

Council rents to rise to an average of £89 a week in West Lothian

Council rents will rise to an average of £89 a week in West Lothian following agreement by a special meeting of the full council today (Monday).

Councillors across the chamber backed the 3.5% increase which will be in force until 2027/28.

Councillors also agreed a capital spending programme, including new builds and renovation of existing stock totalling over £100 million in the next three year.

An amendment by the SNP calling for more money to be targeted on empty homes was rejected.

The average weekly rent will rise by £3.01 from £86.13 to 89.14 from April. Rents for garages will rise £6.71 to £6.94.

By 2027/28 rents will be £95.49 a week.

Opposition SNP group leader Councillor Janet Campbell suggested that tenants had been given a "loaded question" in the recent consultation in only being asked whether they agreed to the 3.5% increase, with no alternatives.

A report to councillors said: "The council also received 725 responses to the consultation, with 431 (59%) of those tenants

responding expressing a preference for a 3.5% per annum rent increase over the three-year period 2025/26 to 2027/28. There were no responses from persons on the Common Housing Register.”

The average weekly rent level in West Lothian for 2024/25 is £86.13 which is slightly above the average rent charged by Scottish Local Authorities of £83.32, but below the average rent charged by local Registered Social Landlords of £103.65.

As the Local Democracy Reporting Service revealed last week neighbouring authorities are planning higher rent rises- including East Lothian which is considering a 6.5% increase.

A motion from the Labour group said: “This minority Labour Administration doesn’t underestimate the challenges for our tenants in these very difficult times, and notes the reported level of cumulative rent arrears.

“However, with an in-year collection rate of 97% this year to date, our tenants yet again are to be commended for the priority they are placing on the payment of rent.”

The SNP group supported the 3.5% rise but an amendment by Councillor De Bold called for the redirection of funds with the housing accounts to concentrate on getting void homes back to lettable standard quicker.

The amendment said: “The average cost to return a void property, including labour and material costs, is approximately £6,150 per property, and the Council therefore resolves to redirect £160,000 of budget from within existing resources to reduce the number of void properties by a further 26 properties in addition to existing targets for 2025/26 and return them to mainstream lets.”

Independent Councillor Andrew McGuire said the council had already made “good progress” in bringing down the number of

void homes through the last year.

The council had, last year, agreed to suspend non urgent repairs for a time to concentrate on a growing backlog of void homes, and more than 1,000 were returned to the books in the last year.

Council leader Lawrence Fitzpatrick said the problems West Lothian faced had been exacerbated by changes in legislation which removed the need for a local connection to qualify for housing. This change now allows anyone to demand a council home in West Lothian.

Executive councillor for housing services George Paul said: "It is important to stress that every penny of income from council rent collections goes towards enhancing homes for our tenants and maintaining and improving the quality of council homes remains a key priority for the council."

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter