

Scrutiny Topic Registration

Name of person proposing topic:	Date: 16 August 2011
Councillor Barbara Driver	
Contact: as above	
Suggested title of topic:	
Council Tax discounts on empty properties	
What is the issue that scrutiny needs to address?	
<p>If you leave a property empty for what ever reason (trying to sell it etc) you pay full Council tax. BUT if you leave a couple of bits of furniture in it you can get a 10% discount.</p> <p>While I understand we do not want empty property in the town, to say you get 10% discount if you leave in a few bits of furniture just seems daft. I know people who have had to move a few bits of furniture back into the property while trying to sell it to get round the discount problem.</p>	
What do you feel could be achieved by a scrutiny review?	
<p>Making it plain so people know exactly what is meant in the statement regarding council tax discount on un used property. If you leave a few bits of furniture in it you get a discount, if you move out with all furniture you do not get a discount. People then leave a few bits around just to get the discount. Some people who move out before the property is sold should know exactly if and why they get a discount. Better still, it should be for an un lived in property. Scrutiny could come up with a plain policy everyone can understand and not have to leave a couple of pieces of furniture in the empty property to get a discount. It should be no discount on a property that is unused, empty if too vague and can be manipulated.</p>	

Priority and urgency

Is the topic urgent?	No
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If so, please consider which of the following might apply:

Is there a strict time constraint?	No
Is there currently high media coverage?	No
Is there high public pressure to respond?	Some
Does it involve a high risk to the council?	No
Any other reasons:	
To be transparent in what the council policy is and means.	

Issues

Please consider whether the following might apply:

Is the topic important to the people of Cheltenham?	Some
Does the topic involve a poorly performing service or high public dissatisfaction with a service?	No
Is it related to the Council's corporate objectives?	No
Is it directly related to an item on the council workplan?	No
Has there been media interest in the topic?	Not yet
Can scrutiny help in the development of council policy?	Yes
Any other issues or details:	
Some people have to move for different reasons before they sell their property and so need to know exactly what the policy means.	

Officer Implications

Please give your comments on this proposed topic, for example is there any other similar review planned or in progress, are there any potential resource constraints etc

Council's power in this area

The Council has no powers to set rules to determine whether a property is considered furnished or unfurnished and which classification for charging it falls in to. This is determined by council tax legislation and precedents set by case law.

The Council does have the power to set the level of charge raised on long term empty properties and second homes. Council exercised this discretion and agreed a policy to increase the charges on long term empty properties (from 50% to the maximum 100%) and second homes (from 50% to the maximum 90%). It was agreed that the decision need not be reviewed again until there was some reason to do so. A review can be undertaken if deemed appropriate and the current set level can be reduced for both classes of property or either one, individually.

Implications

The set level of charge applies to all long term empty properties and second homes. It can not be varied according to property or council tax payer circumstances.

Any proposal to vary the set level to a lower percentage must fully consider the financial implications to not only this Council but the County Council and Police Authority.

The decision to increase the charge to the maximum allowed in respect of long term empty properties was made in support of the Council's strategy for reducing the number of empty homes and bringing homes back in to use more quickly.

Jayne Gilpin

Revenues Manager

**Links to Business Plan and
Corporate Objectives or
Risk Register**

Completed by
Cllr. Barbara Driver

Date....17 August 2011