

Council Tax: Frequently Asked Questions

What is Council Tax?

Council Tax is a property tax that is charged by local councils to pay for local services. This information aims to give you brief overview of the Council Tax rules. More detailed advice can be obtained from Council info shops or by contacting the Council on 01432 260360.

Who has to pay the Council Tax?

There is one Council Tax bill sent to each dwelling whether it is a house, flat, mobile home or houseboat, and whether it is owned or rented. To work out who is liable, look down the list below. As soon as you reach a description which applies to someone in your home, they will be responsible for the bill and will be liable to pay the Council Tax.

1. A resident who owns the dwelling
2. A resident who holds the lease of the dwelling
3. A resident who holds a tenancy for the dwelling
4. A resident licensee
5. A resident
6. The owner (this applies if the dwelling has no residents)

Are residents always liable?

In special cases the owner, not the residents, has to pay the Council Tax.

These are:

- Dwellings occupied by more than one household, where the residents pay rent separately for different parts of the dwelling and perhaps share cooking or washing facilities, for example hostels or groups of bedsits.
- Residential care homes, nursing homes, mental health nursing homes or certain types of hostels providing high levels of care.
- Religious communities such as monasteries or convents.
- Dwellings which are not the owner's main home but which are the main home of someone employed by the owner in domestic service.
- Vicarages and other dwellings where a minister of religion lives and works.
- Accommodation provided to asylum seekers under Section 95 of the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999.

If you live in such a dwelling where the owner is liable, you do not have to pay Council Tax. If your landlord is the liable person, they might be able to ask you to pay something towards the bill depending on the terms of the agreement with them.

How does the Council know who is liable?

The Council sends out forms asking for information so they can tell who is liable to pay. If the Council send you a form you should complete it and return it to the Council. If you don't return the form you may face a penalty of £50 and could be incorrectly charged Council Tax.

Can bills be reduced?

Bills can be reduced by:

- Discounts – for example for homes in which there is only one adult.
- Council Tax Benefit – for people on a low income.
- Reductions for Disabilities.

How do Discounts work?

A full Council Tax bill assumes there are two adults living in a dwelling. If only one adult lives in a dwelling, a single person discount of 25% can be claimed.

Certain people are not counted when looking at the number of adults resident in a dwelling. For example, if there are two residents and one is not counted, the property will receive 25% reduction based on only one resident living at the property.

Who is not counted?

- Apprentices
- Young people in training
- Full time students
- Student nurses
- Resident hospital patients
- People living in care homes or hospitals
- People who are severely mentally impaired
- People living in hostels or night shelters
- Monks and nuns
- 18 and 19 year olds in full time education
- Carers
- People in prison
- Members of visiting forces

What sorts of dwellings are exempt?

Some properties are exempt from Council Tax even though the property is someone's home. The circumstances when occupied properties are exempt are as follows:

- Properties occupied entirely by full time students.
- Properties occupied only by people under the age of 18.
- Armed Forces accommodation or properties occupied by a member of a visiting force.
- An annex occupied by a dependant relative of someone living in the main property.
- Properties occupied only by people who are severely mentally impaired.
- Properties occupied by someone who has diplomatic privilege or immunity.

What is the “reduction for disabilities” scheme?

A property that is a disabled person's home and has been adapted to meet the needs of the disabled person can receive a reduction if the adaptation is one of the following:

- An additional bathroom or kitchen required for the use of the disabled person.
- Any other room used by the disabled person for meeting their needs as a disabled person.
- Extra space to allow the use of a wheelchair indoors.

Properties that meet the criteria will pay the Council Tax at the rate of a lower band than the actual band of the property.

When will I get my bill and when will I have to pay?

Annual bills are issued in March and will offer 10 monthly instalments and explain the different ways to pay. If you move into a property during the course of a year the Council will issue you a bill showing the charges due for the part of the year you are liable. The number of instalments available will depend on the time of year your bill is issued.

What if I have trouble paying the bill?

If you are unable to pay the Council Tax you should contact the local authority that sent you the bill as soon as possible to see if you are entitled to any reduction on the amount of charge and to arrange an affordable payment scheme.

What if I don't pay?

The Council Tax legislation gives local authorities a number of powers to recover Council Tax from people who fail to pay. To begin with you will be issued with a reminder asking for your payments to be brought up to date. Should you fail to pay, the authority may commence court proceedings against you and obtain a liability order from the magistrates. A liability order gives the local authority powers to order your employer to deduct money from your earnings, or for bailiffs to remove your goods and sell them to clear your debts. Non-payment of Council Tax is a serious matter, and persistent offenders can be sent to prison for a maximum term of 90 days.

What if my bill is wrong?

If you believe your bill is wrong, you should contact the Council straight away and explain why you think the charges are wrong. The Council will then be able to re-assess your charges and issue you a correct bill. You are advised never to make a payment on a bill that does not have your name on it. If you are passed someone else's bill and are advised to pay it, you should again contact the Council to establish if you are liable to pay.