

Council Tax Freeze 2014

The council tax freeze is now in its seventh year and as we reported last year councils are increasing charges in order to balance the books. The freeze disproportionately benefits the wealthy; while those on lower incomes face new or increased charges for the services they rely on. Band H households are “saving” on average £441 per year while those in the cheapest homes (Band A) “save” £147 a year. Increased charges take little or no account of ability to pay. UNISON’s FOI request shows increased charging far outweighs the claimed savings. Costs for burials and cremations across Scotland have soared. A burial in Highland is now £505 compared to £237 in 2007. 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.

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.

Burials: Some areas are seeing significant rises in the cost of burials and cremations. Renfrewshire charged £274 in 2007, this year the charge is £445. Glasgow did not provide figures for this year but last year the charge was £832 compared to £747 in 2007. West Dunbartonshire charges are now £547 in 2007 it was £368. Edinburgh again didn’t provide figures for this year but last year charges were £957 up from £627 in 2007.

School meals: Charges for school lunches continue to rise, while those who qualify for free school meals are protected, lunch for the rest has gone up by as much as a third in some areas. Even a 5p rise per day, as in Fife this year, soon adds up particularly for those with larger families. Families with two school age children in Fife are paying an extra £19 per year compared to last year and £114 more than in 2007. Glasgow has just put up prices by 10p per meal: £38 a year for a two child family compared to last year and £138 more than in 2007.

Swimming: Scotland faces significant health challenges. Swimming is a great way for adults to keep fit. Swimming doesn’t require specialist equipment and is low impact and low risk even for those who are obese. Sadly this is also becoming more and more expensive. Falkirk council now charge £3.50 per session, £1.20 more than in 2007. A weekly swim now costs an extra £60 per year. Making it harder for people to keep fit and lose weight is completely contrary to the policy of increasing investment in preventative spending.

These are just a few examples of the increased charges service users face. Increased and new charges vary from authority to authority: Other examples include bulk uplift of rubbish, resident’ parking permits, attendance at day centres for elderly and disabled residents, and meals for housebound residents.

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. We need a new fairer tax for local government.

Last year’s briefing is available [here](#) and here is our [blog](#) on the Equality Trust report on perceptions on taxation

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