



REQUEST 19087

1. For each financial year 2022/23, 2023/24, 2024/25 to date.
 - a. the total monetary value of long-term empty homes premiums written off, waived, or refunded; and
 - b. the number of individual properties affected.
2. For the same years, the number of properties where the premium was removed/reduced because the council accepted evidence of ongoing major repairs or structural alterations.
3. Copies of all internal briefings, reports, emails or notes prepared for Cabinet, Corporate Leadership Team or scrutiny committees between 1 January 2024 and today containing the phrases “empty homes premium”, “major repairs exception”, “change in liability rule” or “Class M exception”.
4. In respect of any dwelling owned by Wigan Council that has been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for one year or more at any point since 1 April 2019:
 - a. how many such dwellings currently attract the long-term empty homes premium (200% or higher); and
 - b. what was the total monetary value of premium charged on council-owned properties in each year 2019/20 to 2025/26 (to date)?
5. If the answer to 4(b) is £0 or the council claims exemption, please provide the legal advice or policy decision permitting the council to exempt its own stock from s.11B Local Government Finance Act 1992.

RESPONSE

1. We do not hold this information in relation to long-term empty home premiums.
2. We do not hold this information in relation to long-term empty home premiums.
3. Council reports and minutes can be viewed and downloaded from our website [Meetings, agendas, and minutes](#)

The proposal to increase long-term empty premiums was put forward to cabinet on 15/02/2024 and resolved by the council on 06/03/2024

[Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 15th February, 2024, 4.00 pm](#)

[Agenda for Council on Wednesday, 6th March, 2024, 6.00 pm](#)

The relevant report has been enclosed with this response.

The proposal for a Council Tax Premium Exception Policy was put forward to cabinet on 10/07/2024 and resolved by the Council on 24/07/2024.

Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday, 10th July, 2024, 3.00 pm

Agenda for Council on Wednesday, 24th July, 2024, 6.00 pm

A copy of the report is enclosed specifically mentioning a proposed exception due to properties requiring major repairs or alterations.

4.

a - As of 23/12/2025, 51 dwellings currently attract a Long-Term Empty Property Premium.

b - We do not hold the information that you have requested in an easily retrievable format. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) relieves a public authority from the obligation to comply with a request for information where the estimated time required to locate, review and extract the information exceeds a certain threshold set out in Regulations. The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 (SI 2004/3244) set out the rules in relation to the cost limit (otherwise called the "appropriate limit"). These Regulations are published by the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) and are viewable on their web site from this link: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2004/uksi_20043244_en.pdf.

The Regulations set out the cost limit for Government departments and for other public authorities. For local government, Regulation 3 states that the cost limit is £450 and Regulation 4(4) states that the prescribed hourly rate is £25. Regulation 4(4) further provides that where the local authority estimates the time taken to gather the information would exceed this limit (which based on the prescribed hourly rate, equates to 18 officer hours), it may refuse the request under section 12 of FoIA. I am satisfied the cost limit applies to your request and will explain why this is the case.

To calculate the monetary value accurately, we would need to manually cross-reference each Wigan Property account with a long-term empty premium charge since 01/04/2019, with the corresponding record in our Council Tax database. The findings would then have to be individually recorded in a spreadsheet. During the period in question 806 individual accounts have been identified. At an estimated 5 minutes per account to check and record the information, completing this exercise would require around 67 hours of work.

5. Council Tax premiums and premium exceptions apply to every domestic dwelling in the borough including those owned by Wigan Council.

This is an open report

Report to: Council

Date of Meeting(s): Wednesday, 6 March 2024

Subject: Revenue and Capital Budget Framework and Council Tax Setting

Report of: Tony Clarke, Director – Resources and Legal

Contact Officer: Tony Clarke (01942 827581)

Cabinet Portfolio Holder and area: Councillor Nazia Rehman, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Transformation

Summary:

To present to Council the Council Tax resolutions for 2024/25 and the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

To review the robustness and adequacy of Council reserves as indicated by the Council's Chief Finance officer under section 25 of the Local Government Finance Act 2003

To set the Prudential Indicators and Capital Programme and adopt the minimum revenue provision policy.

To review the Council's Pay Policy.

Link to Corporate Priorities:

Our People: Together we feel happy, safe, included and look out for each other:

- Best start in life for children and young people
- Happy healthy people
- Communities that care for each other

Our Place: Together we are proud of our towns and look after our environment:

- Vibrant town centres for all
- An environment to be proud of
- Embracing Culture, Sport and Heritage

Our Future: Together we will build a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive:

- Economic growth that benefits everyone
- A well-connected place
- Confidently digital

- A home for all

Wards Affected:

All

Recommendation(s):

The Council is recommended to approve:

- (1) the Council Tax Resolutions, Calculations and rates for 2024/25 as detailed in Appendix 1 of this report., which incorporate a 2.99% increase in the General Rate of Council Tax and a 2% rise for the Adult Social Care precept;
- (2) the Budget and Medium Term financial plan 2024/25 – 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 2 (including the proposed changes to fees and charges as at Appendix 2a);
- (3) Council Tax premium charge increases in relation to Long Term Empty Properties and reduce the time frame before a Long Term Empty property attracts a premium charge effective from 1 April 2024, and Council Tax premium increases in relation to Unoccupied and Unfurnished homes and reduce the time frame before an Unoccupied and Unfurnished home attracts a premium charge from 1 April 2025, as set out in Appendix 2;
- (4) the Prudential Indicators in relation to the Capital Programme and the revised Operational Boundary and Authorised limits for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 3;
- (5) the Capital Strategy together with Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 3;
- (6) the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy as set out in Appendix 3;
- (7) the Housing Revenue Account Estimates 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan to 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 4;
- (8) an indicative Schools Budget of £262.447m as set out in Appendix 5; and
- (9) the Pay Policy Statement as set out in Appendix 6.

Implications:

What are the financial implications?

The report provides details of the level of funding together with the proposed level of Council tax. After incorporating the 2.99% increase in general council tax and the 2% increase in the Adult Social Care precept the Council tax for 2024/25 at Band D equivalent will be £1,922.64. This figure includes the Greater Manchester Police, Greater Manchester Mayoral Precept (incorporating the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority).

Is budget release necessary (Capital Expenditure Only)?

Council approval is required for the proposed capital programme as set out in Appendix 3.

What are the legal implications?

The Council is required to set a balanced budget in accordance with the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 together with a Statement on the adequacy of financial reserves by the Council's Section 151 Officer under Section 25 of the Local

Government Act 2003. The Council is also required under the Localism Act 2011 and in accordance with the Transparency code to publish an approved Pay Policy.

What are the staffing implications?

As the Council continues to transform it is inevitable that there will be changes to the resourcing level within the council. Any changes will be assessed as plans are developed.

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason). If not required, then a relevance check needs to be completed.

As individual transformation plans are developed, they will be supported by the necessary impact assessments. Relevance Check is attached.

What are the property implications in terms of reduction, addition or change to the council's asset base or its occupation?

The proposed capital programme will involve changes to the Council's asset base

What are the Corporate Parenting Implications?

None identified in this report

Risks:

The Medium Term Financial Plan shows that savings are required for the duration of the plan to ensure that the Council is best placed to meet the increasing demands on Adults and Children's social care. The Council has a strong track record in delivering the efficiencies necessary to ensure it remains in a sustainable financial position. The continued transformation in its services is key to this longer term sustainability. Significant risks remain within services and are detailed in Appendix 2 of this report.

Sustainability/Environmental implications:

The Council is required to set a balanced budget and must evidence that it is sustainable in the short to medium term. The medium term plan now reported takes, as usual, a prudent approach as there are many unknowns around the future of Local Government finances. This will ensure that the Council remains in a strong sustainable position.

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution?

Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget?

Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council?

No

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

None as it is a legal requirement for the Council to set a budget

There are no background papers for this report.

Directorate Sign-off:	Tony Clarke
Date:	27 February 2024

Please list any appendices:

Appendix number or letter	Description
1	Council Tax 2024/25 and Statutory Calculations
2	Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25-2026/27
3	Treasury Policy, Prudential Indicators, Capital Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision
4	Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 – 2026/27
5	Schools Budget 2024/25
6	Pay Policy 2024/25

1.0 Background:

- 1.1 The Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement was announced by the Government in December and has subsequently been updated in February when the final settlement was announced. The Government announced an additional £500m of social care funding at the final settlement, of which £3.3m was allocated to Wigan, in recognition of national pressures faced by the sector.
- 1.2 The 2024-25 settlement is effectively the second year of a two-year settlement. With the exception of the additional social care funding noted in 1.1, much of the funding had been previously announced, either in the Autumn Statement (22 November 2023) or the Policy Statement (5 December 2023). No allocations for 2025/26 or beyond have been announced and therefore the Medium-Term Financial Plan set out in Appendix 2 is based on assumptions for years beyond 2024/25.
- 1.3 The Local Government Settlement for 2023/24 increased the overall spending power for Local Government by 7.5% cash terms. Social Care authorities received a higher cash terms rise, with Wigan's rise being 8.4%. This is an above inflation settlement (inflation 4.7%) but is a lower increase than the previous two years, which were 8.4% and 10.2% respectively. The cash terms rise quoted assumes that all Councils achieve a taxbase rise, and will maximise the increase in Council Tax and Social Care Precept. This assumption has been included in the Governments figures for the foreseeable future.
- 1.4 The additional funding announced in the Local Government Financial Settlement has helped to bridge part of the gap in the budget, however, there is a requirement on all directorates to ensure that efficiencies are made. Efficiencies of £10.1m, £15.6m and £12.6m are required for the period 2024/25 – 2026/27 respectively.
- 1.5 Members will be aware that to date the Council has successfully met the financial challenges it has faced by taking difficult decisions early. The continuation of this approach has allowed the Council to remain in a sustainable financial position. A Transformation Board chaired by S151 Officer and includes all directors has been established to drive through plans and efficiencies.
- 1.6 As in previous years wherever possible Directorates will continue to contain pressures within the areas that they service.

2.0 Council Tax Base

- 2.1 The Council Tax Base must be set under regulation by 31 January each year. For 2024/25 the figure has been set at 97,900 (96,500 for 2023/24). The increase of 1,400 is evidence that the house building market in the Borough is really buoyant which has provided a real benefit towards the 2024/25 budget gap and is in line with government assumptions within the settlement. The increase is prudent as the impact of the cost of living crisis is not yet fully known and as there is potential for more people to lose their jobs which could result in an increase in those accessing the Local Council Tax Support scheme which is funded by the Council. The increase

in council tax support in effect reduces the council's tax base and therefore reduces its overall yield from Council Tax.

3.0 Council Tax

3.1 Cabinet has proposed, and Council are now invited to approve an increase of 2.99% in general council tax for 2024/25 and a 2% increase for the Adult Social Care precept as announced by the Government. The Council Tax resolutions are included in Appendix 1.

3.2 The table below provides a breakdown of the Council Tax at Band A and D for 2024/25 with the proposed increase applied. The figures include the Greater Manchester Mayoral Precept. This includes the former Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority together with an amount proposed by the Elected Mayor Andy Burnham which will provide the funds necessary to deliver his strategic plans for the Greater Manchester Region. Amounts for the Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner are also included.

	Analysis of Council Tax Overall Precept		
	Total Amount	Band A	Band D
Wigan Council	£152,076,885	£1,035.59	£1,553.39
Mayoral General inc Fire and Rescue	£11,057,805	£75.30	£112.95
Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner	£25,091,770	£170.86	£256.30
	£188,226,460	£1,281.75	£1,922.64

4.0 Reserves and Balances

4.1 Reserves are earmarked for a specific purpose and available only once which is why we have not proposed the use of reserves to support the Council's Budget Strategy. We have maximised their use to assist in the delivery of our Deal 2030 principles. Reserves will continue to be utilised to provide continued support as we look to the future.

4.2 The impact of capital investment decisions on reserves are included within the Capital Strategy at Appendix 3. Reserves are utilised for capital expenditure rather than borrowing where appropriate.

- 4.3 The most recently published and verified data from the government's Office For Local Government (OFLOG) shows that Wigan has a higher proportion of non-ringfenced reserves as % of net revenue expenditure and as a % of service spend than its 'nearest neighbour' authorities, i.e. those with similar demographics and functions. A robust level of reserves is a key part of the medium term financial plan, and allow for necessary investment to transform and improve our services which ensure that future budgets can be set on a sustainable basis.
- 4.4 A key part of the financial position for a Local Authority is the adequacy of its financial reserves. The Local Government Act 2003 (Section 25) requires me to report on the robustness of the budget and the level of financial reserves. As Section 151 Officer I need to ensure that the Council maintain a sufficient level of balances and reserves. General Balances are held as a contingency against risks not provided for in the Council's financial plans and are available to provide that one-off funding for emergencies such as local disasters etc. The level of the General fund Balance is an important indicator of a Council's financial position as insufficient levels will place the Council at significant financial risk. The level of balances at Wigan are assessed annually and are currently at c£13m which is deemed to be sufficient.

5.0 Fees and Charges

- 5.1 Appendix 2a provides details of the Directorate reviews of their respective fees and charges together with details of any proposed increases to existing charges.

6.0 Schools Budget

- 6.1 Details of the Dedicated Schools Grant announced by the Department for Education for 2024/25 are included at Appendix 5. The grant has been confirmed at £262.447m for 2024/25 after the deduction of ESFA NNDR payments.

7.0 Housing Revenue Account

- 7.1 The HRA has also proposed a capital programme for 2024/25-2026/27. The council is currently refreshing its asset management strategy and this will feed into future quarterly reviews and the 30 year business plan to better meet the needs of our council house tenants and provide a long term strategic plan for the maintenance and development of our housing stock. To maintain current stock and develop new homes, the HRA will need to undertake additional borrowing. The programme is funded from a combination of borrowing, direct revenue financing, government grants, major repairs reserve and right to buy receipts.
- 7.2 The Housing Revenue Account is a ring-fenced account and is totally separate from the General Fund Budget. Full details of the HRA Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan are included at Appendix 4. As with the General Fund the HRA must maintain a prudent level of balances in order to provide an adequate level of financial

cover for unforeseen circumstances. The minimum level is currently assessed at £4.7m, and it is anticipated that the opening balances for 2024/25 will be £13.604m.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The delivery of this medium-term financial plan will continue to maintain the financial position of the Council. The plan has been developed alongside the Deal 2030 strategy and focuses on the regeneration of the borough's towns, together with improving the quality of life for our residents by continuing to improve and provide quality services to our residents.
- 8.2 The continued uncertainty around the future of funding for Local Government make it difficult to say with any confidence what our position will be in future years. This makes it more important that Directorates deliver the planned level of efficiencies to ensure we are in the best possible financial health. The longer term sustainability of the Council is a key part of this Budget Strategy.

Relevance Check

Budget Reduction/Service Area: Finance

Service Lead: Jane Green

Date: 23rd February 2024

In what ways does this Budget reduction have an impact on an outward facing service? How will the service feel different to your customers or potential customers?

N/A

If not, how does it impact on staff e.g. redundancies, pay grades, working conditions? Why are you confident that these staff changes will not affect the service you provide?

N/A

Is a Customer Impact Assessment needed?

No

This is an open report.

Report to: Cabinet
Council

Date of Meeting(s): Wednesday, 10 July 2024
Wednesday, 24 July 2024

Subject: Council Tax – Empty Property Premium Exception Policy

Report of: Sonia Halliwell, Director - Customer

Contact Officer: David Beaven (07933 259959), Joanne Mitchell (01942 828642)

Cabinet Portfolio Holder and area: Councillor Nazia Rehman, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Transformation

Summary:

The purpose of the report is to recommend the implementation of an exception policy regarding Council Tax Empty Property Premiums. The proposed policy aims to address specific scenarios where Council Tax payers may be excepted from paying a premium.

Link to Corporate Priorities:

Our Future: Together we will build a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive:

- Economic growth that benefits everyone
- A well-connected place
- Confidently digital
- A home for all

Wards Affected:

All

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet is requested to endorse to Council for approval, the implementation of a Council Tax Empty Property Premium Exception Policy that will provide certain criteria under which customers can apply for an exception from long-term empty and second home Council Tax premiums.

The Council is requested to approve the implementation of a Council Tax Empty Property Premium Exception Policy that will provide certain criteria under which customers can apply for an exception from long-term empty and second home Council Tax premiums.

Implications:**What are the financial implications?**

There is no direct cost that the Council will incur for implementing the policy. However, there will be an impact on the amount of Council Tax we can collect for those that successfully claim an exception. Those that claim an exception will only be required to pay 100% of the Council Tax due for the duration of the exception rather than the increased premium rate which will reduce the amount of Council Tax we must collect.

Is budget release necessary (Capital Expenditure Only)?

No budget release is necessary.

What are the legal implications?

The Government intends to legislate for most of the exceptions outlined in the new policy. This is expected to happen in 2025/2026 so implementing the policy now using our discretionary powers will ensure that we are compliant before legislation is passed.

What are the staffing implications?

Additional work will be required to implement the policy, but this will be managed within existing staff resources within the Collections Team.

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason). If not required, then a relevance check needs to be completed.

An Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required. Relevance Check is attached.

The exception policy is designed to give relief to customers under certain circumstances, so they are not unfairly penalised with increased Council Tax charges for long term empty properties or second homes. Any person that falls within a vulnerable group will be positively affected by the implementation of this new policy.

What are the property implications in terms of reduction, addition or change to the council's asset base or its occupation?

There are no property implications in terms of a reduction, addition or change to the council's asset base.

What are the Corporate Parenting Implications?

There are no Corporate Parenting implications.

Risks:

As customers can apply for a reduction in their Council Tax under this policy, there is a risk that false representations can be made, and/or exceptions claimed incorrectly.

The policy will set out the qualifying criteria for each exception and any supporting evidence required to support their application.

Staff will be trained in administering the new policy to ensure it is implemented correctly.

Regular reviews of exceptions will also take place to ensure entitlement is still correct and our data base is accurate.

Sustainability/Environmental/Climate implications:

Wigan introduced new premiums this year to maximise the incentive for owners of long-term empty homes and second homes to bring their properties back into use, reduce anti-social behaviour associated with empty properties, reduce homelessness, and further enhance and support essential services within our community.

The exceptions to premiums outlined in this report aim to provide some flexibility for customers who have certain circumstances where the imposition of a premium may be considered financially and socially detrimental to them as they are genuinely trying to bring their property back into use.

Has the Assistant Director - Legal Governance and Elections (Janet Davies) confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution?

Yes

Has the Director – Finance and Legal (Tony Clarke) confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget?

Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council?

No

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

We currently have discretion to implement an exception policy, therefore it is possible to forgo the implementation of exceptions and charge the relevant premium in each case.

However, the government intends to legislate for certain exceptions in the near future. Therefore, it would be prudent to use our discretionary powers now to implement these before they are mandatory.

The other alternative is that we could change the level of local discounts we apply for empty properties.

Currently, unoccupied and unfurnished properties benefit from a 100% discount for one month followed by a 25% discount for five months if they remain empty and unfurnished for this period.

