

Help with Council Tax

If you have Parkinson's, or care for someone who does, you might be worried about how you'll manage financially. But there is some financial support available, so it's important to find out what you're entitled to.

This information explains what schemes are available to help with your Council Tax, who qualifies and how to claim.

The information in this publication is correct as of April 2019, but is subject to change.

What is Council Tax?

Council Tax is a charge made by your local council to cover services that they provide for you. It applies to England, Scotland and Wales.

There is no Council Tax in Northern Ireland, which still has a system of rates, using the rateable capital valuation of your home as the basis to calculate the amount owed.

The amount of Council Tax that you must pay varies from council to council, but all assessments are based on the property band that applies to your home.

Each property in Great Britain is placed on a valuation list in 1 of 8 broad valuation bands (9 in Wales). The lowest is band A and the highest is band H (A to I in Wales). The band that applies to your home will be written on your Council Tax bill.

There are many different ways to reduce your Council Tax bill, which vary depending on your personal circumstances.

For example, there are discounts you can get if you have a certain number of people in the house, and there are means-tested benefits that take into account your income and/or savings, such as Council Tax Reduction (which is sometimes called 'Support').

Help to pay when you can't afford it

There are four ways to reduce your council tax bill if you have low income and savings:

- Council Tax Reduction
- Second Adult Rebate
- Discretionary Payments
- Discretionary Relief

Each of these are described in this information sheet (see below).

Some people may qualify for several forms of discounts at the same time, so it's possible to combine different ways of reducing your Council Tax bill. Your council should explain how to do this on their website.

Council Tax Reduction

In England and Wales, if you receive one of the following means-tested benefits, you'll probably receive a substantial amount of help with your Council Tax bill:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- High levels of Tax Credits

As your income increases, the level of help you receive for your bill decreases.

Each council in England and Wales has its own way of calculating how much help you'll get towards your bill. It's best to check with your local council or visit the Council Tax Help website: www.counciltaxhelp.net

In Scotland there's one system that looks very similar to the old Council Tax Benefit, please contact your local council for details.

Pensioners in England, Scotland and Wales can receive 100% help with their bill if they receive the Guarantee element of Pension Credit or have a similarly low income.

For all age groups and locations, the amount you get may be reduced if other adults live in the property, such as grown-up children. This is known as a non-dependent reduction.

Second Adult Rebate

This is aimed at single people who can't claim their 25% single person discount because another adult (who is not their partner) lives at the same address.

This other adult must be on a low income and not liable for the Council Tax bill.

There are different levels of help available depending on the benefits the second person receives or how much income they get:

- **25%** if the other person is on Pension Credit, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, or Income Support
- **15%** if the other person has a gross weekly income of less than £193 a week
- **7.5%** if the other person has a gross weekly income between £193 and £249.99

Some councils have chosen not to offer this rebate to people of working age anymore. This means that in some areas, this discount is only available to people who are pension age.

Second Adult Rebate cannot be claimed at the same time as Council Tax Reduction.

Discretionary payments

You might be able to get a discretionary payment if you're finding it difficult to pay your Council Tax bill

Discretionary payments are means-tested (they take into account how much income and savings you have). You'll be asked for a lot of evidence to prove you can't afford your Council Tax bill.

Discretionary payments are paid as short-term payments to cover up to a year.

Each council has complete discretion (they can decide) on who they offer this support to, and how to offer this support. Each council has its own way of deciding who is given the payment.

If you've been refused a discretionary payment and you think the decision is wrong, you can always ask the council to look at their decision again.

The funding for discretionary payments comes from central government.

Discretionary relief

The 1992 Local Government Finance Act granted local councils the power to locally finance and pay local relief for your Council Tax bill if paying the bill is causing you 'severe financial hardship'.

Each Council has complete discretion in how they choose to award this relief, and who they decide to give it to. Most councils do not offer this help.

Help to pay because of your situation

There are three ways to reduce your Council Tax bill which look at your personal situation, and not how much income or savings you have. They are:

- Status Discount (including severe mental impairment)
- Disability Reduction
- Unoccupied and exempt accommodation

Each of these are described in this information sheet (see below).

Some people may qualify for several forms of discounts at the same time, so it's possible to combine different ways of reducing your Council Tax bill. Your council should explain how to do this on their website.

Status Discounts

The Status Discount is not means-tested (in other words, it's not affected by your income or savings).

The most common type of Status Discount is the one-person discount of 25%. This is where only one adult lives in the property.

Sometimes, other people living there might be ignored too and a 25% or 50% discount might be awarded.

Adults will be ignored if they:

- are living in a shelter, hospital or care home
- are in prison or detention
- are a full-time student
- are aged 18 to 19 and in full-time education
- are under 25 and in approved training (such as student nurses, youth trainees and some apprentices)
- are a carer for at least 35 hours a week for someone who lives with you, who is not your spouse, partner or child, and who receives a qualifying benefit (see below)
- have a severe mental impairment (see below).

Status Discount for carers

If you care for someone for at least 35 hours a week or more, and the person lives at your address, and they are not your spouse, partner or parent, you will qualify for a discount if the person you care for receives one of the following benefits:

- the high or middle rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance (only the high rate in Scotland)
- either rate of the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment (only the enhanced rate in Scotland)
- Attendance Allowance (only the high rate in Scotland)
- Armed Forces Independence Payment, or
- the highest rate of Constant Attendance Allowance.

Status Discount for severe mental impairment

A 'severe mental impairment' can be the result of health conditions like dementia. But there are many conditions that can lead to an impairment of cognitive or social functioning that can be described as a 'severe mental impairment'. Some people with Parkinson's may fit this description. Ask the GP if you think this is the case.

You're eligible for a Status Discount if you have a certificate from a medical professional (such

as a GP or consultant) which confirms that you have a permanent 'severe mental impairment'.

As well as this certificate, you must also receive one of the following benefits:

- the high or middle rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance
- either rate of the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment
- Employment and Support Allowance
- Attendance Allowance
- Armed Forces Independence Payment
- Constant Attendance Allowance
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit
- Income Support with a disability premium
- Universal Credit with either of the Limited capability elements
- Working Tax Credits with either of the disabled workers element, **or**
- You're over state pension age and you would get one of the above benefits, but because of your age you don't qualify.

If you live alone and you're 'severely mentally impaired', you're completely exempt from paying Council Tax – see the section 'Exempt and unoccupied accommodation' below.

It's possible for more than one person in a property to be ignored. For example, if there is a sister who provides 35 hours or more care per week for her brother who has a severe mental impairment and qualifies for the enhanced rate of Personal Independence Payment, both the sister and brother will be ignored. And if they're the only two people in the house then they will get a 50% discount on their Council Tax bill.

The Disability Reduction Scheme

This scheme is not means-tested so it doesn't take into account your income or savings. You also don't have to receive any qualifying benefits to get it.

If you qualify, the scheme reduces your Council Tax bill by one banding, i.e. from Band C to Band B, if the home has been adapted or changed in some way for someone with a substantial and permanent disability.

To qualify, the home should have at least one of the following:

- an additional bathroom or kitchen (which has been added for the use of a disabled person)
- a room (other than a toilet, bathroom or kitchen) which is used mainly by a disabled person for treatment or therapy
- enough space in the property for a wheelchair to be used indoors (the property may have been adapted to cater for wheelchair-use in this way).

Each council has its own application form and assessment is always done by home visit, so they can see the changes that have been made.

Disabled Person's allowance (Northern Ireland)

Disabled Person's Allowance is Northern Ireland's equivalent of the Disability Reduction Scheme. It gives you a 25% discount in rates for any household where the property has been adapted or has additional facilities added to suit the disabled person's needs.

Exempt and unoccupied accommodation

Some properties and your personal circumstances can mean you are completely exempt from Council Tax liability (meaning you don't have to pay).

You're exempt from paying if you or your property meet one of the following criteria:

- All occupants living in the property are under the age of 18
- You're in prison
- You're in hospital or a care home
- You're living away from the property elsewhere to care for someone
- You're a student studying elsewhere and the property is unoccupied
- Everyone in the property is a full-time student

- The only person living in the property has died and probate has yet to be granted (after it's been granted, the property is exempt for the next six months too)
- Occupation of the property is forbidden by law (for example, because of planning restriction or it's derelict)
- The property has been repossessed
- The person living in the property who is liable to pay Council Tax has become bankrupt and the property is part of the bankruptcy, **or**
- The resident(s) of the property are severely mentally impaired.

If everyone living in the property is severely mentally impaired, they must also receive one of the qualifying benefits listed under the heading 'Status Discount for severe mental impairment', above.

Secondly, a qualified medical practitioner (usually your doctor) must confirm to the council that in their medical opinion all resident(s) of the property have an impairment of their cognitive and social functioning that appears to be permanent, and they are, as a result, 'severely mentally impaired'.

How can I appeal a decision?

To challenge a Council tax decision, the appeal goes to the Local Council and then on appeal in England and Wales to the Valuation Tribunal, In Scotland it goes to the Valuation Appeals Committee.

You can appeal against decisions on:

- Council Tax exemptions
- Council Tax liability to pay
- where you are resident
- whether a Status Discount applies
- whether a Disability Reduction applies
- Council Tax Reduction awards
- discretionary payment award decisions
- Council Tax banding

You should first go to your local council. There is no time limit for lodging the appeal, but you should put your appeal in writing. If an appeal to your local

authority is refused, you can appeal to one of the following bodies:

- the Valuation Tribunal for England (www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk) within two months of receiving the decision, or within four months of your original appeal if your local council has not responded.
- the Valuation Tribunal for Wales (www.valuation-tribunals-wales.org.uk) within two months of receiving the decision, or within four months of your original appeal if your local council has not responded.
- the Valuation Appeal Committee in Scotland (www.saa.gov.uk) within four months of your original appeal.

More information and support

You can call our free confidential helpline for general support and information. Call **0808 800 0303** (calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks) or email hello@parkinsons.org.uk.

Our helpline can put you in touch with one of our Parkinson's local advisers, who give one-to-one information and support to anyone affected by Parkinson's. They can also provide links to local groups and services.

Our website parkinsons.org.uk has a lot of information about Parkinson's and everyday life with the condition. You can also find details of your local support team and your nearest local group meeting at parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou

Visit parkinsons.org.uk/forum to chat to other people with similar experiences on our online discussion forum.

Parkinson's nurses

Parkinson's nurses provide expert advice and support to people with Parkinson's and those who care for them. They can also make contact with other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

The role of the Parkinson's nurse varies. Each will offer different services, aiming to meet local needs. Some nurses are based in the community, whereas others are based in hospital settings.

Many Parkinson's nurses are independent prescribers. This means they can prescribe and make adjustments to medication, so someone with Parkinson's doesn't always need to see their specialist for changes to or queries about their Parkinson's drugs.

Parkinson's nurses may not be available in every area, but your GP or specialist can give you more details on local services.

You can find out more at parkinsons.org.uk/nurses

Thank you

Thank you to benefits specialist Barbara Knight for helping to update this information.

Can you help?

At Parkinson's UK, we are totally dependent on donations from individuals and organisations to fund the work that we do. There are many ways that you can help us to support people with Parkinson's.

If you would like to get involved, please contact our Supporter Services team on **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at parkinsons.org.uk/donate. Thank you.

Our information

All of our most up-to-date information is available at parkinsons.org.uk/informationsupport

If you'd prefer to read one of our printed leaflets or booklets, find out how to place an order at parkinsons.org.uk/orderingresources or by calling **0300 123 3689**.

We make every effort to ensure that our services provide current, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your health and social care team if you are worried about any aspect of living with Parkinson's.

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, including references and the sources of evidence we use, please contact us at publications@parkinsons.org.uk

Help with Council Tax (WB12/2018)

Do you have any feedback about this information? Your comments will help us ensure our resources are as useful and easy to understand as possible. Please return to [Information Content team, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ](#), or email publications@parkinsons.org.uk. Thank you!

1. Please choose the option that best fits you.

- I have Parkinson's and was diagnosed in I care for someone with Parkinson's
 I have a friend or family member with Parkinson's I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's
 Other (please specify)

2. Where did you get this information from?

- GP Specialist Parkinson's nurse Parkinson's UK local group Parkinson's UK local adviser
 Ordered directly from us Call to the helpline
 Other (please specify)

3. Has it answered all your questions?

- Yes, completely Yes, mostly Not sure Partly Not at all

4. How easy was it to understand?

- Very easy Easy Not sure Quite difficult Very difficult

We're the Parkinson's charity that drives better care, treatments and quality of life.

Together we can bring forward the day when no one fears Parkinson's.

Parkinson's UK
215 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 1EJ

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**
(Monday to Friday 9am–7pm, Saturday 10am–2pm).
Interpreting available.

NGT Relay **18001 0808 800 0303** (for use with smart phones, tablets, PCs and other devices). For more information see www.ngts.org.uk

hello@parkinsons.org.uk
parkinsons.org.uk



Order code: PKWB12

Last updated July 2019. We review our information within three years.
Please check our website for the most up-to-date versions of all our information.

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5. Has it helped you manage your condition better, or make choices that have improved your life in some way?

It helped a lot It helped a little No change It didn't help It made things worse

6. What is your ethnic background?*

Asian or Asian British Black or Black British Chinese Mixed White British White other
 Other (please specify)

*We ask about your ethnicity to ensure our information is reaching a broad range of people. However, this question is optional.

Want to hear more from us?

I would like a response to my feedback I would like to be a member of Parkinson's UK
 I'm interested in joining the Information review group, to offer feedback on Parkinson's UK information

If you've answered yes to any of these options, please complete your details below.

Name

Address

Email

Telephone

How would you prefer us to contact you? Email Post Phone

We will not pass on your details to any other organisation or third party. To find out more, read our privacy policy at parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions