

Rent control zones on hold in Midlothian

Plans to look into introducing rent control zones in Midlothian have been put on hold despite claims private tenants are paying 'extortionate' amounts of money.

Concern about rapidly rising private rental costs in the county which has a council house waiting list of more than 5,000 applicants, saw council officers asked to look into introducing controls.

A meeting of Midlothian Council on Tuesday heard that legislation introduced in 2016 which allows local authorities to introduce Rent Pressure Zones (RPZ) where they can cap increases by private landlords has not been taken up by a single Scottish council.

Officers told elected members the level of data required to submit an application for such a zone "may take several years to collate" adding that it does not 'sufficiently control rents' as it still allows increases above inflation and between tenancies.

Councillor Stephen Curran told the meeting private rent prices in the county had gone "through the roof" with claims a three-bedroom ex council house now cost £1400 a month to rent from private landlords. He said: "The rise is extortionate."

The meeting was told that the Scottish Government had asked the council to take part in a government-funded pilot project

to profile the private rent sector in the county ahead of national legislation.

Councillor Stewart McKenzie said, given the pilot, there seemed no reason for the council to be the first to “try and untangle” powers to cap rents right now, proposing the council agrees not to continue investigating introducing RPZ at this time.

Councillor Derek Milligan agreed saying what is needed is more affordable housing not rent controls.

He said: “If people are having to pay £1,400 a month for a three bedroom home then they have to be on a high income.

“We need more social housing in the area.” Councillors agreed not to pursue RPZ at present.

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter