

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Empty Properties

Tuesday, 14th March 2023, 6.30 pm
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Chorley

Agenda

Apologies

1 **Declaration of Any Interests**

Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any pecuniary interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda.

If you have a pecuniary interest you must withdraw from the meeting. Normally you should leave the room before the business starts to be discussed. You do, however, have the same right to speak as a member of the public and may remain in the room to enable you to exercise that right and then leave immediately. In either case you must not seek to improperly influence a decision on the matter.

2 **Minutes of Meeting Wednesday, 14 December 2022**

(Pages 3 - 6)

3 **Scoping the Review**

(Pages 7 - 10)

To receive, consider, amend, and approve the Task Group Scope document.

4 **Update from Other Local Authorities and Their Empty Properties**

Democratic and Member Services Officer, Matthew Pawlyszyn to provide a brief update from other Local Authorities and their empty properties.

5 **Discussion from the World Cafe Event and Conversations with Officers**

Members to discuss and highlight information learnt from the World Café Event and conversations with Officers in relation to empty properties.

Chris Sinnott
Chief Executive

Electronic agendas sent to Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Empty Properties Councillor Sarah Ainsworth (Chair), Councillor Michelle Le Marinel (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Aaron Beaver, June Molyneaux, Dedrah Moss, James Nevett, Arjun Singh, Kim Snape and Ryan Towers.

Meeting contact Matthew Pawlyszyn (matthew.pawlyszyn@chorley.gov.uk)

If you need this information in a different format, such as larger print or translation, please get in touch on 515151 or chorley.gov.uk



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

Meeting date **Wednesday, 14 December 2022**

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

Committee Members present virtually (non-voting): Councillors Aaron Beaver

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

Apologies: Councillor Arjun Singh

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

1 Appointment of Chair

Resolved: It was agreed unanimously that Councillor Sarah Ainsworth be appointed Chair of the Task Group, and Councillor Michelle Le Marinel be appointed Vice Chair.

2 Declarations of Any Interests

No interests were declared.

3 Background Information - Empty Properties

The Task Group welcomed Adele Hayes, Head of Planning and Enforcement, and Nathan Howson Enforcement Team Leader (Licensing) to provide background information on empty properties in the borough.

The definition of empty property according to Chorley Council was a property that was empty for a period of two years or longer.

Chorley Council's Empty Properties Policy was introduced in 2015.

In 2017, empty properties was placed under enforcement with Planning, Building Control, and Licensing. Due to the change in its placement within the organisational structure, the role of Empty Properties Officer covered both empty properties and licensing. The post became vacant May 2021 and due to the specialism required for the role, the decision was made not to fill the position.

Since the vacancy in the post, there had been no active enforcement of empty properties in the borough.

The yearly average empty property number in Chorley

2017 - 156

2018 - 151

2019 - 142

2020 - 152

2021 - 157

2022 - between 101 and 132

There were several reasons as to why properties were empty, these included but were not limited to

- Death of the owner
- Issues relating to inheritance and drawn out legal issues
- The owner had left the property and entered care
- Financial issues with the cost of repair and upkeep
- Personal issues of owners
- Difficulties locating the owner

A full breakdown of the length of empty properties to be provided to the Membership as of the time of the meeting,

55 properties in the borough had been empty between 2 and 5 years.

25 properties in the borough had been empty between 5 and 10 years.

29 properties in the borough had been empty for more than 10 years.

Members had raised that they were aware of empty and derelict properties that had been empty for over 50 years but were not recorded.

The Council, like many other across the country actively discourage properties remaining empty with an increase in council tax dependent on the time empty, with a 300% council tax charge for properties empty for more than 10 years.

It was highlighted that Chorley did not have a problem with empty properties, however it could be said that it had a small number of problem empty properties.

The Task Group were informed that there were paths of enforcement that was available to the council, but action was expensive and a long process. The council preferred to work positively and to cooperate with the owner of an empty property to bring the property back to use.

Resolved: The update was noted.

4 Scoping of the Review

Members of the Task Group considered the scope of the inquiry and discussed objectives, outcome, and potential choice of internal and external partners to engage with.

After consideration, Members agreed that the Task Group would only focus on residential empty properties.

Members agreed that it would be positive to engage other local authorities and partners such as Select Move to understand actions taken with empty properties.

Members believed that it would be worthwhile to engage the Executive Member for Planning and Development, of which portfolio contained empty properties, in addition to officers throughout the council that deal with or encounter empty properties in their roles.

The scoping document would be formulated by officers in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair and would be distributed amongst the Task Group for comments, amendments or additional information to be added at the next meeting.

5 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is still to be confirmed.

Chair

Date

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Scrutiny Inquiry Project Outline

Overview and Scrutiny Inquiry Project Outline

Review Topic:

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Empty Properties

Objectives:

- To gain a greater understanding of empty properties, the definition used, and powers available to the council.
- To understand the number of empty properties within Chorley and how it compares to other neighbouring borough councils.
- To ensure that the council is fulfilling its required duties and exercising best practice.

Desired Outcomes:

- To be updated on the number of empty properties in the borough. The definition the council used to classify empty properties and to understand what powers the council has in relation to empty properties, and the circumstances required for powers to be exercised.
- To understand the position of Chorley Council in respect of the number of empty properties in the borough.
- To understand the process of empty properties in Chorley, and to understand how each department in the is involved with empty properties.

Terms of Reference:

To understand how the council handles empty properties in the borough.

To establish if there is anything that the council could do to improve its empty property figures and understand the resources that will be needed.

To develop recommendations to Executive Cabinet on how the council can make improvements.

Equality and diversity implications:

Rurality
Identify how our geography may effect influencing changes

Risks:

- Managing expectations of Member and the public
- Whether stakeholders will want to engage, if so, work must be conducted in a positive way to avoid any long-lasting damage to any working relationships.
- Scope creep – the Task Group must focus on achievable goals.

Venue(s):

Town Hall, Market Street, Chorley.

Chair: Councillor Sarah Ainsworth

Vice-Chair: Councillor Michelle Le Marinel

Timescale:

Start: December 2022

Finish: March 2023

Information Requirements and Sources:**Documents/evidence:** (what/why?)

- Chorley Council's Empty Properties Policy
- Feedback from other local authorities in relation to their number of empty properties, their definition.

Witnesses: (who, why?)

- Adele Hayes – Head of Planning and Enforcement
- Nathan Howson – Enforcement Team Leader (Licensing)
- Councillor Alistair Morwood – Executive Member for Planning and Development
- Neighbouring Borough/District Councils
- Chorley Borough Council Officers involved with empty properties (via World Café Event)
 - Licensing and Enforcement,
 - Legal
 - Customer Services, Revenue and Benefits
 - Housing -
 - Environmental Health

Consultation/Research: (what, why, who?)

- Research to be completed into other borough councils that have completed similar task groups exploring empty properties.

Site Visits: (where, why, when?)

Officer Support:

Lead Officer: Adele Hayes

Democratic and Member Services Officer: Matthew Pawlyszyn

Likely Budget Requirements:

<u>Purpose</u>	£
Total	_____

Target Body¹ for Findings/Recommendations **Executive Cabinet**

(Eg Executive Cabinet, Council, partner)

¹ All project outcomes require the approval of Overview and Scrutiny Committee before progressing



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