

Swinney announces more funds for health boards in budget



In a budget that he promises will promote growth in the economy and reform public services, Deputy First Minister John Swinney today announced an injection of an additional half a billion pounds for health boards, taking total spending to a record of nearly £13 billion.

And, to support the most significant reform since the foundation of the NHS, Mr Swinney announced £250 million for the integration of health and social care, ushering in a fundamental realignment of the way the NHS and local government deliver care.

Mr Swinney also set the Scottish Rate of Income Tax (SRIT) for the first time and, in a move designed to protect the poorest taxpayers, the Deputy First Minister froze income tax by proposing a rate of ten pence. This means total income tax rates remain unchanged.

To protect household budgets already hit by UK Government austerity, the Budget proposes the 9th successive freeze in Council Tax – a saving of £1,500 for an average band D household.

Mr Swinney also announced he is protecting the Small Business Bonus – sheltering around 100,000 small firms from business rates – and investing in the future economic health of the nation through £345 million for research and innovation and £1 billion of investment in higher education. In order to support this investment, he announced he is asking Scotland's biggest businesses to pay more by increasing the Large Business Supplement.

In the foreword to the Budget publication which you can read below Mr Swinney wrote: [tweet_box design="default"]"The Scottish Government believes that with a relentless focus on tackling inequality and boosting productivity, we can create the foundations for a stronger and more inclusive economy."[/tweet_box]

Deputy First Minister John Swinney said:

"The spending plans that I am announcing today will equip the country for the future and lay the foundations for the reforms that will define the next parliament – reforms that will reshape our health and social care services, deliver a step change in educational attainment, deliver a fairer system of local taxation and use new powers over tax and welfare in a way that supports our central purpose.

"This Budget is driven by two themes: supporting inclusive growth and protecting and reforming public services. We will deliver inclusive growth by focusing on investment in innovation, infrastructure, education and skills, and by maintaining a competitive business environment.

"And we will protect and reform public services by delivering on the Christie Commission approach of service integration at local level, prevention and improving outcomes for individuals.

"The current financial landscape presents us with a challenge and a choice. Scotland can meekly accept these UK Government cuts or we can rise to the challenge and chose a Scottish alternative to austerity. We choose to rise to the challenge. We choose the Scottish alternative. We choose to put reform and growth at the heart of this Budget."

Patrick Harvie MSP, Finance spokesperson for the Scottish Greens, said the draft 2016/17 Scottish budget published today doesn't go far enough on funding for warm homes or low carbon infrastructure in light of fuel poverty figures and the Paris

climate deal.

845,000 households in Scotland are in fuel poverty. Despite agreeing that energy efficient housing should be a National Infrastructure Priority, ministers have only proposed increasing spending in this area by £14million to £103million.

Patrick Harvie, Finance spokesperson for the Scottish Greens and MSP for Glasgow, said:

“The latest fuel poverty figures are a stark reminder that a transformation in our approach is required, and sadly this budget does not deliver that. It is disappointing that while ministers agree that energy efficient housing should be a National Infrastructure Priority, they are not yet committing to the scale of investment required. This will still take decades to resolve. We need Holyrood to be bolder, and Greens will continue to press the case.

“It’s also a concern that just days after the global deal on climate change in Paris, this budget does not prioritise investment in low carbon infrastructure. The First Minister promised that her Government would be a strong driver of a progressive climate agenda. Today’s draft budget is a world away from that. Engineering, finance and construction experts have already made clear that such investment will make our economy more resilient. Greens will continue to push for the jobs of the future.

“The decision to keep the Scottish Rate of Income Tax the same as the UK makes sense as this devolved power does not allow a more progressive approach.”



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