

SNP Labour coalition gets their budget passed

Yesterday was budget day across Scotland, with the Scottish Government deciding on their spending plans at Holyrood, and The City of Edinburgh Council [meeting](#) to agree on theirs.

The two are of course interlinked, since much of Edinburgh's funding comes from The Scottish Government. As a result of what is widely perceived as underfunding, the council has to look at making cuts of around £100 million by 2022/23. In the next financial year it has to shave £33 million from its £1 billion revenue budget.



Betty Stevenson on the right representing Edinburgh Tenants Federation outside the City Chambers

Although the funding package from Holyrood is better than the administration had hoped for, they have introduced a Change Strategy which will find ways of maximising council income

while ensuring that key services remain funded. This may also lead to a number of posts being lost through voluntary redundancy, referred to previously as around 300 but no figures quoted yesterday.

The council will now for example charge full commercial rates for any of the properties which they own across the city, and will increase charges for licensing. Their income will be bolstered by looking again at the advertising contract for outdoor sites. Other policies will simply build on what has been said in previous years : generating energy by putting solar panels on the roofs of council-owned property and expanding the electric vehicle network.

A revised set of fees and charges runs alongside the administration budget plans. (see below)

Health and Social Care

Health and Social Care is one of the areas identified several years ago as one where pressures are building, mainly due to people living longer and our population increasing. This is now run by the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board and they will receive up to £15.7m of additional investment to reflect increasing demand, new legislation and to contribute to better outcomes for those using the service. Councillor Ricky Henderson who is chair of the IJB said during the debate that he is confident the body can set its own balanced budget when it meets next month. Meanwhile his Labour colleague Cllr Scott Arthur deplored the fact that the council cannot get a cross-party group to develop a real plan for the IJB.

Schools

The council has set aside £66.7m which it will spend on new or refurbished primary and secondary schools across the city and it will double the amount of early years education by next

year. One of the deputations was presented by Alison Murphy the local association Secretary for the Edinburgh branch of the Educational Institute for Scotland. She pointed out to councillors that there is now so little money available for running schools that teachers regularly have to put their hands in their pockets to buy food, pens and pencils for pupils.

The council will commit spending to a new high school in Craigmillar and a replacement in Trinity. Green councillor Gavin Corbett expressed his desire that the new schools are sustainable buildings and perhaps community hubs in the future. (The Greens wanted a Climate Emergency Fund set up but that was not agreed yesterday.)

Last deputation is by Alison Murphy the Edinburgh Local Association secretary of [@EISunion](#) and we spoke to her earlier about what affects teachers in the [@Edinburgh_CC](#) budget pic.twitter.com/Zo1Hws4DJR

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 21, 2019](#)

Roads

The council will allocate £30 million to fixing potholes and resurfacing roads as part of a four £125 million programme. In other public transport news the Conservative group issued its own plans. It wants the council to ditch the tram extension project (not yet agreed but probably on the way) and spend £90 million on schools instead.

Homelessness

The council will fund a Rapid Access Accommodation pilot and provide funding for one housing officer in each locality focussed on preventing homelessness. This is in addition to the

£2m of extra investment included in the 2018/19 budget.

Speeches

At the City Chambers the speeches were long, the party political divides evident, but was there anything really new during the Budget meeting on the High Street?

Well Brexit crept in. The Labour Group were almost all as one when it came to calling on Holyrood as well as Westminster for fair and full funding for the capital. And all of their elected members spoke in the debate. Cllr Maureen Child said she is 'sick and tired of taking the blame for the wilful ignorance of successive parliaments'.

It is often entertaining to listen to these, and none more so perhaps than veteran Labour councillor Gordon Munro who always seems to get some literary or musical reference into his. Here is a portion of his speech:

'All the worlds a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.'

We work within a template that is set for us by Holyrood. The Scottish Government were elected in 2007 on a promise to reform Council Tax. That is still to happen.

Recognising that Council finances needed reform The Scottish Government launched jointly with COSLA the 'Just Change' report in 2015 and is still to act on it .

Audit Scotland warn us that : "Council revenue funding from the Scottish Government has fallen in real terms by 9.6 per cent between 2010/11 and 2018/19. This has presented councils with a major challenge in delivering services and making savings".

Source , Audit Scotland , report April 2018

This is why they say that Councils are in 'financial distress'.

In Edinburgh this has meant £240m of cuts and 1600 less workers under Transformation.

It means £150m of cuts and 1700 less workers for this Council under Change. Enough is enough. Edinburgh needs fully and fairly funded.

The deputations told us why this morning.

This distress is not alleviated by 'bus stop diplomacy' or the Finance Convener saying in the Evening News that he hopes the Greens in Holyrood can persuade his party to fully and fairly fund Edinburgh .

Leaders

SNP Finance Convener Cllr Alasdair Rankin moved the coalition administration's budget motion saying "These are not normal times. We have had almost ten years of continuous spending cuts.

"Nothing remotely sufficient has been proposed for social care.

"The backdrop to this is that UK economic growth is dropping – it is difficult to think of any UK policy area which is a success."

It is probably a little more difficult for Council Leader Adam McVey to openly criticise his Holyrood colleagues, perhaps even more so in view of his recent 'win' over Tourist Tax. The Scottish Government has agreed to pass legislation which will allow all 32 councils to introduce a tourist tax. It is believed that with a charge of £2 per night (up to 7 nights) imposed on visitors, the council could raise almost £15 million in the capital.

The Deputy Leader Councillor Cammy Day was given short shrift

by Edinburgh Tenants Federation representative Betty Stevenson, a stalwart of these meetings. He asked a question of her which she batted away by suggesting that he had not listened to a word she said. She began her deputation with "Here we go again..."

Deputations

The arguments from the eight deputations heard before councillors debated their various budget motions could have been from any of the last five years or so. Their comments were much the same, though still just as heartfelt.

Cuts to public services such as breakfast clubs for young people at schools, or cuts to clubs which offer so much to older people directly affect real people in the city. And of course such cuts might have direct consequences. Willie Barr of Citadel Youth Centre said : "If we start losing some grassroots services we will have a serious problem in a couple of years' time."

UNITE the Union spoke out against the possible cuts to public toilets saying that some of their members, bus drivers, would be affected.



Speeches from these groups took all morning to hear. They included :

- 3.1 North Edinburgh Save Our Services
- 3.2 Edinburgh Tenants Federation
- 3.3 Children and Young Peoples Network (EVOC)
- 3.4 Edinburgh Trade Union Council
- 3.5 UNITE Edinburgh Not for Profit Branch
- 3.6 UNISON
- 3.7 Unite the Union (City of Edinburgh branch)
- 3.8 Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers

Listening

The council has been criticised in the past for not listening to the public or the deputations who speak to it.

But in the budget agreed there is a u-turn on funding for [Marketing Edinburgh](#), and also a commitment to look again at funding for Edinburgh Leisure. The council had proposed cuts to both bodies which attracted much comment in the budget consultation.

An Edinburgh Leisure spokesperson said: “It’s so heartening and important to us to see the value that the people of Edinburgh place on the services that Edinburgh Leisure delivers; with 255 participants (out of 776 submissions) contacting the Council during phase two to oppose the budget changes that the Council were proposing.

“As a result, the feedback from the budget proposal will be considered within the next three-year budget strategy starting 2020/21. Whilst we recognise the financial challenges that Edinburgh Council has, we’re committed to working with them to address these challenges and more importantly, realise the need and value for people to live active and healthier lives.”

So the council goes ahead with its budget plans for 2019/20 – and your council tax goes up by 3% to help pay for that.

You will find revised charges for various council services here :



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Protesters outside the City Chambers on Thursday morning