

Initial equality impact assessment screening form

This form is an equality screening process to determine the relevance of equality to an activity, and a decision whether, or not a full EIA would be appropriate or proportionate.

Directorate:	Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services
Service Area:	Revenues and Benefits
Activity being screened:	Proposed increases to the Council Tax empty property premium from April 2020
Officer(s) carrying out the screening:	Anthony Sandys – Head of Housing and Revenues Services
What are you proposing to do?	Increase the Council Tax empty property premium in line with the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018
Why are you proposing this? What are the desired outcomes?	The purpose of the proposals is to further encourage landlords and property owners to bring their empty homes back into use as soon as possible and to penalise those owners who deliberately leave their properties empty for years.
Does the activity involve a significant commitment or removal of resources? Please give details	No

Is there likely to be an adverse impact on people with any of the following protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010, or any other socially excluded groups?

As part of this assessment, please consider the following questions:

- To what extent is this service used by particular groups of people with protected characteristics?
- Does the activity relate to functions that previous consultation has identified as important?
- Do different groups have different needs or experiences in the area the activity relates to?

If for any characteristic it is considered that there is likely to be a significant adverse impact or you have ticked 'Don't know/no info available', then a full EIA should be carried out where this is proportionate.

Protected characteristic	Yes	No	Don't know/ Info not available
Age		✓	
Disability			✓
Sex (gender)		✓	
Race		✓	
Sexual Orientation		✓	
Religion or belief		✓	
Gender reassignment		✓	
Pregnancy or maternity		✓	
Marriage or civil partnership		✓	
Other			
Carer (unpaid family or friend)		✓	
Low Income			✓
Rural Location		✓	
Does the activity relate to an area where there are known inequalities/probable impacts (e.g. disabled people's access to public transport)? Please give details.	The activity relates to the ability of owners to bring their long-term empty properties back into use		
Will the activity have a significant effect on how other organisations operate? (e.g. partners, funding criteria, etc.). Do any of these organisations support people with protected characteristics? Please explain why you have reached this conclusion.	None expected		
Decision (Please tick one option)	EIA not relevant or proportionate:		Continue to full EIA: ✓
Reason for Decision	To consider the impacts of the proposals on disabled people and those on low incomes who could find it difficult to renovate, sell or rent long-term empty properties		
Signed (Assistant Director)	P. Mitchell		
Date	24/7/19		



Equality Impact Assessment Record Form

This form is to be used for recording the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of Council activities. It should be used in conjunction with the guidance on carrying out EIA in **Annex 2** of the Equality Scheme. The activities that may be subject to EIA are set out in the guidance.

EIA is particularly important in supporting the Council to make fair decisions. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

Using this form will help Council officers to carry out EIA in an effective and transparent way and provide decision-makers with full information on the potential impact of their decisions. EIAs are public documents, accompany reports going to Councillors for decisions and are published with committee papers on our website and are available in hard copy at the relevant meeting.

Title of activity:	Council Tax empty property premium	
Name of Directorate and Service Area:	Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services Revenues and Benefits	
Lead Officer and contact details	Anthony Sandys – Head of Housing and Revenues Services x6926	
Assistant Director accountable for this EIA	Pauline Mitchell – Assistant Director - Housing and Building Services	
Who else will be involved in carrying out the EIA:	N/a	
When did the EIA process start?	July 2019	

Section 2 – The Activity and Supporting Information

<p>Details of the activity (describe briefly - including the main purpose and aims) (e.g. are you starting a new service, changing how you do something, stopping doing something?)</p>
<p>Proposed increases to the Council Tax empty property premium, which is the charging of additional Council Tax to owners of long-term empty properties (those that have been empty and unfurnished for 2 years or more). If agreed, these changes will be implemented from April 2020.</p>
<p>Why is this being proposed? What are the aims? What does the Council hope to achieve by it? (e.g. to save money, meet increased demand, do things more efficiently)</p>
<p>The purpose of the proposals is to further encourage landlords and property owners to bring their empty properties back into use as soon as possible and to penalise those owners who deliberately leave their properties empty for years. Exemptions from the Council Tax empty property premium are also being proposed for owners actively renovating, selling or renting long-term empty properties.</p>
<p>What will change? What will be different for service users/ customers and/ or staff?</p>
<p>A 50% Council Tax empty property premium already exists for properties empty for 2 years or more. These proposals will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Increase the Council Tax premium for properties empty for 2 years or more to 100% (double the Council Tax normally charged) (b) Increase the Council Tax premium for properties empty for 5 years or more to 200% (treble the Council Tax normally charged) (c) Increase the Council Tax premium for properties empty for 10 years or more to 300% (quadruple the Council Tax normally charged).
<p>What data, research and other evidence or information is available which is relevant to the EIA?</p>
<p>There are currently 154 long-term empty properties in Darlington. A mapping exercise has already been undertaken to identify the location of these properties in relation to deprivation data already held. Whilst the locations of long-term empty properties are spread across Darlington, higher concentrations of these properties exist in areas of deprivation (see appendix 1 to this EIA).</p>
<p>Engagement and consultation (What engagement and consultation has been done regarding the proposal and what are the results? What consultation will be needed and how will it be done?)</p>
<p>A public consultation exercise has been undertaken in May to June 2019 in the form of an on-line survey. In addition, we wrote to all 160 owners (at that time) of long-term empty properties and invited them to complete a paper or on-line survey. The results are attached on a separate document.</p>
<p>What impact will this activity have on the Council's budget? (e.g. cost neutral, increased costs or reduced costs? If so, by how much? Explain briefly why this is the case)</p>
<p>These proposals will potentially generate more Council Tax income.</p>

Section 3: Assessment

How will the activity affect people with protected characteristics?	No Impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	Why will it have this effect? (refer to evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)
Age	✓			Consultation identified that most respondents were aged between 45 and 75 (70%), although there were no specific impacts identified relating to age.
Disability (Mobility Impairment, Visual impairment, Hearing impairment, Learning Disability, Mental Health, Long Term Limiting Illness, Multiple Impairments, Other – Specify)	✓			<p>4 out of the 23 respondents (17%) to the consultation indicated that they considered themselves to have a disability. However, none of the comments indicated that disability would be a barrier for an owner to renovate, sell or rent their long-term empty property.</p> <p>Advice and assistance is available to empty property owners from the Council's Private Sector Housing Team.</p> <p>The Council Tax discretionary discount scheme is available to Council Tax payers who are experiencing severe financial hardship or other crisis or event. Whilst applications are looked at on their own individual circumstances, disability would be a factor in determining an award.</p>
Sex (Gender)	✓			Consultation identified that most respondents were male (70%), although there were no specific impacts identified relating to gender.
Race	✓			No impacts identified
Gender Reassignment	✓			No impacts identified
Sexual Orientation	✓			No impacts identified
Religion or belief	✓			No impacts identified

APPENDIX 2

Pregnancy or maternity	✓			No impacts identified
Marriage or civil partnership	✓			No impacts identified
How will the activity affect people who:	No impact	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Why will it have this effect? (Refer to evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)
Live in a rural location?	✓			No impacts identified
Are carers?	✓			No impacts identified
Are on a low income?			✓	<p>Consultation indicated that owners of long-term empty properties on a low income would not be able to afford the increases in Council Tax. They may also experience difficulties in refurbishment work for the same reason (properties being renovated would be exempt from the proposals).</p> <p>Free advice and assistance is available to empty property owners from the Council's Private Sector Housing Team.</p> <p>The Council Tax discretionary discount scheme is available to Council Tax payers who are experiencing severe financial hardship or other crisis or event. Whilst applications are looked at on their own individual circumstances, people on low incomes would be a factor in determining an award.</p> <p>Whilst Council Tax Support (CTS) is only available for occupied properties, owners of long-term empty properties receiving CTS for their own home would be considered for assistance from the discretionary scheme, providing it was specifically to assist the owner to renovate, sell or rent their empty property and bring it back into use.</p>

Section 4: Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative Impacts – will the activity affect anyone more because of a combination of protected characteristics? (e.g. older women or young gay men – state what you think the effect might be and why, providing evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)

Are there any other activities of which you are aware which might also impact on the same protected characteristics?

None

Section 5: Analysis

a) How will the activity help to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation?

Initial research into the location of long-term empty properties has indicated that higher numbers of these properties exist in areas of deprivation. These areas will include higher numbers of people with protected characteristics.

The specific aim of these proposals is to further encourage the owners of these properties to bring them back into use by renovating, selling or renting the properties. This is expected to have an overall positive impact on these areas, providing additional affordable housing, improving the overall quality of neighbourhoods and reducing homelessness.

Whilst some negative impacts have been identified for owners of long-term empty properties, exemptions from these proposals, along with advice, assistance and financial support is available.

b) How will the activity help to advance equality of opportunity?

As above



c) How will the activity help to foster good relations?

As above

During the engagement/ consultation process were there any suggestions on how to avoid, minimise or mitigate any negative impacts? If so, please give details.

Respondents indicated that consideration should be given to owners who are trying to renovate, sell or rent their properties and these are covered by the proposed exemptions to the empty property premium.

Section 6 - Sign-off when assessment is completed

Officer Completing the Form:		
Signed 	Name:	Anthony Sandys
	Date:	24/07/19
	Job Title:	Head of Housing and Revenues Services
Assistant Director:		
Signed 	Name:	Pauline Mitchell
	Date:	24/07/19
	Service:	Housing and Building Services

Section 7 – Reporting of Findings and Recommendations to Decision Makers

<p>Next Steps to address the anticipated impact (Select one of the following options and explain why this has been chosen – remember we have a duty to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people can access services and work for us)</p>
<p>Negative impact identified – recommend continuing with the activity (Clearly specify the people affected and the impacts, providing reasons and supporting evidence for the decision to continue. The EIA identifies potential problems or missed opportunities. Officers will advise to change the proposal to reduce or remove these adverse impacts, or the Council will achieve its aim in another way which will not make things worse for people. There must be compelling reasons for continuing with the proposal which will have the most adverse impacts.)</p>
<p>Explanation of why the option above has been chosen (Including any advice given by legal services)</p> <p>Potential negative impacts identified relating to owners of long-term empty properties on low incomes. However, sufficient available advice, assistance and financial support has already been identified in this EIA to mitigate these impacts.</p> <p>Positive impacts have also been identified in encouraging owners of long-term empty properties to bring these back into use in areas of high deprivation.</p> <p>There are no impacts identified which should prevent the proposals from continuing.</p>
<p>If the activity is to be implemented how will you find out how it is affecting people once it is in place? (How will you monitor and review the changes?)</p> <p>If the proposals are approved by Council Members, we will contact all the owners of long-term empty properties to explain the additional charges and the exemptions, advice, assistance and financial support available. This will take place before the Council Tax annual billing for 2020-21.</p> <p>After April 2020, if an owner of a long-term empty property falls into Council Tax arrears, again we will attempt to contact them to offer support.</p> <p>We will also monitor the numbers of long-term empty properties in Darlington to measure the effectiveness of these proposals, and in particular, the impacts in areas of higher deprivation.</p>

Section 8 – Action Plan and Performance Management

List any actions you need to take which have been identified in this EIA, including post implementation reviews to find out how the outcomes have been achieved in practice and what impacts there have actually been on people with protected characteristics

What is the negative impact?	Actions required to reduce/eliminate the negative impact (if applicable)	Who will lead on action	Target completion date
Owners of long-term empty properties on low incomes	Contact owners to offer advice, assistance and financial support	Head of Housing and Revenues Services	March 2020

Performance Management	
Date of the next review of the EIA	July 2020
How often will the EIA action plan be reviewed?	Annually
Who will carry out this review?	Head of Housing and Revenues Services

Appendix 1

The numbers of long-term empty properties mapped against deprivation data

