

Midlothian Council backs 10% council tax rise

Midlothian Council became the latest Scottish local authority to introduce a 10% council tax rise today as its leader said people would pay more but the council was 'delivering more'.

Councillor Kelly Parry welcomed additional funding from both the UK and Scottish Governments for services in Midlothian but said it still needed to raise council tax to balance its budget.

And she hit back at people who had been protesting over cuts to the hours of some leisure centres and swimming pools telling them if they wanted to support the centres they needed to use them more.

Speaking about the council tax rise Councillor Parry pointed to higher National Insurance contributions which have to be paid by the council as one of the reasons for the high council tax rise.

The UK Government increased the amount employers have to pay in their budget last year and despite hope local authorities would be reimbursed the money they have been given only covers around 60% of the additional costs.

Councillor Parry said: "I can confirm the council tax will rise by 10% in the next financial year however I think it is important, in context, to note what that means to residents

and what it provides in terms of value.

“Based on a Band D residence, it will add on approximately £150 a year. In return residents will expect us to prioritise their views and I believe we have all tried our best to do so.

She said important issues from public consultations including retaining leisure centres, keeping community facilities open and retaining instrumental music tuition had all been acted on as well as tackling concerns about health and wellbeing by giving one of ‘the most generous’ grants to the county’s health and social care partnership of any council in Scotland.

Among savings approved by the council were plans to reduce the opening hours of swimming pools and close two sports centres at weekends.

Councillor Parry said the council needed to take a commercial approach to the income generation side of its services.

She said: “That means where there is low footfall in our gyms and leisure centres we need to address this either by reducing opening hours or costs, and that is what any business would do.

“I do note the public interest and petitions over the weekend and want to make it absolutely clear , particularly to those petition to ‘save our swimming pools’ that principal is what is happening here and this is how we save our leisure centres and facilities.

“If the public wants to help they can contribute by using these facilities themselves.”

The budget proposals which came after cross party discussions at its Business Transformation Steering Group was unanimously supported.

Councillor Derek Milligan welcomed the additional money for the health and social care partnership as well as a 5%

increase in payments to foster carers, the second rise in two years.

He said: "When you have all three political parties sitting here agreeing you know it needs to be done."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter