

Council Tax Empty Homes Premium Consultation Questionnaire

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Background to the consultation

Across the borough, there are currently almost 1,600 homes that have been empty for six months or longer (excluding those which are exempt from paying Council Tax); of these, 478 have been empty for over two years, with 169 of these empty for over five years. In a time when demand for housing is increasing this is a significant wasted resource. In 2016, we launched an Empty Homes Strategy covering the five years to 2021. This set out our target of bringing 900 long-term (over six months) empty properties back into use by 2021. To date, we have brought 400 long-term empty properties back into use during this period.

Under current legislation, we are able to charge a Council Tax premium of up to 50 per cent on largely unfurnished properties that have been empty for over two years. Currently, we charge the maximum 50 per cent in these circumstances, except in the following situations where there is an exemption:

- Property left empty by previous occupant(s) now detained under immigration law, in prison, in hospital or other place on mental health grounds
- An unoccupied property where the previous occupier (who must have been the owner or tenant) now has their sole or main residence in a hospital, residential care home or nursing home
- An unoccupied dwelling where the person subject to the charge is the personal representative of a deceased person and no grant of probate or letters of administration have been made or less than six months has elapsed since such a grant was made
- Where occupation is prohibited by law
- Property left empty by a person living elsewhere to receive/provide personal care

- Property left empty by a qualifying student
- Property repossessed under the terms of a mortgage
- Property left empty by a bankrupt person
- An empty caravan pitch or boat mooring
- An unoccupied annex which cannot be let separately because it is part of the main property and where its letting is restricted under planning regulations
- Property left empty due to service in the Armed Forces
- Property left empty by a person with a serious illness
- Empty retirement homes in leasehold developments which are advertised for sale or rent

As well as charging the empty homes premium, there are a number of other Council initiatives available to help the owners of empty homes bring them back into use. These are outlined in Table 1 below and further information is available on the [Council website](https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/housing/empty-homes/empty-homes.aspx)

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Table 1: Initiatives to help bring empty homes back into use

Initiative	Brief description
Conversion/ Empty Homes Grant	A grant to help convert long-term empty property or obsolete commercial premises to private rented residential accommodation.
Matching service	Helps to link empty home owners wishing to sell and accredited landlords wishing to purchase empty homes and bring them back into use.
Buy and sell service	Helps to link empty home owners wishing to sell and property developers looking to refurbish properties and sell them on the open market.
Private Landlord service	Supports landlords by providing contact with prospective tenants and giving access to tenancy management and sign-up services.

If you need any more information about Council Tax, please visit the "[Council Tax](https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/council-tax/council-tax.aspx) (<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/council-tax/council-tax.aspx>)" section of our website. Alternatively, please contact the Council Tax

team by emailing counciltax@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk
(<http://counciltax@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/>) or by phoning 0300 123 7
022.

What we are consulting on

This consultation seeks your views on both the immediate proposal to double the premium from 50 per cent to 100 per cent from 1 April 2019 and other potential future changes should further legislation amendments be introduced.

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How to complete this questionnaire

- Some questions ask you to click on a circle or in a box to select your answer
- For some questions you need to click in the box and type in your answer
- If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer, please leave them blank.

Council information is also available in audio, Braille, large print or other formats. If you would like a copy in a different format, in another language or require a BSL interpreter, please email equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk (<http://equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/>), telephone 0300 123 8 123 or textphone 18001 01606 275757.

Completing the questionnaire is voluntary and all the information you provide will be treated in the strictest of confidence. No information will be released that could identify an individual or organization. If you would like to know more about how we use and store the information you give us in this survey, you can find out by visiting www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/system-pages/privacy-notices/consultations-privacy-notice.aspx (<http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/system-pages/privacy-notices/consultations-privacy-notice.aspx>)

Please note that you need to be aged 16 or over to take part in this survey.

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Increasing the Council Tax premium on empty properties

A bill is currently going through parliament which will increase the premium we can charge on largely unfurnished properties that have been empty for over two years from 50 per cent to 100 per cent, effective from 1 April 2019. We are proposing to charge the maximum premium of 100 per cent in all cases (except the exemptions listed above); we believe this will incentivise owners of long-term empty properties to bring them back into use more quickly. If there are specific circumstances where charging the premium will lead to hardship we will consider exemptions for these on a case by case basis.

Q1. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to double the Council Tax premium charged on largely unfurnished properties that have been empty for over two years from 50 per cent to 100 per cent? (Please select one option only)

Please take into consideration the ongoing exemptions referred to in the background information, such as properties left empty by individuals who now reside in a hospital, residential care home or nursing home, and properties awaiting probate following the death of the homeowner.

- Strongly agree
- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q2. Do you have any comments relating to the proposal to double the Council Tax premium charged on largely unfurnished properties that have been empty for over two years? In particular, you may wish to highlight any circumstances where an exemption should be considered (in addition to the existing exemptions referred to in the background information). (Please tell us in the box below)

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Your views on other potential changes to the Council Tax premium on empty properties

Conversations in parliament have also highlighted a number of other proposed changes which may be implemented in the future. These include allowing local authorities to charge the premium earlier e.g. after a property has been empty for one year rather than two, and allowing local authorities to increase the premium for properties that have been empty for longer periods e.g. charging a premium of up to 200 per cent on properties that have been empty for between five and 10 years, and up to 300 per cent on properties that have been empty for longer than 10 years.

Q3. If the Council was given additional discretion over the timing and amount of the empty homes premium, please indicate how strongly you would agree or disagree with the following changes. (Please select one option per row)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Charging the premium earlier e.g. after a property has been empty for one year rather than two years	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Charging a higher premium the longer a property has been empty e.g. increasing the premium to 200 per cent for properties that have been empty for over five years



Q4. Do you have any comments relating to the potential changes outlined in the question above? (Please tell us in the box below)

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About you

To ensure we have views from a cross section of people in the area and to understand how views differ between different groups, we would like to know a bit more about you.

Completing this section is voluntary and all the information you provide will be treated in the strictest of confidence. No information will be released that could identify an individual, household or organization.

Q5. Please tell us your postcode

Q6. In what respect are you completing this questionnaire? (Please select all that apply)

- I am a resident of Cheshire West and Chester
- I am a homeowner with an empty property in Cheshire West and Chester
- I am an elected Member of Cheshire West and Chester Council
- I am a local Town or Parish Councillor

- I am an employee of Cheshire West and Chester
- I am a member of a voluntary, community or business organization
- Other (please specify):

Q7. If you are responding on behalf of a group or organization, please tell us the name in the box below.

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Finish Survey