

**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