

# Politicians have their say on the upcoming council budget

The council is legally obliged to set what is called a “balanced budget” this month.

There are obvious problems in doing this, and up to £80 million savings or cuts have to be made.

We asked all finance spokespeople from all parties at the City Chambers to comment ahead of the budget process which is conducted at two meetings in February.

Only the Conservatives have not come up with any comment, otherwise what follows here are the thoughts of the administration and other parties.

In rough terms the council has around £1 billion to spend on services, but it already knows it has to make cuts of £80 million to break even.

These thoughts and proposals are offered against a backdrop of a cost of living crisis, and council officers who have [cast doubt](#) on the council’s ability to balance the books.

## Edinburgh Labour



Cllr Mandy Watt Depute Leader of the Council at the Launch of 2022 Edinburgh Labour Manifesto at Coffee Saints with Cllr Cammy Day and Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar MSP PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Mandy Watt, Finance Convener, writes: “Almost everyone who lives in this city will be aware that we’re dealing with unprecedented need for help with 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. This has been made worse by welcome – but unfunded – Scottish Government changes to the ways that we deal with this in our city.

“Between 2020 and 2023 the cost of help with homelessness has more than doubled, from £31 million per year to an expected £65 million in 2023. Requests to government for funding for this – and with the challenges of finding settled accommodation for Ukrainians who have been forced to flee for their lives – have been met with silence. Edinburgh’s citizens

are being expected to pay for decisions made by national government. Unlike income tax, the council tax cannot be levied only on those with the broadest financial shoulders. Promises by government to change this have never materialised.

“These 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. Any additional costs for funding a pay settlement with teaching staff is still unknown.

“Across the council, we have been working to meet this funding crisis by looking at possible ways that costs can be reduced whilst always considering what the impact on our citizens will be. We will not depart from our policy of no compulsory redundancies because that would compromise the council’s ability to deliver the services that its citizens need.

“Over £50 million of cost reduction proposals have been developed that minimise the impact on services; some of the most controversial relate to transport, with the under-22 free tram travel and renewal of the bike hire scheme being unfunded at the time of writing.

“As reported at November’s Finance and Resources Committee, there remains a further £20 million funding gap that must be dealt with by finding further reductions and/or by raising council tax by more than the planned three percent.

“After years of council tax freezes and caps, the Scottish Government is now allowing councils to decide the level at which council tax should be set. For far too long, governments have chosen to starve councils of funding and are now throwing the burden onto citizens during a cost-of-living crisis. The Scottish Government should give Edinburgh a capital city supplement to cover the huge cost of providing accommodation to prevent homelessness.”

# Edinburgh Greens



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“Luckily, the solutions to the climate crisis and the crises of poverty and inequality are often interlinked. Helping people walk, wheel and cycle around the city, for example, can save money as well as carbon emissions. The same is true of energy efficiency, local food production, and other measures to green our city which improve people’s quality of life at the same time. Crucially, failure to invest now will only create more pain in the future.

“Young people are already facing the disastrous consequences of decisions which have prioritised greed and growth at the expense of everything else, and we cannot squander the opportunity to invest in the wellbeing of future generations. Council budgets must look further than just the next year, or even the next political term; the decisions we make now will echo for decades to come.

“Recognising this, late last year Greens in Council passed motions to develop tools to help parties measure the climate and equality impacts of their budget proposals. Frankly, making spending decisions without knowing the repercussions they will have on our most vulnerable citizens, or our ability to withstand climate change is reckless. Nobody is pretending that these decisions will be easy, or cheap. But they are vital if we want an Edinburgh fit for the future, a city which works for us all.”

# Liberal Democrats



Lewis Younie at the Liberal Democrat photo call on Calton Hill in 2022 PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Lewis Younie Liberal Democrat group writes: “As a first-time councillor, the budget process has, even this far, been a sobering experience. To participate in the designing of a budget for our Capital city, intended to serve hundreds of thousands of residents, is an immense responsibility. Getting this right is critical in fulfilling the needs of our City – education, roads maintenance, social care, to name a few; all need adequate funding to function.

“However, adequate funding is a pipe dream in the budget process this year. The City of Edinburgh Council raises less than 30% of its budget from Council Tax, forced to rely upon grant funding from the Scottish Government. This has been cut year after year, clearly demonstrating the lack of regard the SNP and Greens give local government. We are, like our colleagues in all other 31 local authorities, being forced to

cut services we only want to see greater investment in.

“For example, education: allegedly, there are potential plans afoot in Glasgow City Council to cut 800 front-line teaching roles and reduce the length of the school day. The Liberal Democrat Group in the City of Edinburgh Council knows the devastating impact upon young people’s development a cut like this would cause. Education is the great engine of social mobility; movement in this direction will only exacerbate deprivation and disillusionment.

“To protect young people, my group has made it a red line to support front-line education delivery. We will not vote for any budget which disregards the importance of young people’s learning and developing their potential.

“While we cannot protect everything, we’ll fight for those issues which rear largest in people’s minds – crumbling roads and paths, care for vulnerable people, and delivering on environmental ambitions. This Budget cannot be everything we want; the Scottish Liberal Democrat group will listen to the priorities of residents and fight to deliver them.”

**SNP**



Councillor Lesley Macinnes. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam  
[www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)

Cllr Lesley Macinnes, the SNP Finance spokesperson writes: This year's Council budget is more important than ever. The cost-of-living crisis is terrifying for many residents worried about the cost of food, heating, and their homes while climate change is an ever more present threat. The budget is an opportunity for the Council to support Edinburgh residents and businesses through this utter mess caused by Brexit, Russia's illegal war in Ukraine and Tory government's complete failure and incompetence.

The SNP's priorities are clear. We want to make decisions that enable all our essential services to be the best they can be, providing strong support to the most vulnerable in our communities and keeping up the momentum on dealing with climate change. We will be bringing forward some creative approaches to our budget which will allow us to put more resources where they are most needed. The current administration is asleep at the wheel. Labour isn't interested

in getting feedback from residents on their proposals and are only publishing some proposals a matter of weeks before the Council sets the budget.

The SNP are working hard to bring forward serious proposals to reflect the seriousness of the financial challenges, while keeping money in the classrooms, care sector and other lifeline services. The Capital needs a progressive budget and that's what we'll offer. We can only speculate what Labour and their Tory and LibDem administration partners will do. Failure to deliver for Edinburgh will have a devastating impact on our communities.

Council discussions to approve the budget will be held on 7 and 23 February. The papers for 7 February are already online and others will be published in the week beginning 13 February. [All papers for council meetings in February are here.](#)