

A 10% council tax rise proposed ahead of budget showdown

A 10% council tax rise, more funding for education and an end to free tram travel are among some of the proposals from Edinburgh Council's opposition groups ahead of a budget showdown on Thursday.

No party has a majority in the city chambers, meaning groups will have to come to some kind of agreement in order to finalise a budget.

For the SNP, Edinburgh Council's largest group, the biggest budget priorities are education, road safety and housing.

SNP group leader Simita Kumar said: "Labour have not actually thought about what things we can do differently, what are the things we can innovate on?"

"The only thing they've done is take the officers' recommendations and moved some tokenistic amount around.

"Our budget is a wellbeing budget. We know we have a cost of living crisis, we want the best wellbeing for our children, our young people, our communities, and for everyone.

They want to ensure that transition teachers – educators who help pupils experiencing changes in their education or who face tough times – remain funded, which is not the case in the

Labour administration's budget.

To accomplish this, they propose using some remaining Covid relief funding.

Further, they want to see the Holiday Hubs scheme – which gives families of additional support needs pupils respite – maintained.

And for the Greens, they propose big investments in active travel, housing and the third sector, but it would all come with a hefty price tag.

They're eyeing a whopping 10% increase in council tax to help fund their goals – a significant increase over the other groups, but not out of line with the current plans of some other councils in Scotland.

Labour's most likely partners in coming to a budget consensus are the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, who all together have a one seat majority in the council.

For the Liberal Democrats, the biggest priorities are education and road safety. Like the SNP, they have concerns over the plans to axe transition teachers.

Group leader Kevin Lang said: "Liberal Democrat councillors have always been clear. We cannot and will not support cuts to schools.

"It's why we are completely opposed to proposals currently in the Labour budget to remove transition teachers and a number of pupil assistants. If Labour want our support then they simply have to find the money to save these vital posts.

"We also think more money is needed to improve road safety, especially around schools. Just two weeks ago, 53 parent councils from across the city wrote a joint letter to say more needed to be done.

“Liberal Democrats agree, which is why we want to increase the road safety budget to a record level this year.

Meanwhile, the Conservative amendment eyes a lower council tax rate of 7%, and axing free tram travel for under-22s and people over 60 to make up for some of the revenues lost.

They also want to see council officers move quickly with plans to slim down the amount of property owned by the city, and also want to see officers explore ways of reducing staffing levels.

They further propose a departure from Cosla, a partnership between Scotland’s 32 local authorities to allow coordination and cooperation on a range of issues.

One of its main functions is negotiating with the Scottish Government for council funding. Cosla and Holyrood work out an agreement every year on how much each council will receive.

They say that Edinburgh has failed to get good deals through Cosla in recent years. Edinburgh is projected to get the lowest amount of funding per person of any council in Scotland, with the city set to receive £2009.2 per head – just 73.5% of the national average.

Four Labour-run councils – including Glasgow City Council, Scotland’s largest – left the body in 2015, but rejoined in 2017.

The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have each filed empty amendments to the Labour administration’s budget motion, which can be amended with each party’s requests if they come to an agreement.

By Joe Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter