

Tourist tax could be introduced in East Lothian

A tourist tax could be introduced in East Lothian after early results of a new survey revealed two thirds of visitors were happy to pay.

Councillors will be asked to give officers the go ahead to develop a Visitor Levy scheme at a meeting next week which could mean guests are charged an extra fee per night for staying in the county's hotels, hostels and other holiday accommodation.

A report due to go before elected members has revealed early results from a public survey suggest visitors are happy to pay the addition fee.

It said that while a regular visitors survey was still ongoing, online responses relating to a question about the levy had been analysed and revealed 62 per cent of guests supported the additional charge,

The report said when people were asked if they would support in 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 ."

New laws passed by the Scottish Parliament in May this year give local authorities the power to introduce a Levy that is charged on the purchase of overnight accommodation at a percentage rate.

Councillors are being asked to agree a proposal for an East Lothian Visitor Levy Scheme should be developed with proposals to bring it back to council for further approval and public consultation in the future.

The report set out a timeline which would see a proposal brought back to council by October next year and, if approved, a 12 week public consultation.

It said: "Adoption of a Visitor Levy would result in the collection of a local tax based on the occupancy of visitor accommodation in East Lothian.

"Visitor Levy proposals will be developed and reported to Council in line with the indicative timeline.

"Following a decision to implement a Visitor Levy Scheme there is a statutory 18-month implementation period before the first date a Levy would be chargeable."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter