



Cabinet

To the Cabinet on Friday, 10 January 2025

Date of meeting: Monday, 20 January 2025

Time: 18:30 Please note start time.

Venue: The Council Chamber

The Symington Building, Adam and Eve Street, LE16 7AG

Members of the public can access a live broadcast of the meeting from the [Council website](#), and the meeting webpage. The meeting will also be open to the public.

- Information Exchange from Portfolio Holders
- Councillor Champion Update
- Topical Issues
 - Questions
 - Petitions
 - Notices of Motion

Agenda

- 1 Apologies for Absence
- 2 Declarations of Members' Interests
- 3 DRAFT Minutes of Cabinet - 25.11.24 3 - 18
- 4 Draft Empty Property Strategy and Council Tax Premiums 19 - 64
- 5 Devolution White Paper Update
To Follow
- 6 Draft Budget 2025/26 & Medium-Term Financial Strategy
(2026/27 to 2029/30)
To Follow
- 7 Any Urgent Business
To be decided by the Chairman.

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Circulate to: Jo Asher - Member, Paul Beadle - Member, Simon Galton - Vice-Chair, Mark Graves -
Member, Jim Knight - Member, Phil Knowles - Chairman, Darren
Woodiwiss - Member

Any exempt items included on this agenda will be heard in private. They have been included on the agenda as no representations against hearing the items in private were received.

Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting

Location: The Council Chamber, The Symington Building,
Adam & Eve Street, Market Harborough LE16 7AG



Date: 25 November 2024 commencing at 6.31pm

Present:

Councillors: Knowles (Chair) - Leader of the Council

Asher - Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Economy, and Tourism

Beadle - Portfolio Holder for Corporate

Galton – Portfolio Holder for Planning

Graves – Portfolio Holder for Finance

Knight – Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing

Woodiwiss – Portfolio Holder for Environmental and Climate Change

Forman – Domestic Violence Champion

Officers: J. Richardson – Chief Executive

L. Elliott – Deputy Chief Executive

C. Mason – Director of Finance & S.151 Officer

D. Atkinson – Director of Planning

C. Hartley – Director of Communities

C. Averill – Head of Property

N. Barnard – Head of Democratic Services and Elections and
Monitoring Officer

E. Bird – Head of Regulatory Services

K. Aitken – Business Planning Officer

S. Nash – Housing Services Manager

I. Pennington - Consultant

The meeting commenced with introductions from Cabinet members and officers.

Information Exchange from Portfolio Holders

Strategy

The Portfolio Holder for Strategy provided the following update. A meeting has been held with relevant agencies to discuss flooding issues. Anglian Water confirmed they will be investing in the District to address issues. Thanks were offered to the Local Resilience Forum and Council staff for the support to residents affected by Sunday's flooding in Little Bowden and Market Harborough. The County Council have confirmed they will be conducting a review of the flood events that occurred in October.

Congratulations were offered to Harborough Town Football Club on reaching the second round of FA cup. It was confirmed that nearly 3000 tickets had been sold for the match against Reading Football Club.

The hard copy community newsletter should now have been received by all households in the District.

The first annual community awards are being held on 5 December and the response has been so positive that the event has been moved to a larger venue. The recent active Harborough sports awards were also a great success.

The £1m community grants fund has started to be allocated with the Cabinet Sub-Committee Grants allocating over £66,000 last week.

The Corporate Peer Challenge took place two weeks ago and thanks were offered to officers for the work put into making it a success. The Peer Review Team met a wide range of partners, staff and members and recognised the significant change the organisation has faced recently and the good foundations that have been built, including good evidence of investment in communities across the whole of the District. The draft report is awaited.

Wellbeing

The Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing provided the following update. The need for affordable housing and support for homeless households is increasing with 89 households housed in October but 113 applications received. In total 127 homeless households were being worked with at the end of October and there is increasing reliance on temporary accommodation. It is increasingly challenging to deliver affordable housing and completions have decreased. Work is underway to increase temporary accommodation in the District and proactive work is being undertaken with developers and housing providers to maximise new affordable homes. An Affordable Housing Strategy is to be developed covering matters including lobbying for increased funding, working with Homes England, and increasing the number of affordable housing sites coming forward.

The planning for the Community Awards to take place on 5 December is in its final stages.

A Parish Liaison Meeting will be taking place in January and Community Safety teams are preparing to launch their festive messages for example, discouraging drink driving.

Culture, Leisure, Economy and Tourism

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Economy and Tourism provided the following update. Fifteen applications have been received to date for the £1million Community Grant. Seven of these were approved at a meeting of the Cabinet Sub-Committee, Grants last week. The outstanding application will be considered at a further meeting, the date of which is to be confirmed. The next application window is now open and closes on 9 February.

Plans for the Lutterworth town square redevelopment are progressing, ready for works to begin in 2025.

Eleven awards were presented at the Active Harborough Sports Awards and congratulations were offered to the winners and nominees as well as to those who'd organised the very successful event.

The Arena at Harborough Leisure Centre is now open offering a weatherproof space replacing the old dome. The centre refurbishment is nearing completion with an open day taking place this Saturday.

Key decisions coming forward include the Economic Development Strategy which will be progressing to Council for approval in December.

Corporate

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate provided the following update. Two Neighbourhood Planning referenda will be taking place early next year. The annual Canvas of Electors is now concluding and a new register will be published on 1 December.

A national recruitment campaign is currently underway, seeking to inspire individuals to work for Local Authorities.

The Employee pay award has now been approved and all staff have been informed they'll receive their new salary, backdated to 1 April 2024 in their December pay. Members will also receive an uplift to their allowances in December.

A report is being taken to Council in December seeking approval to move to the next stage of the Community Governance Review for Mowsley parish. If the plans progress to the approval of the establishment of a Parish Council in Mowsley the first elections will take place in May 2025, alongside the County Council elections.

Customer service teams have been conducting face to face appointments and on digital channels 1291 on-line forms were completed with the most common enquiries relating to missed bins and other waste queries.

The majority of staff have now completed the Equalities and Diversity Training. Members will also be emailed and asked to complete the training.

Planning

The Portfolio Holder for Planning provided the following update.

Local Plan evidence continues to arrive to support its development. The timetable is very tight but is progressing and there is confidence that deadlines will be met.

The agenda for next week's Planning Committee is now published and contains five applications for consideration.

Recruitment is underway in the Development Management Service. Planning enforcement continue to be busy ensuring there is compliance with planning conditions.

The Local Plan Advisory Panel is meeting on Thursday where a general update and summary of responses received during the regulation 18 consultation will be among the items discussed. It is intended that the papers presenting the draft Local Plan to Cabinet will be published before Christmas.

Finance

The Portfolio Holder for Finance provided the following update. The review of the Symington Building is now complete and will be considered at this meeting. Lanning for the 2025-26 Budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is underway.

The Harborough Innovation Centre occupancy rate remains at 98% with one until vacant and the solar panel installation is now complete. The response to the opening of the new café has been very positive. The Harborough Enterprise Centre currently has an occupancy rate of 88% but a new tenant is expected.

The footfall at the market is slightly down on last year with traders suggesting anticipation of the budget and the re-opening of the market in Northampton may have impacted.

Key Decisions coming forward include the budget and MTFS and two reports on remediation work at the Market Hall.

Environment and Climate Change

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change provided the following update. Thanks were reiterated to those officers and volunteers who had supported in recent flooding events. Work is underway with agencies to understand the impact of storm Bert. Residents affected are encouraged to submit their experience through Leicestershire County Council's website.

Free Saturday parking is to be implemented in the run up to Christmas but shoppers are reminded that they will still need to either get a ticket from the machines or register their parking via their phones. The tenders are also back on new parking machines and lighting upgrades have been completed.

Work on procuring new food and other waste collection vehicles and mechanical sweepers is underway. The change of bin collection day for over 25,000 households was well managed.

Work on the Friendship Park is being carried out.

The Envirocrime Team are running an anti-littering campaign with other councils in Leicestershire.

Councillor Champion Update

As Domestic Violence Champion, Councillor Forman gave the following update. It was noted that the meeting was being held on White Ribbon Day, an international campaign calling for the end of male violence against women and girls.

Reducing and tackling domestic abuse remains a priority for the Community Safety Partnership. There has been a 7.6% increase in reported domestic abuse compared to the same quarter last year but across the full year there has been a 2.9% reduction. The Community Safety Partnership, which is funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner proposed putting together care packages for those urgently leaving situations involving Domestic Abuse. A booklet has been designed to go into GP services and family wellbeing centres which provided basic safety advice and contact details for local and national services. Daily meetings are held regarding those at high risk of serious harm.

The UN international day to end violence against women and girls was marked through showing the impact Domestic Abuse can have and highlighting local services. Information was put out on social media and local radio. The Link Worker and Community Safety staff have been attending Leisure Centres in Broughton Astley, Lutterworth, and Market Harborough to raise awareness and signpost services.

There were no questions, petitions or notices of motion.

1. Apologies for Absence

There were none

2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3. **DRAFT Cabinet Minutes – 28 October 2024**

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 28 October 2024 were proposed by Councillor Knowles, and therefore were accepted as a true record.

4. **The Symington Building – Supplementary Asset Options**

Portfolio Holder for Finance introduced the report. He explained that the asset options review had concluded that residential use within the Symington Building is unprofitable, that the ground floor is unsuitable for cinema use due to the low ceiling height, that managed co-working/serviced offices should be investigated further, and that development of the rear car parks is potentially profitable.

It was noted that any residential development on the rear car parks can only progress following consideration of the current car parking review and that no decisions were being made on the future of the car parks other than to continue to explore the matter. It was also noted that the new Chief Executive had introduced a stronger office presence with all staff expected to be in the office once a week and people managers in twice a week.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Graves and seconded by Councillor Woodiwiss.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Cabinet:

- notes the contents of the Supplementary Assets Options Report (shown at Appendix 1 and 2 to the report).
- agrees to continue with exploring residential redevelopment in the car parking space surrounding The Symington Building.
- agrees to develop options for improved occupancy, including further tenanted options or alternative use opportunities for the Ground Floor, including customer service and/or managed office space, Second Floor with the current tenant, including potential sub-division for generating

income from managed office space, and Third Floor including looking into options for alternative use as multi-use, council only space.

- agrees to commence scoping for delayed remediation works for The Symington Building

Reasons for Recommendations

To provide more efficient use of space and environment improvement within The Symington Building for existing and future users. To reduce the energy consumption of The Symington Building. To protect the external structure of the Symington Building.

Other Options Considered

An option open to the Council is to do nothing. This was not considered a viable option because of the financial implications of operating offices larger than that required to accommodate Harborough District Council staff.

5. Corporate Plan 2024-31 for Consultation

The Portfolio Holder for Strategy introduced the report. He explained that the current Corporate Plan was approved in February 2022 and runs until 2031 but that in May 2023 a new administration was elected for Harborough district and, as a result, a light touch review of the Key Activities of the Corporate Plan was undertaken. Following this a refresh of the Corporate Plan was undertaken and the revised plan requires public consultation and scrutiny before being finalised.

It was noted that the Plan lists the Coalition's commitments. And that the recently undertaken peer challenge may produce feedback on further improvements. These will be considered alongside any responses to the consultation in the New Year prior to a final document being brought back for approval.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Knowles and seconded by Councillor Knight.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Cabinet approves the Draft Corporate Plan 2024-31 for public consultation.

Reasons for Recommendations

The Corporate Plan outlines the Council's Vision, Priorities and Critical Outcomes. It is essential to engage with the key stakeholders on its content before it is finalised to help the Council deliver better outcomes for communities, which reflects the views of those affected.

Other Options Considered

It would be possible to do nothing but this would not support the Corporate Plan in remaining up to date and relevant. It is important that the citizen voice is reflected in the refreshed version of the plan therefore consultation is required.

6. Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland's Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy Public Consultation

The Portfolio Holder for Planning introduced the report. He explained that the Environment Act 2021 had introduced mandatory Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) to support spatial planning for nature and reverse the national decline in biodiversity. Leicestershire County Council, as the 'responsible authority', is charged with a legal duty for producing the LNRS while Harborough District Council is a 'supporting authority' under the LNRS Regulations and contributes toward the preparation of the strategy. The report sought Cabinet endorsement and approval of the draft LNRS document for public consultation in January 2025.

It was noted that the County Council and all Leicestershire Districts and Boroughs have been working in partnership on this matter. The document will be used in spatial planning and aims to reduce national decline in biodiversity and provide a baseline of the state of nature in the area. There are links to the local plan and the public and other stakeholders are asked to engage with the consultation.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Galton and seconded by Councillor Woodiwiss.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Cabinet endorses and approves the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland's Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy to be published for consultation by Leicestershire County Council in January 2025

Reasons for Recommendations

To support the delivery of the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Other Options Considered

Cabinet does not endorse and approve the Draft LNRS for consultation in January 2025. This was not the recommended option as it could potentially result in delay to delivery of the LNRS, adversely impact on the potential to deliver strategic opportunities for nature recovery and interventions to contribute toward the delivery of the relevant Corporate Objectives outlined in the report.

7. 2025/26 Budget & MTFS - Budget Principles & Reserves Strategy

The Portfolio Holder for Finance introduced the report. He explained that in February each year, the Council is required to approve the Council Tax for the forthcoming year. To achieve this, the Council has to prepare an annual budget that has to comply with statutory regulations as well as its own Constitution and local corporate priorities and prepare a medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) that aids future decision making. An essential part of the budget setting process is the agreement of a set of "budget principles", which were detailed in the report. These principles set the foundation upon which the budget will be built. In addition the report asked Cabinet to review and agree any updates to the Reserves Strategy.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Graves and seconded by Councillor Galton.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Cabinet approves the budget principles, delegations and definitions that are summarised in Appendix 3 to the report and the Reserves Strategy in Appendix 4

Reasons for Recommendations

To develop the foundation on which to support the development of the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

Other Options Considered

No other options were considered as this process is an essential part of the budget setting process which is a statutory duty.

8. 2024/25 Performance Report – Financial (Outturn) and Corporate Performance Quarter 2 (Year ending 31 March 2025)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance introduced the report. He explained that the report combines two reports that were previously brought separately. The report outlined the Financial Performance (Outturn), and Performance for the year ending 31 March 2025 for revenue and capital as at end of Quarter 2. It also covered performance monitoring of the refreshed corporate plan for Quarter 2, July to September 2024. In relation to Financial Performance, Revenue is forecasting an underspend of £485k, a variance of 3.3% to the approved budget and Capital is forecasting an underspend of £11.6m, a variance of 50% to the approved budget. In relation to Performance a refresh of the corporate plan Key activities was undertaken prior to 1 April 2024, resulting in 21 Key activities for the year 2024/25 and the report covered progress against all 21 Key activities in the Corporate Plan. At the end of Quarter 2 there were no activities at red status The report also covered the 19 key performance indicators (KPI's). At the end of Quarter 2, two KPIs were at red status.

It was noted that the underspend in Capital was due to delays in schemes. Budget variances greater than £25,000 were also reported and included an

increase in IT costs, additional income from trade waste and a drop in income from Development Control.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Graves and seconded by Councillor Galton.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Cabinet notes the report.

Reasons for Recommendations

The Council's Performance Management Framework requires that both Scrutiny and the Cabinet have a role in monitoring the performance of the Council against its Corporate Plan. Good financial governance requires the Cabinet to consider and comment on financial outturn. Such commentary demonstrates to customers, partners, and stakeholders that the Council is actively considering the environment within which the Council is operating.

Other Options Considered

This report is for information only so no alternatives were considered.

9. Homelessness Temporary Accommodation Purchase Strategy

The Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing introduced the report. He explained that the Council in its role as a Local Housing Authority must provide emergency accommodation in connection with its homelessness duties. Demand for accommodation has been rising significantly and with it the costs of providing temporary accommodation. To address this the report recommended the adoption of a Temporary Accommodation Purchase Strategy which sets out a way to move from private sector provision to stock ownership in order to achieve best value. It also recommended the purchase of 3 one-bedroom flats funded from within the existing allocated capital programme.

An amendment to recommendation three was proposed by the Director of Communities to allow the purchase of one or two bedroomed flats as further

analysis of the market has revealed a shortage of one bedroomed accommodation. The amendment was accepted by Cabinet.

The recommendations, as amended, were proposed by Councillor Knight and seconded by Councillor Asher.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Cabinet:

- notes the Temporary Homelessness Accommodation Business Case included as Appendix 1 to the report
- adopts the Temporary Accommodation Purchase Strategy at Appendix 2 to the report
- agrees to the purchase of 3 one or two bedroom flats funded from within the existing allocated capital programme and
- approves the rent setting for Council owned or operated temporary accommodation properties in line with the Local Housing Allowance Rate as set out in section 3.4 of the report.

Reasons for Recommendations

To address the rising demand and cost associated with fulfilling the duty to provide Temporary Accommodation as set out in the Business Case.

The purchase of accommodation which is subsequently operated directly by the Council allows an element of cost mitigation.

Other Options Considered

Do nothing and continue to deliver the service as is now. The current demand for temporary accommodation already far exceeds the supply of owned stock. The use of hotels, Bed and Breakfast and other private sector rental has a significant impact on the budget and whilst these accommodation types will still be required to meet the need, relying only on this sector is not the preferred option. Charging rent for our own properties below the Local Authority Housing Allowance Rate, means that the Council is not maximising its ability to recover costs.

To adopt a Temporary Accommodation Purchase Strategy - Whilst the business case and purchase strategy will not negate the need for alternative provision of temporary accommodation, the ability to increase the Council's own stock will improve value for money and provide better accommodation for those in need. The purchase of more stock directly is the preferred option.

To align Temporary Accommodation Rent to the Local Housing Allowance Rate – This is the preferred option as it would ensure that the Council will maximise its income to cover the costs of providing temporary accommodation and there will be no impact on the service users as rental costs are covered by Housing Benefit.

10. Section 100A (4) Local Government Act 1972

It was **RESOLVED** to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the remaining item by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972. The public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it due to procurement process currently being undertaken.

11. Food Waste Caddies Capital Funding Allocation

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental and Climate Change introduced the exempt report.

The recommendations, as set out in the exempt report, were proposed by Councillor Woodiwiss and seconded by Councillor Asher.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Cabinet approve the recommendations as set out in the exempt report.

Reasons for Recommendations

As set out in the exempt report.

Other Options Considered

As set out in the exempt report

12. Any Urgent Business

There was none.

The meeting ended at 19.49.

Harborough District Council



Report to Cabinet 20 January 2025

Title:	<i>Draft Empty Property Strategy and Council Tax Premiums</i>
Status:	Public
Key Decision:	Yes
Report Author:	Elaine Bird Head of Regulatory Services
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr J Knight, Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing Cllr M Graves, Portfolio Holder for Finance
Appendices:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Draft Empty Property Strategy2. Council Tax Premiums additional income forecasts3. Consultation questions4. Draft Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions5. Equalities Impact Assessment.

Summary

- i. The Council approved its current Empty Homes Strategy in 2015; it is timely to update the strategy.
- ii. Since the new government was elected, it is clear that one of their primary objectives is to increase the provision of residential properties over the medium-term – this is clearly stated in their objective to build and develop 1.5m homes over the course of the next 5 years.
- iii. Although not specifically a part of that programme, the government has enacted additional statutory provisions to incentivise owners of empty properties to bring them back into residential use by increasing council tax premiums based on the time that a property has been empty (increasing to 4 times council tax if empty for 10 or more years). Further, the government is introducing a premium on all second homes (a doubling of council tax). The increases in premiums and removals of discounts will be subject to consultation, which will follow the same process as the 2025/26 budget consultation.
- iv. In addition, the Council itself is in the process of developing a risk-based process to establish a programme to prioritise bringing empty homes back into residential use along with recruiting an officer to directly support this activity.

Recommendations

That Cabinet agree the:

1. Draft Empty Homes Strategy at Appendix 1.
2. Draft Council Tax Premiums, Discounts and Exemptions at Appendix 2 and 4.
3. Consultation questions to go out for consultation at Appendix 3.

Reasons for Recommendations

The updated empty homes strategy and the changes to council tax premiums, discounts and exemptions should help to incentivise the owners of respective empty or second homes to bring them back into residential use.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is:

- a. Members to consider the draft empty property strategy ahead of public consultation.
- b. Member to consider the introduction of additional Council Tax Premiums for empty properties and second homes

A further report will be brought to a future cabinet meeting to consider the outcome of the consultation and to approve the final empty property strategy.

2. Background

- 2.1 There is no statutory duty to bring empty properties back into use, however it is recognised that long term empty properties can have a detrimental impact on the local community and when brought back into use can provide much needed accommodation.
- 2.2 At the meeting of the Executive on the 19 October 2015, members approved the Council's Empty Property Strategy which has been reviewed and refreshed and the draft updated strategy can be found in Appendix 1.
- 2.3 The strategy consolidates all the powers/initiatives currently available to the Council in relation to bringing empty properties back into use into a single document and introduced a tool for officers to use to prioritise their work on empty properties. This enables resources to be targeted to properties where there is the greatest impact.
- 2.4 As part of the review of the Empty Property Strategy review, the Council conducted a review of the council tax discounts and exemptions with the focus on empty homes and second homes to promote occupancy and reduce the impact of housing shortages. The proposed changes align with other local authorities in the Leicestershire Revenues and Benefits Partnership.
- 2.5 The Empty Homes Premium and Second Homes Premium are additional charges levied on properties that are not the primary residence of the owner. The Empty Homes Premium applies to properties that have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished

for a specific period, while the Second Homes Premium targets properties used as a secondary residence

2.6 In addition to proposals in respect of empty and second homes, there are further proposals in respect of empty, unoccupied and unfurnished discount .

3. Details

3.1 Empty properties are distributed across the district and there is no large-scale concentration of empty properties in any particular area such as occurs in many larger urban authorities. The majority of empty properties are in the main centres , but scattered across those settlements and not concentrated in particular streets or neighbourhoods.

3.2 In Harborough District in April 2022 there were 528 properties empty for more than 6 months, of which 121 properties were empty for more than 2 years. In October 2024 there were 286 properties empty for more than 6 months of which 123 were empty for more than 2 years. Empty Property trend data can be found in the table 1 below

Historic & Current Empty Property Information				Table 1
Classification	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Oct 24
Empty unoccupied and unfurnished	199	170	208	337
Long term empty after 6 months	337	383	396	286
Premium 2+ years empty	127	150	138	123
Total empty	703	703	742	746

3.3 The strategy review has focused on the following priority areas

- Utilising the application of council tax premiums for empty properties as a deterrent against continued long-term empty properties (see later).
- Standardising the application of Council Tax Premiums across the Leicestershire Revenues and Benefits Partnership
- Establishment of a risk matrix of empty properties that will enable a programme of redevelopment to be undertaken that will award the community the widest benefit in based on the principles of value for money.
- Consideration of the use of financial assistance to owners of long-term empty properties which are suitable to be used to tackle temporary accommodation issues.
- Provision of a dedicated resource to tackle empty properties across the district.

Empty Homes Premium

3.4 The Local Government Finance Act 2012 introduced the power to charge premiums in addition to the standard Council Tax for properties that have been unoccupied (empty) and substantially unfurnished for more than two years.

3.5 Since 1 April 2013, billing authorities have been able to charge this premium of up to an extra 50% of the Council Tax on the property. Since the introduction of The Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 it has been possible from April 2019 to increase this premium to 100% (i.e. pay double the

standard Council Tax charge in total) for non-exempt properties that remain empty longer than two years.

- 3.6 The Act also phased in over the next two years further increases for properties empty for longer than five years (200%) and ten years (300%). This legislation has recently been amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 which received royal assent in October 2023. In summary the new amendments, reduce the time threshold that the empty homes premium can be applied (from 2 years to 12 months) from 1 April 2024 and additionally introduce the option to charge a new second homes premium from 1st April 2025 (see below).
- 3.7 The Council currently charges a Council Tax premium of 50% for properties empty between two and five years only. The proposal is to charge a:
- 100% premium between one and five years (2 x Council Tax),
 - 200% premium between five and 10 years (3 x Council Tax), and a
 - 300% premium for over 10 years (4 x Council Tax).

Approximately 570 properties will be affected by the proposed changes.

Second Homes Premium

- 3.8 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) A billing authority wishing to use this power must give 12 months' notice before it first uses it. Therefore, the Council is required to decide before 1 April 2025, if it intends to introduce the charge from 1 April 2026.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 There are currently 187 properties identified on the Council Tax system as second homes.
- 3.11 Currently, the Council does not impose a premium on second homes. However, the proposal is to introduce a 100% premium on these properties. This change aims to encourage owners of second homes to either sell or rent out their properties, thereby increasing the availability of housing for residents.
- 3.12 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.

Empty, Unoccupied and Unfurnished Discounts

- 3.13 Under the Council's current discount scheme, a property that is empty and unfurnished is not be charged Council Tax for one month. The proposal is to remove the discount i.e. the charge becomes payable from day one.
- 3.14 The estimated number of properties that will be affected is 70.
- 3.15 The financial implications of these changes are show in Appendix 2 and discussed further in 4.3 below.

4. Implications of Decisions

Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 This report contributes to the delivery of the following corporate priorities
- 4.1.1 **Place and Community**; there will be adequate supply of housing to meet local needs across all tenures and price ranges and reducing the potential for homelessness.
- 4.1.2 **Environment and Sustainability**; In line with our climate action plan, our carbon footprint will be reduced ensuring a sustainable future.
- 4.1.3 **Prosperous local economy**; Ensure that Harborough District's towns, villages and rural areas remain attractive and vibrant places to live, work invest and visit

Consultation

- 4.2 It is important that the council considers feedback from stakeholders with regards to the draft empty property strategy and proposed changes to Council Tax premiums. Subject to the outcome of this report, consultation will take place with direct communication to all owners of empty properties and second homes along with wider community consultation. This process will ensure that all stake holders will have the opportunity to have their say prior to the implementation of any changes and any comments received will be considered through the decision-making process. Draft consultation questions are shown at Appendix 3.

Financial

- 4.3 The cost relating to the update of the Empty Homes Strategy will be met from within current resources. However, there are specific elements that will have individual financial implications; these include:
- i. Consideration of the use of financial assistance to owners of long-term properties which are suitable for to be used to tackle temporary accommodation issues.
 - The council could provide capital funding to support redevelopment costs; this would be linked to potential overage/clawback upon sale. An allocation of £100k is included in the 2025/26 capital programme.
 - ii. Provision of dedicated resource to tackle empty properties across the district.
 - The 2025/26 budget includes a proposition of a full-time, 2-year fixed term contract post to support the delivery of the empty property strategy.
 - iii. Application of council tax premiums and discounts to deter against the continuation of long-term empty properties and use of second homes.
 - If the premiums and discounts are agreed, the Leicestershire Revenues & Benefits Partnership will be able to administer a 3-partner approach to the application of premiums and discounts.
 - Based on the number of empty properties in Table 1 (and no reduction in such properties); the estimated net total council tax income (for all preceptors and the billing authority) is £556k in 2025/26; £981k in 2026/27. For the council alone (billing authority), the net council tax income is £35k in 2025/26, £69k in 2026/27.

Legal

- 4.4 Section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (the 1992 Act) (as amended by section 79 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023) (the 2023 Act) gives the Council as a billing authority the power to charge a discretionary Council Tax premium for properties empty for at least one year up to a maximum level set by law, depending on the length of time the property has been empty. There are a number of discounts and exemptions which would prohibit the ability to charge a premium are set out in Appendix 4.
- 4.5 Section 11C of the 1992 Act inserted by the 2023 Act gives the Council as a billing authority power to charge a discretionary Council Tax premium of up to 100% for properties which are periodically occupied, referred to as second homes.
- 4.6 A second home is defined as a dwelling that is substantially furnished and has no resident (i.e., it is not someone's sole or main residence). Section 11C (3) of the 1992 Act requires that the first decision to impose a premium for second homes must be taken at least 12 months before the financial year to which it would apply.
- 4.7 This means that if the Council decides to apply a premium for second homes it cannot take effect until the 2026/27 financial year at the earliest. However, it is essential that a decision is made by the Council at the latest before 31 March 2025 to give the required one-year notice. The Council has discretion on whether to apply a premium and at what level to apply the charge below these maximums.
- 4.8 The 1992 Act also provides the framework for Council Tax including provisions for discounts and exemptions.

Environmental Implications

- 4.9 Long term empty properties have the potential to increase anti-social behaviour in a local community. Focusing resources on the long-term empty properties can reduce the impact of anti-social behaviour.
- 4.10 Bringing empty properties back into use provides an opportunity to promote sustainable housing practices through improved energy efficiency measures. There is the potential to reduce carbon emissions and support the Council's commitment to achieving as far as practicable net zero carbon emissions within the district.

Risk Management

- 4.11 Bringing empty properties back into use can be challenging and time consuming. Enforcement action may be costly and there is no guarantee that all enforcement cost will be recovered.
- 4.12 The introduction of higher Council Tax premiums may increase the amount of nonpayment which will increase the demands on the debt recovery process or result in owners of empty properties employing strategies to evade the premium, taking into consideration the exemptions.
- 4.13 The Empty Property Officer resource, will be funded for a fixed term of 2 years. Working with empty property owners can be resource intensive and time consuming. Following the 2-year period, the lack of a dedicated resource will have an impact on the effective delivery of the strategy.

Equalities Impact

- 4.14 There has been a large increase in the number of applications to the Council's housing register over recent years. Bringing empty properties or underutilised second homes back into use can help meet this demand for housing.

Changes to discounts and exemptions may disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including low-income families, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. It is essential to assess how these groups might be impacted by increased financial burdens and to ensure that support mechanisms are in place. We will continue to monitor the impact of the introduction of additional premiums on vulnerable groups

The Equalities impact assessment is set out in appendix 5

Data Protection

- 4.15 There are no data protection issues associated with this report

5 Alternative Options Considered

The Council does have the option not to implement a strategy and/or make changes to the Council Tax Premiums or discounts and do nothing. However, there is a high demand for suitable accommodation across the district and bringing empty properties back into use could meet some of this unmet need.

Doing nothing with empty underutilised and problem properties may create further social consequences and implications for Council resources and service delivery, including more enforcement action which requires more significant invention.

6. Recommendation

That Cabinet agree the:

1. Draft Empty Homes Strategy at Appendix 1.
2. Draft Council Tax Premiums, Discounts and Exemptions at Appendix 2 and 4.
3. Consultation questions at Appendix 3.

7. Background papers

None

EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY

2025

Foreword

In 2015, Harborough District recognised the potential problems caused by long-term empty properties and thus produced an Empty Property Strategy. Since then, our intervention has resulted in some empty properties being brought back into use that might otherwise have still been standing vacant.

Harborough District Council recognise that there are many reasons why properties become empty and that bringing them back into use can be complicated.

Harborough District Council want to work with owners to support them to bring their properties back into use wherever possible. Formal action will be reserved for the most difficult cases, where the local community is impacted by the properties remaining empty.

This is our first strategy review and action plan update and includes new initiatives designed to reduce even further the number of empty properties in the district. We intend to continue to take action both informally and if necessary, formally to continue our record of success in dealing with empty properties in the district.

Introduction

The Government has clearly stated that it is essential that better use is made of existing housing stock to assist in the supply of housing. One way of achieving this is to take action in respect of private sector houses, left vacant by their owners for more than six months.

In November 2023 the Local Government Association published national statistics relating to empty homes from 2018 to 2022 in their document "[A Practical Approach for Councils on Dealing with Empty Properties](#)" Nationally the number of long term empty homes which have been empty for six months or more has increased from 227,953 in 2018 to 256,872 in 2022 – an increase of over 12%.

In Harborough District in April 2022 there were 528 properties empty for more than 6 months, of which 121 properties were empty for more than 2 years. In October 2024 there were 286 properties empty for more than 6 months of which 123 were empty for more than 2 years. The Council's adopted Local Plan 2011 to 2031 set a target of developing 532 new homes per year, with 40% affordable housing, which indicates the level of housing need in the district. The current emerging Local Plan will set new targets for affordable housing within the district.

There is no recognised definition of an empty property and it is not always as straightforward to identify an empty property as it may seem. Generally, and for the purpose of this strategy, an empty property is a domestic property which is void of people and furniture/possessions for at least 6 months.

There are many reasons why a property becomes empty and is not brought back into use. Here are some examples:

- Owner is in residential care and would wish to return (but often is unable to do so)
- Reluctance to let or sell the property
- Unclear ownership or probate issues
- Being marketed for sale or rent at unrealistic asking price
- Property needs repair, improvement, refurbishment or complete redevelopment
- Property has been abandoned

In addition, there are many reasons why they remain empty, including:

- Lack of knowledge/skills to refurbish or manage an empty property
- Lethargy or indifference – maximisation of wealth from assets is not a priority for an individual or company
- Business disputes
- Inheritance disputes

- DIY owner – a property is acquired as a renovation project, but expense or unforeseen problems escalate
- Owner inertia – owners who do not wish to sell or rent due to previous bad experiences or sentimental reasons, often there are mental health issues and vulnerability that contribute to the problem
- Property owner has died and there are no traceable descendants
- Land-banking – owners waiting for values to increase and not wanting to offer the property for rent in the meantime
- Obstruction – owners who simply refuse to bring the property back in to use

There is a significant need and demand for housing in the Harborough district and empty properties which could otherwise be made available for sale or rent are a wasted resource. In many cases, the longer a property is left empty the more money it will cost to bring it back into use as the condition of the property deteriorates. This makes it increasingly difficult for some owners to be able to afford to bring a property back into use and so the property remains empty and continues to deteriorate.

Apart from the estimated cost to an owner, empty properties have a detrimental effect upon a neighbourhood and often detract from both the appearance and value of adjacent properties. It has been estimated that the presence of a boarded-up property can reduce the valuation of an adjacent property by as much as 10%. There have been examples in other parts of the country where the presence of empty properties has undermined confidence in the area. This in turn has resulted in the creation of areas where nobody wants to live.

Empty Properties are often used for a range of anti-social behaviour and can be the source of a substantial number of complaints from members of the public. Properties are often vandalised and used for the dumping of refuse and there have been numerous examples of properties being fire-damaged, which can present grave risks to the occupiers of adjoining properties. Experience has also shown that empty properties can be used for prostitution and drug abuse. In addition to the environmental problems, properties left vacant deny affordable houses to those in housing need.

It is the Council's experience that the longer a property is left vacant, its condition will worsen and as a result the more problems it will cause. This can then impact on the eventual cost of returning the property back into use. As such it is important that empty properties are identified as early as possible to enable contact to be made with an owner and hopefully a quick return of the property into occupation.

Harborough District Council's Approach

Harborough District Council's Empty Property Strategy was adopted in 2015. A targeted approach has been employed to bring properties back into use, applying a range of potential solutions appropriate to the property and situation. This will ensure

that action is taken based on consistent and transparent policy criteria and will combine an approach based on incentives and enforcement.

The Council wishes to prevent properties being left vacant in the long-term and will take preventative action wherever necessary to intervene. Understanding the reasons why a property has been empty for more than 6 months is the key issue in tackling empty properties. Reasons for vacancy may vary according to owner and property circumstances and the local authority has a key enabling role to try to bring the property back into use with the owner's cooperation. Appendix 1 highlights the intervention path that the Council will follow, when dealing with an empty property.

Strategic objectives

Our strategic objectives can be summarised as follows:

- to identify and monitor both derelict and long-term empty properties
- to rate the risk that empty properties pose and target those with the greatest risk
- to raise awareness of empty property issues
- to encourage an owner to take action to secure the re-occupation of a property
- to initiate formal action to bring a property back into use

Identification and monitoring of long-term empty properties

A list of properties that are long term empty has been collated and is maintained and updated regularly. This list identifies the addresses of the properties concerned together with basic information concerning current action being taken. The list will be periodically updated and will contain both newly identified properties and those where action has been successful in bringing a property back into occupation.

Council tax records, His Majesty's Land Registry and the Electoral Register will all be used to secure information regarding the ownership of a property.

In addition, we will react to the complaints we receive from members of the public, we will also look to access any other information available to us, either internal or external to Harborough District to identify private sector empty properties.

Rating the Risk of Empty Properties

Most empty properties in the District are returned into occupation without any interventions by the council. In order to target the most problematic properties a system of prioritisation has been adopted to ensure that the most serious cases receive the most urgent attention.

The following table of criteria will be used to determine the properties to be prioritised for action. Individual cases will be reassessed in the case of changing circumstances.

Table 1: Assessment Framework for Prioritising Empty Properties

Issue	0 points	1 point	2 points	5 points
Length of time property has been left empty		Over 6 months	6months to 12 months	Over 12 months and +1 point for every year after
Area of high housing demand	No demand	Low	Moderate	High demand
Number of complaints received about the property	No complaints	1 - 2	3 - 4	5 +
Listed building Status	Not listed	Grade II	Grade II*	Grade I
Level of impact on the surrounding neighbourhood	No Impact	Low	Moderate	High impact
Property state of repair	No disrepair	Low	Moderate (e.g. Cat 2 hazard)	High (e.g. Cat 1 hazard) +10 points for multiple Cat 1 hazards
Attracting secondary problems i.e. fly tipping/anti-social behaviour	No associated problems	Low	Moderate	High

The ongoing assessment of properties on the list will enable the Council to target the most problematic properties first, considering where there is the greatest housing need, and to develop a delivery plan for individual properties including timeframes for bringing the property back into use.

Information affecting the prioritisation of empty property action will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that intervention remains responsive to changing needs in line with the Action Plan set out in Appendix 3 of the strategy.

Raising awareness of empty property issues

We would make every attempt to seek to use the media in advertising the action we are taking in the hope that this firstly reassures the public affected by such properties

and secondly, encourages empty property owners to work with us in bringing properties back into use.

In addition, we will engage with national campaigns as appropriate to raise awareness of the issue of empty properties. Our website will include the various ways that the council can support owners to bring homes back into use. The Council signposts owners of empty properties to various schemes that enable them to become accredited private landlords.

Re-occupation – informal action

Harborough District Council wants to work with owners to bring their properties back into use. Once an empty property has been identified, steps will be taken to establish ownership of the property and the current whereabouts of the owner. All reasonable attempts will be made to trace the whereabouts of an owner to commence discussions, but it should be made clear that failure to do so does not preclude the District Council from taking any action that may be legally necessary to deal with both short and long-term issues pertaining to the property.

Since 2013, councils in England have had the power to charge additional council tax on long-term empty homes. In accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 2012, the Council has exercised its discretion regarding Council Tax discounts. In 2019 an empty property premium of 50% was introduced for properties empty for more than 2 years.

In Act also so phased in over the two years further increases for properties empty for longer than five years (200%) and ten years (300%). Recent changes to the legislation strengthened the powers to council so that they can charge the premium on homes that have been empty for 1 or more years (rather than the previous 2 years).

In addition, the legislation allows for the introduction of premiums on second homes. A second home is defined as a dwelling that is substantially furnished and has no resident (i.e., it is not someone's sole or main residence). 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.

Once an owner has been identified we will enter into dialogue with them to determine what his/her proposals are for the future of the property, together with an associated time scale. Providing that the owner has plans in place to bring the property back into occupation, no further action will need to be taken by the Council, other than monitoring the property to ensure that progress is being made. Action that could be taken by the owner to secure the re-occupation of the property could include any of the following:

- ◆ Re-occupation by the owner
- ◆ Property let to tenants

- ◆ Property placed on the open market for sale
- ◆ Leasing arrangements
- ◆ Discretionary grants available to owners to assist in bringing empty properties back into use.

The Council's Environment Team has responsibility for providing advice for owners and residents. There is advice available on the Council's Web Site including how to report an empty property and information for homeowners and landlords on bringing empty properties back into use.

In some cases, subject to available resources, the Council may be able to support owners to bring empty properties back into use through the provision of an Empty Properties Grant. The grant will provide a contribution towards some of the costs required to bring the property back into a state of good repair. The grant will be discretionary and will be subject to an inspection of the property to identify the works which must be carried out before the property can be reoccupied. The grant is also reclaimed by the council once a property is sold.

The Council considers opportunities to put owners in touch with private or third sector organisations that can support the owner in renovating a building to either rent or sell.

There may be instances where a person is interested in purchasing one of the properties that we are dealing with. We will not break data protection legislation but acknowledge that freedom of information would entitle an applicant to a list of these properties. Whilst we may not be able to disclose the identity of an owner, we will where we feel an interest is genuine, advise the owner of that interest in the hope that he/she will approach the prospective purchaser directly. In other situations, we will gladly act as an intermediary in an attempt to put relevant parties in touch with each other.

Re-occupation – formal action

The Council want to enable owners to bring their empty properties back into use themselves and will work with them to try to achieve this. However, this is not always possible, and the Council can, if necessary, use a range of legislative tools to ensure that empty properties do not become a nuisance, Appendix 2 details the legislation available.

If an empty property becomes a nuisance to neighbours/the local community and informal avenues have been exhausted, then the council will consider using legislation to enforce action and this could include:

a) Nuisance and unsecured properties

Where properties have been vandalised, are open and allowing unauthorised access or being used to dump rubbish, an owner will be required to undertake works to abate

any nuisance being caused. Owners will usually be given the opportunity to do the necessary work themselves, but if they fail to do so, then the Council may undertake the work in default and an appropriate charge will be made on the property. There is also the option of prosecution dependent upon the seriousness of the offence(s).

b) Adversely affecting the amenity of a neighbourhood

The condition and appearance of an empty property can have a blighting affect and can also often be described as 'adversely affecting the amenity of a neighbourhood'. This could include for example the level of disrepair, dumped rubbish, the general appearance of the property or the overgrown state of a garden. In such situations, owners will be required to carry out appropriate work to improve the appearance of the property pending its re-occupation. Failure to fulfil this legal obligation could result in the Council undertaking the necessary work in default, placing a charge on the property and/or undertaking a prosecution.

c) Community Protection Notice

Under the Crime and Policing Act 2014 an individual can be served with a notice to bring a property up to a certain standard, where it is creating a nuisance to neighbours/the local community. In this case the action is against the person and not the property. Formal action follows and incremental approach and an individual would be first warned that they would be served with a Community Protection Notice (CPN).

d) Enforced sale

Enforced sale is a procedure that can be used by the Council which not only assists in bringing empty properties back into use but also ensures that debts owed to the Council are recouped.

Mention has already been made that the Council can undertake work in default on behalf of an owner to ensure that problems with an empty property are resolved. The owner does, however, still have a liability and will be expected to pay for the cost of these works together with any other costs incurred by the Council. In certain circumstances where debts go unpaid the Law of Property Act 1925 can be used to 'force' the sale of the property to recover these debts. The subsequent sale not only ensures that the Council recovers the money owed to it but will also result in new owners undertaking the renovation and reoccupation of the property.

d) Compulsory purchase orders

The use of compulsory purchase powers is viewed by the Government as a 'last resort' for Councils to use in situations where they have failed to secure the co-operation of an owner in bringing an empty property back into use. The Council views compulsory purchase as a valuable tool in dealing with empty properties and will use these powers in situations where the co-operation of the owner is not forthcoming.

The timescale for possible compulsory purchase action will be greatly determined by the response of an owner. The council will offer every opportunity for an owner to submit proposals for the reoccupation of a property together with agreed timescales. It will only be in instances where no such proposals are forthcoming or not honoured when compulsory purchase action will be commenced.

Prior to commencing compulsory purchase procedures, owners will be advised of the council's intention to consider such action in a final attempt to encourage activity on their part.

Compulsory purchase orders, once made by the council, need to be confirmed by the relevant Government office. Prior to a decision being made, a local public inquiry may be necessary in situations where owners object to the making of an order.

In the event of a compulsory purchase order being confirmed we will seek to dispose of the property to somebody who is prepared to enter into an agreement with the council to renovate and reoccupy within a specified period of time. The council may apply covenants to any sale that takes place to control the future occupation of the property.

e) Empty dwelling management orders

As part of its ongoing commitment into ensuring that empty properties are brought back into use, the government introduced Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) in the Housing Act 2004.

An EDMO can be applied to a dwelling that has been empty for at least six months. In appropriate cases an EDMO might be considered as an alternative to using compulsory purchase powers. It must be stressed that EDMOs will not be appropriate in all cases, but they do enable the Council to in effect take over the management and control of a dwelling. Unlike compulsory purchase orders, an owner still retains ownership of the property. The Council would, however, spend money on the renovation, repair and management of the property and these costs would be recoverable.

Monitoring and Review

This strategy is operational from 2025 to 2030 and builds on the Strategy from 2015.

It will be reviewed periodically and updated as necessary to ensure it remains responsive to local and national issues, changes in legislation/guidance and operational requirements.

Any case requiring intervention in the form of Compulsory Purchase, Enforced Sale or Empty Dwelling Management Order, will be subject to the appropriate authorisation of the Council.

Achievements to date

Action on empty homes since the introduction of the strategy has been delivered in several areas that had been identified in the previous Action Plan, specifically:

- Revoking the discount offered to empty property owners and introducing a 50% empty homes premium. This has led to conversations with owners of long-term empty properties, which has helped signpost them to support.
- There are regular inspections of long-term empty properties on the list to evaluate risk. These are done on an area-by-area basis and are used to update the council tax records. Properties that remain empty are then targeted for intervention. The number of interventions is reported monthly.
- There is ongoing engagement with some of the properties that have been identified as problematic. This follows the process identified for dealing with empty properties (see Appendix 1).
- There is information on empty properties on the council website. This often leads to complaints about properties that are empty.
- Some of the online complaints have related to empty properties that are exempt from the list, for example because probate is still in process. Others have led to the identification of some properties that are incorrectly reported to council tax.
- There is ongoing engagement with partners, including social housing providers to find opportunities for intervention. Further engagement with private and third sector organisations has taken place to try to find possible services that homeowners could access. This work is ongoing.

Action Plan

The revised Action Plan is included as Appendix 3. This includes some actions that continue from the original Action Plan for 2015- 2020 but introduces some new actions.

A joined up approach across the council is effective way to work to ensure that the most appropriate course of action is taken in relation to the more problematic long-term empty cases. The approach includes officers from housing, planning, council tax and environmental health, with support from legal services.

Further work on building partnerships with private and third sector organisations to support homeowners to return their properties to use, has also been identified as a priority. This will allow the council to offer homeowners a wider range of support.

Further work on communications and promoting the return of empty homes to use is also a priority.

Performance and targets

Our performance and targets are intended to reflect the 'direct action' taken by the District Council in securing the re-occupation of an empty property. The number of interventions, including inspections, formal letters, meetings and other contact, will be recorded monthly. The number of empty properties will be reported annually.

Table 2 below provides information in terms of the number of empty private sector properties in the Harborough District over recent years.

Statistical data regarding the number of empty properties is taken from the District Council's Housing Investment Programme submission document.

Table 2: Empty properties in the Harborough District

	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/ 19	2019/ 20	2020/ 21	2021/ 22	2022/ 23	2023/ 24
Total number of empty properties	672	670	657	662	721	805	703	703	742
Number of empty properties for more than 6 months (October 2020)	347	355	331	322	379	528	377	383	396
Number of properties classed as empty and being charged the empty homes premium	0	0	0	103	113	121	127	150	138

Equality Assessment

The equality assessment recognised that bringing empty properties back into use would have a positive impact on the local community by reducing the issue of blight and the risk of anti-social behaviour in the area.

The strategy recognises that enforcement action will only be considered as a last resort and in the event of such action due consideration will be given to human rights and equality legislation throughout the process.

Contact Information

Should you have any comments about this strategy or require any further information on empty property issues, please contact the Environment Team at:

Harborough District Council

The Symington Building

Adam & Eve Street

Market Harborough

Leicestershire

LE16 7AG

Email: environmentteam@harborough.gov.uk

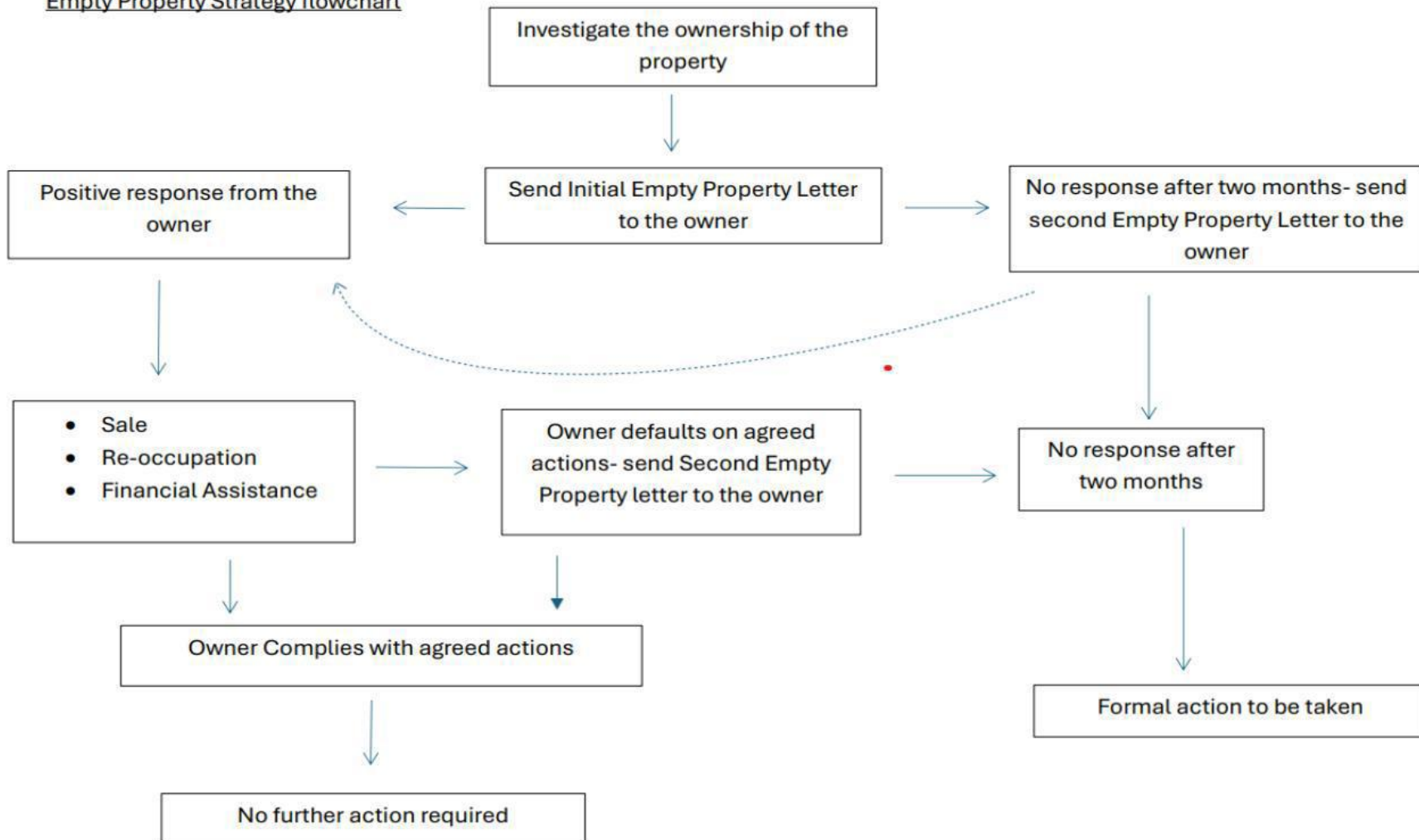
Empty properties can also be reported via the Council website at www.harborough.gov.uk

Appendices

1. Intervention Process Map
2. Enforcement powers available to the council
3. Action Plan

Appendix 1: Intervention Process Map

Empty Property Strategy flowchart



Appendix 2: Enforcement Powers Available to the Council to Tackle Long-Term Empty Properties

Problem	Legislation	Power Granted
Dangerous or dilapidated buildings or structures	Building Act 1984 Sections 77 and 78	To require the owner to make the property safe (Section 77) or enable the Local Authority to take emergency action to make the building safe (Section 78).
	Housing Act 2004 Part 1	Under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System local authorities can evaluate the potential risks to health and safety arising from deficiencies within properties and take appropriate enforcement action.
	Environmental Protection Act 1990 Section 80	To determine whether any premises is in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance.
Unsecured properties (where it poses a risk that it may be entered or suffer vandalism, arson or similar)	Building Act 1984 Section 78	To allow the Local Authority to secure the property.
	Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 Section 29	To require the owner to take steps to secure a property or allow to board it up in an Emergency.
Blocked or defective drains or private sewers.	Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 Section 35	To require the owner to address obstructed private drains.
	Building Act 1984 Section 59	To require the owner to address blocked or defective drainage.
	Public Health Act 1961 Section 17	To require the owner to address blocked or defective drainage.
Vermin (where it is either	Public Health Act 1961 Section 34	To require an owner to remove waste so that

present or there is a risk of attracting vermin) that may detrimentally affect people's health.	Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 Section 4	vermin is not attracted to the site.
	Public Health Act 1936 Section 83	
	Environmental Protection Act 1990 Section 80	
	Building Act 1984 Section 79	
Unightly land and property affecting the amenity of an area.	Public Health Act 1961 Section 34	To require the owner to remove waste from the property (see above).
	Building Act 1984 Section 79	To require the owner to address unightly land or the external appearance of a property.
	Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Section 215	To require the owner to take steps to address a property adversely affecting the amenity of an area through its disrepair.
	Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014	To require the owner to take steps to address a property adversely affecting the amenity of an area through its disrepair.

Appendix 3: Action Plan 2025 to 2030

Actions	Justifications	Milestones	Responsible Officer/Team	Funding/Resources	Timescales	Expected outcomes
Regular sharing of information on empty properties between Revenues and Benefits and Enforcement Officers	Informed use of strategic information in support of further service development	Annual Audit of Council Tax Information to meet deadline for Government returns Sharing of empty property information	Council Tax Team Leader Partnership Manager (Revenues and Benefits)	Operational budget	Annual Monthly	Reduce discrepancies in Council Tax data. Sharing information to shape the prioritisation of interventions
Maximise the application of Council Tax Premiums on empty properties	The increased cost to owners of long-term empty properties and second homes should encourage them to bring them back into use without enforcement intervention	Consultation on the proposed changes Align the approach of Council Tax Premiums across the Revs and Bens Partnership Review and evaluate the impact of the	Partnership Manager (Revenues and Benefits)	Operational budget	Introduced XX	Voluntary Reduction in the number long term empty properties and second homes

		introduction, quarterly.				
Remain responsive to issues affecting owners/landlords that impact on vacancy rates.	Support for landlords and the local economy leading to increased sustainability of occupation	Development and promotion of information for landlords / owners via South Leicestershire Landlord Forum Empty Property Grant linked temporary accommodation Aquisition	Environment Team Leader Housing Team	Operational budget	On going	Increased number of accredited landlords To allow every opportunity for empty home owners to engage with the authority informally
Promote the strategy to highlight the issues presented by empty homes, and promote the successes and benefits of bringing empty homes back into use	Reduction in number of empty properties through education and service awareness.	Update website content and other information available Participate in Empty Homes Week	Environment Team Leader	Operational Budget	On going	Increased awareness of the impact of empty properties Streamlined process for reporting problematic empty properties

Develop links with third sector organisations and private companies that can support empty property owners to bring them back into use	Support homeowners to access a range of possible services that could help them to find a way to move the empty property to market	Establishment of links with companies and third sector renewal organisations	Environment team Leader	Operational Budget External funding	On going	Re-occupation of properties through owners' own actions
To risk assess the list of properties for enforcement action based on prioritisation criteria.	To ensure that the most problematic issues are addressed first To provide a transparent criteria for the prioritisation of empty property action	Maintenance of project plan for top priority properties including timeframes for interventions including cross team action to coordinate the approach	Environment Team Leader	Operational budget	Annual review, with monthly updates	Properties for enforcement action identified and reviewed until resolved To pursue enforcement action and to progress with the appropriate tools where there is no reasonable prospect of the property being brought back into use

Forecast of additional revenue taking into account empty property charges and premiums											Appendix 2			
Classification of Council Tax Premium and Discounts			Numbers of Properties based on CTB (November 2024)	Council Tax Band								Impact on Council Tax		
				Council Tax Multiplier	0.66666667	0.77777778	0.88888889	1	1.22222222	1.44444444	1.66666667	2	Total Council Tax (average based on billing and precepting authorities) A	HDC element only B
Current position	Proposed position			A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	£2,212.48	£177.97	
Empty unoccupied and unfurnished discount	Following a change in owner if empty a 100% discount will apply for first month	No discount, this discount to be abolished.	70	12	26	16	6	8	1	1	0			
				Total council tax	£1,475	£3,728	£2,622	£1,106	£1,803	£266	£307	£0	£11,307	
				HDC council tax only	£119	£300	£211	£89	£145	£21	£25	£0	£910	
Empty Property Premium	For properties currently empty for more than 1 month		531	84	124	102	75	70	34	38	4			
	Following a change in owner if empty a 100% discount will apply for first month	To charge full Council Tax following a change in owner			Total council tax	£10,325	£17,782	£16,717	£13,828	£15,774	£9,055	£11,677	£1,475	£96,633
				HDC council tax only	£831	£1,430	£1,345	£1,112	£1,269	£728	£939	£119	£7,773	
	Charge a Premium of 50% from start of Year 2 (i.e. current Council Tax + 50%)	Premium of 100% from start of Year 1 (i.e. double Council Tax)		<i>(assume 25% of 531 properties are empty for over one year)</i>										
				Total council tax	£30,975	£53,345	£50,150	£41,484	£47,322	£27,164	£35,031	£4,425		£289,896
				HDC council tax only	£2,492	£4,291	£4,034	£3,337	£3,807	£2,185	£2,818	£356		£23,320
For properties that will exceed 5 years empty under new premium policy		76	21	14	15	10	5	5	5	5	1			
Currently a premium is only charged at 50% after 2 years -there are no increases in premium beyond that	Premium of 200% (i.e. Council Tax * 3) for 5-10 years and 300% (i.e. Council Tax * 4) for 10+ years.			Total council tax	£30,975	£24,091	£29,500	£22,125	£13,521	£15,979	£18,437	£4,425	£159,053	
			HDC council tax only	£623	£484	£593	£445	£272	£321	£371	£89		£3,198	
<i>NB. The following are the numbers of properties between 5 and 10 years and 10 years plus, but they are included in the 76 above.....</i>														
<i>Empty between five and ten years</i>			29	9	3	4	3	3	4	2	1			
<i>Empty over ten years</i>			16	2	4	5	3	2	0	0	0			
2nd Homes	No premium applied.	Premium of 100% (i.e. double council tax) unless exceptions apply. This is not chargeable until April 2026	187	25	34	40	31	25	15	12	5			
				Total council tax	£36,875	£58,508	£78,666	£68,587	£67,604	£47,937	£44,250	£22,125	£424,552	
				HDC council tax only	£2,966	£4,706	£6,328	£5,517	£5,438	£3,856	£3,559	£1,780	£34,150	
Estimate Additional Council Tax											2025/26	£556,889	£35,201	
											2026/27	£981,441	£69,351	

Properties currently in receipt of a discount for one month For each property we will charge an extra 1 month
For each property we will charge an extra 1 month from 1 April 2025
If we assume 25% of those in line 4 have been empty for over one year - they will attract a 100% premium from 1 April 2025
For each property we will collect a premium of 100% after one year rather than 50% after 2 years
For info these are currently included in line 9 Number of second homes
For each property we will recover a 100% premium but not effective until 1/4/26

Source of Information for Council Tax Calculation

Leicestershire County (Main+Care)		£1,601.58
Policy & Crime	Council, Apx 9, Para 4 - all band D	£286.23
Leics, Leics C & Rutland Fire		£81.65
Harborough District	Council, Main Report, Recommendation (see bullet before special expenses)	£177.97
Parish/Town	Total Precepts 2,531,873 (included in total of 36,318,633 which is shown in Main report, first bullet under Council Tax)	
	Total Clax Band D Base 38921.9 Council, Apx 9, Para 1a, 65.05	£65.05
Average Council Tax		£2,212.48

Consultation Questions

Appendix 3

Empty Homes Strategy, including changes to Council Tax Exemptions & Discounts.

Harborough District Council is currently reviewing its Empty Homes Strategy and welcomes your views on our approach to bringing private properties back into use.

The Council regards empty homes as a wasted resource particularly as there is such an acute demand for affordable accommodation in the area. The Council wants to improve how we work with the private housing sector to improve the availability of affordable and suitable accommodation across the district.

So, whether you are a local resident, landlord, local business or owner of an empty property we would like to hear your views. The questions should only take a few minutes to complete and are split out between the general Empty Property Strategy and some specific questions around the changes to the Council Tax Premiums and discounts we are considering.

General Comments on the Empty Property Strategy

- 1. Do you think the draft strategy clearly explains why empty properties are a priority for the council?**

RANGE FROM 'STRONGLY SUPPORT' TO 'STRONGLY DISAGREE'

- 2. Do you agree with the Councils approach to identifying and prioritising empty properties?**

RANGE FROM 'STRONGLY SUPPORT' TO 'STRONGLY DISAGREE'

- 3. Do you agree with the Councils approach for providing help and assistance to owners of empty properties?**

RANGE FROM 'STRONGLY SUPPORT' TO 'STRONGLY DISAGREE'

- 4. Do you agree with the Council's approach to enforcement when appropriate to deliver the strategy?**

RANGE FROM 'STRONGLY SUPPORT' TO 'STRONGLY DISAGREE'

5. Do you have any other comments on the Councils draft empty property strategy?

Council tax discounts, exemptions and premiums and Second homes

As part of this work we are looking at council tax discounts and exemptions, which reduce what our income could be in some areas. We're also looking at where we can charge extra council tax in some areas. By giving discounts to second and empty home-owners, and avoiding premiums, we miss out on around £550,000 in additional money in year one that could be used to invest and protect important public services not just Harborough District Council but Police, Fire and Rescue and the County Council.

We also know that, over time, circumstances and needs within our community can change and our policies need to reflect these changes accurately. Our goal is to for our council tax system to be fair, transparent and equitable for all residents.

This set of proposals would remove discounts and exemptions for second home-owners and increase the amount of council tax paid by owners of long-term empty properties.

As well as increasing our income, we hope that these proposals would reduce the number of properties that stay empty for a long time.

Proposals

PROPOSAL 1 - EMPTY PROPERTIES

Harborough District Council currently gives a 100% council tax discount on empty, unoccupied and unfurnished properties for one month. This means owners of empty properties pay no council tax for one month. We are proposing to remove this discount and charge full council tax from the point of ownership.

1. Are you the owner of an empty, unfurnished property?

YES / NO

If you answered yes to question 1

2. Are you in need of or currently carrying out major repairs to the property?

YES / NO

3. Do you support or disagree with this proposal?

YES / NO

4. Are you the owner of a furnished, unoccupied property?

YES / NO

If you answered yes to question 4, is your property:

- **Subject to probate**
- **An emergency situation**
- **Owner in hospital or residential care home**

5. Do you support or disagree with Proposal 1?

RANGE FROM 'STRONGLY SUPPORT' TO 'STRONGLY DISAGREE'

6. Do you have any further comments about Proposal 1?

PROPOSAL 2 - LONG-TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES

Harborough District Council currently charges one and a half the standard council tax rate (150%) if a property has been empty for between two and five years. We are proposing that council tax on long term empty properties will be charged as follows:

- Empty 1-5 years – double standard council tax (200%)
- Empty 5 – 10 years – triple standard council tax (300%)
- Empty 10 years or more – four times standard council tax (400%)

7. Do you support or disagree with this Proposal 2?

RANGE FROM 'STRONGLY SUPPORT' TO 'STRONGLY DISAGREE'

8. Do you have any comments about this Proposal 2?

PROPOSAL 3 – SECOND HOMES

Second homeowners currently pay the standard rate of council tax on those properties in Harborough District. We are proposing that these property owners would pay double council tax (a 100% surcharge) from day one.

9. Are you the owner of a second home within Harborough District?

YES / NO

10. Do you support or disagree with this Proposal 3?

RANGE FROM 'STRONGLY SUPPORT' TO 'STRONGLY DISAGREE'

11. Do you have any comments about Proposal 3?

Appendix 4

Exemptions to the Application of Council Tax Premiums

The Local Government Finance Act 1992 (the 1992 Act) (as amended by section 79 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023) (the 2023 Act) gives the Council as a billing authority the power to charge a discretionary Council Tax premium and also sets out the exemptions which would prohibit the ability to charge a premium.

Classes of dwelling	Application	Definition
Class E	Long term empty and second homes	Dwelling which is or would be someone's sole or main residence if they were not residing in job-related armed forces accommodation
Class F	Long term empty and second homes	Annexes forming part of, or being treated as part of, the main dwelling
Class G	Long term empty and second homes	Dwellings being actively marketed for sale (12 months limit)
Class H	Long term empty and second homes	Dwellings being actively marketed for let (12 months limit)
Class I	Long term empty and second homes	Unoccupied dwellings which fell within exempt Class F and where probate has recently been granted (12 months from grant of probate / letters of administration)
Class J	Second homes only	Job-related dwellings. A dwelling would be classed as a job-related dwelling, where it is a dwelling provided by a person's employer for the purposes of performing their work. The definition of a job-related dwelling for the purposes of this exception is set out in the Schedule to the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003. Examples include headteachers for boarding schools who are required to live in school accommodation.
Class K	Second homes only	Occupied caravan pitches and boat moorings
Class L	Second homes only	Seasonal homes where year-round, permanent occupation is prohibited, specified for use as holiday accommodation or planning condition preventing occupancy for more than 28 days continuously

Under the Council's current discount scheme, a property that is empty and unfurnished is not be charged Council Tax for one month. The proposal is to remove the discount i.e. the charge becomes payable from day one unless one of the listed exemptions applies.

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.