

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

8 March 2024

Council tax measure ramped up to help tackle long-term empty homes in Fenland

A council tax premium charged to owners of long-term empty properties in Fenland is being strengthened to help increase the supply of housing for residents and improve local communities.

Since April 2021, properties that have been unoccupied for two years or more have been subject to a 100% council tax premium – meaning owners pay double the usual council tax rate – to discourage them from letting homes sit empty.

From 1 April 2024, the application of the premium is being changed. Owners will now be charged the premium on properties left empty for one year or more, rather than two.

From 1 April 2025, a 100% premium will also be introduced on second homes in the district.

As of 29 February 2024, there were 763 empty domestic properties in Fenland. This included 453 properties empty between six months and two years and 156 empty for over two years.

Cllr Samantha Hoy, Fenland District Council's Cabinet member for Housing, said: "The housing crisis has become a significant challenge across UK, affecting communities and individuals alike. Limited housing availability, soaring property prices, and escalating rental costs have left many residents struggling to find suitable accommodation.

"Long-term empty homes represent a significant, untapped resource that can play a crucial role in addressing the housing shortage, which is why we're committed to bringing them back into use. The longer properties remain out of use, the more they also become a blight on our communities and become a focus of nuisance and criminal activity.

"Charging a council tax premium encourages owners to bring their much-needed properties back into use so they are not left empty for years on end. The Council also works closely with owners, landlords and the local community to identify other properties, and offer a range of support and guidance to give such properties a new lease of life."

Since April 2021, the Council has suspended the council tax premium to support owners in certain cases, such as those who have recently purchased a long-term empty property.

From 1 April 2024, following feedback from owners, there will be three set classes of property in which the Council can offer to suspend the premium.

- **Properties recently purchased for renovation.** A property which is purchased through Land Registry at market value and where the new owners are unable to reside in the property due to its condition. Where evidence of this is produced by the new owners, the premium will be waived for a maximum of 12 months from the date of purchase before reverting back to the appropriate level of premium prior to the waiver period.

- **Properties marketed for sale.** Where a property is actively being marketed for sale at market value, the premium will be waived for a maximum of 24 months.
- **Inherited properties.** Where a property has been inherited and the new owners are unable to reside in the property. Where evidence of this is produced by the new owners, the premium will be waived for a maximum of 12 months from the date of ownership before reverting back to the appropriate level of premium prior to the waiver period.

Empty Homes Service

Fenland District Council provides an Empty Homes Service, with a dedicated Empty Homes Officer able to provide support and assistance to owners, including free property assessments, support with applications, approvals, lettings and sale processes.

The Council also has a Problem Property working group; a cross-team collaboration that meets to target more difficult empty properties in the district. The team explores the best powers and enforcement routes to break the impasse that leads to properties falling into disrepair.

If you own an empty property and would like advice and support to bring it back into use, you can:

- Contact the Council's empty homes officer Lorraine Moore on 07729 638832 or via email at: lmoore@fenland.gov.uk, or
- Visit our Empty Homes advice webpage at: www.fenland.gov.uk/emptyhomes

Report an empty property

Are you being affected by an empty property? Report it to us! Please contact Lorraine on the details above or use our simple online reporting form available at: www.fenland.gov.uk/emptyhomes

ENDS

Notes to Editors

For media enquiries, please contact the Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226 or email: communications@fenland.gov.uk