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Surrey Councils holding unclaimed tax refunds

9 April 2024

Council	Value of refunds owed	Number of accounts owed
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council	Failed to share the requested data	
Elmbridge Borough Council	Failed to share the requested data	
Tandridge District Council	Failed to share the requested data	
Guildford Borough Council (rolling)	£323,769.96	1,095
Spelthorne Borough Council	£307,273.08	1,245
Mole Valley District Council	£249,459.01	802
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	£218,883.91	765
Waverley Borough Council	£157,452.49	566
Woking Borough Council	£148,046.16	566
Surrey Heath Borough Council	£83,060.34	293
Runnymede Borough Council	£5,777.17	4

Councils in Surrey are holding nearly £1.5million in overpaid tax that can be claimed back. People who moved to a different borough after paying their tax are supposed to be sent a closing bill. If an account is in credit, overpayments are refunded.

When this is not possible, for example if the council does not have a resident's forwarding address, the overpaid cash can sit in a pot until a claim is made – or the residents return to the borough.

In Surrey, that figure is a combined £1,493,722.12 for eight of the 11 councils. As for the others (Elmbridge, Tandridge and **Epsom and Ewell**) their figures remain unclear.

The three most common reasons for overpayments are when someone moves out of their house and has already paid, changes to a property's tax band, or when residents forget to cancel standing orders when they move.

The two biggest stockpiles are held by Guildford and Spelthorne Borough Councils, and account for more than £600,000. This is according to data released under Freedom on Information to Money Saving Expert.

Tax not claimed back can be written off by a council – to balance the cost of bad debts – however Guildford Borough Council said it reinstates the money if a resident comes forward to claim the credit.

Guildford Borough Council told the Local Reporting Democracy Service it has refunded 12,793 people on both closed and open accounts with a total value of £4.4 million, since April 2021. It says nearly a third of these were refunded through MyGuildford online accounts.

A spokesperson for Guildford Borough Council said: "It's important that we are provided with a forwarding address so we can send closing bills or retrospective bill changes.

"If a refund is not claimed, the money will remain on the account until the resident claims it or becomes liable for council tax in our borough again." They added: "To be transparent, we roll over overpaid council tax every year. If other councils have already written off credits, their credit value will be reduced."

Guildford council added that they don't have a specific deadline for claiming overpaid council tax. But to avoid fraudulent claims, they ask residents to provide proof of the overpayment. The older the claim, the more proof is needed.

A spokesperson for Spelthorne Borough Council said: "Tax refunds occur for a number of reasons, for example if a resident has moved from the borough or they have paid a bill in advance and Spelthorne Borough Council proactively issues any council tax refunds which are due.

"Where accounts are in credits, statements are sent with refund application to the last known address, if we hold bank details refunds are refunded directly back to the bank account that they were paid from. Where accounts are constantly paying in credit, copy bills are sent to prompt a response from the payer to claim the overpayment back.

"Residents can keep track of their council tax bill by registering for the self-service customer portal online or call the team on 01784 451499."

Elmbridge Borough Council, which did not respond to the FOI, said it refunds overpaid council tax if a resident's account is in credit and does not owe any other amounts of tax.

People who move within the borough will usually have credits from their previous address transferred across, while those leaving the area can arrange a refund.

[Nationwide the London Borough of Newham holds the highest of £9,539,750 and Surrey's Runnymede fourth lowest of £5,777.]

Contact your local authority for specific advice on claiming it back, as this is likely to differ.

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