

Appendix 5

Empty Property Strategy and Council Tax Premiums Due Regard (Equality Analysis)

Due Regard (Equality Analysis) is an on-going proactive process which requires us to consider the effect our decisions are likely to have on local communities, service users and employees, particularly those most vulnerable and at risk of disadvantage.

This template has been designed to assist in the collation of information and evidence required to support the 'Due Regard' process when introducing new policies/procedures/functions and services or reviewing existing ones.

For help with this template please view the guidance document, which contains advice to assist you when you are considering the impact (both positive and negative) of the proposed actions on each of the protected equality characteristics.

Name of policy/procedure/function/service being analysed: Empty Property Strategy and introduction of Council Tax Premiums on long term empties and second homes

Department and section: Regulatory Services

Name of lead officer: Ian Bartlett

Other people involved (assisting or reviewing – including any service users or stakeholder groups etc.): Council Tax, Planning Enforcement

Date assessment completed:

Step 1: Defining the policy/procedure/function/service

Is this a new, amended or reviewed policy? What are the aims, objectives and purpose and how will they be achieved? What are the main activities, and which communities are likely to be affected by these activities? What are the expected outcomes?

This is a review of the policy from 2015. The Strategy is aimed at reducing the number of empty properties and bringing empty properties back to occupation, including via letting. The aim is to engage with owners of empty properties, targeting those with the greatest risk of poor upkeep and length of time empty first, to try to support owners bringing properties back to use, but also recognising the options for enforcement action, if other routes are exhausted.

The updated strategy has put more emphasis on informal support for owners of empty properties to help them bring their property back into use, with formal enforcement used for the worst cases.

The introduction of enhanced council tax premiums in line with the action plan within the existing strategy has been developed further

Step 2: Data collection & evidence

What relevant evidence, research, data and other information do you have and is there any further research, data or evidence you need to fill any gaps in your understanding of the potential or known affects of the policy on different communities? Include quantitative data as well as qualitative intelligence such as community input and advice.

Harborough District has a recognised housing need and shortfall of affordable housing (see HEDNA report 2017) [Harborough Local Plan 2011 to 2031 - Submission documents and evidence library | Local Plan Supporting Evidence | Harborough District Council.](#)

The annual number of homes required in the local plan is over 500 new dwellings.

Empty properties can lead to an area becoming rundown when empty properties lead to an unsightly street scene. The data on empty homes since 2019/20 is shown below.

	Historic & Current Empty Property Information					
Classification	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Oct 24
<i>Empty unoccupied and unfurnished</i>	291	192	199	170	208	337
<i>Long term empty after 6 months</i>	266	407	337	383	396	286
<i>Premium 2+ years empty</i>	133	121	127	150	138	123
Total empty	690	720	703	703	742	746

The spread of homes across council tax bands shows that the majority are in lower council tax bands. However where the property is activity being marketed for sale or rent or is going through probate they will be exempt from the council tax premiums .

BAND	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
Number of dwellings which have been empty for up to a month as of Oct 2024	12	26	16	6	8	1	1	0	70
Number of dwellings that are classed as empty as of October 2024 between 1 month and 2 years .	84	124	102	75	70	34	38	4	531
Number of dwellings that are classed as empty as of October 2024 for more than 2 years and attracting a premium	21	14	15	10	5	5	5	1	76
Second homes	25	34	40	31	25	15	12	5	187

Guide to bands

Council tax bands are calculated on the value of houses as if they were in existence in 1991.

Band guide to property

A flats, terrace housing, caravans and residential moorings

B larger terrace housing, 2 bed new semis,

C 3 bed semis

D	larger semis or smaller 3 bed detached
E	4 bed detached
F	larger executive housing 4 plus bedrooms
G	larger executive housing 4 plus bedrooms
H	mansions

In addition to long term empty properties the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act allows billing authorities to introduce a 100% premium for second homes (furnished homes which are not a main residence). There are currently 187 second homes registered on the Council Tax data base. Second homes can contribute to a shortage of available housing for local residents.

The number of people at risk of homelessness in the district continues to increase. At the time of writing this report it was stated by Gov.Uk statistics that there has been an average national increase of approx. 10%. In comparison, the increase of demand at Harborough from 22/23 to 23/24 stood at 17%.

The number of application to the council's housing register continues to increase

**Number of applications
within the quarter**

	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020 -2021
Q1	373	430	334	358	108
Q2	394	342	387	368	112
Q3	N/A	332	281	318	91
Q4	N/A	401	367	431	81
Total:		1505	1369	1475	392

Step 3: Consultation and involvement

Have you consulted and if so outline what you did and who you consulted with and why.

Input from housing team, council tax, planning enforcement has been sought.

The draft Empty Property Strategy and introduction of Council Tax Premiums will be subject to public consultation and the equalities assessment will be reviewed following this process and any comments received incorporated into the final decision making process

Step 4: Potential impact

Considering the evidence from the data collection and feedback from consultation, which communities will be affected and what barriers may these individuals or groups face in relation to Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Other groups e.g. rural isolation, deprivation, health inequality, carers, asylum seeker and refugee communities, looked after children, deprived or disadvantaged communities and also the potential impact on Community Cohesion. Remember people have multiple characteristics so the impact of a policy on a particular community may impact people within the community differently. Where possible include numbers likely to be affected.

Living near an empty property can cause significant anguish, if there are issues with poor upkeep. Neighbours fear damage to their own property, as well as poorly maintained properties attracting vandalism and antisocial behaviour.

Second homes can contribute to a shortage of available housing for local residents. When properties are often taken off the market for long-term rentals, exacerbating the housing crisis.

However, it should be noted that the home-owner also has the right to enjoy their property, as part of their human rights and owners often have legitimate reasons for wishing to keep a property, whether for sentimental reasons or family disputes or indeed any other reason.

It is recognised that the property owner may also be vulnerable or suffering from poor mental health and not able to engage with the process of selling or letting a property.

The primary objective of the proposed long-term empty and second home premiums is to bring unoccupied property back into use. However, where owners choose not to do so, they will be subject to the premium which will result in additional Council Tax revenue.

Step 5: Mitigating and assessing the impact

If you consider there to be actual or potential adverse impact or discrimination, please outline this below. State whether it is justifiable or legitimate and give reasons. If you have identified adverse impact or discrimination that is illegal, you are required to take action to remedy this immediately. If you have identified adverse impact or discrimination that is justifiable or legitimate, you will need to consider what actions can be taken to mitigate its effect on those groups of people. Consider what barriers you can remove, whether reasonable adjustments may be necessary and how any unmet needs have identified can be addressed.

The strategy looks first at ways to support homeowners, including through advice, signposting and in some cases a grant. Enforcement only takes place if the level of detriment to neighbours and the lack of engagement of the owner is such that the harm to neighbours is so

great that action is needed. Consideration of vulnerability would also be factored into any enforcement, for example with the support of advocates for the home-owner.

There is a huge demand for permanent accommodation within the district, bringing empty properties or under used second homes in to the housing market supports this need

Step 6: Making a decision

Summarise your findings and give an overview of whether the policy will meet Harborough District Council's responsibilities in relation to equality, diversity and human rights. Does it contribute to the achievement of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty – eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations?

This policy meets the responsibilities of HDC through protecting neighbours and communities from the impact of poorly maintained or dangerous properties that could impact on their health and wellbeing and safety.

It protects the owners by ensuring that enforcement is the last resort but targeted to those properties where there is the greatest risk or demands.

Changes to discounts and exemptions may disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including low-income families, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. It is important to monitor the impact on this sector and review the process as required.

There are a number of exemptions in legislation which a local authority must apply when introducing empty property and second homes premiums, including properties which are actively being marketed for sale or rent or going through probate for example.

Step 7: Monitoring, evaluation & review of your policy/procedure/service change

What monitoring systems will you put in place to promote equality of opportunity, monitor impact and effectiveness and make positive improvements? How frequently will monitoring take place and who will be responsible?

Visits, letters and actions will be recorded and summarised.

A cross team group will meet to ensure data sharing on difficult cases and to support any enforcement action should it come to that point.

Equality Improvement Plan

Equality Objective :

Action: Monitor the impact of empty property and second homes premiums on vulnerable populations

Officer Responsible: Eh Team Leader

By when: Oct each year

Equality Objective :

Action:

Officer Responsible:

By when:

Equality Objective :

Action:

Officer Responsible:

By when:

Equality Objective :

Action:

Officer Responsible:

By when:

Signed off by:

Date:

Once signed off, please forward a copy for publication to Julie Clarke, Equality and Diversity Officer

e-mail: j.clarke@harborough.gov.uk , telephone: 01858 821070.