How do we bring empty homes back into use?

In most cases, the Council will adopt an informal approach initially with owners of unoccupied houses. It is much better to engage and encourage them to put their premises back into use without the use of enforcement and as mentioned, there are often genuine reasons why a property is vacant, and we do try and find this out.

Once we have obtained contact details for an owner, a telephone call will be made to discuss their property, followed with an enquiry letter or questionnaire requesting their cooperation to bring

about a positive change. Once we have received their response (or not), we can then make an informed judgement on how best to proceed.

What enforcement options does the Council have?

Enforcement action will be used to return an empty home to use by using legal powers available to the local authority. These powers are used only as a last resort, where all possibility of reaching an agreed solution with the owner have been exhausted:

- Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO): The purchase of the property from an owner without consent
- Enforced sale: The sale of the property primarily to recover debts that are owed to the Council
- Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO): The local authority takes over management of the empty property to bring about its re-use

In addition to the measures highlighted above, the Council can also use formal notices to bring about improvements to land and buildings and are used once an informal approach has proved to be unsuccessful and the owner is either unwilling or unable to improve the condition of their premises. If an individual does not satisfactorily comply with the requirements of the enforcement notice, the Council can then:

- Carry out the works by default and invoice the recipient for the incurred costs.
- Prosecute the recipient for non-compliance of the notice.
- Both of the above.

The most common legislations used to bring about improvements to empty homes are:

- Environmental Protection Act 1990 Section 79
- Town & Country Planning Act 1990 Section 215 & Section 330
- Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 Section 4
- Building Act 1984 Section 79 & Section 59
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 Section 29
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 Section 16

Tackling empty homes across borough will bring positive economic, social and environmental benefits for the borough and its residents:

- Reducing the number of empty homes and upgrading the existing housing stock
- Improvements in the safety and well-being of local neighbourhoods and communities
- Increase in availability of affordable housing
- Increase in revenue via Council tax income and New Homes Bonus

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