

East Lothian councillors unanimously back a 6.5% rent rise for tenants

East Lothian councillors today unanimously backed a 6.5% rent rise for tenants despite calls from some members for it to be even higher.

The increase in council house rent was lower than the initial proposal of 7% but means the council remains one of the cheapest landlords in Scotland.

SNP councillor Lee-Anne Menzies told a special meeting of the council called to set its budgets for the year ahead, that a low rent was not a good thing.

She said: "I am supporting this increase of 6.5% today but I believe the rent should be higher."

Councillor Menzies said a check with neighbouring local authorities found East Lothian was charging as much as £18 less than other councils a week.

She said: "East Lothian has the third lowest council rent in Scotland but we also have some of the most expensive houses for buying and this translates into some of the highest private rents as well.

"I am hearing from officers we are being impacted with an increase in homeless applications from people not currently living in East Lothian and are coming from other areas, are our low rents part of this issue?"

Councillor Andy Forrest, the Labour administration's cabinet member for housing, said the rent increase he proposed allowed the council to continue its work to provide new affordable homes and upgrade those already in stock.

He said: "It has been a difficult decision to agree this rent increase but to ensure we can continue to deliver our services to residents we have no choice but to increase our rents to help meet the needs of our tenants."

Councillor George McGuire, Conservatives, said that while he agreed 6.5% was an appropriate level it was time to review rent in the county.

He said: "We need to have a review of our rent levels as soon as possible with no dithering around."

The cross party proposal for a 6.5% rent increase was unanimously approved by councillors.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter