

Government offers 'support for Edinburgh' in budget



Thursday's budget delivered on the ask of the Scottish people for a fairer and more prosperous Scotland, Finance Secretary John Swinney said today.

Setting out the budget to parliament, Mr Swinney said the plans, which also respond to the improved economic picture, would make Scotland a more prosperous country, tackle inequalities and continue to protect and invest in Scotland's public services.

The Finance Secretary claimed that the budget would build on the Scottish Government's track record since 2007 and take steps to meet the aspirations for Scotland set out in the recent referendum campaign.

He outlined that people living in Edinburgh will benefit from:

- Average savings of around £1200 thanks to extra money provided to freeze council tax since 2007
- Free prescriptions
- Free school meals
- Free personal care for the elderly
- 600 hours of free childcare for three and four-year-olds and the most vulnerable two-year-olds
- More affordable housing
- Continued measures to fully mitigate the Bedroom Tax
- A commitment to the Living Wage
- Quality healthcare and a protected NHS budget
- Improvements to transport links including investment in the Forth Replacement Crossing
- 1,000 additional police officers across Scotland's streets

In addition to this Edinburgh will receive its fair share of the £10.8 billion local government allocation including an extra £13.7 million in 2015-16 within their local government finance settlement as a result of the new 85 per cent funding floor formula this Government introduced, ensuring Edinburgh gets a better deal than ever before.

The city will also receive a share of the £10.8 billion local government allocation, a £31.6 million boost to its housing stock and Scottish Government investment in James Gillespie's and Boroughmuir High Schools, St John's Primary School, Edinburgh to Glasgow rail improvements and the Borders Railway.

This comes on top of investment in the redevelopment of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Royal Edinburgh Hospital Campus and the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Centre.

Since 2007 the Scottish Government has also invested in the National Museum of Scotland and refurbished Parliament House.

Mr Swinney said: "We want to build a Scotland which shares its wealth with every one of its people, which is why this budget takes action to prioritise policies that help hard working families, protect the vulnerable and grow our economy.

"By providing the money to allow councils to freeze the Council Tax for the eighth year in a row we are putting cash back into the pockets of people across the country.

"It's crucial that we develop our health service and meet the changing demands of people living in Edinburgh City, which is why we are also protecting the budget for the NHS.

"We have increased our spend on health and social care in NHS Lothian, and are developing top-class services for people in Edinburgh through the new Chalmers Hospital and Royal Victoria Building at the Western General Hospital. By increasing our spend in 2015/16 we will maintain estates and replace

equipment in the NHS Lothian area.”

The budget comes at a time when record numbers of Scottish people are in employment. Employment levels rose by 87,000 over the year to reach 2,623,000 which is the highest levels since records began.

Mr Swinney added: “Our economy is now back above pre-recession levels. At this time it is only right that everyone in Scotland should have access to good quality, affordable homes where they can be safe and warm.

“We have already delivered more than 21,000 affordable homes in Scotland. This £31.6 million boost to housing in Edinburgh City will help even more people get their foot on the housing ladder.

“Westminster cuts to our spending make conditions very challenging for Scotland and we are doing everything possible to tackle these effects on some of the lowest paid people in our communities.

“Despite these pressures we are protecting Edinburgh’s budget and continuing to invest in the area. We have maintained levels of local government funding and allocated extra money for new responsibilities including our pre-school nursery care for children.