

Council Tax

E-billing and checking your account balance online

You can have your Council Tax or National Non-Domestic rates bill sent to you by email. Your bill will be sent as an attachment with a link to leaflets that accompany the bill. Register online at www.myaccount.runnymede.gov.uk if you would like to use this service or to check your account balance online. Alternatively, you can call the phone number on your bill for further information.

When does Council Tax have to be paid?

Your instalment plan is shown on the front of your bill and states the amounts payable. A full year's Council Tax is payable over 10 monthly instalments if the bill is issued on or before 30th April. Payments are usually due from 1 April to 1 January and must be paid on or before the first day of each month.

Half yearly payments: If you wish to pay twice a year, please pay **April to August** instalments on or before **1 April** and **September to January** instalments on or before **1 September**. You may also pay your Council Tax in full on or before **1 April**.

IMPORTANT: if you wish to pay your instalments on any day other than the first day of each month, you **MUST** pay a month in advance (the first payment should be paid in March) so that payment reaches the council on or before the due date.

Late or non-payment

If your payment is late, you may receive a reminder shortly after the due date. Please note that no more than two reminder notices are issued in one year. If you do not bring your instalments up-to-date, or if you continue to make late payments in following months, we may withdraw the instalment facility and demand settlement of the year's Council Tax or National Non-Domestic rates immediately.

Recovery action: in fairness to the majority of payers who do pay on time, we will not hesitate to take legal proceedings against those who don't pay on time. If we do take action, we will make an application for a Liability Order at Woking Magistrates Court, which will entitle the Council to:

- instruct a bailiff to recover the debt;
- order an employer to make deductions from earnings;
- apply for part of any income support, job seekers allowance or direct pension credits, to be paid direct to the council; and
- begin bankruptcy proceedings against the debtor or make a charge upon the debtor's home (if he/she own it).

We may also apply for the debtor to be committed to prison for up to three months if the reason for non-payment is willful refusal or due to culpable neglect.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

If you, or someone who lives with you, need a room, or an extra bathroom or kitchen or extra space in your property to meet special needs arising from the disability, for example the use of a wheelchair, you may be entitled to a reduction in your Council Tax bill. The disabled person may be a child. The bill will be reduced to that of a property in the band immediately below the band your property is in, or by one-ninth if your home is in band A.

The reduction ensures that disabled people do not pay more tax on account of space needed because of a disability. If you want further information, please contact us on the number shown at the top of your Council Tax bill.

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EXEMPT PROPERTIES

Some properties are exempt from Council Tax if they fall into one or more of the following classes:

- A** unoccupied and unfurnished properties which require or are undergoing structural alteration or major repairs are exempt for up to six months after completion of works, for a maximum of 12 months, from the date the exemption was first applied;
- B** properties unoccupied and owned by a charity are exempt for up to six months, after which full Council Tax is payable;
- C** unoccupied and unfurnished properties are exempt for up to six months. The exemption is applicable to the property and not to individual accounts;
- D** properties left unoccupied by someone who has gone to prison or another place of detention;
- E** properties left unoccupied by someone who has moved to receive personal care in a hospital or home;
- F** unoccupied properties awaiting probate or letters of administration to be granted are exempt for up to six months after grant of probate;
- G** unoccupied properties where occupation is prohibited by law, because of action taken by a public body;
- H** unoccupied properties kept empty for future occupation by a minister of religion;
- I** properties left unoccupied by a person who has gone to live elsewhere (not a hospital or care home) to receive care because of old age, disability, illness, drug or alcohol dependency;
- J** properties left unoccupied by a person who has moved to provide personal care to another person;
- K** property left unoccupied by a student who owns the property;
- L** unoccupied property that has been repossessed by the mortgagee;
- M** student halls of residence;
- N** properties occupied solely by full time students or by the partners who are not British citizens and who by law are not permitted to work or claim benefits;
- O** armed forces' accommodation and married quarters (contribution to the cost of local services are received through a special arrangement);
- P** properties occupied by members and dependents of visiting forces;
- Q** property left unoccupied by a person who is bankrupt and is the responsibility of a bankrupt's trustee;
- R** a caravan pitch or mooring not occupied by a caravan or boat;
- S** properties lived in only by people under the age of 18;
- T** unoccupied annexe forming part of another property which cannot be let separately, without a breach of planning restrictions;
- U** properties occupied solely by those who are severely mentally impaired;
- V** properties occupied by diplomats as their main UK residence;
- W** separate annexes (often called 'granny flats') lived in by a person who is related to the people living in the rest of the property and is 65 or over, or severely mentally impaired or permanently disabled.

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DISCOUNTS

The full Council Tax bill assumes that there are two or more adults (that is, people aged 18 or over) living in a property.

Single occupancy discount: if only one adult lives in a property (as their main home) the Council Tax bill will be reduced by 25%.

Properties that have remained unfurnished and unoccupied for a period exceeding six months: if a property is no-one's main home and it remains unoccupied after the period of exemption has expired under exempt classes A and C (see the previous section) full Council Tax will be payable.

Unoccupied furnished accommodation: for properties that remain unoccupied and furnished and are not used as a second home (see below), full Council Tax will be payable. This also applies to properties that remain furnished but unoccupied between tenancies (including student-let accommodation).

Second home discount: if a property is occupied as a second home, the bill will be reduced by 10%. The Council will confirm that Council Tax is being paid for a main residence elsewhere (or within the borough).

Houseboats and caravans: for second homes that consist of a pitch occupied by a caravan, or a mooring occupied by a boat, there will be a 50% discount.

PEOPLE DISREGARDED FOR DISCOUNT PURPOSES

People in the following groups do not count towards the number of adults resident in a property. This means that if all but one of the residents in a property falls into one of the groups below, the Council Tax will be reduced by 25%.

- full-time students, student nurses, apprentices and youth training trainees;
- people staying in certain hostels or shelters;
- patients permanently resident in hospital;
- 18 and 19 year olds who are at, or have left school and will be taking up a university type course;
- people who are being looked after in care homes;
- care workers working for low pay, usually for charities;
- people who are severely mentally impaired;
- people caring for someone with a disability who is not a spouse, partner or a child under 18 years;
- members of visiting forces and certain international institutions;
- people in prison (except those in prison for non-payment of Council Tax or a fine);
- members of religious communities (monks and nuns); or
- diplomats.

If your bill indicates that a discount or exemption has been allowed, you must inform the Council Tax Section of any changes of circumstances that may affect your entitlement. If you fail to do so you may have to pay a penalty.

All bills issued with a discount or exemption will assume the circumstances will remain the same throughout the whole financial year. If the discount or exemption is only applicable for a period of time (e.g. Class C exemption is only applicable for up to six months) a revised bill will be issued once the discount or exemption ceases.

For further information on any of the above discounts or exemptions, and an application form, visit our website at www.runnymede.gov.uk. You can also contact the Council Tax Section directly on the telephone number shown at the top of your Council Tax bill.

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APPEALS

Appeals to the Valuation Office Agency

Property bandings are based on property values as at 1 April 1991. Where a property has been built or converted after this date, its value for banding purposes has been determined by reference to comparable properties in your area. The price paid for a property listed after 1 April 1991 may not necessarily reflect its value at that date. This applies throughout the Valuation List. Accordingly, recent purchase prices may not be the best evidence if you feel that the banding for your property is incorrect.

If you want to appeal against the band your property has been placed in, you should write to the Listing Officer, Valuation Agency, West Block, Westbrook Mills, Borough Road, Godalming, Surrey, GU7 2SG. Telephone number 01483 702900.

The grounds for appeals regarding bandings are restricted to the following cases:

- where you believe that the banding should be changed because there has been a material increase or material reduction in the dwelling's value;
- where you start or stop using part of your dwelling to carry out a business, or the balance between domestic and business use changes;
- where the Listing Officer has altered a list without a proposal having been made by a taxpayer; or
- where you become the taxpayer in respect of a dwelling for the first time. (Your appeal must be made within six months, but if the same appeal has already been considered and determined by a Valuation Tribunal it cannot be made again.)

A material increase in value may result from building, engineering or other work carried out on the property. In these cases revaluation does not take place until after a sale, so the new owner appealing would usually be the new owner or resident.

A material decrease in value may result from the demolition of any part of the property, any change in the physical state of the local area, or an adaptation to make the property suitable for use by someone with a physical disability. In these cases revaluation should take place as soon as possible.

Making an appeal does not allow you to withhold payment of tax in the meantime. If your appeal is successful you will be entitled to a refund of any overpaid tax.

You can also appeal if:

- you consider that you are not liable to pay Council Tax, for example, because you are not the resident or owner;
- you believe your property to be exempt and no exemption has been granted;
- you have claimed a discount and this has not been granted; or
- the Council has made a mistake in calculating your bill.

If you wish to make an appeal on any of the above grounds, you must first write to the Council Tax Section, and give details of your appeal. If the matter cannot be resolved to your satisfaction, or you do not get a reply within two months, you may appeal to the Valuation Tribunal.

Again, making an appeal does not entitle you to withhold payment of Council Tax pending an appeal.

For further information on appeals and bandings, visit the Valuation Office website at www.voa.gov.uk

Benefits

Council Tax Benefit is available for people on low incomes. Entitlement is based on household income and savings/capital. You will not be able to claim Council Tax Benefit if you and/or your partner have combined savings or capital assets worth more than £16,000; this does not include the value of your home. If you receive income support, job seeker's allowance (income based), or pension credit guarantee, you should be entitled to full benefit. There are some exceptions. Similar rules apply to Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance.

If you would like to claim Council Tax Benefit, you will need to complete an application form. You can download the form from our website at www.runnymede.gov.uk/benefits or you can contact us on 01932 425388 or email benefits@runnymede.gov.uk and we will send you one. Alternatively you can get one at the Civic Centre. You will need to send the form back to us as soon as possible as the benefit will usually start from the Monday after we receive the completed form.

Had a change in your circumstances?

If you receive Council Tax or housing benefit, you must tell us about any changes in your financial or household circumstances immediately, as they may affect your benefit entitlement. Lengthy delays in informing us of any changes in your circumstances can be considered an offence and could lead to prosecution.

If you are entitled to increased benefit, a delay in telling us might mean that you miss out on some of your entitlement. Normally, your benefit can only be backdated if you tell us your change in circumstances within one month of the change.

If the change means that you should receive less benefit it may mean that you need to pay some money back to us. Any delay in telling us could mean that you will have to pay back a larger amount.

Examples of changes in circumstances are if:

- your job seeker's allowance or income support stops (don't assume that we already know);
- you move out of your property;
- you are no longer responsible for the payment of Council Tax for the property;
- there is a change in your household income, savings, rent or household;
- you are awarded pension or tax credits;
- you receive backdated income or state benefits, such as a pay rise or pension; or
- you start or stop working.

This list gives only examples of changes that will affect your benefit and is not exhaustive. Please contact us if you are unsure about the effect a change in circumstances could have on your benefit entitlement.

Annual renewal of benefit claims

If you receive Council Tax Benefit and/or Housing Benefit, we are required to check that the information on your application form has not changed. We select a number of claims to check each year. If yours is one of those selected, you will be sent a short form to confirm your details or a council officer will arrange to see you in your home. If you do not complete and return the form to us, or agree to the visit, your benefit will be stopped.

Benefit fraud

Our aim is to deliver benefits to only those that are entitled and to detect false claims made by those who are not. We have a Fraud Prosecution Policy for our worst offenders.

If you suspect that someone is making a false claim for benefit, please call our free 24-hour Benefit Fraud Hotline on 0800 0130 814, email fraud@runnymede.gov.uk, or use the 'REPORT A SUSPECTED FRAUD' form on our website, www.runnymede.gov.uk/benefits. Anything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence and you are under no obligation to leave your contact details.

Contact us

You can contact us by visiting the Civic Centre in person, in writing, by telephoning, faxing or emailing us. You can also find out further information about our services by visiting our website at www.runnymede.gov.uk

For general enquiries

Call our switchboard on 01932 838383

Fax 01932 838384

Email generalenquiries@runnymede.gov.uk

For enquiries about your Council Tax

Call the number on your bill or for general enquiries about your Council Tax, call 01932 838383

Email counciltax@runnymede.gov.uk

For enquiries about housing benefit or Council Tax benefit

Call 01932 425388

Email benefits@runnymede.gov.uk

For enquiries about our finances

Call 01932 425336

Email finance@runnymede.gov.uk

For enquiries about your recycling service

Call 0800 052 0067

Email recycling@runnymede.gov.uk

For enquiries about your refuse service

Call 0800 096 2028

Email refuse@runnymede.gov.uk

Civic Centre opening hours and trial period for a reception and enquiry service

Normal opening hours are Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5.00pm and Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm. There are plans to extend the opening hours of the reception desk for routine enquiries to 7.00pm on Tuesdays and 9.00am to 5.00pm on Saturdays when the new Civic Centre opens. The arrangements will be reviewed after 9 months in the light of public demand.

Our address is: Runnymede Borough Council, Civic Centre, Station Road, Addlestone, KT15 2AH