

# Empty home owners targeted by East Lothian Council

**Hundreds of empty home owners in East Lothian will lose large discounts and have to pay double council tax if the homes remain unoccupied for more than a year under new rules.**

Councillors today approved plans to reduce the time properties can lie empty without paying the 100% council tax premium from three years to just one.

And they agreed to reduce the 50% discount applied after a six month vacancy to the full annual charge to just 10%.

A report to East Lothian Council's Labour administration cabinet said the move aimed to bring more houses back into the market amid the county's affordable housing crisis.

It revealed that last week there were 637 empty homes across East Lothian which, under the changes, would bring a potential additional income up to £81,266 in additional council tax revenue.

Nine of the empty properties belong to the council and will pay the same charges as private owners.

The report said: "The changes to the council's Council Tax Empty Property Policy seek to maximise the council tax charges applicable to empty properties within existing powers, as a means of encouraging property owners to bring these properties

back into use and generate an income stream which can be used to support this.

“The proposed changes will mean the application of a 100% council tax premium (double the standard bill) for properties which have been empty for over 12 months. Under the current policy, stepped increases apply with full application of the 100% premium applying after 36 months.”

Some exemptions will be in place covering situations where a home owner dies and the transfer of the property takes longer than the period allowed or where an owner moves into a care home.

Councillors were told additional income from the empty homes could be used to provide new-build affordable housing, bring empty properties back into affordable housing use and cover land or property acquisitions to boost the affordable stock.

The changes were approved by cabinet and will be in place from April 1.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter