

Welcome from the Leader of the Council

The 2023/2024 budget is the first I have presented as Leader of the Council and my plan is to make sure we develop our vision, ambitions and priorities and deliver a better and brighter future for Trafford. I know nobody likes receiving their Council Tax bill, especially in the current economic climate; however, I wanted to highlight to you the increasing importance of Council Tax in funding local services.

Financial Pressures

In a normal period, the financial strain caused by inflationary costs on budgets covering pay and contracts, the cost of the National Living Wage and increasing demand for social care services outstrip any funding increases available to the Council each year. In 2023/24 we needed to address a budget gap of £24.86m, which is on top of £171.1m of savings and efficiencies delivered over the last 12 years. This has been no mean task for an authority like Trafford who already provide value for money services and are one of the lowest spending authorities in the country and with a council tax level in 2022/23 some £205 per property lower than the average for our neighbouring districts.

Despite some very welcome grants in 2023, to cover the extraordinary pressures being faced in our social care sector, the government has set out an expectation that councils will raise Council Tax and the adult social care precept by the maximum amount available to cover the growing cost pressures. We are faced with a difficult choice to increase Council Tax by 2.99% and use the 2% adult social care precept increase to help towards the rising cost of caring for older people and some of the most vulnerable in Trafford Council.

As a Council we continue to deliver innovative solutions to generate alternative funding and income streams rather than to make cuts to vital local services. The Council's Asset Investment Strategy is continuing to support the achievement of a balanced budget and is providing invaluable revenue streams to support the budget. Some of the acquisitions involved some key regeneration sites in the Borough, such as Stretford Mall and Stamford Quarter in Altrincham, and will provide a real opportunity to develop them into assets we can be proud of in the future.

Whilst the economic forecasts remains uncertain, we must continue to look to the future. In this regard, the Council, remains confident that we can improve services, facilities and the environment. Our Corporate Plan and budget proposals contain commitments to tackle health inequality, support people out of poverty and push forward with our ambitious climate change initiatives through the net zero action plan.

Additional Investment

Despite the budget challenge there are some key areas of investment within our 2023/2024 budget including £8.83m net investment in our social care services; safeguarding vulnerable children, young people and adults and supporting a sustainable care market.

In addition, as part of our plan to be a carbon neutral borough by 2038, we have a carbon neutral action plan which is delivering some notable successes including a range of energy efficiency measures across our council buildings and leisure estate.

We are also investing in services which affect the look and feel of the borough, as we know how important the environment is for our residents. These include additional capital investment of £92m in 2023/24, including £11.8m in our highways, modernisation of our leisure centres £16.3m, improving schools and provision of additional places £14m, town centre regeneration schemes £13.6m and investment in our parks and green spaces £0.5m.

Future Outlook

The Government's Autumn Statement in 2022, brought welcome news of additional funding for local government over the next two years, but at a local level there remains significant uncertainty over the distribution and certainty of that funding beyond 2024/25. The lack of a long term settlement, the postponement of the review of how the Government allocates resources known as the Fair Funding Review and reset of the business rates retention scheme, have added yet further uncertainty surrounding local government finance.

Trafford Council is no exception to these pressures and our medium term budget plans are showing a gap of over £17.0m for the two financial years 2024 to 2026. It is therefore imperative that the Council continues with its

bold and ambitious Innovation and Change Programme and invests in further transformational delivery of our services.

We will face difficult choices, and we must decide how we best cut our cloth in these trying times. But, as ever, our commitment to maintaining Trafford as a place where residents, communities and business prosper remains our overriding vision.

Thanks for taking the time to read this leaflet and we look forward to 2023/2024.

Councillor Tom Ross

Leader of Trafford Council

Your 2023/2024 Council Tax bill

Council Tax is a tax on domestic properties. It is collected by local councils and it helps to pay for services which councils provide, such as education, refuse collection and street lighting. Council Tax is charged on all domestic properties, whether they are rented or owned, and whether they are lived in or not.

This booklet forms part of your 2023/2024 Council Tax bill. In it you can find information and advice, including ways in which you might be able to reduce your bill. This booklet also provides information and advice about the empty-home premium. If you are having difficulty paying your Council Tax, help is available. Please call **0161 912 2220** or visit www.trafford.gov.uk/counciltax. The different sections of this booklet are listed below.

- A - Council Tax Support**
- B - Discounts and premiums**
- C - Disability reduction**
- D - Exemptions**
- E - How to apply for a reduction**
- F - Valuation**

A Council Tax Support

What is Council Tax Support?

If you are a low income household, you may be entitled to a reduction in the amount of Council Tax you pay.

How is Council Tax Support worked out?

To work out how much Council Tax Support you are entitled to, we look at things such as:

- Your family circumstances
- The money you have coming in
- Any benefits you get
- Any savings you have
- The total of your Council Tax bill

Council Tax Support is not only for people who are out of work. Many working people can also claim it.

To find out if you can claim Council Tax Support, visit our support calculator at <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/>

How do I claim?

If you want to make a new claim for Council Tax Support, simply fill in an online claim form available at www.trafford.gov.uk/new-claim

If you are unable to complete the online claim, you can phone us on **0161 912 2220** or email caseworkers@trafford.gov.uk to make an appointment with an adviser.

Change in Circumstances

You must tell us if your circumstances change. For example, if someone moves into or out of your property, or your income or savings and investments change. We could take court action against you if you do not tell us about a change in your circumstances. Report your changes online at www.trafford.gov.uk/benefit-changes

B Discounts and premiums

Single adult discounts

If there is only one adult living at the property, as a general rule we will take a 25 per cent discount off your bill. In certain circumstances, if you are an adult living alone you will qualify for a discount of 50 per cent if you are a 'disregarded person' (see below).

Discounts for households with more than one adult

If there is more than one adult living in your household but one is a 'disregarded person', you might be entitled to a 25 per cent discount. If all of the adults living in your household are disregarded, you might receive a discount of 50 per cent.

Disregarded people

The following adults are disregarded for Council Tax purposes:

- People in prison or certain types of legal detention centres
- People who have a severe learning disability, mental illness or form of dementia
- People aged 18 or over for whom Child Benefit is paid
- Students
- The wife, husband or dependant of a student who is not a British Citizen and who cannot take paid employment or claim benefits
- Apprentices
- Student nurses (including student nurses on Project 2000)
- Youth trainees
- Patients who are staying in hospital for a long time
- Adults who mainly live in a nursing or residential home and who receive care or treatment there
- Certain school-leavers under the age of 20 who have finished a course of education between 1 May and 31 October

B Discounts and premiums

Disregarded people (continued)

- Certain carers providing care or support to another person other than their husband, wife or partner, or their child under the age of 18
- People living in hostels– people with no fixed address
- Members of religious communities
- Members (or their dependants) of international headquarters and defence organisations
- Foreign-language assistants who are registered with the Central Bureau
- People associated with visiting armed forces
- Diplomats and senior officials of international organisations and their husbands or wives

Second homes

If a residential property is furnished, but is not used as a main home and is needed under a contract of employment, we might give a discount of 50 per cent.

B Discounts and premiums

Empty-home premium

We will add a premium of 100 per cent to Council Tax bills for properties which have been empty and unfurnished for two years or more. This means that you will receive a bill for 200 per cent of the full charge. For properties that have been empty for more than five years the charge increases to 300 per cent of the full charge and 400% for properties empty for more than 10 years.

We introduced this premium to encourage owners to bring empty properties back into use. This is consistent with our Empty Property Strategy.

Cancelling or changing a discount or premium

If your bill shows that we have given you a discount or charged an empty-home premium, you must tell the Council Tax Section if you think that the reduction or premium no longer applies or should be for a different amount.

You must also tell us about any change within 21 days. If you do not do this, we may charge you a £70 penalty.

Annexes

A 50 per cent discount is available for properties with self-contained annexes occupied by family members. Any qualifying annexe will have a 50 per cent reduction. The liability on the main house remains unaffected.

B Discretionary discounts

The Council may consider a reduction in any circumstances if it determines doing so would be in the interest of the borough or extenuating circumstances exist. Discretionary discounts are currently awarded to:

- Care Leavers where the Council is their Corporate Parent
- Special Constables who serve in the borough

If you wish to be considered for a discretionary discount please write with full details to **council.tax@trafford.gov.uk** or Council Tax, PO Box 542, Sale, M33 0GD.

C Disability reduction

In certain circumstances, we will reduce the amount of Council Tax you have to pay if any member of your household is severely and permanently disabled. To qualify for this reduction, the property must have at least one of the following features:

- A room (other than a bathroom, kitchen or toilet) which the disabled person uses and needs
- An extra bathroom or kitchen needed for the disabled person
- Enough floor space indoors to allow the disabled person to use a wheelchair

If you qualify for disability reduction, we will give you a discount in your banding (for example, if your home is in band B, you would pay the same Council Tax as a property in band A). The disability reduction scheme applies to properties in all valuation bands (A to H).

D Exemptions

Sometimes you may not have to pay Council Tax. This is known as an exemption. Most exemptions only apply when no-one is living in a property, but sometimes properties which are lived in can be exempt. Some of the popular exemptions are detailed below. A full list can be found by visiting <http://www.trafford.gov.uk/residents/benefits-and-council-tax/council-tax/reducing-your-bill.aspx>

Class E - Properties left empty by people who have gone to live in a hospital or home to receive care.

Class F - Properties left empty because the person responsible for paying the Council Tax has died are exempt for up to six months after the grant of probate or letters of administration.

Class I - Properties left empty because the person responsible for paying the Council Tax has gone to live elsewhere to receive personal care.

Class L - Properties that have been repossessed by a mortgage lender.

Class N - Properties which only students live in.

Class Q - Properties where the person who has possession is a trustee because the owner is bankrupt.

Class T - An unoccupied home which is part of another home (for example, an annexe), if planning controls do not allow the annexe to be treated as a separate property.

Class U - Properties lived in only by people who have a severe learning disability, mental illness or form of dementia who would otherwise have to pay Council Tax.

E How to apply for a reduction

If you do not currently receive any of the reductions we have mentioned and you would like to apply for one or more of them, you can contact us by:

- Visiting our website at **www.trafford.gov.uk** or emailing us at **council.tax@trafford.gov.uk** or **benefits@trafford.gov.uk**
- Phoning our Customer Services Team on **0161 912 2220**
- Writing to us at Council Tax, PO Box 542, Sale, M33 0GD
- Visiting any library in Trafford

F Valuation

The Valuation List

This Valuation List contains the address of every residential property in the borough, with the relevant valuation band next to it. An officer of the Valuation Office Agency (known as the listing officer) puts this list together and maintains it.

Valuation principles

The valuation is based on an estimate of how much the property would have been worth if it was sold on the open market on 1 April 1991 (not the current value) and the following applied:

- The property was empty when it was sold
- The property sold was freehold or, in the case of a flat, had a lease for 99 years with a small charge for ground rent
- The size, character and layout of the property, and the physical state of the area it is in, are the same now as they were at the time of the valuation in 1991
- The property was in a state of reasonable repair

F Valuation

The valuation bands

The following chart shows the valuation bands and the proportion of the full Council Tax charge for each of the bands. The Council Tax is based on band D being the full Council Tax charge. For example, a household with a property assessed in band A will pay 6/9 of the Council Tax compared with a property in band D which will pay 9/9 (100 per cent) of the Council Tax. A property in band H will have a Council Tax charge double that of a band D property.

Valuation band	Range of values (as at 1 April 1991) (£)	Tax proportion (£)
A	Up to 40,000	6/9
B	Over 40,000 to 52,000	7/9
C	Over 52,000 to 68,000	8/9
D	Over 68,000 to 88,000	9/9
E	Over 88,000 to 120,000	11/9
F	Over 120,000 to 160,000	13/9
G	Over 160,000 to 320,000	15/9
H	Over 320,000	18/9

F Valuation

Appealing against a valuation

In certain circumstances you can appeal against the valuation band your home is in.

