

# **Midlothian Council raise council tax by five per cent**

**Council tax will rise by five per cent in Midlothian in the year ahead as a last minute agreement among councillors allowing plans to cut council jobs put on hold.**

Stand alone toilets are to close and there will be a one per cent budget cut across schools as part of measures to plug a £14 million hole in the council budget.

At a meeting of the council on Tuesday elected members agreed not to push ahead with savings proposals which would have meant school crossing patrols being axed, librarians and countryside rangers jobs cut and the removal of community police officers as well as a reduction in free music tuition in schools.

However councillors did agree to increase council tax by five per cent in the coming year, pushed ahead with a 1 per cent budget cut across schools and raised the cost for brown bin services to £40 a year from £35 from next year.

And they decided to use new Scottish Government rules to extend loans on privately financed public buildings reducing payments and claiming back past overpayments to find an additional £4 million in savings as part of approved service concession changes.



Protesters at Midlothian Council  
Protesters gathered outside the council headquarters representing community transport, voluntary groups and students.

Council leader Kelly Parry said the views of the public had been heard by councillors in the run up to the budget decisions being made.

And she said the council's cross-party business transformation steering group had created an amendment to the officers' recommendations which would see many of the proposed cuts sent back for review.

Initial proposals had also included reducing the number of teachers in Midlothian by 174 but that was shelved after The Scottish Government made it clear a reduction in teachers would see additional funding withheld.

Councillor Parry told the meeting: "All Midlothian councillors have worked hard to do their best for the people of Midlothian. We do all care deeply and we care about council services.

"We have all listened carefully and engaged with our residents, employees and trade unions and community partners and worked tirelessly through cross party working to find a consensus.

"While we all want to move towards transformation some budget savings put forward by council officers need further work, that does not mean they are completely off the table but we recognise that we either need to find a different way to deliver services, work with our communities or, in some cases, make difficult decisions."

Cuts which will go ahead include the loss of five cleaning jobs, which will see current vacancies deleted, closure of stand alone public toilets, and the closure of PPP schools during holidays.

Cllr Derek Milligan, leader of the Labour group told the meeting: "This is the most challenging budget time I have ever come across, it is exceptionally difficult to find a way to

balance this book.

“We have not solved a problem today we have simply rearranged our borrowing and it will not go away. This is a stay of execution.”

Mr Milligan said there needed to be more funding from government to councils with 77 per cent of funding coming to local authorities through national grants.

He urged all parties to work together to persuade The Scottish Government Midlothian needs fair funding.

The amended budget was approved with a decision to bring back savings proposals which had been shelved to council in June for a further review.

by Marie Sharp

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