

Council now consulting on next year's budget – here are their proposals

Following a fierce campaign by the [City of Edinburgh Music School](#), parents and children alike, the council agreed not to pursue plans to close the school as part of its budget proposals.

The council drafts up its proposals in November and then works towards passing a budget in February. At this point it does not yet know what the settlement from the UK Government or The Scottish Government will be as these figures will only become known by early December.



At the first of two closely timetabled Finance & Resources Committee meetings in November, the administration was forced to go back to the drawing board on the possible £363,000 saving it might have made by closing the music school. From an overall revenue budget of £1.3 billion this is a relatively small saving. Last year the council wanted to close down many public toilets in an effort to save around the same figure, but that plan was changed as a result of comments made during the consultation.

The council is faced with a financial position where it has to make £21million of savings in the revenue it spends in the next financial year 2018/19.

Their draft plans are set out below, showing an overall belt-tightening and some degree of lateral thinking. There will be no compulsory redundancies for council staff without a major

U-turn in council policy, but there is still a desire for a 'simpler, leaner and more efficient workforce'. Some vacancies across the council will not be filled including one in the Communications team, but a reduction of five posts in all in that department.

Remember that these are only proposals until approved (or not) in February 2018.

A realignment of the Chief Executive's team will result in a saving of over £1m

Residents' Parking Permits and Pay and Display parking charges may go up by a standard 5% each year

An annual charge of £25 might be made for fortnightly garden waste collections

Ticket prices for the Scott Monument might increase

By charging Edinburgh Leisure for maintenance of football pitches the council could raise £375,000

The costs charged by the Edinburgh Shared Repairs Service might increase the council's income by about £100,000

The council may sell advertising on roundabouts and verges which could net them an additional £300,000

A review of home to school transport could mean a £400,000 saving (out of a current spend of £5.5m) Bus passes might be one alternative in certain cases.

A réduction in the hours which the Night Team works. This is a non statutory service to deal with antisocial behaviour in the city. Police Scotland will be expected to fill the gap. This would save an estimated £255,000

By expanding the enforcement using bus lane cameras, introucing new controlled parking zones and Sunday car

parking charges, the council expects to increase its income by around £300,000.

Improvements in the collection of unpaid council tax have reduced the sums outstanding. The sum available to the council as a result is in the region of £1.3m.

Fees paid to external lawyers could be reduced by £400,000 by using in house staff in the council itself and in the Health and Social Care sector.

One of the most innovative proposals is that the council might change the shift pattern for its 'bin men'. This would mean the council would only collect rubbish on four days from Tuesday to Friday. By removing Mondays from the waste collection team's working pattern the council can reduce costs by not having to pay double or triple time on public holidays. Shifts would be 10 hours long to ensure that all waste is collected.



In 2017/18 the council had an additional £10million which they got from Holyrood. There is of course no guarantee that the government will make any additional sum available to Edinburgh this year, and the council have made what Cllr Rankin the Finance Convener calls 'prudent estimates' of what their overall budget will be this coming year.



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These savings were initially introduced to the F&R committee under six themes with estimated sums beside them. The outcry from among the ranks of new councillors was one of frustration. They believed they were being denied any form of transparency in the budget process of which this framework was only the first step, and said they did not have enough information.

There has now been agreement that the council's Chief Executive will look at the way the budget process works next year in the hope that change will improve transparency for the other political parties on the committee who are not members of the administration.

It was said on more than one occasion during recent meetings that the fact that the administration had simply set out its recommendations on where savings could be made, and had already discounted others was not in itself transparent.

The opposition parties called for the rejected proposals to be revealed, but the Finance Convener was adamant that it is the job of the governing party to produce draft plans, steer the conversation and then listen to the public during the consultation.

So what can you do?

Read the above, then the leaflet below, then watch the video and have your say on the council's consultation hub by clicking on the image at the foot of the article. And of course feel free to have your say in the comments section below too.



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<https://youtu.be/mmNuXUwHWss>

The draft budget consultation is now available online for the public in Edinburgh to have their say. Click on the image below to have a look and also make any suggestions. You have a few weeks.

