

Edinburgh Councillor Blogs – Councillor Gavin Corbett on the draft budget

✘ *City of Edinburgh Council spends over £1 billion a year. The draft budget framework for 2014-15 and 4 years after was approved for public consultation at the council's Finance and Budget Committee today. But not before an amendment by opposition groups was voted down – an amendment which sought to refer the budget back for more thorough preparation. Green Finance Spokesperson Gavin Corbett explains why.*

Edinburgh's Capital Coalition has made a lot of its commitment to produce a draft budget for consultation and the fact that it has been produced in September. Writing in his self-named ["Really Bad Blog"](#), council leader, Andrew Burns says: "This year we are leading the way for other local authorities by publishing the draft budget even earlier."

I would heartily applaud that, if what we got was a draft budget.

But we don't have that. Or anything like it.

At the Finance Committee [@Edinburgh_CC](#) [@gavincorbett](#) criticising the form of the draft budget which has been prepared – not enough detail.

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [September 19, 2013](#)

Readers can see what a draft budget looks like by looking at the Scottish Government [draft budget](#) published last week. And, to ensure that I am not making a partisan point, this is equally true of the Labour-Lib Dem Scottish Executive in the past. The Scottish Budget is a long way short of perfect, but at least there one can see **total spending**, set out sector by sector, with an indication of what's changing, what is not and what lies behind the proposals.

What we have from the City of Edinburgh Council is nothing like that. It is a [draft savings plan](#), at best, amounting to less than 3% of ongoing spend, which allows no opportunity to see other potential proposals. It is like an iceberg, only the tiniest tip of which is visible, with 97.5% hidden below a dark surface.

To take an absurd (and, let me emphasise, entirely fictional, example), let's say the Lord Provosts' office spent £2 million annually on cakes. If that amount was not changing it would not appear in the budget framework, even though almost everyone (bakers aside) might want to suggest better uses for the money.

To compound the matter, the detail given as to actual savings or cuts in the draft budget framework is far too sketchy to mean anything. It's all most a week after the papers were published and we still do not have budget packs which would describe each proposal, would set out risks and alternatives and allow us to judge what has merits, what has not.

That is why I said at committee that, if we approve the report

presented to councillors, we are giving the green light to a process which is a travesty of transparency and does a great disservice to the consultation which is to follow. It is why I urged all members of all parties to send the process back to get a proper draft budget on which to consult.

As a Green councillor I am going to have very different spending priorities from fellow opposition groups, the Liberal Democrats and Tories. But we have a shared interest in a budget process that is complete, accessible and transparent. Indeed, I think that is in the interests of all councillors and of the Edinburgh public, whose ideas and insights are so important if the City Council is to make the right spending choices.

Councillor Corbett was at the [Finance & Budget Committee](#) this morning where the amendment which he seconded was defeated. The motion which he seconded would have meant that the motion proposed at item 7.1 would have been defeated. In practical terms this would have resulted in more information being made available to councillors before voting on the budget framework. The Finance Convenor assured the committee that all details will be made available by Monday 23 September on the council website.

Gavin Corbett is Green Councillor for Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart and he tweets [@gavincorbett](#)

We filmed a cameo video of him earlier this year.