



# **DRAFT** VACANT PROPERTY STRATEGY

2010 – 2015

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**IMAGES TO BE ADDED THROUGHOUT DOCUMENT**

# 1. Foreword

**Cllr William Challinor  
Portfolio Holder for Regeneration**

## **PHOTO OF BILL?**

Throughout the Borough of Rossendale there are left abandoned and poorly maintained which have a harmful and detrimental impact on the neighbourhood and quality of the local environment, and create a poor image of the area.

People who live in the vicinity of such properties fear the repercussions of neglected buildings by the anti-social behaviour they attract. It also impacts on the housing market in the area as it makes the place unattractive for people to move to and live in. Redundant shops also have a local economical effect that leaves neighbourhoods unsustainable.

To reverse this decline caused by deserted properties, we are putting in place this Strategy to improve our neighbourhoods by bringing back into use both residential and commercial properties. The intention is to invigorate the area by reducing the number of empty homes which can provide quality housing much needed in the Borough; and to reduce the number of vacant commercial premises which can offer accommodation to the business sector.

This Strategy will set out in detail the way we will deal with empty properties, the resources identified, action plans and monitoring to achieve our goals.

## 2. Introduction

Empty properties can take a number of forms and are usually associated with vacant residential properties; however, they can also be disused commercial properties such as shops, offices or the space above shops.

Long-term empty properties are at best a waste of resources and at worst a blight on the lives of individuals and whole communities who live near them. The implementation of the Vacant Property Strategy will have the following benefits to Rossendale:

- There is a need for housing within the Borough, and returning properties to use will contribute to meeting that need. Because of this, there will be less pressure to build new homes on Greenfield sites. More affordable homes will be provided, reducing pressure on housing stock.
- Bringing empty properties back into use will prevent empty properties from becoming the focus of anti-social behaviour.
- By returning empty properties to use, residents of Rossendale will benefit from cleaner, more attractive neighbourhoods and stronger, safer communities. This will also encourage investment and regeneration in the area.
- By ensuring existing empty homes are brought back into use, fewer new homes will have to be built. Research has shown that refurbishing existing building creates around 85% less carbon emissions than building new ones.
- Bringing empty commercial properties back into use will increase vitality, improve the economy and contribute to regeneration in the area.

This Vacant Property Strategy demonstrates that the Council has an effective and co-ordinated approach to combating the problems caused by empty properties and a robust methodology for returning empty properties back to active use.

Empty buildings - both residential and commercial, are caused by various factors. An underlying level of vacancy arises as a result of the normal transactions of the property market. These are generally known as **transactional vacancies**. There is some debate as to the acceptable level of transactional vacancies, however the DTLR's memorandum states that these vacancies amount to approximately 2 per cent of the housing. For example, it is necessary for some houses to be available for relatively short periods whilst they are being sold, or let. This type of vacancy is for a relatively short period of time – usually no longer than six months.

Others, known as **problematic vacancies** are empty for long periods (over 6 months). This could be because of their poor condition; they may have been

abandoned, or there may be an ownership dispute. A common characteristic that distinguishes them from transactional vacancies is that they are not being actively marketed. Ownership may be unresolved resulting in deterioration, dilapidation and abandonment.

Problematic vacancies are often an indicator of the popularity of an area being in decline, due to low demand in some residential areas or economic areas such as town centres.

Should structures be allowed to deteriorate they can cause many problems, which can have serious impacts on neighbouring properties. These problems might include:

- Fly tipping
- Vermin
- Vandalism
- Squatters
- Leaks/damp

Some of the wider consequences of vacant properties could include:

- Damage to neighbouring properties
- Loss of Council Tax income
- Negates other regeneration initiatives
- Depopulation closes businesses and affects services and jobs
- Increased strain on resources to police and monitor empty buildings
- Negative perceptions of an area

These problems can require extensive remediation works which can be expensive. The value of the property and properties around it can also depreciate. Although this document will set out how the Council intends to deal with properties that are causing such problems, its main aim is to bring properties back into use before these problems can occur.

## **3. Background**

### **3.1. The National Picture**

Nationally, empty properties are not only found in large towns and cities; they are a feature of the landscape in many areas. In 2009, there were 651,993 empty residential properties in England. Of these, 307,001 have been empty for more than 6 months. The average empty property rate for England is 2.9%.

The Government has introduced legislation to resolve the matter of this untapped resource. There are several acts of parliament which give Councils discretionary powers to bring empty properties back into use. These powers include the ability to make Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) (Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004), Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) (Housing Act 2004) and Enforced Sales (Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004). These powers are covered in more detail later in this document.

The 2007 housing Green Paper – Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable which sets out the Government's strategy for meeting its target of 240,000 net additional homes by 2016 makes specific reference to tackling empty homes – including the use of EDMOs, as a way of reaching this target.

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing, is Central Government's main housing policy. It requires Local Authorities to identify enough land to deliver the homes needed in their areas. The reuse of vacant dwellings will contribute to delivering this requirement.

**MORE ABOUT COMMERCIAL (policies and stats)**

### **3.2. The Regional Picture**

Across the North West in 2008 there were 122,632 vacant properties, which represents 3.91% of the total housing stock. 64,332 of these were empty for more than 6 months.

The Pennine Lancashire Housing Strategy states that although the overall levels of empty properties in Lancashire is falling; Empty Property Strategies will continue to be developed to bring forward unused sustainable existing property as part of a new supply and keep markets in balance.

**MORE ABOUT COMMERCIAL (policies and stats)**

### **3.3. The Local Picture**

In Rossendale there were 1541 empty residential properties in 2009. This represents 5.04% of the total housing stock of Rossendale. Of these 554 had been empty for more than 6 months. The vacancy rate for commercial properties was 264 as of November 2009.

### The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy.....REBECCA TO FILL

In 2003 the Council agreed an Empty Property Strategy which set out in basic terms how the Private Sector Renewal Team would address the issues caused by vacant dwellings, and how they intend to bring them back into use. A performance target was set under BVPI 64. The focus of the policy document was to set the objective to bring back into use a number of vacant properties in line with the current regional average by 2020. In 2006 this was revised and the Empty Properties Policy Statement and Action Plan was adopted. Its objectives linked to the aspirations for housing set out in the Community Strategy. Its key methods of approach to solving unoccupied properties were by **MORE ABOUT COMMERCIAL (policies and stats)**

**Inducement** – through equity release.

**Incentives** – through the Planning and Council Tax systems

**Enforcement** – Using statutory powers

These documents make no reference to commercial properties which also have a negative impact on the high street and in town centres, or to utilise space above shops.

This strategy provides a more thorough, robust policy on how Rossendale Borough Council will tackle its long term vacant properties, providing a strategic link with the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy.

The Vacant Property Strategy supersedes these documents and includes commercial properties to give a more holistic approach to the problems that unoccupied buildings can cause.

## 4. Statistics

Below are various tables indicating the level vacant buildings throughout the Borough and in the sub region

<b>Empty Housing Stock, 2006 to 2009</b>				
	Percentage of housing stock that is empty			
	2006	2007	2008	2009
Burnley	7.4	7.5	6.6	8.1
Chorley	3.3	1.0	3.1	3.3
Fylde	4.5	4.7	3.9	3.4
Hyndburn	5.5	6.4	5.6	6.5
Lancaster	4.1	3.6	3.9	4.4
Pendle	6.2	6.7	7.0	6.5
Preston	4.4	4.5	3.4	4.6
Ribble Valley	3.3	3.8	3.3	3.4
<b>Rossendale</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>5.0</b>
South Ribble	0.9	2.5	2.6	2.7
West Lancashire	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.0
Wyre	3.1	3.7	2.0	1.7
Blackburn with Darwen	5.9	5.8	5.4	4.7
Blackpool	5.7	4.7	4.8	5.3
North West	4.1	4.2	4.2	3.9
England	3.1	3.0	3.1	2.8

Sources: Empty Homes Agency, Lancashire County Council



## Brownfield Land, 2007

	Area of brownfield land (hectares)							
	Vacant derelict land and buildings				Currently in use			Total
	Previously developed vacant land	Derelict land and buildings	Vacant buildings	All	With planning allocation/permission	Other with known potential	All	
Burnley	17	18	17	52	21	4	25	78
Chorley	13	0	106	119	12	9	21	139
Fylde	9	4	0	13	14	13	27	40
Hyndburn	20	6	27	53	4	27	31	88
Lancaster	7	21	121	149	34	59	93	242
Pendle	26	6	16	48	3	14	17	64
Preston	64	14	25	103	9	12	21	123
Ribble Valley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rossendale	32	6	53	91	1	3	4	97
South Ribble	75	15	0	90	0	1	1	90
West Lancashire	20	8	60	88	7	6	13	101
Wyre	115	4	3	122	1	3	4	127
<b>Lancashire (12 districts)</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>932</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>1,196</b>
Blackburn with Darwen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Blackpool	6	0	0	6	52	10	62	69
<b>Lancashire (14 authorities)</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>1033</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>1,428</b>
North West	2,530	680	4,830	8,040	1,900	980	2,880	10,910
England	12,710	4,080	16,810	33,600	17,770	10,750	28,520	62,130

Source: Lancashire County Council

## 5. Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the Vacant Property Strategy are intrinsically linked with the Corporate Priorities of Rossendale Borough Council. The Vacant Property Strategy will contribute to delivering the vision of the Corporate Priorities.

The Council's Corporate Priorities are:

- Keeping our Borough clean, green and safe
- Delivering quality services to our customers
- Providing value for money services
- Delivering regeneration across the Borough
- Encouraging healthy and respectful communities
- Promoting the Borough

Returning vacant properties to use will actively contribute towards the achievement of these aims:

- By reducing the problems associated with vacant properties, it will be helping to keep the Borough clean, green and safe
- By combating the adverse impacts on communities and individual properties which an empty property has, it will be delivering a quality service to customers
- By increasing the prosperity of areas which would otherwise be in decline due to empty properties, it will be providing a value for money service
- By increasing vitality and regeneration opportunities, it will be enabling regeneration across the Borough
- By reducing harmful effects of empty properties such as damp and vermin, and removing anti-social behaviour hotspots, it will be contributing to a healthy and respectful community
- By increasing the attractiveness of an area, reducing the negative impacts of empty properties and encouraging regeneration, the Strategy will be promoting the Borough of Rossendale

To achieve the aims set out within this Vacant Property Strategy, the Council's objectives are to:

- **Reduce the number of long term vacant properties** through targeted schemes and uses of the Council's powers of enforcement
- **Improve the environment arising from abandonment** through returning properties to active use and the application of powers through Section 215 notices
- **Support empty property owners** by offering by offering advice and assistance where possible

- **Support business start up** through offering advice and assistance where possible
- **Increase housing supply** through enabling the return of empty homes to active use
- **Reduce the social rented sector housing waiting** list through increasing the stock of social housing with suitably renovated empty homes
- **Improve community safety** through eliminating crime hotspots caused by vacant properties
- **Encourage shop front take up** through public realm improvements
- **Restoration of Council Tax and rental incomes** through bringing empty properties back into active use

We aim to:

- Reduce problematic vacant dwellings by XX% per year
- Reduce problematic vacant commercial properties by XX% per year

## **6. Delivery of the Strategy**

### **6.1. Identifying the Problem**

#### **What are we currently doing to identify empty properties?**

There are several methods the Council currently employs in identifying empty dwellings. Many individual dwellings, which are unsightly, or causing problems to neighbouring properties are reported directly to the Council by a member of the public. . The Council also has an online form which allows people to report empty properties directly through the Council's website.

Members of the Council's Communities and Environmental Health teams also provide a useful role in reporting empty properties which are highlighted through their work in the community.

The Council also identifies empty dwellings from Council Tax records. This is often useful for schemes such as the Haslingden Home Renew initiative (see section 6.4 – Partnerships), where clusters of long term empty homes can be identified and targeted.

The Empty Homes Officer has developed and maintains a database of empty dwellings which are currently being dealt with. This contains detailed notes on each property and a history of any actions taken. This provides a solid audit trail should any enforcement action be taken on a property.

In relation to vacant commercial premises, the Regeneration Projects Officer has undertaken an audit within the key focus areas to identify vacant commercial properties which may be suitable for intervention. Owners and agents are then contacted with a view to assisting with the re-development proposals for the property.

A joint working database is also in development which shows all actions taken across several teams in the Council. This allows teams to see at a glance what involvement other teams have with a specific property they are also dealing with. This database covers both commercial and domestic properties.

#### **Priorities for the future**

Our current method of identifying empty properties, whilst successful, has scope to be expanded and improved. Developing methods of identifying properties quicker and making the overall process much more streamlined is an identified priority within the Action Plan and includes the following elements:

The Council will **raise awareness** of empty property works to its stakeholders. The Council has a number of services and employees who provide services at a local level. A priority will be to raise awareness within these services of the actions which can be taken to address the problem of long term vacant properties and the reporting mechanisms which are available. This will be undertaken through the Council's monthly Team Briefing papers and through training sessions with specific employee groups. The Council also works with a number of partners whose employees provide services within the community, for example the Police, Registered Providers, District Nurse and Occupational Therapy services. Training events to raise the awareness of the methods of tackling empty homes will be undertaken with these groups supported by key contact information.

**Mapping** properties will enable the Council to identify clusters of empty properties which can be targeted in one approach. The Council will use its internal PlanWeb GIS system to map all properties which are classed by Council Tax as 'Unoccupied and Unfurnished' – that is all properties empty for more than 6 months and that don't fall under another exemption, such as refurbishment or care home resident. This mapping will be updated every three months. Priority properties will be highlighted, and the mapping linked to the database which holds all information on priority properties. This will improve the efficiency of dealing with these priority properties as well as enabling clusters to be identified and considered for targeting in one go. This mapping will also improve the audit trail for properties.

**Prioritising** properties will enable the Council to effectively decide which properties need targeting sooner, and have more resources put into, and which properties are less of a priority and can be tackled through lower impact measures. Properties would be prioritised based on the following:

- Whether they have been empty for longer than two years – this allows sufficient time for the owner to have taken all possible steps to bring the house back into use.
- If the property is within a key strategic location e.g. Pathfinder. Properties within these areas could restrict regeneration and so dealing with them quickly can be crucial.
- If the property is having an immediate detrimental impact on the community or neighbouring properties. In this case then the offending property needs to be sorted out immediately to avoid further negative impacts.
- How secure the property is. If the property is open to access then it can potentially attract squatters.
- If the property is having a negative visual impact. To avoid the appearance of the area being brought down – potentially deterring visitors, future residents and investors, properties which look unsightly need to be dealt with quickly.

- If the owner is willing and co-operative in bringing the property back into use. If the owner is unwilling to cooperate then the Council will have no option but to take further action to return the property to use.

This approach for prioritising problematic vacant dwellings is developed within the 'Vacant Dwelling Process Flowchart on page XX.

## 6.2. Dealing with the Problem

### Vacant Property Policy

The Council seek to reduce the number of long term empty properties within the Borough of Rossendale by maximising the Council's role as an enabler, by working with owners to bring their properties back into use and utilising the tools and powers available at the Council's discretion.

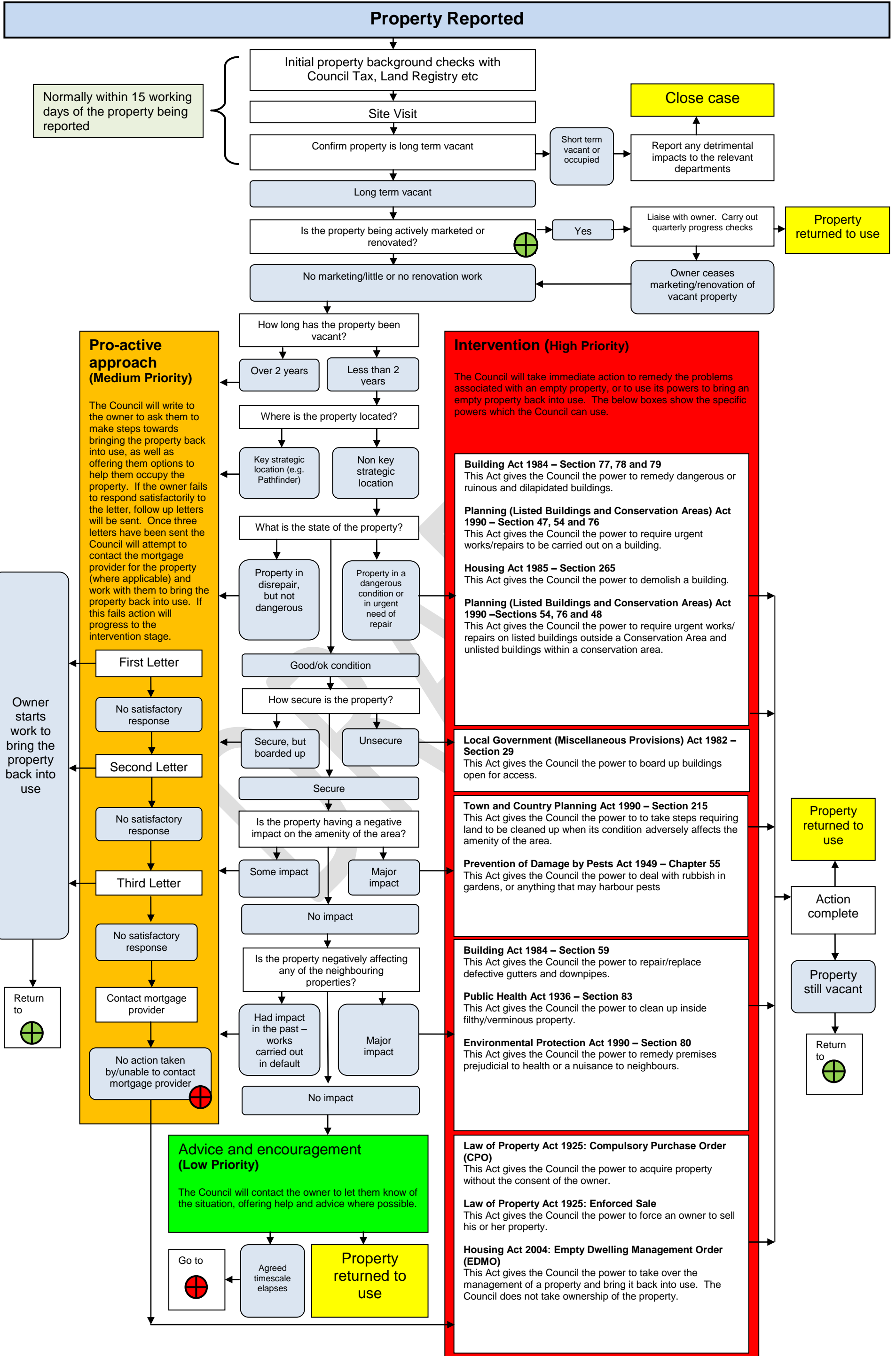
### Approach

The Council will apply a consistent approach to dealing with long term vacant commercial and residential properties. This section outlines the approach the Council will take when dealing with problematic vacancies.

Due to finite resources that are available to the Council, it has been proposed that resources be targeted to gateways to the Borough, concentrating on clusters of empty properties and areas of anti-social behaviour that are linked to empty properties.

The flowchart overleaf shows the exact process the Council will follow when dealing with long term vacant dwellings. The text following the flowchart explains the process in greater detail.

6.3. Vacant Dwelling Process Flowchart



The Council will prioritise properties based on the level of negative impact a vacant property is having on an area, the willingness and cooperation of the owner and the location of the property. The approach the Council takes will depend on the priority of the property in question. The Council will always look to apply empty property and business council tax rates to properties where appropriate in order to discourage a property being empty for any length of time.

### **Low Priority Properties**

A vacant dwelling will be given a low priority where the property is not being actively marketed and:

1. Contact is established with owners who are willing to work to bring their property back into use; **and**
2. Where the empty property is having a minimal impact on the surrounding area.

The Council will offer support and advice to the owner where necessary and encourage them to bring their property back into use and where applicable, signposting to appropriate partners. The Council may decide to agree with the owner a schedule of works, which the owner would commit to keeping to. Evidence would be required to show that they have the intentions to renovate and refurbish in order to either:

- Occupy the property
- Let it to tenants or lease to a business\*
- Put it on the open market
- Have a valid alternative proposal for its future use.

\*Where the property meets the minimum standards for rented accommodation

If the owner of the property does not make satisfactory progress in bringing the property back into use or does not keep within a schedule of works then the property shall be moved to the 'medium priority' category.

There are several possible options open to owners of problematic vacancies, and where the owner is willing and committed, the Council will offer its support and assistance in looking into these options. These could include equity release loans, RSL purchase, private sector/housing association leasing schemes, rent deposit schemes, and change of use applications. It is important to note that these are only possible options and are subject to Cabinet approval and funding.



## Medium Priority Properties

A vacant dwelling will be given a medium priority where the property is not being actively marketed and:

1. The property has been vacant for more than 2 years; **or**
2. The property is within in a key strategic location (e.g. Pathfinder); **or**
3. The property is in disrepair, but not in a dangerous state; **or**
4. The property is secure, but boarded up; **or**
5. The property is having some level of negative impact on the amenity of the area; **or**
6. The property has had works carried out in the past to stop negative impacts on a neighbouring property; **or**
7. Where a property previously classed as 'low priority' has failed to be brought back into active use within agreed timescales (these properties shall go straight to stage 2 below).

Using contact details gained from Council Tax or Land Registry information, the Council will write to the owner of the empty property. Three letters will be sent to the owner, giving 21 working days to respond to each letter.

Stage 1:

Where:

- There is positive contact and the owner satisfies the Council of his or her intention to bring the property back into use and rectify any negative impacts

The Council will work with the owner, offering advice and assistance to help them return the property to use, in line with the approach taken for 'low priority' properties.

Stage 2:

Where:

- Contact cannot be established with the owner; **or**
- Contact is made but the owner shows no willingness to bring his or her property back into use; **or**
- A property previously classed as 'low priority' has failed to be brought back into use within the agreed timescales,

The Council shall write to the mortgage provider where possible and applicable and attempt to work with them to return the property to use. Where the mortgage provider cannot be contacted, or will not work with the Council to return the

property to use, the Council shall approach the situation as a 'high priority property'.

### **High Priority Properties**

Where approaches used to bring low and medium priority properties back into use have failed, and where a property is having a detrimental impact on the surrounding area, a high priority approach shall be adopted:

- Where a property is having a major, detrimental impact on the surrounding area – for example attracting fly tipping or squatters, causing hazards to nearby properties or degrading the area by virtue of it being unsightly,

The Council will exercise its powers where necessary, to rectify the situation. These powers are explained in more detail in the 'Council Powers' section below. After the situation has been rectified, the property will be reassessed and re-prioritised.

- Where all other approaches to bring properties back into use have been tried and failed,

The Council will look to exercise its powers to compulsorily purchase, enforce sale, take over management, or demolish a property. These powers are explained in more detail in the 'Council Powers' section below.

### **Council Powers**

It is possible that all Council departments will at some stage be involved in empty property works; however in particular Strategic Housing, Economic Regeneration, Environmental Health, Building Control, Planning Enforcement, Legal Services, Property Services, Conservation and Communities will have a key role. It is officers from these teams that make up the Vacant Properties Task Group, which meets on a regular basis to discuss all aspects of current vacant properties work. All these officers will play a part in the overall decision on how best to bring a particular property back into use. The task group has acted as a steering group for the production of the Vacant Property Strategy.

The Council has powers to take enforcement action against owners of vacant properties, to require them to remedy problems associated with their properties. If they do not comply with this notice, the Council can carry out the work in default and place a charge on the property, which is recovered from the value of the property when it is sold on. The Council also has powers to take over management, enforce the sale, compulsorily purchase or demolish a property (usually commercial only). These powers are administered by specific teams

within the Council. These teams all sit on the Vacant Property Task Group. This section looks at each of these powers.

**Building Control** has statutory powers under the Building Act 1984 to make buildings safe. Section 77 and Section 78 give the Council the power to require any building or structure which is in such a condition as to be considered dangerous be made safe. Section 79 allows the Council to require remedial works on any building or structure which, by its ruinous or dilapidated nature is having a negative impact of the amenity of the area.

Under Section 29 of the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976, Building Control are able require any commercial building which is open for access be boarded up.

**Environmental Health** has statutory powers under Section 59 of the Building Act 1984 to repair any above ground drainage, such as gutters and downpipes. Broken gutters/downpipes can cause damage to neighbouring properties if they are persistently leaking onto them.

Under Section 83 of the Public Health Act 1936 Environmental Health have the power to require filthy or verminous property be cleaned up. Verminous property can be hazardous to health. For example, poor conditions in a neighbouring property caused by an infestation of pigeons could be prejudicial to the health of occupants in the property next door.

Section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 gives Environmental Health the power to require premises in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance to neighbours be remedied. This allows the Council to combat any vacant properties causing issues to the neighbouring properties – e.g. damp or mould caused by a cold, damp adjoining property.

The Housing Act 2004 gives Environmental Health the power to require domestic dwellings be made free from serious hazards – this is known as the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

Under Section 29 of the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1982 Environmental Health are able to request that any domestic dwelling open for access is boarded up. If a vacant house has a broken window which could allow access to squatters, this can be boarded up.

**The Communities Team** is able to require that any area of land having an adverse affect on another by virtue of its condition is cleaned up under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 (C.55) gives Communities the power to request any area which is, or has the potential to harbour pest, be cleared up. For example children playing in a garden can be at risk if the neighbouring garden is infested.

**Conservation** officers have powers under Section 48 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to compulsorily purchase a building where the Council has reasonable cause to believe necessary steps are not being taken to preserve a listed building. The same Act allows Conservation to require works on a unoccupied listed building (Section 54) or an unoccupied building in a Conservation Area (Section 76) to preserve its future.

With any of the above powers, if the owner fails to comply with a notice served on him or her by the Council, then the Council is able to complete the works in default by placing a charge on the property.

**Regeneration** has powers under the Law of Property Act 1925 to enforce a sale of a property. The Council does not take ownership of the property during an enforced sale and receives none of the money from the sale other than costs incurred (and any charges already on the property).

Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 allows the Council to compulsorily purchase a property. This is commonly known as a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). The Council must apply to the Secretary of State for permission to compulsorily purchase the property. The owner of the property is entitled to all money from the sale other than costs incurred by the Council and any charges existing on the property. This would be applied where an owner persistently refuses to bring their property back into use, and to remove the property from their ownership is the only option.

Section 265 of the Housing Act 1985 allows Regeneration to apply for an order to require demolition of a building. In the majority of cases this will only apply to commercial buildings. This can be applied where it is decided that the building is too dangerous to be left standing, or if the area is to be cleared for future development.

The Housing Act 2007 gives the Council the power to apply for an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) on a property. This allows the Council to take over the management of a domestic property for a certain period of time in order to bring it back into use. The ownership of the building does not transfer to the Council during the course of an EDMO. This can be employed where an owner is not capable in the short term of bringing their property back into use, however once it is back in use they are capable of regaining management of the property.

The Regeneration Team will also apply to bring Selective Licensing into force in any areas it feels necessary. Part 3 of the housing Act 2004 gives the Council the ability to introduce selective licensing into areas which suffer, or are likely to suffer from low housing demand and also into areas which suffer from significant and persistent anti-social behaviour.

### **6.3. Partnerships**

#### **Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)**

Registered Social Landlords work with the owners of properties to buy in on a voluntary basis, properties that have been empty long term. The organisation will then renovate and rent the building at an affordable price.

There is also the opportunity for the Council to work in partnership with RSLs on a targeted programme of works. The pilot for the Haslingden Home Renew initiative launched in summer 2009 - its aim being to return homes within the Haslingden area back to active use. The Council, in partnership with Great Places Housing Group, has written to owners of long term empty properties within Haslingden with the view of identifying properties for Great Places to purchase, renovate to decent homes standard and let as social housing.

#### **Lancashire Empty Homes Partnership (LEHP)**

The Lancashire Empty Homes Partnership is made up of representatives from each of the Lancashire Local Authorities. They meet together on a regular basis to discuss and share ideas and initiatives around empty homes work. The Partnership also hosts a website where members of the public can find contacts within their local authorities who deal with empty homes.

#### **HomeSure**

The HomeSure group is made up of representatives of the six East Lancashire Local Authorities – Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale. The group meets regularly to discuss various aspects of housing within East Lancashire – including empty homes.

### **6.4. Funding**

The availability of funding has a major influence on any work to bring empty properties back into use. The Council will work to identify funding sources which may be used in a variety of ways to combat vacant properties. This funding can be either internal or external funding.

The Council has funds available to deal with problematic vacancies through powers of enforcement. Where necessary works to secure properties, rectify environmental health issues and tidy up properties will be funded by the Council, and costs will be claimed back via a charge placed on the property in question. Funding is also available for interventions such as CPOs, EDMOs and Enforced Sales where the Council decides that execution of these powers is necessary. These properties will be considered for enforcement action on an individual

basis, however the Council may decide to pursue enforcement on a number of properties at once if they are clustered in a single location.

The Council is engaging with partners for schemes such as the Haslingden Home Renew Initiative, as they may have funding available for specific projects, such as buying up empty properties in bulk to refurbish as social housing. The Council will make the most of these links and seek to work with external partners in this way where possible.

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## 7. Conclusion

This Strategy is necessary to overcome the problems of vacant properties within the borough as, both empty houses and shops blight an area. The Council will identify properties and engage with owners to realise the full potential of bringing back into use those buildings which have long been neglected. This can be pursued through negotiation and persuasion with owners by the Council in the capacity of an enabling role and use their influence to achieve a solution that is to the benefit of all.

Owners who are disinterested or just do not want to shoulder the burden of managing properties themselves may wish to handover that responsibility to a Housing Association, but owners who refuse to recognise their duty to maintain their properties could find themselves losing them through the powers of enforcement which the Council has at its disposal.

The Council has already agreed the measures needed to make this Strategy a success, and fully implemented it will result in housing accommodation becoming available and the potential to create new businesses for the Borough.

**INSERT PHOTO**

## 8. Vacant Property Strategy Delivery Plan

Target Date	Action	Outcome	Resource	Responsible Officer	Current Status	Risks	Controls
<b>Short term - up to six months</b>							
September 2010	Prioritise vacant properties in line with the approach set out in the vacant property strategy	More effective and efficient approach to dealing with problematic vacant dwellings	Regeneration	Housing Regeneration Projects Officer	To be established	N/A	Monitoring
September 2010	Promote the strategy with partners and public	Increased awareness in identifying empty properties	Regeneration Communications	Communications Advisor	Preparation ongoing	Not approved by members	Monitoring
September 2010	Extend the Haslingden Home Renew Pilot	Increased partnership working	Regeneration RSL's Landlords Contractors	Housing Regeneration Projects Officer	Only used for pilot project.	No Funding	Monitoring
Ongoing	Rosendale against Recession	Continue to promote government mortgage rescue schemes	Regeneration	Economic Regeneration Development Manager	Established	Future funding	Build in to monitoring procedures.
Ongoing - every 6 weeks	Maintain the Vacant Property Task Group	Pooling of resources	Regeneration Communities Environmental Health Building Control Forward Planning Legal	Housing Regeneration Projects Officer	Established	Duplication	Record all actions taken by other services



Target Date	Action	Outcome	Resource	Responsible Officer	Current Status	Risks	Controls
<b>Medium term - six months to three years</b>							
December 2010	Expand options for reporting empty properties - including online methods	Point of contact for residents	Regeneration IT	Housing Regeneration Projects Officer	In use but limited	N/A	Monitoring
December 2010	Revise database	Includes commercial element	Regeneration	Housing Regeneration Projects Officer	Ongoing	N/A	Monitoring
December 2010	Identify and map long term vacant properties	Bring forward willing owners to reuse properties	Regeneration  Council Tax	Housing Regeneration Projects Officer	Ongoing	No Funding	Monitoring
December 2010	Revise literature	Advise the public on procedures	Regeneration Communications	Housing Regeneration Projects Officer,  Communications Advisor	Present literature insufficient	N/A	Controlled distribution of leaflets
March 2011	Annual monitoring report to Overview and Scrutiny on number of properties (domestic and commercial) brought back into use	Increase the number of housing units available and business opportunities available	Regeneration	Vacant Property Task Group	Group in place	Legal Funding	Monitoring
March 2011	Conduct a survey of empty shops	Realisation of scale of problem	Regeneration  Forward Planning	Economic Regeneration Projects Officer, Technical Assistant	Various Studys, but need updating	No Funding	Monitoring
March 2011	Develop enforcement procedures	Identify best course of action	Regeneration  Communities Environmental Health Building Control Forward Planning Legal	All	Ongoing	No Funding	Monitoring stating the cause of action taken

Target Date	Action	Outcome	Resource	Responsible Officer	Current Status	Risks	Controls
<b>Medium term - six months to three years</b>							
March 2011	Monitoring arrangements	Records performance and audit trail	Regeneration People & Policy	Housing Regeneration Projects Officer, Performance Management Officer	Monitoring only used internally	Does not meet performance indicators	Build in to corporate standards
March 2011	Annual Review of Vacant Property Strategy	Ensures the Strategy is up to date and relevant	Regeneration	Housing Regeneration Projects Officer, Regeneration Projects Officer, Vacant Property Task Group	Yearly review	N/A	N/A
March 2012	Annual monitoring report to Overview and Scrutiny on number of properties (domestic and commercial) brought back into use	Increase the number of housing units available and business opportunities available	Regeneration	Vacant Property Task Group	Group in place	Legal Funding	Monitoring
March 2013	Annual monitoring report to Overview and Scrutiny on number of properties (domestic and commercial) brought back into use	Increase the number of housing units available and business opportunities available	Regeneration	Vacant Property Task Group	Group in place	Legal Funding	Monitoring

Target Date	Action	Outcome	Resource	Responsible Officer	Current Status	Risks	Controls
<b>Long Term - three to six years</b>							
March 2014	Look into making grants available to assist with bringing properties back into use	Greater assistance for owners of empty properties	Regeneration Finance	Regeneration Delivery Manager, Housing Regeneration Projects Officer, Regeneration Projects Officer	To be looked into	No Funding	Monitoring
March 2014	Annual monitoring report to Overview and Scrutiny on number of properties (domestic and commercial) brought back into use	Increase the number of housing units available and business opportunities available	Regeneration	Vacant Property Task Group	Group in place	Legal Funding	Monitoring
March 2015	Annual monitoring report to Overview and Scrutiny on number of properties (domestic and commercial) brought back into use	Increase the number of housing units available and business opportunities available	Regeneration	Vacant Property Task Group	Group in place	Legal Funding	Monitoring

## 9. Glossary

BVPI	Best Value Performance Indicator
CPO	Compulsory Purchase Order
EDMO	Empty Dwelling Management Order
RSEDP	Rossendale Sustainable Economic Development Programme
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
The Council, RBC	Rossendale Borough Council
VPS	Vacant Property Strategy
GIS	Geographic Information System