



FAREHAM BOROUGH
COUNCIL
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Equality Impact Assessment Executive Summary Report

Name of function, policy or strategy being assessed:	Technical reforms of Council Tax – Exemptions relating to Empty Unfurnished Properties.
Service:	Revenues and Benefits
Department:	Finance and Resources
Name and job titles of officers completing this assessment:	Caroline Quirk – Head of Revenues and Benefits Adrian Collier –Local Taxation Manager Jenny Moses – Corporate Policy Officer
Date of Assessment:	7 th December 2012

Summary of decision from screening stage or findings of detailed assessment:

This EIA is in response to the Governments' technical reforms of Council Tax – exemptions relating to empty or unfurnished properties. It looks at the potential impact for each of the proposals that are subject to a report to the Executive for decision 7th January 2013.

The following consultation methods were used to ensure views are gathered from a wide range of customers, including for example, claimants and non-claimants, representative organisations, voluntary community and faith organisations:

- On-line and e-panel surveys (paper copies also to be made available)
- Attendance at CAT meetings - opportunity for residents to talk about the proposed scheme with officers, complete a paper survey or signpost to on-line consultation
- Targeted publication of consultation to those organisations listed on our Community Groups database
- Targeted publication of consultation to accompany all benefit and Council Tax correspondence issued during the consultation period

Publication of consultation via press release, Facebook, Twitter, borough notice boards and Autumn edition of Fareham Today.

A total of 630 responses were received from individuals, organisations and community groups. The responses were generally positive and the majority were in favour of all of the proposals.

In summary 80% of respondents said that the 10% discount on second homes should be removed. 75% of respondents said that those who own empty properties or those in need of refurbishment should pay council tax, 69% said that the six month exemption should be removed and 62% said that owners should pay 150% council tax if their properties remain empty after 24 months.

Equality monitoring information is not collected from those claiming exemptions and therefore it is not possible to quantify the actual/potential positive or negative impact on specific groups. The proposals will apply to all landlords, private and social and in some cases can be viewed as increasing a business charge but for some individual owners, particularly in the case of long term empty properties, may increase financial burdens.

Summary of Recommendations:

Although there is no equality data collected and therefore little evidence of the impact the proposals may have it is recognised that the likely impacts of the changes are financial through increased costs. Financial hardship can also affect housing status, health and wellbeing or result in legal proceedings. With this in mind and the feedback from the extensive consultation exercise it is found that the proposals are fair, in that those who can afford to pay should pay. However, legislation gives the Council power to reduce the amount of tax payable. This power can be utilised to offset potential hardship that may be caused in respect of unoccupied and unfurnished properties. This discretionary power should be used to alleviate any problems in exceptional circumstances.

Once full Council has decided on which proposals it will implement the decisions will need to be publicised fully as a response to all those who have taken part in the consultation process.