

## Appendix 2

### Consultation Questions

#### *Questions on Council Tax charges on long-term empty properties*

1. Should Councils be able to remove the current Council Tax discount (of between 10% and 50%) on long-term empty homes?

The Council would welcome the proposal to remove the discount on LTE properties. However, the proposal should be extended to include second homes.

2. Should Councils be able to charge an additional levy on the Council Tax on long-term empty homes and should they have flexibility in deciding the level of the levy? If so, what should be the maximum level of levy Councils could impose?

Councils should be able to charge an additional levy of up to 100% of the council tax charge.

3. Do you agree that Councils should continue to be able to apply different levels of Council Tax charge in different geographic parts of their area if they feel this is appropriate?

No. All area within the Council should be treated on an equal basis

4. Do you agree that Councils should have flexibility in deciding how long a home should be empty before they apply increased Council Tax charges for long-term empty homes and should Councils also be able to increase the level of charge the longer a home has been empty?

The scheme should apply evenly across Scotland so as to prevent disparity between neighbouring Council areas. The scale of charge should also apply evenly across Scotland.

5. Should Councils be able to apply additional, time-limited exemptions to the levy for certain types of property or owner? If so, please provide details of the circumstances under which you feel that an exemption would be appropriate and how long these additional exemptions should be available for.

Additional exemptions would increase the complexity of the scheme and as such would affect the ease of implementation, costs of collection and the ease with which the taxpayer could understand the charge, all of which would reduce the level of collection.

6. Do you agree that homeowners should have a duty to inform their Council if their home has been empty and unoccupied for six months? If so, should Councils be able to charge a fixed penalty fee where an owner has not informed them that a property is unoccupied and what level of penalty fee would be appropriate?

Homeowners should have the duty to inform the Council of the status of their property. However, fixed penalty fees in practice are seldom used by Councils as they have a very poor collection rate. A more powerful enforcement action would be to introduce land attachments.

7. To help minimise avoidance, do you agree that a home should no longer need to be unfurnished to be classed as long-term empty?

Yes

8. Should the minimum period an empty home must be occupied before it can be declared as empty again and benefit from an exemption be extended beyond the current six week minimum? If so, what should the minimum period be?

Yes. In order to discourage owners from 'flipping' their property between empty and occupied status, the period should be extended to a minimum period of 3 months.

9. Should the additional revenue raised from Council Tax on long-term empty homes be used for affordable housing? Please let us know if you have particular views on the types of project or expenditure this revenue should be used for.

Yes, however the scope should be widened so as to allow Councils to offset their additional costs of levying and collecting the additional revenues and also to fund the development of an empty homes strategy.

#### *Question on the Housing Support Grant*

10. Do you agree that Housing Support Grant should be abolished from April 2013 onwards?

Yes