REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTIVITY

Since my last report to Full Council, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has concluded its review of empty/blighted homes.

Our review took place over two meetings. In my last report to Council I reported on the Committee's reasons for choosing the topic for review, together with a summary of the information provided to us at our first meeting by the Head of Housing and Environmental Health and the Empty Homes Officer.

- At our second meeting we were first presented with an **Enforced Sale Policy and Procedure (ESP)** for bringing vacant properties back into use.

  The ESP provides a clear statement and process for dealing with long-term empty properties. The process is used to recover debts and charges that have been attached to an empty property, through work being carried out in default by the Council, where owners have failed to act. It can also help to bring long-term problematic empty properties back into use.

  We learnt of the statutory powers that enable us, as a Local Authority, to use Enforced Sale and the scoring matrix to be used to assess what procedure should be followed.

  As a committee, we considered the information in detail and were happy to welcome the introduction of the ESP. We did however make a number of comments and suggestions that we asked be taken into account when finalising the document.

  These included a request to amend the designation of 'priority ward' to 'priority street' in terms of points scored when prioritising empty homes for enforcement. If this suggested change is accepted we have asked that one priority street be allocated in each ward of the borough, to be reviewed annually.

- Continuing with the review, we then scrutinised and assessed the draft **Empty Homes Strategy 2025-2030** prior to it being considered and adopted by the Executive.

  As with the ESP, we made several comments and suggestions, leading to some proposed amendments which we put to the Executive for agreement.

  At its meeting on 17th December 2025, the Executive noted our comments but, disappointingly, did not agree to the proposed amendments.

- Finally, we were provided with a proposed mechanism for adding new properties to the **Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)** list, together with a list of long-term empty properties to be prioritised for compulsory purchase.

  We noted that the proposed actions align with the Empty Homes Strategy. Along with supporting the proposed options for acquired properties, the Committee was happy to recommend that the Executive approve the mechanism for adding new properties to the CPO priority action list as issues arise. We also recommended that the Executive agree to receive individual reports for each property proposed for compulsory purchase, including a statement of reasons.

  These recommendations were agreed by the Executive at its meeting on 17th December 2025.

- At our final meeting of the municipal year, held on 10th March, we carried out a review of the work being undertaken by the Pendle Community Safety Partnership (CSP). This was done in our role as the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee.

  We were pleased to welcome Inspector Rob Grey and Councillor D. Whipp, the Chair of the Pendle CSP to the meeting as representatives of the Partnership, as well as the Council's Community Safety Officer and Head of Policy and Commissioning.

  Together with a detailed report, and answers to our questions, we learnt of the valuable work carried out by the responsible authorities and other organisations within the Partnership.

  As a committee we feel it's important that the Partnership's achievements are promoted to the wider public. We have therefore recommended this as a course of action.

  If you would like to learn more about the achievements, together with the Partnership's priorities for 2025-28, you can do so by viewing its Strategy on the Council's website via the following link –
  https://www.pendle.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/3543/overview_and_scrutiny_committee

You may recall that, in my last update, I reported that we had agreed to add a general review on asset transfers to our work programme, should Local Government Reorganisation timescales allow. As things are moving forward with the asset transfer process, we have agreed that the proposed review is no longer necessary.

This means that we have now completed our work programme for 2025/2026.

Councillor Chris Church
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
12th March 2026