

Council Tax Freeze

The Scottish Government claims that the council tax freeze is “vital lifeline to hard pressed Scots”. This is not the case. The freeze disproportionately benefits the wealthy; while charges are being increased and services cut. Band H households are “saving” on average £441 per year while those in the cheapest homes (Band A) “save” £147 a year. UNISON’s FOI request shows increased charging far outweighs the claimed savings. Rents in some areas are going up by over £900 per year. Other charges appear small but build up quickly on essential services which are used as often as every day. It’s much fairer for everyone to pay a small amount extra in tax than have big increases in charges that bear no relation to ability to pay services.

Discussions around the council tax usually use the Band D charge for comparison but the average bill rate gives a better idea of what people are actually paying. The average council tax bill in Scotland is £985 while the average band D charge is £1149. Band D in Glasgow is £1213, the average bill is only £953. Dundee City also has a higher than average band D charge, the average bill is £900. The average bill in East Renfrewshire is £1233 although their band D charge is £1126 and East Dunbartonshire has a band D of £1142 but an average bill of £1240. A 1% rise on average would cost £98.50, even on East Dunbartonshire the average rise would be £124: far less than extra charges are costing residents.

Rents: Since the council tax freeze stated in 2007 rents in Edinburgh have gone from £61.57 per week (for a three bedroom home) to £85.55 that adds up to £1237 a year extra. The average council tax bill in Edinburgh is £1098; the band D charge for Edinburgh is only £1169. A 3% rise there on average would have cost £330 instead social housing tenants face a substantial rise in housing costs. South Ayrshire rents have gone up by £870, the average council tax there is £1050 so even a 3% rise in council tax would have meant on average an extra £300. Tenants in Fife had a rise of £688 the average tax there is £931 so a 3% rise would have cost less than half the rent increase. Housing associations are not subject to FOI but data available on the Scottish housing regulator website shows that housing association rents have gone up by 4.8% in the last year alone. **There is no freeze in housing costs for social housing tenants.**

School meals, while those who qualify for free school meals are at least protected, lunch for the rest is going up by a third in some areas. Since 2007 meals in Argyll and Bute have gone from £1.60 to £2.10. An extra 50p per day per child soon adds up for families. A family with two children is paying £5 extra per week £200 for a school year. The average council tax bill in Argyll and Bute is £1037. In Orkney charges rose from £1.50 to £2.00 another £200 rise for working parents to find. Meals in Edinburgh were £2.15 in 2007 when the freeze started, they are £2.25 with a possible rise to £2.30, this 15p rise works out at £60 per year for a family with 2 children.

Day Centres: Councils are introducing charges for attendance at day centres for elderly and disabled residents: East Dunbartonshire is charging £10 a week (no matter how often you go), that is £500 a year. Falkirk has introduced a charge of £23.50 per visit for people with learning difficulties. Fife used to charge £2.80 per day; it increased to £3.13 with a further rise awaiting approval this year. That is an increase again of almost £60 a year. Scottish Borders have introduced a £2 per day charge. Even a weekly visit means an extra £100. Western Isles is planning to add £1.00 to their lunch charges for day centre attendees. £260 per year for five visits a week.

These are just a few examples of the increased costs service users face. The ring-fencing, tied to the inadequate subsidy given to those councils who implement the freeze, further limits council’s choices. The charges are cutting deep into people’s pocket. Freezing taxes will not reduce poverty or inequality. Councils need resources to continue providing vital services rather than impose damaging cuts or punitive charges.

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