

Households in West Lothian could see 5.8% Council Tax rise

West Lothian households could see a 5.8% increase in Council Tax from April, when the budget is set later this month.

That would add £6.73 a month, or £1.55 a week, to the bill for an average Band D property in the county.

The figure is one of lowest rises predicted among neighbouring local councils, despite West Lothian having had to cut £159m from its budgets since 2007.

The assumed rise mirrors what the council had wanted to put in place in February 2024 before the Council Tax freeze – the tenth imposed on local authorities by Holyrood's SNP administration – was introduced in the Autumn of 2023. If it's agreed it will bring in just over £6m to council coffers.

West Lothian received only around £4m for this financial year in government funding to cover the 2023 freeze imposed by the then First Minister, Humza Yousaf.

The council's Corporate Policy and Resources PDSP also heard proposals to cut the discount reduction for empty properties and end generous rates relief on empty commercial property.

SNP group leader Councillor Janet Campbell criticised wider budget proposals outlined as lacking "foresight and imagination."

A report to councillors detailed the long-term financial position. "The council has made £159.2 million of savings over the period 2007/08 to 2023/24 and it is becoming increasingly difficult to make all the required savings without impacting on the level of service provided to the public."

If a 5.8% Council Tax increase is agreed at the budget meeting later this month West Lothian will likely set one of the lower increases. Neighbouring East Lothian has considered a rise of up to 10%.

The Scottish average band D council tax is £1,421 compared with the West Lothian 2024/25 band D rate of £1,390.96. West Lothian Council has the tenth lowest council tax band D rate in Scotland.

From 2017/18 to 2024/25 the average band D council tax rate for Scotland has increased from £1,173 to £1,421, an increase of £248 (21.1%) or 68p per week for seven years. West Lothian's band D rate has increased by £262.96 (23.3%) or 72p per week.

Councillor Janet Campbell, questioned an assertion in the Council Tax report that the average band D rate in England is £750 higher than the Scottish average and £780 higher than West Lothian.

Councillor Campbell also suggested the financial officers' suggestion that the projected additional income of from Council Tax of £19.3m over the next three years: "would appear to more than cover the £7.1m which is the total pressure over the three years taking into account all the savings which have already been agreed by the council."

Kenneth Ribbons, Acting Head of Finance and Property Services said: "That's not in fact correct because the budget model already assumes the rate of council tax over those years. It is 5.8% for the first year, for the other two years it is 4.5%. So those increases are already factored into the budget

model and resolved in the projected deficit already outlined.”

Councillor Campbell asked the finance director: “Is this correct that that average {English} Band D rate is £750 more than the Scottish average?

Mr Ribbons responded: “I would certainly hope it is correct given that it is in the report, but I can check that and report back separately.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter