

INFORMATION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIRECTORATE	ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE	4 JANUARY 2022	17

EMPTY RESIDENTIAL HOMES POSTION 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 3rd November 2020 to the Environment, Health and Housing Committee. In recent years, several 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 2020.

[Environment Health and Housing Committee 2020](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION

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EMPTY RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES POSITION STATEMENT

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 4th January 2022. 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, further types of empty property that has been empty for 2+, 5+ and 10+ years. 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 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+, 5+ and 10+ years. Between October 2020 and October 2021, for properties left empty for 6-24 months there has been a reduction of 182. This has impacted on the figures for the number of properties empty for 2 years+ which have seen an increase of 17. However, there is then a reduction in the 5 years + empty properties of 11 between October 2020 and October 2021. Separate figures for properties 10+ years empty is collected from April 2021.

Therefore, it can be concluded the introduction of the Council Tax Premium policy is having an impact on reducing the number of longer-term empty homes (5+ years) across the borough.

Table 1 – Long Term Empty Properties in Fylde

Date	Long term empty	2 years+ empty	5 years+ empty	10 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	97	37	
Oct 21	626	114	15	11

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 and environment protection can take are limited to complaints received from members of the public.

Between October 2020 to October 2021 the Housing Team has received no such complaints in relation to empty properties. However, the Environmental Protection Team has seen an increase in complaints, mainly in relation to overgrown land, filthy and verminous properties that do appear to be empty. These properties have been checked against Council tax records and the properties are listed as occupied. If the occupier is resident and requires support as they are no longer keep up with the upkeep of their home a welfare check can be made by Environment Protection or Housing Teams and if required a referral will be made to Adult Social Care for support.

Council Tax receive information from several sources, regarding whether a property is empty. They can be notified by the former occupant moving, or a landlord advising that a tenant has left a property and by a property inspection following returned mail. They welcome information received from any source and this can be emailed direct to fyldevenues@blackpool.gov.uk.

The Private Sector Enforcement Policy makes a commitment, subject to available resources, to work with owners of empty homes to bring them back into use. The Housing Team is embarking on an inspection programme from January 2022 of all houses of multiple occupancy (HMO's) within the Borough, which will assist in the identification of empty properties that appear to be in disrepair.

The adopted Local Plan for Fylde to 2032 notes 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”