

# **Survey to ask Edinburgh residents their views on council spending**

**Edinburgh residents to be asked what services could be reduced or scrapped, in the face of a projected £150 million deficit.**

Engagement with the public on local authority spending is set to kick off next month and will also seek ideas for how the council could save cash.

City leaders say the process will help to shape budget decisions over the next few years.

Edinburgh Council is facing a projected deficit of £150m in the next five years and “growing demand for services which exceeds the funding available to provide those services,” a report said.

Through a series of surveys, focus groups and workshops – which will cost around £60k to administer – the authority hopes to capture “views and priorities of Edinburgh’s diverse residents”.

The first phase, set to be agreed at the policy and sustainability committee on Tuesday, March 12, will be a short questionnaire.

This will ask residents ‘what is going on in your neighbourhood that the Council should pay more attention to?’ and ‘where do you think the Council has done well in the last year?’

Other proposed questions are ‘what ideas do you have for how the Council could save money?’ and ‘in order to save money, what service that you receive could the council reduce or stop

providing?'.

The questionnaire will run online and in drop-in sessions in libraries and community centres over 16 weeks from April 2.

The report said: "As part of phase one, the council will communicate its overall budget position and strategic priorities to residents, setting out what the Council seeks to achieve for Edinburgh.

"Results from phase one will be reported to committee alongside more detailed proposals for phase two. Results will also be reported to Trade Unions. These results will show what priorities residents expressed, where we are seen as succeeding, public suggestions for change, and any problems resolved through normal systems. Results will be communicated internally to the Senior Leadership Team and Council Leadership Team to assist with the preparation of budget options."

Iain Whyte, leader of Edinburgh Council's Conservatives, said it was vital the public were made aware of "projected deficits for the next few years" when being asked for their views.

Whyte, a councillor since 1995, said in the past "town hall meetings where people could put forward ideas" had proved the most effective when gauging opinions and ideas on how public funds should be spent.

He added: "Most of these things showed the public aren't quite as left-wing as some of the councillors.

"They showed there was public support, for instance, for ending the no compulsory redundancy policy and ensuring we diverted staffing and resources to things that most mattered in people's neighbourhoods."

For phase two, launching in autumn this year subject to councillor approval, a series of focus groups will be held "on subjects which were either raised by residents during phase one or are felt to be essential for discussion". Participants will be paid £40.

The third phase, in spring next year, will see "a series of workshops held with council colleagues, Trade Union representatives, and representatives of partner organisations

looking at problems and solutions identified from phase two”. The report added: “Results from phase three will be reported to committee as part of a final engagement summary report along with any relevant action planning, next steps, and public communications.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



City Chambers Edinburgh Council. Photo Martin McAdam