

West Lothian revenue budget looks to increase charge by up to 5%

The cost of West Lothian council services, from bulky uplift to burial charges are set to rise by an average of up to 5% from April.

Councillors will meet in Livingston next Tuesday 25 February to set this year's revenue and capital budget for West Lothian.

They will be asked to give the stamp of approval increases in a range of discretionary fees and charges likely to bring in an extra £289,000, as the council look to close a £9.9 million budget gap.

Registration services could see increases generating £12,000 for council coffers. These include the cost of registry office weddings rising from £225 to £266 per ceremony through the week and from £312 to £427 – with guests- on a Saturday.

Naming services and renewal of vows ceremonies could rise from £116 to £188 Monday to Friday in a registry office and in approved venues from £245 through the week to £288.

There is no planned increase in registration of births and deaths.

The cost of burials could rise, with interment fees rising from £907.04 to £1,020.04 for adults. Interment fees for cremated remains are planned to rise from £220 to £234. There

are no charges for children.

As the Local Democracy Reporting Service has already highlighted, the council proposes to lift the costs of bulky uplifts of five items to £50 from £38. This will bring in £49,000.

This increase would move the financial position for this discretionary service closer to full cost recovery, but the service would still require some subsidy from council budgets to deliver.

On the basis of a similar five item uplift service, the council's current charge of £38.59 is the 16th highest of the 31 councils which charge for bulky uplifts. Moving to a charge of £50 would exceed the current average charge of £41.91 and would move the council to 9th highest, based on 2024/25 charges.

The income generated through the sale of lairs and interment fees does not offset the full operating costs of delivering the service, with the cemetery service heavily subsidised by the council.

Whilst the council has a statutory responsibility to provide a burial service, it has discretion to set its own charges. It is proposed to increase cemetery charges for the sale of lairs and interment fees to a charge where the service operates at a reduced subsidy level.

An increase of 20% in 2025/26 would generate additional income of approximately £65,000 and decrease that subsidy to around £102,000.

Officers propose that the council would move towards a full cost recovery model, through above inflation increases in the years beyond 2025/26. The sale of lairs is proposed to rise from £1,069 to £1,140, and cremation lairs from £426 to £454.

New charges for temporary tenancies starting at £145 a week, for a one-bedroom property, and including a service charge for such things as furniture storage have already been introduced following a decision by the council in January. Until then the council had met the cost of temporary tenancies out of its own budgets

Across libraries, swimming pools and partnership centres there is better news, with charges largely remaining static at current levels on services ranging from room/pool hire charges to photocopying.

A report to the Corporate Policy and Resources PDSP highlighted: "Despite an increase in core grant, the council has a budget gap before savings of £9.9 million in 2025/26 and £20.9 million over the three years to 2027/28.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter