

# Council Tax

2014 / 2015

The  Deal

## Foreword by the Leader of the Council, Lord Peter Smith

Welcome to this year's Council Tax booklet.

I've been involved in setting more than 30 council budgets and can tell you it's never easy. But these last few years have been the most difficult I've known.

We will have £105.8m less to spend on our services in 2017 than we did in 2010. That's a reduction of 30 percent – one of the largest cuts faced by any council in the country. We've already cut £64.8m and this year must reduce our spending by another £14m.

There will be pain – make no mistake but we will be working with local groups to help protect most front line services.

Acting early when we realised the full extent of the government's cuts, listening to your views and making the tough but necessary choices has put us in a stronger position.

It means we're able to freeze Council Tax this year. Hopefully this will help all of you struggling with your own financial challenges.



But we need your help too. We've launched The Deal – setting out a new relationship between you and the council. We will freeze Council Tax and protect front line services if you work with us to save money and improve the borough. This is explained on page 7.

Despite the challenges, there's still much to celebrate. The borough enjoyed stunning sporting success in 2013, which inspired our successful "Believe" campaign. And the council was declared one of the best in the UK after an external inspection.

If we all work together, I believe we can build a better borough and look forward to the future with confidence.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Lord Peter Smith of Leigh  
Leader of Wigan Council

## About Council Tax

Council Tax is a tax on dwellings, not people. It only applies to properties used by people as their homes.

Each year we send a Council Tax bill to every domestic property in the borough, whether it's a house, bungalow, flat, maisonette, mobile home or houseboat. Each dwelling is put into one of the eight bands below, based on what it would have cost to buy on the open market on 1 April 1991.

Every year we set the Council Tax for each band. The amounts for 2014/2015 are below. The band given to your property is on the front of your bill.

The Valuation Office Agency decides the band not us. You can appeal against your property's band if you have moved into the property in the last six months or there has been a change in the building or physical state of the local area.

You can contact them at Valuation Office Agency, Manchester Valuation Office, Portland Tower, Portland Street, Manchester, M1 3LD.  
Phone 03000 501 501  
[www.voa.gov.uk](http://www.voa.gov.uk)

For information about the council's income and spending visit:  
**[www.wigan.gov.uk/incomeandspending](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/incomeandspending)**

Band	Band Value	Council Tax for 2014/15
A	Up to £40,000	£934.71
B	£40,001 - £52,000	£1,090.51
C	£52,001 - £68,000	£1,246.29
D	£68,001 - £88,000	£1,402.08
E	£88,001 - £120,000	£1,713.64
F	£120,001 - £160,000	£2,025.22
G	£160,001 - £320,000	£2,336.79
H	£320,001 and above	£2,804.16

## When you may not have to pay Council Tax

You won't have to pay if only the following people occupy your property:

- Students,
- People under the age of 18, or
- People who have a severe mental impairment and would otherwise be liable to pay Council Tax.

You may not have to pay for a limited time if your property is not occupied because it is:

- Newly built and not yet occupied (no charge for 1 month); or
- Substantially unfurnished (no charge for 1 month); or
- Owned by a charity (exempt for 6 months).

You may not have to pay for any of the following types of properties even if they are occupied:

- Armed Forces' accommodation.
- Visiting Forces' accommodation.
- An annexe such as a 'granny flat'.
- Occupied by someone who has diplomatic, commonwealth or consular privilege or immunity.

Please ring us and let us know if you think you qualify for an exemption. Certain conditions may apply.

You may not have to pay for your property whilst it is:

- Left empty by the owner or tenant, who was the last occupier, and who has moved to receive or provide personal care in either a hospital or home elsewhere;
- Repossessed by a mortgage company;
- Empty because occupation is forbidden by law;
- Waiting to be occupied by a minister of religion;
- The responsibility of a bankrupt's trustee;
- Left empty by a student owner who lived in it immediately before leaving to study elsewhere;
- An empty caravan pitch or houseboat mooring;
- Unoccupied because the last occupier, who was also the owner, had died and probate or letters of administration have not yet been granted (and for 6 months after).

## Ways to pay less Council Tax

The full Council Tax bill assumes that there are 2 or more adults living in a property.

If you are the only adult living in your property your bill can be reduced by 25%. We can also consider local discounts for other reasons as well.

When we work out if you are entitled to a discount we don't count these people:

- Children under 18.
- People over 18 that still qualify for Child Benefit.
- 18 or 19 year olds who leave school after 30 April are not counted until 1 November of the same year.
- People with a severe mental impairment.
- Apprentices.
- Youth Training Trainees.
- Care Workers.
- Carers.
- People in residential care homes, nursing homes and hostels that provide a high level of care.

- Resident hospital patients.
- Student nurses.
- Prisoners in detention (unless for non payment of fines or Council Tax).
- Students in full time education.
- Diplomats and members of international organisations with headquarters in the UK (and their non British spouses).
- Members of religious communities such as monks or nuns.

Certain qualifying conditions apply.

### **People with disabilities**

If you, or a person that lives with you, has a disability you may qualify for a reduction.

Your home will need to have an extra bathroom, kitchen or other room that is used mainly to help with the person's disability. You can also qualify if the disabled person uses a wheelchair in the home.

If you qualify we will work out your Council Tax charge again using the valuation band below the one your property is in.



## Introducing 'The Deal'

Councils across the country are facing tough times. Here in Wigan Borough, we've seen massive cuts to our funding from central government. In fact, we've lost 30 per cent of our budget – one of the biggest cuts faced by any local authority in the country.

You'll have seen in the media how other councils are adjusting to their own spending challenges by slashing jobs and services. We've had to make cuts too and it's not been easy. But we now want to take a different approach to dealing with our new financial reality. We have to transform and modernise the way we work – ensuring our services are fit for purpose and value for money. And we want your help to make this happen.

We've come up with an informal contract – The Deal – which sets out what we're going to do and asks you to do a few things too. The alternative is huge cuts which would affect everyone in the borough and have a terrible impact in our communities. We've got to work together.

Over the page, we explain clearly our part and what we'd like you to do. Please take a look, or for more details of how to get involved visit [www.wigan.gov.uk/thedeal](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/thedeal)

We're going to freeze council tax, something that hopefully will help you cope with your own financial challenges.

We're also going to help our communities support each other – not least through our Community Investment Fund which will see us invest £4m into projects run by local people.

Cutting red tape and providing value for money will also be a priority for us as will creating opportunities for young people.

For your part, we're relying on you to help us in any way you can. That might mean volunteering in your community, helping to keep where you live clean and tidy, or looking out for your neighbours. Lots of you already do this kind of thing and we promise to help you all we can.

There are other, more practical things everyone can do to help us save money and reduce the impact of the government's cuts. For example, if more people recycled – and recycled the right things – we could make huge savings. We have to pay massive fines to put rubbish in landfill sites – recycling what we throw away reduces the cost to us.

We could also save money if you can use our online services more. Rather than ringing us up or filling out paper forms, if you can contact us via the internet we can save money.

These small, simple steps could make a big difference. We all want the same thing – a better borough. If we can work together, we can achieve it.

# The Deal



## Our part

- Freeze Council Tax
- Help communities to support each other
- Cut red tape and provide value for money
- Build services around you and your family
- Create opportunities for young people
- Support the local economy to grow
- Listen, be open, honest and friendly
- Believe in our borough

Signed



Lord Peter Smith of Leigh, Leader of Wigan Council

## Your part

- Recycle more, recycle right
- Get involved in your community
- Get online
- Be healthy and be active
- Help protect children and the vulnerable
- Support your local businesses
- Have your say and tell us if we get it wrong
- Believe in our borough

Signed

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## Council Tax for Empty Dwellings and Second Homes

### When a dwelling first becomes empty

A dwelling that becomes newly empty will be given a maximum 1 month full exemption followed by a 25% discount for a maximum of 5 months.

### Long term empty dwellings

Dwellings left empty and unfurnished for longer than 6 months, or have already been empty for between 6 months and 2 years, will be charged 100% Council Tax.

### Empty Homes Premium

Long term empty dwellings that remain empty and unfurnished for longer than 2 years will attract an Empty Homes Premium. The premium will be an extra 50% charge in addition to the 100% charge for a long term empty dwelling.

### Second homes

Dwellings that are unoccupied but furnished are classed as Second Homes. There is no discount for these dwellings. The charge for a Second Home is 100%.

If your property becomes empty, contact us straight away and we can tell you if you qualify for any reduction.

You can tell us about any changes by registering online for your Wigan Council My Account by visiting [www.wigan.gov.uk/MyAccount](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/MyAccount)

## Council Tax Reduction

The Government provides us with some funding to help households on low incomes to pay their Council Tax bill. There are two schemes:

### 1. The National Council Tax Reduction Scheme – pensioner households and households with children under 5

These households:

- Can apply for support
- Can apply for Second Adult Rebate if the only other adult living in the property is on a low income.
- Can apply for backdated support. This will only be awarded if there is good cause why the claim wasn't made from the earlier date.

### 2. The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme – working age households with no children under 5

These households:

- Can apply for support under our local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- Will have their entitlement calculated using the national scheme but support will be reduced by 20%
- Cannot apply for Second Adult Rebate.
- Can only get support from the date a claim for reduction is made.

### Who can apply for Council Tax Reduction?

To apply for Council Tax Reduction you must be the person whose name is on the Council Tax bill.

You may qualify if you are:

- On Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance or Universal Credit;
- On Pension Credit, Guaranteed Credit and in some cases Saving Credit;
- Working and on low pay (including people who are self employed); or
- On a low income. For example you might only get a retirement pension or be getting social security benefits like Incapacity Benefit.
- A working age household with capital / savings under £12000
- A pensioner household, or household with a child under 5, with capital / savings under £16000

## How to apply

You must register for MyAccount and apply directly to Wigan Council online at

**[www.wigan.gov.uk/MyAccount](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/MyAccount)**

You cannot make a claim for Council Tax Reduction through Job Centre Plus or the Pensions Service.

For more information about Council Tax Reduction visit

**[www.wigan.gov.uk/counciltaxreduction](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/counciltaxreduction)**

If you rent your home you might also be entitled to Housing Benefit. For more information about Housing Benefit visit

**[www.wigan.gov.uk/housingbenefit](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/housingbenefit)**

## Need help to make an application?

- See the back of your bill for details of how to contact us.
- You can get help at our Wigan and Leigh Housing offices as long as you fill in a consent form.
- You can get help and use our online facilities at our Life Centres in Wigan, Marsh Green, Atherton, Leigh Town Hall, Ince and Platt

Bridge.

- If you are a tenant of Arena Housing, Adactus Housing, or Riverside Housing, your landlord can help you fill in and check your benefit claim online.
- If you do not have access to a computer or are unable to visit us at any of the above places, contact us 01942 828644.

The following agencies can give advice about your application:

- Wigan Independent Advice Centre 01942 489984
- Citizens Advice 0844 826 9713
- Age UK (for those over 50) Wigan 01942 241972

These facilities are available to all customers:

- Access for wheelchair users at our Life Centres in Wigan, Marsh Green, Atherton, Leigh Town Hall, Ince and Platt Bridge.
- Browsealoud is available on our website to download so that you can have the information on our web pages read aloud to you.
- A textphone for people who are hard of hearing - 01942 828725.

## Changes you need to tell us about

Tell us straight away if you are getting Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction and have a change in circumstances. If you do not tell us about a change as soon as it happens, you could lose benefits or we could pay you too much and you will probably have to pay it back. It is an offence not to tell us about any change in circumstances that affects your entitlement. We may take court action against you.

Tell us online - don't delay, tell us today. You don't have to send us a letter.

## Under Occupancy of Social Housing

If you rent from a local authority, a registered housing association or other registered social landlord, from 1 April 2013 the amount of Housing Benefit you get is based on the number of bedrooms your household needs.

The rules allow one bedroom for:

- every adult couple (married or unmarried)
- any other adult aged 16 or over
- any two children of the same sex aged under 16
- any two children aged under 10
- any other child
- a non-resident carer

Tell us online by registering for MyAccount and filling in one of our forms. Visit [www.wigan.gov.uk/MyAccount](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/MyAccount) and click on our 'report a change in your circumstances' form.

You can get face-to-face help with any enquiry about a council service at our Life Centres in Wigan, Marsh Green, Atherton, Leigh Town Hall, Ince and Platt Bridge.

## Complaints or compliments

Fill in an online form at [www.wigan.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/contactus)

- an overnight carer for children with disabilities
- a child assessed as being unable to share a room due to a disability
- qualifying foster carers
- a child serving in the armed forces but living alone as long as they intend to return home

If you are classed as having one or more extra bedrooms your Housing Benefit may be reduced. If you are under-occupying there will be a reduction in your Housing Benefit.

For more information go to [www.helpwithrent.org.uk](http://www.helpwithrent.org.uk) or telephone 0845 120 2093 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday and contact your landlord.

## Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a new benefit that has started to replace 6 existing benefits with a single monthly payment. Universal Credit will help you to be better off in work, start a new job or work more hours.

Universal Credit will eventually replace:

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit

Some postcodes in Wigan are eligible to claim Universal Credit already. Eligibility depends on where you live and your personal circumstances. From Autumn 2014 couples in Wigan will be able to make a claim for Universal Credit.

To check if you are eligible visit [www.gov.uk/universal-credit/eligibility](http://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/eligibility)

Universal Credit will be available across Great Britain during 2016 and new claims for the existing benefits will be moved to the new Universal Credit. The vast majority of those in receipt of the existing income benefits, which Universal Credit replaces, will move onto Universal Credit during 2016 and 2017.

### What's new about Universal Credit?

- It is 6 benefits in one monthly payment.
- If you have a partner you'll get one monthly payment for both of you.
- If you get help with your rent, this will be included in your monthly payment – you'll then pay your landlord yourself.
- You'll claim Universal Credit online. Help will be available for people who don't have access to the internet or have difficulty using a computer.

You will have to pay your Council Tax from your monthly Universal Credit payment yourself.



## The new way to use council services.

As part of The Deal we are asking residents to get online and sign up for **MyAccount** saving you time and money when contacting the council.

- Set-up direct debits.
- View your Council Tax details, make payments, apply for discounts and amend address details online.
- Make a Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction or Free School meals application and complete a change of circumstances online.
- Wigan and Leigh Housing tenants will move over from the current My Council service to view rent statements and make payments.

**Registering for an account is easy and takes a couple of minutes – all you need to get started is an email address.**



**Register online  
for an account**



**Activate your  
account via email**



**Log in to  
your account**



**Get started with  
MyAccount!**

**[www.wigan.gov.uk/MyAccount](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/MyAccount)**

We can make the information in this booklet available in other formats and languages on request. Contact us at:

**Customer Services**

Wigan Council, PO Box 100, Wigan, WN1 3DS.  
Phone: 01942 828696 Textphone: 01942 828725  
Email: [revenues@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:revenues@wigan.gov.uk)

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