

Increase in Long-Term Empty Homes Premium Consultation Findings

1. Background

A public consultation ran for 5 weeks from 29th October 2018 to 3rd December 2018.

The consultation requested views on the proposal to increase the premium charge from 50% to 100% from 1 April 2019.

It also asked for views on further options to increase the premium charged on properties that have been empty for longer than 5 years to 200% from 1 April 2020 and those empty for 10 years or more to 300% from 1 April 2021.

The consultation was available online and by paper form to download where required. Direct mailing was used to contact all Council Tax payers currently liable to pay the Empty Homes Premium, and the consultation was promoted internally through the service, including the Council's Empty Homes Team.

Letters about the consultation were also sent to various stakeholders including private and registered social landlords and our major preceptors Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Information about the survey was also available at the Sefton Borough libraries and our One Stop Shops. The Council also promoted the Consultation on its website, intranet, via a press release and Sefton Council's social media.

The aim of the survey is to ensure that the views of those Council Tax payers affected, other stakeholders and members of the public are considered before the decision is made to implement the premium from 1 April 2019 and that any exceptions to the premium be considered.

1. Consultation Options

The options consulted on were as follows,

Question 1 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposals to double the Council tax premium on properties that have been left empty for more than 2 years from 50 per cent to 100 per cent.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Question 2 Do you have any comments relating to this proposal? You may wish to highlight any circumstances where this premium should not apply other than those examples mentioned earlier that are already exempt from Council Tax.

Question 3 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the potential future changes to increase the premium to 200 per cent on homes left empty from 5 to 10 years from April 2020 and to 300 per cent on those empty for more than 10 years from 1 April 2021?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Question 4 Do you have any comments relating to the potential future changes to increase the premium to 200 per cent on homes left empty from 5 to 10 years from April 2020 and to 300 per cent on those empty for more than 10 years from 1 April 2021? You may wish to highlight any circumstances where this premium should not apply other than those examples mentioned earlier that are already exempt from Council Tax.

3. Analysis of survey results

- In total, there were 129 responses to the on-line consultation, which is relatively substantial for a premium affecting only 645 properties.
- Details of the capacity in which those who responded to the on line survey are listed in the table below: -

(a)	A Member of the public	78
(b)	A Local business owner	2
(c)	A landlord of a property in Sefton that isn't empty	24
(d)	A landlord of a property that is empty	17
(e)	An elected Member	0
(f)	A local charity, voluntary or community organisation	0
(g)	Other (please specify) Executor	4
	No response provided	4

3.3 Of the 129 respondents to the online Questionnaire, the following postcodes were submitted

Postcode breakdown					
Outside Sefton	L20	L21	L22	L23	L30
9	11	7	6	9	2
L31	L37	L38	PR8	PR9	Not

					Completed
3	7	1	19	19	36

3.4 Responses to questions

Question 1 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposals to double the Council tax premium on properties that have been left empty for more than 2 years from 50 per cent to 100 per cent.

Strongly agree	51
Agree	15
Neither agree nor disagree	7
Disagree	12
Strongly disagree	43
No response provided	1

Question 2 Do you have any comments relating to this proposal? You may wish to highlight any circumstances where this premium should not apply other than those examples mentioned earlier that are already exempt from Council Tax.

	Comment
L20	<p>Most Landlords don't deliberately leave property's empty for more than a year.</p> <p>As a property owner, I'm trying to find a tenant. Increased council tax penalises me for this.</p> <p>I agree that increasing the council tax on long term empty properties is a fair approach as long as constructive advice is available from the council. I feel that the initial exemption of one month for vacant unfurnished properties should be extended to two months.</p> <p>There may also be economic reasons for the property being empty. Only if the owner does not cooperate with the Council to change this should the premium may be in place.</p> <p>Monies raised should be put towards social housing care.</p> <p>Why should anyone have to be "incentivised", or to put it another way, bullied and forced into occupying, or putting their property up for rent, or even for sale, just because it has been empty for a certain length of time? It is THEIR house, NOT a COUNCIL house, and therefore it is the OWNER's right to choose what they do with their property, as long as it is not illegal or anti-social, and all the bills are paid. It is irrelevant how long a private house stays empty,</p>

as long as it is kept in a reasonable state of repair and is not causing any problems to the neighbours, so therefore, the owner should only have to pay the standard rate of Council Tax like other property owners, NOT an inflated rate. It is not up to private property owners to solve the Council's housing problem, nor is it up to them to be an easy target to solve Sefton Council's financial problems. The Council should be targeting those who deliberately evade paying Council tax, not ripping off those who do pay - this proposal is just wrong. Just because somebody owns a property does not mean that they are rich. I inherited my house from my parents who worked extremely hard to buy a house which they would eventually leave to me; they were very proud of being able to do this for me. As well as having a strong emotional attachment to the house, I am disabled, on a very low income, and therefore unable to renovate the house myself, or pay for a builder to do it. Why should I be penalised by having to pay a huge premium? I have done nothing wrong, I am not a scrounger who expects something for nothing; I pay all the bills on the property. Likewise, somebody who is working and on a low income cannot afford to pay a builder to renovate their property and so would have to do it themselves at weekends and after work - a long job. Why should they be penalised with a huge premium?

An excellent proposal. The Council needs to generate revenue in any way possible.

The refurbishment of this property is progressing well & being done to a high standard. This is taking longer & costing more than we anticipated, but the property is in good repair & not causing any nuisance or issue for neighbours (with whom we are on very good terms) or Sefton Council. The additional imposition of Council Tax costs would inevitably lead to financial pressures which could offset completion of refurbishment works. We are retired people who are doing our best to look after a house that has been in our family since 1941.

My property was seriously vandalised by last council tax tenant and I just haven't got the funds (in excess of £3000) required for repair and replacement.

As a private landlord with one property, our former home, the additional financial burden of having an empty property was not one I was expecting. Unfortunately, tenants are not perfect and I have suffered through non-payment of rent, eviction costs and extensive repairs of damage caused by the tenant.

So, despite having to meet the mortgage on the property while it is empty, and pay for repairs the recent changes in council tax cause further burden. Originally a 6 month exemption period applied to empty properties. That has now reduced to one month. The increase in premiums adds further to my financial issues.

	<p>It is not my intention that the property remains empty, why would it? But additional council tax premiums simply prevent or delay the necessary work required to get the property in rental condition.</p>
L21	<p>If a property is up for sale they should not have to pay the charges.</p> <p>Your proposal would punish people who are already punished and will do nothing to improve the poor housing situation. There are many reasons for houses to be left unoccupied for a length of time and none of these are to benefit the owner. Your proposal, and indeed your current policy, merely compounds the financial hardship. It would be far more effective to offer help to the owners of long term occupied homes to get them ready for sale/rental. Loans and grants should be available. Compulsory purchase could also be an option should the owners keep a property empty for two years or, perhaps, a commandeering of the property to be rented to deserving people with the equivalent of social rent only going to the owners. There are many solutions to the housing shortage and the number of unoccupied homes and none of them involve imposing what amounts to monthly fines.</p> <p>Sometimes people own properties that have fallen into disrepair and they do not have the funds to renovate it.</p> <p>I think this possibly to apply to landlords, however I wouldn't agree with it for our circumstances. My mother passed away and we have been trying to sell her bungalow. Naturally it's in our interests to get rid as soon as possible but it's not been as easy as it sounds. The property has sold 6 times, but the sale has been withdrawn for one reason or another (not due to anything wrong with the property) so here we are over 12 months down the line. We are constantly worried about the property being broken into because there are no police to deal with that. I have emailed many times about recruiting more police but she doesn't reply. The fact is that your council probably owns many of the empty properties anyway.</p>
L22	<p>If someone can afford to leave a property empty for that length of time they're clearly able to afford it, so the charges are an entirely appropriate incentive to correct the commercial priorities.</p> <p>Unfortunately, I am unaware of all the reasons that people have for not paying their council tax on an empty property but the existing exclusions should remain.</p> <p>For small landlords, this is a crippling double penalty when added to the already lost the rental income. Landlords with large portfolios (exceeding £1 million) who might have property for investment purposes can afford to pay 100%.</p> <p>No one should be expected to pay more than 100% charge. The</p>

	<p>services for the property are the same for everyone whether the property is empty or occupied. In fact, empty properties are not impacting on Sefton Council services for a property.</p> <p>The property needs work and this further expense would further delay the work going ahead If the owner is living on a pension may be some assistance could be provided.</p>
L23	<p>As a landlord in Sefton I have previously been impacted by the 50% additional charge. I have purchased empty properties which have required full renovations before I could find tenants. As one property had already exceeded the 2 years of being empty when I purchased it I was liable for the additional council tax charges. This I felt was unfair. Surely taking a property which is not liveable and has been empty for some time and doing the necessary renovations to provide additional affordable homes in the area is a good thing and should be rewarded and not punished. That said I agree that properties should not be kept empty and a penalty should be in place for those who sit on empty properties. I am aware that this can be a problem in some areas I think a fair addition to the new rules would be to reset the clock one these properties when newly purchased to provide landlords like myself the opportunity and incentive to improve living standards within Sefton.</p> <p>There are a number of unused/ derelict buildings and it would be a positive result if an increased council tax payment forced the owners into letting or selling them, to bring vibrancy to the area. However, those with legitimate reasons for leaving the property empty should not be penalised.</p> <p>I think the 100% charge should be applied after 6 months of being empty. It is inappropriate to leave a property empty while so many people need a home and councils are having financial difficulties.</p> <p>It might make the owner make more of an effort to get the property occupied.</p> <p>It is crucial that people do not continue to have incentives to leave houses empty by the current lower council tax rate, given the numbers of homeless people and others who may be living in cramped conditions. This increase would hopefully be some deterrent.</p> <p>I think you should look at the finances of the owners of these properties. If they live elsewhere it's possible that they can't afford more council tax and by taking them to court you would waste even more money. I don't think it should be a complete ban on the exemption of the 50% tax as it is now. I even think that is too much - isn't the tax for facilities used and if no-one lives there they don't use any facilities!</p>

I would suggest the increase should be even larger, say to 200%, to have a greater effect on the situation.

It is immoral for people to have unused living accommodation while there are so many families without a home.

I feel that a lot of people for good reasons could have a property for 2 or 3 years empty so 50% seems fairer

Where probate has been granted and the property is for sale

My parents are stuck living next door to an empty property that has been that way in excess of 10 years. Owners refuse to sell yet put solar shades on a roof that is in a bad state of repair? My elderly parents are petrified that squatters will move in and we have no way of contacting these selfish owners. My parents and their neighbours try to keep the front of the house tidy so it isn't obvious what the situation is but are too elderly to continue to keep that up. It is a disgrace the place is left to rot. Hit the owners where it hurts - in their pocket and this will hopefully make them do something about the property.

The government and local authorities are taking a totally simplistic view and failing to understand the complex series of factors that can cause properties to remain empty, including for example, simple lack of market demand, or lack of financial resource on the part of the owner to bring dilapidated properties back from the brink back into use.....even just these two example factors can have a complex inter-relationship, with one interacting on the other. The proper and productive approach to this problem would be to abandon the stick (or at least not make it any bigger) and throw a carrot or two at it.

I understand why the proposal would be implemented for empty properties that could be brought back into use. However, this should not apply to circumstances such as the one that I am in. I am executor to my mother's will - she died in January 2015 and probate was obtained in May 2015, since when the property has been up for sale. It is a one bedroomed retirement shared ownership flat in XX. It went on the market at £65,000 and has been reduced over time to its current asking price of £44,950 and has been on the market with two estate agents. The shared ownership is with a Housing Association and they are difficult to deal with and I have lost one buyer due to their incompetence. In the meantime, not only do I have to pay council tax at an additional 50% rate, but I shall have to pay monthly service charges and a sinking fund charge if ever it is sold. There will be very little money left by the time this all happens. I feel very strongly that I should not be having to pay any council tax, as I receive no services

	<p>whatsoever, never mind an additional premium. Due to myself spending lots of my time caring for my mother, I managed to keep her out of Sefton's Social Services system, and she never needed any additional support from the Council. Also, the Council itself does nothing to help me sell the flat - sale boards are not allowed outside the listed building. I am unable to bring the flat into use unless it is sold, one of the conditions of the lease is that I am unable to rent it out. I am extremely concerned whether there will be sufficient funds if the council tax charge is further increased. In circumstances where an executor to a will is unable to sell or rent a property and can prove that they have done everything possible to sell it, there should be an exemption.</p> <p>For someone who is already paying nearly £250.00 a month taking it to nearly £400.00 a month is just too much.</p>
L30	<p>If a property is up for sale, I can't see how you can penalise people who want to sell the property but it is taking longer than they wanted.</p> <p>Property's that are up for sale should be exempt from the increase.</p> <p>We have had the house up for sale for 2 years but can't sell it. Properties that are on the market and empty should be exempt from this.</p> <p>When properties are left empty when owners have gone into care the council should check that they are indeed empty and should take the waived council tax payments from the estate when the property is sold.</p> <p>I strongly disagree with this proposal for the following reasons. I realise that everyone's circumstances are different but mine are as follows. I inherited the house when my father passed away. After being unable to find a buyer for the house I realised that I would have to complete some work on the house in order to bring it up to a standard to allow me to either sell or rent the property. As I have a home, wife and a young family which I need to support finances are quite tight. I agree that as I own the empty property I should contribute towards the council but asking for double or treble the council tax will not only make the payments impossible to afford and so just cause stress and anxiety and the possibility of court action for not being able to pay and also make it more difficult to pay to renovate the house</p>
L31	<p>I believe the premium should rise due to the current housing shortage and this increase may persuade private landlords to sell properties that they cannot rent.</p>
L37	<p>I think owners should have an opportunity to make a case to the Council to use its discretion to waive the premium where they have been unable to sell or bring their properties back into use due to</p>

	<p>other circumstances out of their control. The Council should also take the opportunity to provide help and support to owners of long-term empty homes to assist them in bringing these properties back into use. The Council should not waive the premium where owners are marketing their property at an inflated price as this will not help to increase the supply of affordable homes.</p> <p>Without room for discretion this is a very unfair tax to increase to 100%. not all property is just kept empty sometimes there are issues which mean you cannot get a new tenant and therefore are being unfairly penalised.</p> <p>Maybe it will force a few sales and reduce pressure on the precious B Green Belt you seem so keen to destroy</p> <p>Council tax should be paid by all if empty or not.</p> <p>Sheer extortion! An ill-considered 'blanket' approach. Appalling because you seem to want to penalise the very people who are trying to do the right thing. Our property is vacant again and we (3 beneficiaries) want to sell the retirement flat and that has been our desire since 2004. It has been marketed for sale continuously, through estate agents. For a period of about 5 years we rented it to a tenant (who has died). The flat is empty again and it is being marketed for sale, yet again. Try as we might we cannot sell the property which is in a block of retirement flats where other flats are regularly up for sale. We are competing with other flat owners (sellers) on the same site. The residents are all elderly so any would-be buyers have to be over 60 thereby creating a 'niche' market.</p> <p>It should be imposed after 1 year. 2 years is far too generous.</p> <p>I believe that a 50% initial increase is sufficient.</p> <p>When a property has genuinely been on the market with local estate agents the extra premium should not apply. When you are paying over £200 a month in management fees there is absolutely no reason to keep a property empty, which has been my personal experience. "Largely unfurnished" is too open to personal interpretation by council staff.</p>
PR8	<p>Awaiting planning permission (this process can sometimes be protracted and out of the control of the property owner)</p> <p>If somebody can afford to have an empty house they should be able to afford to contribute to the council tax fund also.</p> <p>There are too many vacant properties in the Borough, I also think if a property has been vacant for 5 years or more, the owners should lose the right to ownership and it automatically transfers to the Council, this if obviously where the owner can't be bothered to deal</p>

with any issues with the property

Instead of increasing to 100% make it 150 - 200% This will force owners to get tenants or sell. Why does Sefton Council not Compulsory Purchase empty homes to use for homeless?

This proposal, and the current 50% premium does NOT incentivise home owners of empty properties to "bring them back into use" as: You are charging more tax, therefore the owner has LESS money to sort their house out and 'bring it back into use'. Therefore, prolonging the period of time that the house will be empty. I believe that if the owner of the property is renovating it BEFORE they live in it or consequently sell the property, they should be exempt as the long-term plan is to "bring the property back into use". To ensure that this is true, council inspectors or a written council policy to state that all work undertaken on the property has to be evidenced and sent to the council.

Strongly object as purchased with intent to downsize but having to wait to move as husband became ill and would not be suitable, will move to property on husband's death. Your proposal is just a punishment for anyone trying to plan responsibly.

What about an empty property that is up for sale but is not selling? They should not be penalised because of stagnant housing market.

We would not have properties standing empty for no reason, it would be either because there was work needed doing to it or we were unable to find a tenant, the fact that we have to pay council tax from day 1 is already crippling without increasing it further

As a Expat visiting my own fully furnished property for family visits as well as family members using it , If the council puts up the taxes I shall have to let it out for shorts lets which benefits neither I nor the Council. As someone using less public services the extra surcharge is unfair. This is our only home in the UK. Mine is not empty but is taxed as if it was.

I can accept that an empty property may warrant a 100% tax as the council is losing income on empty properties.

I (together with my brother) purchased an apartment on Lord Street for my mother to live in when she was in her 80s. She died, aged 101, 18 months ago and the property has been for sale since that time. The lease prevents us from letting it, or from selling it to someone under 55, or from selling it to a third party (eg the Council). We have offered it to the ground landlord without success. Each month it is unsold we have to pay approx. £500 Service Charge plus 100% Council Tax even though we receive no services from either RSL or the Council. I am a resident of Sefton

	<p>and also pay full Council tax on the house I share with my wife. We have had the apartment redecorated to a high standard and we do use it whilst we are overnighing in Southport but we wish to sell. The purpose of the legislation is presumably to bring unused property to the market. We have been trying to sell for 18 months; it is currently listed at a price lower than others in the building. You should either target the ground landlords who enforce the restrictive conditions in the lease or make an exception for "very sheltered accommodation".</p> <p>I just need to know if I can no longer manage the property will you take it off me. I have no other income but my husbands and disability pips. I have mental health issues, at the moment my husband is my carer. I do not come under the heading without capacity though if I am sick I would come under that category. I own no other property. The flat I own is not occupied but I would say it is my second home should I become homeless for whatever reason. I did approach your offices for help but they told me if no one was living there it was empty (however, it is furnished) so I would just have to carry on paying council tax. I don't really know what to do. I can't sell it the lady in the flat below has a life threatening illness. They have told me so over a period of several years. I find it difficult to cope.</p> <p>I always considered that a tax or rate had to be fair. If you are using the facilities you should pay for them. I already pay rates to Sefton as I live in their Borough. I have another property that I purchased to house my elderly mother who was a war widow. She died late last year and I put the flat up for sale. It will not sell because there are a number for sale and the service charge is so high. I don't use the council's facilities and I am desperately trying to sell but nobody wants to buy. I am currently paying 50% rates for a flat that nobody lives in nor uses any of the services that the Council provide. To increase the empty rate from 50% to 100% (and subsequently 200% and 300%) on a property that I am desperately trying to sell is patently unfair. The proposed increase was to target landlords who are deliberately leaving properties empty and not renting them out to tenants. This isn't the case with my circumstances. I know that Councils are strapped for cash and they will simply introduce this measure to increase revenue. I have the feeling that anything I write will eventually be ignored as raising money is paramount. I simply reiterate that the tax/rates must be fair.</p> <p>I cannot afford the mortgage I have on the property let alone increased council tax.!</p>
PR9	<p>I would love you to raise it to 100% considering the empty flat I am trying to sell is costing me 150% of the rateable value into the second year of being on the market.</p>

Authorities should be allowed to take all necessary steps to bring empty properties back into use. This should include compulsory purchase rather than increased Council Tax where property has been empty for 5 years or more.

The whole point of council tax is to charge an occupant for using council services. If the property is empty there should actually be a nil charge never mind a 100% charge because there are no costs to the council.

I am becoming elderly with an elderly husband and mobility problems and increasingly struggle to manage the only flat I own that is attached to and accessed via my own flat entrance. I have had really bad tenants and am reaching the point of not feeling able to go on renting emotionally and physically. If these council tax changes come into effect I will have to choose between bills I would struggle to pay, continuing to rent regardless of my health or selling the whole property.

Great care must be taken to ensure the owner is not vulnerable. Penalties should be in place for any council staff member who fails to exercise due diligence.

I have been trying to sell my house for 3 yrs over this period I have reduced the price by 80k in a desperate effort to sell. Some understanding from the council for those actively trying to sell would help enormously. I do agree those empty houses not for sale should have incentives to bring them back into homes. But this blunt instrument without some consideration for those of us already stressed about when will this house stop eating into my pension may just be seen as yet another way of bleed the tax payer.

Empty properties often fall into disrepair and neglect, and are not nice to see.

If not exempt and unwilling to sell or rent out, then the premium seems fair. Perhaps consideration should be given for discretion to waive the premium in genuine cases of inability to sell or rent out a property.

This is daylight robbery ! Sefton council still get paid the council tax whether the building is empty or not ? It should infect be reduced for empty properties as none of the services are being used if the property is empty ! Just sheer greed!

I think this is an excellent proposal as homes left empty for that long will tend to be neglected damaging the neighbourhood

There is a housing crisis whilst some of the wealthiest people are leaving properties to lay empty and unused, accumulating personal

wealth at the expense of the majority. I fully support increasing the council tax levied. The only slight disagreement I have is the suggestion that this is a doubling of the council tax levied. What it is is a removal of a discount in council tax that has previously been applied.

Three years would be fairer than two. My property is empty because I cannot sell it at a reasonable price due to Brexit uncertainty. It remains on the market, but I have had few viewings and fewer offers, all well below comparable prices.

As an owner of a Residential Care Home we have a Cottage in the grounds. We cannot just rent this property out to anyone. The tenant has to have an enhanced DBS check, related somehow to the business i.e. a member of staff. This significantly reduces the chance of renting out this property. CQC would not allow us to rent the property out to anyone due to the Vulnerability of the elderly people living in the Care Home. The cottage is also connected with all Fire related incidents. We test the Fire alarm weekly at the Care Home which is also sounded in the Cottage. If the Fire alarm went off it would also go off in the cottage. There are lots of issues associated with the suitability of the Tenant. We manage a retirement complex of 37 rental properties which have on average five or six empty at any one time. These properties are advertised weekly but it does not result in the properties all being let. We pay out enough in council tax already and to increase this further would be being penalised for a lack of suitable tenants that fit the criteria.

My mother owns a flat in XX. Mum is 86 years old and she lives in a care home as she has dementia. I have an Order from the Court of Protection which allows me to act for Mum and part of that regime is that I need to show that I have acted in Mum's best interest and taken advice where necessary. Father passed away in 2007. Both Mum and Dad worked hard and saved in order that they would be reasonably if modestly provided in their later years. Part of the planning was the purchase of the flat. Over the past year I consulted with a financial adviser and Mum's solicitor. As a result, I concluded that there is little point as in selling the flat as interest rates are so low. The flat needs major improvements, particularly in the bathroom and the kitchen. If Mum funded these improvements and let the flat, it would take quite a while to recover the outlay. In addition, the cost of the works would deplete the pool of money Mum has to pay for her care. Currently Mum pays the standard levy plus 50%. The proposal is that she now pay even more council tax. Mum is basically confined to her care home and uses very little of the services provided by the local authority, but the proposal is for Mum to pay a further increased penalty simply because she has poor health.

This must rank as the most ill thought out proposal since the

	<p>bedroom tax. If you have a property to sell with a registered estate agent, why should you be penalised, because the market is suppressed and is difficult to sell. Unless you sell under market value, which I did, after trying to sell for two and a half years, paying 50% extra tax, just to get rid.</p> <p>The Empty Homes premium should be 100% only and should be for properties of £100,000 or over, not for property less than that amount as you are punishing poor people.</p>
<p>Outside Sefton</p>	<p>If the home is being advertised for rent, then this should not apply. I have a house that is in very good condition (newly refurbished), but still we are having trouble finding a tenant.</p> <p>Empty retirement flat belonging to my deceased father has been on market for 2 years - have reduced price but still no sale - I am paying maintenance charges and council tax outside my own area out of my savings - whilst I understand basic council tax has to be paid I think it is unfair to expect executors to pay an additional premium when there is nothing more they can do to sell the property.</p> <p>As a landlord if we had an empty property we would still have a mortgage to pay, and I feel it would be unfair to punish us further.</p> <p>Fully in agreement if no effort is being made to have the property occupied. However, I have had the property in Sefton on the market for sale ever since my mother passed away in May 2017. The lease does not allow me to let the apartment, and it can only be occupied by someone over 50. To charge 200% of the Council Tax seems totally unfair when I am doing everything I can to sell it. Surely in these circumstances, empty properties should also be exempt.</p> <p>I most certainly agree considering that Sefton is at present charging me 150% rates for an empty flat that I am desperately trying to sell. A 100% rate would be a relief to this pensioner.</p> <p>Depends on the circumstances as to why a property is unoccupied. An increase is unfair to those who intend to live in the property but can't at present due to extensive renovations to make a property habitable (council tax deductions with his regard are currently not sufficient with respect to the period of availability). Therefore, this only extends the period the property is uninhabitable and vacant due to unavailable cashflow to do the work.</p>

Question 3 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the potential future changes to increase the premium to 200 per cent on homes left empty from 5 to 10 years from

April 2020 and to 300 per cent on those empty for more than 10 years from 1 April 2021?

Strongly agree	48
Agree	15
Neither agree nor disagree	9
Disagree	10
Strongly disagree	46
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	Comment
L20	<p>how many council houses are empty.</p> <p>There is no reason for properties to be left empty for extended periods.</p> <p>Positive proposals work better than simply "fine". I suppose landlords/owners have no real reason to have property empty.</p> <p>How can you charge for a property that isn't using any services?</p> <p>All the points that I have made in the previous question apply equally to this question. Also, the proposal to charge such inflated premiums is not only morally wrong, but will not work anyway: On one hand, you say that you are trying to encourage property owners to put more homes back into use. On the other hand, you say that you want to raise more money from the owners of empty properties- you are contradicting yourselves! If more properties get put back into use, you will get LESS money as the occupiers will only be paying Council Tax at the standard rate; not at the ridiculously inflated premiums that you are proposing if the properties were to remain empty - it doesn't work both ways!!</p> <p>An excellent proposal. The Council needs to generate revenue in any way possible.</p> <p>We think it would be helpful to consider properties on a case by case basis. It should be used to target those properties which are in poor repair and/or causing issues for neighbouring properties, the local community or the Council. We do not think that these costs should go over 150% for properties like ours which are in good repair &</p>

	<p>undergoing further renovations as we are doing our very best to carry out improvements as effectively & efficiently as possible.</p> <p>If council tax is paid I can see no justification to double or treble that.</p>
L21	<p>If a property is up for sale they should not have to pay the charges. It is unfair for people who are actively trying to sell their empty property to impose these high charges when they may already be paying a mortgage and council tax on the empty property AND the property they live in.</p> <p>Your proposal would punish people who are already punished and will do nothing to improve the poor housing situation. There are many reasons for houses to be left unoccupied for a length of time and none of these are to benefit the owner. Your proposal, and indeed your current policy, merely compounds the financial hardship. It would be far more effective to offer help to the owners of long term occupied homes to get them ready for sale/rental. Loans and grants should be available. Compulsory purchase could also be an option should the owners keep a property empty for two years or, perhaps, a commandeering of the property to be re-rented to deserving people with the equivalent of social rent only going to the owners. There are many solutions to the housing shortage and the number of unoccupied homes and none of them involve imposing what amounts to monthly fines</p> <p>I feel that increasing the premium would result in landlords creating fake tenancies in order to avoid making payment.</p>
L22	<p>If someone can afford to leave a property empty for that length of time they're clearly able to afford it, so the charges are an entirely appropriate incentive to correct the commercial priorities.</p> <p>Unfortunately, I am unaware of all the reasons that people have for not paying their council tax on an empty property but the existing exclusions should remain.</p> <p>The increase in costs will mean rents for everyone will have to go up.</p>
L23	<p>As a landlord in Sefton I have previously been impacted by the 50% additional charge. I have purchased empty properties which have required full renovations before I could find tenants. As one property had already exceeded the 2 years of being empty when I purchased it I was liable for the additional council tax charges. This I felt was unfair. Surely taking a property which is not liveable and has been empty for some time and doing the necessary renovations to provide additional affordable homes in the area is a good thing and should be rewarded and not punished. That said I agree that properties should not be kept empty and a penalty should be in place for those who sit on empty properties. I am aware that this can be a problem in some</p>

areas I think a fair addition to the new rules would be to reset the clock on these properties when newly purchased to provide landlords like myself the opportunity and incentive to improve living standards within Sefton.

There are a number of unused/ derelict buildings and it would be a positive result if an increased council tax payment forced the owners into letting or selling them, to bring vibrancy to the area. However, those with legitimate reasons for leaving the property empty should not be penalised.

I think the 100% charge should be applied after 6 months of being empty. It is inappropriate to leave a property empty while so many people need a home and councils are having financial difficulties.

It might make the owner make more of an effort to get the property occupied.

It is crucial that people do not continue to have incentives to leave houses empty by the current lower council tax rate, given the numbers of homeless people and others who may be living in cramped conditions. This increase would hopefully be some deterrent.

I think you should look at the finances of the owners of these properties. If they live elsewhere it's possible that they can't afford more council tax and by taking them to court you would waste even more money. I don't think it should be a complete ban on the exemption of the 50% tax as it is now. I even think that is too much - isn't the tax for facilities used and if no-one lives there they don't use any facilities!

I would suggest the increase should be even larger, say to 200%, to have a greater effect on the situation.

It is immoral for people to have unused living accommodation while there are so many families without a home.

I feel that a lot of people for good reasons could have a property for 2 or 3 years empty so 50% seems fairer.

Where probate has been granted and the property is for sale

My parents are stuck living next door to an empty property that has been that way in excess of 10 years. Owners refuse to sell yet put solar shades on a roof that is in a bad state of affair? My elderly parents are petrified that squatters will move in and we have no way of contacting these selfish owners. My parents and their neighbours try to keep the front of the house tidy so it isn't obvious what the situation is but are too elderly to continue to keep that up. It is a

	<p>disgrace the place is left to rot. Hit the owners where it hurts - in their pocket and this will hopefully make them do something about the property.</p> <p>The government and local authorities are taking a totally simplistic view and failing to understand the complex series of factors that can cause properties to remain empty, including for example, simple lack of market demand, or lack of financial resource on the part of the owner to bring dilapidated properties back from the brink back into use.....even just these two example factors can have a complex inter-relationship, with one interacting on the other. The proper and productive approach to this problem would be to abandon the stick (or at least not make it any bigger) and throw a carrot or two at it.</p> <p>I understand why the proposal would be implemented for empty properties that could be brought back into use. However, this should not apply to circumstances such as the one that I am in. I am executor to my mother's will - she died in January 2015 and probate was obtained in May 2015, since when the property has been up for sale. It is a one bedroomed retirement shared ownership flat in XX. It went on the market at £65,000 and has been reduced over time to its current asking price of £44,950 and has been on the market with two estate agents. The shared ownership is with a Housing Association and they are difficult to deal with and I have lost one buyer due to their incompetence. In the meantime, not only do I have to pay council tax at an additional 50% rate, but I shall have to pay monthly service charges and a sinking fund charge if ever it is sold. There will be very little money left by the time this all happens. I feel very strongly that I should not be having to pay any council tax, as I receive no services whatsoever, never mind an additional premium. Due to myself spending lots of my time caring for my mother, I managed to keep her out of Sefton's Social Services system, and she never needed any additional support from the Council. Also, the Council itself does nothing to help me sell the flat - sale boards are not allowed outside the listed building. I am unable to bring the flat into use unless it is sold, one of the conditions of the lease is that I am unable to rent it out. I am extremely concerned whether there will be sufficient funds if the council tax charge is further increased. In circumstances where an executor to a will is unable to sell or rent a property and can prove that they have done everything possible to sell it, there should be an exemption.</p>
L30	<p>If a property is up for sale, I can't see how you can penalise people who want to sell the property but it is taking longer than they wanted.</p> <p>Property's that are up for sale should be exempt from the increase.</p> <p>We have had the house up for sale for 2 years but can't sell it. Properties that are on the market and empty should be exempt from this.</p>

	<p>When properties are left empty when owners have gone into care the council should check that they are indeed empty and should take the waived council tax payments from the estate when the property is sold.</p>
L31	<p>I believe the premium should rise the current housing shortage and this increase may persuade private landlords to sell properties that they cannot rent</p>
L37	<p>I think owners should have an opportunity to make a case to the Council to use its discretion to waive the premium where they have been unable to sell or bring their properties back into use due to other circumstances out of their control. The Council should also take the opportunity to provide help and support to owners of long-term empty homes to assist them in bringing these properties back into use. The Council should not waive the premium where owners are marketing their property at an inflated price as this will not help to increase the supply of affordable homes.</p> <p>Without room for discretion this is a very unfair tax to increase to 100%. not all property is just kept empty sometimes there are issues which mean you cannot get a new tenant and therefore are being unfairly penalised.</p> <p>Maybe it will force a few sales and reduce pressure on the precious B Green Belt you seem so keen to destroy</p> <p>Council tax should be paid by all if empty or not</p> <p>Sheer extortion! An ill-considered 'blanket' approach. Appalling because you seem to want to penalise the very people who are trying to do the right thing. Our property is vacant again and we (3 beneficiaries) want to sell the retirement flat and that has been our desire since 2004. It has been marketed for sale continuously, through estate agents. For a period of about 5 years we rented it to a tenant (who has died). The flat is empty again and it is being marketed for sale, yet again. Try as we might we cannot sell the property which is in a block of retirement flats where other flats are regularly up for sale. We are competing with other flat owners (sellers) on the same site. The residents are all elderly so any would-be buyers have to be over 60 thereby creating a 'niche' market.</p> <p>Make it 200% after 2 years</p> <p>Other measures should be put into place to bring the properties back into use, looking at the reasons why the properties remain empty rather than just applying a financial penalty.</p>
PR8	<p>Awaiting planning permission (this process can sometimes be</p>

protracted and out of the control of the property owner)

If somebody can afford to have an empty house they should be able to afford to contribute to the council tax fund also.

There are too many vacant properties in the Borough, I also think if a property has been vacant for 5 years or more, the owners should lose the right to ownership and it automatically transfers to the Council, this if obviously where the owner can't be bothered to deal with any issues with the property

Instead of increasing to 100% make it 150 - 200% This will force owners to get tenants or sell. Why does Sefton Council not Compulsory Purchase empty homes to use for homeless?

This proposal, and the current 50% premium does NOT incentivise home owners of empty properties to "bring them back into use" as: You are charging more tax, therefore the owner has LESS money to sort their house out and 'bring it back into use'. Therefore, prolonging the period of time that the house will be empty. I believe that if the owner of the property is renovating it BEFORE they live in it or consequently sell the property, they should be exempt as the long-term plan is to "bring the property back into use". To ensure that this is true, council inspectors or a written council policy to state that all work undertaken on the property has to be evidenced and sent to the council.

Strongly object as purchased with intent to downsize but having to wait to move as husband became ill and would not be suitable, will move to property on husband's death. Your proposal is just a punishment for anyone trying to plan responsibly.

What about an empty property that is up for sale but is not selling? They should not be penalised because of stagnant housing market.

I strongly disagree with both these proposals as it is exorbitant. Why should you be penalised unfairly for owning a property that you do not want to rent out because of all the problems that this may entail (watch channel 5) or sell because of the state of the current housing market where we are likely to lose money. The property in question was purchased from our pensions and savings for one of our daughters who was going to get a mortgage and repay us. However, she has since married and purchased a property with her husband having taken out a large mortgage. All the costs of the property in question have reverted to us, her parents, who are pensioners and do not want to get into renting. Why should we be penalised further if we pay 100% Council Tax. It certainly will not win you or the government any votes. I'm totally disillusioned with you all so expect that this is just a way of telling us what you intend to do no matter what is said.

	<p>It would be more equitable if the Council compulsorily purchased such accommodation.</p>
<p>PR9</p>	<p>I would love you to raise it to 100% considering the empty flat I am trying to sell is costing me 150% of the rateable value into the second year of being on the market.</p> <p>Authorities should be allowed to take all necessary steps to bring empty properties back into use. This should include compulsory purchase rather than increased Council Tax where property has been empty for 5 years or more.</p> <p>The whole point of Council Tax is to charge an occupant for using council services. If the property is empty there should actually be a nil charge never mind a 100% charge because there are no costs to the council.</p> <p>I am becoming elderly with an elderly husband and mobility problems and increasingly struggle to manage the only flat I own that is attached to and accessed via my own flat entrance. I have had really bad tenants and am reaching the point of not feeling able to go on renting emotionally and physically. If these council tax changes come into effect I will have to choose between bills I would struggle to pay, continuing to rent regardless of my health or selling the whole property.</p> <p>Great care must be taken to ensure the owner is not vulnerable. Penalties should be in place for any council staff member who fails to exercise due diligence.</p> <p>I have been trying to sell my house for 3 yrs over this period I have reduced the price by 80k in a desperate effort to sell. Some understanding from the council for those actively trying to sell would help enormously. I do agree those empty houses not for sale should have incentives to bring them back into homes. But this blunt instrument without some consideration for those of us already stressed about when will this house stop eating into my pension may just be seen as yet another way of bleed the taxpayer.</p> <p>Empty properties often fall into disrepair and neglect, and are not nice to see.</p> <p>If not exempt and unwilling to sell or rent out, then the premium seems fair. Perhaps consideration should be given for discretion to waive the premium in genuine cases of inability to sell or rent out a property.</p> <p>This is daylight robbery! Sefton council still get paid the council tax whether the building is empty or not? It should in fact be reduced for empty properties as none of the services are being used if the</p>

	<p>property is empty! Just sheer greed!</p> <p>I think this is an excellent proposal as homes left empty for that long will tend to be neglected damaging the neighbourhood.</p> <p>There is a housing crisis whilst some of the wealthiest people are leaving properties to lay empty and unused, accumulating personal wealth at the expense of the majority. I fully support increasing the council tax levied. The only slight disagreement I have is the suggestion that this is a doubling of the council tax levied. What it is is a removal of a discount in council tax that has previously been applied.</p> <p>Three years would be fairer than two. My property is empty because I cannot sell it at a reasonable price due to Brexit uncertainty. It remains on the market, but I have had few viewings and fewer offers, all well below comparable prices.</p> <p>As mentioned we are very limited to whom we can rent the property to due to the exceptional circumstances related to the "ideal tenant". I think this needs to be looked into in much more detail and not just a blanket increase which suits all as this is not the case. If this did happen then the cost would be passed onto our service users which I do not think is fair.</p> <p>Most responsible landlords do their best to let properties to suitable tenants if a property has been empty as long as ten years it is most likely derelict. Taxpayers are disgruntled at paying 50% Premium Tax. Can't see collection rates rising if Premium Tax is increased excessively.</p>
<p>Outside Sefton</p>	<p>If the home is being advertised for rent, then this should not apply. I have a house that is in very good condition (newly refurbished), but still we are having trouble finding a tenant.</p> <p>Empty retirement flat belonging to my deceased father has been on market for 2 years - have reduced price but still no sale - I am paying maintenance charges and council tax outside my own area out of my savings - whilst I understand basic council tax has to be paid I think it is unfair to expect executors to pay an additional premium when there is nothing more they can do to sell the property.</p> <p>As a landlord if we had an empty property we would still have a mortgage to pay, and I feel it would be unfair to punish us further.</p> <p>Fully in agreement if no effort is being made to have the property occupied. However, I have had the property in Sefton on the market for sale ever since my mother passed away in May 2017. The lease does not allow me to let the apartment, and it can only be occupied by someone over 50. To charge 200% of the Council Tax seems</p>

	<p>totally unfair when I am doing everything I can to sell it . Surely in these circumstances, empty properties should also be exempt.</p> <p>I most certainly agree considering that Sefton is at present charging me 150% rates for an empty flat that I am desperately trying to sell. A 100% rate would be a relief to this pensioner.</p> <p>Depends on the circumstances as to why a property is unoccupied. An increase is unfair to those who intend to live in the property but can't at present due to extensive renovations to make a property habitable (council tax deductions with his regard are currently not sufficient with respect to the period of availability). Therefore, this only extends the period the property is uninhabitable and vacant due to unavailable cash flow to do the work.</p>
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3.5 Summary Table - Questions 1 & 3

	Agree/Agree strongly	Neither agree / disagree	Disagree / Strongly disagree	No response
Question 1	66	7	55	1
Question 3	63	9	56	1

2. Equality Impact Assessment

4.1. Introduction

Any change to function, provision or policy that may have an effect on people is automatically subject of the Equality Act 2010. As such the 'decision makers' have a statutory duty to pay 'due regard' to equality legislation and the potential discriminatory impact that changes have on service users. To inform decision makers, an 'equality analysis report' is submitted to them at the time of decision making in order for them to consider equality implications as part of their final decision making.

In order to meet equality legislation public bodies have to consider Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:-

- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and person who do not share it.

4.2 Protected Characteristics

Equality Law (Equality Act 2010) is clear that there are particular characteristics intrinsic to an individual against which it would be easy to discriminate. Section 149 (the Public-Sector Equality Duty) sets the goals of the Act and the characteristics, known as 'protected characteristics' against which we have to test for discrimination. These characteristics are gender, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity and disability.

4.3 Consultation

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council (Sefton MBC) is considering increasing the Council Tax homes premium from April 2019 on homes left empty and substantially unfurnished for over 2 years. This will help to reduce the number of long term homes and bring them back into use through sale or renting. Any additional income raised from the premium will help support the provision of Council services.

As part of the consultation, equality questions were asked in connection to gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

The main issues that we have to consider in relation to the proposed changes to the scheme in relation to equality and diversity are:

Disabled people, on very low income, who are unable to carry out the necessary renovations to properties themselves or pay someone to do it for them.

Where owners are struggling to cope with managing the property they own.

4.4 Impacts

The tables below highlight what evidence we have on how the proposed changes will affect different groups and communities in relation to equalities and human rights. Where numbers are presented which refer to the survey, this relates to the number of people who responded to the equality questions in the survey, and aligned to the question on impacts. People who responded to the survey and reported any impacts, whether this was a lot of impact or no impact, did so from an individual perspective. The table recognises the responses to the survey but also considers any detrimental impact on the protected characteristic as a whole and includes the mitigations the Council has in place.

Breakdown of respondents by Gender

In terms of the 129 respondents to the eConsult Questionnaire 52 females, 40 males, 2 preferred not to say and 35 not completed returns.

Breakdown of respondents by Age ranges

In terms of the 129 respondents to the eConsult Questionnaire, 94 gave the following age ranges, cross matched against gender.

Age Ranges				
	Female	Male	Not declared	Total
18-29	2	0	0	2
30-39	5	2	1	8
40-49	10	6	0	16
50-59	13	13	1	27
60-69	12	11	1	24
70-79	7	7	1	15
85+	2	0	0	2

Breakdown of respondents by Postcode

In terms of the 129 respondents to the eConsult Questionnaire, the following postcodes were submitted:

Postcode breakdown					
Outside Sefton	L20	L21	L22	L23	L30
10	10	7	4	17	1
L31	L37	L38	PR8	PR9	Not Completed
3	6	2	15	16	38

Breakdown of respondents by Equality Data

Respondents were asked to indicate answers against Equality data questions, the breakdown of which is:

Disability

4 indicated a Hearing Impairment, 5 indicating a Long-Term Illness Affecting Daily Activity, followed by 4 indicating Mental Health/Distress, a further 7 indicating a Physical impairment and 2 with a visual impairment.

Ethnicity/ Religion or Belief

79 of our 129 respondents who answered indicated they were "White British" or "White English" in terms of ethnicity, with fewer numbers for the other classifications.

Ethnicity - do you identify as...	Total
White British	55
White English	25
White Irish	2
White Polish	1
White Welsh	1
Black British	1
Asian Indian	1
Other White background	2
Other Chinese background	1
Prefer not to say / no response	40

Sexual Orientation

On Sexual Orientation, 78 out of 129 respondents who answered indicated they were Heterosexual, 2 Bisexual and 49 Prefer not to say / or did not respond

Heterosexual	78
Bisexual	2
Prefer not to say / no response	49

Religion / Belief

42 out of 129 who answered indicated they were Christian, 1 Buddhist, 86 no religion / did not respond / prefer not to say.

Gender at birth

85 of the 129 respondents who answered the question indicated that they currently live in the gender given to them at birth. 1 respondent was not in the gender given at birth. 43 prefer not to say / no response.

4.5 Impacts table

Protected Characteristic	
Gender	No inadvertent bias on the basis of gender is indicated. We have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Race/Ethnicity	No inadvertent bias on the basis of race/ethnicity is indicated. The proposals do not treat people of different race/ethnicity groups any differently and we have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Religion and Belief	No inadvertent bias on the basis of religion or belief. The proposals do not treat persons of different religions or beliefs any differently and we have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Sexual Orientation	No inadvertent bias on the basis of sexual orientation is indicated. The proposals do not treat persons of different

	sexual orientation any differently. We have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Age	No inadvertent bias on the basis of age is indicated. Young people looking to join the property ladder or rent an affordable property may be affected as more empty properties are made available. We have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Gender Reassignment	No inadvertent bias on the basis of gender reassignment age is indicated in the proposals. We have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Pregnancy and Maternity	No inadvertent bias on the basis of pregnancy and maternity is indicated. We have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Disability	No inadvertent bias on the basis of disability is indicated. However, the consultation results indicate that disability is also relevant to the proposals as people felt that there should be mitigations in place for owners who are unable to manage their affairs or circumstances where disability prompts a need to change property and reduces the ability to carry out the work required to an empty property.

4.6 Mitigations

Key measures in place

- Consideration to be given to whether any additional exemptions under which the Empty Homes Premium should not apply, for example where an owner is living elsewhere to receive care or resident in a nursing home etc.
- Any short term financial hardship or other exceptional circumstances affecting a person's ability to pay will be addressed by the Council's Discretionary Reduction in Liability Policy, and the promotion of that policy, so additional support can be provided for those in exceptional need.
- Sefton MBC will continue to maintain its good track record of providing proactive and tailored support for those Council Tax payers who struggle to make payments and will continue to ensure our recovery procedures identify cases where additional support might be required.
- A proactive approach will be taken to identify persons meeting the severe mental impairment conditions set out in the Council Tax Regulations with a view to exempting them from paying Council Tax.
- We will continue working with and supporting customers whose first language is not English.
- Customers affected by the proposals will be contacted directly and provided with clear explanation and offers of advice and support.
- The Council's website information will be updated to reflect the key changes and any issues identified.