

Customer First Analysis – Council Tax for Empty Dwellings and Second Homes

Purpose

What are you trying to achieve with the policy/service/function?

The Policy has two key aims:-

- i. To introduce Council Tax charging on empty homes, especially long term empty homes, as an incentive to encourage home owners to bring them back into use sooner rather than later;
- ii. To get the owners of empty homes and second homes to make a contribution towards local services.

Who defines and manages it?

The proposals emerge from the Local Government Finance Bill 2012.

The policy has been designed by the Head of Regeneration and Housing in conjunction with the Head of Benefits, Revenues and Customer Contact. The policy will be managed by the Revenue Team.

Who do you intend to benefit from it and how?

The aim is to encourage bringing empty homes back into use. Residents in need of housing may benefit as will residents who may suffer nuisance as a consequence of living near to an empty home/empty homes.

The policy could have an adverse effect on the certain equality groups especially lower income home owners unable to sell their home due to the economic downturn. The elderly and disabled on low income appear most at risk.

What could prevent people from getting the most out of the scheme?

N/A

How will you get your customers involved in the analysis and how will you tell people about it?

The intention is to consult before finalising the Policy. Consultation will be Borough wide, but we will target the owners of empty homes. The aim is to gather equality information to help identify any specific equality issues for any final proposals that we take back to Cabinet/Council for consideration.

Various publicity approaches will be considered including local press, Council's website, targeted mail to known empty home owners, focus groups, telephone contact with empty home owners, etc.

Evidence

How will you know if the policy delivers its intended outcome/benefits?

There should be a reduction in the number of empty homes.

How satisfied are your customers and how do you know?

It is not possible to say at this stage. The consultation that we carry out as described above will give us a better understanding of how residents feel, especially the owners of empty homes.

What existing data do you have on the people that use the service and wider population?

We hold Council Tax data on empty and second homes, including in most cases owner details and length of time a dwelling has been empty.

However, we do not have details of owner's financial circumstances and therefore the potential financial consequences should this Policy come into force. Financial information is something that we can try to collect as part of the consultation process.

What other information would it be useful to have? How could you get this?

As part of the consultation we will try to understand why homes are empty, and what can be done to bring empty homes back into use, including any support from the Council.

Are you breaking down data by equality groups where relevant (such as by gender, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity)?

Yes, the aim will be to collect qualitative data on equality groups.

Are you using partners, stakeholders and councillors to get information and feedback?

We will consult with a range of people, groups and organisations including councillors, residents, registered providers, members of the Homelessness in Hyndburn Forum, private landlords, local letting and sales agents, resident groups, etc.

Impact

Are some people benefiting more or less than others? If so, why might this be?

It is very unlikely that this Policy will be seen as a benefit except where it is seen as part of a wider package to bring empty homes back into use.

The Policy will potentially be seen as a detriment if, as proposed, some Council Tax exemptions are removed.

Actions

If the evidence suggests that the policy/service/function benefits a particular group or disadvantages another, is there a justifiable reason for this and if so, what is it?

As highlighted above, the Policy is likely to be seen as detrimental to empty home owners. Whilst it is believed that the Policy will help encourage bringing empty homes back into use, and therefore have wider regeneration benefits, potentially it may cause some hardship for low income empty home owners. This is an issue that we need to understand better as part of the consultation exercise.

Is it discriminating in any way?

No.

Is there a possible impact on relationships or perceptions between different parts of the community?

It is more likely to be unpopular with empty home owners but it should not impact on relationships or perceptions between different parts of the community.

What resources can you put in place to reduce disadvantages?

As part of the consultation we will ask empty home owners what they believe can or should be done to assist in bringing empty homes back into use sooner rather than later.

Do you need to consult further?

It is important that we consult on the Policy as outlined above and then decide whether further consultation is necessary.

Have you identified any potential improvement to customer service?

Not at this stage, the aim will be to explore customer service issues as part of the consultation.

Who should you tell about the outcomes of this analysis?

It is important that this analysis is reported to Cabinet when it considers approving consultation on the Policy.

Have you built the action into your Business Plan with a clear timescale?

Yes, including when we will report back to Cabinet/Council on the findings of the consultation.

When will this assessment need to be reported?

Almost immediately after the consultation has been completed to help inform the scope of the new Policy i.e. January 2013.