

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT COUNCIL TAX

1. Question

Why has my Council Tax bill increased? I was told that my Council Tax was frozen this year, but it's not

Answer(s)

Despite the current economical climate, you will find that the council tax element of your bill is the same amount as last year. However your overall bill has increased by an average of 0.9%, because Scottish Water has increased the Combined Water/ Waste Water Charge by 3.7%.

Council Tax bills for properties in West Lothian remain at a level below the Scottish average.

2. Question

How much has the Water and Sewerage increased by?

Answer(s)

- The council does not provide water and sewerage services, these are provided by a completely separate body called Scottish Water.
- Combined Water/ Waste Water have increased by 3.7%. This decision was taken by Scottish Water and they do point out that the increase is below the rate of inflation.
- The council has a statutory responsibility for collecting the water charges along with Council Tax.
- There is a Water Charge reduction scheme in place for many customers who receive Council Tax Benefit. There is no need to apply for this. Those who qualify will have the reduction automatically shown on their bill.
- The Scottish Water leaflet is enclosed, which may provide more detail, however, an explanation of why water charges have increased can be obtained from Scottish Water by telephoning **0845 601 8855** or **writing to Scottish Water, PO Box 8855, Edinburgh EH10 6YQ**. The Scottish Water website can be found at www.scottishwater.co.uk

3. Question

Where/how is all the revenue from Council Tax being spent?

Answer(s)

- The income the council receives is being spent on the delivery of essential local services, such as:
 - Care of the vulnerable and elderly
 - The education of our children, and lifelong learning opportunities for adults
 - The maintenance of roads, lighting, pavements and footpaths
 - Tackling poverty and improving health
 - Reducing crime and increasing community safety
 - Supporting and developing local businesses
 - The collection of waste and street cleaning.

- Only 17% of the money spent on services by West Lothian Council is funded by Council Tax. The remaining 83% is funded by government grants and the redistribution of National Non Domestic Rates income, which is controlled by the Scottish Executive.

- It is important to explain that the Council Tax does not cover expenditure on council house repairs. This cost is entirely funded through income from house rents.

4. Question

Why do I have to pay so much when I do not use all the services?

Answer(s)

Council Tax is a tax (not a charge) which funds the overall provision of services in West Lothian and not a direct charge based on service usage. Everyone in West Lothian is using, receiving or benefiting from council services. These services include: -

- Care of the vulnerable and elderly
- The education of our children, and lifelong learning opportunities for adults
- The maintenance of roads, lighting, pavements and footpaths

- Tackling poverty and improving health
- Reducing crime and increasing community safety
- Business support and development to invest in our community.
- The collection of waste and street cleaning.

5. Question

What is the council doing about other customers who do not pay?

Answer

- The council's position is that everyone must meet their Council Tax liability and action is taken to fulfil that objective.
- The in-year collection rate has improved every year from 1998/99. In that year West Lothian Council collected 84.3% of the in-year Council Tax due. For the year 2007/08 this figure had risen to 94.03%. In cash terms in 1998/99 we collected less than £40m in 2007/08 we collected £74.5m. The improvement of nearly 10% in-year collection in real terms amounts to £8m. Whilst we are unable to confirm the 2008/09 collection rate until 31 March 2009, we are predicting that we will at least maintain our collections levels of the previous year, despite the difficult economic climate.
- The collection of money does not stop when the year ends. Our work to collect money from earlier years has seen, for instance the 1998/99 collection rate rise to 97.34%. More importantly we have exceeded the original budgeted collection rates for previous years charges by over £1.0m in 2007/08. This has made a sizeable contribution to enabling the Council Tax for 2009/10 to be frozen for the second year in a row. Collection rates have improved against a background of increasing property numbers.
- The council will continue to pursue non-payers by a variety of means and will continue a rigorous recovery program throughout 2009/10 to further improve the collection rate, both in-year and overall previous financial years.

6. Question

How can I pay my Council Tax?

➤ Answer

There are a number of ways to pay. These are:

- By Direct Debit

- Over the Internet
- By Credit or Debit Card
- At all our local council information service centres
- At the Post Office

You can find more details on how and where to pay your Council Tax on the back of your bill or the council's website www.westlothian.gov.uk

7. Question

I heard the Scottish Executive is going to abolish Council Tax. Why should I pay?

Answer

The Scottish Government has recently announced that it has dropped plans to replace Council Tax. You have a legal duty to pay your council tax as long as it remains the method of local government taxation. You must continue to pay your Council Tax in line with your demand notice.