

Edinburgh council's budget – a handy guide

The City of Edinburgh Council has set its budget for the year ahead after wrestling with a £79 million gap in funding.

After a long day at the City Chambers the Liberal Democrats' budget was unexpectedly approved, after Green councillors voted tactically with other parties to block the Labour administration's plans at the first hurdle.

During the dramatic six-hour meeting to decide how to use the city's £1.24 billion budget in 2023 to 2024, Cllr Ross McKenzie resigned from the Labour group, saying he knew "how little work" the administration put into its budget – which he branded "confusing and misleading".

The events have raised serious and difficult questions for the minority administration – now made up of just 12 of 63 members – over whether it can continue running the council whilst implementing another party's budget, as leader Cammy Day faces calls to step down.

Councillor Day said after the meeting he was "still keen to lead the capital city" and would hold discussions with "all the parties" to discuss the way forward. He has also released a statement today saying: "As Leader of this Council and the Edinburgh Labour Group, it will always be my commitment to invest in Public Services, Protect our Council workforce and Stand up for Our City."

"The SNP and Green party tried to set an illegal budget

earlier in the week and then presented a budget with a 20% increase to council tax that nobody could support.”

“The Greens voted with the Tories to manipulate the budget process threatening compulsory redundancies and privatisation.”

“We will bring forward proposals to in-house council services from private providers and remain 100% committed to no compulsory redundancies”

The approved Lib Dem budget reverses most, but not all, of the cuts proposed by officers to address the funding gap of nearly £80 million, whilst investing heavily in roads and street cleansing.

Cllr Kevin Lang, Lib Dem leader on Edinburgh Council, said he didn't expect to see his group's budget get approved but was “delighted to see it pass”.

Lib Dem finance spokesperson, Cllr Neil Ross said: “This year's budget has been the most challenging of all the six budgets I've worked on with an enormous starting gap of £76 million in the revenue budget.”

These are the key cuts and spending contained in the budget that will affect Edinburgh residents.

Council tax rises by 5 per cent

Council tax will rise by 5 per cent in the capital to help improve the authority's financial position and avoid cuts to services.

This means the average household (band D properties) will pay an extra £5.74 a month or £68.94 over the year, which will

raise £5.39 million.

Education

Under initial saving plans drawn up by officials, the city's education budget was set to be slashed around £7 million, however under the Lib Dem budget this has been reduced to £1 million by reversing £6 million cuts through the council tax increase.

The move avoids reduced funding for speech and language therapy in schools, devolved budgets for headteachers to spend, transition teachers and pupil support assistants.

However, a £400,000 cut to education welfare officer roles and a 'review' of education contracted spending to save £904,000 will still go ahead.

Cllr Ross said: "For Liberal Democrats, education is a top priority as it offers a pathway to a fulfilling life and should be a top priority for this council.

"Support in the classroom for teachers and inclusion in mainstream education are critical elements of getting it right for every child. Having the appropriate support in place from teachers providing additional support for learning, pupil support assistance in the classroom and speech and language therapy for children who need it – all of this is essential to achieving positive outcomes for children who might otherwise struggle in mainstream education.

"That's why we're reversing £6 million of the education savings proposals funded by an increase in council tax.

Compulsory Redundancies

One of the most controversial parts of the Lib Dem budget will see the council end its commitment to making no compulsory redundancies to save £600,000.

Trade union Unite, which represents 1,500 council staff, said after the meeting it was “devastated” at the decision.

Roads and pavements

There will be an extra £11 million invested to improve the state of roads and footpaths and fill in more potholes, reversing a £1.5 million cut which was proposed to help fund the soaring cost of the North Bridge refurbishment. This is made possible through £16 million borrowing and an increase in parking fines.

Cllr Ross said reports of potholed roads and paths are the “most popular complaint from residents” adding they are “the worst they’ve ever been”.

Waste and street cleansing

The budget also commits to an additional £3 million for gully cleaning, tackling fly tipping, graffiti removal and street sweeping.

“Residents take pride in their local areas and Liberal Democrat councillors are listening and responding,” Cllr Ross said.

Another contentious move in the Lib Dem plan however is to save £500,000, rising to £2.5million in subsequent years, by outsourcing more waste and cleansing jobs – a policy opposed by unions and the city’s Labour group, despite voting it

through yesterday.

Cllr Day said his group does not support the privatisation of services and will “bring forward proposals to in-house council services from private providers”.

Cllr Ross said: “The Liberal Democrats are open minded on this, our objective is to achieve delivery of a good service that represents best value.

“We want the council to deliver better outcomes in a cost effect way whether has in house or external or by some combination.”

Parking fines increased

Around £2.4 million will be raised to support the cash boost for roads and footpaths after the Scottish Government confirmed the council would be able to increase parking fines from £60 to £100 (£50 if paid in two weeks).

The increase will take effect from 1 April.

Rent and housing

Councillors voted to raise council tenants’ rent by 3 per cent following price freezes over the last two years. This was agreed under a separate housing budget put forward by the Labour administration.

However the increase is not sufficient to fund the council’s affordable house building programme and means that only around 200 new social homes will be built in the next 10 years. In addition, work to retrofit council properties to improve energy efficiency will be scaled-back.

Councillor Kate Campbell, housing spokesperson for the SNP

group which proposed a 4.5 per cent rent hike, said the decision “will effectively end house building in Edinburgh and will be catastrophic for the city.”

Transport

The budget will mean an end to funding free tram travel for under 22s, which will save the council £2 million this year.

Plans to reintroduce a cycle hire scheme are also scrapped, as £500,000 previously set aside for the reintroduction of rental bikes was cut.

However a proposed phasing-out of the Taxicard scheme which helps people with disabilities get around has been shelved, and the service will be maintained.

Climate Change

The Lib Dem’s budget gives an extra £279,000 for the council’s climate and sustainability team to help meet net zero targets, whilst £2million will be invested in measures to prevent flooding.

The Green group’s decision to block Labour’s plans in the first round of voting came because the Lib Dem budget committed more funding for climate action.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

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