

# Age Scotland warns against council cuts

**Next week The City of Edinburgh Council will set its budget for the year ahead. The council will have to find almost £80 million of cuts to services to create a balanced budget.**

In advance of the process next Thursday when the Labour administration will hope to set their budget based on their manifesto, the older people's charity Age Scotland has warned that reductions could seriously impact the health and wellbeing of older people in Scotland. The Chief Executive of the charity has issued an open letter to councils all over Scotland.

With services such as public and community transport, social care, in-person service points and community groups on the chopping block, Age Scotland is urging councillors across Scotland to do everything in their power to protect those most vulnerable to significant change, such as those without digital access and who already face significant inequalities and financial barriers.

Age Scotland's Chief Executive, Mark O'Donnell, said: "Councils are facing drastic choices but, with many people already struggling to access the support they need, proposals for service changes could have a truly devastating impact on older people if they become a reality.

“With demand and need for social care greater than ever, any reduction in service provision will place the NHS under unmanageable strain, driving up waiting times and leading to a loss of independence for many. Cuts to in-person customer service points risk making life much harder for the 500,000 older people in Scotland who are not online, while reduced community transport and groups may result in greater levels of loneliness and isolation.

“In the short term we hope that timely discussions between local government and the Scottish Government can address funding shortfalls to ensure that the wide range of necessary services can meet the needs of residents.

“In the longer term, as funding will always be a point of contention, local government could look at how to transform and innovate services with the aim of ensuring quality outcomes for residents rather than just cost efficiencies.

“It’s vital that all decisions take into consideration the potential impact on the wellbeing, health and experiences of communities, and that these communities, their representatives and advocates within councils are as involved in these difficult decisions as possible.”

## **The open letter to councillors reads:**

Local government across Scotland has a critical role in improving lives and addressing the challenges we face as a society today, and in the years to come.

Improving health and wellbeing; connecting people; providing care, warm, affordable housing and high-quality amenities; supporting older people to live independently and boosting economic growth are just a few of the responsibilities that lie at the heart of local government.

There is no doubt that this is a very difficult financial environment for local government – perhaps one of the most challenging in a generation – as more people need support from local services while the resources available to meet demand fall short. We know that many people are struggling to access the support they need right now, and this will be compounded if proposals for service changes become a reality.

Suggested council savings documents do not make for light reading. Drastic choices are being discussed by councillors and officials across the country, and the impact of each budget line has cross cutting implications.

Reduced funding for public transport routes and community transport services, for example, will result in greater levels of loneliness and social isolation, more car journeys, poorer access to health and care services, and impact the local economy and where people spend their money.

Cuts to social care spending at a time when demand and need is greater than ever will mean further pressure on the NHS, longer waiting times, more severe needs once treatment is available, and a loss of personal independence.

The removal of in-person customer service points will make it much harder for the 500,000 older people in Scotland who are not online to access information, advice and realise their rights. As will reducing the number of staff in libraries and community centres.

Removing or reducing funding for third sector organisations and community groups will have far-reaching consequences for service users. Our recent [Keeping the Doors Open report](#) highlighted the vital role of community groups and services for older people in tackling loneliness and isolation, helping people to remain active, offering educational activities, improving mental health, and supporting people living with dementia and other health

conditions and their unpaid carers.

It is only once a service disappears that its value is fully understood, and once gone it is almost impossible to restore.

Many of these community services have an intrinsically preventative basis. Their reduction or withdrawal will simply store up bigger problems for later.

It will likely be the case that from April households will pay more in Council Tax, yet have access to fewer, or considerably reduced, public services. That is just not sustainable.

In the short term we hope that timely discussions between local government and the Scottish Government can address funding shortfalls to ensure that the wide range of necessary services can meet the needs of residents.

In the longer term, as funding will always be a point of contention, local government could look at how to transform and innovate services with the aim of ensuring quality outcomes for residents rather than just cost efficiencies. This should take good account of those most vulnerable to significant change such as those without digital access, financial barriers residents might face and the already substantial inequalities that many disabled people experience.

As you are making these difficult decisions, we ask that you do so in close consultation and collaboration with members of your community, their representatives, and advocates within councils, such as older people's champions and those with lived and living experience of health conditions. It is also critical that the impact of decisions on the wellbeing, health and experiences of communities is assessed, monitored, and evaluated.

Yours sincerely

Mark O'Donnell  
**Chief Executive**  
**Age Scotland**