

**COMMENTS FROM REGENERATION & TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING OF
10TH SEPTEMBER 2012**

The Regeneration and Transport Select Committee, as part of its scrutiny review of empty properties, received a pre-consultation report regarding the Local Government Finance Bill which provides more flexibility over the Council Tax charges that can be levied on certain empty properties. The draft scheme was shown to represent a starting point for discussion and a period of consultation designed to gather feedback and gauge the potential impact, so as to inform the final scheme design that will be presented to Cabinet in February 2013.

The Committee raised the following for consideration:

- An example of impacts on Council Tax payers highlighted inheritance of a property and probate. The Committee was reassured that an exemption would continue to be applied until probate had been reached.
- An example of uninhabitable property prompted the Committee to request that 'genuine' reasons for the uninhabitable nature could still attract some support / relief for a short period of time and that officers research this matter.
- The purpose of consultation was questioned when a negative response was considered likely but the Committee accepted the legal opinion that carrying out a consultation exercise could protect the Council in the event of any challenge to the decision making process and would provide further information to help understand the potential impact of the proposals.
- More financial information was requested as the process of consultation is developed as concern was raised about the costs possibly outweighing the amount collected.
- Will a hardship fund be developed for people without sufficient funds as some protection measures should be in place?
- The Committee recognise the speculative figures shown especially with regard to the 150% premium being considered for properties empty more than 2 years due to the ease in which to adequately furnish a property and thereby remove the premium. With only one external investigator at the present time the workload could become excessive.
- It is recognised that certain empty properties (depending on their circumstances) will still be exempt from Council Tax, as a number of existing exemption categories have not been included in the Government's review. The availability of these exemptions should continue to be promoted.

In conclusion, the Committee agreed the scheme as presented on 10 September with the above caveats and reserving the right to further review the scheme, if necessary, when additional information is available prior to Cabinet in February 2013.