

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT NELSON TOWN HALL
ON 11TH NOVEMBER 2025**

PRESENT –

Councillor C. Church (Chair)

Councillors

*D. Cockburn-Price
S. Cockburn-Price
M. Stone
S. Land
Y. Tennant*

Officers in attendance

<i>Sarah Whitwell</i>	<i>Head of Housing and Environmental Health</i>
<i>Simon O'Hara</i>	<i>Technical Officer, Environmental Health</i>
<i>Lynne Rowland</i>	<i>Committee Administrator</i>



17. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded of the legal requirements concerning the declaration of interests and that whipping declarations were also required.

Members' attention was also drawn to the requirements of the Council's Code of Conduct relating to the disclosure of Other Registrable Interests and Non-Registrable Interests.

18. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

19. EMPTY/BLIGHTED HOMES

Further to a review on empty/blighted homes being included in the Committee's work programme, Members agreed the review plan which detailed the following terms of reference –

- To understand the current process for dealing with empty/blighted homes in Pendle.
- To consider whether any changes could better deliver on the Council's priorities and make appropriate recommendations.

Information to support the review was provided in a briefing note, which had been circulated prior to the meeting, and was presented to the Committee by Simon O'Hara, Technical Officer, Environmental Health.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (11.11.2025)

The briefing note provided information on the definition of an empty home; the reasons why properties became and remained empty; the challenges presented by empty homes; how empty properties were brought back into use; and the enforcement options available to the Council.

Pendle Council empty homes statistics were also provided using data from the Council Tax records.

It was explained that enforcement action would be used to return an empty home to use by using legal powers available to the authority. These powers, listed below, were used only as a last resort, where all possibility of reaching an agreed solution with the owner had 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 could also use formal notices to bring about improvements to land and buildings and were used once an informal approach had proved to be unsuccessful and the owner was either unwilling or unable to improve the condition of their premises. If an individual did not satisfactorily comply with the requirements of the enforcement notice, the Council could then carry out the works by default and invoice the recipient for the incurred costs and/or prosecute the recipient for non-compliance of the notice.

In response to questions of the Committee, the Head of Housing and Environmental Health and the Technical Officer provided further details of the CPO, enforced sale, and EDMO powers and gave information on the number of current CPO cases in the early stages.

It was explained that there were no set criteria as to how CPO cases were chosen and included a combination of factors, such as how long the property had been empty, complaints received, and how problematic the property was. Due to the strict legal process, there was a significant amount of work involved. It was therefore important to select the right properties and be able to demonstrate, if challenged, that all appropriate actions had been taken.

A discussion was held with regard to enforced sale and whether there was a set debt amount at which deadlines for collection were set, prior to enforced sale being pursued. It was explained that there were only certain pieces of legislation that applied to enforced sale and that there was some variance by Local Authority (LA) area with some policies stating a £500 or a £1,000 threshold. The debt was secured against Local Land Charges for works in default and, under legislation such as the Building Act 1984 and Public Health Act 1936, the debt would take priority over certain other debts, but not all.

The legal process was explained and Members were reminded that there would be legal costs incurred with both the CPO and enforced sale processes.

The Committee was advised that the Council was currently revising its Enforced Sale Policy. This, along with an Empty Homes Enforcement Strategy would be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee for comment.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (11.11.2025)

During discussion answers were also provided to questions around the definition of an empty property in relation to Council Tax charges; the initial reporting point for empty homes; the various stages of notices issued, together with timescales; the way in which action was monitored; and the legislations that applied. It was noted that there was no legislation to force owners to occupy their properties.

In respect of landlords, it was understood that the rental market was currently stagnant and that some landlords were struggling to find occupants for their properties. In addition, there had been reports of landlords leaving or intending to leave the profession, following the recent introduction of the Renters' Rights Act.

Members were advised that there was a different approach for blighted occupied properties, where the threshold was higher. Various different factors had to be taken into account, such as vulnerability and/or social/community issues for which other organisations may be involved.

It was noted that a flowchart was currently being drafted to show how various properties were categorised and identifying the department responsible for action to be taken.

The Committee was keen to understand where, in the borough, there were banks of empty properties and questioned whether there would be any government grants available should these be identified.

Members were also interested to learn of actions taken in nearby boroughs to address the problems associated with empty/blighted homes and bringing empty properties back into use.

In response to further questions, the Committee was advised that the possibility of partnering with external bodies had been considered and was acknowledged that this could help with very difficult cases/properties.

Members were reminded that the non-statutory post of Empty Homes Officer had been deleted from the authority several years ago, but the post had recently been reinstated, as empty homes were a priority.

Since appointment to the post in May 2025, progress had been made in bringing empty properties back into use. There was now the opportunity to challenge the Council Tax empty property data, carry out site visits, and identify properties to be brought back into tax, ultimately generating income for the Council. Members welcomed this information and agreed that such income generation should be publicised.

The work also included tracing ownership, finding lost relatives etc. It was explained that, as all this work was time consuming, there was a limit as to how much progress could be made.

Reference was made to a system used elsewhere in the Council, where issues were reported via a generic email address and logged by an administrator. It was acknowledged that administrative support for the reporting of empty homes would be beneficial to the service and was noted that a suggestion to review the administration arrangements in the Town Hall was being considered.

A further suggestion was to consider potential AI opportunities and investigate whether other Councils were using AI technology. The Technical Officer advised that they were a member of a nationwide forum and, to their knowledge, there was nothing to show that other Councils were doing things differently to Pendle.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (11.11.2025)

The Committee was advised that the database used supported a lot of services across the Council. However, it was admin. heavy and had limitations. Although the system was expensive it was acknowledged that it could be more expensive to move to a new system. This was something that could be further explored under the new authority.

RESOLVED

- (1) That a further meeting of the Committee be held on 9th December 2025 to continue with the review of empty/blighted homes.
- (2) That the Empty Homes Enforced Sale Policy and Empty Homes Strategy be submitted to the 9th December meeting for comment, prior to consideration by the Executive and/or Council.
- (3) That the Head of Housing and Environmental Health be asked to -
 - review the central administration system used elsewhere in the Council to establish how the system works and whether a similar system would benefit the empty homes service;
 - identify the financial savings made to date through visits to those properties listed as empty on Council Tax records, but found to be occupied;
 - investigate if there are any funding sources available in recognition of works to bring empty homes back into use, such as an empty homes bonus;

and report back to the next meeting of this Committee

20. EXECUTIVE WORK PROGRAMME/FORWARD PLAN

The draft Executive Forward Plan, to be published on 14th November 2025 was circulated at the meeting, for information.

It was noted that the Executive was due to consider a number of asset transfer requests.

It was suggested that, looking forward to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), a general review on asset transfers be carried out by this Committee.

RESOLVED

That, should Local Government Reorganisation timescales allow, a general review on asset transfers be added to the Committee's Work Programme 2025/26.

CHAIR _____