

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

**(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot and
Microsoft Teams)**

Members Present:

18 March 2024

Chairperson: Councillor P.Rogers

Vice Chairperson: Councillor C.Jordan

Councillors: T.Bowen, C.Galsworthy, J.Henton, J.Jones,
R.G.Jones, S.Paddison, R.Phillips, S.Pursey
and A.J.Richards

**Officers In
Attendance** A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce, C.Griffiths,
H.Jones, N.Daniel, T.Davies, A.Hinder,
C.Howard, Roberts, C.Saunders and A.Thomas

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors W.F.Griffiths, J.Hale, S.K.Hunt,
J.Hurley, N.Jenkins, S.Jones, S.A.Knoyle,
A.Llewelyn and C.Phillips

1. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

Cllr J Hale (Cabinet Member) – Item 5 – Personal, Prejudicial (left the room when item 5 was scrutinised).

3. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

**Council Tax Premium on Long Term Empty Dwellings and
Second Homes**

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Members were supportive of the policy intent to bring long term empty homes back into use. Members recognised that there are a lot of empty homes within the borough and the proposed 200% premium would encourage people to move into the empty properties or sell them on. However, concerns were expressed for buyers. The proposals presented a complicated picture of exemptions currently for council tax. Currently, a person may claim up to six months exemption from council tax where their property is empty, however the exemption relates to the property. If a person buys a property and the exemption has been used already, they would not qualify again for the exemption. If the policy is approved, some people may get six months exemption, then pay 100%, then pay 200% thereafter. Members expressed their concern that the policy would discourage people to buy long term empty properties.

Officers confirmed that the exemption rule pertaining to six months would continue to apply as it currently does. Exemptions are complicated and are dependent upon the circumstances of the person residing in the property. Officers outlined various circumstances that could apply with the exemption rule.

Members outlined that not all term empty properties are uninhabitable however, may not be in a condition that a person or family would wish to live in. Members recognised that some exemptions fall under statutory guidance, however the authority does have some discretion with how they apply. It was suggested by members that consideration could be given to resetting the six-month exemption period to reset when a property is sold. Officers were concerned that if this was done it would encourage people to delay moving into a property in order to avoid the council tax premium.

Members expressed their concern at the lottery of whether or not the six-month exemption applies when purchasing a property. The exemption should be uniformly applied to properties.

In relation to the consultation, members outlined that they considered the responses to be heavily biased towards those that will be affected by the policy. In particular those who have second homes and rent out that property.

Members considered that there is a need to strengthen the relationship between residents and the empty properties officer, to

ensure that any concerns are relayed and that there are no issues with any empty properties.

Officers confirmed that they directly sent the consultation to those who own a second home or empty property (1700 people).

Members queried if someone owns a property and open it as an AirBnB does it need to be registered with the authority? Officers confirmed the owner will need to contact the Valuation Office Agency, as they determine if a property falls into the council tax list or the business rates list. The property will need to meet certain criteria to fall into the business rates list in terms of the time that it is offered to be let and how much time it is actually let.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

4. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

Nicola Pearce advised members that at the last meeting of Cabinet Scrutiny, the Capital Programme was discussed and the money proposed to be spent on PDR. At that meeting members were advised that the money proposed to be spent related to an area of works at the entrance site in Margam. However this information was inaccurate, and the area of the PDR which is subject to improvement works and repairs is the stretch of road between the hospital and the Magistrates Court. The officer asked that this be noted for accuracy.

5. **Access to Meetings**

Resolved: to exclude the public for the following item(s) pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the relevant exempt paragraphs of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

6. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Private Item/s**

Capital Programme Update following the Outcome of a Tender Exercise

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

CHAIRPERSON