

Report Title	Empty Homes Strategy 2025-2030
Meeting	Overview and Scrutiny
Meeting Date	8 th December 2025
Report Author	Sarah Whitwell
Directorate	Place
Lead Executive Member(s)	Cllr Ali, Cllr Hanif
Wards Affected	All
Public. Part Exempt, or Fully Exempt	Public
Appendices (if any)	Appendix 1 – Draft Empty Homes Strategy

1. Executive Summary

1.1 For Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise and assess the draft Empty Homes Strategy and to provide feedback and recommendations to Executive.

2. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in this report, Overview and Scrutiny is recommended to:

2.1 have first sight and comment on the Empty Homes Strategy and make recommendations to Executive.

3. Information: the Rationale & Evidence for the Recommendations

3.1 Empty Homes are a key factor in low demand housing areas, they are a wasted asset, encourage anti-social behaviour and can cause neighbourhoods to decline. It is therefore essential that the problem is tackled as part of the overall regeneration of Pendle.

- 3.2 The Council's Empty Homes Strategy has not been revised since 2021.
- 3.3 The overarching aim of the Strategy is to develop and implement a range of measures that will directly, or indirectly, help return long-term empty homes back into use.
- 3.4 The objectives are to provide a clear, open, defined statement of the Council's role in dealing with empty properties through:
 - a) continuing to raise awareness of empty homes in the borough
 - b) continuing to maintain a database of empty homes and improve the accuracy of the data 2
 - c) assisting and encouraging empty homes owners to bring their property back into use
 - d) improving the condition of empty homes and target the most problematic with enforcement action.
- 3.5 There are no substantive risks arising from adopting the Policy as attached in appendix 1.

4. Link to Corporate Plan Priorities: (Providing High Quality Services and Facilities, Proud and Connected Communities and Places, Good Growth and Healthy Communities)

- 4.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the corporate priority Housing and Healthy Communities.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial Implications

There are potential financial benefits to Council in regard to bringing properties back into use through a robust Housing Strategy

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

5.3 Climate and Biodiversity Implications

None arising directly from this report

5.4 Human Resources Implications

The strategy will help Officers when dealing with Empty properties which should reduce time spent on cases, therefore at this stage it is expected that no extra resource should be required in terms of staff.

5.5 Equality and Diversity Implications

A service impact assessment has been completed and there are no known equality and diversity issues arising from this report

6. Consultation

6.1 Consultation is not required for the introduction of this Policy

7. Alternative Options Considered

None

8. Reasons for the Recommendations

8.1 The Empty Homes Strategy provides a clear statement for dealing with long-term empty properties.

9. Statutory Officer Sign off (please tick)

Section 151 Officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Monitoring Officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

10. Background Documents

None

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Appendix 1



Empty Homes Strategy

2025-2030

1 Strategy introduction

- 1.1 This is Pendle Council's Empty Homes Strategy, from 2025 through to 2030. This strategy aims to give an understanding of the various issues surrounding vacant properties, the problems they can cause, how they can impact residents and neighbourhoods, whilst also providing details of a clear intention to bring more empty homes back into use.
- 1.2 The strategy examines the reasons why homes become empty, and how the Council intends to use the range of powers at its disposal in order to effect change and prompt action.
- 1.3 Empty homes can be detrimental to the lives of local residents and communities for a number of reasons. A single empty home can blight a street or community, reduce surrounding property values and be a catalyst for nuisance to local residents. Empty homes can also attract vandalism, fly-tipping and other criminal activity, ranging from the minor to the extremely serious, but all increasing crime and the fear of crime as well as having a detrimental impact on the local community. They also represent a risk for the emergency services and put added pressure on council departments such as Housing and Environmental Health.
- 1.4 Homes can become and remain empty for a number of reasons. Whether financial pressures, legal or administrative delays, or pending refurbishments, empty homes and their owners often face challenging and difficult circumstances that prevent properties from being utilised fully. Supporting owners in overcoming such hurdles where it is their intention to do so and tackling those empty homes where there are no reasonable prospects of positive action from their owners, will positively impact our residents, both by increasing the housing supply but also the wider community for whom empty homes often cause the most problems.
- 1.5 Across Pendle, Council Tax records show there are currently 1364 empty homes (November 2025), of which 897 have been empty for six months or more and are classed as long-term empty. Equating to **3.3% (1364) 2.15% (897)** of the Borough's housing stock, this represents a significant waste of a limited resource, at a time which housing supply is not meeting an increased demand. Of this, Council Tax records show 397 properties are currently liable for the Empty Homes Premium, meaning they have remained empty for a period of two years or more. However, statistical information is limited, and it is recognised that there are a number of empty homes where full Council Tax is being paid and the property has not been registered as being empty. Similarly, records show that Pendle currently has 206 second homes, reported as such by their owners in order to obtain discounted Council Tax charges. Our work shows that many of these should in fact be classed as empty, and complaints received would support 1.6 attempts to have many of them reclassified.
- 1.7 The benefits of implementing an Empty Homes Strategy are wide ranging, and can be categorised as social, regenerative, financial and strategic. In supporting these key areas through bringing empty homes back into use, this strategy aims to:
 - assist in meeting housing need
 - improve housing conditions
 - assist with a reduction in crime and the fear of crime
 - regenerate blighted areas
 - increase Council Tax collection rates and empty home premiums
 - generate additional income through the New Homes Bonus (NHB)

1.8 The case for dealing with empty homes is a compelling one, not only from a neighbourhood improvement and housing perspective, but also as a financial incentive both for the owners of empty homes, and for the authority.

1.9 The Empty Homes Strategy 2025-2030 outlines the Council's intentions in supporting and assisting owners of empty homes, along with the available tools and possible enforcement options at the authority's disposal should support and negotiation prove insufficient. In tackling the most challenging of cases, it is the Council's aim to reduce the numbers of empty homes across the Borough, regenerate unused and vacant properties, and reinvigorate communities for the benefit of our residents.

1.10 Many families are finding it difficult to access a suitable home they can afford and are forced to live in temporary accommodation. As of 2024/25, local authorities in England spent £2.8 billion on temporary accommodation for homeless households, more than double the amount from 2019/20. There were 272,257 homes empty for at least six months in England in March 2025, an increase from 2020 but slightly below the pandemic peak (England Empty Homes Statistics Summary 2025).

1.11 Empty properties are a national scandal and a wasted resource. They deteriorate faster than occupied homes, blight neighbourhoods, incite crime and anti-social behaviour and have a negative impact on communities, the local environment and the local property market, leading to reduced house prices. Whilst some empty properties do not visibly reduce the appearance of an area, they are often a source of concern to neighbours who may fear the potential for anti-social behaviour.

1.12 It's not just communities and residents that can be affected by empty properties; they can cause issues for owners too. Empty properties can be a financial drain due to ongoing maintenance costs, increasing council tax and, in some cases, mortgage payments. The more a property deteriorates, the higher the cost to the owner to bring it back into effective use.

1.13 Like many other local authorities, Pendle Council has faced significant reductions in funding in recent years which has affected staffing resources and the way that the Council is able to deliver services and carry out its statutory functions.

1.14 The Council is committed to reducing the number of empty properties by adopting a proactive approach in supporting owners to help return their empty properties to use, in conjunction with the Council's corporate plan (CP25 4.05b). Tackling empty properties will help return much needed homes in the Borough back into use, improve standards in the private sector and benefit the wider community.

1.15 This Strategy reinforces the Council's stance on empty properties and builds on the work that has already been undertaken to reduce them. It identifies the scale of the empty property problem in the Borough, together with the options and resources available to maximise re-use of existing housing stock and address the negative impact on local communities and economic regeneration.

1.16 Reoccupation of empty properties remains a considerable challenge for the Council, and strong partnership working with communities and other agencies is essential to drive progress and help deliver the Strategy.

2. Strategic priorities

2.1 The overall aim of the Strategy is to reduce the number of empty properties across the Borough and increase the supply of available housing to help meet housing need. However, it is important to note that Government policy no longer permits a reduction in the number of

empty properties to be counted as a contribution towards meeting the borough's housing targets. Even if all of the borough's empty properties were occupied, there would still be a need to build a minimum of 2,220 new homes in the 15 years up to 2040, to meet the annual housing requirement of 148 dwellings per annum set out in Policy SP04 of the Pendle Local Plan Fourth Edition 2021-2040, which is due to be adopted in December 2025.

2.2 The strategy has three key priorities:

1. Preventing properties from becoming empty for prolonged periods

Projected outcomes:

- empty homes recorded and monitored to demonstrate the progress being made towards bringing empty properties back into use
- increased knowledge and information: accurate records of number, type and location of all long-term empty properties and commercial buildings in the borough
- bespoke action plans developed for wards or townships
- improved communication and early engagement with empty property owners: promotion of services and financial incentives and disincentives, including council tax premiums and means of enforcement, to deter owners from leaving properties empty for prolonged periods
- enhanced advice and guidance: empty property owners are aware of the options available to them
- correct council tax premiums applied to all empty properties and commercial premises to maximise revenue.

2. Reducing the number of long-term empty properties in the borough

Projected outcomes:

- an increased supply of available housing including affordable homes for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- increased council tax revenue
- all empty properties that have been empty for 2 years or more risk assessed and prioritised for action
- making best use of existing housing stock to help meet housing need
- limited resources allocated effectively
- a healthy private rented sector.

3. Minimising the negative effects of empty properties on local communities

Projected outcomes:

- long term empty properties prioritised for enforcement where appropriate
- effective action on problematic empty properties
- appropriate use of enforcement powers
- safer communities - reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour
- improved amenity and visual impact of neighbourhoods creating pride in communities
- reduction in the number of complaints the Council receives regarding empty properties
- all costs associated with direct works and legal action on empty properties reclaimed where possible.

3. Definition of an empty property

A property, residential or commercial, is classed as long term empty if it is inactive in the market and has been recorded as empty for more than six months. If a property is empty for less than six months it may be due to a delayed sale or letting. These are classed as transactional empty properties. Although transactional empty properties are less of a priority for the Council, they can still cause concern.

In some cases, a property may appear empty but it is not classed as empty. Properties do not have to be used all the time to be classed as occupied. This applies to properties that might be awaiting refurbishment or are second homes and holiday homes.

The vast majority of empty properties are privately owned, and there are many reasons why they become empty in the first place and remain empty. Some of the most common reasons are:

- the property has been abandoned
- problems achieving a sale or letting and/or unrealistic asking prices/rent
- the owner may be in residential care and wishes to return, but is often unable to do so or lives abroad
- the ownership of the property may be unclear/property owner deceased and there are no traceable descendants
- inheritance issues, business disputes or delays with probate
- the owner may lack the financial means or skills to carry out essential repairs, refurbishment and/or complete redevelopment
- land-banking: owners waiting for values to increase before they offer their properties for sale
- general reluctance: owners refuse to let or sell their property.

While short term empty properties are unavoidable, there are those which remain empty, with no likelihood of returning to occupation. The Council discourages homes being left empty for long periods and charges an 'Empty Property Premium' which from April 25 has been charged as below, unless exempt:

Properties over	Percentage premium	Council Tax charge	Effective date
1 year	100%	200%	1 April 2025
5 years	200%	300%	1 April 2021
10 years	300%	400%	1 April 2021

A property that has been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for:

- a period of 1 to 5 years has to pay a premium of 100% of the Council Tax
- a period of 5 to 10 years has to pay a premium of 200% of the Council Tax
- a period of more than 10 years has to pay a premium of 300% of the Council Tax

Problems caused by empty properties

Empty properties can have a detrimental impact on communities and the local environment. Whilst it is not illegal to keep a property empty it can be an expensive option. The longer a property lies empty, the more it will deteriorate. Some of the most common problems associated with empty properties include:

- wasted asset that costs the owner money to maintain or leave empty
- vandalism, arson or anti-social behaviour

- blight on local communities and general loss of value affecting neighbouring property values
- urban deprivation of inner areas accelerating population loss
- loss of community as permanent homeowners move out and are replaced by passing tenants
- deterioration leading to dangerous and dilapidated structures which can be a danger to the public and/or cause damage to neighbouring properties
- fly tipping, dumping, overgrown land and gardens
- problems due to vermin infiltration
- illegal squatting
- time and money costs to both the Council and the emergency services.

Benefits of bringing empty properties back into use and enabling housing growth

There are many financial, environmental, social and economic benefits of bringing disused residential and commercial properties back into use. These include:

- attractive neighbourhoods and economic vitality which can increase spend and boost the local economy
- an increased supply of available housing to help meet housing need and reduce homelessness and the need for temporary accommodation
- making best use of existing housing stock
- increased council tax revenue and new homes bonus income
- increased income for owners who rent or sell their empty properties
- reduced crime and anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime through improvements to homes and buildings to create safer communities and attractive neighbourhoods
- improving homes and buildings to modern standards using the latest low carbon technology
- enhancing the vitality of town centres and promoting economic growth by bringing town centre homes and buildings back into use
- improving the visual impact of neighbourhoods to boost wellbeing, create pride in the community and reduce demand on public services
- supporting the Council's commitment to tackling threats to public health which are sometimes linked to empty properties such as fly tipping, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

National and regional context

3.1 The problems posed by empty properties remain a national issue. According to the latest data from October 2024, there were approximately **719,470 empty dwellings** across England. Of these, approximately **264,884 had been empty for more than six months** (long-term vacant). [Dwelling Stock Estimates, England: 31 March 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

3.2 The number of long-term empty homes has remained relatively stable since 2020 but is higher than pre-pandemic levels. These figures include empty properties in the public sector (those owned by local authorities and registered providers) as well as empty properties in the private sector.

Long Term Empty Properties (over 6 months) in England (2022 Data)

3.3 The most recently available regional data for long-term empty properties is from October 2022. The North-West region continued to have a high number of long-term empty properties, though London saw the largest increase since 2018.

Region	Long term empties (2022)
North West	42,677
North East	18,104
Yorkshire and Humberside	32,327 (2020 data, not updated in source)
East Midlands	22,621
West Midlands	28,740 (2020 data, not updated in source)
South West	22,495 (less than 6 months empty, not long term data in source)
East of England	24,615
South East	33,481
London	35,751

Note: 2022 regional data for Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands, and South West was either unavailable in the sources or was for short-term empty homes, so 2020 figures were retained for consistency.

3.4 The updated national figures reflect a continuing challenge for local authorities, who have been granted stronger powers, such as the ability to increase council tax premiums on long-term empty homes, to encourage owners to bring these properties back into use. However, complex issues like the cost of repairs, legal processes (probate), and intentional 'buy-to-leave' investment strategies mean numbers remain high.

3.5 The following data was sourced from [Live tables on dwelling stock \(including vacants\) - GOV.UK](#) and shows the total number of empty properties in 2024 across Lancashire. Blackpool had the highest number of empty dwellings and Ribble Valley had the lowest.

Area	Number
Blackburn with Darwen	2,452
Blackpool	3,198
Burnley	1,724
Chorley	1,454
Fylde	1,671
Hyndburn	1,194
Lancaster	2,189
Pendle	1,442
Preston	2,721
Ribble Valley	909
Rossendale	1,201
South Ribble	1,380
West Lancs	1,598
Wyre	918

4. Government incentives and opportunities

4.1 Over the last two decades, the Government has placed considerable emphasis on the importance of bringing long term empty properties back into use and has introduced a number of incentives to encourage local authorities to support this work.

4.2 The New Homes Bonus scheme introduced in 2011 offers local authorities financial incentives for increasing housing supply, including the return to use of empty properties. Under this scheme, local authorities currently receive the same financial reward for bringing an empty property back into use as they would for building a new one. An additional premium is applied to properties that become affordable homes. However, it is unlikely that this scheme will continue past 25/26.

