

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD AT NELSON TOWN HALL  
ON 9<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2025**

*PRESENT –*

*Councillor C. Church (Chair)*

**Councillors**

*R. Anwar  
D. Cockburn-Price  
S. Cockburn-Price  
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>

*(Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Ammer, S. Land and M. Stone.)*



**21. 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.

**22. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**23. EMPTY/BLIGHTED HOMES**

In continuing its review of empty/blighted homes, the Committee received an update on information requested at the last meeting. Members had been keen to assess value for money in relation to the post of Empty Homes Officer by identifying the financial savings made to date through visits to those properties listed as empty on Council Tax records but found to be occupied.

Members were advised that, since his appointment, the work of the Empty Homes Officer had identified 32 properties as occupied which had been brought back into taxation. Just two or three of these had resulted in £13,000 being recovered. Further debts had been recovered, however this data was not available.

As part of the review, Members were then presented with the following -

**(a) Enforced Sale Policy and Procedure**

The Committee was first invited to scrutinise and assess an Enforced Sale Policy and Procedure (ESP) for bringing vacant properties back into use. It was explained that the Council did not currently have such an approved policy and procedure in place.

The ESP presented to Committee had been produced in consultation with Legal Services and provided a clear statement and process for dealing with long-term empty properties where charges had been levied against the property and all other options had been considered.

The Head of Housing and Environmental Health presented the ESP, together with an accompanying report. It was explained that Enforced Sale was a process that was used to recover debts and charges that had been attached to an empty property, through work being carried out in default by the Council, where owners had failed to act. It could also help to bring long-term problematic empty properties back into use.

The Committee was advised of the statutory powers that enabled a Local Authority to use Enforced Sale. It was explained that a scoring matrix would be used to assess whether enforcement action was required and to determine what procedure should be used.

The scoring matrix, together with example letters, notices and a process responsibility flow chart were attached as appendices to the ESP.

A number of proposed conditions and threshold amounts for undertaking enforced sales were detailed in the report.

Members welcomed the introduction of the ESP and considered the information in detail. During discussion, the following comments/suggestions were made -

- That the introduction include reference to the scheme being an effective way of dealing with blighting on the street.
- The procedure for the re-service of notices was acknowledged, which included the requirement for one to be served on the listed owner or owners by first class post or by hand, or by affixing it to the property. However, it had been noted that some notices had remained on properties for years, with further notices added during that time, which added to the blighting of the area. It was accepted that these had to remain in place whilst they were effective but was agreed that legal clarification would be sought on when they could be taken down.
- The deadlines and main issues in all letters be highlighted.
- That the deadlines for compliance/response be set at 28 days and amended as appropriate throughout the policy.
- That the designation of a priority ward, used as a factor in the assessment framework for prioritising empty homes for enforcement, be amended to priority street. It was felt that, as there was a concentration of streets with empty homes, making these a priority would have a bigger impact than prioritising a ward. The pros and cons of this were discussed in detail.
- That the document and appendices be proofread, formatted and amended where necessary, prior to final approval.

In answer to questions it was explained who at the Council would be involved in the process and how empty properties were reviewed.

Reference was made to a regular empty homes report that was submitted to West Craven and Colne and District Committees and was noted that this could also be done for the other area committees if requested. It was agreed that this information would be welcomed but was felt that alternative reporting methods, such as allowing Councillors access to a database, could be less time consuming for officers and therefore more efficient. It was agreed that this would be looked into.

## **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the Committee welcomes the introduction of an Enforced Sale Policy and Procedure for bringing vacant properties back into use and asks that the comments and suggestions as detailed above, be taken into account when finalising the document.
- (2) That the Head of Housing and Environmental Health be asked to consider the specific request to amend the designation of a priority ward to a priority street, in terms of points scored when prioritising empty homes for enforcement.
- (3) That, should the suggested changes at resolution (2) above be agreed, the Head of Housing and Environmental Health be asked to allocate one priority street in each ward of the borough, to be reviewed annually.

### **(b) Empty Homes Strategy 2025-2030**

The Head of Housing and Environmental Health presented a report which invited the Committee to scrutinise and assess the draft Empty Homes Strategy and provide feedback and recommendations to the Executive.

The draft Strategy was attached as an appendix to the report.

A Member first commented on the rationale and evidence for the recommendations detailed in the report and asked that 'improving the local neighbourhood' be added to point 3.4.

Members then moved on to discussing the draft Strategy overall. During discussion, the following points were raised and comments/suggestions made –

- It was felt that there were elements of repetition in the document and that these needed to be deleted/amended where necessary. Specific examples related to paragraphs 1.3 and 1.11; 1.7 and 1.9; and the Council Tax premiums at Sections 3 and 4.
- It was suggested that paragraph 1.13 was unnecessary and that paragraph 1.5 could be amended for better understanding.
- It was noted that the draft Strategy included housing numbers in a national and regional context and was proposed that this information be included in an appendix, rather than being included as part of the Strategy.
- Section 5, which provided information in a local context, was felt to be scene setting information that would date in the Strategy. It was therefore suggested that this could be provided at the beginning of the document as an informative introduction that could be updated annually.
- It was proposed that the heading at Section 9 be amended to 'Formal intervention' only, with a subheading of 'Enforcement powers'.
- That the document be proofread, formatted and amended where necessary, prior to final publication.

Overall, it was felt that the Strategy itself should consist of the information from Section 6 onwards, as Sections 1 – 5 were viewed as an introduction and scene setting information.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive be asked to note the comments of the Committee and agree to the proposed amendments.

### **24. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

#### **RESOLVED**

That in pursuance of the power contained in Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 as amended, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the next item of business when it was likely, in view of the nature of the proceedings or the business to be transacted that there would be disclosure of exempt information which was likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

### **25. LONG TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES TO BE CONSIDERED FOR COMPULSORY PURCHASE**

The Head of Housing and Environmental Health submitted a report which provided the Committee with a recommended list of long-term empty properties to be prioritised for compulsory purchase. A proposed mechanism for adding new properties to the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) list was included as an appendix to the report.

Members were invited to provide feedback and recommendations to the Executive to agree the criteria for inclusion in the high priority list.

It was noted that the report did not address the climate and biodiversity implications. It was understood that bringing properties back into use would have a positive impact and help meet the requirements of the Climate Strategy. Members therefore felt that information should be provided at this section.

#### **RESOLVED**

That –

- (1) it be noted that the proposed actions align with the Empty Homes Strategy and corporate priorities for Housing and Healthy Communities;
- (2) the approved budget of £600,000 for CPOs and the potential risks of legal challenges from property owners be acknowledged;
- (3) the Committee confirm that each acquisition will require a formal resolution from the Executive under the Housing Act 1985;
- (4) the following proposed options for acquired properties be supported –
  - Sale under development agreements to ensure refurbishment

- Use of properties for Homeless Temporary Accommodation where appropriate

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive be recommended to agree to –

- receive individual reports for each property proposed for compulsory purchase, including a statement of reasons;
- approve a mechanism for adding new properties to the Compulsory Purchase Order priority action list as issues arise.

After consideration of all the above, the Committee referred back to its review plan on empty/blighted homes. It was confirmed that the terms of reference of the review had been met, and that the review was now concluded.

CHAIR \_\_\_\_\_