



Birmingham

Budget for Birmingham 2010/11

Council tax help and information notes



“The Council continues to offer people a good standard of service, both in terms of the quality and range of services available.”

Audit Commission (December 2009)

GLOBAL CITY LOCAL HEART



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Message from the Leader



Our commitment, through sound financial management, is to give the citizens of Birmingham what they need, at a price that's fair, whilst improving service delivery.

This booklet outlines how the budget for Birmingham City Council 2010-11, **a budget for the people of Birmingham**, is made and spent, along with highlights of our successes, and details of our 2010-2011 priorities.

Importantly, we are able to announce that we will keep tax increases to 1.9% for the fifth successive year – more than one percent below inflation at the time of setting the budget.

We are looking after those on low and fixed incomes, pensioners, and vulnerable people within our city. Giving more back at a time when people need to have more to spend on their families and communities.

There are a great many challenges facing local and national government as a result of the national economic recession. We have to be practical, and plan strategically, to ensure we can continue to improve satisfaction levels and deliver quality services. Quite simply we have to do more for less.

We remain committed to our own journey towards excellence, and this year our budget provides £67.5million for key priorities. Our top three priorities are supporting employment and employability; a clean and safe city, and protecting vulnerable people.

We continue to improve our service delivery and strengthen our resolve to create a prosperous, internationally competitive city that is celebrating its cultural diversity, reaching out and welcoming in.

I champion Birmingham as a global city with a local heart – a city that is modern and iconic, transforming its infrastructure. A national centre for cultural, sporting and creative excellence. Today Birmingham is a city which over a million people proudly call home. We have a rich history, and a bright future.



Councillor Mike Whitby, Leader of the Council

Message from the Deputy Leader



One of our Council priorities is modernising our services and creating significant savings. Transforming the way public services are provided, how we involve and engage people in important decisions and how we provide value for money are critical to the quality of life in Birmingham.

The next important phase of Business Transformation is how we introduce the new easy way that residents and businesses communicate with the Council. "Click, call, visit" is our commitment to putting Customers First. The new and improved website (www.birmingham.gov.uk) allows each resident to have his or her own account. This year we are expecting to roll out the ONE number and we are re-vamping our Neighbourhood Offices so that there is a one-stop shop for council services close to you.

In addition to transformation, I am particularly proud of the work we are doing on the Birmingham Declaration 2015 at the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit. Our Climate Change Action Plan tackles the first crucial steps in achieving our 2026 carbon emission reduction target of 60%.

It is to our credit that we are one of only ten areas to be awarded two 'Green Flags' for outstanding achievements, innovation or good practice by external assessors for our work in tackling climate change, reducing CO2 emissions and working in partnership to meet housing need. The award recognises the good progress we have made.

To that end, we greatly appreciate the support and contributions from community groups, activists, businesses, officers and individuals who see the carbon agenda, among other areas such as housing, as important to the future of a great city like Birmingham.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Tilsley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Paul Tilsley, Deputy Leader of the Council

We backed Birmingham: 2009/10 successes

Birmingham City Council has worked hard to support all residents and businesses by stimulating the local economy on the road to recovery. Several major, exciting projects and programmes are underway. These include:

Supporting employment and employability

A total of £31m has been secured as part of the new Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) to stimulate vital enterprise and business activity in Birmingham. Through projects such as the Employment Connections programme, we are providing employment and training support directly to residents in some of our most deprived neighbourhoods.

The Future Jobs Fund (FJF) provides young people between 18-24 years old who are approaching 12 months of unemployment, access to employment and training opportunities. With Government funding and working with private and public sector partners, over 5,800 jobs are being created in the city region.

Central Library's Business Insight programme has supported 292 jobseekers and 186 business start-ups over the period April to September 2009. It also provided support on job searches, CVs and job applications for 4,930 people.

New Street Gateway

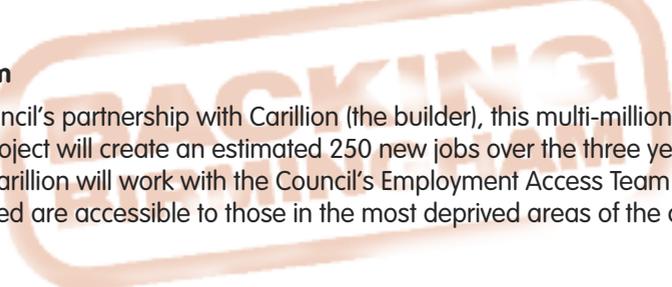
Working closely with Network Rail, this project will see around 1,000 people working on the development and, on completion in 2015, could see the creation of up to 10,000 new jobs. We are keen to ensure local people can access these employment and training opportunities.

Library of Birmingham

Thanks to the City Council's partnership with Carillion (the builder), this multi-million pound construction project will create an estimated 250 new jobs over the three year construction period. Carillion will work with the Council's Employment Access Team to ensure that jobs created are accessible to those in the most deprived areas of the city.

Inward Investment

We have expanded our national and international marketing of Birmingham and will strengthen international relationships to bring about stronger trade links and attract new inward investment.



We backed Birmingham: 2009/10 successes

Business Transformation

We are making fundamental changes to enable Birmingham City Council to deliver better services to residents. The future public services in the city need to be characterised by:

- systematic Business Transformation, working with partners to redesign more cost-effective services
- developing personalised public services, rather than “one size fits all”
- shifting the balance from dealing with symptoms to addressing and preventing underlying problems
- increasing cost-effectiveness by collaborating with partners so that all public funding in Birmingham (approximately £7.5bn) allows us to deliver joint ambitions for the city coherently
- people and communities being able to help themselves to produce positive outcomes and reduce dependency on the state.

Several of the nine programmes focus on the organisational changes needed – procedures, processes, organisational structures, job roles – as well as on technology. Others focus directly on specific service areas. For a £600m investment the complete programme will deliver £1.5bn savings over 10 years. We have already reached the level of an estimated £60m per annum in benefits and developed a national and international reputation as a world leader in transformation.

Listening to local people

Working with partners, we listen closely to Birmingham people. In October 2009 the Council introduced the **Birmingham Be Heard Consultation Database**, an online consultation portal that allows your views to be heard more easily. We now routinely review all the feedback and check what we've done in response to previous feedback. The Be Heard database helps us plan and respond to new issues.

One of our major consultation initiatives is the **Birmingham Annual Opinion Survey**. The Council has conducted tens of thousands of face-to-face interviews with adults since 1997. In 2008 Birmingham residents told us that their top three concerns were i) clean streets, ii) the level of crime, and iii) activities for teenagers.

Backing Birmingham 2010/11

Our priorities for spending in 2010/11

The City Council's 2010/11 budget is driven by the priorities developed through consultation with people in Birmingham and set out in the Council Plan 2010+. We will be working with partners so that residents can: succeed economically; stay safe in a clean and green city; enjoy a high quality of life; be healthy and make a contribution. Our long term strategic approach to financial planning is helping to provide ever better services to create a global city with a local heart.

1.9% – City council tax increase remains low

- Council tax for city council services will rise by only 1.9%. When increases for the separate fire and police authorities are added, the overall level of council tax increase for Birmingham is 1.9%.
- Our council tax increase for next year has been kept below the current consumer price index for inflation*. This is the fifth year of below inflation increases. Through tight financial discipline the council continues to develop and improve services by making efficiencies and reducing waste. (*Based on the Consumer Prices Index of 3.5% for January 2010).

Succeed Economically

We are responding effectively to the current economic situation and helping to accelerate economic recovery to ensure:

- people want to live and work in Birmingham and skilled workers are retained to support a diversifying economy;
 - investment in the city is secured and development opportunities are maximised;
 - employment opportunities are created and access to training and learning new skills is provided;
 - innovation and business enterprise are stimulated and supported;
 - economic inequalities between communities are reduced;
 - major development proposals are responded to positively;
 - the city's built environment is revitalised.
- Our regulatory services will work to achieve a safe, clean and fair trading city for all residents, businesses and visitors and, in doing so, contribute to economic prosperity.
 - We adopted the 15-year Longbridge Area Action Plan which is expected to create up to 10,000 new jobs.

Backing Birmingham 2010/11

- A £10.5m Business Loan Fund is being delivered in partnership with Investbx, offering loans of £50k to £1m to larger companies.
- We are helping local neighbourhoods, through externally funded initiatives designed to develop skills and assist people into employment such as the Apprenticeship Scheme and Jobs for the Future.
- The Council showcased business opportunities and benefits of digital technologies and social media for economic growth to over 350 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs.

Stay safe in a clean and green city

- The safeguarding, well-being and achievement of children and young people in Birmingham will be maintained and improved. In particular we will provide more and better support for families so that fewer children need to come into the care system, and we will increase the number of local family placements for those that do.
- We will continue to deliver a personalised adult social care service, and invest £8m so that more people can live independently and enjoy a higher quality of life.
- Through the Safer Birmingham Partnership, the city council and other statutory and voluntary agencies will continue to work with local communities to make Birmingham a safe city to live in, work in and visit.
- Additional funding will be provided for waste disposal to reflect legislative and contractual commitments. 2010/11 is also expected to see major additional investment to improve and maintain the city's road network via a new 25 year Private Finance Initiative contract. The capital budget includes measures to tackle traffic congestion and increase road safety, improvements to recycling and depot facilities, continuing support for the New Street Station Gateway project and a programme of highway improvement schemes chosen by local people.

Enjoying a high quality of life

- A major new council home building programme will start with the construction of 129 properties in the first phase of the Municipal Housing Trust programme and the planning of future phases will follow. We will continue to invest in our council homes with over £250m planned over the next three years, including a large scale structural investment programme and Decent Homes Plus programme.
- Investment of over £50m is planned over the next three years in private sector housing to assist in developing new affordable housing, home adaptations and decent homes. Extra money will be provided to meet the pressures of costs of temporary accommodation for people made homeless because of the economic downturn.

Backing Birmingham 2010/11

- We will be driving forward sporting and cultural improvements to help the local economy, inspire participation by local people and enhance Birmingham's reputation by:
 - progressing construction of the new Library of Birmingham and Harborne Pool and Fitness Centre (the first stage of the modernisation of our swimming pools)
 - bidding to be the UK City of Culture in 2013
 - improving Alexander Stadium to be a training base for Olympic teams and attract new events.

Be Healthy

- Working with the Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT, the 'Be Active' scheme has had half a million attendances since its launch in April 2009. Approximately 65,000 people have registered for the award-winning 'Gym for Free' scheme in Constituencies. Following the city-wide launch in September 2009, an additional 16,000 new customers have signed up.
- The World and Birmingham EDF Half Marathon took place in October 2009, with new championship records being set for both the men's and women's races. Entries increased from the previous year, from 9,000 to 12,300 and more are expected this year.

Making a contribution

- We will continue to fund local priorities through our 'Community Chest' programme worth £4m.
- The city council has published the new statutory 'Duty to Inform, Consult and Involve' guidance on how you can help influence decisions made in the city.
- We have published 'Be Involved' which informs staff and the public about opportunities for getting involved and influencing decision-making

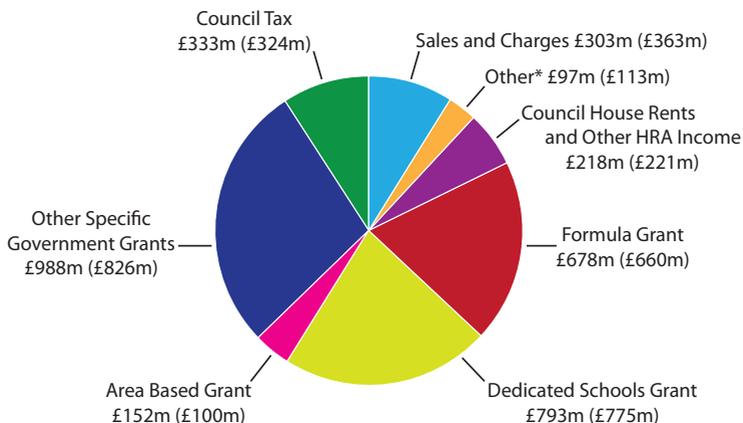
Providing value for money

- Savings of £69m have been identified to address key priorities and other calls on council resources. Our 10 year business transformation programme which redesigns services to deliver them more cost effectively will contribute significantly to achieving the savings.

How budgets are put together

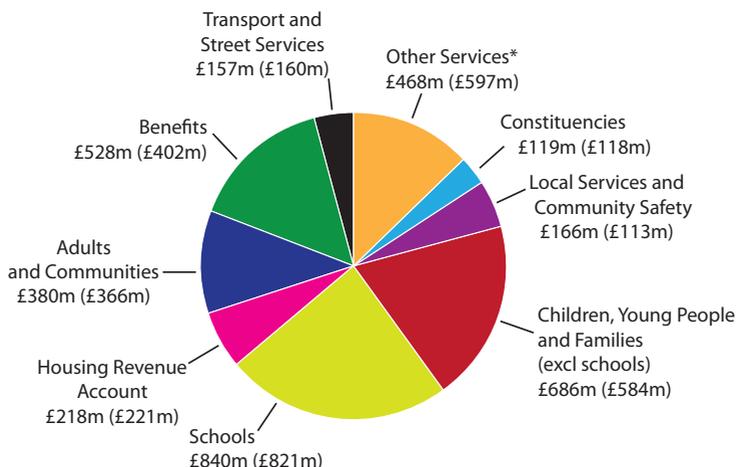
Revenue expenditure involves spending by the Council on the day-to-day running costs, e.g. employees, premises, supplies and services.

Where the money comes from 2010/11 – Total £3,562m (£3,382m) (2009/10 figures in brackets)



*Other includes: Rents £59m (£60m); Other Grants & Contributions £34m (£28m); Transfer from Collection Fund £3m (2010/11 only); Application of Corporate Resources and Temporary Use of Corporate Reserves £1m (£25m).

Where the money is spent 2010/11 – Total £3,562m (£3,382m) (2009/10 figures in brackets)



*Other Services includes: Central departments/budgets £259m (£317m); Leisure, Sport & Culture £68m (£70m); Regeneration £66m (£71m); Housing General Fund £44m (£106m); Regulatory Committees £31m (£33m).

Spending and council tax

	'09/'10 £m	'10/'11 £m
Total spending	3,381.8	3,561.9
Less: income	-2,397.9	-2,548.6
City Council budget requirement	983.9	1,013.3
Less: formula grant	-660.1	-678.0
transfer from Collection Fund	-	-2.6
TO BE FINANCED BY COUNCIL TAX	323.8	332.7

HOW SPENDING HAS CHANGED FROM 2009/10

	£m
CITY COUNCIL BUDGET REQUIREMENT 2009/10 WAS:	983.9
Inflation (non schools)*	-1.5
Budget pressures and policy choices	+67.5
Efficiency savings	-69.0
Net change in use of reserves and one-off resources	+27.2
Financing costs	+6.1
Other	-0.9
CITY COUNCIL BUDGET REQUIREMENT 2010/11 IS:	1,013.3

* schools are funded by a separate grant

	'09/'10	'10/'11	% change
Charge to council taxpayers	£323.874m	£332.663m	+2.71
Divided by the taxbase (Band D property equivalents)	296,341	298,709	+0.80
Council tax for City Council services (Band D)	£1,092.91	£1,113.67	+1.90
Fire and Rescue Authority precept	£46.90	£47.83	+1.99
Police Authority precept	£97.98	£99.45	+1.50
Gives a total council tax (Band D)	£1,237.79	£1,260.95	+1.87

New Frankley in Birmingham Parish Council is levying a precept for 2010/11. Its charge will be made only to council taxpayers in the parish and amounts to £90,370, equivalent to £43.14 per property in Band D.

Detailed council tax figures and efficiency statement

Council tax 2010/11

Band	City Council	Fire and Rescue Authority	Police Authority	Total	New Frankley in Birmingham Parish	
					Parish Precept	Parish Total
	£	£	£	£	£	£
A	742.44	31.89	66.30	840.63	28.76	869.39
B	866.19	37.20	77.35	980.74	33.55	1,014.29
C	989.92	42.52	88.40	1,120.84	38.35	1,159.19
D	1,113.67	47.83	99.45	1,260.95	43.14	1,304.09
E	1,361.15	58.46	121.55	1,541.16	52.73	1,593.89
F	1,608.63	69.09	143.65	1,821.37	62.32	1,883.69
G	1,856.11	79.72	165.75	2,101.58	71.90	2,173.48
H	2,227.34	95.66	198.90	2,521.90	86.28	2,608.18

Did you know?

The City Council's five-year council tax increase (2005/06 – 2009/10) was below the rate of inflation and the average rate of other groups of councils. If we had increased our council tax in line with inflation, or at the average rate of other groups of councils, over those five years then our 2009/10 Band D council tax could have been larger by:



Efficiency Statement

An efficiency saving occurs when the cost of an activity falls, but its effectiveness is not reduced. All councils are required to measure and report the value of efficiency savings they have achieved since April 2008.

Birmingham City Council continues with its plans to deliver important cash-releasing efficiency projects. This includes its business transformation programme which is expected to make further significant savings in 2009/10 through initiatives such as the better buying of goods and services and more streamlined and automated back-office support services. The table overleaf shows the value of efficiency savings achieved by the end of March 2009 and forecast to be achieved by the end of March 2010.

Efficiency Statement (continued) – Birmingham City Council

Value of efficiency savings achieved by 31 March 2009 since 1 April 2008	£39,300,000*
Value of efficiency savings forecast to be achieved by 31 March 2010 since 1 April 2008	£79,693,000*
Value of efficiency savings forecast to be achieved by 31 March 2010 since 1 April 2008 per Band D dwelling	£269
National average value of efficiency savings forecast to be achieved by 31 March 2010 since 1 April 2008 per Band D dwelling for similar authorities	£227

* The City Council has reinvested the money released by the efficiency savings to meet increased demand for services and new service priorities, and to keep down its level of council tax increase.

Environment Agency Midlands Region

The Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rating (Demand Notices) (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended)

The Environment Agency as a levying body for its flood defence functions, under the above regulations, provides the following information. The Environment Agency has powers in respect of flood defence along 4,682 km of main river along with tidal and sea defences, in the area of the Severn Trent Regional Flood Defence Committee. Flood defence money is spent on the construction of new flood defence schemes, the maintenance of the river system and existing flood defences together with the operation of a flood warning system. The financial details are:

Severn Trent Regional Flood Defence Committee

	2009/10	2010/11
Gross Expenditure	£56.100m	£63.822m
Levies raised	£3.075m	£3.000m
Total Council Tax Base (Band D)	2,888,934	2,907,617

The majority of funding for flood defence comes directly from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). However, where there are schemes which do not attract central funding the agency may seek funding from county and metropolitan councils, unitary authorities and London Boroughs in the form of a local levy. The local levy is shared on the basis of Band D equivalents between all contributing bodies within the committee area.

Changes in the gross budgeted expenditure between the years is mainly due to an enhanced capital programme based on national prioritisation. The total local levy raised has decreased from £3,075,000 in 2009/10 to £3,000,000 for 2010/11. Birmingham's share in 2010/11 is £308,000.

Council tax – help and information

If you have any difficulty understanding this part of the leaflet or you want more help with your council tax, you can:

Log on to the council tax website at: www.birmingham.gov.uk/council-tax

You will find information about council tax, along with forms you can use to ask questions about your account, or to tell us about changes in your circumstances. Please quote your account reference number, if you have one.

Telephone: 0121 303 1113

Lines are open from 8.00am to 8.00pm (Monday to Friday)

Our call centres can be busy in the morning, if this is the case, please try calling again later in the day.

All calls may be monitored / recorded for training and quality purposes.

Translation services are available.

Text phone: 0121 303 1119 (Registered Users Only)

Write to: Birmingham City Council, Resources Department (Revenues and Benefits), P.O.Box 5, Birmingham B4 7AB

E-mail us using the address shown on the front of your bill.

or visit us at: www.birmingham.gov.uk/business-rates and
www.birmingham.gov.uk/council-tax

Go to any Neighbourhood Office (see information on page 17). You may need an appointment. Please Telephone: 0121 303 1113

Fair Processing Statement – Customer First

Any personal data held by Birmingham City Council in relation to your council tax or business rates bill will be held in full compliance with the legal obligations as set out in the Data Protection Act 1998 and in accordance with the Council's new Privacy Policy. A copy is available at any Council Neighbourhood office, Council Library or on the Birmingham City Council web site: www.birmingham.gov.uk/privacy

Birmingham City Council will incorporate the names and addresses held in the council tax and business rates systems into the new Customer Services Systems. This is in line with the Privacy Policy.

Council tax – help and information

Changes in circumstances

You are required by law to inform the Council if there is a change that affects your council tax. For example; if you receive a discount or exemption and the discount or exemption conditions no longer apply. An example is where you receive a discount for being the only person over 18 years of age living at your property. You should also advise us if you change address or if a different person should now be liable to pay the bills.

You should note that if your income has changed and you are claiming, or wish to claim, council tax benefit, you can contact your local Neighbourhood Office. If you have recently started work after claiming Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance or have recently become unemployed you need to contact your local Jobcentre Plus. Any claim for council tax benefit will be passed by them to the Benefit Service.

You must inform the Resources Department (Revenues and Benefits) with 21 days. Failure to do so, without reasonable excuse, could result in a financial penalty.

Help and information for visually impaired

Please telephone 0121 303 1113 to register for our large print services. We can provide you with information relating to your council tax bill in large print, audiotape or Braille.

Neighbourhood offices

You can get help and advice at any of the following Neighbourhood Offices:

Please note that appointments must be arranged in advance by calling 0121 303 1113.

Acocks Green	3 Botteville Road, Acocks Green	B27 7YE
Bartley Green	Monmouth Road, Bartley Green	B32 3LX
Bromford	Cameronian Croft, off Bromford Drive, Bromford	B36 8UB
Castle Vale	Spitfire House Community Campus High Street, Castle Vale	B35 7PR
Cotteridge	9 Pershore Road South, Cotteridge	B30 3EE
Druids Heath	Druids Heath Library, Idmiston Croft, Druids Heath	B14 5NJ
Erdington	Civic House, 101 Sutton New Road, Erdington	B23 6RE
Frankley	Frankley Community Library, New Street, Frankley	B45 0EU
Handsworth	12 Dawson Road, Handsworth	B21 9HS
Handsworth Wood	13 College Road, Handsworth Wood	B20 2HU
Hawkesley	50 Hawkesley Square, Kings Norton	B38 9TU
Kings Heath	38 Silver Street, Kings Heath	B14 7QU
Kingstanding	20 Rough Road, Kingstanding	B44 0UY
Ladywood	Botany Walk, St Vincent Street West, Ladywood	B16 8ED
Newtown	New Aston House, Newtown Shopping Centre	B19 2SW
Northfield	1a Vineyard Road, Northfield	B31 1PG
Perry Beeches	174 Beeches Road, Perry Barr	B42 2HN
Perry Common	599 College Road, Kingstanding	B44 0AY
Quinton	Four Dwellings Centre, Quinton Road West, Quinton	B32 2RJ
Saltley	54 Highfield Road, Washwood Heath	B8 3QU
Shard End	Shustoke Road, Shard End	B34 7BB
Small Heath	349 Coventry Road, Small Heath	B10 0SN
Sparkbrook	Greencoat House, 261 Stratford Road, Sparkbrook	B11 1QS
Sparkhill	641 Stratford Road, Sparkhill	B11 4DY
Stechford	189 Meadway, Kents Moat	B33 8NB
Sutton Coldfield	2nd Floor Library Building, 45 Lower Parade, Sutton Coldfield	B72 1XX
Yardley Wood	201 School Road, Yardley Wood	B14 4ER

Council tax bands

Council tax is the way the City Council receives some of the money it needs to provide local services. The amount you pay is based on the value of your property. There are 8 bands set by the Government. Your band is shown on your council tax bill.

Band	Property value	Band	Property value
A	Up to and including £40,000	E	£88,001 - £120,000
B	£40,001 - £52,000	F	£120,001 - £160,000
C	£52,001 - £68,000	G	£160,001 - £320,000
D	£68,001 - £88,000	H	More than £320,000

Appeals against banding

You can appeal against the banding of newly occupied properties, or properties which have had a major change in structure, or use of facilities. It is not possible to appeal on the grounds of general changes in the property market, or if an appeal has been made before. The property value is based on 1991 prices.

If you have any questions concerning the banding of your property, contact:

The Listing Officer, Valuation Office Agency, Regent Court, 14-17 George Road, Birmingham, B15 1NU Telephone: 0121 410 3700, or visit www.voa.gov.uk

Council tax liability

The person liable to pay council tax is the person who first fits one of the descriptions listed below, starting with 1, and working through to 6. More than one person can be held liable if they are on the same level. Husbands and wives, or partners may also be jointly and severally liable. In some cases, the owner of a property will always be held liable, rather than the residents (e.g. houses in multiple occupation, care homes or nursing homes, etc.).

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Resident owner | 4. Resident with a licence to occupy |
| 2. Resident leaseholder | 5. Resident aged 18 or over |
| 3. Resident statutory or secure tenant | 6. Owner |

Appeals against liability

If you think that you are not the person who should have to pay council tax, see Help and Information.

You should not withhold payment of your council tax whilst an appeal is being dealt with by the valuation office agency or we are processing your application for council tax benefit.

Council tax reductions

People with disabilities

If your home has special facilities for someone in your household who is disabled, it may be possible to get your bill reduced. You may be able to get a reduction if, for example:

- You have a room needed by the disabled person for a special purpose (e.g. dialysis equipment).
- You have an extra bathroom or kitchen for the disabled person.
- There is enough floor space for someone who uses a wheelchair within the home.

You will need to complete an application form to request this reduction.

Personal discounts

The full bill is only payable if there are at least two adults living in the property. In certain circumstances you may be entitled to a reduction:

- If you are the only adult living in your property you can apply for a 25% discount.
- If there are no adults living in the property (e.g. second home or an unoccupied furnished accommodation), you can apply for a 10% discount.

Some people are not counted when looking at the number of adults in a property. The main categories are:

- Full-time students, student nurses, apprentices and youth training trainees.
- People who are severely mentally impaired.
- People caring for someone living in the property who has a disability, and who is not their spouse, partner or child aged under 18 years.
- 18 and 19 year olds who are at, or who have just left, school or college.
- Patients resident in hospital.
- People who are being looked after in care homes.
- People in prison (except those in prison for non-payment of council tax or a fine).

For further information, or to make an application please visit www.birmingham.gov.uk/Discounts-and-Exemptions-Form or contact Council Tax Customer Services on 0121 303 1113.

Exemptions

Exempt properties

Some properties are exempt from council tax. For a full list please visit www.birmingham.gov.uk/Exemptions

However, the main categories are:

- an unoccupied, unfurnished property having major alterations or repairs, for a maximum of 12 months;
- an unoccupied, unfurnished property, for a maximum of 6 months;
- a property left unoccupied by a person detained in custody;
- a property left unoccupied by patients now resident in a hospital or care home;
- a property left unoccupied because the owner or tenant has died, for a maximum of 6 months after probate has been granted;
- a property left empty by people receiving care;
- a property left empty by people providing care;
- a property left empty by someone who is now a full-time student living elsewhere;
- a property occupied solely by full-time students, or by some non-British dependants of students;
- a property left empty by a bankrupt;
- a vacant caravan pitch or boat mooring;
- a property occupied only by people aged under 18 years;
- an unoccupied annexe which cannot be let separately without a breach of planning control;
- a property occupied only by people who are severely mentally impaired (including the liable person);
- certain properties occupied by diplomats;
- an annexe occupied by an elderly or disabled relative.

You will need to complete an application form to request any reduction or exemption.

For further information, or to make an application please visit www.birmingham.gov.uk/Discounts-and-Exemptions-Form or contact Council Tax Customer Services on 0121 303 1113.

Council tax benefit

Council tax benefit is money off your council tax bill. Council tax benefit can be paid in addition to any other reductions in your bill, for example because you live alone. You may still qualify for council tax benefit even if:

- You are working
- You have other income such as a works pension or a private pension
- You have savings, unless these are more than £16,000

How much am I entitled to?

The amount of council tax benefit you get depends on your individual circumstances. It takes account of any income you (and that of a partner, if you have one) get from working, pensions, benefits and tax credits, any savings over £6,000 and your household circumstances including the circumstances of any other people who live with you.

Single people, couples and families can get council tax benefit. There is no minimum amount of council tax benefit. Even if you are only entitled to £1 per week that still means over £50 coming off your bill. For example:

- A pensioner living alone with a council tax bill for £750 might still get some help where their weekly income is as much as £205 per week;
- A pensioner couple with a £1000 bill could be getting as much as £300 per week and still qualify;
- A couple with 3 children who are working could also get help if their income (including child benefit and tax credits) is as much as £385 per week.

Remember: These are only examples. You could get more if your council tax bill is more than £1,000 or someone in your household is sick or disabled, so check it out now, even if you think you will not be entitled.

If your income is too high to qualify but you are a single person living with another adult who is not your partner and who is on a low income, you might still get some help. This is called a 2nd Adult Rebate and is worked out based on the income of the person who is living with you.

Millions of council tax benefit goes unclaimed each year

Every year thousands of people in Birmingham who are entitled to council tax benefit do not claim. This means that all of these people are having to pay more council tax than they should.

Council tax benefit

Getting help and advice

Some people might not know how to claim, others might think it is too complicated.

If you have not claimed council tax benefit but would like to know if you are entitled or would like us to send you an application form, ring us today on 0121 464 7000.

You can also visit any Neighbourhood Office (see page 17) where staff will be happy to help you make your claim. Please note that you may have to make an appointment at some Neighbourhood Offices. To find your nearest Neighbourhood Office you can call 0121 303 1111 or see the list in this booklet.

If you already get council tax benefit you do not need to make a new claim. Your benefit has already been taken off your bill. But you **must** tell us straight away if your circumstances change.

In and out work

If you have recently started work after claiming Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance you now only need to contact your local Jobcentre Plus. They will take the details from you in relation to your housing benefit and council tax benefit and pass these to the Benefit Service.

If you are no longer in employment, you only need to visit your local Jobcentre Plus. They will take your details from you and pass them to the Benefit Service. These will be used to calculate your housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Benefit fraud – Help us stamp it out

Do you know anyone committing Benefit Fraud (or any other type of fraud) against the Council? If you want to report a suspected benefit fraud, you should call, in confidence, the Local Authority Fraud Hotline on 0800 328 6340, (0800 328 6341 Textphone), or write to P.O. Box 9990 Birmingham B1 2YS, or e-mail fraudhotline@birmingham.gov.uk

Make life easier with Direct Debit

During 2009/10 the number of households paying council tax by Direct Debit has increased to 52% from 43%. It really is the most convenient way of paying and all payments are covered by the Direct Debit Guarantee Scheme. To pay by this method please ring 0121 303 1113.

Service improvement

The Council has tracing software which enables us to identify and recover outstanding council tax from people who leave their property without paying.

Comments / compliments / complaints – your views

We are committed to providing our customers with a good level of service and support the City Council's Your Views policy.

If you would like to raise anything about the service you have received whether it is a comment, compliment or complaint, please let us know by visiting www.birmingham.gov.uk/yourviews or contact us using the details available in the help and information section of this booklet.

Alternatively, you can complete one of the Customer Views feedback forms, which can be found at any of the city's Customer Enquiry Service Points, and return it to the freepost address stated on the form.

How to pay

Please note that your payment date is the 1st of the month, commencing in April, unless you pay by direct debit when you will have a choice of payment dates. Direct debit payers have the choice of paying on 8, 15, 21 or 28 of the month.

Direct Debit is the easiest way to pay, and you are protected by the Direct Debit guarantee.

This method is available for monthly instalments only.

If you would like to pay your council tax by Direct Debit, it could not be simpler. Just call us on 0121 303 1113, advise us of your chosen payment date and provide us with your relevant details. We will do the rest.

Online – Visit www.birmingham.gov.uk/council-tax where you can make payment by Debit or Credit card.

By Telephone using Debit / Credit Card – Call 0121 464 2001 to make payment on the 24 hour Automated Payment System, or 0121 303 1113 Monday – Friday 8.00 am – 8.00 pm, (except Bank Holidays) and your payment can be taken.

If you pay by any of the following methods, you must allow 5 days for your payment to reach us.

Payment Card – If you have a payment card, you can take this to any Post Office. If you pay by cheque at the Post Office you must make it payable to 'Post Office Ltd'. You can also pay at any shop displaying the PayPoint or PayZone logo – **only cash** is accepted at these outlets.

By Post – to Birmingham City Council, Resources Department (Revenues & Benefits), P.O. Box 5, Birmingham B4 7AB. Cheques / Postal Orders should be made payable to Birmingham City Council – writing your Payment Reference number on the reverse. Please do **not** send your Payment Card, if you have been issued with one. Cash must not be sent in the post and **do not staple, pin or fold cheques**. Receipts will only be issued if a stamped self-addressed envelope is provided.

If the front of your bill shows that you will be paying by Payment Card you should continue to use the card sent to you last year.

Whether you choose the Post Office, Paypoint or Payzone please take your payment card with you.

Don't fall into the debt trap

All payments must be received by the due dates shown on your bill, or you will receive a Reminder Notice. If payments are not made on time, you may be subject to enforcement action. This can involve bailiff action, deductions from your income, bankruptcy proceedings, Charging Order or an application to commit you to prison. Substantial costs are involved – which you will have to pay.

If you have difficulties paying your council tax, please contact us on 0121 303 1113. To pay by Direct Debit and avoid missing your payments, please visit www.birmingham.gov.uk/directdebit. You can also ring 0121 303 1113.

Paying by Direct Debit ensures you do not miss payments.

For information about all Council services visit our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk

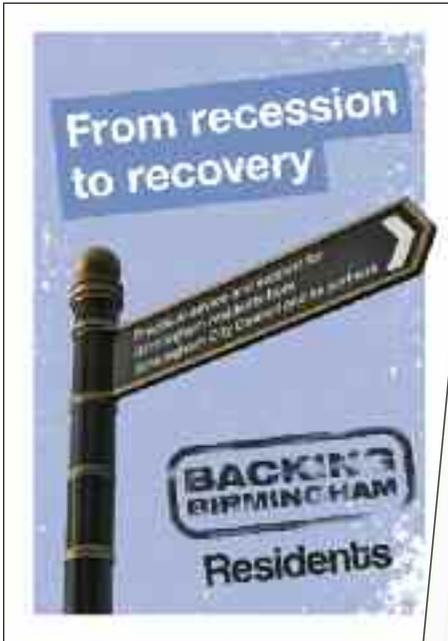
Useful contact details

Council Tax Customer Services – www.birmingham.gov.uk/council-tax	0121 303 1113
The Benefit Service – www.birmingham.gov.uk/benefits	0121 464 7000
Valuation Office Agency – www.vo.a.gov.uk	0121 410 3700
Refuse Collection – www.birmingham.gov.uk/refusecollection	0121 303 1112
Adult and Communities (Out of Hours) –	0121 675 4806
Home Care Services (Out of Hours) –	0121 464 5001
Homelessness – www.birmingham.gov.uk/homeless	0121 303 7410
Trading Standards – www.birmingham.gov.uk/tradingstandards	0121 303 6031
Benefit Fraud – e-mail fraudhotline@birmingham.gov.uk	0800 328 6340

This leaflet explains council tax and the Council's budget. If you cannot understand it, please go to your Neighbourhood Office or telephone 0121 303 1113 and you will be given help.

Backing Birmingham Booklets

Look out for the Backing Birmingham booklets, 'From Recession to Recovery' in leisure centres, libraries, public buildings and usual distribution centres.



To request a copy, or more information go to www.birmingham.gov.uk/backingbirmingham



GLOBAL CITY LOCAL HEART