Second homes (properties that are unoccupied and furnished) do not benefit from a discount. They pay 100% of the Council Tax due.

Changes to the level and duration of local discounts for empty properties could be implemented but is not recommended.

Premiums for empty properties were brought in to encourage owners to bring properties back into use and changes to the current discounts could be detrimental to that aim as well as having a negative financial impact on the council's budget.

An exception policy will provide flexibility in encouraging owners of empty properties to bring them back into use while also recognising there are some circumstances where the imposition of a premium may not be appropriate.

Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?

This item is included on the Forward Plan.

This report does not involve a key decision as Council approval is required.

There are no background papers for this report.

Directorate Sign-off:	Sonia Halliwell
Date:	27 June 2024

1. Background:

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to recommend the implementation of a Council Tax Empty Property Premium Exception Policy.
- 1.2 From 1 April 2024, new premiums for long-term empty properties have been introduced in Wigan. A property is classed as long-term empty if it has been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for over 6 months and is not subject to any exemptions.
- 1.3 The Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 allows Local Authorities the discretion to charge the premium levels shown in the table below. The Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023 allows Local Authorities to reduce the time a long-term empty property is payable from 2 years to 1 year.

Property Continuously Empty & Unfurnished (Long Term Empty)	Premium Charged	Overall Charge
More than one year but less than five	100%	200%
More than five years but less than ten	200%	300%
Over ten years	300%	400%

- 1.4 The Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023 also allows Local Authorities to charge a premium for second homes. A property is classed as a second home if it is unoccupied and substantially furnished.
- 1.5 The Council has resolved to implement the Second Home Premium from 1 April 2025 and the level of premium is shown in the table below.

Property Unoccupied & Furnished (2nd Homes)	Premium Charged	Overall Charge
From the date the property becomes unoccupied & furnished	100%	200%

- 1.6 As the ability to charge a premium is discretionary, we also have discretionary powers to create exceptions for circumstances where we believe a premium should not be payable.
- 1.7 It should be noted that the government has stated an intention to legislate and introduce nationally defined exceptions to premiums before the 2025/2026 financial year.
- 1.8 The government has indicated that each of the proposed exceptions apart from the 'Legal or Technical Issues Preventing Let or Sale' exception will be prescribed.
- 1.9 Because of this, we recommend that it is prudent to bring the following exceptions to premiums in before the legislation is passed in fairness to owners, and on the basis that there may be some delay in legislation being passed.

2. Proposals:

2.1 Proposed exceptions relating to Long Term Empty Properties and Second Homes.

2.2 Properties undergoing probate.

2.3 The period after someone passes away can be very challenging for relatives and/or executors of an estate. Unoccupied properties that have become vacant due to the death of the owner are already exempt from Council Tax.

2.4 Once probate is granted, or letters of administration have been issued a further 6 months exemption from Council Tax is available if the liability for Council Tax remains in the estate of the deceased person and the property remains unoccupied.

2.5 If the property remains unoccupied after the 6-month exemption has ended, the property may attract a long-term empty or second home premium.

2.6 Therefore, we recommend that a maximum 12-month exception should be adopted from the date that the exemption from Council Tax has ended as long as the property remains unoccupied.

2.7 The relevant premium will be payable if the property remains unoccupied after the 12-month exception period has ended.

2.8 Properties being actively marketed for sale or let.

2.9 To qualify for this exception, customers must make an application and provide relevant evidence that the property is being actively marketed for sale or let at a reasonable market value, depending on the type of property and the area that the property is situated.

2.10 The exception will be applicable from the date the property is empty and marketed for sale or let at a reasonable market value, until the end of the 12-month period or when it is occupied, sold, or let, whichever is sooner.

2.11 Owners experiencing legal or technical issues which is preventing the sale or letting of the property.

2.12 There may be instances where owners experience legal and/or technical issues outside of their control that prevents their property from being actively let or sold. Therefore, we recommend that a maximum 12-month exception should be available for owners who fall into this category.

2.13 To qualify for this exception, customers must make an application and provide relevant evidence of the legal/technical issues preventing the sale or letting of the property.

2.14 Exceptions relating to Long Term Empty Properties only.

2.15 Empty properties undergoing major repairs.

2.16 The Council currently offer a 75% discount for properties that are undergoing, or in need of major repairs or alterations. This discount is available for a maximum period of 12 months. The property must be occupied for a minimum period of 6 weeks before the discount can be claimed again.

2.17 We understand that there may be circumstances where there is a change in liability, the previous liable party has benefited from the discount and the property has not been occupied for more than 6 weeks since the discount was claimed.

2.18 If major repairs and/or structural changes are being undertaken after the change in liability, we recommend that an exception from the relevant Long Term Empty Premium is made available for a maximum period of 12 months.

2.19 An application including relevant evidence and a schedule of works will be required to claim the exception.

2.20 Exceptions relating to Second Homes only.

2.21 The government has indicated that the following exceptions will be prescribed exceptions before the next financial year. The Second Home Premium will not be active until 1 April 2025 so in anticipation we recommend that the following exceptions are adopted in time for 1 April 2025.

2.22 Annexes forming part of, or being treated as part of, the main dwelling.

2.23 The government will legislate so that unoccupied and furnished annexes forming part of, or being treated as part of, the main dwelling will not be subject to a Second Home Premium. This exception will not apply to the annexe if it is not being used as part of the main residence.

2.24 Job related dwellings.

2.25 The government will legislate to introduce an exception to the second homes premium for job-related dwellings. This exception will not apply to cases where someone chooses to have an additional property to be closer to work while having a family home elsewhere or where an individual is posted to a new location but maintain their previous address.

2.26 Occupied caravan pitches and boat moorings.

2.27 The government will legislate so that a pitch occupied by a caravan and a mooring occupied by a boat are an exception to the second homes premium.

2.28 Seasonal homes where year-round or permanent occupation is prohibited or has been specified use.

2.29 Where properties have planning restrictions or other conditions on occupation or use in place which prevent year-round occupation, the government will legislate so that such properties are an exception to the second homes premium.

3. Conclusions:

- 3.1** The government intends to legislate for most of the exceptions described in the proposal. Using our discretionary powers under The Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, the proposed exceptions could be implemented in advance.
- 3.2** Wigan introduced new premiums this financial year to maximise the incentive for owners of long-term empty homes and second homes to bring their properties back into use. It also supports work being undertaken by the council to reduce the number of long-term empty properties and make better use of the existing housing in the borough.
- 3.3** However, we understand that there are circumstances outside of an owners' control or where an imposition of a premium could be considered unfair or detrimental to customers who are genuinely trying to bring a property back into use. This must be balanced against the need to generate revenue to fund vital services, which is why the exceptions outlined in this report have been proposed.

Relevance Check

Budget Reduction/Service Area: Customer Experience and Support

Service Lead: Sonia Halliwell

Date: 27 June 2024

In what ways does this Budget reduction have an impact on an outward facing service? How will the service feel different to your customers or potential customers?

The ability to claim an exception outlined in the proposal will provide fair and proportionate circumstances for customers that meet the qualifying criteria. Therefore, the policy should have a positive impact on the service and our customers who would otherwise be required to pay a premium without the prospect of any relief for genuine circumstances.

We do not expect that the overall amount of Council Tax available to collect will be severely impacted as relative to the overall domestic property base, the number of empty homes attracting a premium is small. The amount of empty homes that will be eligible to claim an exception from a premium will only be a percentage of this.

If not, how does it impact on staff e.g. redundancies, pay grades, working conditions? Why are you confident that these staff changes will not affect the service you provide?

There will be no impact on staff in relation to redundancies, pay grades or working conditions.

The policy will be administered as part of normal processing within our existing staff structure.

Is a Customer Impact Assessment needed?

No