

# **Council administration set out their stall ahead of tomorrow's budget meeting**

**The Labour administration in Edinburgh have published their proposals for setting the budget at the City Chambers on Thursday.**

The overarching theme is that this is a responsible budget protecting council services, but there are many mentions of underfunding from The Scottish Government. The Labour administration claims that Edinburgh continues to receive the lowest block grant of £1,786 per capita as opposed to £2,221 which is the Scottish average. They demand reform of the unfair council tax system saying that in the next financial year councils are facing "real budget cuts of £1 billion".

Their conclusions are these, although we have put them first:

"Edinburgh Labour commit to reviewing the operation and delivery of our services, ensuring best value and sustainability whilst acknowledging the significant medium-term gap. Recognising the substantial pressures faced by Edinburgh as the lowest funded local authority in Scotland, both now and in the future, we will continue to demand that The Scottish Government gives Edinburgh the fair funding settlement our capital city deserves."

**The motion will be debated on**

## **Thursday by all parties and it has some headlines:**

- Council Tax will go up by 5.75%
- £2.5 million will be spent on improved street cleaning waste collection and recycling – which includes annual investment of £300,000 in communal bins, free special uplift for those on low incomes £500,000, tackling fly tipping £200,000, dedicated team for approach roads and rural roads £400,000
- Additional £10 million on roads and pavements with an ongoing £1.5 million for repairs
- £3 million for the King's Theatre
- £220,000 added to Education, Children and Families funding for their main grants programme
- £11.4 million increase on education creating 34 new teaching roles
- Parking tickets rise to £100

## **This is the text of the administration motion being presented to the budget meeting on Thursday:**

The local government funding shortfall across Scotland in the coming year is unprecedented with councils facing decisions which will negatively impact the vital services which people rely on. For 2023-24 councils across Scotland will be faced with real budget cuts of over £1bn, imposed on us by the SNP/Green Scottish Government.

Across Scotland, these cuts will impact homelessness, schools, waste, roads and pavements, family support, public health, and

social care. Without opposition from councils, the choices made by the Scottish Government will result in councils reducing or stopping services altogether and ultimately, reducing the number of jobs.

Edinburgh continues to receive the lowest per capita block grant – £1,786 compared to the Scottish average of £2,221 – and although at long last, councils may now make their own decisions regarding raising Council Tax, they lack the powers to adjust the increase by band or update the value of properties. Council Tax is a regressive, unfair tax and needs to be reformed.

Edinburgh needs more power to raise revenue relevant to the unique economy of our city. The considerable spend of tourists and festival visitors should contribute to our public services and work better for the people of Edinburgh. Legislating for a transient visitor levy must be given urgent priority by the Scottish Government.

We are committed to developing Community Wealth Building through our Business Plan to ensure our local economy benefits all of Edinburgh's citizens.

We made a commitment to take action to end poverty in Edinburgh by 2030 and remain dedicated to achieving this aim. In consultation with the Edinburgh Poverty Commission, we continue our response to the cost of living crisis. Last year we distributed an additional £8m, of which £2m was funded by the Council, to help mitigate the impact on our citizens.

We will encourage an expansion in the number of living wage accredited employers in the city, which since the launch of the strategy the number of living wage employers has increased by 50% to 617 currently. We are confident 2023 will see a further increase in the number of sign-ups, building on the record number of employers which signed up last year.

Together with Edinburgh employers, public sector, third sector

and Trades Union partners we will work with the Living Wage Foundation Scotland to continue to promote the use of living wage and fair work practices throughout the city economy. By tackling low pay and insecure work, we will make progress towards our ambitious goal to end poverty by 2030.

Edinburgh Labour are putting forward a responsible budget that aims to protect services, reducing inequalities, and secure jobs by investing in the Council workforce and insourcing for best value, through a radical review of our procurement process and reduced use of agency staff.

We will continue to source accommodation for citizens who become homeless, we'll maintain our cultural venues and our libraries; our leisure centres will remain open; there will be no cuts to teacher numbers, and we will invest in basic services like waste collection and improve our pavements and roads.

We commit to securing sustainable Council jobs, whilst continuing our no compulsory redundancy policy because we will not compromise the Council's ability to deliver the services that our citizens need.

We are proud to be a diverse and growing city and are committed to delivering our budget within the context of the climate emergency. We will consider any environmental impact in all our strategies and ensure climate goals are embedded across our services as we work towards our 2030 net zero target. We will continue our calls for support from the Scottish and UK Governments to help us achieve these aims.

As we mark the one year anniversary of the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine, we are proud to have welcomed over 10,000 Ukrainian people through our Welcome Hub. We will continue to support them while the crisis is ongoing; but we will require further resources and effective partnership with the UK and Scottish Governments, particularly in our services already

under pressure, such as education and housing.

### **Increased demand and diminished budgets**

Real-terms cuts are being imposed on Edinburgh by an SNP/Green Scottish Government. Homelessness costs, together with other inflationary increases for energy costs, staff costs and property rates – which councils pay to the government – for schools, libraries and other essential buildings have increased the cost of running our city by over £70 million this year alone.

Across the Council, we have been working to meet this funding crisis by looking for possible ways that costs can be reduced whilst always considering the impact that cuts will have on the day-to-day lives of our citizens.

We have listened to the public and shall increase parking fines to £100 to deter inconsiderate and anti-social parking; and we'll invest the net income raised in our programme of road and pavement repairs.

### **Education**

We'll increase spending on education by £11.4m in the coming year and we're adding 34 new teaching roles, but we want to do more. The Council and our schools have worked together to pool resources and mitigate the budget demands created by rising school rolls and long overdue pay increases.

There are some proposed changes that will improve outcomes, whilst also reducing costs. For example:

- the pay and job security of Pupil Support Assistants are to be reviewed with the intention of improving them. Such initiatives, properly done, will address recruitment and retention challenges, whilst also reducing costs.

We are committed to protecting services which improve outcomes for all children:

- Our Transition Teachers will play an essential role in improving attendance and attainment

and we must keep them in our schools.

- We will continue to invest in Speech and Language Therapy; if there is under used resource then we must match it to any unmet need for this assistance.

We will continue to work with our third sector partners and the most recent Education, Children and Families Committee allocated £2.24m to extend our main grants programme through to 31 March 2024. We appreciate that “flat funding” means real term cuts for these organisations, so we are adding £220k for a cost of living uplift.

Our buildings management service, which keeps our public buildings safe and accessible, has already invested more than £100m in major upgrades to schools, leisure facilities and swim centres, and will remain a priority.

## **Culture, Communities and Wellbeing**

We have not made cuts to our core culture and communities budget. We will continue our work to create safe, welcoming and empowered communities, ensuring people can access the support they need in the place they live and work.

Our museums, galleries, art centres and libraries remain open as before; we’re not charging entry fees and we’ll not be levying fines for overdue library books.

- We will continue to support users of our Taxi Card programme, which is available to Edinburgh residents with a severe permanent disability who can’t use ordinary buses or can only use buses with assistance.
- We won’t be reducing our customer service assistant roles because not all of our citizens are online. We are using venues, including libraries, as warm and welcoming

spaces; we're facilitating collaboration between community-based arts organisations; and we've delivered a £100k cultural diversity and inclusion fund. Edinburgh events and festivals are watched around the world, with growing numbers attending in person. Such has been their success, that we are already considering ways to ensure that residents feel involved rather than overwhelmed by them. Therefore, we want to support our cultural venues and recognise that the future of the much-loved King's Theatre is important to many Edinburgh citizens. We will dedicate £3m of asset management capital towards reducing the £9m funding gap, which was caused by the impact of construction inflation on the pre-pandemic renovation plans, subject to confirmation of the project's cost and match funding from other partners, including the UK and Scottish Governments.

- **Transport and Environment** The coming year will see us move from talking about improving sustainable transport in Edinburgh, to actually delivering the change we need. For example, in the coming months: We'll begin assessing effectiveness of bus priority measures. We will work with residents and businesses to evaluate selective Vehicle Detection to enable bus
- priority at traffic signals, combined with an assessment of the cumulative benefits of increased bus lane operating hours, aligned with parking and loading restrictions. The aim will be to reduce bus journey times on the A70 corridor (Currie/Balerno to city centre).
- As well as investing in sustainable transport, we need to get the day-to-day basics right – the core services of our council impact directly on the lives of our citizens, wherever they live in the city.
- That's why we are committing to an additional £10m next year of investment in our pavements and roads; with an ongoing £1.5m for pavement and road repairs. We'll get best value for our city by expanding the Council's own

road works and repair teams.

- We're cleaning up our city by putting £2.5m annually into improved street cleaning, waste collection and recycling. This includes annual investment in: Communal bins £300k; a free Special Uplift programme for people on low incomes £500k; tackling fly tipping and dumping beside communal bins £200k; a dedicated team for approach roads and rural roads £0.4m; and improved service resilience of £1.0m. We expect these new services to be coming onstream from Autumn this year and these investments will create up to 90 jobs with more in the pipeline as we continue the expansion of our own road works and repairs teams. Our work to develop a '20-minute neighbourhood' network where public transport and active travel are the best options for getting around will continue.
- **Planning and Regulatory** We know that to achieve our ambitions for a green and sustainable city we need robust enforcement of existing planning regulations; and that applications and licensing is a source of income for the city. The Planning Service is currently recruiting new staff, including 3 assistant planning officers to help address the increase in planning applications and enforcement cases resulting from the introduction of a short-term letting. Edinburgh's Planning department will continue to provide a strong standard of service for the residents and businesses in our city.
- **Homelessness** Edinburgh is a growing city and we're facing housing pressures like nowhere else in Scotland, with the lowest proportion of social housing in the country and biggest, most expensive, private rented sector. The Scottish Government has rightly tightened rules around the standards of temporary accommodation and changed the eligibility rules but has failed to provide additional funds for us to deliver that. The Scottish Government must provide more funding for social and affordable homes, and we will also seek



alternative methods of funding to progress our house building programme, given the failure of the Scottish Government to assist us with the homelessness crisis that is facing our city. Between 2020 and 2023 the cost of helping with homelessness has more than doubled, from £31 million per year to an expected £62 million in 2023. This represents a further unfunded shortfall in the coming year of £10.4m, equivalent to the entire 3.4% council tax raise recommended in the Chief Financial Officer's report.

- **Raising Revenue** After years of Council Tax freezes and caps, the Scottish Government is now allowing councils to decide how much to increase the level of Council Tax. Opportunities to make council tax fairer or to implement a transient visitor levy have been cast aside by a government which has shown little interest in Edinburgh or in the services that citizens and businesses here rely on in their day-to-day lives. To provide for homelessness, to protect services and to secure jobs, there will be a further Council Tax increase of 2.35% relative to officers' recommendations, giving a total increase this year of 5.75%. For a band D property this amounts to £6.61 per month and we strongly encourage, and will support where needed, residents on low incomes to apply for financial assistance.



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The City of Edinburgh Council meets on Thursday morning at 10am. [The papers for the meeting and details of how to watch online are here.](#)