

Minor Review: Empty Homes Council Tax Premium

Committee name	Residents' Services Select Committee
Officer reporting	Iain Watters, Director – Strategic and Operational Finance Debby Weller, Housing Policy and Strategy Manager
Papers with report	Scoping Report

HEADLINES

This item will encompass the witness session regarding the Committee's review into the Empty Homes Council Tax Premium.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Residents' Services Select Committee notes the evidence heard at the witness session, reviews the findings and considers the feasibility of increasing the current Empty Homes Council Tax Premium, applicable to non-exempt properties empty for more than two years, from the current 150% to 200%.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

At the Committee meeting held on 21 July 2022, Members discussed potential topics for a review. Further discussions with officers took place following the meeting, and it was agreed that a scoping report on the "Empty Homes Council Tax Premium" would be brought before Members for consideration. The planned September Residents' Services Select Committee meeting was subsequently cancelled following the passing of HM Queen Elizabeth II, hence the attached minor review Scoping Report was circulated to Committee Members for approval offline.

At this October witness session, Members will hear from key officers; namely Iain Watters, Director – Strategic and Operational Finance, Maureen Pemberton, Head of Revenues and Debby Weller, Housing Policy and Strategy Manager. These officers will set out the current situation in respect of the Empty Homes Council Tax Premium chargeable within Hillingdon Council. Evidence will also be received from a local Hillingdon resident of their experiences and views on the matter.

Terms of Reference

The following Terms of Reference were noted for this review, subject to any changes agreed by the Committee:

1. To fully investigate the feasibility and effect both on owners and the Council of applying the maximum Empty Homes Council Tax premiums on non-exempt properties empty for more than two years; and
2. To make any necessary recommendation to Cabinet based on the Committee's findings.

Possible Lines of Enquiry

1. How do other local authorities operate in terms of their Empty Homes Council Tax Premium rates?
2. How likely is it that any outstanding premiums will be settled in full?
3. What would be the additional income to the Council were the premium to increase from 150% to 200% as proposed?
4. Do the cost benefits of the proposed increase outweigh those of debt recovery?
5. In the case of death / probate, how can debt recovery be expedited?
6. How are long-term non-exempt properties liable for the highest premium identified?
7. What power does the Council have to seize a property / force a sale?
8. How many homes currently attract the Empty Property Premium of 150%?
9. How is the proposed increase likely to impact on housing stock?
10. Can a discretionary policy be introduced? How would this work and who would authorise it?

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Select Committees directly engage residents in shaping policy and recommendations from the Committees are presented to Cabinet to consider, and ultimately seek to improve the way the Council provides services to residents.

Financial Implications

None at this stage.

Legal Implications

None at this stage.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.