

Council Tax 2015/2016



Thank you for recycling **more**
We've frozen
Council Tax again

Foreword by the Leader of the Council, Lord Peter Smith

Welcome to this year's Council Tax booklet.

Over the last few weeks we've been busy preparing the annual budget. It's never an easy task, and the government's budget reductions of £80m have made it extremely difficult.

You will have read that many councils, with more savings to find this year, are closing libraries, stopping school crossing patrols and shutting local services. We are taking a different approach with our local communities through The Deal to find new ways of working which are sustainable in the future.

An excellent example of this is the "Heart of Scholes project". Based on the community facility at Sunshine House, many local volunteers use their skills and talents to support their neighbours in dealing with their problems rather than expecting someone to come along and do it for them. This terrific project has received national recognition and we would like to roll it out into other areas.

Thanks to this approach, we're on track to meet the savings challenge and have been able to freeze Council Tax for the second year running.



We understand the financial difficulties our residents are facing so this should help alleviate some of that pressure.

But we need your help too. Simple things like recycling more or accessing our services online can really help us to save money. We will continue to invest in community groups and begin to increase the use of IT in the borough so no one is left behind. To find out more about The Deal and how you can help visit www.wigan.gov.uk/thedeal

2015 promises to be an exciting year. We have backed Leigh Centurions' bid for Super League this season and we are working on redeveloping Haigh Country Park and Wigan Pier. In May, Wigan Council will make its debut on BBC daytime television when we appear on Call the Council – make sure you tune in to see how we're helping to improve your local communities.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Smith".

Lord Peter Smith of Leigh
Leader of Wigan Council

About Council Tax

Council Tax is a tax on residential dwellings, not people.

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 2015/2016 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

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 2015/16
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.



As part of The Deal we are encouraging residents to have their say.

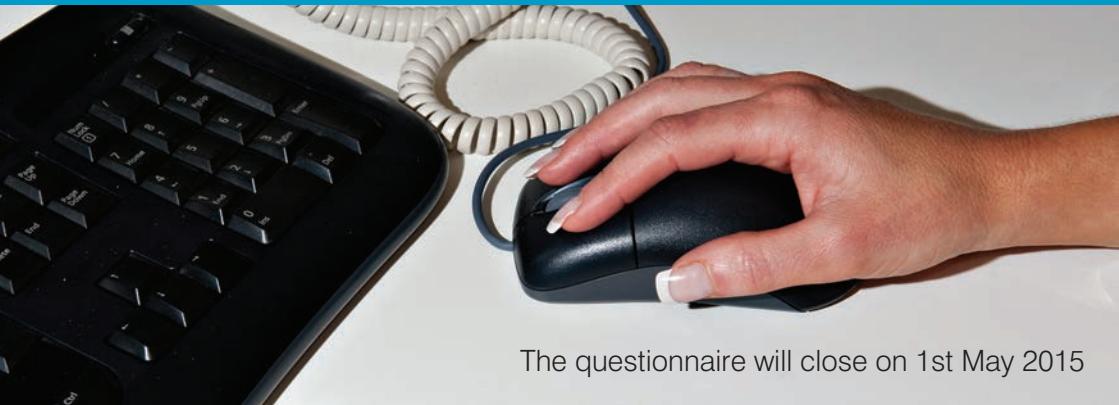
You can help to make a difference right now

Complete the short questionnaire to give your feedback on this booklet and its contents.

The questionnaire will take no more than 2 minutes online.

The results will help us to design and produce future Council Tax booklets and other communications.

www.wigan.gov.uk/CouncilTaxSurvey



The questionnaire will close on 1st May 2015

The Deal - One Year On

We believe we've made giant strides since we launched The Deal in March 2014.

Recycling has seen an increase of 16% since 2012 – that means 52% of all waste during 2014 was recycled. And to reward your support, we have frozen Council Tax for the second year running.

The Deal is our approach to the way we operate to help protect frontline services and make the borough a better place. Over the next few pages you can see the impact The Deal is already having.

Young people are at the very heart of The Deal. Our schools are amongst the most improved in the country against all national measures with Ofsted highlighting us an area of best practice in their annual report.

We are the leading authority in Greater Manchester for apprenticeships and we have invested £2 million into our Confident Futures Programme - a programme to ensure our looked after young people are 'work ready'.

Our efforts to secure more than £135 million of investment in new employment sites and infrastructure improvements means we have helped to create an extra 4,400 jobs in the borough during 2014.

Our community investment fund has seen £4 million support around 100 community groups; helping to achieve our priorities while saving money and making the borough a better place.

The Deal is also coming to a street near you. In February, the campaign started it's roll-out across the borough including events and activities to bring communities together and to get some of the local issues sorted - ranging from planting flowerbeds to filling potholes.

We know 2014 was a good year for the launch of The Deal - but we think 2015 will be even better.

You can find more information and show your support for The Deal by signing up at
www.wigan.gov.uk/thedeal



Our Part

Freeze Council Tax

£ 0

We have frozen council tax for two years running to help residents as home budgets get tighter.

Help communities to support each other

£4m



Our £4m investment fund has supported around 100 community groups since its launch.

Cut red tape and provide value for money



We've reduced the number of our admin buildings from 20 to four, saving £1m per year.

Your Part

Recycle more, recycle right



2012 = 36%

2014 = 52%

Get involved in your community



We are developing an army of 3,000 engaged residents including 1,655 health champions.

Get online



We have a four star rated website with 20,000 residents signed up to our MyAccount service.

Our Part

Build services around you and your family

-£2m 

The Deal for Adult Social Care will save around £2m per year.

Create opportunities for young people



9,000 apprentices employed across the borough, more than 100 at the council.

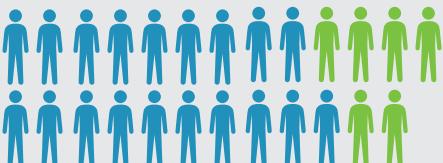
Your Part

Be healthy and be active



Over 1.7m visitors to the borough's leisure centres during 2013/14 with 15,454 residents engaged in community sports activity

Help protect children and the vulnerable



Increase in foster carers from 189 to 252 since 2012.

Our Part

Support the local economy to grow

£135m investment

We have helped to secure more than £135m of investment in new employment sites and infrastructure improvements that will be delivered this year.



4,400 jobs created

Job opportunities have also improved in Wigan Borough, with an extra 4,400 jobs created during 2014.



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.

A property in need of, or undergoing, major repairs

If you own a property that is either in need of, or undergoing, major repairs you may be entitled to a reduction of 75% from your bill for a maximum of 12 months, or until the work is completed if that is sooner. You will be asked to provide evidence of the extent of the works required to render the property habitable. Only one major repairs reduction can be given for any period during which a property is continuously empty. Certain qualifying conditions apply for all reductions.

You can tell us about any changes by registering online for your Wigan Council MyAccount by visiting 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. Wigan Council has 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 £12,000
- A pensioner household, or household with a child under 5, with capital / savings under £16,000

How to apply

Register for MyAccount and apply directly to Wigan Council online at 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?

- If you are a Wigan & Leigh Homes tenant go to [www.walh.co.uk/
moneymanagement](http://www.walh.co.uk/moneymanagement) for information on how to access help and support.
- 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 489002.

The following agencies can give advice about your application:

- Wigan Independent Advice Centre 01942 489984
- Citizens Advice Tel: 0844 826 9713 Email: advice@wigancab.org Web: www.wigancab.org
- Age UK (for those over 50) Wigan Tel: 01942 241972 Email: enquiries@ageukwiganborough.org.uk Web: www.ageukwiganborough.org.uk

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.

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 by registering for MyAccount and filling in one of our forms. Visit 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

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

- 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 under-occupy there will be a reduction in your Housing Benefit.

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

To check if you are eligible visit
www.gov.uk/universal-credit/eligibility

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.

Beware

Need help with money or other problems? For information go to www.wigan.gov.uk/moneyadvice

Avoid doorstep loan companies. Their interest rates can be extremely high.

Don't be excluded

Get in touch with those you owe money to as soon as you can. You can nominate a friend or representative to help you if you find it hard to manage it yourself.

In a crisis?

If you find yourself in a crisis our Local Welfare Support Advisors can help support customers to:

- access financial help and advice,
- gain appropriate referrals e.g. food parcels, white goods, and
- build self reliance.

To speak to a Local Welfare Support Advisor ring 01942 705221.

Get Online

If you don't have a computer at home, you can use one for free at your local library or Life Centre.

Free courses are available to help you get online and make the most of it. We can help you access the internet, introduce you to email and use online forms. Computers and the internet can help you:

- keep in touch with family and friends,
- manage your money,
- search for jobs,
- apply for Universal Credit and other benefits, and
- learn more about the things that interest you.

For more information and to get on a course go to www.wigan.gov.uk/getonline

For more information about money, benefits and where to get advice go to www.gov.uk

To find out more information about Get Online courses contact us on 01942 489009.

Get Online



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

Customer Services

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