

Paper XX-XXX Appendix A

WBC EQUALITY IMPACT AND NEEDS ANALYSIS

Directorate	Resources
Service Area	Council Tax
Service/policy/function being assessed	Empty Property Premium
Which borough (s) does the service/policy apply to	Both
Staff involved	None
Date approved by Directorate Equality Group (if applicable)	n/a
Date approved by Policy and Review Manager All EINAs must be signed off by the Policy and Review Manager	
Date submitted to Directors' Board	6th December 2018

SUMMARY

The Council's policy is to provide a cost-effective Council Tax service with regard to empty properties in order to encourage owners to bring them back into use. The Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 provides Councils with additional discretion in setting Council Tax premia on empty and substantially unfurnished properties.

This report recommends that the premia be set as follows:

- 100% extra premium for vacant over 2 years from 1 April 2019
- 200% extra premium for vacant over 5 years from 1 April 2020
- 300% extra premium for vacant over 10 years from 1 April 2021

The Council currently charges a premium of 50% for those properties which have been empty and substantially unfurnished for over 2 years.

1. Background

There were two drivers for the proposed premium change. Firstly, local authorities have been given more local control to help them keep Council Tax down by increasing the Council Tax base. Secondly, authorities need stronger levers to make sure that the housing stock is effectively utilized. The changes proposed will enable them further to encourage owners to bring empty dwellings into use quickly.

2. Analysis of need and impact

Protected group	Findings
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Age	Data not collected by the Council Tax Service. The most represented age groups on the housing register were 25-35 year olds and 35-45 year olds, both making up 28% of the register (56% in total). Therefore, any impact as a result of the proposed changes will be felt most by these age groups.
Disability	Data not collected by the Council Tax Service and no other relevant data is known regarding disabled owners of empty homes in the Borough.
Gender (sex)	Data not collected by the Council Tax Service and no other relevant data is known regarding the gender of owners of empty homes in the Borough. However, the Council's Housing Waiting list whilst not representing the entire housing need in the Borough did give an indication of those residents who were in need of housing, which would be aided by the proposed changes. Using the Council's housing database consisting of 5,156 applicants across all housing queues as at 31 May 2016, this showed that 65% were female and 35% male.
Gender reassignment	There is no reliable data collected for this protected characteristic. Therefore, as above.
Marriage and civil partnership	No relevant data held for this protective characteristic within the Council Tax database, as not relevant to the ownership of properties that may attract the empty premium.
Pregnancy and maternity	No relevant data held for this protective characteristic within the Council Tax database, as not relevant to the ownership of properties that may attract the empty premium.
Race/ethnicity	Data not collected by the Council Tax Service, however the Private Sector Housing Team can analyse data on empty property grant cases. Between April 2016 and April 2018, this data showed that for 48 grants approved, race could be broken down as follows: Asian 35 Black/African 5 White British/European 8 The Council's Housing Waiting list whilst not representing the entire housing need in the Borough did give an indication of those residents who were in need of housing, which would be aided by the proposed changes by encouraging properties to be brought back into use. Using the Council's housing database consisting of 6,726 applicants across all housing queues as of 31st March 2018, this showed that 36% of applicants were white, 5% mixed/ multiple ethnic, 34% black/ Caribbean/ Black British, 15% Asian/ Asian British, 5% other ethnic group and 5% unknown. Wandsworth
Religion and belief, including non belief	No relevant data held for this protective characteristic within the Council Tax database, as not relevant to the ownership of properties that may attract the empty premium.
Sexual orientation	No relevant data held for this protective characteristic within the Council Tax database, as not relevant to the ownership of properties that may attract the empty premium.

Data gap(s)	How will this be addressed?
No data held on any of the protective characteristic groups in the Council Tax database	Consideration will be given to the potential for collecting additional information on Council Tax demographic.

3. Impact

Guidance

Protected group	Positive	Negative
Age	The increase to the premium should encourage more empty homes to be brought back into use.	No data is available on the ownership in relation to this protected characteristic of empty property owners. The premium increase will mean that owners of empty properties, either waiting to be occupied, let or undergo significant repair, will have to pay more council tax.
Disability	As above.	As above.
Gender (sex)	The increase to the premium should encourage more empty homes to be brought back into use. The housing waiting list suggests that more female residents, including female residents with children, may be in need of housing. This suggests that a move to bring empty properties back into use would benefit female residents	As above.
Gender reassignment	The increase to the premium should encourage more empty homes to be brought back into use.	As above.
Marriage and civil partnership	As above.	As above.
Pregnancy and maternity	As above.	As above.

Race/ethnicity	The increase to the premium should encourage more empty homes to be brought back into use. The housing waiting list suggests that more BAME residents than White residents maybe in need of housing. This suggests that a move to bring back into use empty properties would benefit BAME residents.	The premium increase will mean that owners of empty properties, either waiting to be occupied, let or undergo significant repair, will have to pay more council tax. The small number of empty property grants approved between 2016 and 2018, suggests that a number of empty property owners are BAME residents. The changes in relation to empty homes may therefore impact more on BAME residents. However, as highlighted, this group also stands to benefit most from the changes. In order to mitigate against these further changes, advance notice will be given to all affected parties in writing, as well as via local newspaper adverts and Brightside. Empty home owners can also access grants and advice via the Private Sector Housing Team, to support them in bringing their home back into use.
Religion and belief, including non belief	The increase to the premium should encourage more empty homes to be brought back into use.	No data is available on the ownership in relation to this protected characteristic of empty property owners. The premium increase will mean that owners of empty properties, either waiting to be occupied, let or undergo significant repair, will have to pay more council tax.
Sexual orientation	As above.	As above.

4. Actions

These actions will be tracked by the Policy and Review Team.

Action	Lead Officer	Deadline
Write to all affected residents, as well as via local newspaper adverts and Brightside.	Gaven Downton	Ongoing

5. Consultation. (optional section– as appropriate)

Not a legal requirement for a statutory council tax premium.