

**PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL
EMPTY PROPERTIES**

SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION	PROPOSED ACTION	POST TITLE	BUDGET COST	TIMESCALE
A) Introduce a charge of 100% Empty Property Council Tax Premium after year 1 instead of year 2 which it is currently.	Action/Response: The Executive welcomes any ideas and suggestions that could bring empty properties back in to use and whilst this is an option that the Council could consider, the preference would be to embed the empty property strategy and associated actions, tracking the impact prior to making any further changes. By doing so, provides the service with an opportunity to track each individual improvement as it is introduced. Actions linked to the strategy (this list is not exhaustive). • Explore opportunities for private leasing scheme, tenant finder schemes and social letting. • Explore partnership working with local registered providers. • Develop links with internal and external agencies, letting agents and responsible landlords. • Progress with enforcement options, such as CPO, Empty Dwelling Management Orders and Enforced Sales, Charging Orders.	Head of Resident & Business Support		Review by 30 December 2026

	Once embedded the service intends to review the effectiveness/gaps balanced against the resource/level of impact to determine appropriate next steps that would support a reduction in empty properties, one of which may lead to a review of the empty property premium. Maintaining the current two-year period at this time remains the most balanced and pragmatic approach to achieving the intended policy outcomes. Evidence suggests that an increased charge does not necessarily lead to re-occupation, rather the reliance on other Council Tax Legislation means the premium can't always be applied. Furthermore, whenever a premium charge is to end or be removed an inspection is carried out to confirm circumstances and, though the additional dwellings involved would amount to less than 20% of the total that are empty, the resource required to continue to verify occupation or furnishing would likely incur additional cost.			
B) Impose the maximum premium for properties which have been empty for 10 years or more.	Action/Response:			

	The Executive welcomes any suggestions that could bring more properties back into use and has considered options around long term empty properties, however they tend to be very complex and changing this aspect of the current approach is unlikely to yield the desired outcome. The Council is continuing to review all options as part of its 'new' Empty Property Strategy and would be happy to reconsider this option once the strategy has been embedded and the Council understands its effectiveness and gaps (see item A above for the extended rationale).	Head of Resident & Business Support		Review by 30 December 2026
C) Ensure that all enforcement powers available to the Council such as Completion Notices and Demolition Orders in relation to empty properties are utilised where appropriate and justify any failure to do so.	Action/Response: Use of Completion Notices for new-build properties is already embedded within the Investigations team's standard operating procedures. Enforcement powers are applied/used based on circumstances/suitability and on a case-by-case basis Whilst Demolition Orders are a power that already exists this power carries limitations to such situations like Category 1 Hazards, examples of which are structural collapse, asbestos, explosions, and situations	Strategic Business Manager/ Investigations and Enforcement Operations Manager	Within existing resources	Continuing

	that can lead to serious injury, although this list is not exhaustive. A combined list of powers already exists. Cases are assessed to determine the most suitable course of action/intended outcome and progressed accordingly. (Also see item F below).			
D) Produce a database of derelict empty properties and report annually to the Executive and/or the Place Scrutiny Panel.	Action/Response: To develop a report for presentation to the Executive and/or Place Scrutiny Panel, summarising insights from the Information which is held. Information is held in multiple systems. A dashboard will be developed using Power BI, to summarise the current position into one central point. This is a future planned enhancement and is an action within the Empty Property Action Plan.	Head of Resident and Business Support Investigations and Enforcement Operations Manager/Head of Neighbourhoods/ Head of Strategic Housing.	Within existing resources	31 August 2026
E) Review empty properties across the town by carrying out data matching using the electoral register, council tax list and business rate list.	Action/Response: The Executive welcomes all suggestions of options for use of data to improve outcomes. The Council's Customer theme within the Transformation Programme is exploring improved use of data to achieve better outcomes, which			

	includes this element through the single use of data. At this time, the Service already uses a more accurate data set which is contained within the NEC system. Note: A further enhancement to this action is a key project within the Customer Transformation Programme - 'single view of the customer'. This is an emerging project that will gather information to form a single view, negating the need for residents to engage/report/inform the Council multiple times. It is intended that this project will strengthen data matching opportunities.			
F) Make greater use of Compulsory Purchase Orders for residential properties and smaller commercial properties such as small shops below flats. For commercial properties investigate schemes such as the High Street Rental Auctions scheme.	Action/Response: There are many enforcement powers/tools available to and used by the Council to undertake enforcement linked to bringing properties back into use. CPOs and the auction scheme are two of the many tools that can be used (Empty Property Strategy Enforcement Powers). Enforcement powers are assigned on suitability of circumstance and on a case-by-case basis to ensure the best possible outcome and with a clear focus on reducing the number of empty	Strategic Business Manager – Resident & Business Support	Within existing resources	Continuing

	properties. Nb. OSB were informed that should the Council acquire properties through a compulsory purchase order, the responsibility of the property falls to the Local Authority as does any risk, repairs, payment of Council Tax or Business Rates, therefore it is important that the powers given to the Local Authority are used appropriately and provide the intended outcome. The support of the scrutiny panel was welcomed when this was considered by the panel some time ago and the service have already implemented changes to support this recommendation prior to this being formalised. As the recommendation has already been implemented and noting this will continue to evolve and reviewed by officers it is proposed that this recommendation be closed.			
G) Explore how the Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme can be made into less of a deterrent to letting out empty properties, by allowing landlords to pay the Selective Landlord License fee over 60 monthly payments instead of up front. Also by providing a waiver of future	Action/Response: Fees charged are less than council tax demanded on empty dwellings and this should be an incentive of itself to let. The Selective Landlord License fee covers the cost of administering the scheme e.g. issuing licences and the			

payments if the landlord sells the property.	enforcement of licence conditions, housing standards and reducing ASB associated with rented properties. The fee is calculated on the salary, administration, training and legal costs required to deliver the scheme. The owners of all private rented properties in the scheme's area are required to pay the fee when the scheme commences. The fee is split into two equal payments. The initial payment is 50% of the fee which covers the cost of processing their application and the initial administration of the scheme. The second fee payment covers the ongoing administration and enforcement of the scheme: inspection visits, collation of documentation, and enforcing ASB and Housing Act legislation. This second payment can be paid by instalments over a period of between 3 and 12 months depending on the number of properties being licensed. Allowing owners to pay over a longer time period such as 60 months could make it difficult to manage the budget and ensure that the income is achieved to cover the cost of the scheme. There is a greater risk that owners would default on their payments and there would be additional resource costs in ensuring that all the payments are up to date. Considerable input is already			
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	put into ensuring properties are licensed and recovering unpaid part fees would become an enforcement matter which would require additional resource and could divert officers from the delivery of the scheme. If the income is not achieved to cover the cost of the scheme, then this will become a pressure on the Council's budget.			
H) Encourage Social Housing Providers to demolish uneconomical properties that cannot be brought back into use or encourage them to sell to other developers or owner occupiers and to reinvest any money generated into their current stock.	Action/Response: Engage with registered providers to facilitate discussions and contribute to the development of formal guidance concerning asset disposal and reinvestment. This is one of the actions contained in the Empty Property Action Plan – see item A above.	Head of Strategic Housing	Within existing resources	31 March 2027
I) Investigate if CPOs can be issued for unsafe buildings so that they can be demolished by the Council and associated costs passed onto the owner.	Action/Response: Work collaboratively to reflect on relevant legal and safety considerations and explore potential approaches for addressing concerns around unsafe properties.	Head of Strategic Housing	Within existing resources	30 June 2026
J) Explore ways of getting long-term empty properties back into use through affordable rents/full market rents or owner occupation as well as social rent.	Action/Response: Identify and develop pathways and incentives to support reuse across different tenure types	Head of Strategic Housing	Within existing resources	30 September 2026
K) Investigate if empty social housing properties that are difficult to let could be	Action/Response:	Head of Strategic Housing	Within existing resources	31 March 2026

used by the council to provide temporary accommodation.	Engage with RPs to explore suitability of properties for temporary accommodation use			
L) Explore all possible channels of funding and work with more developers, social housing providers and private landlords to bring empty properties back into use, including office to residential conversions.	Action/Response: Map potential funding sources and foster collaborative opportunities with relevant stakeholders	Head of Strategic Housing	Within existing resources	31 March 2026
M) Explore alternative ways of dealing with non-residential empty properties that have been taken out of the rateable value ratings where the owner shows no intention of developing the property. Seek to ask Government to change rules on the rating system so not to be exploited/abused by landlords.	Action/Response: Review broader policy themes and identify any areas that may benefit from further dialogue or external engagement, whilst also continuing with discussions with the Valuation Office Agency who are responsible for the rating list. For Government changes, this will likely fall to Executive who may wish to consider any representation they would want to make to Central Government regarding this point.	Head of Resident & Business Support	Within existing resources	30 June 2026