

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 17 November 2020
Report Subject	Council Tax Base for 2021/22
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets
Report Author	Chief Officer (Governance)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Setting of the Council Tax Base is integral to the revenue budget and Council Tax setting process for 2021/22 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 has been calculated at 65,026 Band 'D' equivalent properties, after taking into account the total number of properties that will be subject to Council Tax, less those which are exempt from Council Tax or where statutory household discounts apply.

Setting in the Tax Base at 65,026 Band 'D' equivalents also represents significant growth in the Tax Base of 0.73% compared to the previous year, equivalent to an increase of 472 band D equivalent properties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Approve the Tax Base of 65,026 band D equivalent properties for tax-setting purposes (as shown in Appendix 1) for the financial year 2021/22.
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.
3	Continue to set a 50% Premium for long term empty property and second homes falling into the Council Tax Premium scheme.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR 2021/22
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 in 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	The Council has previously made a determination to use discretionary powers to charge a 50% Council Tax Premium on long term empty homes and second homes. The continuation of this scheme in 2021/22 forms part of the Council Tax Base for Tax setting purposes.
1.04	Once approved, the Tax Base calculations (before adjusting for the assumed losses in collection) are also supplied to Welsh Government and are then used for the calculation of entitlements to Revenue Support Grant for 2020/21 and this figure will appear in The Local Government Finance Report (No 1) (Wales) 2021/22. This information will also be published in a national statistical release in January 2021.
1.05	The calculation of the Tax Base for 2021/22 is the measure of the annual taxable capacity for all areas in the County, including the additional taxable capacity for the Council Tax Premium, 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, disregards and discounts. Discounts include, for example, reductions for single-persons or students.
1.06	Council Tax collections in Flintshire continue to be ranked as amongst the very highest in Wales, reflecting the work of the service to enforce debts more effectively against those able to pay and make reasonable arrangements with those in genuine financial hardship.
1.07	Collection of Council Tax both locally and nationally remains challenging in the current economic environment, the loss of committal action for non-payment and the uncertainties of the global coronavirus pandemic.
1.08	The latest Tax Base has therefore been calculated using a projected collection level of 98.7% - a reduction of 0.2% compared to the projection (98.9%) for the previous years' Tax Base. The reduction also reflects the fall in the outturn 'in-year' collection levels for 2019/20. In other words, setting an assumed collection level of 98.7% is the level at which the Council will eventually collect from what is due to be paid and allows for an overall provision of 1.3% for bad debts.

1.09	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).
1.10	The Council Tax Base for 2021/22 has also been calculated in line with current policies of not awarding discounts to any Prescribed Class coupled with the fact that some properties are liable to pay the 50% Premium.
1.11	The second year continuation of the Council Tax Discount scheme for Local Authority Foster Carers from April 2021 is not incorporated into the Tax Base since locally-funded discretionary discounts or exemptions made by billing authorities under section 13a of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 are specifically excluded from the Tax Base calculations. This is because any decrease in the Tax Base made as a result of such discounts or exemptions would lead to an increase in entitlement to Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and hence to the discounts being funded by central rather than local government.

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 2021/22 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 2021/22, which will be included in the bills sent to every Council Tax payer in March 2021.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	The Council has a statutory duty to set a Council Tax Base and the proposed Tax Base is a complex calculation across 34 Town and Community areas 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 are subject to the 50% Council Tax Premium scheme.
3.02	The key risks centre around financial prudence and accuracy of forecasts used to determine the Tax Base.
3.03	The Base is largely based on property data and discount levels at a fixed point in time (31 st October 2020) but includes an increased bad debt provision of 1.3% for non-collection, giving a forecasted eventual collection rate of 98.7%.
3.04	The Council Tax Base at 65,026 sets a Base at an accurate level to ensure, as far as possible, that a deficit does not occur in the Collection Fund.

3.05	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.
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4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	None.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 shows the breakdown of the Tax Base for 2021/22 by Town and Community area.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Government Finance Act 1992 – sections 22b(7) and 68 • Local Authorities (Calculation of C.Tax Base) (Wales) Regs 1995 • The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (Wales) (Amendment) Regs 2016 • Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (Wales) Regs 2004 • Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – section 139

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: David Barnes, Revenues Manager Telephone: 01352 703652 E-mail: david.barnes@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<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>

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:

- Class A – property which is unoccupied and furnished but where occupation is prohibited by law for over 28 days each year
- Class B – property which is unoccupied and furnished and where occupation is not prohibited by law
- Class C – property which is unoccupied and substantially unfurnished beyond the normal exemption period.

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 as either being second homes or long term empty property. For the purposes of charging a premium a long term empty home is defined as a property which is unoccupied and substantially unfurnished 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.