

Midlothian Council votes against 4.7% council tax rise

A bid to increase council tax by nearly 5% in Midlothian was narrowly defeated as councillors clashed over the charges.

The local authority's Labour administration put forward plans for a 4.7% increase after Scottish Government guidance that they could raise the annual cost as long as it was less than inflation.

Council leader Derek Milligan told a virtual meeting of elected members that it was equivalent to £1.27 extra a week for households.

And he warned the next administration which will be elected after May's council elections already faced a £12 million funding gap for the following year.

However opposition SNP councillors proposed a lower 2.38% increase arguing that residents in the county would be appalled at the rise being suggested by the Labour administration at a time of financial hardship.

And the Conservative group went further proposing a freeze on council tax for the coming year urging the council to dig deeper into its reserves to meet the funding gap.

Mr Milligan told the council meeting: "The cabinet secretary for finance and economy has stated that she does not expect inflation busting Council Tax increases, and our amendment recognises that expectation by keeping our recommendation for

the increase in Council Tax below the current rate of inflation.

“Keep in mind the new administration is already starting with a £12million black hole for next year and inflation is running at 4.8-5%. This amount keeps us below this figure.

“It is about £1.27 a week in council tax rises.”

Mr Milligan was referring to the estimated amount of funding in the coming year’s budget which is ‘non-recurring’ and would have to be taken out of the following year’s budget as the £12 million gap.

Councillor Kelly Parry who put forward the lower rise for the SNP group said the increase was too high for residents already facing high inflation, energy cost increases and household pressures.

She said: “People will be appalled and wonder which colour the Labour party is.”



Urging councillors to back a zero per cent increase for the Conservative group, Councillor Andrew Hardie said: “We have to acknowledge to situation many people in Midlothian find themselves in. We have some wages not keeping up pace with inflation and the average shopping bill.”

Councillors were asked to vote for either the SNP or Conservative motion with the winning amendment then put forward against the Labour administration proposal.

The SNP amendment won by seven votes to five with Labour councillors abstaining.

When the SNP motion for a smaller increase went head to head with the Labour administration’s plans the vote was split by nine votes to nine with three Conservative councillors, including Councillor Hardie who proposed the council tax

freeze, backing the 4.7% administration increase.

Provost Peter Smaill (Cons) who chaired the meeting had the deciding vote and gave it to the SNP group's 2.38% increase which will now be introduced.

It will mean Band D council tax will rise from £1,409 to £1,442.60.

by Marie Sharp, Local Democracy Reporter

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