

Edinburgh councillor blogs – Councillor Gordon Munro

Gordon Munro is Labour Councillor for the Leith Ward. Here he tells us about the questions he has asked and what he thinks about the answers to them.

Gordon writes:



“I have asked questions at each Full Council of the Council Leader how he and his deputy have pushed the case for Edinburgh to be fully and properly funded in setting its budget for 2018/19 .

“I started this at the same time as the Council began consulting its citizens on its budget, and have done this as Edinburgh has made cuts of £240m to date and has seen the full time equivalent of 1446 staff leave voluntarily. It has to do more, and this is why Audit Scotland use the phrase ‘financial stress’ when talking about Scotland’s councils and their finances .

“Each time I have asked about meetings held where the case for Edinburgh has been put to the Finance Secretary, I have received evasive replies about who, where and when. This is disappointing, as it was publicly proclaimed in a local newspaper that ‘robust representations ‘ would be made in this respect.

“I would have thought that this would be backed up with a report back on who attended, where the meeting was held, what was said and the result. In my set of questions at full council yesterday 1 February 2018, the Leader’s laryngitis meant that it was the Deputy Leader, Councillor Cammy Day. who answered on behalf of the coalition. Councillors were

informed that the deputy leader had taken part in meetings but not how many, with whom or the outcome, but, revealingly, also that the Leader may not have been involved in other meetings. Whether these other meetings were chance conversations, electronic messages or instructions was not made clear .

“However the Leader felt confident enough to proclaim after the December announcement of the initial Holyrood settlement as ‘positive’ for Edinburgh.

“The reality is that cuts still have to be made. The fact that they were not as large is not ‘positive’. This pronouncement was made before councils found out that the Finance Secretary had double counted some of the money.

“Hardly ‘positive’.

“On Wednesday, a deal was made by Patrick Harvie on behalf of the Greens with the Finance Secretary that saw extra money being provided for councils. Nowhere near the £545m demanded by COSLA to make up for the cuts imposed by the Scottish Government on Scottish councils. Look on the Council website and you will see that the Leader issued a press release as Leader of the Council which proclaimed this deal as, you guessed it, ‘positive’. It was disappointing to hear that the Deputy Leader of the Council had not been involved or even informed of this release until all members received notice of it late on Wednesday night.

“Not the actions of a partner more one of a party apparatchik working at another’s behest .

“My third question pointed out how in his rush to do his Masters bidding, Mr Harvie proved too eager and willing for the second year in a row. The amount prised out of the secretary is £170m over two years. Edinburgh’s share of this is £2.6m for the current year and £9.717m for 18/19 . Yet it is estimated that the main source of this years money the Non

Domestic Rates income (NDRI) will yield £2.812m with £2.636m being given back to local government meaning that the Finance Secretary will have £176m of this money to use as Parliament sees fit . The deal has not even given back what is being kept . Again this is proclaimed by both parties as 'positive', it's almost like it's co-ordinated , rather than the sleight of hand it really is . Giving back to councils this money is a small step , one of several steps that could be taken , to tackle the " financial stress" faced by councils.

"There is still time for this to happen but it requires the will of Parliament to use its powers to provide for rather than punish councils."

You can watch the webcast of yesterday's full council meeting [here](#).