

Council sets budget after long day of discussions

The council's budget meeting began at 10 am with several deputations and coursed through the day with occasional moments of levity and laughter, but in truth with a lot of serious debate too.

Finally at 4.30 after a couple of short breaks for tea and a longer one for the councillors to have lunch, the budget was agreed.

The coalition of SNP and Labour got their budget passed and all other counter proposals by the Greens, LibDems and Conservatives fell.



The council leader says this does not mean that some of the suggestions from other parties were not taken into account however.



Speaking to us after the meeting ended Cllr Adam McVey said :
“We engaged constructively with a whole range of parties, so we voluntarily made sure that there were synergies between our budget and the Greens, for example. There was even a last minute adoption of one of the Conservative proposals as well. I think that shows that we are open, that we are able to take ideas from wherever.

“But fundamentally the budget that was proposed today was an SNP/Labour coalition budget. The fact that we are a minority administration with an outcome that was so secure for us today in making sure our budget was the one that got passed a credit to all the work that went into it.”

CONSERVATIVES



Councillor Iain Whyte Conservative Group Leader told The Edinburgh Reporter : “The administration took on one of our Spend to Save proposals around increasing recycling. We want a campaign to get the public to recycle.

“But they missed an opportunity by failing to look at some of the deeper strategic proposals in our budget which would have made much more money available for Health and Social Care, to change the way that service works and make it more efficient and effective. Also we want to repair our potholed roads and pavements.”

The Conservative Group wanted to divert the £7.2 million dividend which the council gets from Lothian Buses to sorting potholes and pavements rather than using it as a deposit for the new tramline. Councillor Whyte explained what the Conservatives want to do with the money : “A small part of the £7.2 million would fix the potholes. The vast bulk of it would actually be spent on measures to reduce congestion in the city, particularly at key junctions which are affecting Lothian Buses, making their service slower and making it harder for citizens to get about by public transport.”

FOCUS ON HOMELESS AND VULNERABLE

We then asked the Council Leader what pleased him most today. He replied : “I am most pleased that we had more money to spend at the end of the day thanks to yesterday’s decision in the Scottish Parliament passing their budget. That was always helpful and gave us £27.1 million to invest in our priorities. I think we have invested that prudently and I think we have invested that ethically and socially.

“For example we have invested £2 million extra in homelessness to make sure fewer people have to rely on Bed and Breakfast accommodation. This is one of our key pledges to abolish B&B for those in need of temporary accommodation. There is £4 million extra for social care. The exciting thing about that is that the NHS will also put in £4 million making real inroads in the number of people who are waiting for care assessments and care packages.”

[Council sets its 2018/19 budget](#) from [The Edinburgh Reporter On](#)

[Vimeo](#) on [Vimeo](#).



Convener of
Finance and
Resources Alasdair
Rankin

The council still has less money than it needs. No matter which way you look at it, the Finance Convener Alasdair Rankin has a tough job working alongside the council officers in setting out priorities for council spending.

The council says it will now continue to prioritise the frontline services it provides for young, older and vulnerable residents while at the same time making some savings.

There will be £200 million of spending on health and social care where there is a definite need, as well as dealing with the problem of homelessness where there will be £2 million invested and repairs to existing school buildings. £8.5 million will be used to improve all council-owned buildings including schools.

With an addition of £400,000 to spend on lower income families who need help the council is to give children meals outwith term time as well as increasing school uniform grants. Edinburgh still does not pay as much as some other councils, but it is a welcome improvement nonetheless.

A man who is believed to have been homeless was found dead in the city earlier today, lending some reality to the budget debate for a time.

The Lord Provost limited contributions by individual councillors to just three minutes. Believe me it was long enough for all of them to put forward their support for their particular party's proposals. A time limit condenses and focuses arguments and makes for more coherent discussion.

Councillor Alasdair Rankin, Convener of the Finance and Resources Committee, said: "When forming the coalition, we pledged to deliver improved services for residents and communities over the next five years. We have taken opportunities in this, our first budget, to do things differently and invest in key areas, delivering on our 52 Coalition commitments.

"We are committed to protecting frontline services and maintaining investment in areas which will provide more support for our most vulnerable residents and despite an uncertain financial climate we have set a balanced budget for Edinburgh, as well as securing funds for improvements throughout the city."

Cllr Rankin pointed out during the debate that the council has saved £240 million in this and in the last administration by working more efficiently and prioritising services. He was Finance Convener in the last administration too, and in charge when the Transformation Programme to streamline the council staff was put in place.



The Culture Convener Donald Wilson was very pleased with today's proposals which are he said the best budget in cultural terms for a decade. Funding has been found for the Leith Theatre, the concert hall in St Andrew Square (formalising the

money required in terms of the City Deal) and money is to be made available to the King's Theatre refurbishment fund.

The city owned museums and galleries will now all open seven days again from 10-5 which the convener hopes will lead to increased footfall.

Councillor Gordon Munro is always good value at big meetings such as this and he was again today. In his speech he urged the coalition against the budget as it stood, although he did vote for it, respecting the party whip. In his speech he said : " I come to bury the Budget not to praise it .

"Context is important . Transformation has seen this council make cuts of £240m and the reduction of 1446 in the workforce . This year 2017/18 contained £39.5m of cuts and the month 8 position reported that £11.5m were still to be realised, therefore £4m has been built into this budget and another £4m will come from reserves.

"Something has to change.

*"This minority led Council will have to make net cuts of £133m by 2022/23 and will receive a reduction in block grant of £59m **if** it lasts the full term . This is why Audit Scotland use the phrase 'financial stress ' to describe Council finances . Something has to change."*



Ahead of the budget meeting today there were several deputations heard in the chamber. The Edinburgh Reporter spoke to a couple of the groups who were at that point getting ready to speak at the council meeting. We got the impression that the various groups were not as confrontational as they perhaps had been of old. It appears that they understand that any cuts to services offered, or cuts to budgets are not made lightly, and that they have to be put in the Scottish and UK political contexts.

Des Loughney Secretary of the ETUC said : "The council has outlined a budget which will involve severe cuts to its services. It will put several services into a state of crisis. This is unacceptable. We realise that the council itself can't do much about it because of the way they are funded, but we are saying the council should lead the people of Edinburgh to put pressure on the Scottish Government."

Willie Black from North Edinburgh Fights Back said : "We have deep problems. The council cuts are deeply affecting the community that I come from in North Edinburgh as elsewhere in Edinburgh. What is happening is that there are cutbacks in

community centres, facilities and services for youth, old people, for the disabled. It can't keep going on year in, year out."

Tom Connolly of UNISON said : "I think the councillors need to start listing. We are witnessing the silent slaughter of local government. Nine out of ten jobs in public services in the last five years, that's 30,000 jobs, have been lost in the past five years. Nine out of ten of those in local government."

Betty Stevenson of Edinburgh Tenants Federation invited all councillors to go out with her to see for themselves the conditions of some communal stairs or council flats. She had a selection of photos to show them all during the meeting and urged them to improve the lot of those living in council houses with some immediate action.

The council tax bands for 2018/19 will be :

A – £826.79

B- £964.60

C- £1,102.39

D- £1,240.19

E – £1,629.47

F – £2,015.31

G – £2,428.71

H – £3,038.47