

Tories call for tram extension to be scrapped

Conservatives are calling for what they describe as the city council's tram extension "vanity project" to be scrapped to free up £90m for public services as part of alternative budget proposals.

The Tories' budget motion, to be tabled at tomorrow's full council meeting, includes capping council tax rise at two per cent, saving nursery teachers from the axe and binning the £25 garden waste charge.

The Conservative Group's spending proposals include £70m of additional revenue being made available by halting plans to extend the Capital's tram line to Newhaven. The council's tram extension business case is based on borrowing, with future ticket sales paying off the debt. But Conservatives say without the extension to pay for, the future ticket sales revenue from the existing tram service can be ploughed into improving public services.

The Conservatives claim that scrapping the tram extension plans would also free up a £20m dividend from Lothian Buses, currently set to help fund the new tram-line, for other public transport investment.

The SNP-Labour administration is yet to publish its final budget proposals ahead of tomorrow's meeting as is the case for all political groups which make up the council.

Conservative group leader, Cllr Iain Whyte, said: "With the council facing financial crisis due to the SNP Government's budget cuts, the SNP and Labour councillors have fallen into a

tail-spin of disagreement, delaying their budget announcement while they continue to fight within their groups and between their parties over where the axe should fall.

“Against that background, we Conservatives have drawn up plans that show how our city could be much better run by concentrating on delivering better core services and cutting out waste.”

He added: “Our budget would limit the council tax increase to two per cent to give a break to hard-working families in the city. It would also make a badly-needed additional fund of £90m available to improve public transport while accelerating the school building programme, all by rejecting the costly tram extension to Newhaven.

“This would deliver better services for residents with new schools not trams, improved care services, staff resource redirected to front-line services and more funding to repair our crumbling roads and pavements.

“Edinburgh deserves so much better than this minority coalition are giving it. They have no strategic plan other than the hugely expensive trams vanity project which they use in an attempt to disguise their failings. If they would rather squabble about minor cuts that’s fine but we want to show how to deliver for our citizens – the people that matter.”

The Conservatives also propose a £300,000 cull of the most senior managers at the authority in a bid to make savings. The alternative budget plans include a £3m boost for under-pressure health and social care services, Sunday parking charges scrapped and proposed budget cuts to Marketing Edinburgh reduced.

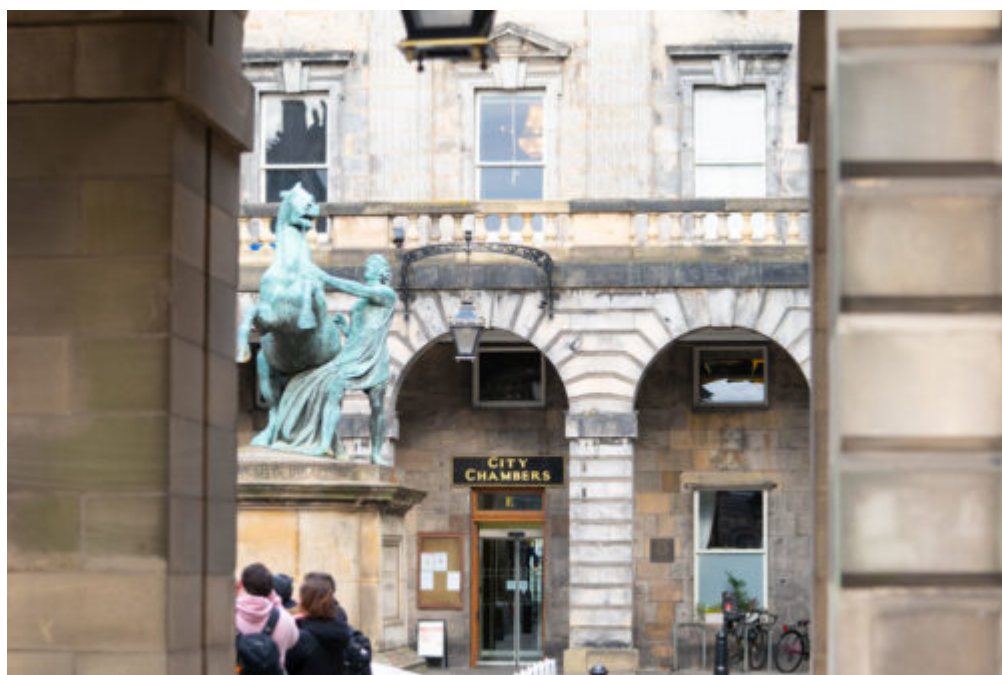
Conservative finance spokesman, Cllr Graham Hutchison, said: “Last year’s administration’s budget was unrealistic, particularly in health and social care where it failed to

deliver £6m of promised savings and given the depth of the cuts coming from the SNP Government, we expect this year to be no different.”

Council leader, Cllr Adam McVey, said: “The people of Edinburgh will see through the Tories’ cynical attempt to spin a fake windfall from their opposition to public transport investment.

“We will only deliver the extension if it can be done without putting any additional pressure on council budgets by using tram fares and an additional Lothian buses dividend to repay the construction costs.”

The council papers for tomorrow’s meeting are [here](#).



City Chambers