4.3 The Council Tax Premium introduced in 2013 gives local authorities the right to charge higher council tax rates on properties that have been empty for more than two years. The table below shows the amount of council tax that local authorities can charge for long term empty properties:

Amount of Council Tax local authorities can charge for long term empties

Length of time empty	Council Tax (percent)
less than 2 years	100
over 2 years	200
over 5 years	300
over 10 years (from 2021)	400

4.4 Homes England has confirmed plans for the **Social and Affordable Homes Programme (SAHP) 2026-2036**, which aims to expand the supply of social and affordable housing across England. The funding will provide grants for the capital costs of affordable housing. Registered Providers of Social Housing, local authorities, housebuilders, developers, charities and community-led organisations can apply individually or as part of a consortium. Funding can be used for new builds, repurposing empty homes, traveller pitches, community-led schemes, estate regeneration and acquiring market homes for affordable use.

4.5 In addition, commuted sums/financial contributions made by private developers on residential housing sites under Section 106 planning applications, can be used to acquire and refurbish empty properties and bring them back into use as affordable homes. (Pendle Local Plan DM23)

5. Local context

5.1 The Borough of Pendle has a population of **99,777** with approximately **38,066** households (Office for National Statistics 2024 estimates and Census 2021 data). It comprises twelve wards and various parishes, including the main towns of Brierfield, Nelson, Colne, Barnoldswick, and Earby.

5.2 A Local Housing Need and Demand Assessment, specifically the **Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) published in April 2023 and updated in March 2024**, indicates that there is an affordable housing need in the range of **187 to 251 homes per year** for the period of 2019 to 2039.

5.3 Regarding households seeking social housing, there has been an increase in recent years. There were **2,095** households registered on the Household Waiting List at the end of March 2024 (LAHS).

Summary of Latest Data

Metric	Previous Figure (c. 2020/2021)	Latest Figure (c. 2023/2024)
Annual Affordable Housing Need	Net shortfall of 448 households each year	Need for 187 to 251 homes per annum
Households on Housing Waiting List	Approximately 1,552 in May 2021	2,095 at the end of March 2024
Households with Urgent Need	197 in May 2021	Data not publicly specified in recent reports

5.4 These LAHS figures highlight a continued, need for affordable housing within the borough, which the Council uses to inform its Local Plan.

5.5 On 10th November 2025, there were 897 long term empty properties known to the Council across the Borough (representing approximately 2.2 percent of all dwellings) of which, 397 had been empty for two years or more. The table below shows where these properties are located by ward and the length of time that they have been empty.

Number of long-term empties over time for each council ward

Ward	6 - 12 months	1 - 2 years	Over 2yrs	Total
Barnoldswick	26	25	41	92
Bradley	21	14	33	68
Barrowford & Pendleside	29	24	53	106
Brierfield East & Clover Hill	27	18	34	79
Brierfield West & Reedley	21	21	20	62
Boulsworth & Foulridge	19	19	30	68
Earby & Coates	12	11	41	64
Fence & Higham	9	5	11	25
Marsden & Southfield	35	19	35	89
Vivary Bridge	20	18	30	68
Waterside & Horsfield	21	26	34	81
Whitefield & Walverden	34	26	35	95

5.6 As can be seen, Barrowford and Pendleside Ward has the highest number of long-term empty properties in total (106) followed by Whitefield and Walverden (95). Barrowford and Pendleside Ward has the highest number of properties that have been empty for over two years (53). If a proportion of these properties could be brought back into use, it would help increase the supply of homes for occupation across the borough.

5.7 The following table data was sourced from MHCLG live tables and shows the number of long-term empty properties in the Borough since records began. As can be seen, numbers have reduced but remain high.

Empty properties in Pendle since 2004

Year	Number
2004	2,515
2005	2,442
2006	2,508
2007	2,803
2008	3,002
2009	2,823
2010	2,688
2011	2,746
2012	2,554
2013	2,519
2014	2,190
2015	2,045
2016	1,897
2017	1,859
2018	1,817
2019	1,620
2020	1,534
2021	1,428
2022	1,376
2023	1,533
2024	1,442

5.8 The Council receives a wide range of complaints regarding empty properties every year. The decision to take action depends on the individual circumstances of each case and, factors such as the length of time it has been unoccupied and the risk it poses to the community and general environment

6. Our approach to empty properties

6.1 The Council in collaboration with partners and empty property owners, aspires to return 15 long term empty properties back into use each year as a minimum, to help increase the supply of homes for occupation across the Borough and support economic growth. This may involve the Council purchasing, refurbishing and bringing empty properties back into use with, with grant funding from LAHF.

6.2 £600,000 has been allocated from the Capital Programme to help support this work. Where the Council identifies a suitable property to purchase, it will undertake a comprehensive assessment and financial appraisal to establish viability and ensure commercial potential.

6.3 Whilst appropriate action will be taken where necessary on empty properties that are causing a nuisance or detriment to the amenity of a neighbourhood, the Council intends to focus its resources on long term, problematic empty properties that have been unoccupied for two years or more in the first instance. In order to ensure that resources are allocated appropriately, each property will be risk assessed using a scoring matrix. The assessment considers various aspects including overall condition, appearance, impact on neighbouring properties community/social impact, environmental issues and health and safety concerns.

Results will be recorded and properties and those properties with the highest scores will be prioritised for action. The Empty Property Officer will oversee this process.

7. Informal intervention and support for owners of empty properties

7.1 The Council seeks to prevent properties from becoming empty for prolonged periods by offering an enhanced advice and guidance service to empty property owners, responding to enquires and concerns from member of the public, undertaking targeted media campaigns, and publicising a range of incentives and disincentives and an on-line reporting form on its website, to encourage members of the public to report problematic empty properties in their neighbourhoods. An Empty Homes Officer has recently been appointed in the Environmental Health Residential Team to oversee this work.

7.2 Empty property owners are not always aware of the support the Council can offer them or, the environmental and financial consequences of leaving their properties empty. The Council has a responsibility to provide information, guidance and general support to owners of empty properties. Through this support, many empty properties can be returned to use. Options include, for example:

- refurbishing and re-occupying the property
- letting the property themselves as landlord or through a letting/management agent
- selling the property through an estate agent or via auction
- selling the property to an investor
- leasing the property to a private individual, property developer or registered provider.

7.3 Supporting owners to sell or let their empty properties is a key component in the reduction of empty properties across the borough.

7.4 Below are some of the incentives and services the Council can offer to empty property owners:

- Council Tax exemptions in some cases e.g. where an owner of an empty property is in hospital or receiving residential care
- Council Tax discounts in some cases e.g. where empty properties are uninhabitable due to renovation
- reduced rate VAT or zero VAT on refurbishment works if a property has been empty for two years or more
- enhanced advice and guidance service to empty property owners on a case-by-case basis to determine options
- a list of investors looking to purchase properties in the Borough that are in need of refurbishment
- referrals to partners including registered providers and/or other agencies where owners want to sell or rent their properties
- free annual events for landlords and owners to enable them to keep up to date with legislation and share good practice.

7.5 The Council does not have the means to offer empty property grants and/or loans to residents to encourage restoration.

8 Partners and stakeholders

Registered providers

8.1 The Council works with a number of registered providers operating in the Borough who can help empty property owners by purchasing and refurbishing their properties and/or leasing them and renting them to people in housing need, which would give owners an income

throughout the term of the lease. The Council will refer empty property owners to registered providers where appropriate.

8.2 The Council seeks to identify opportunities for joint working with these organisations, to maximise resources and help bring empty properties back into use.

Ward councillors

8.3 Ward councillors provide a vital link to communities. They are well placed to raise awareness of the issues surrounding empty properties and the support available to owners. Their assistance will be crucial to the successful delivery of this Strategy.

9. Enforcement powers and formal intervention

Formal intervention

9.1 The Council is keen to avoid enforcement action where possible. However, if an owner is unwilling to co-operate and their empty property is causing concerns in the neighbourhood, the Council may consider enforcement action, which could result in them losing ownership of the property. Enforcement action can include but is not limited to:

- improvement notices to ensure any necessary remedial works are undertaken as and when required
- securing empty residential or commercial premises to protect the public and prevent unauthorised access and acts of crime (Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1982)
- abatement notices to ensure owners improve properties that are causing a statutory nuisance, for example a defective roof that is causing damp to a neighbouring property (Environmental Protection Act 1990)
- action to improve the appearance of a property if it is considered to be detrimental to the amenity of an area under section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990
- community protection warnings and notices to prevent unreasonable behaviours that have a negative impact on local communities (Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014).

Acquisition of land and property

9.2 In some circumstances, it may be necessary for the Council to consider long term enforcement solutions for problematic empty properties including:

- enforced sale (Law of Property Act 1925): the Council may enforce the sale of a private property to recover outstanding debts secured against the property, excluding Council Tax debt
- empty dwelling management orders (Housing Act 2004): enable local authorities or nominated parties, usually registered providers, to take over the management of an empty property for up to 7 years and rent it out to people in housing need. Renovation costs to improve the property can be reimbursed through rental income
- compulsory purchase orders (CPOs): can play a pivotal role in be used by local authorities as a last resort where all other options have failed. CPOs give local authorities the power, where justified, to acquire land or property including empty properties that are causing a statutory nuisance with or without the owner's consent, to prevent further decline. CPO's provide the 'teeth' to the empty homes process and strengthen every aspect of this work.

10. Delivering the strategy

An action plan has been developed to support the delivery of the Strategy over the next two years. This document outlines the approach the Council will take to achieve its objectives and focus resources in collaboration with partners.

11. Monitoring

Performance against the actions within the action plan will be monitored by the *Head of Housing and Environmental Health?

The number of empty properties in the Borough will be assessed annually to determine progress, based on the following performance indicators:

- all long term empty properties that have been empty for 6 months or more
- number of empty properties that have been empty;
 - between 6 months to 1 year
 - between 1 and 2 years
 - over 2 years
- number of empty properties brought back into use due to Council intervention, excluding demolitions without gain.
- Number of empty properties subject to enforcement action
- Number of informal interventions by the Empty Property officer

In addition, annual government statistical returns will be analysed to monitor and review the prevalence of empty properties in each local authority area in England. This will give an indication of regional and national trends and enable benchmarking against statistical neighbours and other local authorities in Lancashire.

Empty Home Strategy Action Plan – November 2025

Empty Homes Action Plan & Milestones

The action plan is designed to be ongoing, with regular monitoring and review.

Action Area	Key Actions	Target Milestones (Ongoing/Annual)
Data & Intelligence	Continue to collect, record, and maintain accurate information on empty homes across the borough.	Quarterly: Review and report on empty property data and analysis of market changes to inform targeting of resources.
Owner Engagement	Proactively engage with empty homeowners, offering advice, support, and information on the Empty Homes Loan Scheme.	Annual: Achieve a specific number of properties returned to use through voluntary owner engagement.

Financial Incentives/Penalties	<p>Continue to apply and enforce Council Tax premiums on long-term empty properties.</p>	<p>April 2026: A new 100% premium for second homes (substantially furnished but not a main residence) will be introduced from April 2026, encouraging these properties back to primary residence use.</p> <p>Ensure that all second homes and LT empties are identified and referred to Liberata.</p>
Enforcement	<p>Target problematic empty homes with statutory enforcement powers as a last resort where negotiation fails.</p>	<p>Ongoing: Utilise powers such as Section 215 notices (Town and Country Planning Act 1990) for neglected properties and Enforced Sales procedures when appropriate.</p>
Direct Intervention & Partnerships	<p>Work with partners (e.g., housing associations) on regeneration projects and consider direct purchase of properties.</p>	<p>Annual/Project-based: Specific number of properties acquired and renovated for use as temporary or social housing accommodation.</p>
Community Engagement	<p>Raise awareness of the negative impact of empty homes and provide clear pathways for residents to report problem properties.</p>	<p>Ongoing: High levels of public awareness and increased number of reported empty properties via the Council's website.</p>
Performance Monitoring	<p>Monitor progress against the strategy's aim to reduce overall empty home numbers.</p>	<p>Annual: Maintain or reduce the empty property vacancy rate below national and regional averages.</p>