

Equality Impact Assessment Form **Reference –**

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The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council to have **due regard** to the need to

* eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
* advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and
* foster good relations between different groups

# Section 1: What is being assessed?

* 1. **Name of proposal to be assessed.**

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 allows local authorities to reduce the period a dwelling is required to be empty and unfurnished before it can attract an empty premium charge of 100%.

The proposal is to reduce the empty qualifying period for the premium from 2 years down to 1 year from April 2024. The Act also enables a premium to be applied to 2nd homes but only from April 2025, so this EIA is solely focussed on empty and unfurnished properties.

* 1. **Describe the proposal under assessment and what change it would result in if implemented.**

Local Authorities have the power to apply premiums to empty properties. The premiums currently applied in the Bradford District to those properties that are empty and unfurnished are set out below.

| **Date introduced** | **Years empty** | **Extra percentage Council Tax charged** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 April 2019 | 2 | 100% (2 times the full charge) |
| 1 April 2020 | 5 | 200% (3 times the full charge) |
| 1 April 2021 | 10 | 300% (4 times the full charge) |

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 gives Local Authorities the power to reduce the period for which the 100% premium can be applied from 2 years to 1 year.

This will increase the Council Tax base due to an increased number of dwellings attracting the additional 100% premium.

One impact of applying the Long-Term Empty Premium over one year would be that owners of empty homes would be incentivised to bring properties back into use earlier than they would otherwise be. This would reduce the income from the premium but would have wider benefits and align with the drive to reduce the number of empty homes in the district.

# Section 2: What the impact of the proposal is likely to be

* 1. **Will this proposal advance equality of opportunity for people who share a protected characteristic and/or foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those that do not? If yes, please explain further.**

No.

* 1. **Will this proposal have a positive impact and help to eliminate discrimination and harassment against, or the victimisation of people who share a protected characteristic? If yes, please explain further.**

No – The proposed increase in Council Tax will not have a positive impact in this area**. I**t may result in houses coming back onto the rental market for low-income families.

* 1. **Will this proposal potentially have a negative or disproportionate impact on people who share a protected characteristic? If yes, please explain further.**

If an empty property is owned by someone on low income there would be an impact as a Council Tax empty premium will increase the Council Tax Bill by 100%. However, the property could generate an income if brought back into use. (Bringing empty properties back into use is the policy objective of the scheme).

* 1. **Please indicate the level of negative impact on each of the protected characteristics?**

(Please indicate high (H), medium (M), low (L), no effect (N) for each)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Protected Characteristics:** | **Impact**(H, M, L, N) |
| Age | N |
| Disability | N |
| Gender reassignment | N |
| Race | N |
| Religion/Belief | N |
| Pregnancy and maternity | N |
| Sexual Orientation | N |
| Sex | N |
| Marriage and civil partnership | N |
| **Additional Consideration:** |  |
| Low income/low wage |  L |
| Care Leavers |  N |

**2.5 How could the disproportionate negative impacts be mitigated or eliminated?**

(Note: Legislation and best practice require mitigations to be considered)

The Council’s collection strategies for Council Tax include informal stages of recovery before formal action commences. This means that if Tax and Ratepayers engage with us at early stages, they can avoid being charged court costs. The Council Tax team has invested in alternative approaches to the early engagement of residents who are struggling to pay, using SMS text, e-mail, and telephone contact to prompt payment.

The Government has not yet confirmed what exemptions to the empty premium will be applied but these could include those properties undergoing major repairs, those actively being marketed for sale or let or those undergoing probate.

These exemptions, if applied, may help those who would be financially impacted by the premiums.

# Section 3: Dependencies from other proposals

**3.1 Please consider which other services would need to know about your proposal and the impacts you have identified. Identify below which services you have consulted, and any consequent additional equality impacts that have been identified.**

The Empty Homes team in Housing are leading the initiative. If empty properties are brought back into use, this could provide much needed housing for residents in the district and improve neighbourhoods.

# Section 4: What evidence you have used?

**4.1 What evidence do you hold to back up this assessment?**

There is no evidence that a particular group would be adversely affected. As this is an increased charge it is possible that low-income households will be disproportionately affected by an increase in charges for empty properties. However, exemptions to the premiums as determined by the Government may mitigate this impact as would bringing the property back into use or selling/letting it.

The Council’s digital channel strategy approach, which uses innovative technology to connect with residents, offer support and advice, and more importantly minimise the need to take a statutory route to recovery and reduce/remove costs for customers reduces this likelihood. This strategy frees up resources that were taken up with often unsuccessful outward-bound calling and means that we can better support those residents who need further help.

**4.2 Do you need further evidence?**

Details of the exemptions to the premium. The Government’s consultation closed on 31 August 2023 and the outcome of that consultation is yet to be published.

# Section 5: Consultation Feedback

**5.1 Results from any previous consultations prior to the proposal development.**

The Council is not required to consult on reducing the period that the empty premium should be applied from, but the proposals are included in the budget consultation process

**5.2 The departmental feedback you provided on the previous consultation (as at 5.1).**

Not applicable

**5.3 Feedback from current consultation following the proposal development (e.g. following approval by Executive for budget consultation).**

Not applicable.

**5.4 Your departmental response to the feedback on the current consultation (as at 5.3) – include any changes made to the proposal as a result of the feedback.**

The consultation feedback will be considered, and in particular any disproportionate impact that potentially could be experienced by any protected characteristic