

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	
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Report of:	Andrew Humble – Dir. of Finance and Transformation (s151 Off.) Richard Horniman – Dir. of Regeneration Geoff Field – Dir. of Environment and Community Services
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Relevant Executive Member:	Cllr Nicky Walker - Executive Member for Finance Cllr Theo Furness - Executive Member for Development Cllr Peter Gavigan Executive Member for Environment and Sustainability
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Submitted to:	Executive
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Date:	3 December 2025
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Title:	Final Report of the Place Scrutiny Panel - Empty Properties
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Report for:	Decision
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Status:	Public
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Council Plan priority:	A successful and ambitious town
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Key decision:	No
Why:	Decision does not reach the threshold to be a key decision

Subject to call in?	Yes
Why:	Non-Urgent Report

Proposed decision(s)	
That Executive:	
• APPROVES the Empty Properties Action Plan at Appendix 1. • NOTES the additional demand on resource and cross-departmental collaboration required for successful delivery.	

Executive summary	
This report seeks approval for the response and actions proposed following receipt of recommendations referred to the Executive by the Overview and Scrutiny Board at a meeting on 30 July 2025 aimed at reducing the number of empty properties across the borough. The recommendations are designed to enhance housing availability, mitigate urban decline, and contribute to broader regeneration objectives. Not all of the recommendations are to be taken forward, at least initially, as the objectives overall	

would not be served and the action suggested could be counter-productive to existing service delivery.

The implications of the proposed recommendations have been thoroughly assessed by relevant Council officers and are outlined in detail within the Action Plan at Appendix 1.

Purpose of this report and its contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions

1.1 This report references the findings and recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel review of empty properties and sets out an Action Plan for approval, in response.

1.2 It contributes to the Council Plan ambitions by supporting housing regeneration, improving neighbourhoods, and encouraging investment in the local area.

Our ambitions	Summary of how this report will support delivery of these ambitions and the underpinning aims
A successful and ambitious town	• <i>Supports regeneration by bringing long-term empty properties back into productive use.</i> • <i>Enhances housing availability to meet local demand and attract inward investment.</i> • <i>Contributes to neighbourhood renewal, improving the town's appeal to residents and businesses.</i>
A healthy Place	• <i>Reduces urban blight and improves environmental quality through reuse and regeneration.</i> • <i>Promotes healthier living environments by tackling dereliction and associated anti-social behaviour.</i> • <i>Encourages inclusive growth by addressing housing inequality.</i>
Safe and resilient communities	• <i>Improves community safety by reducing the prevalence of neglected and unsecured properties.</i> • <i>Enables better use of enforcement powers to address unsafe or problematic buildings.</i> • <i>Supports temporary accommodation solutions for vulnerable residents, including care leavers.</i>
Delivering best value	• <i>Maximises council tax recovery and reduces financial losses associated with long-term vacancies.</i> • <i>Aligns with strategic housing objectives and ensures efficient use of existing resources.</i> • <i>Encourages cross-departmental collaboration to deliver sustainable outcomes.</i>

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Executive:

APPROVES the Empty Properties Action Plan at Appendix 1.

NOTES the additional demand on resource and cross-departmental collaboration required for successful delivery.

3. Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

3.1 The Place Scrutiny Panel's review of the Empty Properties Strategy resulted in a series of recommendations requiring formal consideration. In response, a comprehensive Action Plan has been developed, outlining proposed measures that now require Executive approval to proceed.

3.2 The recommendations of this report are underpinned by the strategic imperative to address the growing number of long-term empty properties, which adversely affect housing supply, neighbourhood vitality, and the Council's financial resilience. The proposed actions are designed to promote reoccupation and align with broader housing and regeneration objectives.

3.3 Properties that remain vacant for extended periods contribute to reduced housing availability and can adversely affect the Council's financial position. In the absence of targeted intervention, the Council faces the risk of continued financial losses and missed opportunities to revitalise neighbourhoods and increase the supply of available housing.

4. Background and relevant information

4.1 In 2024, the Place Scrutiny Panel initiated a review of long-term empty properties in response to growing concerns regarding the increasing number of vacant residential and commercial buildings across the borough. These properties were identified as contributing to neighbourhood decline and reducing the availability of housing.

Accordingly, the Panel established the following Terms of Reference:

- To understand the current position with regard to empty domestic and commercial properties in Middlesbrough and the efforts the Council is making to address the various associated issues.
- To investigate the Council's responsibilities and enforcement powers in respect of empty properties.
- To investigate what work has been undertaken with third party providers to refurbish and re-let empty properties.
- To investigate what work has been undertaken to bring empty commercial properties back into use.

- 4.2 The review was informed by cross-service collaboration, drawing on evidence and expertise from officers within Resident and Business Support, Enforcement, Legal, and Regeneration. This multi-disciplinary approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with long-term empty properties.
- 4.3 The review culminated in a series of draft recommendations aimed at enhancing the Council's strategic and operational capacity to manage and reduce the number of empty properties.
- 4.4 The findings and draft recommendations were considered, endorsed and referred to the Executive by the Overview and Scrutiny Board at a meeting on 30 July 2025.
- 4.5 Prior to submission, the recommendations were subject to detailed review by relevant service areas. This process informed the development of a robust Action Plan, which sets out a coordinated response and provides a framework for implementation, subject to Executive approval.

5. Ward Member Engagement if relevant and appropriate

- 5.1 Ward members have not yet been formally engaged or invited to review the responses set out in the Action Plan, beyond their initial contributions to the development of the Place Scrutiny Panel report. Further engagement with ward members will be explored during the implementation phase to ensure the Action Plan remains aligned with local priorities.

6. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended

- 6.1 The rationale for adopting alternative approaches in certain instances has been detailed within the action plan.

7. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

The recommended actions are expected to deliver improvements in neighbourhood conditions, expand the availability of housing, and generate additional revenue for the Council through increased council tax contributions. It is acknowledged that implementation may have resource implications, which will be subject to further detailed assessment.

Topic	Impact
Financial (including procurement and Social Value)	The initiative presents opportunities to deliver Social Value through the regeneration and productive reuse of long-term vacant properties, contributing to broader community and economic development objectives. As far as can be determined, the actions required can be delivered within existing resources and without a requirement for procurement.

Legal	Increased use of enforcement powers (e.g., CPOs, Demolition Orders) will require legal oversight and compliance with statutory frameworks. Policy changes may require formal approval and consultation.
Risk	These may include • legal challenges from property owners • reputational, if enforcement is perceived as unfair • financial, if sums billed are not collected • operational, if resources are insufficient to deliver actions.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	Actions must be compliant with equality duties and human rights legislation. Reuse of properties may support community cohesion by reducing blight and improving neighbourhoods.
Reducing Poverty	Bringing properties back into use may increase access to affordable housing and temporary accommodation, supporting vulnerable groups and reducing housing-related poverty.
Climate Change / Environmental	Reuse and regeneration of existing buildings can reduce environmental impact compared to new builds. Demolition and redevelopment must consider sustainability and waste management.
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	Improved access to housing, including temporary accommodation, may benefit care leavers and young people in need of stable living arrangements.
Data Protection	Data matching and property intelligence must comply with data protection regulations, including secure handling of personal and property-related information.

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Subject to formal approval, the proposed actions will be incorporated into the Housing Transformation Programme. Responsibility for leading and coordinating delivery will rest with Resident & Business Support. Progress will be monitored through established governance mechanisms to ensure alignment with strategic objectives and accountability for outcomes.

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Implement the Empty Property Action Plan	As set out in the Action Plan	As set out in the Action Plan

Appendices

1	Empty Properties Action Plan
2	

Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
Overview and Scrutiny Board (Item 25/14)	Final Report of the Place Scrutiny Panel - Empty Properties	30 July 2025

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