TOTAL EXPENDITURE PER HEAD OF POPULATION

*Tewkesbury

Gloucestershire

£21.72

League tables show councils are complacent about performance

REPORTS BY IAN MURRAY COMMUNITY CORRESPONDENT

LOCAL authorities are remarkably complacent about the efficient delivery of basic services, according to the second annual council performance tables published today by the Audit Commission, the public spending watchdog.

While those councils that performed worst last year have improved, the overwhelming majority have made little progress. "A big message to emerge is that councils really need to be more ambitious and start trying to do better," Andrew Foster, the controller of the commission, said. "It is not enough to be just average. Everyone can and should improve."

The figures, covering everything from recycling rubbish to rent collection and care of the elderly, show that neither political control nor prosperity guarantees good performance. Most councils provide a majority of services to a high

average level, but there are

Plymouth |

Islington

Liverpool

Haringey

Southwark

Lewisham

COUNCIL tax is proving

much easier to collect than the

poll tax, especially in the

shires. Half of all district

councils collect more than 97

per cent of the money due to

them; the average for this type

In London, however, the

average is 88 per cent. It is

dragged down by Lambeth,

where a culture of non-pay-

ment grew during the days of

the poll tax, when councillors

urged residents not to pay. In

the last set of indicators

Lambeth collected 61 per cent,

and that has now fallen to 55.3

per cent. Hackney has seen its

collection rate drop even fast-

er from 79 per cent to 69.1 per

Compared with these fig-

ures, the metropolitan coun-

cils have a far better record.

with an average take of 93 per

cent, which the commission

believes should be the target

for all councils. The least

successful is Liverpool, which

has the highest council tax success rate.

Brent

Haringey

Southwark

Greenwich

Liverpaci

Hackney

Metropolitan councils 5.1*

District councils 2.6*

London boroughs 11.7*

Waltham Forest

Hammersmith and Fulham

Ealing

TENANTS OWING MORE THAN 13 WEEKS RENT

cent over the year.

of authority is 96 per cent.

COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION: BOTTOM TEN

London boroughs

Collection rate is

best in the shires

Metropolitan councils

still wide variations between the best and worst performances for similar services provided by comparable authorities. No clear pattern emerges. Poor councils in deprived inner cities sometimes perform better in some departments than wealthy authorities in the shires.

"The accident of council area you happen to live in can have very serious implications," Paul Veevers,

who led the commission team compiling the figures, said. No Conservative flagship, Labour stronghold or Liberal

REVENUE

level in England but collects

The cost of collection varies

widely. In the City of London

— a special case because of the

small number of residents —

it costs £129 per dwelling,

compared with £44 in Lab-

our-run Hackney, £21.98 in

Outside London the collec-

Tory Westminster and £11.39

tion costs are lowest in pros-

perous areas. In Surrey

Heath, with a 96 per cent

collection rate, the cost is £8.73

per dwelling. In St Albans,

where the council collects

102.4 per cent, including un-

paid tax from earlier years,

The commission suggests it

is not necessarily cash eff-

icient to spend a lot to ensure

100 per cent collection: there

may be a case for cutting the

costs and accepting a lower

the cost is £17.

in Liberal Democrat Sutton.

only 81 per cent.

	age of people aged over 75 helped to live at		6.9
Percentage of adu	ilts going into residential care who were offe	red single rooms	95
	children in local authority care placed with f	and a contract of the contract	73
Number of nights of r	espite care provided or funded by the author	rity per 1,000 adults	43.6
	t of collecting council tax per chargeable dv		£16.14
Percentage of	food premises due to be inspected which w	ere inspected	100
	Percentage of household waste recycled *No	party has overall conf	11.8 tro! of either council
iations between	Democrat bridgehead can claim to be perfect. Departments in some hung councils	"Many counci	ils used not to formation ever use, let alone

could give object lessons in good practice to authorities with solid political leadership. Parties will therefore have to be highly selective if they use the figures in the looming local election campaign, because good indicators in one area are often cancelled out by bad ones in another.

A TALE OF TWO COUNCILS

Performance Indicator

Percentage of three and four year-olds with a local authority school place

Roger Freeman, the Public Service Minister, said the indicators showed that councils could no longer get away with waste and inefficiency.

publish it and be judged by their residents," he said. "This is open government at the service of the consumer."

*Berwick u Tweed

Northumberland

Labour said that it intended to use the indicators to identify councils in need of help. The party has already said that it will send "hit-teams" of council management experts to authorities in difficulty.

Because the figures are a year old, covering the 12 months that ended last April, some authorities with bad

improvements. These include Lambeth, the London borough with one of the worst records, which has been under new management for the past year.

The average returns for the five least-efficient London boroughs, metropolitan councils, district and county authorities all show marked improvements. The worst group is 110 within 14 days and 63 per cent better at paying student grants on time. They have cut the average time to relet a council home from 14 weeks to ten weeks and cut the average stay of a homeless family in bedand-breakfast accommodation from 46 weeks to 26.

The worst performers, however, are still at the foot of most tables. With rare exceptions they are councils in areas of high deprivation, which have a long way to catch up with the national average.

Typical of the worst is Liverpool. It is the secondspender per head of population and is the worst at collecting council tax and rent. It has no recognisable complaints procedure or food inspection service and is one of the slowest at providing equipment to help the disabled. It has, however, improved its performance over last year in nearly every department.

Westminster cut the amount it spends per head by

ty Prime Minister, and to Frank Dobson, the Shadow Environment Secretary. "They see in these figures a powerful tool to reform local government so all those complacent authorities can expect a shakeup whatever the outcome of the next election," a commis-

sion spokesman said.

£66 over the year, yet increased spending on education. On the downside, it has one of the poorest complaints procedures in London. The Audit Commission was asked to give private briefings on the figures this year to Michael Heseltine, the Depu-

Tax bills will rise by 6% as town halls cut costs to appease voters

AVERAGE council tax in England and Wales will rise by 6.2 per cent next month, much less than the Government had cided to hold down costs rather than upset voters with steep increases.

The figure is 2 per cent lower than the Government estimated last year when it announced the level of support for local authorities. It has been held so low only by pruning £500 million of services, making more than 6,000 workers redundant while dipping deep into remaining reserves.

The increase was announced yesterday in a written answer by David Curry, the Local Government Minister. He said the increase would raise the bill for a middle-range Band D proper-

Checks on

restaurant

cleanliness

vary widely

A WORRYING lack of consis-

tency in the way councils carry

out their duty to inspect places

such as restaurants, school

canteens and hospitals is ex-

places where food is prepared

on a regular basis to ensure

that hygiene standards are

maintained, pests are con-

Only a quarter of councils

made all the inspections they

were meant to. The worst

FOOD HYGIENE

performers made only a

quarter of those necessary.

"This must be a cause of great

concern to people," the report

relationship to the number of

places a council has to inspect.

Some authorities with many

premises to visit manage the

job while spending less than

The commission says that

some councils should recon-

sider priorities. Those which

are not carrying out an ade-

quate number of visits are

urged to "reflect on the poten-

In London, the inspection

others with only a few.

tial risk to the public".

The differences bear no

inspect

posed by the figures.

eliminated.

Councils must

AVERAGEBILLS £525.65 £505.38 £490.70 £561.27 £525.48 £528.97 Independent £521.90 £569.60 £521.61

PERCENTAGE OF NURSERY PLACES

FOR THREE AND FOUR-YEAR-OLDS

Cleveland 9:

Knowsley 91

N Tyneside 90

ty to £647. The rise would be highest, at 10.4 per cent, in inner London, and lowest, at 5.1 per cent in outer London.

However, very few councils are levying the average figure and many, especially Labour ones in inner-city areas, have been forced to raise their levels well above the average. The few remaining Tory councils

have generally fared better. A survey of English authorities by the Local Government Chronicle shows that the 19

Tower Hamlets

Buckinghamshire

Hereford and Worcester 25

Gloucestershire 30

Oxfordshire 27

W Sussex

Wiltshire 23

Essex 21

London boroughs 57

District councils 50

Metropolitan councils 2000 2000 2000 75

Devon 28

remaining Tory councils have been able to reduce council tax by 0.03 per cent. Labour, with 165 councils, is asking for an extra 6.36 per cent, while the 109 hung authorities need an extra 7.76 per cent on average. The Liberal Democrats need

only 1.48 per cent extra. Residents in metropolitan authorities will pay an extra 6.8 per cent and district householders will have to find an extra 5.9 per cent.

Frank Dobson, the Shadow

Environment Secretary, said that the Conservatives had pushed up council tax in the hope that Labour would get the blame because it controlled so many authorities. "Over the next three years the Government hopes to force council taxpayers to cough up an extra £3.5 billion, equal to an extra 2p on income tax."

David Rendel, the Liberal Democrat spokesman on local government, criticised the Government for using Band D as the average. "This does not take into account the larger share of properties in higher council tax bands in the few remaining councils under their [the Conservatives'] control," he said. "The Government's budget has put local authorities under tremendous pressure to raise more money

rubbish

RUBBISH collection is the service that councils tend to do best. When the commission produced its first set of figures it found performance across the country was so good that it was not worth providing com-

The same is not true of waste disposal, however. The Government promised at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 that Britain would be recycling 25 per cent of its waste by the turn of the century. But the national average is only 4 per

RECYCLING

cent. London boroughs lead the way at up to 9 per cent, shire districts recycle 6 per cent of their waste and metropolitan councils only 3 per

The greenest authorities tend to be Liberal Democratcontrolled: Adur in West Sussex has the highest rate at 20.4 per cent. At the other end of the scale are councils such as Alnwick in Northumberland, Medina on the Isle of Wight and Slough, Berkshire, where

little or no recycling is done. Councils in the South and West recycle significantly more than those in the North, where only 12 councils process more than 5 per cent of waste. Epsom and Ewell in Surrey, the only council controlled by ratepayers' groups, improved its performance by 7 per cent over the year, trebling the

The commission says that

Only 4% of household is reused

parison charts.

amount it recycles.

recycling can be cost-effective. Many councils that treated high levels incurred no greater costs per household than similar councils which recycled less waste, it says.

Low spenders can be most efficient

A QUARTER of the population lives in council-owned property, but authorities vary widely in their ability to manage their stock.

The speed with which a council can relet a property is crucial in the battle against homelessness. The ability to ensure that rent is paid either directly or through housing benefit — is vital in balancing the books.

inner-city authorities have a as well. Authorities which difficult job in matching the spend little on administration performance of more prosperous areas, but there are still glaring differences in performance between authorities with similar problems.

The contrasts are greatest in inner London, where Southwark manages to relet its property in just three weeks, compared with 26 weeks in Hackney.

However, Hackney has lopped nearly 11 weeks off its average time over the year — a feat also achieved in North-

HOUSING

ampton, where the wait is down to five weeks. The commission says that it is not necessary to spend more money to improve management since some of the better performers have low management costs.

ties and collecting more rents. Rent collection generally is good, except in London, which contains nine of the worst 11 councils. Collection in the capital is more difficult because of the high turnover of properties and the difficulty of keeping a check on tenants

However, councils with long relet times sometimes Years of neglect mean that have high management costs and have a poor performance are advised to increase management costs if this can create a higher income through letting more proper-

who move frequently.

Geographical lottery in nursery places THE lottery of state-funded

nursery education is disclosed. The proportion of places for three and fouryear-olds ranges from 99 per cent in Sunderland to 21 per cent in Essex. Cleveland has one of the

rate was 76 per cent of what it should be, with Westminster, best records, providing 93 which controls the largest per cent of the age group with a place for £1,113 each. concentration of restaurants, On average, only half the scoring 100 per cent. Islington under-fives in the shires managed only 40 per cent. Outside the capital metrocouncil have a provided. In London the pacesetter

politan councils averaged 79 per cent, although neither Liverpool nor Newcastle had a is Tower Hamlets, providing places for 87 per cent, but clear idea of how many they each costs £2,600. Bromley, inspected. The tourist centres with places for 33 per cent, of Bath and Blackpool managed only 40 per cent.

PRE-SCHOOL

spends £1,660 on each. The average London borough provides places for 57 per cent, but the proportion is higher in inner London.

Even Coventry, the lowest provider among the metropolitan councils, finds places for 60 per cent of underfives. Trafford, which was under Conservative control over the year, had places for 88 per cent at a cost of £1,290 each. Liverpool, with over double the population in the age group, had places for 86 per cent, costing £1,320.

London has highest costs per pupil By David Charter

EDUCATION CORRESPONDENT

SECONDARY school education costs nearly 2½ times as much in the most expensive local authority as it does in the least. Lambeth, in south London, spent £4,113 on every secondary school pupil in 1994-95, compared with £1,655 in Enfield. London boroughs on average spent

£2,595 on secondary pupils, compared with £2,183 spent by metropolitan councils elsewhere in England and Wales, and £2,168 by county councils. The second highest-spending London

borough was Kensington and Chelsea

EDUCATION

(£3,283), followed by Hammersmith and Fulham (£3,222). The lowest were Enfield, Bexley (£2,065) and Bromley (£2,126). An education spokeswoman in Lambeth said the figure was raised by the disproportionate cost of relatively few pupils at a secondary school being closed down that year. The 1995-96 sum was £3,100.

Lambeth came 103rd out of 108 in the latest GCSE league table, whereas the lowest-spending county, Isle of Wight, came 56th. The GCSE league-topper, Kingston upon Thames, where 55.5 per

cent of students gained five or more A-C grades, spent £2,360 per secondary pupil and the bottom authority, Islington, with a 17.4 per cent A-C rate at GCSE, spent

The biggest-spending metropolitan were Doncaster Manchester (£2,453), and (£2,343), and the lowest Wakefield (£1,952), Bradford (£1,959) and Bury (£2,031). Highest-spending counties were Mid Glamorgan (£2,557), Essex (£2,456) and Nottinghamshire (£2,418), and the lowest were Isle of Wight (£1,826), Northumberland (£1,841) and Dorset

How to compare levels of service

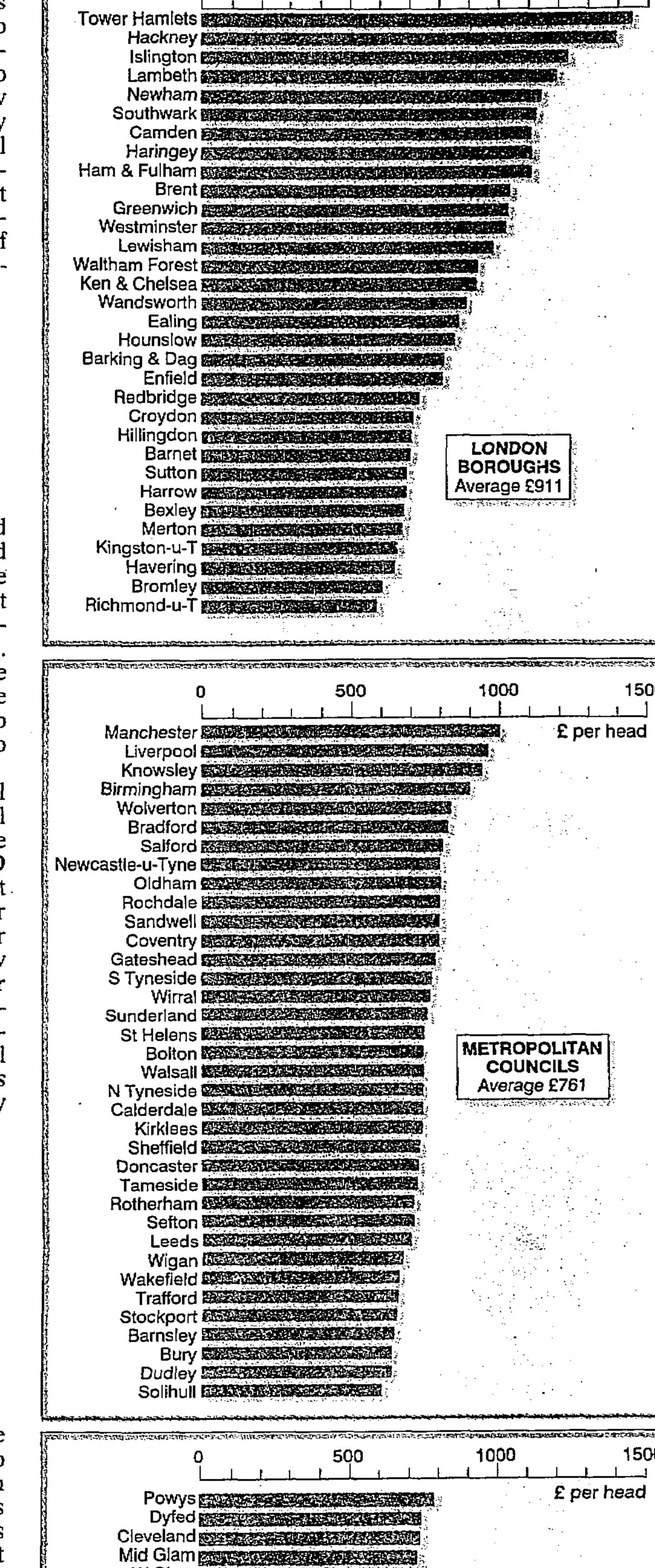
COUNCIL taxpayers can judge the value for money provided by their council by using today's statistics to compare authorities across England and Wales.

The tables disclose how the amount each council spends on every resident varies hugely, with costs inevitably higher in London and urban areas. They also show that services do not necessarily improve if councils spend more. Tower Hamlets spends £1,453 per head, the highest in England and Wales, yet its performance lags behind

Southwark, which spends £320 a year less per head. The indicators are to be

published annually and this second series makes it possible for the first time to see if councils are improving their performance.

What improvements there are have largely been minimal, except among those authorities which performed badly last year. The Audit Commission believes that the publication of the figures has been enough to inspire those councils to make a greater effort.



W Glam

Gwent

Gwynedd

S Glam

Humberside

Lancashire Control of the Control of

Bedfordshire

Isle of Wight

Buckinghamshire

Clwyd

Kent

Notts in the second sec

Essex

Durham Exercises 1

Northants (S. 1988)

Cheshire Cheshire

Berkshire Manager 1988

Cornwall

Nthumberland 1997

Hertfordshire Comments of the Comments of the

Leicestershire

Lincolnshire Company

Derbyshire Derbyshire

East Sussex Market Sussex

Shropshire Resident States of the State of t

Staffordshire Staffordshire

Warwickshire Warwickshire

West Sussex

Cambridgeshire Resident Cambridgeshire

Gloucestershire Contract Contr

Avon

Devon Market Bridge

Suffolk The Party of the Suffolk The Suffo

Norfolk Barrier States

Wiltshire Comments of the Comm

Surrey Base Survey

N Yorks Committee of the Name of the Name

Hampshire Resident Barrier

Oxfordshire Control of the Control o

Hereford & Worcs

EXTRA SPENDING VARIES BY DISTRICT

IN ADDITION to the amount spent by shires on education and social services, districts spend more on services such as housing and refuse collection. The extra amount spent

per head by dist within counties as	tricts varie. follows:
North Cheshire: Cleveland: Cumbria: Durham: Humberside: Lancashire: Northumberland: North Yorkshire:	£109 - £73 £144 - £103 £122 - £83 £124 - £83 £136 - £73 £154 - £73 £111 - £83 £113 - £54
Midlands Derbyshire: Leicestershire: Lincolnshire: Northamptonshire: Nottinghamshire: Shropshire:	£108 - £8 £188 - £5 £120 - £8 £108 - £1 £146 - £7 £107 - £7

Lancashire: Northumberland: North Yorkshire:	£154 - £77 £111 - £87 £113 - £54
Midlands Derbyshire: Leicestershire: Lincolnshire: Northamptonshire: Nottinghamshire: Shropshire: Staffordshire:	£108 - £81 £188 - £54 £120 - £80 £108 - £10 £146 - £72 £107 - £71 £112 - £74
Central Bedfordshire: Buckinghamshire: Cambridgeshire: Hereford & Worcs:	£132 - £74 £118 - £72 £122 - £43 £105 - £74

t n s n	Hertfordshire: Norfolk: Oxfordshire: Suffolk: Warwickshire:	£156 - £79 £128 - £58 £146 - £60 £138 - £73 £104 - £81
t S	South East Berkshire: East Sussex: Essex: Kent: Surrey: West Sussex:	£142 - £72 £145 - £89 £158 - £82 £123 - £74 £103 - £79 £118 - £79
3 2 7 7 4 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	South West Avon: Cornwall: Devon: Dorset: Gloucestershire: Hampshire: Isle of Wight: Somerset: Wiltshire:	£142 - £75 £110 - £94 £126 - £88 £119 - £74 £105 - £47 £134 - £74 £114 - £107 £112 - £82 £99 - £79
1 1 1 1 1	Weish Districts Clwyd: Dyfed: Gwent: Gwynedd: Mid Glamorgan: Powys: South Glamorgan: West Glamorgan:	£226 - £139 £151 - £132 £155 - £133

COUNTY

COUNCILS

Average £629

"How to compare levels of service." Times, 21 Mar. 1996, p. 11. The Times Digital Archive, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/IF0500777874/TTDA?u=west85252&sid=TTDA&xid=ed34cb8f. Accessed 19 July 2020.