

Councillors call for more cash for school uniforms

At the special meeting of the council to be held on 22 February 2018 the council will agree its budget for the next year. The Edinburgh Greens regard this as a major opportunity to address the matter of financial help with school uniforms for lower income families, but Labour councillor Scott Arthur believes it is a cynical demand on the part of the Green Group, and does not go far enough.

Edinburgh Greens say that research by child poverty charities show that Edinburgh sits almost bottom of the league table in providing grants for school clothing for families on low incomes. The current rates of £43 per primary school child and £50 for secondary school child were set in 2001 and have not been changed since. Meanwhile, in neighbouring West Lothian the same grants are £94 and £110.

Just under 5,000 children and young people receive grants for school uniform in the capital. In their budget Green councillors will propose that the grants are comprehensively uprated to the benchmarks calculated by the Child Poverty Action Group which reflect the actual costs of school clothing, including uniform, PE kit and school bag. This would cost just over £400,000 a year.



Green councillors say they will propose the first increase in school uniform assistance in Edinburgh since 2001, but this matter was actually first raised by Labour Councillor Scott Arthur at the October 2017 meeting of the Education and Families committee.

At the October meeting Cllr Arthur lodged a motion which was approved by the committee

Cllr Arthur's motion read :

"1) To recognise that child poverty is rising in Edinburgh and that the City of Edinburgh Council, The Scottish Government and the UK Government have a duty to use their powers to reverse this trend.

2. To recognise that a significant burden on low income families is providing their children with a school uniform.

3. To recognise the significant work of the Edinburgh School Uniform Bank, Edinburgh Police Fund for Children, and others to help equip children from low income families for school.

4. *To recognise the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland estimate that the cost of a school uniform is £129.50, but the School Uniform Grant provided by City of Edinburgh Council is only £42 and £50 for primary and secondary school children respectively.*
5. *To recognise that the Scottish Government recommends the School Uniform Grant level be set at £70, but many Local Authorities exceed this.*
6. *To request that within two cycles Council Officers report on the feasibility of increasing the School Uniform Grant to ensure that from the 2018/19 academic year children from low income households are better equipped for school.”*

This motion was approved by the committee for further action.



Councillor Mary Campbell

Green education spokesperson Cllr Mary Campbell said: “In the Green manifesto for the 2017 council elections we made a very clear commitment to increase school clothing grants to make them reflect actual costs. With the first budget since those elections now looming, it is time to put our manifesto commitment into action.

“The lowest income families in Edinburgh have faced a direct attack on their incomes from UK Government policies for almost a decade now. While councils cannot make good on all of those attacks, where they are able to make a difference, they should. Providing properly-funded support to put young people on an equal footing on what they wear to school is one such step.

“I look forward to all councillors supporting this Green proposal.”

The Edinburgh Reporter asked Councillor Arthur what he thinks of the Greens backing this idea in the upcoming budget.

Councillor Arthur said : “I am genuinely outraged to read Cllr Mary Campbell’s demand that the School Clothing Grant be increased in Edinburgh for children from low income families.

“It is cynical acts like this that undermine the reputation of all councillors. As she well knows, all parties in Edinburgh supported my motion last year asking for the School Clothing Grant be increased after I noted that Edinburgh offers one of the lowest levels of support in Scotland – a fact that should shame us all.

“Since then, I have spoken to Council Officers about the work they are doing with “The Cost of the School Day” project. This goes beyond uniforms and encourages people to think about all of the costs associated with attending school, ranging from buses to snacks and trips.

“I’m hugely proud of how the schools, parents and children in my Ward have engaged with this. It has increased awareness of how child poverty is rising and lets people play a small part in fighting it. I anticipate the forthcoming city budget will contain a mention of the steps the Council is taking to tackle child poverty, and that this will include an increase to the School Clothing Grant.

“The biggest barrier to making real change here is, however, the budget settlement forced on Edinburgh by the Greens and the SNP.

“Cllr Mary Campbell was all too quick to call the settlement “good news”, but the 3.6% real terms cut she backed has made it impossible to increase the School Clothing Grant to the level I hoped for and that which the most deprived households

need.

“This is heart-breaking for me, but it is also a tragedy for many low income families in Edinburgh who had hoped the council could do more to protect them. Cllr Mary Campbell should be ashamed of this rather than making cynical demands in the press.”

The council will meet on 22 February to set its budget for the next year and you can [watch the proceedings online here.](#)