

Council agrees spending for the next year

The council has set its spending for the next year, with the administration budget approved over all the opposition groups' amendments and proposals.

The £1 billion or so which it takes to run the council for year will be prioritised on what the SNP/Labour administration says are its core policies. They plan to concentrate on the areas of alleviating poverty, and improving sustainability and wellbeing. While the administration had proposed a 2% rise in council rents, this was [defeated](#) by all opposition parties who demanded a rent freeze.

There was agreement that council tax will be frozen for the year as follows:

Council Tax Bands 2021/22

A: £892.39

B: £1,041.13

C: £1,189.86

D: £1,338.59

E: £1,758.76

F: £2,175.21

G: £2,621.41

H: £3,279.55

The Scottish Government previously increased the financial settlement to Edinburgh by a net £9 million, although it was not enough for Cllr Gordon Munro who abstained from voting on any of the budgets proposed on the basis that the Scottish Government continues to underfund the council.

The £9 million sum is a net calculation from the additional funding of £14.2 million delivered in return for the council agreeing to freeze the council tax for the next year.

This 'costs' the council £5.2 million as they had planned for a 4.79% council tax rise leading to a net additional sum of £9 million to spend. The Vice-Convenor of Finance and Resources, Cllr Joan Griffiths, told us yesterday that they will lobby the Scottish Government to get the council tax freeze fully funded – in other words to get the £5.2 million from the government.

The £9 million will be used as follows:

- £0.170m to freeze fees and charges of school meals, care at home services, garden aid and library reservation charges and fines;
- £0.400m in 2021/22 to expand support and advice to help people at risk of homelessness and support those experiencing homelessness into secure tenancies;
- £1.050m to manage crisis needs, increase funding for direct payments in light of Covid, support food security in the City, embed advice across schools and GP surgeries and expand programmes like Discover!, all to help put millions of pounds extra in the pockets of families who need it the most;
- £0.500m to support the council's climate obligations and further decarbonisation of the Council's estate;
- £0.300m to support delivery measures for the sustainability plan which will be published in the

- summer;
- £0.500 million to enhance our parks, playparks, food growing and urban forests, with £4m of related capital investment
 - £0.250m into setting up a short-term let licensing and enforcement system to move quickly in dealing with the problem;
 - £2.000m extra to accelerate the 1-to-1 digital strategy to help all school pupils get the equipment they need for their studies;
 - £0.110m to strengthen and support the council's role as corporate parents by expanding the support team;
 - £0.175m to support expansion of Edinburgh Guarantee in light of the impact Covid has had on jobs;
 - £0.500m investment to take forward Smart City initiatives; and
 - £0.052m to extend the role of the Gaelic Development Officer for one year beyond the end of Scottish Government funding.

It may turn out after the UK Government budget on 3 March that there is more money available, but based on the sums available today the council has already balanced its budget and has put £2.743 million back into reserves as a contingency. But the council has acknowledged that fundamental service improvement and reform will be needed.

In setting the budget until 2022, the councillors also approved a three year business plan which will guide the way the council needs to change after the pandemic to be able to save over £100 million in future financial years.

To meet their priorities the council has set out these headline

figures:

Reducing poverty

- £82 million on early years services – 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare by August 2021
- A £2.8 billion ten-year HRA Capital investment programme to deliver Council commitments, including the delivery of 10,000 new Council-led affordable homes by 2027, the modernisation of existing homes and the commitment to deliver zero carbon emissions by 2030
- £3.6 million to improve pupil attainment, achievement and attendance, as well as £7 million from Scottish Government Pupil Equity Funding
- £0.8 million for clothing grants
- Investing an additional £10m to provide temporary accommodation to address the ongoing impacts of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Providing free school meals to almost 7,700 pupils and all pupils in P1-P3
- Almost £30 million for people who need help paying their Council Tax

Sustainability – working towards being carbon neutral by 2030

- Another £8.4 million to finish upgrading our street lighting to energy-efficient LED lights
- Trams to Newhaven project including £2.4 million to support local businesses
- £7.6 million to continue to replace more than 200 vehicles with lower emissions ones

Health and Wellbeing

- £19.7 million to complete Meadowbank Sports Centre
- £2.3 million for community mental health support and school counselling
- £3.9 million in grants to improve mental health and

wellbeing, learning and development and to support personal and social development

In 2021-22, the council will also invest

- £8.5 million on North Bridge
- £234 million on health and social care services

And over the next ten years, the council will invest:

- More than £189 million on roads and pavements, including winter maintenance
- £68 million on road safety, network, cycling and public transport

Finance and Resources Convener Councillor Rob Munn said: “When we set a three-year balanced budget in February 2020, we had no inkling of the economic and social turmoil the pandemic was about to unleash across the globe. As a city and as individuals, this past year has tested us like no other time in recent memory – and the challenges are ongoing. It’s testament to the dedication, commitment and resilience of all our staff, our services and our city that we’ve been able to agree a new business plan and balanced budget for 2021/22 today.

“Helping Edinburgh and our citizens to recover and rebuild after the strains of Covid19 is critical and, as they’ve done throughout, staff in Council services continue to work tirelessly to look after the city and our communities. Guided by our business plan priorities of [ending poverty](#), [becoming a net zero city](#) and making sure wellbeing and equalities are enhanced for all we’ve agreed a comprehensive package of additional investments as part of our £1 billion-plus 2021/22 budget, channelling extra funding to where it’s most needed and will have the most meaningful impact.

“We want to pay tribute to the outstanding efforts of our residents in helping Edinburgh weather the Covid storm. We

have seen communities come together through the hardest of times and they have shown all of what is best about our city. Without the solidarity and resilience of the people of Edinburgh, the financial, social and life cost to our Capital would have been far higher.”

Vice Finance and Resources Convener Councillor Joan Griffiths said: “Everyone’s lives have been up-ended by the Coronavirus pandemic. Jobs have been cut, businesses hit, children’s education disrupted, families separated and, tragically, many, many lives have been lost. It’s essential then that we do whatever we can to help our most vulnerable citizens and those who’ve been hardest hit financially, while at the same time making progress with our key ambitions towards a fairer, greener and better-connected Edinburgh.

“Make no mistake, tough times lie ahead and we’re going to have to think creatively and courageously in the years ahead to meet the substantial savings required. As we’ve learned during this crisis, however, difficult times can sometimes be a catalyst for lasting, positive change and we’re determined to drive forward our commitments on poverty, cutting carbon emissions and equal opportunities for everyone to access jobs, training and good places to live. Our three-year Business Plan responds to this need for change so that our strategies and approach achieve their ambition of making Edinburgh the best possible place to call home.”