

# Greens want to end free lunches for councillors

Greens in Edinburgh have proposed ending free meals for councillors, continuing free tram travel for youngsters, and boosting funding for projects aimed at addressing climate change impacts in their annual budget.

A year after using tactical voting to derail the Labour administration's budget and which meant the Liberal Democrat budget with more climate spending was voted through, the Greens are again hoping to influence the process.

This is the only party in the City Chambers which rejects The Scottish Government's council tax freeze settlement, aside from the independent councillor Ross McKenzie.. Co-leader Alys Mumford said the scheme would only benefit wealthier residents while leaving less to invest in public services.



Cllr Alys Mumford

Backing a 6.75 per cent increase, Cllr Mumford said this left The Scottish Government with a “choice” to either withhold the £16.1 million set aside by Ministers to fund a freeze at five per cent “or they keep that money in our coffers and we only need to charge people in Edinburgh a 1.75 per cent increase”.

Having drawn up a joint budget with the SNP last year, the two groups have submitted separate proposals for 2024/25, with the “key sticking point” the issue of council tax, Cllr Mumford said.

“We are separate parties. Last year it made sense to do a joint budget but that was never saying we are going to be doing joint budgets for evermore. We have some shared priorities with them but we have different ones also.

“I think If the SNP had been open to increasing council tax they could have an incredible budget that had all of the climate spending needed and the early year care plans. The key sticking point was the council tax.”

Central to the Greens budget is an additional £7 million towards “responding to the climate and nature emergencies”.

This includes cash to fund a new ‘nature emergency team’ with a £2.9 million budget; £1.3 million for planting and maintaining trees; £950,000 for flood prevention projects and other climate change mitigations; £450,000 to support community projects aimed at reducing household carbon emissions and £500,000 each for community food growing schemes and work to make council buildings more energy efficient.

The group would look to slash the council’s civic budget by £50,000 – around 10 per cent – which would mean less money for the Lord Provost’s office and no more free lunches for elected members during the monthly full council meeting – which Cllr Mumford said “a lot of people don’t eat anyway”.

She said: “The council catering seems like a no brainer to us.

“It’s costing £15,000 a year at a time when we are looking at cuts.

“It’s bizarre for one meeting a month there is hot food provided. It seems it’s a hangover from the days when full council ended at lunchtime and you got wine and a meal and it was a complete perk for councillors.”

Last month the Greens called for a plant-based meal to be served in celebration of ‘Veganuary’ however the move was voted down by councillors.

Their budget also calls for a wider review of the civic budget – including the Lord Provosts personalised number plates, understood to be worth around £500,000. This has been proposed for a number of years now by a succession of Green councillors as an easy cash win.

A further £1 million would be saved through reduced spend on outsourced services and agency workers.

Meanwhile the Greens are the only party proposing to continue funding free tram travel for under 22-year-olds at cost of £500,000.

“It will be ending at some point, essentially it’s being continued as long as it can be from a bit of funding that was found,” Cllr Mumford explained. “For us that should continue the whole time, it doesn’t make sense to have difference between buses and trams.”

In addition there is £1.85 million to speed-up implementation of City Mobility Plan, aimed at improving public transport and active travel in city; £450,000 to increase the number of dropped kerbs; £1 million for new bike hangars ; £60,000 for cargo bikes to help deliver services; £50,000 to fund a new ‘Night Czar’ for the capital; £800,000 for new accessible public toilets in town centres, and £15,000 to roll-out sign language interpretation of council meetings.

And in a bid to support those hardest hit by the cost of living crisis the Greens want to see the council’s contribution to the Scottish Welfare Fund by £1.8m, reintroduce the tenant grant fund with a budget of £1 million to assist people living in non council-owned properties facing eviction, and set aside £3m for one-off support payments for families eligible for council tax reductions.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



The first bike hangars in Edinburgh were installed in August 2020 in collaboration with CycleHoop