

Money from scrapping tax breaks for private schools must be passed to councils says MP

East Lothian's new MP says money collected from scrapping tax breaks for private schools must be passed to councils to boost public services.

Douglas Alexander, who is marking his first month representing the newly named Lothian East ward, after the General Election, said local authorities have seen funding 'cut to the bone'.

East Lothian Council has warned it needs to find £56m in savings over the next five years to balance its budget.

And Mr Alexander said pressure must be put on the Scottish Government to ensure funds raised by the new UK Labour Government's decision to scrap tax exemptions for private schools are passed to them.

Mr Alexander said: "Funding for local services has been cut to the bone by years of Tory austerity and SNP government cuts.

"There is no doubt that local government here in East Lothian and across Scotland deserves a better deal from both Westminster and Holyrood.

"In the UK Parliament Labour is committed to ending private

schools' VAT exemption to help deliver 6,500 more teachers in England.

"We will be urging the Scottish Government to ensure these new funds flow through to councils to help improve services here in Scotland as well."

Mr Alexander, who served in senior cabinet posts in the UK Government for former Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, as MP for Paisley and Renfrewshire, won the Lothian East seat with a whopping 13, 245 majority.

Within days he was appointed to Prime Minister Keir Starmer's cabinet as Minister of State at the Department for Business and Trade.

Mr Alexander said he was delighted to be appointed to the ministerial role but was also conscious of his responsibility to people in East Lothian.

He said: "It is 14 years since we've had a Labour Government and I'm very pleased to have been asked to play a part in delivering the change which we set out during the election campaign.

"The Department for Business and Trade is at the heart of the government's mission to deliver economic growth and good jobs in every part of the country, and I look forward to playing my part as a Minister.

" The constituency and the interests of constituents will always come first. The responsibility of representing Lothian East in Parliament is one I do not take lightly and will never take for granted.

"Whether it is fighting to secure extra resources for our vital local services, working with businesses to enhance the local economy or supporting our wonderful local charities and community groups, the work starts now."

And the county's new MP revealed he spent time in the county as a student, even celebrating his graduation in Haddington.

He said: " When I was a student, I spent time in the county and had my graduation lunch with my family in the Waterside Bistro in Haddington.

"While walking recently at Gullane Bents I was reminded by my wife of the times we would regularly visit the county to walk its beautiful beaches.

"Since that time, I have lived and worked elsewhere in Scotland, London and abroad and it is great to be back representing a county that combines such outstanding scenic beauty with strong, united communities and many pioneering local businesses and organisations."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter