



Neuadd y Sir / County Hall, Llandrindod, Powys, LD1 5LG

## **QUESTIONS AT ANY TIME TO CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

<b>Question From:</b>	County Councillor Jake Berriman
<b>Subject:</b>	New occupants of problem void properties penalised through Council Tax Premium
<b>Question To:</b>	County Councillor Myfanwy Alexander Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Welsh Language

### **Question:**

Earlier this week I was approached by a disgruntled constituent who, on the 4th of February 2022, completed the purchase of a one bedroom property in my Ward. She is yet to move into the property, which has been void for more than 12 months, as it requires a new central heating system, bathroom and other necessary works to make it habitable once again.

The person concerned is returning to Powys (from over the border in Kington), bringing her business with her, whilst purchasing her first home. By completing the Council Tax form honestly to advise that she would be doing work to the property, to bring it up to a habitable standard, prior to moving into her new home, she was rewarded with a penalty premium of £104.20 being added to her council tax bill. All for simply disclosing that the property is empty and that work underway to sort out previous neglect.

Correspondence with relevant officers has confirmed that the premium, amounting to 150% council tax has applied in Powys since April 2017 arising from provisions set out in the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended). It also confirmed that the premium applies to the property and not the owner. And this, it seems, is immovable, not allowing a new owner any period of grace.

Earlier this month Cabinet approved the Empty Property Action Plan, developed in collaboration with the Welsh Government, as part of a series of ongoing measures to support the early reuse and occupation of problem void properties, such as this example in my ward. These measures, have over time, included interest free loans and even grants, but the only help that this new owner, on a limited budget, received was a bill for an extra 50% Council Tax arising from that fact that the previous owner had neglected it for more than 12 months.

Given the inherent unfairness of our current system, what action, if any, does the Cabinet Member propose to ensure that relevant officers have sufficient discretion to actively encourage (rather than discourage) prospective purchasers willing to invest in Powys' 1000 void properties, rightly deemed a priority to the Council?

