

# Service charges introduced for temporary tenancies in West Lothian

**West Lothian is to increase rents and service charges for those in temporary tenancies in a bid to cut spiralling costs caused by the surge in homelessness.**

The move will standardise rent charges and include service charges which until now have been paid out of council funds.

SNP councillors accused the Labour administration of unfairly targeting “the most vulnerable in society” and voted against the proposals.

West Lothian currently faces a £1.5m overspend on the budget for homeless provision.

Most councils already impose service charges to those in temporary tenancies, but West Lothian does not.

Benchmarking of other local authorities where the charges for temporary accommodation are known, indicates that West Lothian’s revised charge would rank 11th out of 20,

The move standardises rent charges and introduces a service charge which includes furniture storage costs. The base service charge is £43.90 a week.

The SNP raised an amendment to the proposal at the Executive which said increases in rental charges “unfairly targets the

most vulnerable in society.”

Councillor Willie Boyle told the meeting: “This is clearly a severe increase when people are at their most vulnerable. Not everyone will have these costs covered by housing benefit.”

He pointed out that many temporary tenancies were given to working people had lost privately rented homes as landlords had deserted the private rental market in recent years.

Councillors voted to approve the new charges.

The report set out the proposed new framework which places all rents into a sliding scale of charges based on the property size and type.

To date the shortfall in meeting the costs for providing these services have been met by West Lothian Council budgets and has led to significant budget pressures within the Housing Need service as homeless demand and costs to meet this have increased.

Housing officers said the changes will help to alleviate this pressure and ensure the continuation of homeless prevention and support activity which has not been funded in the long term by the Scottish Government.

The changes do not impact council housing rent levels which are set via the council annual budget setting process.

Both housing need and the Advice Shop services will provide additional support to homeless tenants to ensure that there is practical help to ensure financial hardship is prevented wherever possible.

The changes bring the council into line with other local authorities in Scotland, which aim to fully recover the costs of providing a temporary accommodation service and would secure funding to provide the intensive support required for

many homeless applicants.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter