

Council Tax



Your Council Tax Guide 2019/20

This leaflet forms part
of your Council Tax bill



West Berkshire
C O U N C I L

Dear Householder

Today, West Berkshire is a thriving district in Southern England which, it has been said, boasts both the economic advantages of the South East and the excellent lifestyle opportunities of the South West. It is seen as a fantastic place to live by its residents, who benefit from good educational, health and employment opportunities.

However, we are not without our challenges including a growing demand for Adult Social Care. We currently spend £37 of every £100 of our net income looking after our vulnerable adults. The number of elderly people in West Berkshire is growing faster than in many other areas of the country and it has been estimated that in twenty years' time there will be one retired adult for every two of working age. Our Vision 2036 document sets out the plan of how we will respond to that change and balance these demands with the aspirations we all have for our district over the next couple of decades.

This year our central government grant income has ended. In 2013/14 it stood at £24m but has been reducing ever since. We've had to make some difficult decisions in response to this but we believe we remain in a financially sound position.

We continue to review all our services to ensure they deliver the best value for money. We have made prudent investments so that we can generate more income for the long term benefit of the residents of the district.

This year a Council Tax rise of 2.99% delivers a balanced budget and a realistic place to move forward from.

Nick Carter – Chief Executive

A) How we calculate your bill

The Valuation Office has placed every property into one of eight valuation bands A to H. The calculation of Council Tax is based upon the average Band D property

Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Ratio	6/9	7/9	8/9	1	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9

West Berkshire Council's element of the 2019/20 bill has increased by 2.99%.

On top of the West Berkshire element of your Council Tax bill, there are precepts that we collect on behalf of the Fire and Police Services, plus those for the Town and Parish Councils. In addition there may be some specific 'Parish Special Expenses' in a limited number of areas.

These amounts together produce your final Council Tax bill.

B) Funding for Adult Social Care

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has made an offer to Adult Social Care Authorities (these are local authorities, including West Berkshire Council, which have functions under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014). The offer is the option to charge an additional precept on Council Tax (for the financial years beginning in 2016), without having to hold a referendum, so as to assist the authority in meeting expenditure (only) on Adult Social Care. Subject to the annual approval of the House of Commons, the Secretary of State has offered the option of charging this precept at an appropriate level in each financial year up to and including the financial year 2019-20.

The table below for a Band D property shows the total amount to date that has been ring-fenced for Adult Social Care i.e. £106.06. It will be this amount shown on your bill. The Council has not applied an Adult Social Care precept for 2019/2020

Year	Opening Band D	Council Tax Increase		ASC Precept		Closing Band D
2016/17	£1,263.44	£25.14	1.99%	£25.27	2%	£1,313.85
2017/18	£1,313.85	£25.64	1.95%	£39.42	3%	£1,378.91
2018/19	£1,378.91	£41.23	2.99%	£41.37	3%	£1,461.51
2019/20	£1,461.51	£43.70	2.99%	0	0	£1,505.21
Total		£135.71		£106.06		

The 2019/20 Band D charge of £1,505.21 is shown on the Council Tax bill as £1,399.15 for West Berkshire Council and £106.06 for the Adult Social Care precept.

How we show these figures on the bill is largely determined by legislation which we are unable to change.

C) Help towards housing costs

If you are living in rented accommodation you may be able to get help towards paying your rent by applying for Universal Credit.

The amount of Universal Credit you may be entitled to will depend upon your circumstances and for further information please visit www.gov.uk/universal-credit

You can make a claim by completing an on line application at www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-to-claim

However, if you live in supported or temporary accommodation, currently receive a severe disability premium in the assessment of an income related benefit, or are of pensionable age, then at the present time you will be unable to claim Universal Credit for help with housing costs. For more information regarding eligibility for Universal Credit please see www.westberks.gov.uk/universalcredit

If you are unable to claim Universal Credit for your housing costs you can instead claim Housing Benefit by filling in a claim form, which can be downloaded from www.westberks.gov.uk/housingbenefit or obtained by contacting us (see back page)

Once you have completed the form please return it as soon as possible. If you delay in sending back the form then you may lose some benefit.

D) Council Tax Reduction

Council Tax Reduction can help towards your Council Tax bill. Anyone on a low income who is liable to pay Council Tax may be entitled to this help - the amount of help available will depend upon your own individual circumstances. We will assess the income of you and your partner, and the level of your savings. We will also take into account your age, any capital you have and whether anyone lives with you. We can then see if you qualify for help.

If you are of pensionable age and have capital of £16,000 or more we will be unable to help (unless you are in receipt of guaranteed pension credit). This capital threshold reduces to £6,000 if you are of working age and do not fall into a protected category (protection from local scheme changes generally applies where you, your partner or any dependent children are currently in receipt of a relevant disability related benefit - for more information please visit www.westberks.gov.uk/counciltaxreduction)

The maximum amount of help we can provide is limited and you will have to pay at least 30% of your normal Council Tax bill unless you are of pensionable age or a protected claimant. For working age claimants who are not in the protected group, the amount of support is capped at the amount which would apply to a property in Council Tax Band C. A minimum entitlement of £10 per week now applies - no Council Tax Reduction can be awarded unless the calculated entitlement exceeds £10 per week.

If you disagree with the amount of Council Tax Reduction stated upon your Council Tax bill, you should contact us in writing within one month to ask for further explanation or to state your reasons for disagreeing.

If you think you may be entitled to help towards your Council Tax payments you can claim Council Tax Reduction by completing a claim form which can be downloaded from www.westberks.gov.uk/counciltaxreduction or by contacting the council. Once completed please return as soon as possible. If you delay in sending back the form then you may lose some assistance.

E) Instalment payments

All Council Tax payers have a right to make payment by 12 monthly instalments rather than 10. Please let us know if you wish to exercise that right as we will need to update our records to prevent issuing any unnecessary reminder notices to you. We are required to give you notice of the date and amount of instalments due. This may mean that we have to vary the dates from those on which you normally pay.

F) Exemptions and unoccupied charges

The following categories of property are NOT eligible for an exemption or reduction:

- Vacant property unless included in the exemptions below
- Second homes
- Landlord un-occupied/furnished property
- Property newly constructed or subject to repair

Unless an empty property falls within an exemption class listed below, a full Council Tax charge is payable. Where the property has been empty for a period in excess of 2 years an additional premium is applied.

For 2019/2020 a 100% premium will be added to the bill where a property has been empty for more than 2 years.

For 2020/2021 a 100% premium will be added to properties that have been empty for between 2 and 5 years. A 200% premium will be added where the property has been empty for more than 5 years

For 2021/2022 a 100% premium will be added to properties that have been empty for between 2 and 5 years. A 200% premium to properties that have been empty for between 5 and 10 years and a 300% premium where the property has been empty for more than 10 years.

Please note that the calculation of the 2 year period starts from the date of the initial vacation not any subsequent property purchase.

Should there be genuine difficulties in selling an empty property where a premium applies please contact the Council Tax Team.

Properties exempt from Council Tax are those:

- unoccupied and owned by a charity*
- left empty by prisoners
- unoccupied due to the person having gone to live in a care home
- the unoccupied home of a deceased tax payer (certain conditions apply)*
- prohibited by law from being occupied
- held for minister of religion
- left empty because the liable person is providing care elsewhere
- left empty by students
- repossessed properties
- student halls of residence
- only occupied by students
- UK armed forces accommodation
- visiting forces accommodation
- left empty by a bankrupt person
- unoccupied caravan pitches or boat moorings
- occupied solely by persons under the age of 18
- unoccupied annexes which are unable to be let due to planning restrictions
- occupied solely by severely mentally impaired persons
- diplomatic residences
- a self-contained annexe occupied by a relation of the person liable to pay Council Tax on the main dwelling who are aged over 65, disabled or mentally impaired
(*time-limited)

It may be necessary for an inspection of the property to confirm entitlement. Therefore when making a claim for an exemption please ensure that full contact details are provided. The Council does not make a charge for any inspection, nor does it pay a fee to be able to inspect the property.

G) Disabled Reduction

A Disabled Reduction may apply where the home is the sole or main residence of a disabled person. To qualify, there must be at least one such person and the property itself must provide one of the following:

- a room which is not a bathroom, a kitchen or a lavatory and which is predominantly used (whether for providing therapy or otherwise) by, and is required for meeting the needs of, a qualifying individual resident; or
- a bathroom or kitchen which is not the only bathroom or kitchen in the home and which is required for meeting the needs of a qualifying individual resident; or

- sufficient floor space to permit the use of a wheelchair required for meeting the needs of any qualifying individual resident (for the purpose of the regulations which govern the scheme, a 'qualifying individual resident' is a person who is substantially and permanently disabled whether by illness, injury, congenital deformity or otherwise).

H) Other discounts

The person who must pay the Council Tax bill is generally the resident who has the greatest legal interest in the home. In some cases, the owner rather than the resident will be liable for payment. These cases include:

- residential care homes
- houses in multiple occupation
- religious communities
- certain houses with resident domestic staff
- certain accommodation for ministers of religion
- homes owned by the Ministry of Defence
- properties occupied by asylum seekers

If a home is occupied by only one person and it is their main residence, Council Tax is reduced by 25%. This discount can still apply where there are other adults in the household. These adults can be:

- full time students
- student nurses
- apprentices
- youth training trainees
- permanent hospital patients
- residents of certain homes and hostels
- severely mentally impaired people
- residents of certain hostels and night shelters
- members of certain religious communities
- certain 18 and 19 year olds
- carers and care workers
- persons held in prison or legal detention
- members of international headquarters or defence organisations
- members of visiting forces
- non-British spouses of students.
- residents of a self-contained annexe occupied by a relation of the person liable to pay Council Tax on the main dwelling (50% discount)

How to apply for a discount

Please contact the Council Tax Team for an application form. In most cases you will be required to supply documentary evidence in order to confirm entitlement to the requested reduction. In some cases an inspection of a property maybe required.

Financial information

Your Council Tax bill also includes amounts for the Fire Service and Police. Details of the charges and for certain parish/town Council charges can be found at www.westberks.gov.uk/counciltax

Further details about West Berkshire's budget, where the money comes from and how it's spent, can be found at www.westberks.gov.uk/councilspending

How to contact us

Council Tax www.westberks.gov.uk/counciltax	(01635) 519520
Council Tax automated payment line	0300 333 6532
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction www.westberks.gov.uk/housingbenefit www.westberks.gov.uk/counciltaxreduction	(01635) 519258
Rubbish and Recycling www.westberks.gov.uk/waste	(01635) 519080
Emergency Social Services out of hours www.westberks.gov.uk/communitycare	(01344) 786543
Emergency out of hours	(01635) 42161

www.westberks.gov.uk

Or phone **(01635) 551111**

Community Engagement

If you'd like to take part in any of our consultations, including those that affect how we plan, prioritise and deliver services across the district, please visit

www.westberks.gov.uk/communityengagement
or call 01635 503043

We are committed to being accessible to everyone. If you require this document in an alternative format or translation, please call the Public Relations Manager on Telephone: (01635) 519125.