

Council tax freeze to stick in East Lothian

Second home owners in East Lothian will see council tax bills double while the annual fee is frozen for residents, under plans to go before councillors tomorrow.

The council's ruling Labour administration will set out plans to fill a £17million budget gap with a series of cuts, additional charges and delays to projects when the full council meets.

And high on the list is a plan to introduce a 100% council tax premium for second home owners which could bring in an additional £900,000 in income for the cash strapped local authority.

The Scottish Government has offered local authorities a grant which equates to just under a five per cent council tax increase for the year ahead if they agree to the freeze.

But while the administration has agreed to accept the freeze, its budget suggests residents could be hit with a 10 per cent increase next year to make up the difference.

School bus passes could be scrapped for pupils who already carry Under 22 free travel passes to use on public transport under the administration proposals for the coming financial year and there are plans to reduce to cost of instrumental music tuition which is expected to be done by reducing the number of spaces or instruments available to students.

The introduction of a reduced three weekly household bin collection and charges for garden waste collections could also release up to £1million in funds.

A £10million plan for a new primary school at East Linton has been put on hold for four years along with a £5million plan for a Haddington Flood Protection Scheme over the next five years.

A report on the delays to the project says the adjustments have been made so they “aligned to Scottish Government decisions around the funding and criteria available to support these schemes”.

Funding has been set aside to ensure the reopening of the Loch Centre swimming pool with a £5m refurbishment over three years.

Tomorrow’s meeting (Feb 20) will hear amendments put forward by the Conservative and SNP opposition groups to the administration budget.

The SNP also support a council tax freeze for the year ahead with an 8 per cent increase next year while the Conservatives agree with the administration proposal.

Funding cuts proposed by the administration for the Brunton Theatre Trust of £200,000 are supported by opposition groups, however both SNP and Conservative groups want the proposed funding cut to Enjoy Leisure of £100,000 to be increased to £250,000.

And while the SNP support the administration plans to remove £125,000 of funding for additional policing, the Conservative group oppose the move.

Councillors will meet to set the budget at a virtual meeting tomorrow (Tuesday 20) which can be watched via webcast at eastlothian.public-i.tv

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter



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