

Conservatives want the council budget to be transformative



Cllr Graham
Hutchison

by Councillor Graham Hutchison, Conservative Finance & Resources Spokesperson. Councillor Hutchison claims there has been too much secrecy by the administration who choose to concentrate instead on the tourist tax lobby and brown bins. They want to use the money available from Lothian Buses to fix the roads instead of building the tram line from York Place to Newhaven.

“From its botched launch back in October, Edinburgh’s 2018/19 budget process has been an unusual mix of secrecy and farce, met largely with total apathy from the citizens of Edinburgh, and lacking any real ideas or strategic thinking.

“A mere 1,356 people responded to the administrations consultation, thin gruel for a city of half a million people. The people who did take the time to respond might as well not have bothered.

“The administration has chosen to ignore their opposition to the ludicrous £25 Brown Bin charge, and focus instead on the ‘spontaneous support for the introduction of a tourist tax’. In reality it was suggested just 118 times or by approximately 0.02% of the city’s residents.

“This is all the more incredible given that the Scottish Government, in the form of Finance Secretary Derek Mackay,

have been quite clear that they don't want any councils to have the power to deliver a tourist tax anyway!

"For anyone who's been following this fiasco as it's played out over the last 4 months, the publication of the minority coalitions budget proposal last Friday will have brought no surprises. Not even 9 months after its delayed formation, the re-hashed SNP/Labour administration is clearly out of ideas and out of touch with the city it has been running (badly) since 2012.

"In last May's council election the Scottish Conservatives topped the poll on first preference votes in Edinburgh, showing a clear desire for change in the way our capital city is run. Instead of that change our citizens have been saddled with more of the same and an administration which already seems doomed to repeat the failures of their last 5 year term.

"You don't need to be a City Chambers insider to know that the biggest challenges facing our city, aside from the SNP governments ever increasing stranglehold on local government, are the crisis in Health and Social Care, the poorly maintained and decaying council estate, homelessness and a downward spiral of ever poorer road repair and maintenance.

"The budget amendment which I will propose of behalf of the Conservative group will significantly outstrip the administrations proposed spending in all 4 of these priority areas, delivering the transformative change the Council badly needs, while rejecting the administrations support for a maximum 3% increase in council tax.

"The Edinburgh Conservatives budget will;

- Reject the administrations wasteful use of the £7.2m Lothian Bus dividend on the unwanted completion of the tram line to Leith and re-allocate this funding to our pothole ridden roads, problem junctions and an extension to the Hermiston Park and Ride.

- Limit the council tax increase to 2%, every penny of which raised from 2019/20 will be used to fund the entire current school rebuilding and refurbishment program, investing some £77m more than the administration over the remaining life of this council following a full strategic review of the council estate.
- Match the administrations £4m allocation to meet funding pressures in Health and Social Care, while allocating an additional £500k to establish a ringfenced change delivery team.
- Allocate a total of £2.3m to homelessness, £300k more than the administration, £1.4m of which will go directly to the Homelessness Task Force to be used to eliminate rough sleeping and the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Increase the school uniform grant to £85, £13.50 more than the administration and significantly above the national average. We will also match the administrations allocation for year round meals and for children with additional support needs.

“The proposed £25 bin tax is a calculated swipe at homeowners in the city’s suburban fringe who deserted the administration parties in droves last May, we categorically reject the charge, and will increase collections to every fortnight.

“The significant financial pressures which the Council will face over the remainder of this term will require innovative thinking and fresh ideas to deliver improved services to the citizens of Edinburgh.

“The Conservative budget amendment will take the first steps down the road towards a more streamlined and efficient council and signify a marked shift from that on offer from the SNP and Labour.

“I look forward very much to delivering the budget which the citizens of Edinburgh voted for last May.”

This is the detail of the Conservative motion which will be discussed later today at the council's special budget meeting.



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