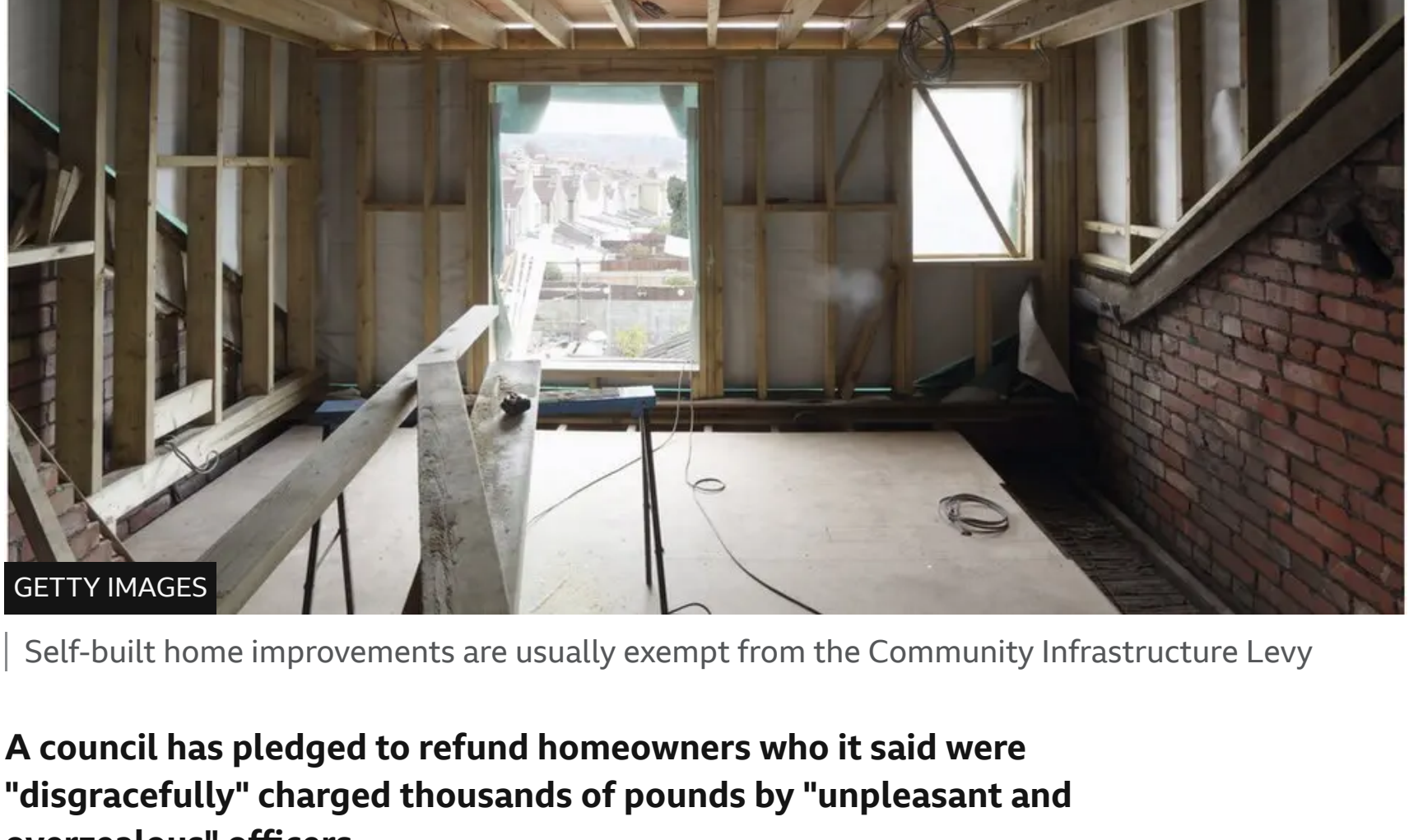
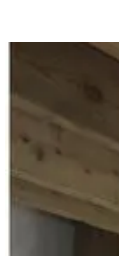


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West Berkshire U-turn over 'disgraceful' home improvement charges

9 April 2024



Self-built home improvements are usually exempt from the Community Infrastructure Levy

A council has pledged to refund homeowners who it said were "disgracefully" charged thousands of pounds by "unpleasant and overzealous" officers.

West Berkshire Council previously adopted a "zero-tolerance" approach to incorrect paperwork for home improvements, leader Jeff Brooks said.

Residents who completed council forms wrongly were charged a Community Infrastructure Levy, he added.

He said the practice would be stopped.



Maria Dobson said a council officer posted a sign about her charge outside her home

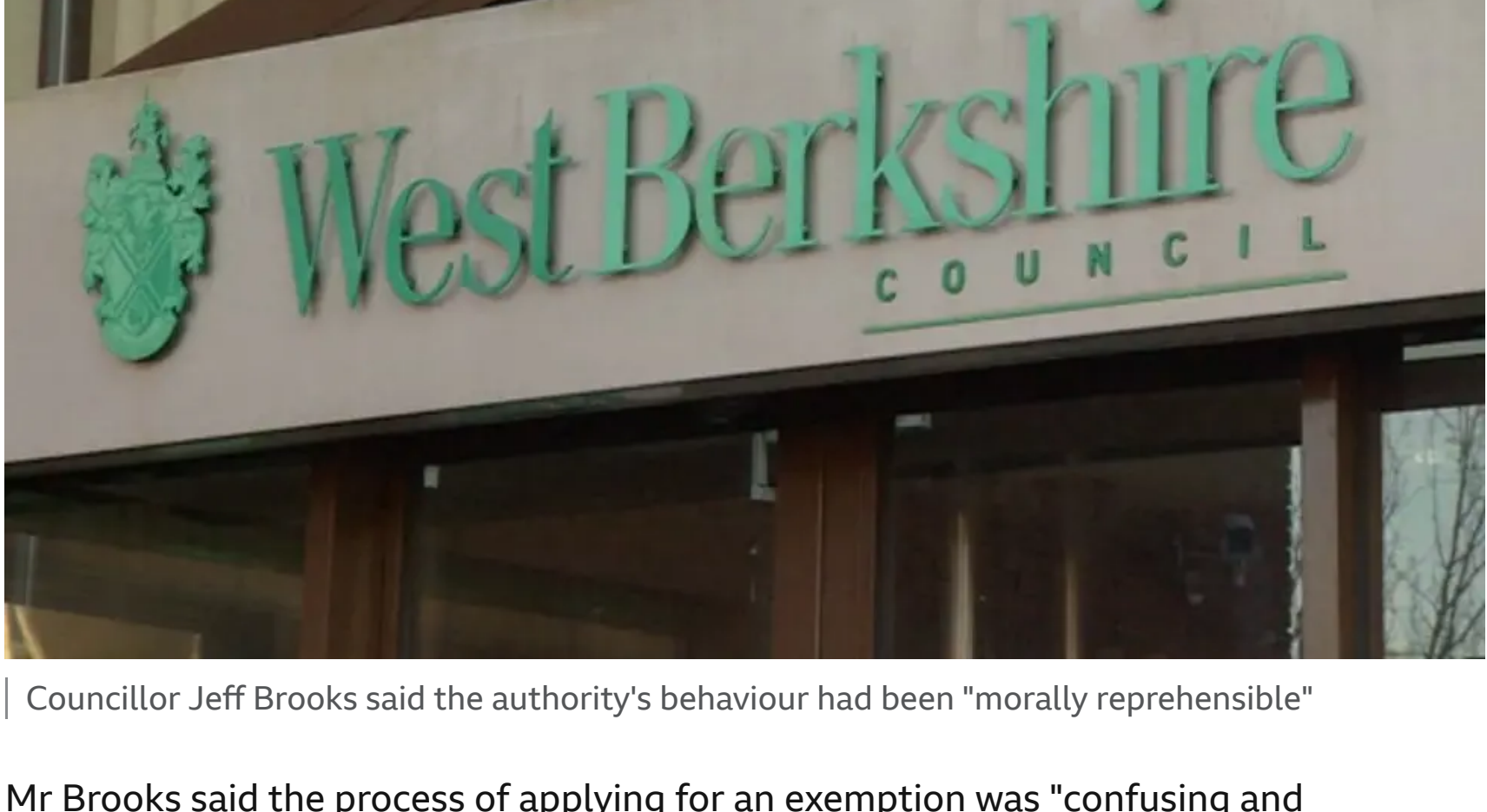
Community Infrastructure Levies (CIL) are charges made by councils on new developments.

Typically, they are used to pay for infrastructure such as schools and roads which a housing development might require.

Self-built annexes and home extensions are normally exempt, according to the government.

Maria Dobson, from Kintbury, said she was "bullied" into paying an extra charge of almost £25,000 for work on her house.

She said a council officer posted notices about the fee outside her property and called through her letterbox when she did not answer the door.



Councillor Jeff Brooks said the authority's behaviour had been "morally reprehensible"

Mr Brooks said the process of applying for an exemption was "confusing and easy to get wrong".

He told a council meeting: "Instead of implementing a light touch approach and assisting the applicant to complete the forms correctly... this council, and via the then CIL management team, implemented what can best be described as a zero-tolerance policy.

"The council chased debts down with a process that, whilst lawful, was at times unpleasant and overzealous.

"This disgraceful episode ends here."

Mr Brooks said council staff "threatened" people who resisted the charge, posted debt notices outside their homes and "shouted through letterboxes".

Ms Dobson said she was aware of more than 20 complainants in West Berkshire as well as people affected in other council areas.

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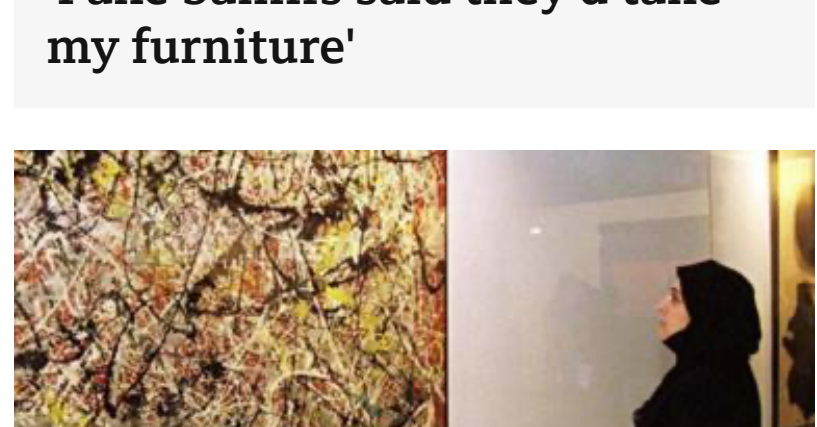
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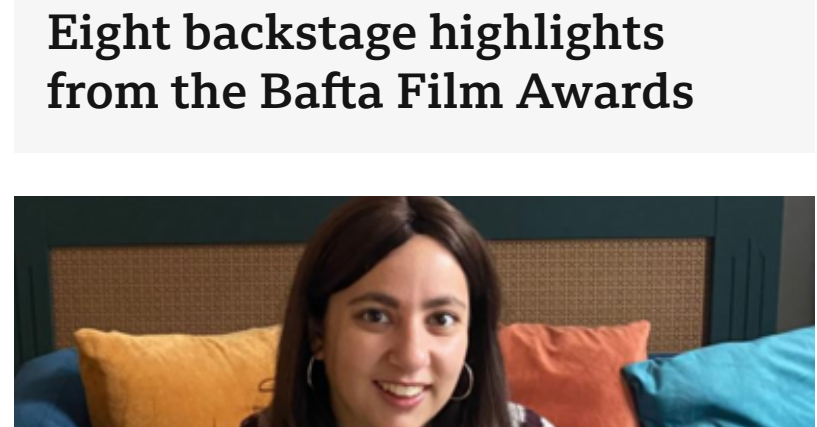
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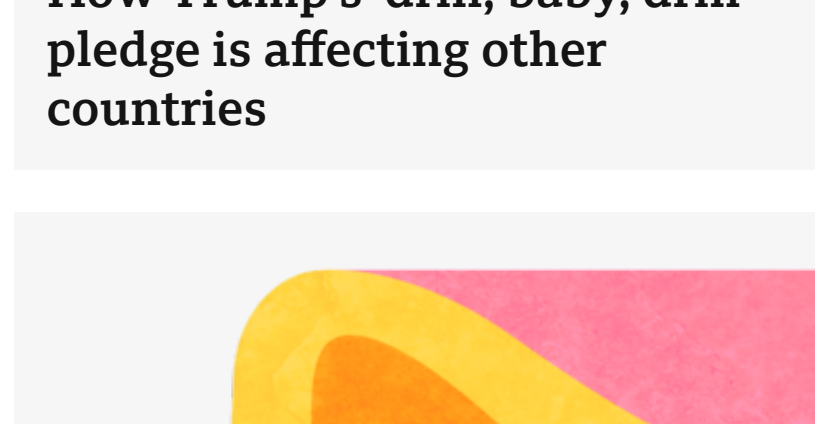
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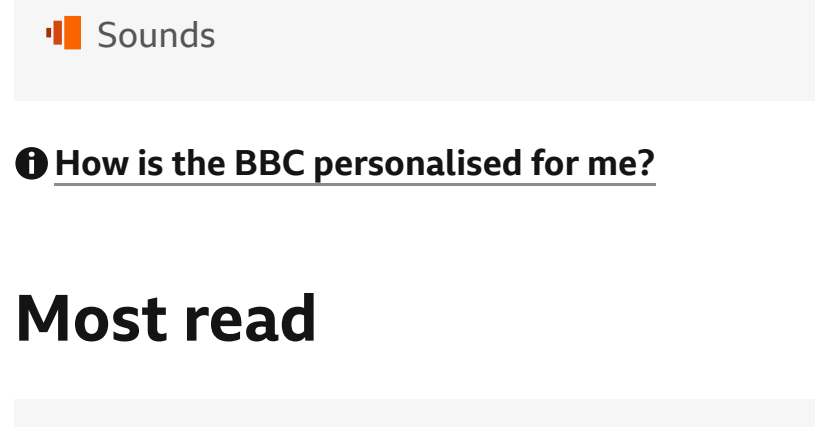
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