



Empty Homes Strategy

2026-2030

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

This document sets out Wyre Council's approach to tackling empty homes in the borough for the next four years. This is an important issue for the Council, as an empty property is a wasted resource which, in an area of high housing demand, could be better utilised by providing someone with a place to live.

In certain cases, without intervention, empty properties can deteriorate and have a negative impact on the local area. Empty homes can often act as a focus for anti-social behaviour and criminal activities, and this combined with disrepair and pest infestations can affect neighbouring property values and a community's sense of well-being, along with discouraging private investment in the area.

The former strategy aligned with the Fylde Coast Housing Strategy (2009) which identified tackling empty homes as a way of maximising the supply of housing within the borough and improving housing choice for residents. Whilst the latest Housing Needs Evidence (2024) does not identify empty homes in the report as a way of maximising supply, with the ongoing housing pressures nationally and recent planning policy changes to increase house building, bringing empty homes back into use will inevitably add to the supply and make a significant improvement to the Boroughs neighbourhoods and communities.

This strategy aligns with Wyre Council's vision of the Council Plan 2024-2028. "Wyre is a place where everyone can prosper. We want everyone in Wyre to have access to jobs and share the benefits of economic growth; live in thriving, safe, more environmentally sustainable and welcoming communities; and be healthier and independent for longer."

The strategy will also show how it is linked to other Council Strategies and how it fits in with National and Regional policies.

This Empty Homes Strategy will:

- set out the current situation with empty properties in Wyre.
- outline which empty properties will be prioritised.
- explain what action will be taken to deal with long-term empty properties.

1.2 Definition of an Empty Property

In any property market there will always be some properties which are empty for relatively short periods of time. This may be because they are rental properties which are awaiting new tenants or owner-occupied properties which are for sale and where the owner has already moved out. A number of vacant properties, typically accepted as between 2 and 3.5%, are necessary for the smooth functioning of the housing market otherwise it would be difficult

for people to move home. Properties that have been empty for relatively short periods of time should not, therefore, be of concern.

The Government defines long-term empty properties as homes that have been empty for over 6 months. Many homes become vacant for extended periods due to several reasons, such as:

- delays in selling on the open market;
- health issues of the owner;
- renovations taking longer than planned;
- delays or disputes with probate;
- relationship breakdowns or family disputes;
- abandonment, repossession or bankruptcy;
- inexperienced or irresponsible proprietorship;
- a property being kept as a financial investment; and
- a property being retained for sentimental reasons.

For reporting purposes, it is accepted that Council Tax records offer the easiest calculable estimate of numbers of empty homes by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It is important to note that some homes are not included in these statistics, namely uninhabitable homes (homes in very poor condition can be excluded from Council Tax) and homes due for demolition. There are unused flats above shops with no residential planning use class, and these properties pay business rates instead. Similarly, second home furnished properties (such as holiday accommodation) are reported separately.

In 2025, Council Tax data reported the number of empty homes in England at 754,264 however in 2021 the Office for National Statistics counted the number of empty properties in England from the Census as 1,352,120, nearly double that of the Council Tax data.

2. Policy Context

2.1 National Context

The current national context for housing in England, is very much focused on social and affordable homes and building new homes. However historically empty homes have been one of the Government's policy priorities. Chapter 5 of the Government's 2011 Housing Strategy [Laying the foundations: a housing strategy for England - GOV.UK](#), sets out its strategy in relation to empty homes. The strategy states the Government's commitment to bringing empty homes back into use as a sustainable way of increasing the overall supply of housing and reducing the negative impact that neglected empty homes can have on communities.

Central Government has:

- Invested £100m of funding to bring empty homes back into use and a further £50m of funding to tackle some of the worst concentrations of empty homes.

- Supported with Council Tax reforms in 2013, including the discretion to remove empty homes discounts and exemptions and the introduction of an Empty Homes Premium for properties that have been empty for 2 years or more.
- The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 strengthened council tax reforms by allowing local authorities to charge the Empty Homes Premium on properties left empty for 12 months or more, and by introducing a premium on some second homes.
- Provided additional guidance and advice in 2025 through the Empty Homes Officer Toolkit designed in partnership with the Empty Homes Network.

2.2 Regional and Sub Regional Context

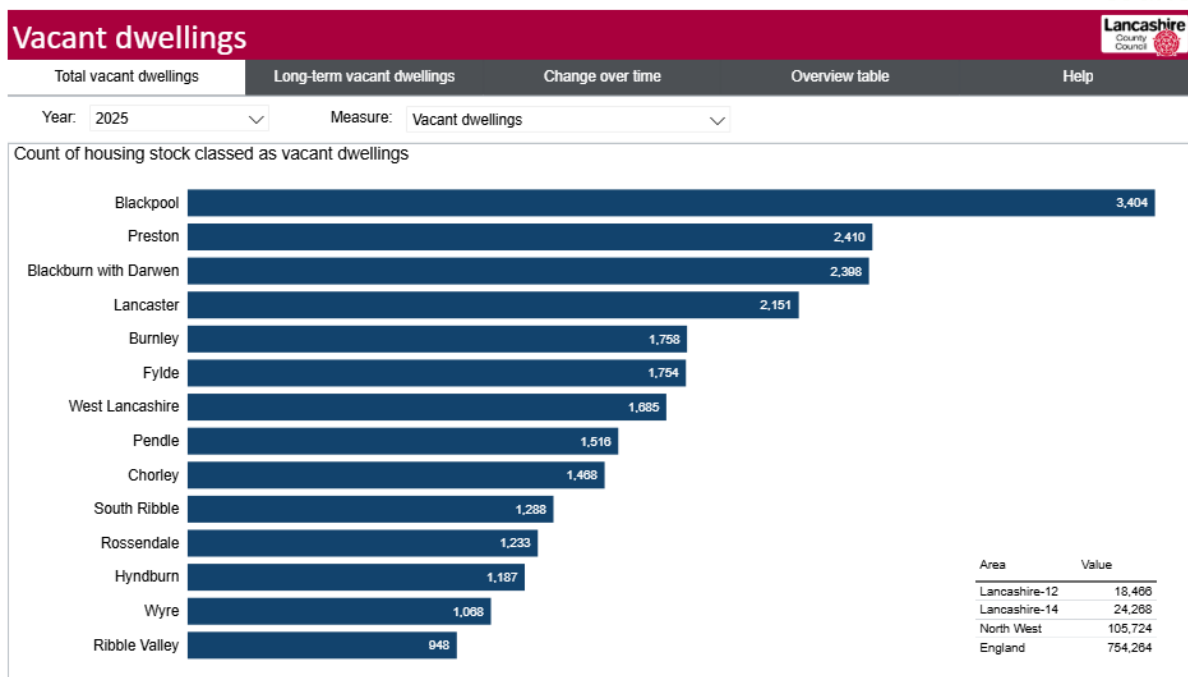
The 2009 North West Regional Housing Strategy and the Fylde Coast Housing Strategy 2009 highlighted the need to create balanced housing markets that support economic growth, strengthen social and economic inclusion and ensure that everyone has access to appropriate, well designed high quality, affordable housing in sustainable, mixed and vibrant communities. As well as achieving the right quantity of new housing these strategies also emphasise the importance of optimising the use of the existing stock and bringing empty homes back into use.

The Fylde Coast Strategic Housing Market Needs Assessment identified high levels of housing demand and need within the borough. To meet the need the assessment identified, the importance of making the best use of the existing housing stock. This included bringing empty homes back into use to increase the overall supply of housing. Bringing empty homes back into use also reduces the demand for new land for housing and its associated environmental impacts.

Whilst the updated Housing Needs Assessment for Wyre, completed in 2024, does not refer specifically to empty homes, the points identified in the 2009 strategy are still relevant as we know the government intends to increase the building of new homes and thus bringing empty homes back into use can only positively contribute to this objective.

Many authorities across Lancashire operate an empty homes strategy and it is very much seen as a priority for authorities in helping address the housing shortage.

The following table shows the count of the housing stock classed as a vacant dwelling across Lancashire, broken down by Local Authority.



Source: Vacant dwellings - Lancashire County Council

- In Lancashire-14 (the 14 local authorities within Lancashire), there were 24,268 vacant dwellings in 2025, of which 9,029 were classed as long-term vacant dwellings.
- Compared to the previous year, there was a 0.4% increase in the number of vacant dwellings in Lancashire-12 (England = 4.8%) in 2025.
- The percentage of vacant dwellings classed as long-term vacant was highest in Preston (44.1%), Pendle (42.2%), and West Lancashire (42.1%). These areas were above England (40.2%).
- As a proportion of the total dwelling stock, Blackpool, Burnley, Preston and Fylde had the highest percentages of vacant dwellings in 2024 at 4% or more of the total dwelling stock (England = 2.8%). Wyre had the lowest (1.6%).

3. Empty homes in Wyre

The following table shows data in relation to the number of households, population and dwellings including empty dwellings which have reduced from 2011 to 2025. .

It is likely that the Council's work on empty homes to date has contributed to this reduction.

Secondly, the introduction of a council tax premium on empty homes leaves the owners of empty homes reluctant to bring them to the Council's attention, whereas historically empty homeowners benefited from a short exemption. Whilst some empty homes do resolve themselves over time this should not be the position the authority takes, as during this period residents and communities

can suffer because of poorly maintained empty homes, it is clear work should be proactive and not just reactive.

Table 1: Wyre: Housing numbers

	2011	2025
Population	111,400	118,743
Number of households	49,906	53,600
Number of dwellings	50,073	56,208
Number of empty dwellings	1,984	1,068
Number of long-term empty dwellings	701	273

Source: Vacant dwellings - Lancashire County Council

Wyre's population is projected to increase by 21.2% between 2022 and 2047, compared with 12.0% across Lancashire-14 and 12.7% in England. The number of households is also expected to grow by 17.7% between 2018 and 2043, exceeding the projected increases for Lancashire-14 (12.3%) and England (16.2%). While the impact on empty homes is uncertain, rising housing demand may increase the need to bring them back into use.

4. Strategic Aims, Priorities and Objectives

The Council is committed to reducing the number of empty homes, a new Empty and Affordable Homes Officer have been in post since January 2026, and with the recently refreshed Council Plan there is a renewed focus on addressing empty homes.

In 2024 it was agreed by Cabinet that Section 106 affordable housing contributions would be used in the purchasing and renovations of long-term empty properties to convert them into affordable housing; for further information about this please see the Affordable Housing Delivery Programme (AHDP) [Affordable housing delivery programme – Wyre Council](#). With the AHDP in place, vacant homes identified through the proactive work of the dedicated empty homes officer can increase throughput to the AHD Programme and provide an additional option for empty homeowners.

Residents are encouraged to report any empty properties to the Council so that proactive work can be undertaken to address any negative impact the empty

home is having upon its neighbours and/or community. Information on Empty Homes can be found on the Council's website [Empty homes – Wyre Council](#).

By reducing the number of empty homes in Wyre we aim to:

1. Improve our local environmental quality by:

- improving the visual amenity of our neighbourhoods
- reducing anti-social behaviour and crime
- encouraging investment in the housing stock
- improving community pride

2. Increase opportunities for people in housing need by:

- increasing available housing stock
- creating more affordable housing
- providing a greater choice of housing
- improving the standard of housing

3. Help the owners of these properties to benefit through

- increased rental incomes or sale proceeds
- improved security of property

4. Benefit the local economy and wider community through

- reduced demand on services – fire/policing/local authorities
- reduced demand for building new housing stock

The action plan in the next section of this document identifies the ways in which we will achieve this.

5. Action plan

5.1 Prioritisation of Empty Homes

Having regard to the scale of the problem in Wyre, the enforcement options available and the most effective use of the Council's resources, our initial attention will focus on homes identified as having been empty for two or more years.

Data and intelligence of empty homes from across Council service areas will be collated. A scoring system will be used to prioritise these homes for enforcement action following their inspection. The scoring system considers issues such as the condition of the home, if there have been complaints, if the property presents a problem to the amenity of its neighbourhood or to the condition of neighbouring properties. It also considers if there is evidence of anti-social behaviour, vandalism or arson.

A database will be maintained to provide information on the reasons why the home is empty, determine what obstacles exist to bringing the home back into use, and to identify possible solutions. To do this we will collect specific information on:

- who owns the property
- why the property is empty
- how long it's been empty
- the type of property
- the condition of the property
- action required to be taken to bring the property back into use

This will allow targeted action to be taken to monitor and deal with different types of empty properties in the borough. This will also help when considering possible enforcement action on a property as it will enable a history to be recorded and so help justify possible enforcement intervention.

Cross departmental working will be vital to ensure empty properties are brought back into use and as such we will continue to collaboratively work with colleagues in departments such as Council Tax, Legal Services, Planning Enforcement, Housing, Building Control and Environmental Protection.

We will also seek to address non-residential premises, such as empty commercial buildings where appropriate. We will do this by engaging with our Economic Development team who are currently undertaking a project called the 'Vacant Shops Academy' to identify potential buildings that are having a negative impact upon our communities.

5.2 Encouraging owners to bring empty homes back into use

Where empty homes have been identified, the Council's Empty and Affordable Homes Officer will initially seek to work informally with owners. Information and advice will be made available to the owners to encourage them to return the property back to use. There are several ways in which we hope to achieve this, namely by:

- Identifying and encouraging empty homeowners to bring their properties back into use voluntarily, either by selling, letting or living in it themselves;
- Acquiring empty buildings through the Section 106 Affordable Housing Delivery Programme [Affordable Housing Delivery Programme – Wyre Council \(AHDP\)](#);
- Identifying other potential buyers and developers who may wish to purchase empty properties to create a matching service;
- Working with Registered Providers to determine if they would be willing to increase their portfolio by taking on empty properties alongside the AHDP; and
- Identifying sources of funding opportunities that empty building owners may be able to access, for instance working with our conservation officer to identify funding for buildings which have heritage value.

5.3 Bringing problematic empty homes back into use through enforcement action

The Council will always strive to engage and support owners to address any issues an empty building is causing before enforcement action is taken. However, in cases where negotiation with an owner fails to return a home back in to use or, where the Council has a duty to act due to the property falling into disrepair or is attracting anti-social behaviour, there are several enforcement options available to the Council.

The table below summarises the legislation and powers which enable the Council to take action to resolve the problems the empty property is causing. These range in severity and complexity but could result in the Council taking control or ownership of the property.

The powers below may enable the Council to complete works in default where necessary to rectify the issues that a premises is causing. If the Council completes works in default a charge may be levied onto the property and/or land which could result in further enforcement action being taken to recover the debt.

Problem	Legislation	Power Granted
Dangerous buildings or structures	Building Act 1984 ss77 and 78	To require the owner to make the property safe (Section 77) or enable the Local Authority to take emergency action to make the building safe (Section 78).
	Housing Act 2004 Part I	Under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System local authorities can evaluate the potential risks to health and safety arising from deficiencies within properties and take appropriate enforcement action.
Unsecured properties (where it poses the risk that it may be entered or suffer vandalism, arson or similar)	Building Act 1984, s78	To allow the Local Authority to fence off the property.
	Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, s29	To require the owner to take steps to secure a property or allow the Local Authority to board it up in an emergency.

Blocked or defective drainage or private sewers	Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, s35	To require the owner to address obstructed private sewers.
	Building Act 1984, s59	To require the owner to address blocked or defective drainage.
	Public Health Act 1961, s17	To require the owner to address defective drainage or private sewers.
Vermin (where it is either present or there is a risk of attracting vermin that may detrimentally affect people's health)	Public Health Act 1961, s34 Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, s4 Public Health Act 1936, s83 Environmental Protection Act 1990, s80. Building Act 1984, s76	To require the owner to remove waste so that vermin is not attracted to the site
Unsightly land and property affecting the amenity of an area	Public Health Act 1961, s34	To require the owner to remove waste from the property.
	Town and Country Planning Act 1990, s215	To require the owner to take steps to address a land and property adversely affecting the amenity of an area through its disrepair.
	Building Act 1984, s79	To require the owner to address unsightly land or the external appearance of a property

Table 2 Enforcement options available to the Council to address empty homes

5.4 Enforced Sale

Enforced sale of an empty property can be carried out under Section 103 of the Law of Property Act 1925. It enables a Local Authority to force the sale of a property which has a local land charge, or charging order on it for money owed, for example, for works carried out by the Council in default following the service of a statutory notice.

5.5 Compulsory Purchase

Under Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985, the Council has the power to acquire land and property compulsorily where an owner refuses to take action to bring the property back into use, where an owner cannot be traced or where a property has been empty for a long time and is causing a nuisance or is a danger to the public. There are several critical tests that must be applied and will be subject to challenge at any appeal inquiry. These include:

- that the Local Authority can demonstrate Housing Need. This can be demonstrated through the Housing Need Assessment;
- that repeated warnings have been given, and that the owner has failed to respond or make reasonable efforts to bring the property back into use;
- that the particular property is a high priority when compared to others. The authority must have considered the relative merit of taking such action in respect of other empty properties and be able to justify why this one has been selected; and
- that there is no reasonable expectation that the owner will bring the property back into use.

5.6 Empty Dwelling Management Orders

The Housing Act 2004 introduced powers to enable councils to take over the management of an empty dwelling. The legislation and qualifying criteria associated with the provision is complex, but in summary the council take over the running of the property, carry out repairs to bring it up to standard and then rent it out for a period of up to seven years, after which the property must be handed back together with any excess rent/monies received.

There are factors that would need to be considered before deciding to implement an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) as there can be significant financial exposure associated with their use.

5.7 Demolition Orders

Typically, this would be an option for end of terrace or detached properties that are in poor condition and beyond viable economic repair. The owner of the property would be ordered to demolish the property.

5.8 Collaborative working

To coordinate and monitor enforcement action on problematic empty homes, the Empty and Affordable Homes Officer will strengthen collaborative working by holding regular meetings between Officers from Housing Services, Planning Enforcement, Building Control, Council Tax, Legal Services and Neighbourhood Services.

5.9 Working with Council Tax

In April 2024 Wyre Council introduced the empty homes premium in line with the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, to charge the following:

- 100% premium on properties empty for at least one year;
- 200% premium on properties empty for at least 5 years, and;
- 300% premium on properties empty for at least 10 years.

As part of business as usual, we will engage with the Council Tax department to inform them of the findings in respect of our investigation of empty properties.

The Council Tax department will provide the Empty and Affordable Homes Officer a quarterly report of properties which are Class F exempt (properties that are unoccupied due to the owner passing away), to enable proactive work to be undertaken and ensure these properties do not become long term empties, as this is one of the most common reasons for properties laying empty for years and falling into significant disrepair.

5.10 Overview of Actions to be taken

Action	By When/Timescale
Implement Empty Homes (EH) Strategy	October 2026
Establish a media campaign to publicise the EH strategy to encourage reports	October 2026
Refresh and review our Empty Homes Database to provide a baseline number of empty homes.	January 2027
Update and review the empty homes database regularly.	With immediate effect
Apply a scoring matrix to homes empty longer than two years.	With immediate effect
Receive a quarterly report on empty homes from Council Tax.	With immediate effect
Create and adopt an Enforced Sale Procedure.	October 2026
Escalate enforcement action where appropriate, ensuring the Empty and Affordable Homes Officer is delegated the appropriate powers and training to serve notices and provided with a budget to complete works in default.	October 2026 - January 2027
Convene regular multi-agency and departmental meetings to review cases and coordinate Council intervention.	With immediate effect
Engage with Economic Development to review empty commercial units regularly and act where appropriate.	With immediate effect – quarterly
Following the database review, we will publish an update identifying the number of actual empty	April 2027

homes in Wyre and set a target to bring back into use	
Develop new ways to engage with empty homeowners and potential buyers of empty properties such as a matching service.	June 2027
Increase our presence both in person at events, and via social media/press to highlight the work that is being undertaken and encourage owners to report empty homes to us. Sharing our success stories to demonstrate the positive impact of the strategy.	With immediate effect
Attend regular training sessions and review performance to ensure staff have the skills to undertake their roles effectively.	With immediate effect
Review the strategy annually and provide a report to the portfolio holder and director outlining how many empty homes have been brought back into use, analysis of actions and any suggested amendments to the strategy.	12 months following adoption of the strategy

6. Monitoring and Performance

We have developed a clear action plan in Section 5.10 showing where we will be focussing our attention.

We will monitor our progress against the action plan over the next four years, highlight our successes and identify if there is a need for development.

The action plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that it reflects Wyre's aims and priorities in relation to empty properties, and the resources that are available.

Appendix 1 – Scoring matrix

Criteria	Response	Score
State of repair and maintenance of the property itself	• Good repair and exterior decor • Satisfactory repair but poor decor • Minor disrepair • Major disrepair • Derelict	0 5 10 15 30
Overall appearance of garden	• Tidy • Slightly overgrown • Very overgrown	0 5 10
Is the property secure?	• Yes • Partially • No	0 5 15
Is it free from refuse?	• Yes • No	0 5
Is there any evidence of anti-social behaviour related to the property?	• Yes • No	5 0
Is it a blight/eyesore on the street?	• Yes • No	15 0
Are there any other empty properties on the street?	• Yes, one or more • No	5 0
How long has the property been empty?	• Less than 2 years • 2 – 5 years • 5 - 10 years • 10 or more years	0 10 15 30
Have any complaints about the property been received, if so, how many?	• None • Low (1-3) • Medium (4-8) • High (9 and over)	0 5 10 15
TOTAL SCORE		
RISK RATING		0-30
		LOW
		31-60
		MEDIUM
		61+
		HIGH