

Proposed changes to the additional Council Tax charge for long-term empty properties

CONSULTATION REPORT

**A summary of the results of the consultation on proposed changes to
Council Tax for long-term empty properties in Vale of White Horse**

JANUARY 2025



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We received 59 responses to this consultation. 88 per cent of respondents were members of the public, whilst five per cent were representing a business or organisation.

Most respondents did not own an empty property in the Vale of White Horse (71 per cent), whilst 29 per cent did so. Of those who did own an empty property, 47 per cent said it had been empty for more than a year but less than two years, and another 41 per cent said it had been empty for less than one year. 12 per cent of empty properties had been so for more than two years.

With respect to whether the empty properties owned by respondents were subject to the Council Tax premium, only two respondents answered this question. Of them, 50 per cent said they were subject to the additional tax, and 50 per cent said they were exempt.

The majority of respondents agreed with the proposal set out in this consultation which, if implemented, would reduce the amount of time before an empty property can be charged a Council Tax premium from 24 months to 12 months (59 per cent). Respondents made 29 comments on this proposal. 55 per cent of comments indicated lack of support for the proposed change in policy, whilst 24 per cent showed support for it, however, on condition that the new timeframe can be extended depending on the specific circumstances at hand, or an exemption is granted.

When asked about the effects that the proposal might have on housing supply, prices and rents:

- ❖ 44 per cent said the proposal will lead to an overall increase in the supply of housing and other private accommodations.
- ❖ 54 per cent said the proposal would have no effects on housing prices.
- ❖ 44 per cent said it would have no effects on rents.

Respondents who did not agree with the proposal were then asked what, in their opinion, is an appropriate amount of time after which empty properties should be charged a Council Tax premium. No clear majority emerged, however, the largest groups of respondents selected '24 months (no change to current policy)' and 'more than 24 months', which were chosen by 48 per cent each. These results highlight a preference for retaining the current policy or even extending the current timeframe to more than 24 months, which goes against the proposal set out in this consultation. Respondents made 16 comments on their preferred timeframe. Of them, 44 per cent said that they would like a more flexible policy that would consider specific circumstances and allow for an extension of the timeframe or an outright exemption.

ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

The consultation on 'Proposed changes to the additional Council Tax charge for long-term empty properties' was launched on 15 October and closed at 11.59pm on 26 November 2024. It was open for six weeks.

The consultation was advertised to stakeholders and the public by:

- Emailing a notification of the consultation to 191 residents on the council's contacts database who own an empty property.
- Emailing the notification of the consultation to the district's 69 Town and Parish councillors.
- Posting on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram and X) on 16 October. Posts on Facebooks received 1,154 reaches (unique views), whilst those on Instagram and X received 131 and 362 views respectively.
- [Publishing a press release on Friday 16 October.](#)

On 23 October [The Henley Herald wrote an article on this consultation](#), which included a link to the online comment form.

Reporting methodology

This report provides a summary of all quantitative and qualitative results of this consultation.

When stating percentages in the analysis, we are referring to the percentage of respondents that answered the specific question, rather than the total number of responses to the overall survey. Response percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding up over .5 and rounding down under .5. Words that appear in italics are quotes taken from comments received.

A full list of all comments made in relation to each question is also available in this report. Any personal information supplied to us within the comments that could identify anyone has been redacted and will not be shared or published. Further information on data protection is available in our [general consultation's privacy statement](#).

Some punctual errors in the original comments raised were corrected in the main body of this report.

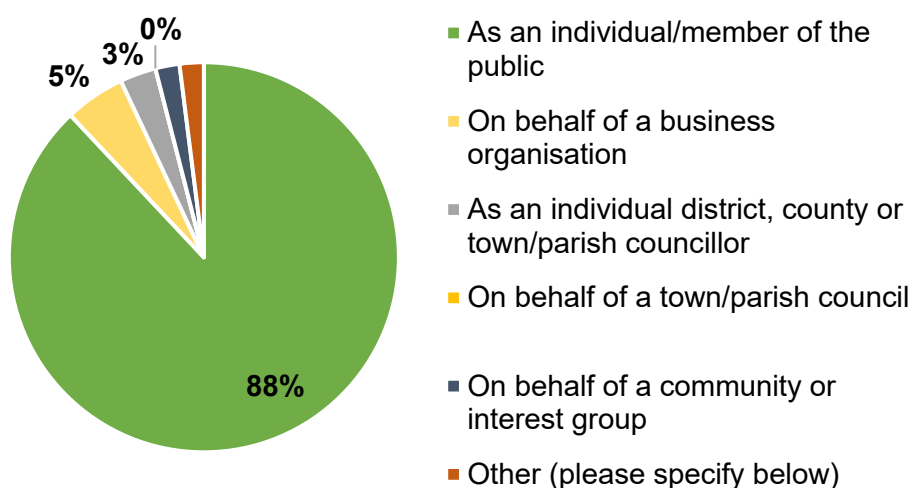
KEY FINDINGS – QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

This section provides an overview of the findings of this consultation, summarising both quantitative and qualitative results. The questions and their relative results are here presented in the same order as they appear on the comment form.

About you

Q1. Are you responding as:

Figure 1



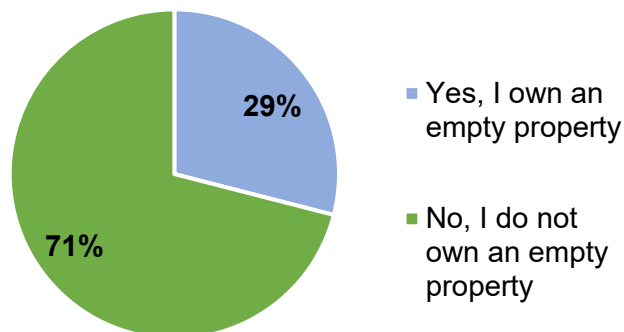
All 59 respondents answered this question. Of them, the vast majority were individuals/members of the public (88 per cent). Five percent responded on behalf of a business organisation, and three per cent were individual district, county or town/parish councillors.

If you selected 'other' please specify below.

ID	Response
ANON-XWA4-2J7K-2	Landlord, resident and town councillor

Q2. Do you own an empty property in the Vale of White Horse?

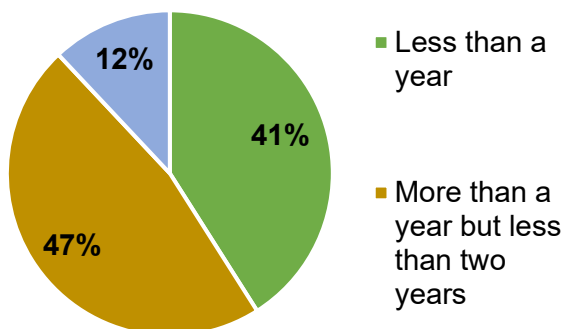
Figure 2



All 59 respondents answered this question. The vast majority of them did not own an empty property in the Vale of White Horse (71 per cent), whilst 29 per cent did.

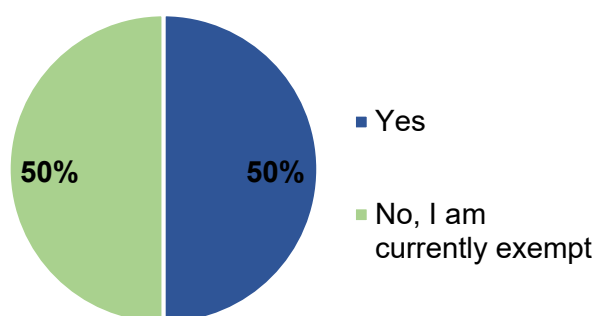
Q3. How long has your property been empty for?

Figure 3



17 respondents answered this question. Of them, eight said their property had been empty for more than a year but less than two years (47 per cent), and seven said their property had been empty for less than a year (41 per cent). Two respondents indicated that their property had been empty for more than two years (12 per cent).

Q4. Is your property subject to the long-term empty properties council tax premium charge?



Among those who own empty properties, two answered this question. Their responses were split 50-50, with one saying that yes their property was subject to a Council Tax premium, and another one saying that they are exempt.

If you said you are exempt, please specify below the type of exemption that applies.

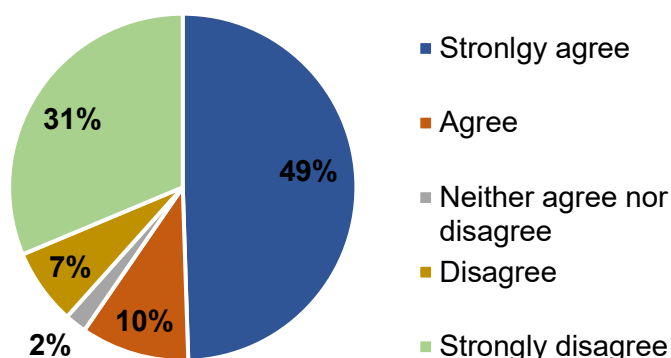
We received one comment in response to the above question, which is shown in the table below. The comment indicates that the responder's property is subject to Council Tax premium, so it does not directly relate to the above question.

ID	Response
ANON-XWA4-2JNH-P	<p>The property was empty for a period of time before I bought it as the lady who rented it from Sovereign died. It then went on the market for a long while and took 3 months to purchase. After purchase the house needed repairs and modernising but the time allocation had been used up.</p> <p>By points for council consideration would be to consider if the owner is the same for the entire period of reduced fees application. Is the person trying to improve the property and thus adding value to the area. Currently I don't believe that I qualify for the long term empty as it was used up by the previous tenant and then owner. I have requested a reduction as I am making structural changes due to the condition of the property. I would appreciate lower council tax costs as the property is expensive to update while no one is living inside it.</p>

Q5. How far do you agree or disagree with the above proposal?

Under current council policy, owners of empty properties can be charged a Council Tax premium if properties have been left unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least two years. Vale of White Horse District Council is now proposing to reduce this timeframe to one year.

Figure 4



58 out of 59 respondents answered this question. Among them, 49 per cent strongly agreed with the proposal and ten per cent agreed with it. This means that the majority of respondents supported the proposal (59 per cent).

Conversely, 38 per cent disagreed with the proposal made, with 31 per cent strongly disagreeing with it. .

Two per cent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal.

If you have any comments on this proposal, please provide them below.

We received 29 comments on the above proposal. Of them, just over half said they do not agree with the proposal set out in this consultation (55 per cent, 16 comments).

24 per cent of comments showed partial support with the proposal, signalling a preference to include more exceptions to it, or to change the timeframe slightly (seven comments). Four comments showed support for the proposal as it is (14 per cent).

Below is a full list of all redacted comments.

Table 1

ID	Response
ANON-XWA4-2JN7-5	<p>I think this is a disgusting and unfair proposal.</p> <p>What happens if you are renovating a property and it takes more than a year to do?</p> <p>What happens if someone passes away and it takes more than a year to arrange probate and sale?</p> <p>Surely if a property is empty the council has to do less work, no bins to collect etc so the charge should be less.</p> <p>It's just the same old story ,robbing the public at every opportunity!</p>

ANON-XWA4-2JNH-P	<p>If a property is empty the use of amenities such as refuse removal, use of roads and services in the area is not proportionately used by the owner of the vacant house.</p> <p>Secondly, since covid and the war in Ukraine living cost and interest costs on home loans have increased. Home owners that are not able to rent properties or live in a first home may be struggling to purchase a home or pay to fix it up to eventually live in it. Added costs makes this reality more of a challenge while not making use of amenities.</p> <p>Perhaps the consideration could include does this owner have one or more homes that they are living in or renting out. Do they contribute to council tax else where. How many properties do they own and are some for income or only personal occupation. Is the owner off shore trying to earn money to purchase a first home or subsequent property. Is the property empty because it does not meet the current requirements of tenant laws.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JN6-4	<p>I think there needs to be an exemption if (REDACTED) you are not living in the property because it flooded internally. This should also be the case if there was a fire - ie something totally out of your control. In principle I agree with the measure but there needs to be protection for these specific circumstances.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNA-F	<p>I agree in principal that no property should be left empty for more than 1 year, as most refurbishments of domestic housing can be carried out within that timescale, and that any property still unoccupied after that time should be subject to an additional premium council tax, provided that there is an exemption in place for properties that are being actively marketed for sale or rent.</p> <p>However, there is a flip side to this discussion, which should also be looked at. Namely; I do believe that it is extremely unfair to charge 100% Council Tax upon properties that are unoccupied whilst being actively refurbished, as the owner is not using/receiving/burdening any of the benefits such as refuse collection, education etc. In my opinion, there should be a 1 year period of 100% exemption, and thereafter reverting to zero exemption, plus the Premium being chargeable, subject to being actively marketed for sale or rent.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNZ-8	<p>We have just bought the property in July- it was owned by an elderly person REDACTED. Her family claimed the empty property benefit and then after her death sold the property. We are not eligible for any relief. REDACTED. We are trying to get planning permission to demolish the house and build afresh - but if the planners delay us and we cannot demolish in the next 9 months we will be penalised further.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNB-G	<p>I understand why the council wants to keep properties occupied, the truth is that empty properties are not increasing council's spending, quite the opposite. In fact, council tax should be lowered on vacant</p>

	properties. Politicians' job is to serve people, not to do social engineering.
ANON-XWA4-2JNN-V	Is this just purely a money grab? What's the difference between one year and 2 years?
ANON-XWA4-2JNP-X	We are in a situation of probate with a house that has subsidence so our hands are tied by how quickly we can sell the house so someone else can live in it.
ANON-XWA4-2JNM-U	If an owner can evidence their attempts to sell a house, there should be an exemption to increased council tax. Being forced to put tenants into a house as a short-term let, and incurring the potential costs associated with this would work against both the tenants who would potentially need to move and incur their own costs associated with this, as well as for the owner who may have no interest in renting, and has just been hit with a downturn in demand.
ANON-XWA4-2JNR-Z	I think the rules should remain as-is. If there is a probate dispute or issue that could take at least 12 months to resolve. Why potentially add more stress on people in a potentially difficult situation?
ANON-XWA4-2JNU-3	If there is a case of probate this could involve more than 12 months. I see no reason to inflict more stress on people involved in such circumstances.
ANON-XWA4-2JNQ-Y	I 'own' an empty property REDACTED. It belonged to my mother who died a year ago. Despite all tax being paid and no other claimants or any disputed part of her Will (it was a very straightforward document), I am *still* awaiting the Probate from court to do anything with the property. Although I agree with your aims, there is nothing I can do to speed this up. Perhaps you could fine the courts instead?
ANON-XWA4-2JNW-5	Two years is a relatively short period of time if refurbishment is required. I am currently in a break in my property being rented and doing much of the work myself alongside a full time job. Everything is taking me longer than planned and although I hope to be in a position to rent the house soon, I want to make some changes and use the empty time as an opportunity to do things that I wouldn't be able to do with tenants in situ.
ANON-XWA4-2JNV-4	Two years is a reasonable time to allow for the sale of a residence once it becomes empty. The only reason for the proposed change that I can see is that the Council want to raise some additional income
ANON-XWA4-2JNY-7	Reducing this timeframe does not take into account the many and varied reasons that properties sometimes remain empty and unoccupied. While I strongly support measures to optimise accommodation to be made available, I think that this proposal will cause great hardship to property owners who are managing situations that are often beyond their control.

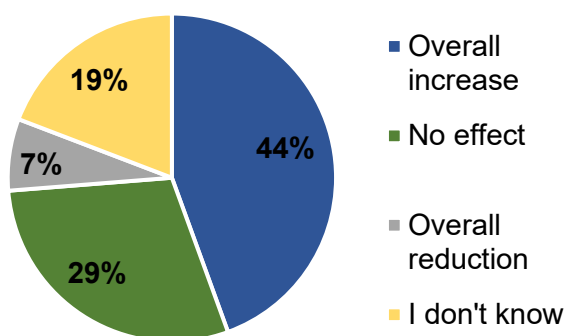
ANON-XWA4-2JNJ-R	As someone who sold a property earlier this year, it was being actively marketed but due to someone pulling out it took over the 12 months to finalise the sale. So providing the "Exemptions to the long-term empty property premium charge" are followed then I agree with the proposal.
ANON-XWA4-2JN1-Y	Will reduce the number of empty properties and in effect tax people for leaving property empty.
ANON-XWA4-2J77-E	We are a developer and often acquire properties as a part of a planned redevelopment to create additional units and upgrade existing units to modern eco standards. The planning process to achieve our planned redevelopment aims can often take over 2 years. We should be exempted from this proposed punitive charge..
ANON-XWA4-2J72-9	The property that we currently have empty which is in the grounds of our care home has a section 52 agreement which specifies any tenants should be over 65 or disabled. It is not always easy to sell properties such as this.
ANON-XWA4-2J74-B	Sometimes it takes time for grieving families to agree to a time scale for selling a house and also to empty it. One year is really not long enough to sort everything out. I would not want to see a Premium council tax imposed by any length of time! The council is getting their monthly council tax for that property so leave the owners alone and don't make life difficult for them.
ANON-XWA4-2J78-F	Empty properties are not using council facilities so what gives the council the ethical right to charge extra
ANON-XWA4-2J7B-S	We are in the position of being able to live in REDACTED maisonette, with a forever home in need of gutting popping up. We've had that since may 2023 and were fully intending on being moved into part of the house within 3-4 months of getting it (then selling her place). Doing all of the work ourselves with favours from friends to be able to get what we want. Where this consultation would have shafted us (like after 1 year it going up to full rate is having an affect) is where things have got in the way of us working on the house. REDACTED. We're scraping by with the two houses and help from my family to be able to make our future forever-home. The changes to this would have severely hampered us, or even forced us to stop completely and even had to sell at a loss.
ANON-XWA4-2J7K-2	Agree - reduce to 6 months with up to 12 months on appeal for substantial building works etc
ANON-XWA4-2J7E-V	The reason the property is empty can vary and so should be kept as it currently is.
ANON-XWA4-2J7R-9	I strongly support this proposal. In a housing crisis, councils should do everything possible to encourage empty homes to be brought back into use. Fewer empty homes will be good for jobs, local services, families and our communities.

ANON-XWA4-2J7W-E	It seems unfair to charge a property for services when no services are being used. It strikes me as being greedy.
ANON-XWA4-2J7Y-G	Sliding scale from 3 months which would incentivise builders, developers, solicitors, architects probate office and, hopefully, the planning authorities who are all responsible for delays, despite the owners best efforts.
ANON-XWA4-2J7J-1	The reduction should made landlords keener to find tenants, and that might lower rents and help to reduce homelessness. If this put landlords off owning rental property, there would be just that much more property available to buy. This isn't a consideration of the proposed change, but "substantially unfurnished" seems to me like a get-out: to be exempt, the owner would just have to furnish a property enough for it to be considered "substantially furnished", which could cost less than the empty-property premium before very long.
ANON-XWA4-2J71-8	There are too many empty properties sitting empty for too long. Owners should either rent it out, sell it or pay for the privilege of keeping it empty.

Q6. In your opinion, if the amount of time before an empty property can incur a council tax premium was reduced from two years to one year, what would its effect be on:

❖ **The supply of available housing and private accommodations**

Figure 5



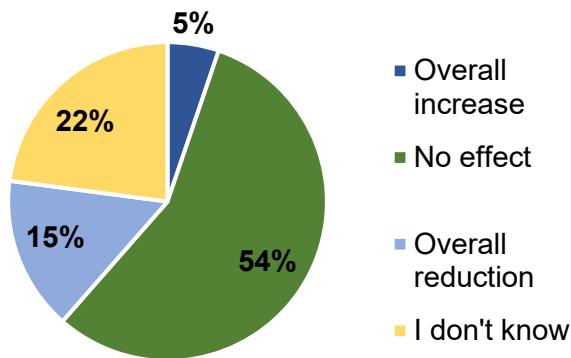
57 respondents answered this question. No overall majority emerged among them, however, the largest group indicated that the proposal to reduce the minimum timeframe before empty properties can be charged an additional Council Tax charge would lead to an overall increase in the supply of available housing and private accommodations (44 per cent).

29 per cent said that there would be no effect on housing supply, whilst 19 per cent said they did not know what the likely effect would be.

A minority of respondents said that the proposal would lead to an overall reduction in housing supply (seven per cent).

❖ **House prices**

Figure 6

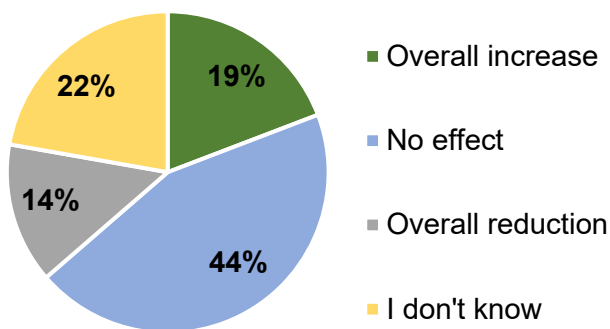


The majority of respondents said that the proposed change of Council Tax policy would not have any effects on house prices (54 per cent), whilst 22 per cent said they did not know what the likely effect would be.

15 per cent said the proposal would likely lead to an overall reduction in house prices, whilst five per cent would expect an increase.

❖ **Rents**

Figure 7



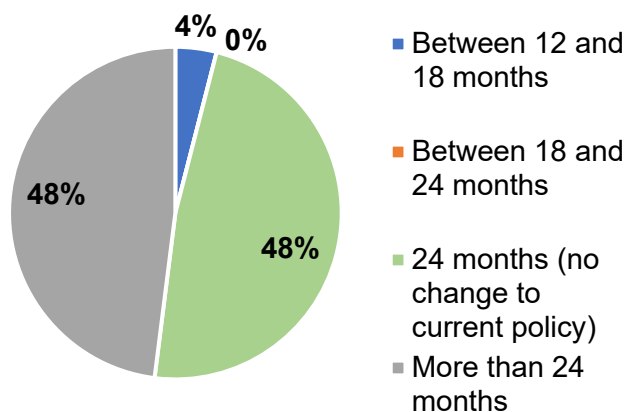
With respect to rents, no clear majority emerged among respondents. However, the largest groups said that the proposal would likely have to no effect on rents (44 per cent). An

additional 22 per cent of respondents indicated that they don't know what the effects on rents would be.

19 per cent said the proposal would cause an overall increase in rents, whilst 14 per cent said it would lead to a reduction.

Q7. In your opinion, what is an appropriate amount of time after which empty properties can be charged a council tax premium?

Figure 8



This question was only directed at those who disagreed with the proposal made. No clear majority emerged among respondents. However, the largest groups selected the options '24 months (no change to current policy)' and 'more than 24 months', which were chosen by 48 per cent each. These options signal a preference for retaining the current policy or even extending the current timeframe to more than 24 months.

A minority of respondents selected 'between 12 and 18 months' (four per cent), which would mean a reduction of the current timeframe.

If you selected 24 months, please let us know why you think the current timeframe should not be changed.

16 comments were made in response to the above question. Of them, 44 per cent indicated a preference for more flexibility in the proposed new policy, to consider different circumstances which might require an extension of the timeframe or outright exemption (seven comments).

3 per cent of comments said that it can take longer than the proposed 12 months to sell or rent a property, which is why they would prefer to keep the current policy in place (five comments).

Two comments showed lack of support for the proposal.

Below is a full list of redacted comments.

Table 2

ID	Response
ANON-XWA4-2JN2-Z	<p>I have a property that has been for sale for just over a year...Sale has fallen through because Buyers 'pull out'....Twice.</p> <p>Third time lucky at present but might not happen, why should I be penalised?. It is a shared ownership house that cannot be rented in the meantime.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNH-P	<p>See earlier comments as already stated. Also if landlords/owners can demonstrate that they have a) tried to find a tennant in the pst 3 months b) owned the property in their own capacity for less that 12 months and are making improvments to make the property habitable or c) Have tried to sell the empty house in the past 3 months.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JN6-4	<p>I believe 12 months is fir unless the circumstances are as I outlined - fire, flooding etc</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNZ-8	<p>Because it does not reflect the case of houses where the previous occupants are possibly in long term nursing care.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNC-H	<p>to allow probate, or refurbishment, who are yhe council to determine an individual owners rights, smacks of comminism</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNN-V	<p>I think it's unfair to people who have made commitments abroad or for whatever reason choose to leave THEIR property uninhabited. What difference does it make?</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNP-X	<p>I don't think people are actively keeping properties empty for their own gain, but in our case we have inherited a situation which is out of our control, and so being penalised for that is not fair.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNQ-Y	<p>The courts are not processing property ownership in time.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNW-5	<p>As mentioned in my previous comments, work on houses can take longer than planned. 2 years seems a fair amount of time to allow for work to be completed if required.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2JNY-7	<p>I have had experience of managing an empty and unoccupied property on behalf of another family member. The situation was difficult and increasing the council tax would not have made the property available for occupation any sooner.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2J77-E	<p>Please see answer above... developers actively seeking planning to improve / redevelop should be exempt from this punitive charge.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2J72-9	<p>There should be allowance for properties where there is restrictions in place as to who can purchase the property.</p>
ANON-XWA4-2J74-B	<p>I've already answered this question in Q5</p>
ANON-XWA4-2J7B-S	<p>A key part should be being able to justify not having an increase where suitable. As previously mentioned, already living somewhere whilst working on the forever home is making time for us to be able to</p>

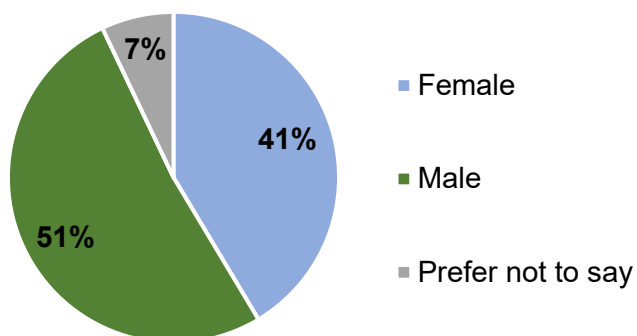
	afford to do the work. Increasing the tax would properly hamper our ability to finish the forever home. With the add-on that the longer that's taken the longer it's taken to put a first-time-buyer type property on the market for someone else to buy.
ANON-XWA4-2J7E-V	No need to.
ANON-XWA4-2J7W-E	People can sometimes have difficulty selling a property within two years eg when waiting for probate to be granted

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA¹

Below is the demographic data collected in the engagement. Not all respondents answered, so percentages given represent responses to each question.

Q8. What is your sex?

Figure 9



58 out of 59 respondents answered this question.

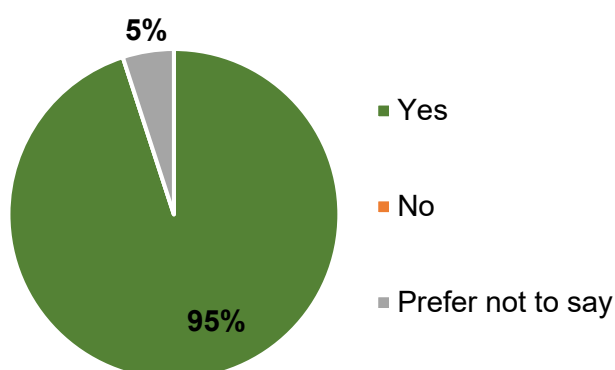
Overall, more males than females took part in this consultation. More specifically, males made up just over 50 per cent of respondents (51 per cent), whilst females made up 44 per cent. This compares to an equal 50 per cent split between males and females residents in the Vale of White Horse population.

Seven per cent of respondents preferred not to answer this question.

¹ Data for the actual population is taken from the 2021 Census and is available [here](#).

Q9. Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

Figure 10



95 percent of respondents said that the gender they identify with is the same as their sex registered at birth. This is the same proportion of the real district's population.

Five percent of respondents preferred not to say.

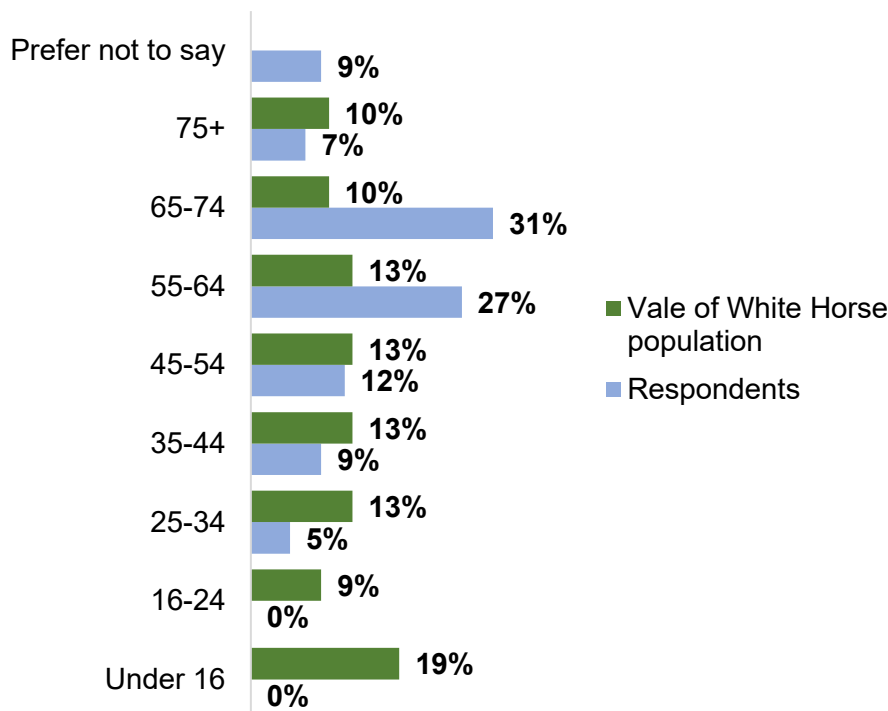
We received two additional comments from respondents, which are listed below:

Table 3

ID	Response
ANON-XWA4-2JNC-H	daft question
ANON-XWA4-2J74-B	Surely this is irrelevant to what you're trying to find out?

Q10. How old are you?

Figure 11



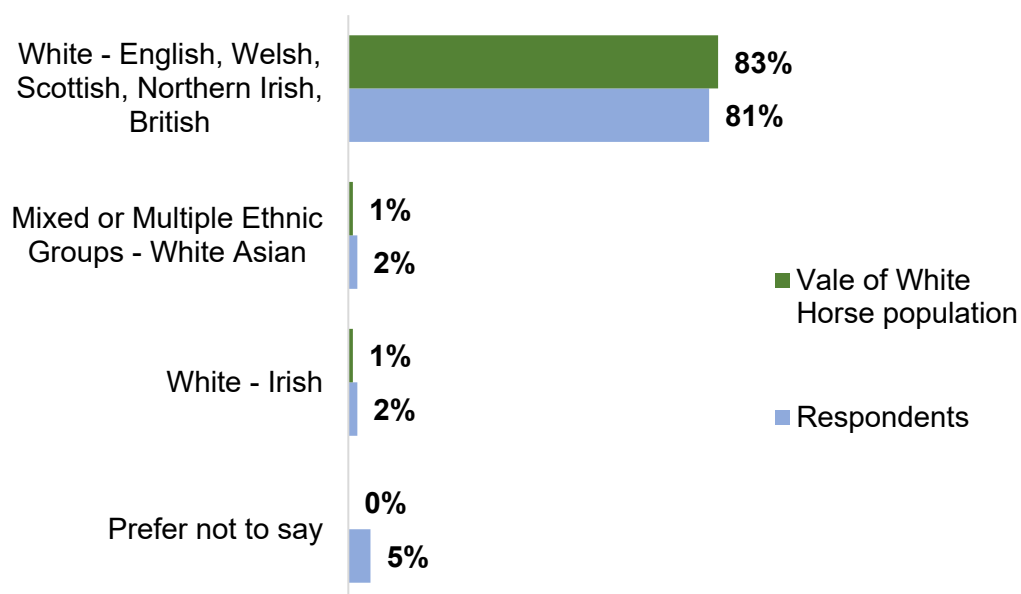
The largest age groups to respond to the consultation were 65-74 and 55-64-year-olds, which made up 31 and 27 per cent of total respondents respectively. Together, these two age groups made up over half of total respondents (58 per cent) and participated in much larger numbers compared to their share of the district's population.

The above two age groups were followed by the 45-54-year-olds (12 per cent) and the 35-44-year-olds (nine per cent). These groups' individual proportion of total respondents are not far from their share of the real district's population, particularly so for the 45-54-year-olds.

Finally, the over-75-year-olds and the 25-34-year-olds made up seven and five per cent of total respondents respectively.

Younger cohorts appear to be underrepresented in this consultation by comparison with real population data, particularly the under-16s. This could be due to the consultation being aimed at owners of empty properties and at understanding residents' views on a possible increase of Council Tax charges for such properties.

Q11. What is your ethnic group?



The vast majority of respondents said their ethnic background was 'White – English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British' (81 per cent). This is a good representation of the actual district's population, where this group make up 83 per cent.

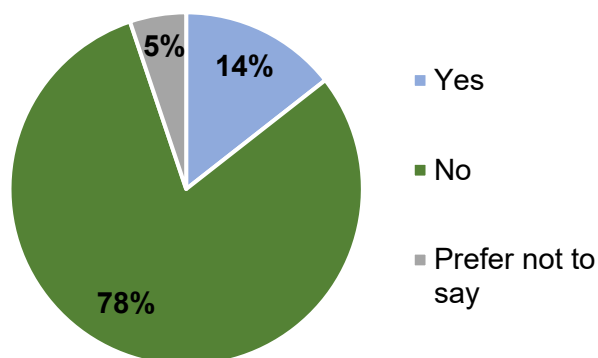
White Asian and White Irish made up two per cent of total respondents each, whilst five per cent preferred not to answer this question.

The three comments listed below were made in response to the question on ethnicity.

Table 4

ID	Response
ANON-XWA4-2JN9-7	European
ANON-XWA4-2JNQ-Y	European
ANON-XWA4-2J76-D	White British and GRT

Q12. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illness lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more?

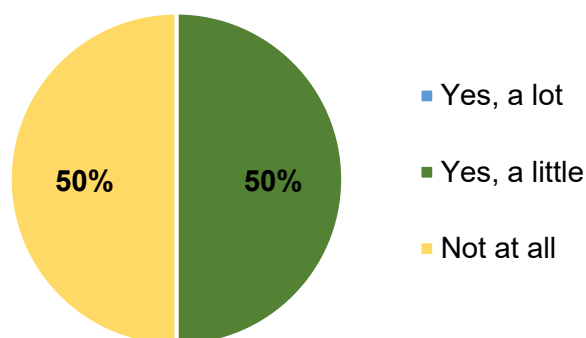


57 out of 59 respondents answered this question.

14 per cent of respondents said they have a physical or mental health conditions or illness lasting 12 months or more, compared to 15 per cent in the district's population. 78 percent said they don't have a disability or illness.

Five percent preferred not to answer this question.

Q13. Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day to day activities?



Eight respondents answered this question. Among them, 50 per cent said their disability affects their day-to-day activities 'a little', whilst another 50 per cent said there is no impact on their daily activities.

HOW WE HAVE USED RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION

Thank you for taking part in our consultation on 'Proposed changes to the additional Council Tax charge for long-term empty properties'. Your feedback has been reviewed and helped us shape our final proposal, which is included in the Cabinet Report wrote by the Head of Finance. Based on the results of this consultation, the council is recommended that, with effect from 1 April 2026, the following amendments are made to the council's long-term empty property premiums (LTEPP):

(a) to reduce the current empty property duration allowed, prior to a council tax LTEPP commencing, down from two years to one year. This change is provided for within the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.

(b) adopting all LTEPP exceptions laid out within the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings and Consequential Amendments) (England) Regulations 2024, published on 1 November 2024 and listed below.

The above final proposal will be presented to Cabinet for adoption on 31 January 2025.

Table showing the exceptions which apply to the Council Tax premiums	
Classes of Dwellings	Definition
Class E	Dwelling which is or would be someone's sole or main residence if they were not residing in job-related armed forces accommodation.
Class F	Annexes forming part of, or being treated as part of, the main dwelling.
Class G	Dwellings being actively marketed for sale (12 months limit)
Class H	Dwellings being actively marketed for let (12 months limit)
Class I	Unoccupied dwellings which fell within exempt Class F - deceased, and where probate has recently been granted (12 months from grant of probate/letters of administration)
Class M	Empty properties requiring or undergoing major repairs or structural alterations. (12 month limit)

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions about this report or require it in an alternative format (for example large print, Braille, audio, Easy Read and alternative languages) please contact:

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If you have any questions on this consultation or would like to know more about the proposed changes to the additional Council Tax charge for long-term empty properties, please contact:

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