This may be for the following reasons:

- You believe the banding of your property should be changed because of a significant reduction in its value. This may be because part of your property has been demolished, there has been a change in the physical state of your local area or the property has been adapted to make it suitable for someone with a physical disability to live in. In these cases, your property should be revalued as soon as possible
- You start or stop using part of your home to carry out a business or you start to use more or less of it for business purposes
- The listing officer has altered the Valuation List without you appealing against the band your home is in
- You have become the taxpayer for a property for the first time. You must make the appeal within six months, but if a valuation tribunal has already considered and decided an appeal for the same reasons, you cannot make the same appeal again

If you have any questions about a valuation appeal, you should contact the Valuation Office Agency at:

www.gov.uk/contact-voa

Telephone 03000 501 501

If you have appealed against a valuation and are waiting to hear the decision, you will still have to pay the instalments shown on your Council Tax bill. However, if your appeal is successful, you will be entitled to a refund of any Council Tax you have overpaid.

Further information

Data disclaimer

This authority is under a duty to protect the public funds it administers, and to this end may use the information you have provided to us for the prevention and detection of fraud. It may also share this information with other bodies responsible for auditing or administering public funds for these purposes. For further information on data matching to prevent and detect fraud and corruption see <http://www.trafford.gov.uk/Z-Archive/Archive/level-2-fair-processing-notice.aspx>. For further information on Trafford Council's own Privacy Notices see <http://www.trafford.gov.uk/about-your-council/data-protection/privacy-notices/Privacy-Notice.aspx> The Council Tax Privacy Notice <http://www.trafford.gov.uk/about-your-council/data-protection/privacy-notices/Service-Level-Privacy-Notices/Council-tax-privacy-notice.aspx>

Facts and figures on finance

Please visit www.trafford.gov.uk/formsandleaflets for more information about the following:

- What your Council Tax helps pay for
- Our spending plans
- Why spending has changed
- How council services are paid for
- How we work out your Council Tax
- Charges for other public services
- Capital spending and loan debt

Or, you can ask us to send you a copy of this information.

Email council.tax@trafford.gov.uk

Phone 0161 912 2220

Minicom 0161 912 2102

Reporting fraud

The monies lost through fraudulent activity takes away resources vital to the local authority. Trafford Council, in accordance with its Anti-fraud and Corruption strategy, will investigate any allegations of fraud that it is believed may be being committed against the authority.

We want to hear from you about any activity being committed against the Council that you believe to be fraudulent. This could include:

Council Tax fraud (e.g. falsely claiming to be the sole occupant of a property).

Council Tax Support fraud (e.g. failing to declare true income or household details).

Social Care fraud (e.g. misusing funds that have been provided to pay for care).

Blue Badge fraud (e.g. using a badge that has been provided to somebody else).

How to report a fraud

If you wish to report somebody you believe is defrauding the Council, you can do so by contacting us in a number of different ways:

Complete our online fraud report form via the Trafford Council website.
<http://www.trafford.gov.uk/residents/benefits-and-council-tax/secure/report-a-council-tax-fraud.aspx>

Email counterfraud@trafford.gov.uk

Telephone 0161 912 1026 / 1839 / 2373

View Your Account Online

You can view your Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Non-Domestic accounts on Trafford Council's OpenPortal system.

OpenPortal allows you to access:

- a statement of account
- payments which have been made or are due
- details of reduction/relief

To register for OpenPortal go to www.trafford.gov.uk/traffordonline You will require:

- Your full name/business name
- Your address
- Your email

Please note that by signing up for this you are also signing up to our e-secure service. This means you will not receive your Council Tax bill, Housing Benefit/ Council Tax Support notification or Business Rates bill by post. Instead we will email you when a new document is available and you log in to your online account to view it securely.

You can now choose to pay by Direct Debit on the 1st or 15th day of each month

Direct Debit is the most convenient way to pay your Council Tax bill.

- No need to remember when to pay
- Paying by Direct Debit can result in 94 per cent less carbon emissions than paying by cheque

You can set up a Direct Debit to pay your Council Tax online by visiting www.trafford.gov.uk Before you complete the form, make sure you have the following information to hand:

- Your Council Tax reference number – this can be found in the top right hand corner of your bill.
- The address of the property you are paying
- Your bank/building society details