

Councillor chooses words carefully at Budget meeting



Cllr Gordon Munro
who represents
Leith Ward

Councillor Gordon Munro is Labour councillor for Leith Ward. He is an experienced councillor who is never stuck for words, but we were again in awe of his eloquence today. Here is his speech in full – with Trainspotting getting a mention of course!

“Lord Provost, fellow councillors, citizens

“Last year I referenced David Bowie and said Edinburgh needed Ch-ch-Changes .

“This year it’s about Choices .

“With a larger settlement than last year Cash is up 2.5% and overall in real terms is up 1.0% the Scottish Government with over £38 billion have chosen to give Edinburgh the lowest settlement since devolution. In fact Local Government is being hit with the largest change with over a quarter of a billion pounds being taken out of funding for local government . A larger settlement for the Scottish Government yet the lowest settlement EDINBURGH has received since devolution. Choices have been made by Holyrood .

“Holyrood have also ” allowed ” a limit to any Council Tax rise to a minimum of a 3% rise . A rise that was signalled by Edinburgh last year in its Budget and if not used would leave a hole in the Budget being set today . Each 3% equates to a reduction of £7.1m so if not taken it would mean a further £7.1m in cuts being needed from this budget . This 3% rise is

factored in for future budgets so to cut it would mean finding cuts up to £21m in the next 3 years. Choices have been made . By Edinburgh last year in its budget and by Holyrood for all of Scotland on what Councils can do .

“Another choice has been made by Holyrood and that is to increase Council Tax for Bands E – H . Let’s take a look at that in a bit more detail .

“Band E is for properties valued from £58,001 – £80,000 of which there are 40,177.

“Band F is for properties valued from £80,001-£106,000 of which there are 24,402

“Band G is for properties valued from £106,001-£212,000 of which there are 20,893

“Band H is for properties valued over £212,000 of which there are only 3,910 .

“To put it into perspective the average house price in Edinburgh is £237,240 . A choice has been made to value properties on what they might have realised on the open market if sold on 1st April 1991. A new dwelling built in April 2016 will be valued on the basis of its open market value as if it had been sold on 1st April 1991. The choice not to change this is a choice that gives Local Government no choice but that of managing decline and making cuts . There are no more efficiencies .

“But let’s look at what is being done with that rise in Band E – H of Council Tax by the Scottish Government . Money raised by this Council is being given direct to schools bypassing Local Government and is to be used for ‘educational attainment ’. It is calculated on those claiming free school meals which is less than those entitled to free school meals . It has been given direct to schools which raises questions of who decides criteria and how it is used . Is attainment academic or could

it be attending school on time and taking part constructively in school . Choices will be made on this money too but by who and for what reasons ?

“There is pain in this Budget and it could’ve been worse but the administration chose to try and mitigate the worst of it despite EDINBURGH having the lowest settlement since devolution. I support the Administration budget but would point out that our choices are limited . We work within the framework that is set for us by others . I ask those others to make choices too .

“In concluding Lord Provost I ask Council, those watching from the public gallery or the webcast and those reporting on our deliberations today to perform two feats of mental stimulation. The first is to imagine what Edinburgh Council could do if it was fully and properly funded , the second is to imagine Iggy Pop singing Lust for Life, (original version or Prodigy remix your choice), whilst I make my concluding remarks :

“To paraphrase a well known rap updated in a recent hit movie set locally :

Choose to use the devolved budget for Local Government ; Choose to use the powers of the parliament to tax those earning over £150,000 ; Choose to reform the Council Tax so it reflects the real world not that of 1st April 1991 ; Choose to let Local Government set its budget without caveats and financial threats ; Choose to let Edinburgh levy a tourist tax ; Choose Council services ; Choose Edinburgh ; Choose Leith ; Choose Fully and properly funding councils.”