

Liberal Democrats claim success in their budget negotiations

Lib Dems say they have secured more than £300m of budget support for mental health, education and councils following negotiations with the Scottish Finance Secretary, Kate Forbes.

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Willie Rennie announced on Monday that the party will back this year's Scottish budget in exchange for additional support for education, mental health, local authorities, environment, training and businesses.

The party has agreed:

- An extra £120million for mental health services to pay for new services in communities.
- An extra £60million to help education bounce back with smaller class sizes.
- Additional support for businesses and the release of money for local authorities.
- Fair funding for the internal ferries in Orkney and Shetland.
- An extra £20 million to provide more in-class support to children who need it by topping up the Pupil Equity Fund. This is money paid directly to headteachers to provide additional support to pupils from less well-off backgrounds. This represents a rough 16% increase on the

current year.

- £15million in special allocations to the North East to pay for skills training, upskilling and business support in a region particularly under pressure given its reliance on fossil fuel industries.
- The addition of compensation for the council tax freeze into the baseline of local government funding, worth around £90million, which will remove the risk that councils would face a cliff edge on funding next year.
- £5million more for agriculture transition funding, which rewards farmers for environmental stewardship and helps our climate change priorities.
- A clear commitment that specialised eye services in Lothian will be protected.

Mr Rennie said: “Scottish Liberal Democrats have been engaged with SNP ministers since the draft budget was published in January. We think that people expect parties to work together in the middle of a pandemic. Our focus has been to put recovery first.

“We have highlighted the need for business support, an education bounce back plan, and better mental health services, given the pressure we know that the virus crisis has put on people.

“As a result of those constructive discussions, the Budget Bill was substantially amended. Those changes were announced by the Finance Secretary in the stage one debate ten days ago and put onto the face of the Budget Bill at the parliamentary committee this morning.

“As a result of discussions since then, further changes have been agreed which allow Scottish Liberal Democrat MSPs to support the budget at its final stage tomorrow. This includes additional money for supporting pupils, training fund for the North East to support the just transition, a further £90m for local authorities and money to support farmers engaged in

environmental stewardship.

“These proposals show the impact that Liberal Democrat MSPs can make, balancing important national matters with targeted local support for our constituents and putting the recovery first.

“That’s what you get with Scottish Liberal Democrat MSPs.”