



**Independent
Age**



Council Tax

Ways to reduce your bill



Thank you

We would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this guide was being developed, and those who reviewed it for us.

What do you think?

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If you'd like to help us develop our information products, you can join our Readers' Panel. To find out more, call **020 7050 6560** or visit **independentage.org/readers-panel**.

Our publications

In this guide you'll find references to our other free publications. To order them, call **0800 319 6789** or visit **independentage.org/publications**.

If you would like this information in a different format (such as large print or audio CD), call us on **0800 319 6789** or email **operations@independentage.org**.

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The sources used to create this publication are available on request.

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We spoke to older people about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout. We have changed the names of some of the interviewees who wished to be anonymous. Some of the images seen throughout this guide are posed by friends of Independent Age.

The PIF TICK is the UK-wide Quality Mark for Health Information.

1. How does Council Tax work?

Council Tax pays for local government services, such as police and fire services, rubbish collection, libraries, road repairs and street lighting.

How much you pay depends on the area you live in and the value of your home. Council Tax applies whether you're renting or a homeowner.

Council Tax Bands

Homes are divided into tax bands based on their market value. There are eight bands in England and Scotland, and nine in Wales. You can find your Council Tax band on your Council Tax bill.

You might qualify for discounts, exemptions or help to pay some or all of your bill, depending on your situation. This guide looks at how you might be able to reduce your Council Tax bill.



2. Council Tax exemptions

Sometimes, you might not need to pay Council Tax at all.

Homes are sometimes exempt from Council Tax, either for a set amount of time or, in some cases, indefinitely. For example, a home might be exempt if:

- it's empty because the person who lived there has moved to a care home or they are living with a relative so they can be cared for, or they can care for someone else
- everyone living in the home has been medically certified as 'severely mentally impaired'. For example, this might happen if they have dementia, Parkinson's or a serious mental health condition. They'd also need to qualify for disability benefits, such as Attendance Allowance
- there's a self-contained annexe and the person living there is a relative of the person who owns the main property – they should be 65 or over, or severely mentally impaired, or substantially and permanently disabled. Only the annexe would be exempt from Council Tax, not the main property.

Your council decides whether a home is exempt and the rules can be complicated. If you think your home might be exempt, call us on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser.

You can also call us for advice if you think your council may have made a wrong decision, or read our factsheet **What to do if you disagree with a benefits decision**.



To speak to someone locally, you can contact Citizens Advice.

In England: **0800 144 8848**

In Wales: **0800 702 2020**

In Scotland: **0800 028 1456**

Or visit **citizensadvice.org.uk**.

3. Council Tax Support

Council Tax Support helps people with a low income to pay their Council Tax.

You may qualify if you have no income or a low income. If you (and your partner) have savings over £16,000, you won't qualify unless you're getting Guarantee Pension Credit.

Council Tax Support is means-tested – the council will look at your income and capital (for example, savings) to work out whether you qualify. If you do, the reduction you get will depend on:

- Your income and capital
- whether you're over State Pension age
- how the scheme works in your area
- your circumstances (for example, who else you live with).

How to apply

Ask your local council for details of their scheme ([gov.uk/apply-council-tax-reduction](https://www.gov.uk/apply-council-tax-reduction)). You might also want to check whether you qualify for Housing Benefit.



Read our factsheet **Housing Benefit** for more information.

You could also try our online benefits calculator ([independantage.org/benefit-calculator](https://www.independantage.org/benefit-calculator)) or call us on **0800 319 6789** to arrange a benefits check.



4. Council Tax discounts

Full Council Tax rates are based on at least two people living in a property.

If you live alone

If you live alone, you're entitled to a 25% reduction. Contact your council to let them know you live alone.



You can find your council's contact details at [gov.uk/find-local-council](https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council) or in the phone book.

If the person you live with is disregarded

Not everyone is counted for Council Tax purposes. This means you'll be treated as living alone if you only live with someone who is, for example:

- severely mentally impaired
- a full-time student
- a long-term hospital patient
- a live-in carer/care worker



If you're unsure whether the people you live with are disregarded for Council Tax, please check with your local council, or call our free Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser.

If everyone else who lives in your home is disregarded, you'll still have a Council Tax bill, but you'll get a 50% reduction.



5. The Disabled Band Reduction Scheme

You might qualify for this if you live in a larger house than you'd otherwise need because you or someone you live with is substantially and permanently disabled.

There is no general test for this – if you think it might apply to you, speak to your council or call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789**. For example, you might:

- need an extra bathroom because of someone's disability
- need extra space inside your home for a wheelchair
- have to move a disabled person's bedroom downstairs so they have easier access to the toilet and kitchen.

What discount could I get?

If you qualify, your Council Tax will be reduced to the band below yours (for example, from band E to band D), or by one sixth if your home is in the lowest band.

Contact your local council to find out more and apply for the scheme.

6. Second Adult Rebate

If you're living with another adult who has a low income and isn't your partner, you may be able to get Second Adult Rebate if your council offers this.

Your income and capital is ignored – only the circumstances of the second adult are considered – so you might want to apply for it if your savings are too high to claim Council Tax Support.

People who are disregarded for Council Tax purposes or who are joint owner or joint tenant of the property with you don't count as second adults.

You can't get both Second Adult Rebate and Council Tax Support. If you qualify for both, your council must award you whichever is higher.



Ask your local council if it's available in your area and how to claim ([gov.uk/find-local-council](https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council)).

7. FAQs

Can I spread the cost of my bill?

Council Tax is usually paid over 10 months of the year. You can ask to spread the cost over 12 months instead. Contact your council to arrange this.

I've heard I can challenge my Council Tax band. How does that work?

You can get your Council Tax band reviewed if you think it's wrong. However, be aware that you could be moved to a higher band, not just a lower one. You can also challenge the council's decision about whether you should be paying Council Tax, or how much you are paying.

See our factsheet **What to do if you disagree with a benefits decision** for more information, or contact Citizens Advice for advice (England: **0800 144 8848**, Wales: **0800 702 2020**, Scotland: **0800 028 1456**, citizensadvice.org.uk).

Can I get discounts backdated?

Yes – you can ask for discounts to be backdated to when you first qualified for them and there's no time limit to apply for a discount.

If you're over State Pension age, you can ask for Council Tax Support to be backdated by up to three months.



Hear from our Helpline

Our Helpline adviser Nick says:

“We get lots of calls from people wondering if they can reduce their Council Tax bill.

One thing people are often not aware of is that they can get a discount if a doctor agrees that someone in their household should be considered ‘severely mentally impaired.’

For example, a recent caller told us that he was a carer for his wife, who had late-stage dementia. She was getting the higher rate of Attendance Allowance and he was getting Carer’s Allowance, but it hadn’t occurred to him that they might be able to get other financial help.

I advised them that they should be getting a 25% discount on their Council Tax bill, and that some councils also let you backdate your claim, so they could be owed a refund!”

About Independent Age

At Independent Age, we want more people in the UK to live a happy, connected and purposeful later life. That's why we support people aged over 65 to get involved in things they enjoy. We also campaign and give advice on the issues that matter most: health and care, money and housing.

For information or advice – we can arrange a free, impartial chat with an adviser – call us on freephone **0800 319 6789** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 6.30pm) or email us at **advice@independentage.org**.

You can also support this work by volunteering with us, joining our campaigns to improve life for older people experiencing hardship, donating to us or remembering us in your will.

For more information, visit **[independentage.org](https://www.independentage.org)** or call us on **0800 319 6789**.



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