

Edinburgh councillors have agreed a new budget for 2025-26

Edinburgh councillors have agreed a budget which means council tax will rise by 8% and there will be increases in charges for many council services. There are promises of new funding for road safety and no cuts to transition teachers.

It comes after eleventh hour negotiations led to a deal between the Labour administration and the Conservative and Liberal Democrat groups.

Presenting the budget, Labour councillor and Finance Convener, Mandy Watt, said: "This administration has put forward a balanced budget that prioritises areas that residents say they care about, while staying true to the council's core commitment of tackling poverty and climate change."

Labour priorities, such as new funding for schools and an investment in temporary accommodation, survived in the compromise budget.

Liberal Democrats meanwhile got £1.6 million in new funding for road safety, and blocked cuts to transition teachers and pupil support assistants.

And Conservatives won £1 million in funding for reforms to the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board, which delivers health and social care funding.

Further, they secured £0.5m for funding the council's data analytics team, £0.5m for council enforcement and £0.5m for new funding to support educational attainment.

A notable omission from the budget was substantial new funding for holiday hubs, a respite scheme for the families of pupils with additional support needs.

Deputations earlier in the day had focused on the scheme, with one parent raising the fact that the yearly time available for each student has shrunk from six weeks to two since 2018.

Edinburgh Council's former leader Cllr Cammy Day voted for the compromise budget lodged by the administration.

Meanwhile, Ross McKenzie, an independent councillor who was elected as a member of the Labour group in 2022, voted for the Green budget. His efforts to set aside funding for Gorgie Community Farm were not successful today, but Cllr Watt hinted there might be room for funding of projects such as this after due diligence.

The mood in the room was restrained as the budget was passed, with no celebration of it in the Labour group. Councillors quickly left the room after the vote was concluded.

SNP group leader Councillor Simita Kumar said: "This is a weak Labour administration, like its budget, it has zero leadership, a budget void of inspiration and accountability. Studies should be done to examine its merit and label it as the laziest budget in modern times.

"There's a fake £1.5m underspend in the Labour budget to help buy support from Lib Dems and Tories while selling their morals in return.

“I cannot comprehend the Labour leader and finance convener saying that parents’ views are only opinions and not reflective of the facts – facts which shows that holiday hubs have gone through systematic cuts since Labour took over.

“Not hearing the pleas of families of children with disabilities, life limiting conditions, and additional support needs is the most disastrous decision of today.”

The Green group’s budget proposals received ten votes in total – nine Green councillors and Cllr McKenzie.

Cllr Alex Staniforth, the group’s finance spokesperson, said: “The Green budget this year suggested radical new ways of investing in social housing, saw increased spending on climate and poverty initiatives, and proposed actions to make the city safer for everyone.

“But unfortunately Edinburgh’s Labour administration have once again bowed to their unofficial coalition partners in the Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties, and passed a timid budget devoid of ideas.

“This is a missed opportunity for the people of Edinburgh who – facing a much-needed council tax increase – will expect to see positive changes to the city in return.

“Green proposals to improve accessibility, to build more public toilets, and to secure the future of Gorgie Farm, could all have been accepted if the Labour administration was not so focused on what is best for their own positions rather than the wellbeing of the people they were elected to help.”

Liberal Democrats meanwhile celebrated the budget’s inclusion of their priorities on road safety. The group’s transport spokesperson, Councillor Sanne Dijkstra-Downie said: “Edinburgh Council has simply not been doing enough on road safety. We have a long list of pedestrian crossings still to be delivered.

“There is a host of traffic calming measures sitting on a priority list but with no idea of when, or indeed if they will be put in place. The Council simply has to do better.

“That’s why the key LibDem priority in this year’s budget was to secure a record sum for road safety. We desperately need new funding to get on top of the backlog of road safety projects across the city, especially those around schools.

“We’re delighted our plan got cross party support and was passed by the Council. Every councillor of every party should be pleased that a record £5.7 million will now be allocated this year. The priority now must be to turn this extra funding into delivery on the ground.”

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter