



INFORMATION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIRECTORATE	ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE	3 NOVEMBER 2020	7
EMPTY RESIDENTIAL HOMES POSITION STATEMENT			

PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

Previous reports have been presented to members about the numbers of, particularly, long term empty residential properties. The most recent report was on the 5th November 2019 to the Environment, Health and Housing Committee. In recent years a number of changes have been made to the council tax scheme in relation to empty residential property and members have asked for regular updates to monitor the effect of those changes. This is the latest report to advise members of the effects of the changes.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Council Tax updates

WHY IS THIS INFORMATION BEING GIVEN TO THE COMMITTEE?

The information is being given to members due to a request to do so from previous Policy Development Scrutiny Committees, and Environment Health and Housing Committee in November 2019.

[Environment Health and Housing Committee November 2019](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION

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EMPTY RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES POSITION STATEMENT

3rd November 2020

This is the background information to accompany the information item presented to members of the Environment, Health and Housing Committee at this meeting on the 3rd November 2020.

Members have received previous reports to the former policy development scrutiny committees and Environment, Health and Housing Committees to update the position on the numbers of long term (greater than 6 months) empty residential properties in the borough. The term 'long term empty' has referred to properties that have been empty for 6 months or more. It now includes, for council tax purposes, a second type of empty property that has been empty for 2 year or more. This information has taken account of policy changes that have been introduced for long term empty properties.

In 2013 the Government introduced legislation allowing local authorities the discretion to charge an additional 50% premium to the owners of properties left empty for over two years. The Council introduced this additional charge with effect from 1st April 2014. The premium is an additional 50% of the council tax charge such that 150% of the council tax for the property becomes payable. The additional premium complements other council tax measures that require 100% of the council tax to be paid for months 6-24 of being empty.

In November 2018, Government introduced further legislation allowing local authorities the discretion to increase the premium to 100% for properties left empty for over two years with effect from 1st April 2019.

At the of Environment Health and Housing on the 11th February 2019 the Council approved the introduction of a new Council Tax Premium level of 100% payable in respect of properties left empty for over two years, to be effective from 1st April 2019. On the 7th January 2020 the premium was increased by the Committee to 200% and then 300% for properties left empty for over 10 years.

In summary:

- 100% in respect of properties left empty for 6-24 months, effective from 1st April 2014;
- 150% in respect of properties left empty for over two years, effective from 1st April 2014;
- 200% in respect of properties left empty for over five years, effective from April 2020; and
- 300% in respect of properties left empty for over ten years, effective from April 2021.

Table 1 details the numbers of both long term empty properties and properties which have been empty for over 2 years. There is a 19.5% rise between October 19 to October 20, for properties which are classed as long term empty (6 months or more).

Table 1

Date	Long term empty	2 years+ empty
Oct 13	688	N/A
Oct 14	611	126
Oct 15	612	122
Oct 16	604	93
Oct 17	584	125
Oct 18	634	123
Oct 19	650	110
Oct 20	808	134

Revenue colleagues have commented that this could in part be to the housing market demand being focussed on new build development, as opposed to properties that require renovation and modernisation.

At the meeting of the former policy development scrutiny committee of November 2013 members resolved that additional actions to deal with empty properties could only be taken within existing resources and actions the housing service can take are limited to complaints received from members of the public.

In the financial year 2019/20 Housing Services received no such complaints in relation to empty properties. Environmental Health have seen an increase in complaints, mainly in relation to overgrown gardens, where the properties do appear to be empty. These properties have been checked against Council tax records and the properties are listed as occupied.

There are two issues which need to be addressed. The first is to establish if the occupier is resident and requires support as they can no longer cope with the upkeep of their home. This is undertaken by both Environmental Health and Housing Services as part of a Welfare Check and if required a referral will be made to Adult Social Care.

The second is to establish the process by which Council Tax are informed a property is empty and can this be improved in anyway, using intelligence from Environmental Health and Housing Services as opposed to direct notification from the Owner.

The Private Sector Enforcement Policy adopted in January 2019, makes a commitment, subject to available resources, to work with owners of empty homes to bring them back into use.

The Adopted Local Plan for Fylde to 2032 note in paragraph 9.59:

“the Council will identify and bring back into use empty housing and buildings in line with local housing and empty homes strategies and, where appropriate, acquire properties under compulsory purchase powers”

It is proposed a further information item be brought to this Committee in 6 months as a further update to inform a future decision item on Empty Homes within the Borough.

Kirstine Riding, Housing Services Manager