

SNP budget to include free Friday afterschool clubs

Ahead of next week's council budget meeting, the SNP group set out their plans including safer pavements and free after school clubs for primary school children on Friday afternoons.

The SNP proposals include an extra £3.5m on getting empty homes back into use, £5.11m to make after school clubs free for all primary pupils on a Friday, and diverting more than £1million in funds for roads to improving accessibility and safety of pavements.

However with less than a week to go until budget day SNP members have had "virtually no dialogue" with the authority's minority Labour administration, according to the group's finance spokesperson Lesley Macinnes.

Councillor Macinnes said. "They keep talking to us about building consensus and all the rest of it, but we haven't had a proper approach from them about anything," she added.

The council has paid out over £26,000 in pothole compensation in last 3 years, and faces a £77 million backlog of road repairs. Despite this a key part of the SNP's budget is to re-direct £1.2m currently earmarked for filling potholes and fixing roads to "ramp-up" the number of dropped kerbs and pedestrian crossings.

"We've said let's take a chunk of the roads budget and put it

in road safety issues,” Cllr Macinnes said. “It falls into three areas, one of them is really important from the view of accessibility. So for wheelchair users, mobility scooters and pushchair pushers there’s a great need for dropped kerbs.

“The same thing around pedestrian crossings – we’ve got a list as long as our arm of community asks for pedestrian crossings and what we’re suggesting is putting in an extra big chunk of cash into that to accelerate that.

“And then in terms of school streets we want to make the routes to school a lot safer and the streets themselves around schools safer so we’re putting £1m into that.”

By cutting spending on the Lord Provost’s office, communications staff, agency workers and contracts, borrowing and drawing from reserves, the group would also look to fund 10 more bus lane cameras, electric cargo bikes, new public toilets and also speed-up the insulation of school buildings, among other projects.

The flagship policy contained in the proposal is to “help hard-pressed households” through universal free after school clubs on Friday afternoons

Cllr Macinnes described the move as “fixing the Friday afternoon fankle”.

She said: “It’s that whole question for working parents or parents who want to work, that lack of flexibility because they get the half day in school on a Friday.

“We’re opting to extend that and make that universal free childcare in that environment. It just buys people some flexibility, both financially and in terms of how they’re running their lives.”

The group – the largest in the council, but out of power since 2022 – is proposing to direct £465k to youth groups only part-

funded through the recent Connected Communities grant scheme, increase headteachers' budgets by £2.2m and spend £1m to improve road safety around schools.

They would also accept the £16m being offered by the Scottish Government to freeze council tax at 5 per cent – a move Cllr Macinnes argued would “undoubtedly benefit every household in Edinburgh” – and increase council tenants' rent by 8.4 per cent in line with officers' recommendation.

“The absolutely clear reason for that is because we believe the house building programme is absolutely paramount,” she said. “Any option below 8.4 means we don't deliver.”

Also proposed is an additional £3.5m for renovating derelict council homes. It's estimated this could save nearly £1.6m from temporary accommodation expenditure over the next two years.

Cllr Macinnes said: “That clearly has a big benefit as far as the homelessness issue is concerned. We might find that all of our ideas are sidelined, but we've demonstrated a way forward on this.”

Other commitments are: £750k on flood prevention; £590k to accelerate the planting of a million trees across the capital; £1m to replace “heavy polluting” council vehicles with electric and low-carbon alternatives; £100k to halt the use of toxic weed killer in parks; £60k for additional planning staff to process short-term let applications; £770k to improve community centres, and £120k to restore bus services to Dumbiedykes and Lady Nairne.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



Councillor Lesley Macinnes. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam
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