

Plans to draw up tourist tax scheme for East Lothian get green light

Visitors to East Lothian may have to pay a tourist tax in the future after councillors gave the go ahead to plans to draw up a new levy scheme.

A meeting of elected members this week unanimously backed officers pushing ahead with a draft scheme in the wake of new powers give to local authorities.

The Visitor Levy scheme would mean guests are charged an additional fee per night for staying in the county's hotels, hostels and other holiday accommodation.

However councillors called on their officials to ensure any new scheme is easy to collect and does not put small hospitality owners under extra pressure.

Councillor Jeremy Findlay told the meeting that while he 'broadly' agreed with the new tax, he was concerned about its impact on smaller businesses.

He said: "I would ask that the collection process is kept simple for smaller businesses who are affected and do not have the administration support of hotels or hotel chains."

Councillors heard that early results from an ongoing visitors survey in the county suggested most people would be happy to pay the extra charge.

Officers told then that when digital responses to the survey had been analysed 62 per cent of guests supported the fee.

They said when people were asked if they would support it knowing the money raised would be spent on improving services and facilities for tourists, the number backing it rose to 76 per cent.

Officers said: "Most visitors stated that the implementation of a Levy would make no difference to their decision to visit East Lothian again in the future (68 per cent) and 15 per cent didn't know. 14 per cent stated that they would be less likely to visit while three per cent would be more likely to visit ."

East Lothian Provost Councillor John McMillan said during a recent holiday in France he had the chance to see a visitors levy in place paying 18 Euros in tax as part of a week long stay.

He said accommodation operators collected the levy themselves paying it to the local authority twice a year.

He agreed with Councillor Findlay saying: "I am with this but we do need to look at how we bring it forward."

The report said work designing a draft scheme would take a year before it is put out for public consultation

If approved, implementation could begin in spring 2026, with a statutory 18 month minimum period from that point before charging of a levy could start.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter