



Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

Simon Hoare MP
Minister for Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
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Clive Betts MP
Chair, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Committee
House of Commons
SW1A 0AA

2 May 2024

Dear Clive,

Response to the Committee's Report on Council Tax Collection

Thank you for your letter of 15 April to the Secretary of State on behalf of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee in relation to the [Government's response to the Committee's Report on Council Tax collection](#). I am responding as the Minister responsible.

Council Tax Information Letter to councils

I am pleased to confirm that, since your letter, we have published a [Council Tax Information Letter](#) to reinforce existing good practice within council tax collection. The letter builds on examples set out in the [Best Practice Guidance](#), such as using "soft" reminders when bills are not paid on time. The letter highlights to councils their flexibility on payments, repayments, and timeframe before demanding immediate payment in full. It also highlights that in all cases, councils should work with residents to agree an affordable and sustainable payment plan and encourages the use of firms who are accredited with the Enforcement Conduct Board.

Virtual hearings

The Committee also inquired about virtual proceedings. The option of virtual hearing is already available to councils and residents where it is requested. A recent survey of courts by HM Courts & Tribunals Service's Legal Operations team found that 46% of councils do not use video link, 28% used it occasionally and 15% used it frequently. For example, hearings are conducted remotely in Avon, Somerset and Gloucestershire and Greater Manchester. Virtual proceedings have also recently been introduced across Greater London for uncontested hearings. Anecdotal evidence shared with the Ministry of Justice suggests that some local authorities prefer in-person hearings, which allow council officers to be present at court to take payments, set up payment plans, address vulnerability, or otherwise triage cases in advance of the hearing.

Office for Local Government

As confirmed at the Oflog inquiry hearing on 22 April, we will keep under review whether the role of permanent Chair of Oflog fulfils the criteria for pre-appointment scrutiny. The Department expects to announce the successor to the interim Chair role before Whitsun recess and we will write to your committee on pre-appointment scrutiny once the decision is finalised following the review against the Cabinet Office criteria.

Further to Secretary of State's letters of 28 March and 31 October 2023 regarding the Government's plans to update posts subject to pre-appointment hearings by the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, we will write to you to confirm the assessment as to whether the Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman and the New Homes Ombudsman meet the criteria for pre-appointment scrutiny once those arrangements have been finalised.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Hoare', with a stylized flourish at the end.

SIMON HOARE MP
Minister for Local Government