

Appendix 2 - Summary of Council Tax Premia consultation responses and comments

It is worth noting some percentage figures on this report are rounded up or down to the nearest decimal place and therefore some consolidated percentages may not total exactly 100%. For example, 50.44 would be shown as 50.4% and 50.45 would be shown as 50.5%. Also, where more than one answer was possible to a question, the total percentage may add up to more than 100%.

A numerical analysis of the responses, details of all the comments made and copies of letters/emails received as part of the consultation exercise have been made available to members prior to a decision on whether to implement Council Tax premiums being made.

The consultation ran between Friday 12th July and Friday 9th August. The survey was made available online and hard copies were made available at all libraries and the contact centre in the Civic Centre.

In addition, the Council wrote to all Council Tax payers that could be identified as potentially being affected by the proposals, 4223 homeowners, to invite them to take part by using the online survey and also offering the opportunity to ask for a paper copy of the form to be issued.

567 responses were received to the consultation using the online or paper consultation forms although not all questions were answered by every respondent.

Of the people who responded and answered the question which indicated how they might be affected by the proposal:

- 59 are owners of a long-term empty property in Swansea
- 253 are owners of a second home in Swansea
- 87 decided they fell outside these groups and described themselves as 'other'.
- 129 left a comment explaining the circumstances of their ownership which included:
 - I am owner of furnished holiday let.
 - Shared owner of a family property.
 - A part time resident in my old family home.
 - I am an owner trying to sell my empty property.
 - I am the executrix for an estate that owns a long term empty property.
 - I am trying to renovate it on my own limited salary whilst working fulltime.
 - We have a home in swansea as we live in and work in a boarding school.
 - Property Owner and property developer in the area aiming to sell all properties.
 - I own a second home in Swansea which we purchased with a view to occupying full time in retirement.
 - Owner of a chalet at Three Cliffs on a yearly licence that restricts to 6 months occupancy

30 people also decided to send in a response (or to add additional information to what they had given in the survey) by letter or email. One letter after the consultation period but on this occasion we have allow that response to be considered as the respondent had been too ill to send it in earlier.

Long Term Empty Properties

Do you agree or disagree that the Council should put measures in place to reduce the number of long-term empty properties in Swansea?

- 451 responses were received in relation to this question.
- 339 (75.2%) responders either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the question.
- 112 responders (24.8%) strongly disagreed or tended to disagree with the proposal.

Do you agree or disagree with our proposal to remove the 50% Council Tax discount on long-term empty properties as outlined above?

- 547 responses were received in relation to this question.
- 375 (68.6%) responders either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the proposal.
- 172 responders (31.4%) strongly disagreed or tended to disagree with the proposal.

170 comments were made by respondents who disagreed. The following comments typically reflect the general sentiments of those responses.

- Individual circumstances should be taken into consideration.
- House may need refurbishment and the owner can't afford to. Adding Council Tax to the burden just extends the time before the owner can afford to repair the house.
- Because there is no-one in the property they are not using any council services.
- I would be living in the property in question were I not tied to living elsewhere because of looking after a severely disabled friend. I was brought up in Swansea area and wish to retire to my property there. I am 66.
- It is not up to the council to tell people how to use their private property.
- One year is too short, if a family suffers a bereavement they would be under pressure to decide what to do with a property and may not make the correct decision.
- Currently it is difficult to sell anything in the City as I am finding with the old family home being difficult to interest potential buyers in.
- i buy properties that require upgrading and modernisation before returning them to market in a much improved condition, but recently the financial institutions have had a negative effect on the housing market and i have seen three potential sales fall through on on property because of this. landlords or home owners cannot be held responsible for the immoral actions of the banks.
- My property is empty as it is being renovated by myself and very unreliable tradesmen. It has took longer than anticipated but if you double my council tax I will not be able to afford improving it and thus you are penalising me owning a property.
- We are a social landlord (Coastal Housing) and are in the process of ensure all of our stock is up to WHQS standards and in some cases have to do a full redevelopment of a property which can take up to one year. In this case the relief

is beneficial to us because we can put the money into building more properties for swansea and investing in our local community and regeneration projects.

180 comments were made by respondents who offered alternative options the Council could adopt. The following comments typically reflect the breadth of those responses.

- Compulsory purchase, renovate and sell or let.
- Leave the 50% discount as it is
- 100% no interest grants on all vacant properties.
- A sliding taxation scale.
- Build more council house accommodation.
- Charge on properties empty for more than 5 years should double.
- City Council should negotiate with the owners of empty properties and offer advice and support regarding its use. If this is not successful then a range of powers could be made available to make sure the property is reused.
- If a property is still empty after two years then the council should step in but until then it could be a number of factors that are responsible for the empty home eg probate.
- Long Overdue - Burden on BONAFIDE CT Payers - being "FREELOADED" on by out of town, speculative Non Resident ex Welsh Landlords. Destroying communities, cohesion & sustainability contrary to WFG Act.
- Discounts on tax should be received for those clearly undertaking works, or refurbishing properties. Those deliberately kept empty should probably not get the same benefit. Maybe this could work in a rebate style system where if you can evidence the work, you receive the council tax back in full? This then encourages works to be done.
- Charge students and student landlords council tax. Why should they pay no council tax when hardworking low income people who permanently work and live in the city, spending their money in it have to subsidise them

Do you agree or disagree with our proposal to introduce a Council Tax premium on properties that have been empty for over 12 months?

- 522 responses were received in relation to this question.
- 289 (55.4%) responders either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the proposal.
- 233 responders (44.6%) strongly disagreed or tended to disagree with the proposal.

Do you agree or disagree with our proposal that the level of premium should be set at 100% (as described above)?

- 506 responses were received in relation to this question.
- 230 (45.5%) responders either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the proposal.
- 276 responders (54.5%) strongly disagreed or tended to disagree with the proposal.

257 comments were made by respondents who disagreed. The following comments typically reflect the general sentiments of the responses.

- If a property is being actively refurbished, it could take longer than 12 months to complete.
- 12 months is an inadequate period to allow granting of probate and sale of properties. The period before this measure is introduced should be 24-36 months.
- 100% premium is too high. 25% - 50% would seem to be more reasonable. Should not apply if efforts are currently being made to renovate, rent or sell the property.
- After 2 years increase beyond 100% premium.
- As stated previously there could be many reasons why a property is empty. Perhaps charge the full council tax but not the premium. Each case should be dealt with on a case by case basis.
- I think that any premium should be on a sliding scale eg 50% for the first year, 75% for the second year & 100% after 3 years.
- As stated previously there could be many reasons why a property is empty. Perhaps charge the full council tax but not the premium. Each case should be dealt with on a case by case basis.
- In a democratic country one should be allowed to leave their property empty.
- It is understandable that S.C want to bring "long term" properties back into the marketplace but it should be noted that the owners do not generally want their properties empty either. S.C should look at ways to reasonably HELP these people and not impose punitive charges that would make their lives more difficult.

198 comments were made by respondents who offered alternative options the Council could consider. The following comments typically reflect the breadth of those responses. There was some crossover between the answers to the previous question.

- Consider Staggering the time and increase i.e. 12,18,24 months etc 10%, 20%, 30%, premium.
- I would favour a premium on properties that are empty, but that premium should be waived if the owner is rebuilding or waiting on a planning decision from the council.
- Possibly remove the 50% discount but not charge a 100% premium.
- Keep the 50% tax as it is or reduce it further.
- rising annually by 100%, some of the people are so well off, 100% is not going to make any difference to them, if this is raised as above it would make people think. Communities are also disintegrating due to these empty homes.
- Empty properties falling into decay should be compulsorily purchased.
- Reducing the 50% discount after 5 years for properties not being made ready for occupation.
- The level should not exceed the full normal rate
- Reduction in council tax for a period of time after an empty property has been renovated/brought back into occupation, to encourage such activity where people's personal circumstances may make such activity an option for them.

If our proposals for long-term empty properties are agreed, we would use any income gained to help bring long-term empty homes back into use and meet local housing needs.

Do you agree or disagree that the income should be used in this way?

- 508 responses were received in relation to this question.
- 344 (67.8%) responders either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the question.
- 164 responders (32.3%) strongly disagreed or tended to disagree with the proposal.

Second Homes

Do you agree or disagree that the Council should put measures in place to reduce the number of second homes in Swansea?

- 552 responses were received in relation to this question.
- 171 (30.9%) responders either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the question.
- 381 responders (69%) strongly disagreed or tended to disagree with the proposal.

Do you agree or disagree with our proposals to introduce a Council Tax premium on second homes?

- 554 responses were received in relation to this question.
- 152 (27.4%) responders either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the question.
- 402 responders (72.6%) strongly disagreed or tended to disagree with the proposal.

Do you agree or disagree with our proposal that the level of premium should be set at 100% (as described above).

- 551 responses were received in relation to this question.
- 129 (23.4%) responders either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the question.
- 422 responders (76.5%) strongly disagreed or tended to disagree with the proposal.

382 comments were made by respondents who disagreed. The following comments typically reflect the general sentiments of the responses.

- Second homes are sometimes occupied at least 50 percent of the time, to help care for elderly or sick relatives living nearby.
- As an old age pensioner my family i.e. son, daughter in law and grandchildren and their family use the other adjacent property to enable them to visit their grandfather and great grandfather on a regular basis (8 people in all) at various times throughout the year.
- People with second homes here spend money in local shops and restaurants. Swansea is reliant on tourism and visitors should be encouraged not discouraged. They bring revenue and support to local businesses and growth to Swansea. Swansea should welcome visitors.
- Most of the second homes in Gower, Swansea West and the Marina do not fit into The category of affordable homes so, even if they came to the market, they would not address the issue you claim to be trying to address with this proposal.
- Many so-called 'second homes' have been inherited from their families; these should not be penalised with any increase in council tax. These people are locals, have been at school or worked in the area. A differentiation needs to be made between people who've inherited their homes and property developers who have bought properties as a business.
- Although my property is a second/holiday home, it is for sole use of my family only. As we are not permanently resident we do not use significant amounts of Council services but are already paying full Council Tax which I believe is sufficient.
- Continue to charge 100%. This is a fair amount. Owners of these properties already pay their fair share of taxes!
- I am keeping my second home in readiness for possible retirement back to Swansea.
- If our taxes are doubled we will simply sell and spend our vacation time elsewhere and so local businesses will suffer.
- It is a disproportionate and socially unacceptable to target second home homers as the value of our second Home and that of others is already in a fair banded system of taxation. You are not targeting according to ability to pay your are imposing a poorly perceived wealth tax over and above that borne by the majority of Swansea residents.
- This Tax aimed at raising money for building houses and bringing homes back into use but the Council is ignoring the fact that people with second homes have INVESTED their futures in these assets, to provide for themselves and their families now and in the future in retirement and as a pension.
- Distinction should be drawn between holiday homes in Gower and second (non-hol.) homes used by ex-Swansea people in unfashionable areas such as Penderry Ward.
- Second homes have a reduced demand on services and the owners bring money into the area by using shops and restaurants. It is healthy to have a mix of homes in holiday areas such as Mumbles and Gower if Swansea is to promote tourism.
- We have recently purchased a holiday home on the Gower peninsula which will be regularly used for family and friends which will bring income to the local area. The property had been a rental including an Airbnb fo4 5 years and was sale on the open market. As far as we are aware we were the only interested party so it was unlikely to be bought by a local family as their sole home.

280 comments were made by respondents who offered alternative options the Council could consider. The following comments typically reflect the breadth of those responses.

- 100% increase is not enough, these holiday homes - empty most of the year - are pricing young people out of the villages. 200% increase with funds going to affordable housing.
- A smaller premium. No more than 25%. (*similar comments were made with different percentages suggested*).
- Build more affordable homes to rent or partial buy.
- I am not opposed in principle to a premium but it should be phased in over 2-3 or 4 years building to a maximum of 50%. (*similar comments were made with different periods and percentages suggested*).
- 1. Request the additional stamp duty payments on second homes to be transferred from national to local government. 2. Ensure that any proposed council tax premiums are properly means tested.
- Concentrate on the empty properties first to see how far this meets your aims.
- Look for greater efficiency in the running of the council.
- Introduce a tourist tax like Edinburgh if you want to punish tourists
- Retain 100% rating on second homes and look to developing more rural housing.
- Reduce second home Council Tax rate to 50% from Standard full 100%
- Remove the 50% rebate on CT currently extended to all long-term empty domestic properties.
- Whatever is decided, there would have to be concessions for ex pats of Gower, who have good reason to own a second home in Swansea.

If our proposals for second homes are agreed, we would use any income gained to help bring long-term empty homes back into use and meet local housing needs.

Do you agree or disagree that the income should be used in this way?

- 527 responses were received in relation to this question.
- 232 (44%) responders either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the question.
- 295 responders (56%) strongly disagreed or tended to disagree with the proposal.

Do you have any other comments in relation to this consultation?

272 comments were made in response to this question. Most re-iterated points made in respect of previous questions although some additional, if very similar, points were raised. The following comments typically reflect the general sentiments of the additional points raised in the responses.

- A lot of second homes are seriously neglected bringing a blight to good residents.
- It's all about being fair and even handed. Empty properties long term are a disgrace. Full Council Tax after 6 months nothing less. Doubling Council Tax to second home owners who already pay full Council Tax is ridiculous. Students not paying a cent into the Council is also ridiculous.
- Be very careful that you do not put vulnerable people into difficulty.
- I am a professional person living in rented accommodation on Gower, I would like to be able to buy, but there are limited affordable homes available, but it seems a number of empty ones, while I agree some should become available to people worse of then me, please don't forget the people in the middle!
- I live in Port Eynon. Every house that comes up for sale is bought as a holiday home/rental. There are now NO young people left in the village. That is sad and outrageous.
- Long-term empty homes and well-maintained second homes are two distinct categories and should be treated as such. Homes which are left untended which could be available for local people should be encouraged to be so. Holiday homes, not designed or designated as being for permanent residence should not be lumped into the same category.
- The council is clearly seeking to implement sensible proposals to help local people in their housing aspirations. Well done.
- There will be a glut of second homes coming to the market (we will definitely sell up) so any income will be significantly reduced by the law of unintended consequences.
- This money should go towards improving infrastructure to entice visitors to the area.
- We live in a rural area (Gower). Our children don't stand much chance of buying a home here. This issue is what leads to other social consequences - grandparents are not close to help with childcare; adult children not nearby to keep an eye on elderly parents. I question what value second homes bring to the local community.
- I would like the council to consider whether there is any way they could control the number of residential properties being allowed to become holiday lettings or air b&b as they have a negative impact on local communities.
- People with second homes bring more than their fair share of disposable income into the local economy (e.g. shops, restaurants, entertainment facilities etc). They pay the full council tax, even though they are not here all the time, so do not use council funded facilities 100% of the time, representing a saving for the council. Second home owners are also unlikely to be a burden on the benefits system or the NHS. Wales should be welcoming people to this beautiful place, not discouraging them.