

Full Council

15 January 2018



Note: this report is also being submitted to the Cabinet on 9 January 2018

Report of: Director of Finance

Title: Approval of Council Tax Base 2018/19

Ward: Citywide

Member presenting report: Councillor Craig Cheney, Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Governance

Recommendation

1. Agree, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Bristol City Council as its Council Tax base for the financial year 2018/19 shall be 125,798

Summary

The Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) requires the Council as the Billing Authority to calculate a Council Tax Collection Fund estimate by 31 January each year.

The significant issues in the report are:

The number of Band D equivalent properties, net of exemptions, reductions and discounts, in the Tax Base for 18/19 is 125,798 an increase of 1,715 (1.38%) Band D equivalent properties since October 2016.

Policy

Bristol City Council has the power in statute to raise a tax on households in its area to pay for the provision of local services. It is designated as the Billing Authority for the area. This means that it is responsible for levying a council tax to meet its own demands and to meet the precepts of other authorities in the area. The major precepting bodies are Avon Police and Crime Commissioner and Avon Fire Authority.

2. Consultation

i. Internal

Revenues Manager – Neighbourhoods
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

ii. External

Not Applicable

3. Context

- i. Section 67 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) requires the Council to determine its tax base for council tax purposes each year. Properties are recorded in eight national bands by value (A to H) as determined the Valuation Office agency. Band H taxpayers pay twice as much as those in Band D and three times as much as those in Band A. The number of properties is expressed as a number of Band D equivalent properties.
- ii. In accordance with Regulations the Authority must set a tax base for council tax purposes and notify major precepting bodies by 31 January each year.

4. Calculation of council tax base

- i. The calculation has been prepared in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012 which came into force on 30 November 2012. In October each year DCLG requires a snapshot, which is based on the number of properties, of the Tax Base at a specified date in September, net of exemptions, reductions and discounts. This is known as the CTB1 return. A copy of the return for October 2017 is attached as Appendix B to this report. This calculates the number of chargeable properties in the City. Adjustments are then made for discounts and exemptions including those for the Council Tax Support Scheme. The adjusted numbers of properties in each of the eight valuation bands A to H are expressed as numbers of band D equivalents so they may be added together to produce a single figure. The table below shows the tax base and associated year on year percentage increase since 2013/14.

Year	Tax Base (Budget Report)	Percentage Increase
2013/14	113,099	
2014/15	115,008	1.69%
2015/16	119,116	3.57%
2016/17	120,946	1.54%

2017/18	124,083	2.59%
2018/19	125,798	1.38%

- ii. The significant factors required to be taken into account in calculating the Tax Base are as follows:

5. Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

- i. From 1 April 2013 local council tax support schemes replaced council tax benefit in England. Under these local schemes reductions are part of the council tax system rather than a welfare benefit. Bristol City Council introduced a localised scheme that provided a full set of discounts that replicated the previously existing national Council Tax benefit scheme. At the Cabinet meeting on 7 November 2017 it was agreed there would be no change to this arrangement for 2018/19
- ii. The table below shows the number of pensioner and working age claimants recorded each year on the CTB return since October 2013 (Band D equivalents)

	October 2013	October 2014	October 2015	October 2016	October 2017
Pensioners	11,831	11,663	11,019	10,054	9,594
Working Age	21,526	20,949	20,163	19,447	19,100
Total	33,347	32,612	31,182	29,501	28,694

- iii. The table shows that the reduction in tax base due to pensioner claimants has fallen by 2,237 band D equivalents, or 18.91% since 2013, primarily because pensioner benefit income is rising more quickly than the cost of living ("triple lock"), while the number of working age claimants has reduced by 2,426 or 11.27% over the same period of time. This is in line with previously reported trends and therefore has been reflected in the calculation of the Tax Base.

6. Unoccupied Properties

- i. Unoccupied Furnished Properties – the Council has discretion to set the level of discount for properties which are substantially furnished but are not anyone's sole or main residence (often referred to as "second homes") The Council has determined this level of discount will remain at 0% and this is reflected in the proposed Tax Base.
- ii. Vacant Properties – The Council has discretion to determine the discount, if any, to be awarded in respect of vacant dwellings (that is dwellings that are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished). From 1 April 2017 the Council has determined that empty properties that are unfurnished are no longer entitled to a discount. The full council tax charge therefore applies.
- iii. Long Term Empty Properties – There is a discretionary power for the Council to impose a premium of up to 50% in respect of properties that have remained vacant for at least two years. The proposed Tax Base incorporates a premium of 50% charged in respect of properties that have been empty for at least two years in accordance with the Council's previous determination that a premium of 50% should apply to this category of dwellings.

7. Single Person Discounts

- i. Regular reviews have significantly reduced the number of properties attracting single person discounts. Currently 29.84% of domestic properties are claiming single person discount. The Revenues team are currently going through a tendering exercise for a fully managed council tax single person discount review to be undertaken later in 2017/18. This will help to ensure that the Council Tax Base properly reflects entitlements to this discount.

8. Student Discounts

- i. Students are entitled to an exemption from paying Council Tax if everyone in the property is a full time student. Alternatively they may be entitled to a discount if some of the people occupying a property are full time students. Bristol has a large student population, and as at the end of October all student lists have not been made available to the Council. It is therefore necessary to estimate the number of additional students likely to be eligible for exemptions. Any estimate to be included in the Tax Base will also take account of any known student related property developments. The adjustment of 1,153 Band D equivalents in the table below comprises of an estimated increase in student exemptions of 969 Band D equivalents due to existing students yet to register and an additional 184 Band D equivalent student properties new to the rating list in 2017/18.
- ii. Student accommodation can take the form of either private housing or halls of residence. The table below sets out both the actual number of properties (houses and halls of residents) receiving student exemptions since 2013 along with an estimate to the end of this financial year and a projection of Band D equivalent exemptions for 2018/19. For 2017/18 the City Council's share of reduced Council Tax income as a result of student exemptions is estimated to be £13.2m. This is greater than expected in the tax base for 2017/18, primarily due to an increase in new developments but also an increasing trend to switch existing privately let accommodation to student lets.

Student Exemptions

	Property Numbers	
Year	Actual Student Exemptions	Band D Equivalents
2014/15	5,980	5,425
2015/16	6,500	5,851
2016/17	7,357	6,506
2017/18		7,207
2018/19		7,777

9. Growth

- i. In determining the Tax Base for the forthcoming year the Council is able to take into account any increase in Tax Base that may arise from the completion of new properties. Given the amount of property development across the City and, in view of this continuing trend, it is

considered reasonable to allow for an element of growth in the Tax Base due to the anticipated completion of new properties in respect of known major developments. In estimating the effect on the Tax Base of new properties it is prudent to assume the majority of new properties will be in lower valuation Bands. Allowances must also be made for discounts that will apply in respect of new properties, including Council Tax Support discounts, and for the fact that Council Tax will only be payable for new properties from the date of completion rather than for a full financial year.

- ii. The 2018/19 estimate for growth uses information provided by the Council's Valuation and Inspection team and is based on the number of new developments in the City where work has commenced. Assumptions are then made as to whether these properties will be banded by the end of the financial year, the actual date during the year they may be banded and the number of exemptions, discounts and Council Tax Support they might attract.

Valuation & Inspection information has identified that there are potentially 5,236 additional domestic assessments where work has commenced, plus an additional 294 properties completed but not yet banded. It is assumed all of the 294 properties will have been banded by 1 April 2018. Allowing for losses and a proportion of lower banded properties this is equivalent to 165 band D properties.

- iii. Of the 5,236 additional assessments, the estimate of properties likely to be banded during 2017/18 is anticipated to be around 75%, resulting in a figure of 3,927. A further reduction of 50% is made to take account of the fact that all of these properties will not have been banded on 1 April 2018. The resulting figure is 1,963 and a 25% reduction has been factored in for loss in revenue due to exemptions, discounts and Council Tax Support. The final figure of 1,472 is assumed to be lower banded properties so this figure has been converted into the Band "D" equivalent of 1,144.
- iv. Additionally, since the completion of CTB1 a further 180 band D properties have been added to the rating list, bringing the total estimated growth to 1,489 band D equivalents.

	Total Dwellings	Band D Equivalents
Identified new dwellings under construction not complete	5,236	
Reduction by 25% for sites not completed during 18/19	3,927	
Reduction by 50%, to take into account sites will be completed through-out the year so won't be eligible for Council Tax until complete.	1,963	
Reduction by 25% to take into account any discounts, exemptions and Council Tax Support Scheme on new properties	1,475	1,144
Add: 294 properties already complete and being banded	294	165
Add: 180 band D properties added to the rating list since completion of CTB1		180
Total Growth		1,489

10. Losses on Collection

- i. In estimating the provision for losses on collection the Council makes an estimate of debts which, after full recovery measures have been affected will be uncollectable and therefore recommended for write-off. Losses on collection for 2018/19, after adjusting for the continued collection of prior years' arrears, is estimated to be 1.5%

11. Calculation of the 2018/19 Council Tax Base

	2018/19 Band D Equivalent Properties	2017/18 Band D Equivalent Properties	Difference
Tax Base as per attached CTB 1 Return	127,376	125,773	1,603
Adjustment due to anticipated growth	1,489	1,450	39
Reduction due to additional student discounts	-1,153	1,250	97
Adjusted Tax Base	127,712	125,973	1,739
LESS losses on collection of 1.5%	-1,914	1,890	24
Recommended Tax Base	125,798	124,083	1,715

- i. This is an increase of 1,715 (1.38%) Band D equivalent properties since the last Tax Base calculation in November 2016. This is primarily due to an increase in the number of chargeable dwellings (all bands) of 2,248 and the continued reduction in the number of benefit recipients receiving council tax reductions. However this growth in the tax base is below the MTFP assumed annual growth in the Tax Base of 1.5%. This anticipates further growth of 471 band D properties. The primary reason for the lower than anticipated growth in the tax base is due to the increasing number of properties, both new developments and existing privately let accommodation now being, or anticipated to be, occupied by students and receiving student exemption.
- ii. To ensure the estimate of overall growth in the Tax Base is prudent officers have carried out a trend analysis of both growth in the local housing market, growth in student occupancy numbers and the reduction in the number of benefit recipients receiving council tax reductions over the last five years.
- iii. The Council Tax collection Fund account for the last three financial years including the estimated surplus for 2018/19 is shown at Appendix B.

12. Other Options Considered

- i. Not applicable

13. Risk Assessment

- i. There are a number of risks associated with estimating the amount of Council Tax collected during the year. These include;
 - Difficulty in estimating Council Tax discounts and exemptions, including the take-up of the Council Tax Support Scheme.

14. Public Sector Equality Duties

- i. There are no proposals in this report which require either a statement as to the relevance of public sector equality duties or an Equalities Impact Assessment.

15. Legal and Resource Implications

- i. **Legal**

The tax base calculations for a particular financial year must comply with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council tax base) Regulations 2012, and be determined by no later than 31st January in the preceding financial year. These regulations have been made under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (LGFA 1992).

(Legal advice provided by Shahzia Daya – Service Director: Legal and Democratic Services)

- ii. **Financial**

(a) Revenue

The council tax base directly influences the resources available to the fund the revenue budget due to be considered by Full Council on 21 February 2018. The growth in the tax base of 1.38% is less than the 1.5% assumed in the MTFP. This is the equivalent of 471 band D properties and represents a shortfall of £766k. This is net of previously reported savings in reliefs and discounts of £420k, so the gross budget pressure is therefore £1.186m.

(b) Capital

Not Applicable

(Financial advice provided by Tony Whitlock – Finance Manager, Corporate Finance)

- iii. **Land**

Not Applicable

- iv. **Personnel**

Not Applicable

Appendices:

Appendix A – Copy of the CTB report submitted to the DCLG October 2017