

# Comment from Alasdair Rankin Finance Convener

by Councillor Alasdair Rankin Finance Convener The City of  
Edinburgh Council



Councillor Alasdair Rankin the council's Finance Convener

**I write to respond to [your article](#) dated 27<sup>th</sup> May, entitled “*Are More Council Cuts on the Way This Summer?*”.**

In the piece a number of opposition Councillors, in my view, misrepresent the city administration in their remarks. For example, one opposition Councillor is quoted as saying “the savings that were approved in the administration’s budget are not going to be delivered.” This is to make precisely the same mistake as opposition Councillors made about the last financial year. It will soon be demonstrated that not only

were the necessary savings made in 2018/19, but that a small surplus was achieved.

The Council has a *projected* overspend at the end of 2019/20 but, as last year and in the ten preceding years, we have a process in place that identifies this possibility early on, enabling us to take corrective action.

On the uncertainty which the administration is said to cause, it is actually entirely a consequence of an opposition motion in the Finance and Resources Committee [meeting in March](#). This demanded that proposals be brought forward, as they duly were, to show that the budget could, in principle, be brought into balance by year-end. The committee was given a list of measures that other councils have considered to demonstrate only that point. There was no statement that these were, or would be, administration proposals.

So, the opposition, for purely partisan reasons, has presented the proposals in the report as the administration causing uncertainty and anxiety when the fact is that it was the opposition which asked for a list of proposals.

More than that, I warned opposition members at the committee's March meeting that their motion was a bad idea precisely because what they were demanding would lead to anxiety and uncertainty that could be wholly avoided. It follows that any concern about any of the other councils' proposals listed is entirely a consequence of opposition Councillors' actions.

What is particularly striking is the attempted criticism of Conservative members whose party has underfunded local authorities for almost ten years.

It is as if a driver, having crashed his car through your front door, then gets out and demands to know how you are going to pay for the damage to your home.

A report released on 28<sup>th</sup> May by the Institute for Fiscal

Studies on council funding in England finds that, on average, local authority spending on services has fallen by 21% since the Conservatives returned to office in 2010. This has happened at a time when demand for public services has been increasing and will continue to increase, adult social care being only the most obvious example.

Yet, since 2010, we have never had a policy statement from the UK government about the role and future of local government. That is both astonishing and irresponsible. Instead, we have had a wholly cynical attempt to devolve responsibility for much of public sector austerity to local authorities.

For the benefit of those who accuse this administration of financial mismanagement, let me remind them that this Council has balanced its budget for the last eleven years and I refer them to the reports by this Council's independent auditors which, if they have bothered to read them, they have chosen to ignore.