

Contributing to **your community**



Your 2012/13 **Council Tax**

This online booklet forms part of your demand notice

Dear Council Tax payer

By paying **Council Tax**, residents play an extremely important role in helping the council provide a wide range of services for communities across West Lothian.

Each day, West Lothian Council provides services to local people, communities and businesses, which impact upon everyone in West Lothian. These include: schools, social care, roads maintenance, libraries, community facilities and waste services.

Council Tax is vitally important in helping to pay for all of these services and much, much more.

Council Tax in West Lothian has been frozen for the fifth year in a row and continues to be below the Scottish average. This has been achieved, in part, due to the council delivering services more efficiently.

Funding from the Scottish Government and ongoing income from Council Tax will enable the council to spend £391.996 million in 2012/2013.

During 2012/2013 the council will prioritise resources for early years and learning; support older people and vulnerable people; and provide support for voluntary organisations. In addition there will be a continued focus on programmes to reduce poverty; invest in early intervention programmes for families at risk, and deliver employment support for young people.

Two of the council's key aims are to make services more accessible and more effective for customers. For residents, this has also resulted in changes to the way residents can pay their Council Tax and it is now easier than ever before

to pay Council Tax and receive information. For example, residents can receive an electronic bill straight to their email inbox rather than a paper copy through the post, similar to the arrangement many people have for their bank statements. This has resulted in a number of benefits for both customers and the council. For example, bills reach customers quicker, and customers can ask questions online, which go straight to the council's Revenues Unit. Electronic billing also reduces administration costs, is safe and easy to use and is a much 'greener' way to receive your bill, as there is less paper used.

There are other efficient ways to pay Council Tax, such as via Direct Debit, which can also take the stress and inconvenience out of paying Council Tax.

The current economic climate continues to provide huge challenges for all councils and West Lothian Council is no different in that respect. However, West Lothian Council is committed to improving services for customers and ensuring resources are spent effectively and efficiently.



Councillor Peter Johnston
Leader of West Lothian Council

Contents

Your guide to council tax	page 4
2012 - 2013 council tax and combined water charges	page 4
How we work out council tax	page 5
Appeals against council tax bands	page 5
Charges for water and waste water	page 5
Who is responsible for paying council tax?	page 6
Appealing against who is responsible for paying council tax	page 6
Changes in your circumstances	page 6
Paying your council tax	page 7
Missed payments	page 7
Benefits	page 8
Discounts	page 9
Exemptions	page 9
Second homes and properties that have been empty for a long time	page 10
Help for disabled customers	page 10
Council tax energy efficiency discount scheme	page 10
Appeals	page 10
Spending on our services	page 11
Funding our services	page 12
Service standards: Revenues and Benefits	page 12-13
Customer survey results	page 13
Tell us about your changes in circumstances online	page 14

West Lothian offers a high quality of life for people who choose to make their home here.

Your guide to council tax

Council tax is an important source of funding for your council.

It helps us to:

- Raise standards of education;
- Protect local communities;
- Care for vulnerable people and elderly people;
- Improve the environment of our towns, villages and countryside; and
- Support and develop businesses.

With your help, we aim to make

West Lothian a better place to live, work and raise a family. This booklet gives you information about your council tax, spending on council services, and how, where and when we can help.

2012/13 council tax and combined water charges

Band	Value of the property	Multiplier to band D	Council tax (£)	Combined water & waste water charges (£)
A	Up to £27,000	6/9	£752.00	£262.38
B	£27,001 to £35,000	7/9	£877.33	£306.11
C	£35,001 to £45,000	8/9	£1,002.67	£349.84
D	£45,001 to £58,000	9/9	£1,128.00	£393.57
E	£58,001 to £80,000	11/9	£1,378.67	£481.03
F	£80,001 to £106,000	13/9	£1,629.33	£568.49
G	£106,001 to £212,000	15/9	£1,880.00	£655.95
H	Over £212,000	18/9	£2,256.00	£787.14

Council tax levels compared

Our council tax in band D 2012/13	£1,128.00
Our council tax in band D 2011/12	£1,128.00
Scottish average council tax in band D 2011/12	£1,149.00

How we work out council tax

The assessor, who works for the Lothian Valuation Joint Board, values your home and puts it into one of eight valuation bands from A to H. The value is based on how much your home was worth on the open market on 1 April 1991. Once we know how much money we need

to raise from council tax, we work out what someone living in a home in band D would have to pay. We then work out the council tax for the other bands by using the 'multiplier' set by the Scottish Government.

Note: The multiplier sets the amount of charge for each valuation band based on the charge for a property in band D. Band D is the starting point and all other bands are a proportion of band D. For example, band A is charged at six-ninths of band D and band H is charged at 18-ninths (double band D).

Appeals against council tax bands

You can appeal against your council tax band to the assessor. You must continue to pay your council tax until the assessor has made a decision on your appeal. For more details, contact:

The Assessor for the Lothian Valuation Joint Board,
17A South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9FL.
Phone: 0131 344 2500
Website: www.saa.gov.uk

Charges for water and waste water

Your council tax bill includes charges for water and waste-water services. By law, we must send you a bill for, and collect, these charges on behalf of Scottish Water. Scottish Water is responsible for setting these charges. The charges for water and waste-water are set separately. There is no change to the water and waste water charges for 2012-2013.

There is a reduction scheme to help some people on low incomes pay their water and waste-water charges. The reduction (up to 25%) helps households with two or more adults, who receive Council Tax Benefit and do not receive a council tax discount. The reduction will apply automatically and will be shown in your bill. You do not need to apply for the reduction.

If you have any questions about the level of these charges, please phone Scottish Water on **0845 601 8855**.

Who is responsible for paying council tax?

The person highest on the list below is usually responsible for paying.

- The owner who lives in the property.
 - The tenant who lives in the property.
 - The subtenant who lives in the property.
 - Someone else who lives in the property.
 - The owner if nobody lives in the property.
- Couples who are married, living together as husband and wife or civil partners are responsible, jointly and individually, for paying council tax even if their names are not on the bill.
- Joint owners or tenants are also responsible, jointly and individually, for paying the council tax even if their names are not on the bill.

Note: 'Jointly and individually' means that the amount on the bill is not split into shares. We can choose to collect the full amount of the council tax bill from anyone who is legally responsible for it. It is then up to the person who has to pay to get back a share from everyone else.

Appealing against who is responsible for paying council tax

You can appeal against the decision that you are responsible for paying council tax. You must continue to pay your council tax until we have made a decision on your appeal.

Please write to: **Revenues and Benefits Manager**
Revenues Unit
St David House
South Bridge Street
Bathgate EH48 1TT.
email: CouncilTax@westlothian.gov.uk

Changes in your circumstances

You must tell the Revenues Unit about any change that may affect the amount of council tax you have to pay. You must tell them within 21 days of the change.

Examples would be:

- You are moving to a different address, or
- Another adult moves into your home and you are receiving a council tax discount.

These changes and others can be reported at www.westlothian.gov.uk by clicking on **online forms** and then **Council Tax**.

Paying your council tax

Your bill shows you how much you must pay and when you must pay it.

You can choose to receive your bill electronically rather than a paper copy. If you want to receive your bill electronically please email CouncilTax@westlothian.gov.uk and confirm your council tax number, name and address.

Direct debit

Choosing to pay your council tax by direct-debit takes the stress and inconvenience out of paying your bill. You'll no longer have to worry about arranging to make a payment each month. Payments are covered by your bank's direct-debit guarantee, so you're still in complete control and your money is safe and secure.

If you pay by direct-debit, it takes up less of our time. This keeps our costs low and means better value for everyone.

Call **01506 776982** with your bank details and council tax account number and one of our friendly staff will set up your direct debit for you. Alternatively, you can complete our online direct debit form by logging on to www.westlothian.gov.uk and click on "online forms".

Missed payments

We must receive your council tax payment on or before the payment date detailed on your bill. If we don't,

we will ask you to make the missed payment within seven days. If you do not do this, you will lose your right to pay in instalments after another seven days. The amount you owe for the rest of the year will then be due immediately and we will apply to the Sheriff Court for a 'summary warrant', which allows us to collect the taxes you owe us. At this stage we will add costs of 10% of the amount you owe.

You can also pay your council tax in the following ways.

By debit or credit card

- Log on to www.westlothian.gov.uk and click on 'online payments'.
- Phone our payment line on **01506 775050**. Lines are open every day from 8am to 10pm.

Bank transfer

Please quote sort code **800880**, bank account number **00918781** and your council tax account number.

For more details on paying your council tax, please see the back of your council tax bill.

So if you do not pay, you may end up having:

- Money taken from your wages;
- Your bank account "frozen" which means you cannot use all of the money in the account;
- Money taken from your Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance; or
- Your goods taken away and sold at auction.

If you are having difficulties paying your council tax, please call us now on **01506 776982** so that we can help.

Benefits

You may be entitled to help with paying your council tax or rent (or both), depending on your income and circumstances.

What benefits are available?

- Housing Benefit is help towards the cost of rent for the property you live in.
- Council Tax Benefit is help towards the council tax bill for your home.

Who can apply for benefit?

- For council tax – the person responsible for paying the council tax bill for your property.
- If you pay rent to us – the tenant of a council house.
- If you pay rent to a private landlord or housing association – the tenant or joint tenant of the property.

Second adult rebate

If you have another adult living in your home who is on a low income and who is not your partner, you may receive help even if you do not qualify for main Council

Getting the benefit

At West Lothian Council we are always aiming to improve our information and make it easier for you to use our services. If you want to apply for Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, you have the option to use our intelligent online benefit application form. There are also online forms for reporting a change of circumstances or reporting a suspicion of fraud.

If you pay both council tax and rent, you need to fill in only one application form. If you are a student, you may not be able to claim unless you have exceptional circumstances.

What information we need

- Details of the people living in your household.
- Details of any income, savings and state benefits you and your partner (if you have one) receive.
- If you have over £16,000 in savings, you will not be entitled to benefit unless you receive the guaranteed part of Pension Credit. We ignore the first £6,000 of savings if you are under pension age. For every £250 you have over that amount, we count £1 as income. If you are of pension age, we ignore the first £10,000 of savings and we count £1 as income for every £500 over that.

Tax Benefit. This may be up to 25% of your council tax bill. If you claim Council Tax Benefit and Second Adult Rebate, we will pay the higher of the two available benefits.

To use our forms go to www.westlothian.gov.uk/onlinefacilities/onlineforms/HousingBenefitandCTaxBenefit.

We also have a booklet that explains all aspects of the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit scheme. To see our booklet go to www.westlothian.gov.uk/17/592/?srid=1852840&apid=1852840

Discounts

You will get a discount on your council tax if:

- There is only one person aged 18 or over living in the property; or
- Nobody is living in the property.
- Unpaid care workers who care for someone other than their partner or a child aged under 18.

When deciding how many adults live in a property, we do not count certain people.

The most common examples of people we don't count are as follows.

- Full-time students, student nurses, apprentices.
- People who have severe mental-health difficulties.
- 18 and 19 year olds who are at school or who have just left school.
- Care workers who are paid no more than £44 a week.

If your circumstances change, you must tell us within 21 days.

By law West Lothian Council must protect the money we manage. We will share information you give us with other organisations responsible for auditing or managing public funds, to prevent and detect fraud.

We will review awards of discount and reserve the right to use credit reference agencies to validate any such awards.

Exemptions

You may get an exemption on your council tax if certain conditions exist. An 'exemption' means you do not have to pay council tax. The following are situations in which you don't have to pay council tax.

- If the estate of a person who has died is liable for paying council tax, it will not have to be paid for up to six months after the 'grant of confirmation' (legal proof that a person has permission to manage the estate).
- If nobody can live in the property because its structure is being repaired, improved or rebuilt. The exemption lasts for a maximum period of 12 months from the date someone last lived in the property.
- If nobody is living in the property and there is no furniture. The

exemption lasts up to six months from the date someone last lived in the property or the furniture was removed, whichever happens last.

- If everyone living in the property is a student.

If your circumstances change you must tell us within 21 days.

By law West Lothian Council must protect the money we manage. We will share information you give us with other organisations responsible for auditing or managing public funds, to prevent and detect fraud.

We will review awards of exemption and reserve the right to use credit reference agencies to validate any such awards.

Second homes and properties that have been empty for a long time

If you have a second home or a property that has been empty and unfurnished for more than 12 months, you will receive a 10% council tax discount.

This discount is only for your council tax charge. You will not get a 10% discount for your water and waste-water charges.

A second home is a home that is not a main home and is furnished.

Help for disabled customers

You could pay less council tax if a disabled person lives in the home and needs:

- An extra room to meet their needs; or
- An extra bathroom to meet their needs; or
- To use a wheelchair in the home.

actual property band.

You can apply for a disabled persons reduction at www.westlothian.gov.uk by clicking on **online forms** and then **Council Tax**.

If this is the case we will charge you the council tax for a band lower than your

Council tax energy efficiency discount scheme

You may be eligible for a one-off reduction of up to £75 (depending on the amount of Council Tax you have to pay) if you install energy efficiency measures in your home under the scheme.

For more information about the scheme, details of how to receive your reduction and impartial advice about energy saving

offers available, please contact West Lothian Council's partner at the Energy Saving Scotland advice centre on **0800 512012** or text **WARM** to **81025**.

Appeals

You can appeal against the amount of council tax you have to pay because we have not awarded a discount, an exemption or a reduction. You must continue to pay your council tax until we have made a decision on your appeal.

Please write to:
Revenues and Benefits Manager
 Revenues Unit
 St David House
 South Bridge Street
 Bathgate EH48 1TT.
 email: CouncilTax@westlothian.gov.uk

Spending on our services

The money we need to spend to provide services is set out in our yearly 'revenue budget'. This budget relates to all services except housing, which is funded entirely from money we receive from rent.

In 2012/13 we will spend £391.996 million, which is made up of the following

Gross spending	£406.005 million
Less fees and charges	£14.009 million
Net spending	£391.996 million

Gross spending is total spending. Net spending is spending, less fees and charges.

The budget sets how much services can spend each year. The 2012/13 budget for each service is as follows.

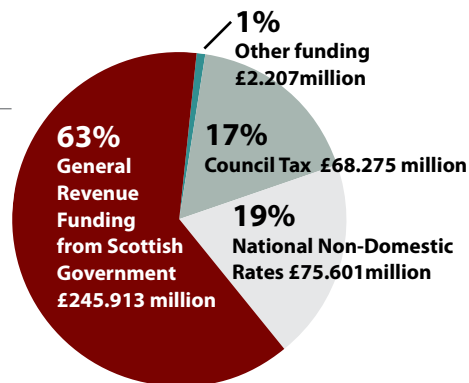
	Net spending	Movement from the previous year	Percentage change from the previous year	Breakdown of Council Tax in band D
	£million	£million	%	£
Education, Planning and Area Services	157.0	3.3	2.1	452
Community Health and Care Partnership and Social Policy	79.8	2.4	3.2	230
Corporate, Operational and Housing Services	71.6	0.2	0.2	206
Chief Executive / Finance and Estates	16.2	(0.4)	(2.3)	46
Police, Fire and Joint Valuation Boards	36.9	0.0	0.1	106
Non Service expenditure (including Capital Charges)	30.4	0.3	1.0	88
Total	391.9	5.8	1.5	1.128

Funding our services

Our budget for 2012/13 is £391.996 million. The money that funds our services comes from Scottish Government grant, National non domestic rates income and Council Tax. In 2012/13, we will receive £1,868 of grant for each person who lives in our area, compared with the national average of £2,090.

Scottish Government grants and non domestic rates income provide 82% of our funding. We raise the rest of the money we need to fund services mostly from council tax.

The chart of the right shows the various sources of funding for 2012/13



Staff numbers	
Full time equivalents	
January 2012	6493
January 2011	6785
Change	(292)

How we performed against the standards we set for 2010/11

Standard	Performance
To collect 94.5% of 2010-2011 Council Tax.	We collected 94.4% of what was due for 2010-2011 and will continue to collect all Council Tax debt that remains outstanding.
To deal with 85% of letters about Council Tax within 10 working days of receiving them.	90%
To deal with 90% of letters about Council Tax accurately, the first time we receive them.	94%
To answer 96% of non-abandoned telephone calls before the customer is asked to leave a voice mail message.	98%
To call back 98% of customers who have recorded a voice mail message within 2 working days.	100%
To look at 75% of our decisions again within 1 calendar month if you have told us that you think we have made the wrong decision.	98.8%
To ensure all work is carried out accurately.	98.4%
To calculate new claims and change of circumstances within 13.5 days of receipt.	10 days

Service standards: Revenues and Benefits

Customer care standards

We will:

- Deal with your enquiry fairly and sensitively;
- Deal with your enquiry promptly and accurately;
- Communicate with you clearly and make sure our documents are easily understood;
- Ask you regularly if our services are meeting your needs as we always aim to improve; and
- Work to remove barriers so you can communicate easily with us.

Core service standards

We will:

- Work with customers to achieve a service that meets your aims and achieves best value within our budget;
- Measure and monitor our performance against other revenues and benefits services; and
- Openly monitor and review our performance against our standards and publish the outcome.

Customer Survey Results 2010/11

- 93.4% of our customers rated the promptness of our service as good, very good or excellent.
- 94.5% of our customers rated our service's ability to resolve their issue at the first point of contact as good, very good or excellent.
- 96.6% of our customers rated our staff's knowledge and skills as good, very good or excellent.
- 95.9% of our customers stated that they were treated fairly and sensitively.
- 97.4% of our customers rated the overall quality of our customer service as good, very good or excellent

Tell us about your changes in circumstances online

As we work to make our service easier to access for our customers we have developed smart E-Forms. You can do the following online:

- Tell us about a change of address;
- Tell us if you are entitled or no longer entitled to single person discount;
- Complete a direct debit instruction to pay your Council Tax;
- Apply for a disabled persons reduction;
- Apply for Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit;
- Tell us about a change in circumstances that affects your Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit; and
- Report a suspicion of fraud.

More forms are becoming available all the time. To use our forms go to <http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/onlinefacilities/onlineforms/>

More information

This booklet is a guide only. For more information, please contact:

The Revenues Unit

St David House
South Bridge Street
Bathgate
West Lothian EH48 1TT

Phone: 01506 776800

Textphone: 01506 464427 (for people who are deaf or hard of hearing)

Text: Text 'CT' and your message to 07624802248

email: CouncilTax@westlothian.gov.uk

Website: www.westlothian.gov.uk

Freedom of Information and customers with special requirements (Scotland) Act 2002

West Lothian Council publishes a range of information online and on paper. The council has developed a Publication Scheme to show what information we make available to the public and the formats it is available in. Copies of the Publication Scheme are available at libraries and Council Information Services (CIS) centres. It is also available online: www.westlothian.gov.uk

Customers with special requirements

Information is available in Braille, tape, large print and community languages. Please contact the interpretation and translation service on: **01506 775000**

هذه المعلومات متوفرة بلغة بريل وعلى شريط وبخط كبير وبلغات الجالية.
الرجاء الإتصال بخدمة الترجمة على الهاتف 01506 775000

এই তথ্য আপনি ব্রেইল, টেপ, বড় অক্ষরে এবং কমিউনিটির বিভিন্ন ভাষাগুলিতেও পাবেন। অনুগ্রহ করে ইন্টারপ্রেটেশন অ্যান্ড ট্রান্সলেশন সার্ভিসের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করুন। টেলিঃ 01506 775000

這份資料是可以凸字、錄音帶、大字印刷及社區語言的式本提供。請聯絡傳譯及翻譯服務部，電話：01506 775000

ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ (ਬ੍ਰੇਲ) ਨੈਕ੍ਰੀਨ ਦੇ ਪੜ੍ਹਣ ਵਾਲੀ ਲਿਖੀ, ਟੇਪ, ਵੱਡੇ ਫਿੰਟ ਅਤੇ ਸਮਾਜ ਦੀਆਂ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ। ਸ਼ੁੱਧ ਵਰਕੇ ਇੰਟਰਪ੍ਰੀਟੇਸ਼ਨ ਅਤੇ ਟਰਾਂਸਲੇਸ਼ਨ ਸਰਵਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ : 01506 775000

یہ معلومات بریل (اندھوں کے رسم الخط)، ٹیپ، بڑے حروف کی طباعت اور کمیونٹی میں بولی جانے والی زبانوں میں دستیاب ہے۔ براہ مہربانی انٹرنیٹنگ اینڈ ٹرانسلیٹنگ سروس سے ٹیلیفون نمبر 01506 775000 پر رابطہ قائم کریں۔

Informacje te mogą być przelozone na jezyk Braille'a, dostepne na tasmie magnetofonowej lub wydane duzym drukiem oraz przetlumaczone na jezyki mniejszosci narodowych. Prosimy o kontakt z Uslugami Tlumaczeniowymi pod numerem 01506 775000.

Text phones offer the opportunity for people with a hearing impairment to access the council. The text phone number is **18001 01506 464427**. A loop system is also available in all offices.