

Frequently Asked Questions

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1. What is Council Tax?

Council Tax is a local tax on domestic properties which helps to pay for local services such as: education, highways, libraries, transport, parks, children and adult services, and refuse and recycling collections; as well as contributing towards police and fire services.

The amount you have to pay depends on the property band your home is in, which is based on the value of your property. Eastbourne Borough Council is responsible for collecting your Council Tax. The amount you pay is spread across East Sussex County Council (about 72%), Fire and Rescue Service (about 5%), Sussex Police (about 9%) and Eastbourne Borough Council about 14%.

2. Who has to pay Council Tax?

Council Tax is the responsibility of people living in the property. The full tax assumes that there are at least two adults living in the property. If you are the only person living in your home, you are eligible for a 25% discount. The tax is also paid by the property owner where the property is unoccupied.

3. What is changing?

From 1 April 2013, the Government is abolishing the national Council Tax Benefits system and asking councils to introduce a local council tax support scheme to replace it. The Government is also reducing funding for council tax benefit by 10%, which means a shortfall of around £1 million to help low income households in Eastbourne.

4. Who will NOT be affected by these changes?

- If you are a **pensioner who receives Council Tax Benefit**, the Government has said that you must be protected. Therefore you will continue to have your discount calculated on the current benefit rules. A pensioner is defined as 'someone who has reached the qualifying age for state pension credit'.

5. Who WILL be affected by these proposed changes?

A) Council Tax Benefit claimants - You will be affected by these proposed changes if:

- i. If you are of **working age** and currently claim full Council Tax Benefit - you are likely to see your benefit change, for example:
 - If you have savings or investments (capital) of £6,000 or more you will no longer be able to get help with paying your Council Tax
 - The maximum level of support anyone will receive a week will be £20.00. For example, based on 2012 Council Tax charges, a couple living in a property rated as Band A, would have to pay at least £0.49 per week; (For Band B this would be £3.90pw week, and for Band C: £7.32pw).
 - If you currently receive less than £5 a week in Council Tax Benefit, you will no longer get help with your bill – the proposed scheme sets a minimum level of support of £5 a week.
- BUT** – there will be **protection for certain groups** - When we assess your net income we will not take into account the following:
- The amount of **child benefit** you receive
 - Certain **disability benefits** e.g. Disability Living Allowance
 - The first £5 - £25 of your **wages** if you are working (the actual amount will vary depending on your circumstances e.g. if you are single or part of a couple)
- ii. If you are of working age and currently claim up to the 25% discount off your bill because of the **Second Adult Rebate** (i.e. where your income is too high for you to qualify for Council Tax Benefit, but the other adult(s) in your household have a low income) – we propose to remove this discount and you will be responsible for the full bill.
 - iii. If you receive Council Tax benefit because you have a low income AND you have an '**non-dependant**' **adult(s)** living with you:
 - Under the new Scheme they will have to pay more towards the Council Tax bill (depending on their individual circumstances* e.g. in work/unemployed etc):
 - Those who are contributing now will see their current payments double (e.g. from £6.55 per week to £13.10 per week)
 - Those who are paying nothing now will have to contribute £5 per week from April 2013.

* There is a table [here](#) (add link) that sets out more details on the non-dependent deductions.

B) Property Owners receiving Exemptions or Discounts on their second home or empty property

You will be affected by these changes:

- i. If you are a property owner of an empty property that is **uninhabitable or under repair**, we propose to reduce the time you will be exempt from paying Council Tax from 12 months to 6 months.
- ii. If you are the owner of an **empty and unfurnished** property we propose to reduce the time you will be exempt from paying Council Tax from six months to 42 days. (NB other exemptions will apply where the owner has died, gone into hospital or a care home)
- iii. If you have a property that has been **empty for 2 years** or more, we propose to make you pay a premium of an additional 50% of your bill.
- iv. If you own a **second home** in Eastbourne we propose to remove your 10% discount and you will have to pay the full 100% of your Council Tax bill.

6. Will I have to reapply for Council Tax support?

If you currently receive Council Tax Benefit your eligibility for the proposed new scheme will be assessed without you having to reapply to the Council – *but you MUST tell us if your circumstances change.*

7. How much will I have to pay?

It is likely that most people who qualify for Council Tax Benefit will get some Council Tax Support but, as there is a 10% reduction in funding from the government, the majority of households of working age will need to pay something more towards their Council Tax.

We will publicise details of the new scheme from January 2013. In March 2013, the Council Tax bills for 2013/14 will be sent out giving details of what every household will need to pay, and people will be responsible for the new payments from 1st April 2013.

8. Why are Eastbourne Council proposing their preferred scheme?

Because of the 10% cut in Government Grant, we have to make very difficult and hard choices about who receives less/no support to help pay for their Council Tax.

In designing our scheme we have followed principles which we believe are the best compromise we can deliver: we aim to limit the impact on the most vulnerable households, we want to make sure that those who start work are not penalised; that all adults in a household contribute, and that benefit is not paid to those with relatively large savings. We are also proposing to protect the most vulnerable people by making those with second or empty homes pay more Council Tax than they do now.

9. Can the money be found elsewhere?

Like all other councils, we are facing difficult choices about how to balance our budget with the reductions in public spending. We will be consulting on our Budget for 2013/14 later this year.

10. Where can I get more help or advice?

The Council's Council Tax and Benefits staff can be contacted here:

counciltax@Eastbourne.gov.uk

benefits@Eastbourne.gov.uk