

Protesters gathered outside of Edinburgh City Chambers ahead of budget meeting

Dozens of protesters have warned planned cuts could hit “the most vulnerable”, as councillors met to agree the budget for the next year.

Groups picketed in front of Edinburgh City Chambers this morning as city councillors arrived to negotiate a budget deal.

Representatives of the Unison and Unite trade unions and the Safe Consumption Edinburgh campaign group were in attendance.

Unison members were protesting proposed cuts to the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (EIJB), which in part funds a series of charities that provide health and social care support in the capital.

Tracy Anne Miller, secretary for the Lothian Health Unison branch, said: “If they make cuts to the EIJB, the vast majority of these charities will fold, because the money they receive for the EIJB pays the salary, the staff, the rent for the buildings.

“It’s the most vulnerable people in society that these charities are looking after – homeless people, poor people.

“We’re a health branch, an NHS branch, but these charities actually take a huge pressure off the NHS, so if these people aren’t being seen by the charities, there’s one direction

they're coming – and that's us.

“The people that they're currently looking after are not going to receive the service that they've been getting for years.”

Some charities have already posted redundancy notices ahead of today's budget meeting, anticipating the cuts to go through.

Meanwhile, members of the Safe Consumption Edinburgh campaign group were present in hopes of drawing councillors' attention to their project.

They want to see safe consumption sites built in the capital, in hopes of combating the drug deaths crisis which has seen 333 people die in the city between 2020 and 2023, the last year for which figures are available.

A campaigner for the group said: “We've been here over the past few weeks to try and get ring-fenced funding, in meetings they all nodded.

“We're here today because they haven't done that. That needs to change, because we need to start saving lives and get done about it.

“Today, no funding has been committed, so the next step for us is making sure the council put their money where their mouth is.”

Councillors will decide on funding for the EIJB at the full council meeting taking place on Thursday, 20 February.

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter