

Integrated Impact Assessment – Council Tax and Discretionary Fees and Charges increase

Subject to the continuing permissibility of applying real-terms (i.e. taking account of the impact of inflation) increases in Council Tax levels, it is proposed to apply incremental rises of c. 4.79% in each of the next three years. In the case of a Band D household, this would result in an annual increase of £61.19 in 2020/21, equivalent to £1.18 per week. A Band A household would see a £0.78 weekly increase, with the Band H equivalent rise being £2.88. Over the three-year period as a whole, the weekly increases would be £2.47 (Band A), £3.70 (Band D) and £9.07 (Band H) respectively.

While the Council was one of 13 in Scotland not to apply an increase greater than 3% in 2019/20, six applied an increase of 3.95% or 4%, one an increase of 4.5% and the remaining 12 the full permissible level of increase of 4.79%.

It is important to emphasise that support provided through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) will increase in line with increased Council Tax liabilities. This increase in payment therefore reinforces the existing safety net in place to support those on lower incomes. A number of continuing or strengthened initiatives to maximise take-up of CTRS and other support will also be undertaken, including:

- Close liaison with internal and external advice-giving agencies, including Local Offices, the Council's Advice Shop and Citizens' Advice Bureaux and other similar organisations across the city;
- Revised wording included in all Council Tax reminder notices;
- Promotion of a range of means to maximise household income through the Welfare Rights Service and a range of income maximisation techniques.

As such, effective on-going communication is mitigate the impact of applying above-inflationary increases in Council Tax levels.

Research has also been undertaken around the impact on collection rates and arrears levels for those authorities approving higher levels of increase in 2019/20. This research indicates no discernible difference according to the level of increase applied.

While most of the Council's fees and charges are not subject to an equivalent system of assistance, the approach being adopted for the 2020/3 budget places particular emphasis on maintaining access for all groups, particularly those least able to afford to do so. In this context, relevant measures include:

- Concessionary rates for services such as adult education classes being maintained at current levels, with increases in fees intended to fall more on groups assessed more able to meet these costs;
- Proposals in respect of school musical instrument tuition being similarly structured to maintain access for all groups;
- Charges for school milk and school meals being frozen, against a backdrop of existing free school meal (FSM) entitlement for those benefiting from support in this area. Applications for FSM and clothing grants have increased year on year through income maximisation activities "auto-awards" using single financial assessment, with 6,245 FSM and 5,599 clothing grants awarded as of 31 December 2019, compared to 5,951 and 5,431 at the same point in 2018.
- Increases for bereavement-related services being minimised to reflect concerns around "funeral poverty".

For the reasons noted above, there is therefore not anticipated to be any material disproportionate impact of the proposals in respect of Council Tax or fees and charges policy on those with protected characteristics, those vulnerable to falling into poverty, geographical communities or staff, nor on the economy or environment.

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