

West Lothian budget: £50 garden waste charge planned

A garden waste collection charge proposed by West Lothian Council, although it may soon be scrapped if the Scottish Government makes it a statutory service

West Lothian Council is expected to introduce a charge on collecting garden waste as part of this year's budget plans, stating it is being forced to reduce spending and change a wide range of non-statutory services, given the tight financial settlement.

The council leader Lawrence Fitzpatrick said while they were following other councils across Scotland in charging residents for the service, he believed it was the intention of the Scottish Government to make it a statutory service.

This would mean the council had to provide it, although it was suggested funding would be provided from the Government for this, but only if they move now to bring in a charge.

Cllr Fitzpatrick said: "I don't think anyone wants to pay for a garden waste collection, but the options available to the council are now very limited and that is why the majority of councils in Scotland already have similar charging schemes."

He added: "We are looking to put in place garden waste charges as it's a non-statutory service.

"We understand however that the Scottish Government is intending making it a statutory service. The Scottish

Government providing funding for that service would make it possible for us to remove the garden waste charge in future.

“It is possible that if we do not introduce a charge now, then the Scottish Government would not provide us with additional income should they make the service statutory in future. This would result in less funding for local services.”

Councillor Fitzpatrick went on: “Operational Services – which provides vital services such as roads, paths, parks, recycling centres, waste and recycling – cannot sustain further cuts. We don’t believe that is what local residents want, either. Without increasing income via charging, the only option available is to look at reducing services further and we don’t want that. We want to protect services and protect jobs.

“We need to consider all options available to us given the financial challenges we face.”

The charge has been backed by the unions. After years of services and staff numbers being whittled away the GMB says the charge- which would generate £1 million – would protect jobs and services.

The unions have suggested that the permit charge be added to rents for council homes and argued that mitigations are put in place to recognise the squeeze on incomes.

There has been widespread criticism of the proposal from householders. An online petition has been started.

It is proposed that permits for West Lothian residents would cost £50 per household per annum, with options to be considered for households with more than two brown bins. This charge is broadly similar to other councils.

The majority of Scottish councils which collect garden waste charge for the service. Glasgow and Falkirk councils introduced charges last year.

The proposal would generate additional net income of £1.15 million. This income would go towards the cost of providing the garden waste collection service.

Food and garden waste collections currently take place on a fortnightly basis from the brown bin. A chargeable garden waste service would see food waste continue to be placed in the brown bin and collected fortnightly without charge, with the purchase of a permit allowing customers to also place garden waste in the bin.

The charge was first suggested by council officers last year. Labour backed away from imposing it then. The Labour Group motion which was passed voted to remove it from the budget. However the SNP amendment proposed for the 2023 budget did not seek to remove it.

So far the SNP group has withheld comments on any budget proposals, though individual members have expressed reservations about the bin charge and the suggestion that the permit would have to be bought with a one off £50 payment.

That may change on Thursday.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter



Cllr Lawrence Fitzpatrick



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