

# **East Lothian residents could face 10 per cent council tax hike**

**People in East Lothian could face a 10 per cent rise in council tax next year after the Scottish Government lifted a freeze on putting it up.**

Cabinet secretary Shona Robison announced the decision to end the freeze in her budget statement to Holyrood yesterday with a pledge of 'record funding' for local authorities to ease the need for a council tax increase.

However East Lothian councillors have already approved a 10 per cent rise in 2025 which was included in its February budget to offset this year's freeze.

At the time a council spokesperson stressed that it would be reviewed ahead of next year's budget setting.

Last night East Lothian Council leader Norman Hampshire welcomed the decision to lift the council tax freeze and said it was too early to say how much it would need to go up to help the council meet demands on services next year.

But Conservative South Scotland MSP Craig Hoy, a former East Lothian councillor, warned residents in the county could find themselves paying more for less services.

Mr Hoy said: "The onus is on the SNP to deliver the funding fast growing councils like East Lothian need to deliver

services for local people.

“Otherwise, hard-pressed local residents will pay more in council tax bills, only to get less in return with the day-to-day services that they rely on being slashed or taken away altogether.

“My concern is that councils – and council taxpayers – will once again pay the price for the SNP’s gross financial incompetence.”

Councillor Hampshire said members would have to wait and see how much additional funding was provided before making any decisions.

He said: “I welcome the removal of another council tax freeze. It is too early to give any indication on what council tax increase we will need. I will wait until we know what grant funding we are receiving and what funding has been ring fenced.

“The council tax is a decision for councils to decide and the Government should not interfere in what councils need to do.”

Labour South Scotland MSP Martin Whitfield, whose base is in Tranent, said the removal of a freeze helped councils but warned funding needed to be given to local authorities to avoid more cuts to services.

He said: “The UK budget delivered record funding for Scotland’s public services, and it is vital that the Scottish Government now ensures that money reaches front line services, including councils.

“The council tax freeze in last year’s budget was not fully funded by Ministers and left councils facing very difficult decisions on funding for local services. Those funding pressures undoubtedly remain, but if there is no council tax freeze or cap, councils will at least have greater flexibility

on how they protect services for the year ahead.”

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter