

Council Tax bill explanatory notes

1 Valuation bands

You have to pay Council Tax for most homes. We send one bill to each home, whether it is a house, bungalow, flat, maisonette, mobile home or houseboat, and whether you own it or are renting it. The Valuation Office has put each home into one of eight 'bands' depending on its value on April 1, 1991.

Valuation band	Range of values	Valuation band	Range of values
A	Up to and including £40,000	E	£88,001 to £120,000
B	£40,001 to £52,000	F	£120,001 to £160,000
C	£52,001 to £68,000	G	£160,001 to £320,000
D	£68,001 to £88,000	H	More than £320,000

2 Appeals

The Valuation Office Agency set the band for your property. This is based on property values on 1 April 1991 (and if built after this it would be valued if it had been built then and not what a property is worth today). We charge you council tax based on their assessment.

Many residents do not know that they can challenge a council tax band by:

- making a formal challenge to the Valuation Office Agency or
- simply asking the Valuation Office Agency to check it. The right to ask the Valuation Office Agency to check their band is not limited by time.

You can contact the Valuation Office Agency where you can compare your band with any other property at: www.gov.uk or telephone **03000 501501**.

Appealing against the band you are in

We have no influence on the band. You need to contact the Valuation Office Agency directly.

- You can appeal against the band your home is in if you have just moved in and you must appeal within six months of moving in.
- You can appeal if you think there has been a material change (reduction) in the value of the property – at any time.

If you want more details about the bands, or details of how to appeal against the band for your home, please contact:

Telephone **03000 501501** or write to: **Council Tax East, Valuation Office Agency, Ground Floor, Ferrers House, Castle Meadow Road, Nottingham, Notts, NG2 1AB**

You must continue to pay your council tax while you make your appeal. If the appeal is successful you will be refunded this money.

3 People with disabilities

If you, or someone who lives with you, needs a room, a second bathroom or kitchen, or extra space to meet the special needs of a disability, you may be entitled to a reduced Council Tax bill. We may reduce your bill to that of a property in the band immediately below yours so that you are not paying extra Council Tax because of a disability. From April 1 2000, Band A properties also qualify. For more information or to download a form please visit www.stevenage.gov.uk/council-tax and select Council tax reductions for people with disabilities.

4 We do not charge Council Tax for properties:

- where only students live;
- that have been repossessed;
- that are the responsibility of a trustee of someone who is bankrupt;
- where it would be illegal to live;
- where only people under 18 live;
- where people with a severe mental disability live;
- where non-British diplomats live;
- where certain visiting and armed forces live;
- where a person who lives next to relatives in an annexe or 'granny flat' and who is over 65, or who has a serious illness, or who is substantially and permanently disabled.

5 We do not charge Council Tax for empty properties (where no-one is living):

- that are owned by a charity (for up to six months);
- that have been left empty by a prisoner, a patient in a hospital or care home, a student or someone who has moved out to provide personal care for someone else;
- where someone has died and the estate is waiting for probate or letters of administration to be granted (after which a charge applies);
- where a minister of religion will be moving in;
- An annexe which forms part of a single property but cannot be let separately from that of the main dwelling.

6 Discounts

You can get a 25% discount on your bill if there is only one person aged 18 or over living in your home. We do not count people who are under 18 or who are in one of the following groups for Council Tax:

- Most full-time students and Youth Training Scheme trainees.
- Patients in hospital and people in care homes (but not staff).
- Young people for whom child benefit is paid.
- People who have a serious mental illness.
- People in prison.
- People living in hostels or night shelters.
- Care workers, monks, nuns and similar members of religious communities.
- School leavers do not count for Council Tax until after 31 October in the year they leave school, unless they start work before then. If you are getting a discount and your circumstances change, you must tell us within 21 days. If you do not, we can charge you a penalty of £70.

Discount for Unoccupied Properties

- There is no discount for:
 - Empty or unfurnished properties or for Empty properties which are undergoing major repairs or structural work, so the full Council Tax is due.
- Empty and unfurnished for over 2 years: 150% of liability

6 Discounts *continued*

Second Homes

A full charge. The only exception to the charge for second homes is where the person liable to pay council tax has to live in job-related accommodation as a requirement of their employment contract and has another home. The discount is 50%.

From 01/04/2014 a new discount was introduced for family annexes:

Many annexes in Stevenage are exempt from council tax but from 1 April 2014 a new Council Tax discount of 50% was introduced for family annexes that are not exempt.

If you currently have an annexe which is lived in by a family member or used by the resident of the main dwelling you can receive a 50% Council Tax discount from 1 April 2014.

The new discount is not based on occupation or furniture but on use of the annexe by the resident of the main building or occupation by a family member. IF A NON FAMILY MEMBER OCCUPIES AN ANNEXE THE FAMILY ANNEXE DISCOUNT WILL NOT APPLY (please see note 4)

7 When to Pay and Methods of Payment

Council tax must be paid as shown on your bill. You can arrange pay your Council Tax in up to 12 monthly instalments from April to March each year.

The Council's website – www.stevenage.gov.uk/pay. All you need is your account reference number to check your balance and make a payment using our online service. We accept all major debit and credit cards except American Express or Diners Club.

Direct debit. You can now arrange to pay by direct debit to do this please visit www.stevenage.gov.uk/council-tax and click on setup a Direct Debit.

Customer Service Centre. All you need is your account reference number to check your balance and make a payment by cash, cheque or debit card at the Payment Kiosk in our Customer Service Centre.

Post Office. You can pay by cash, cheque or debit card at any Post Office using your plastic payment card. If you do not have a plastic payment card, please contact this office and we will arrange for one to be issued to you.

Telephone Payments. All you need is your account reference number to check your balance and make a payment. You can pay by debit or credit card by calling 01438 242345 at any time to pay via the Automated Payments.

Bank Giro Credit. Complete a bank giro credit slip at your bank and make a payment to the Council. The Council's bank sort code is 40 43 36 and the account number is 11549200. Quote the Council Tax Reference number which is printed on the front of this bill.

8 Local Council Tax Support

Council Tax Support could help towards some or all of your Council Tax bill if you are on a low income, even if you own your own home.

Please see our website under 'Online Benefits Calculator', to work how much support we may be able to give you.

To apply for Support - An application form can be completed on our website www.stevenage.gov.uk Go to "Benefits – New Claim"

9 How we collect unpaid Council Tax

We will send you a reminder notice if you miss a payment or your payment is late. You will lose the right to pay by monthly instalments if you do not pay after we have sent you a reminder or if we have to send you more than two reminders in any financial year.

We have the right to collect unpaid Council Tax through the magistrates' court. You will have to pay costs in excess of £80 if we have to do this.

If you have difficulty paying please contact us as soon as possible so that we can discuss your situation.

10 Voting Register

Receiving your Council Tax bill does not mean that you are automatically on the Voting Register. To make sure you do not lose your right to vote please register on-line at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote or alternatively call the Council Offices on 01279 655261 and ask for Electoral Services.

Additional Information

Under S.16 of the LGFA additional information can be found as follows:

Hertfordshire County Council's council tax information: Read and download it online at: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/counciltax Alternatively by emailing contact@hertfordshire.gov.uk, telephoning 0300 123 4040 or by writing to Hertfordshire County Council, PO Box 153, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 2GH.

The Stevenage Council Tax booklet including the council tax explanatory notes, the Police and Crime Commissioner leaflet, the Environment Agency leaflet and the Hertfordshire County Council leaflet:

Read and download them online at: www.stevenage.gov.uk

You can visit our customer service centre in Danestrete. It is open from 8.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday.