

Minutes of **Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Empty Properties**

Meeting date **Thursday, 22 June 2023**

Committee Members present: Councillor Sarah Ainsworth (Chair), Councillor Michelle Le Marinel (Vice-Chair) and Councillors June Molyneaux, Dedrah Moss and Kim Snape

Other Members: Councillors Terry Howarth and Alistair Morwood

Officers: Adele Hayes (Head of Planning and Enforcement), Nathan Howson (Enforcement Team Leader (Licensing)) and Matthew Pawlyszyn (Democratic and Member Services Officer),

Apologies: Councillors Aaron Beaver, Arjun Singh and Ryan Towers

A video recording of the public session of this meeting is available to view on [YouTube](#)

11 Declaration of Any Interests

No interests were declared.

12 Minutes of Meeting Tuesday, 14 March 2023

Resolved: That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

13 Discussion with Executive Member for Homes and Housing and Executive Member for Planning and Development

The Task Group welcomed Executive Member for Homes and Housing Councillor Terry Howarth and Executive Member for Planning and Development Councillor Alistair Morwood.

Discussions included the placement of empty properties within the organisational structure, currently it was under the portfolio of Planning and Development, and under the Head of Planning and Enforcement. Arguments and considerations were made that it would be more suitable under housing.

Members and the Executive Members discussed the potential of a dedicated officer for Empty Properties, and what the role could look like. It was uncertain if additional responsibilities be added to an established role, a creation of a new part time position, or a post shared with South Ribble would occur.

Members acknowledged that comparably to other Borough and District Councils, the number of long term empty properties was quite low, but there was the belief that the

targets achieved was through a number of easy wins and gave the view that expectations were being met. Members felt that tangible action, be it through communication or enforcement encouraged a resolution to outstanding issues, especially if the owner of the long term property was not aware of the properties condition and impact.

Members wished to see the process more streamlined and open, an example was of a tangible flowchart or pattern of work to highlight the process, which would enable further positive outcomes.

Members would like to see long-term empty properties reverted back into use, or as part of the council's portfolio of properties. Members highlighted Preston City Council's partnership with Community Gateway to resolve the number of empty properties in the city and would be welcoming of similar cooperation with partners.

It was reiterated that most long-term empty properties were cleared, renovated, sold or turned around within 2 to 4 years. It was the properties that caused or attracted anti-social behaviour or the properties that fell into disrepair that were the target of enforcement by the council.

The use of Compulsory Purchase Orders were considered to be a legal and logistical nightmare and not favoured due to the cost to obtain the property and then the cost to repair and manage the property until it could be sold or rented. The requirement to enact a CPO required more than it just being empty.

14 Final Report Discussion

Members of the Task Group went through the Final Reports making the final amendments to the document and the final recommendations, ahead of the document going for approval at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Cabinet.

Chair

Date