

Title	Approval of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and the Council Tax Base for 2026/27
Purpose of the report	To make a key decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Darren Carter, Director of Finance
Report author	Chloe Hennessy, Financial Planning Lead
Lead Councillor	Councillor Terry, Leader of the Council and Councillor Emberson, Lead Councillor for Corporate Services & Resources
Corporate priority	Not applicable, but still requires a decision
Recommendations	<p>That Council approve:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme is retained for 2026/27;2. The Tax Base calculation for 2026/27 of 60,353.38 band D equivalent properties. <p>That Council notes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. The assumed Council Tax collection rate of 98.50% for 2026/27;4. That the 2026/27 Council Tax Reduction Scheme will be updated in line with the Scheme's regulations;5. That the estimated balance of the Council Tax Collection Fund as at 31st March 2026 is an overall net deficit of £2.092m. The Council's overall share of this deficit is £1.781m.

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Council is required to calculate a Council Tax Base for its area annually in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base (England)) Regulations 2012.
- 1.2. The Council Tax Base 2026/2027 must be calculated and notified to Major Precepting Authorities (the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service) by 31st January 2026.
- 1.3. The Tax Base for 2026/27 is calculated for the above purposes as being 60,353.38 (band D equivalent) properties – an increase of 1.32% on the 2025/26 Tax Base of 59,566.99.
- 1.4. The declared surplus/deficit on the Council Tax Collection Fund balance is paid out/recoverable by the Collection Fund in full in the following financial year. The estimated balance as at 31st March 2026 on the Council Tax Collection Fund is a projected net deficit of £2.092m. The Council's overall share of this deficit is £1.781m. The component parts are set out in Table 4 below.
- 1.5. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 and Local Government Finance Act 2012 replaced the Council Tax Benefit scheme with a locally determined Council Tax Reduction Scheme

(also known as a local Council Tax Support Scheme), which is effectively a type of Council Tax discount. The legislation requires the Council to approve a Scheme, including amendments to an existing scheme, by the end of January preceding the start of the financial year. The recommended Scheme for 2026/27 is unchanged from the Scheme agreed by Council for 2025/26.

- 1.6. Each year, the Government amends the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012 to ensure that pension-age Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) schemes are updated in line with changes in the wider benefits system. The annual update also provides an opportunity to ensure that the residency requirements for accessing both pension-age and working-age LCTS remain consistent with the UK's immigration policy. These updates will be incorporated into the Council's 2026/27 Scheme in accordance with the principles of the Council's original Local Scheme agreed following consultation in the Summer/Autumn of 2012.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. Under Government regulations it is necessary for the Council to review its Collection Fund and decide the following:
 - The Council Tax Collection Rate for 2026/27;
 - The Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2026/27;
 - The Council Tax Base to be used for setting its 2026/27 Council Tax; and
 - The estimated Council Tax surplus or deficit as at 31st March 2026.

3. The Proposal

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS)

- 3.1. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 replaced the Council Tax Benefit scheme with a new locally determined Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (also known as a Local Council Tax Support Scheme) from April 2013. This is effectively now a Council Tax discount that reduces the Council Tax Base.
- 3.2. Each local authority is required to annually set a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working age claimants. The Government continues to operate a statutory national scheme for pensioners, which provides them with broadly the same level of Council Tax Support as they received under the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme but has been adjusted by the Government since its introduction to incorporate a number of welfare reform initiatives.
- 3.3. The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme was initially funded through a specific central government grant set at 90% of each local authority's Council Tax Benefit expenditure. Government funding since 2014/15 has been rolled into the Council's overall finance settlement and is no longer specifically identifiable.
- 3.4. Pension age customers continue to be protected by the Government's default scheme of 100% support based on a financial means test.
- 3.5. It is recommended that the Council retains the [Council Tax Reduction Scheme](#) in 2026/27 as applied in 2025/26. In light of recent benefit changes, this will be reviewed in 2027/28.

Council Tax Base Calculation

- 3.6. The Council Tax Base is an estimate of the number of band D equivalent properties within the Billing Authority's (Reading Borough Council's) area and is used by the Council and Major Precepting Authorities (the Police and Fire authorities) to determine how much Council Tax income is anticipated to be received and budgeted for in the associated financial year.

3.7. The Tax Base is calculated by taking the list of properties by tax band as supplied by the Valuation Office, (an executive agency of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)) as at 30th November 2025, then adjusting it for various factors to calculate a chargeable number of properties per tax band.

3.8. The factors adjusted for include:

- Properties which will be entirely exempt, so no tax is payable e.g. those occupied entirely by students;
- Properties which will attract a 25% reduction e.g. those with a single adult occupier;
- Properties which will attract a 50% reduction e.g. those where all the adult residents qualify for a reduction (certain Care Homes for example);
- Properties which attract a 100% levy because they have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than 12 months and up to 5 years;
- Properties which attract a 200% levy because they have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than 5 years and up to 10 years;
- Properties which attract a 300% levy because they have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 10 years or more;
- Properties which attract a 100% levy because they are no one's sole or main residence and which are substantially unfurnished (from April 2025);
- Properties which will be treated as being in a lower band because they have been adapted for a severely disabled person;
- Properties which will be on the valuation list, but which attract discounts or disablement relief or are exempt, for only part of the year;
- Properties which are in receipt of Local Council Tax Support;
- Properties which are in receipt of a local discount.

3.9. The calculated chargeable number of properties per tax band is then converted into "band D equivalents" by applying the factors laid down by legislation. These are set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Council Tax Band Ratios

Band	AA	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Ratio	5/9	6/9	7/9	8/9	9/9	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9

3.10. For example, a band A property is multiplied by 6 and divided by 9 to arrive at the "band D equivalent" figure, whilst a band H property is multiplied by 18 and divided by 9 (equal to multiplying by 2). All these are then added together to give a total of "band D equivalent" for the billing area.

3.11. Additions are then made to the tax base for estimates of newly built and occupied properties in 2026/2027 and the final quarter of 2025/2026. This estimate is based on past trends, properties that haven't yet appeared on the valuation list, and planning estimates of housing growth. For 2026/27 we have assumed 0.58% average growth for the year. This is a prudent estimate, which has been calculated using actual growth realised in 2025/26 alongside planned projections of new build that are expected to be realised between December 2025 and March 2027.

3.12. The Council is then required to decide what its collection rate is likely to be and multiply its Tax Base by this percentage to give its Council Tax Base. A collection rate of 100% would assume 100% collection and thus a zero adjustment, whereas a collection rate of less than 100% allows for an element of non-collection and results in a reduction to the Council Tax Base.

3.13. The overall collection rate for 2026/27 is estimated at 98.50%. This is based on revised forecasting and represents a slight reduction from the rate of 98.75% used in 2025/26.

3.14. The total number of properties per Council Tax band as at 30th November 2025 is summarised in the following table:

Table 2. Properties per Council Tax Band as at 30th November 2025

Band	% of Properties	Number of Properties	Ajustements (Discounts, Exemptions, LCTRS etc.)	Net Properties	Ratio	Band D Equivalents (rounded to 1dp)
AA*	0.0%	0	2.3	2.3	5/9	1.3
A	9.4%	7,239	(2,265.1)	4,973.9	6/9	3,315.9
B	19.4%	15,009	(3,520.8)	11,488.2	7/9	8,935.3
C	40.7%	31,526	(5,003.9)	26,522.1	8/9	23,575.2
D	15.8%	12,258	(1,566.2)	10,691.8	9/9	10,691.8
E	7.7%	5,941	(484.7)	5,456.3	11/9	6,668.9
F	4.4%	3,398	(240.8)	3,157.2	13/9	4,560.3
G	2.5%	1,908	(101.3)	1,806.7	15/9	3,011.1
H	0.1%	100	(19.0)	81.0	18/9	162.0
Total	100.0%	77,379	(13,199.5)	64,179.5		60,921.8

*Band A entitled to disabled relief reduction. As at 30th November, 3 properties in band A are entitled to disabled relief reduction (2.3 net properties after adjustments), which are converted to 1.3 band D equivalents on a ratio of 5/9.

3.15. The Council Tax Base calculation is summarised in the following table:

Table 3. Council Tax Base 2026/27 Calculation

	Adjustments	Total
Total Number of Properties on the Valuation List as at 30/11/2025		77,379.00
Reductions for Discounts & Exemptions as at 30/11/2025	(8,609.65)	
Reductions for Council Tax Reduction Scheme as at 30/11/2025	(4,589.88)	
Total Number of Net Chargeable Properties as at 30/11/2025		64,179.47
Band D Equivalent Properties as at 30/11/2025		60,921.80
Estimated New Build (band D equivalents) 2026/27	350.67	
Reduction for non-collection of 1.50%	(919.10)	
2026/27 Council Tax Base (band D equivalents)		60,353.38

Council Tax Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit

3.16. Any difference between the level of Council Tax budgeted for (based on the estimated Council Tax Base) and the level of Council Tax income actually realised in year has no impact on the in-year General Fund revenue position but is retained within the Collection Fund.

3.17. An estimate of the surplus or deficit on the Council Tax Collection Fund must be made, by law, on or before 15th January 2026. Council Tax surplus or deficits must be credited or charged to Reading Borough Council, the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service in proportion to their precepts and will be taken into account in setting the 2026/27 Revenue Budget and Council Tax levels.

3.18. The estimated balance on the Council Tax Collection Fund as at 31st March 2026, in January 2026, is a net deficit of £2.092m, comprising:

- A residual deficit balance brought forward from 2024/25 totalling £0.765m which is primarily due to the 2024/25 adjustment to the Allowance for Impairments for Doubtful Debts (Bad Debt Provision) that was required at the end of the financial year being higher than was forecast in January 2025 when the 2024/25 Council Tax Collection Fund Balance estimate was made;

- An in-year net deficit balance totalling £1.327m which primarily relates to the forecast 2025/26 increase to the Allowance for Impairments for Doubtful Debts.

3.19. Any declared surplus/deficit is paid out/recoverable by the Collection Fund in full in the following financial year based on the January estimate. The shares of this balance are set out in the following table:

Table 4. Council Tax Collection Fund Estimated Balance as at 31st March 2026

	Share of Overall Estimated Net (Surplus)/Deficit (£m)
Reading Borough Council	1.781
Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley	0.238
Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service	0.073
Total	2.092

3.20. Reading's share of the estimated net deficit has been included in the MTFS Update as above in 2026/27.

Risk

3.21. There are several key variables in setting the Council Tax Base which have the potential to change; these are set out below.

3.22. Eligibility for discounts and exemptions is factored into the calculated Tax Base. These include student discounts, single person discount and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme – the latter being particularly prone to change dependent upon employment status of working age benefit claimants. Although numbers have now returned near to pre-pandemic levels, there remains uncertainty as to the potential impact of the cost of living crisis on the economy. Therefore, future fluctuations in caseload/claimant levels cannot be ruled out.

3.23. The Tax Base includes forecast growth in the number of properties subject to a Council Tax liability. Whilst this is based on historic growth levels achieved and known planned development, it remains an estimate and is sensitive to changes in the economy and house building market. The growth factor is also subject to assumptions regarding the band of property completed and also the status of the occupier(s) and their eligibility for discounts (e.g. single person), exemptions and Local Council Tax Support.

3.24. Any significant variation regarding collection rates has the potential to impact on the level of bad debt provision required and would impact on overall collection levels and any projected surplus or deficit.

3.25. In setting the Council Tax Base for 2026/27, statutory regulations prevent the net amount credited to the Council's General Fund from being different in 2026/27 to that originally estimated (and applies to precepting bodies in the same way). Any variance would however impact on future years.

3.26. The Collection Fund balance as at 31st March 2026 is required to be estimated by 15th January 2026. The assumptions made within this calculation are therefore subject to change by 31st March 2026. This risk of non-collection remains high, due to the ongoing cost of living crisis. This impacts on Council Tax collection rates and therefore there is increased uncertainty on future projections.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1. Full details of the Council Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Council Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective, and economical.

4.2. Delivery of the Council's budget is essential to ensuring the Council meets its strategic aims and remains financially sustainable going forward.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

5.1. There are no specific environmental and climate implications to report in relation to the recommendations set out in this report.

6. Community Engagement

6.1. No amendments have been proposed for 2026/27 therefore consultation is not required.

7. Equality Implications

7.1. No implications have been identified as arising directly from this report.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

8.1. There are none.

9. Legal Implications

9.1. The Council, as a Billing Authority, is required to determine the Council Tax Base for the next financial year by 31st January 2026 and to notify other precepting authorities of the determination.

9.2. The Council, as the Billing Authority, is required to formally estimate the balance of the Council Tax Collection Fund as at 31st March 2026 and to notify other precepting authorities of this estimate by 15th January 2026.

10. Financial Implications

10.1. The increase in the Council Tax Base of 786.39 average band D properties equates to an increase in Council Tax income of £1.665m based on the 2025/26 Council Tax charge of £2,117.52 for a band D property.

10.2. The Tax Base of 60,353.38 band D equivalents has been updated from the Tax Base of 60,354.06 used in the Medium Term Financial Strategy Update Report considered by Policy Committee and issued for consultation in December 2025 in order to reflect updated figures in respect of the number of chargeable dwellings, discounts, exemptions, eligible Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme claimants and revised estimates of new build and collection performance.

10.3. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025/26-2027/28 Update assumed that the Council's share of the provisional Council Tax Collection Fund balance would be £0.810m. The Council's share of the net surplus declared in this report is £1.781m for 2026/27 which has been reflected in the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy projections.

11. Timetable for Implementation

11.1. Not applicable.

12. Background Papers

12.1. There are none.