

West Lothian councillors asked to back 3.5% rent increase

Councillors will be asked to approve a 3.5% rent increase when they meet to discuss the budget next week.

The majority of responses to a recent consultation exercise supported the increase which will take the average rent to £89.14 a week, a rise of £3.01 a week, from April, if agreed on Monday morning.

Coupled with a proposed council tax increase of 5.8% this means that West Lothian will be at the lower end of rises planned by neighbouring councils. In East Lothian households are facing a 10% council tax hike and a proposed 6.5% rent rise.

In a report to councillors on the Housing Services PDSP, Graeme Struthers the Depute Chief Executive responsible for Housing said: "Rent levels compare favourably with other Scottish councils and RSLs [Registered Social Landlords]

"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."

It added: "If council rents go up by 3.5%, the eligible rent on which the Housing Benefit calculation is based will also go

up by 3.5%, so those on full benefit will not suffer further financial detriment.

“Approximately 65% of council tenants are in receipt of Universal Credit and/or Housing Benefit and those in receipt of full housing costs would be funded to meet the cost of the rent increase.

“The council’s focus on rent arrears from a preventative standpoint should assist those who are negatively impacted by the 3.5% raise as Housing officers continue to work in partnership with the Advice Shop to maximise income and improve budgeting skills.”

The consultation, which included all existing tenants as well as persons on the Common Housing Register, was held during December and January.

Tenant networks, the tenants’ panel, and the online focus group were all consulted and there have been no additional comments made, with the panels and network members agreeing that the 3.5% agreed during the initial budget strategy consultation is still appropriate.

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.

Council officers argue that the increase matches the Scottish Government’s affordability strategy. The proposed weekly rent of £89.14 compares to a gross household income based on a full-time employee who receives the national living wage, which is currently £11.44 per hour and will increase to £12.21 per hour from 1 April. That will take the gross minimum wage to £440 a week.

While there is no strict definition of affordability the Scottish Government says It is suggested that when housing

costs exceed 30%-35% of a household's income, the cost is judged to be unaffordable.

Chairing the PDSP, Councillor George Paul, the Executive Councillor for Housing Services said: "The response from the general public is that 3.5% is acceptable. There are no responses saying no to the increase."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter