

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 15 th November 2016
Report Subject	Council Tax Base for 2017-18
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Corporate Management
Report Author	Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Setting of the Council Tax Base is integral to the revenue budget and Council Tax setting process for 2017-18 and allows the Council, Police & Crime Commissioners Office for North Wales and Town/Community Councils to calculate next year's Council Tax precept.

The Base for 2017-18 has been calculated as 63,543 band D equivalent properties, after taking into account the total number of properties that will be subject to Council Tax, including the Premium, less those which are exempt from Council Tax or where household discounts apply.

Setting in the Tax Base at 63,543 also represents growth in the Tax Base of nearly 1.3% compared to the previous year, equivalent to an increase of 784 band D equivalent properties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Approve the Tax Base of 63,543 band D equivalent properties (as shown in Appendix 1) for the financial year 2017-18
2	Continue to set a 'nil' discount for properties falling within any of the Prescribed Classes (A, B or C) and for this to apply to the whole of the County area.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR 2017-18
1.01	The Council fulfils the role of 'billing authority' for the collection of Council Tax and each year is required to set the Council Tax Base for the following tax year.
1.02	The calculation of the Base is always set as at 31 st October each year which then allows the Council, the Police & Crime Commissioner for North Wales and Town/Community Council's to calculate next year's Council Tax precepts based on the estimated number of chargeable properties which are expressed as an equivalent number of Band 'D' properties.
1.03	From April 2017, local authorities in Wales, are able to use discretionary powers to charge a Council Tax premium of up to 100% of the standard rate of Council Tax on long term empty homes (unoccupied and unfurnished) and second homes (second homes/holiday homes that are furnished and not someone's main residence).
1.04	Earlier this year, the Council made a determination to introduce a 50% Premium for April 2017. Notwithstanding that many properties will be subject to an exception from the Premium for a further period of 12 months, the Council Tax Base now also includes a projection of those properties that may be subject to the Council Tax Premium in 2017-18.
1.05	Once approved, the Tax Base calculations are also supplied to Welsh Government and are then used for the calculation and distribution of Revenue Support Grant in the annual provision and the final local authority revenue settlement.
1.06	The calculation of the Tax Base for 2017-18 is the measure of the taxable capacity for all areas in the County and is calculated in accordance with prescribed rules. The starting point for determining the Base is the Valuation List supplied by the Valuation Office Agency. The total number of properties in each band is then reduced by exemptions and discounts. Discounts include, for example, reductions for single-persons or students.
1.07	The latest Tax Base has been calculated using a projected collection level of 99.0% with a 1% provision for bad debts. This ensures the Council sets the very highest collection level in Wales and demonstrates the successes in collecting Council Tax.
1.08	To determine the final level of the Base, the Council is also required to determine what discount, if any, is awarded to owners of second or holiday homes (otherwise known as Prescribed Discount Class A and B properties) or long term empty properties (Prescribed Discount Class C).
1.09	The Council Tax Base for 2017-18 has been calculated in line with the current policy of not awarding discounts to any Prescribed Class coupled with the fact that some of these properties will also be liable to pay the 50% Premium.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Setting the Tax Base is part of an annual process of determining Council Tax charges for the next financial year as part of the Councils overall 2017-18 budget preparations.
2.02	The Tax Base is also used by the Police & Crime Commissioner and Town/Community Council's to set their Council Tax precepts for 2017-18, which will be included in the bills sent to every Council Tax payer in March 2017.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	None.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	The Council has a statutory duty to set a Council Tax Base and the proposed Tax Base is a complex calculation requiring an accurate forecast for the next financial year of the number of chargeable properties after taking into account new builds, property exemptions and discount schemes, including those properties that will be subject to the 50% Council Tax Premium scheme from April 2017.
4.02	The key risks centre around financial prudence and accuracy of forecasts used to determine the Tax Base. This year, the introduction of the Council Tax Premium scheme makes these financial projections even more challenging as it is very difficult to predict with absolute certainty the number of properties that may be subject to the Premium from April 2017.
4.03	The Base is largely based on property data and discount levels at a fixed point in time (October 2016) but includes a bad debt provision of 1% for non-collection, giving a forecast collection rate of 99.0%. This is consistent with previous collection levels and minimises financial risk to the Council.
4.04	The Council Tax Base at 63,543 sets a Base at an accurate level to ensure as far as possible that a deficit does not occur in the Collection Fund.
4.05	Officers carefully track and monitor the Tax Base and Collection Fund performance on a monthly basis and the results feed into corporate budget monitoring and reporting processes.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 shows the breakdown of the Tax Base for 2017-18 by Town and Community area

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Local Government Finance Act 1992 – section 68 Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (Wales) Regulations 1995 The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (Wales) Regulations 2004 Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – section 139</p> <p>Contact Officer: David Barnes, Revenues Manager Telephone: 01352 703652 E-mail: david.barnes@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Revenue Support Grant: the annual amount of money the Council receives from Welsh Government to partly fund services, alongside revenue from Council Tax and other income the Council raises locally. Councils can decide how to use this grant across services although their freedom to allocate according to local choice can be limited by guidelines set by Government.</p> <p>Tax Base: is a measure of the Councils ‘taxable capacity’ taking into account the number of chargeable properties after exemptions and discounts.</p> <p>Chargeable Dwellings: are all properties deemed to fall liable to Council Tax which appear in the Valuation List.</p> <p>Prescribed Discount Classes: Special rules apply to certain dwellings where no-one is resident. In these cases, a Welsh billing authority may make a determination to apply a lower rate of discount or, to apply no discount at all. These classes are:</p> <p>Class A – property which is unoccupied and furnished but where occupation is prohibited by law for over 28 days each year, usually, as a result of planning restrictions</p> <p>Class B – property which is unoccupied and furnished and where occupation is not prohibited by law</p> <p>Class C – property which is unoccupied and substantially unfurnished beyond the normal exemption period.</p> <p>Council Tax Premium: an additional amount of Council Tax of up to 100% (a premium) can be charged by local authorities in Wales for property defined by Regulations as either being second homes or long term empty property</p> <p>For the purposes of charging a premium a long term empty home is defined as a property which is unoccupied and substantially unfurnished</p>

for a continuous period of at least 1 year. A second home is defined as a dwelling which is not a person's sole or main residence and is substantially furnished.

There are some exceptions from the Council Tax premium for a period of up to 12 months. For example, if the property is being actively marketed for rent or sale.