

Greens eye spare council cash for Warmer Homes

Scotland's capital should lead the country in investing in jobs, training and protecting the most vulnerable from welfare cuts, according to Green councillors in Edinburgh.

In preparing Green proposals for the [City Council's budget meeting on 7 February 2013](#) the Greens say they have identified an accumulated fund of almost £14 million in the city's coffers. This is made up of additional income from council tax on empty and second homes and can only be used for housing. Green councillors want to invest £10 million of that in a Warmer Homes programme targeted on the lowest income households, those most vulnerable to ongoing cuts in welfare budgets.

Green councillors say a programme of this scale would allow the city to take the next step up in improving energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty, at a time when the lowest income households face loss and cuts to housing benefit. At the same time, the programme would support at least 160 new jobs and 10 new apprenticeships for young people.

✘ Green Group Convenor, Steve Burgess said:

□The City faces some stark budget choices within a very tight financial straitjacket. The Coalition parties have both signed up nationally to the Council Tax Freeze and locally have rejected innovative income-raising opportunities like the

hotel visitor levy.

□That means we need to squeeze every penny of value out of existing funds. That includes the £14 million pot sitting in reserves earmarked for housing projects. I want to see that money put to good use, providing dry warm homes for many of our citizens most at risk of poverty. As benefit cuts bite yet further from this coming April it is important to do what we can in other areas of cost, such as fuel bills. At the same time the programme will support at least 160 new jobs and around 10 new apprenticeships.□

The Greens expect to put forward further budget proposals on schools, transport and supporting vulnerable people in the run up to Budget day on 7 February.

The meeting on 7 February will have the draft budget put forward by the Labour-SNP administration which was the subject of consultation until earlier this month. Even though it is too late to consult on the new budget to be voted on next week, you can read more about the draft budget for 2013/14 [on the council website](#) or watch the finance Convenor Alasdair Rankin here.

Councillor Rankin has pointed out the savings necessary:-“The Council needs to make savings of £12.8million in 2013/14, including an extra £6.9million to fund increasing demand for some services. £3.8million of efficiency savings and suggestions to raise more income have been proposed. A further £9million in savings has also been recommended through changing the way the Council buys goods and services.”

It will also be possible for anyone to put forward their ideas on the Council's finances to the Convenor at any time, as

Council Leader, Andrew Burns was anxious to point out at the last Leader's briefing earlier this month. He also repeats that the draft budget has been available for discussion for some time in his Leader's Report:-"I have been working hard with my colleagues, Councillor Alasdair Rankin and Councillor Bill Cook, looking at how we spend money and how we make sure the public and stakeholders can give us their [views](#).

For the first time the Council's [draft budget](#) was published months in advance so we could start a series of consultation meetings and carry out a survey to gauge what people thought of the proposals. Many of you chose to tell us how we could use money more efficiently and in general said you support the general thrust of detecting problems earlier and helping people more quickly to prevent future problems. We have listened and amended the proposals to take account of your views.

Around a billion pounds each year is spent on roads, schools, care homes and a myriad of other services such as street cleaning, employment initiatives and community safety. It is important we have sound financial management and restore confidence in the way the city is managed. It is a major exercise to prioritise what is important and we feel that the opposition political groups should also have their say if we are to reach the best possible decisions. That is why we are publishing the second draft budget and will look for suggestions that we can all reach agreement on.

We intend to publish the next draft budget even earlier to ensure more time is available for you to feed back your views."