Questions by Members to Full Council on 24 April 2019 under Procedure Rule 9.2

Question 1: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader from Councillor Cathy Gardner

Will the Leader please explain what steps the Council takes to support small businesses in our town centres, specifically related to the application of the 'empty property premium' Council Tax charge? Many shops are closing due to high business rates, surely we should be doing all we can to help where we can?

Answer:

Unfortunately Cllr Gardner has confused the operation of 2 different systems.

Council Tax applies to domestic properties whereas National Non Domestic Business Rates applies to non-domestic properties.

The Government amended legislation to allow Billing Authorities to increase the long term empty home premium on council tax banded properties that have been empty (not lived in and are unfurnished) for more than 2 years. The decision to increase the premium was considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 28 November 2018 and subsequently approved by Council. The overarching aim of this policy is to bring empty homes back into use and we would encourage home owners to work with Private Sector Housing.

In terms of business rates there are two rate relief schemes that many retail businesses in our district benefit from:

•   Small Business Rate Relief provides up to 100% rate relief to premises with a rateable value below £12,000 and below and tapered relief (reducing from 100% to 0%) for those with a rateable value between £12,000 to £14,999.

•   Retail discount scheme - Cabinet on 6 February 2019 approved the use of discretionary powers to implement a retail discount scheme for the next 2 years which provides for a one third discount for occupied retail premises where the rateable value is below £51,000. The Council adopted this scheme in order to ensure that the Government funding could be passed on to eligible businesses.

Members can see from the above that we are indeed doing all that we can to assist retail premises in our district.'