

Finance and Resources Committee

10am, Friday, 6 December 2019

Change and Budget Citizen Focus Groups Report

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Notes the summary of focus groups undertaken.
- 1.2 Notes the report will be included as part of the budget papers for Council in February.
- 1.3 Note that further detail will be provided as to how this detail is reflected within budget proposals as part of the Budget and Change Strategy Report to Finance and Resources.

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Report

Change and Budget Citizen Focus Groups Report

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report summarises the focus groups on service change and budget prioritisation conducted with citizens from September to October 2019. The full report on the findings is included as an appendix.

3. Background

- 3.1 Local authorities face increasingly difficult decisions about which services to provide and how to provide them, driven by national budget decisions, demographic change, and responding to the challenges of climate change. Edinburgh is a leading local authority on engaging on budget decisions and the Council's 2019 Change and Budget Conversation represents a further innovation in our approach for citizens. In the absence of clear, easy choices, the Council has made additional efforts in recent years to ensure that engagement is positive, educational, guided by the things participants want to say about the Council's budget. The Council has also made efforts to design and conduct consultation and engagement events in ways that are a constructive and enjoyable processes.

4. Main report

- 4.1 Strategy and Communications conducted 10 focus groups with citizens in September and October 2019. All used the Council's group engagement tool for budget discussion, developed in 2018 and updated in 2019.
- 4.2 Citizens felt the Council should spend more on mental health and homelessness, with a general belief that homelessness was a bigger problem in Edinburgh than previously.
- 4.3 Citizens wanted the Council to prioritise: radical new house building; care for the elderly; and improved maintenance of parks and other public spaces. There were also unprompted suggestions for income included introducing a transient visitor levy and a 'congestion' charge.

- 4.4 Citizens were divided on potential Council Tax increases, though most would be willing to pay more providing their priorities were addressed and would resent 'paying more and getting less'.
- 4.5 Citizens generally invested less in education in order to increase funding in care for older people and environmental services.
- 4.6 Citizens did not favour the disposal of any historic buildings unless specific criteria were met: assurance of maintenance; lease rather than sale; community use and access; and not to be used as a hotel or similar tourist accommodation.
- 4.7 Further detailed findings are included in the appendix.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 As set out in the October Finance and Resources Committee paper There are no plans for a further formal consultation on the budget. Budget proposals which have substantive impact on citizens and have not been previously subject to discussion will require consultation prior to implementation. This is likely to take place following the budget decision to provide sufficient time for informed consideration.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 All costs were met from within existing budgets. The total cost of communications and focus groups was £12,639 (including colleague and open citizen group engagements).

7. Appendices

Citizen Focus Groups Report

Change and Budget Conversations

A SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH CITIZENS
IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2019

Executive Summary

Strategy and Communications conducted 10 focus groups with citizens in September and October 2019. All used the Council's group engagement tool for budget discussion, developed in 2018 and updated in 2019.

In summary, these groups said:

- Citizens felt the Council should spend more on mental health and homelessness, with a general belief that homelessness was a bigger problem in Edinburgh than previously
- Citizens wanted the Council to prioritise: radical new house building; care for the elderly; and improved maintenance of parks and other public spaces. They were supportive of introducing a transient visitor levy and a congestion charge
- Citizens were divided on Council Tax increases, though most would be willing to pay more providing their priorities were addressed and resented 'paying more and getting less'
- Citizens did not favour the disposal of any historic buildings unless specific criteria were met: assurance of maintenance; lease rather than sale; community use and access; and not to be used as a hotel or similar tourist accommodation

Introduction

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Local authorities face increasingly difficult decisions about which services to provide and how to provide them, driven by national spending choices, demographic change, and climate change. Current approaches to work, travel, care, and education are unlikely to survive the next decade and local government cannot afford to lag behind.

But as decisions become more difficult, meaningful engagement with citizens becomes more important and harder to achieve.

In the absence of clear, easy choices, the Council has made additional efforts in recent years to ensure that engagement is positive, educational, guided by the things participants want to say about Council spending and priorities rather than driven by specific Council led questions.

The Council's 2019 Change and Budget Conversation represents a further innovation in our approach for citizens. The group-based exercise more closely resembles the conversations that people would naturally have about local government services, and provides an opportunity for a stimulating exchange of views between community members which many participants found valuable and enjoyable.

Citizen Focus Groups

Strategy and Communications conducted 10 focus groups with citizens of Edinburgh. All groups were audio recorded for accuracy. Key facts about the make-up of the focus groups include:

- **113 people were involved in total**
- Participants were recruited to ensure they were, collectively, representative of the population of the city
- 12 individuals were invited to participate in each group with a target of 10 participants being an ideal number
- Participants were **evenly split between men and women**
- **All were aged 16 and over, with 25% of the sample aged 16-24, 25% aged 25-44, 25% aged 45-64, and 25% aged 65 or over**
- **25% of participants were recruited each from Socio-Economic Groups (SEG) A+B, C1, C2, and D+E.** This is similar to the overall population of Edinburgh.
- Participants came from a **broad geographic spread across the city and included a range of ethnic and national backgrounds**

During focus groups, citizens were provided with the same information as staff and asked to complete the same group exercise. Citizens were asked questions based on their choices throughout the group activity – guided by those services which each focus chose to increase or reduce funding to.

In this way, groups were always discussing issues that were of interest and relevance to them – either because they saw them as essential or because they felt they were unnecessary.

The following summary of citizen feedback includes extensive verbatim quotes which are typical of discussions, as well as ideas and suggestions put forward by citizens themselves.



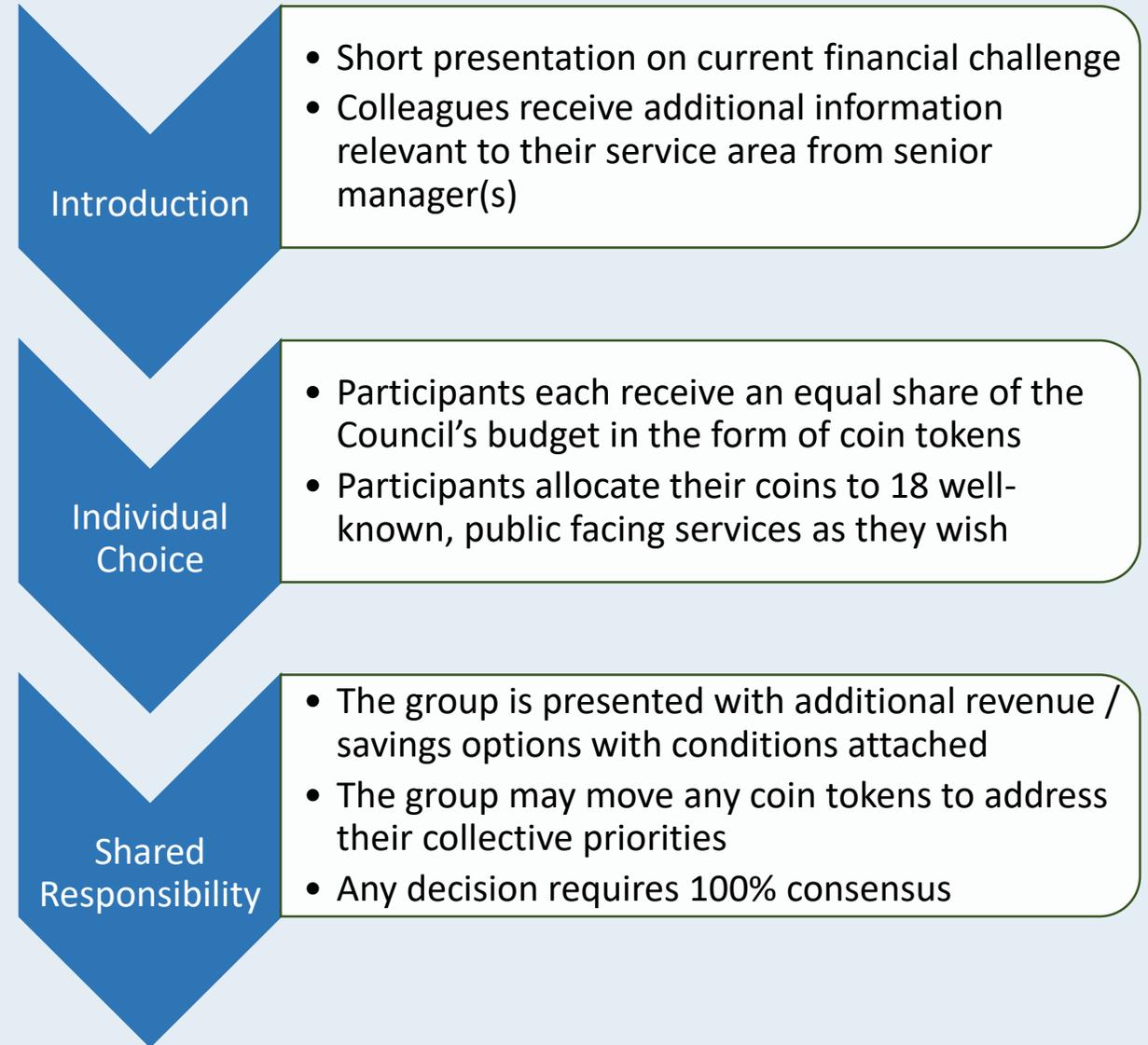
Discussions Facilitated by Group Activity

The City of Edinburgh Council has been a leading UK authority for several years on engaging with residents about how it makes its strategic budget decisions, employing a range of electronic and in-person approaches to give citizens and other stakeholders a say in decisions that will affect them, their families and their community.

In 2018, Strategy and Communications developed a group-based discussion tool with the objective of:

- **Raising awareness** of the Council’s overall financial position
- **Informing** citizens and Council colleagues about the relative levels of spending in services and the choices the Council faces in terms of continuing to deliver services that Edinburgh needs
- Enabling citizens and colleagues the opportunity to **provide useful, structured input** into the decision-making of the Council
- **Encouraging participation** in budget and change engagement activity, and in future Council engagement activities, by ensuring the experience of engagement itself was positive

Strategy and Communications employed a game-based approach to this, which balanced giving individual participants agency and a voice in decision-making alongside the need for a group to make a collective decision.



Raising Revenue

- **Tourist tax** – some believed this had already been introduced
- **Congestion charge** – though cost of public transport is a concern for families
- **More speed cameras** and restrictions around schools to deter car drop-offs and pick-ups
- **Student accommodation charges** of £1 per room, per night or students to pay Council Tax
- **Road hire charges** for long occupation by utility companies and large fines for utility companies who don't reinstate roads properly
- **Charge non-UK visitors** for entry to museums and galleries

Improving Efficiency

- **Deposit-return scheme** for single-use plastics to increase recycling and reduce litter
- **Simplified domestic waste recycling systems**
- **Targeting subsidies for sports and leisure** to those who can't afford to pay, with citizens being enabled to access private facilities
- **Better out-of-hours access to school sport and leisure facilities** by young people and communities
- **Faster arrangement of care packages** to get older people out of hospital and back into their homes where possible
- **Merging libraries** with other community facilities and opening school libraries for use by the public

Prioritising Spending

- **Radical new house building** to increase supply, reduce costs and tackle homelessness
- **Youth programmes** prioritised over community safety and enforcement
- **More officers** instead of more CCTV cameras
- **Better maintenance of parks** and playpark equipment, more evenly distributed across Edinburgh communities, and increase bins in parks
- **Care for older people** in their own home and in dedicated care facilities – recognising that everyone has to pay more to ensure everyone enjoys dignity in their old age

Opposed

“There must be other ways.”

“I think people are struggling as it is.”

“Me and my husband pay the same Council Tax as my children, and they're both working... we've only got our pensions.”

“Some of the services we used to have... aren't there anymore. You don't get your lighting fixed in the stair anymore and at the moment I'm organising to get that privately fixed.”

Citizens recognised the value in Council services and felt that national governments often left local government with tough choices in relation to which services to prioritise with insufficient resources. Some felt they would struggle to see how any increase in Council Tax would be affordable as their own incomes had not kept pace with other costs. Others wanted to see the Council make specific commitments for additional taxation which would result in observable improvements in the quality of services they received.

Conditional

“I think I'd be happy to increase Council Tax more if I knew what it was going to.”

“You wouldn't mind paying it if you thought it was actually going to be beneficial. There is the perception amongst the population I know that there's a lot of money wasted.”

“I don't mind paying it if everything's getting done, but I do grudge paying it if the streets and the potholes and everything are going to be the same as they are now.”

Supportive

“[The Council Tax freeze] was wrong... I'm not anybody to pay more tax than I have to, but something like that to cover... the increasing stress on Council services... I don't see why we shouldn't pay more and it's cost us a lot to lose ten years of 3% increase.”

“You're paying for it through increased damage to your car because there's less money being spent on road maintenance. What you don't pay in Council Tax you pay elsewhere.”

“It depends what kind of society we want to live in. If we want all these things, we have to pay for them... If you listen to the Scottish Government 'we want to have a Scandanavian system' whatever, but nobody will turn round and say 'we want to pay fifty percent tax'.”

Opposed

"They belong to the people of Edinburgh and not the Council."

"I don't like the thought of selling stuff that was gifted to us."

"The whole ethos of the city is based on culture."

"Edinburgh doesn't need any more hotels."

"You can only sell these places once."

Conditional

"If there are buildings that aren't being used... there's no reason why they shouldn't be sold on, but there would have to be some kind of barriers to ensure it was for public good."

"Could you not sell them off giving priority to community interest companies?"

Supportive

"I know a particular housing association who downsized and most of their employees are now working from home... it could benefit the workers with more flexibility."

Citizens were generally opposed in principle to the sale of historic buildings, and were also opposed to any specific examples of public buildings suggested. They believed that the Council was a custodian of these shared assets and did not have discretion to sell them as it wanted. A major area of concern was how buildings would be used if sold, with very negative views attached to the hotel sector.

Making long-term leases of buildings was considerably less controversial than outright sale, but citizens would still expect to see these leases be to worthy organisations such as community groups. The historic nature of buildings was a key consideration in public deliberations – citizens were not concerned about what the Council did with buildings such as Waverley Court.

"I had some friends up this weekend and they were helping to clean up and I said 'no, no, no - that doesn't go in the main bin, we have a food waste recycling bin' and that was a revelation to them... I love what Edinburgh's doing, I think a difficulty with it is the complexity of it - do your yoghurt pots go in the recycling or not? The bottom goes in, but the lid does not... you just pick something up and you want to know where to throw it."

"I work on Lothian Road and the bins from the shops... they just dump their stuff. I don't even think the Council collect them, I think they pay a private [collector] to come round... You walk down Lothian Road or Tollcross... it's just rammed with rubbish. It's not the Council's fault necessarily... but it's not a good look."

"You've got to have a bin strategy for your household because the services that are provided just aren't on it. When our kids were really young and our house was full of nappies it was just impossible."

Citizens tended to fully fund these services and were clear that domestic waste, street cleaning and wardens were all important. There was a strong belief that streets in their neighbourhood were cleaned to a reasonable standard, but more mixed views on the city centre where overflowing bins and trade waste had a big impact on their view of how clean the city was. A minority were in favour of direct charging based on weight of household waste, but most strongly opposed any further 'brown bin type' charging.

Citizens advocated for:

- **A deposit-return scheme** that covered single use items, which they felt would discourage littering or incentivise some people to collect bottles and cans
- **Better information** about what could be recycled and where, with single bin recycling collection being preferable



“If you look at some of the parks in different parts of Edinburgh... and you see the difference in the way the parks are maintained. If you go to Morningside... the parks are all top notch. If you come further down, if you come to nearer Leith and you come to Pilrig and further into Craigmillar or whatever and everything just goes downhill and things are just left to rot.”

“A lot of the parks are also partly maintained by volunteers and that makes a huge difference.”

“I wish they would put more bins back in parks, because really solving the dog rubbish issue is not just take all the bins away so the rubbish won't happen. That's what's happened round our way... The bin men can't walk of course, they have to drive to it, so they took all the other bins away.”

“When I was bringing up my children, it's a safe place; it's a nice place... I have a dog that I walk... on the waterfront and I'd like it to remain as nice as it is as the moment.”



Citizens were frequent park visitors and parks strongly influenced their feelings about the liveability of an area. There was surprise at how little was spent on parks and a belief that playparks were disappearing and maintenance had reduced. Some were very critical of ‘rewilding’ approaches, which they felt worsened the look of the city. There was a belief that parks in better areas enjoyed higher standards and this was unfair. While it was felt volunteers did a valuable service, including by fundraising, they were concerned about coming to rely on them for maintenance instead of the Council.

Citizens advocated for:

- **More bins in parks** to combat dog fouling. Many had encountered dog waste bags left unattended and they felt this was worse than not picking up after the dog, since it prevented waste from biodegrading.

“The only way bikes and roads can work together is if bikes are separate from roads. It is too dangerous... On Leith Walk all the way to the top there's a separate avenue now for bikes... that's brilliant... at least you've got one section of the city that's car-free... it's a start.”

“I feel like in Corstorphine and Leith way, you've got such good transport... whereas if you're going out towards Gilmerton and the Royal Infirmary... they've got the worst bus service ever... and that's where everyone's moving 'cause it is cheaper to live out there.”

“There's nothing worse than you watching utility companies dig holes in the road, fill them in and then a week later they've got to be repaired by someone else... I've seen the same hole dug up ten times and it's never done properly... We pay for all these utilities. We're getting charged twice for the same thing. We're paying for utility companies - they're making the profits - then they dig up holes in the road and we have to pay for them to get repaired properly again - and that infuriates me.”

The condition of roads was a major annoyance for some citizens and as a result this service was often fully funded. There was consensus that Edinburgh was moving in a ‘no-car’ direction. While more central residents felt people did not need to own a car, those in peripheral areas and shift workers felt it was essential to avoid long public transport delays.

Citizens advocated for:

- **More speed cameras** to raise revenue, and further measures around schools to discourage parents from dropping off their children by car
- **More restriction and charging of utility companies for roadworks** – it was felt the quality of repairs done by utility companies was poor and residents paid for repairs twice
- **Congestion charging** was supported even by drivers, but access and affordability of public transport (inc. trains) was a concern for many with families that relied on cars



"I'm thinking more about organised children's sports, so getting kids playing football, rugby, whatever - getting them out ... the more money you spend there the less they're smashing up greenhouses or whatever else they do... gets them away from computers... The schools have now got these astro pitches and if a team's not paying £100 the gates are locked. I understand if a team's booked it they should get priority, but why not lets kids play on it if there's not."

"The adults in these services are role models for a lot of these kids."

"The more you encourage young people to be outside, getting active, it's good for their health, it's good for their mind. The long term savings in terms of health... Immediately it's good for them and in the long term it makes sense too. It's a good thing to have for society - health, active people."

"I think it's a sector where the market... it's improved the choice there. Leisure centres and things, there's lot of them all over the place now, and I think could be given free to people that need it and could benefit... but I think about my local Warrender Park swimming baths - people can afford to be in there."



Sport and leisure was seen as strongly linked to many other areas of public priority including active travel, community policing, and mental and physical wellbeing. Sports centres were also seen as providing non-sports community facilities.

Citizens advocated for:

- **More targeted subsidy** based on income or need, with the private sector providing many facilities rather than the Council or Edinburgh Leisure, and more activities for young people
- **Better out of hours access to school sport and leisure facilities** for communities, with free access for young people but paying users given priority

"I've lived in Edinburgh all my life... I'm sure everyone has and I've walked home late at night and have never felt threatened. I would rather see police on the street, I would rather see police walking around, community Police officers and things like that... I think with the CCTV... it's a really expensive thing to have and I think there are other things that are better ways of doing it... better lighting in the street and if an incident happens then it needs to be more robustly dealt with."

"[The housing association] charge people when their kids destroy things. One of the kids broke something in the park by kicking it - on purpose; it wasn't an accident - so they took a bill round to the kids parents and they had to pay and it got fixed."

"I feel like CCTV helps when things are going wrong but it doesn't help the root causes."

"A lot of the CCTV's in the city centre... I got a car broken into, the supposed CCTV cameras weren't turned on."

Many groups made significant cuts to these services as a result of generally feeling safe in Edinburgh and some having personal experience of CCTV, police and community safety failing to deliver on expectations. CCTV was perceived to be often not working or looking the wrong way, but its supporters felt the police were too slow to respond, whereas CCTV provided evidence. It was felt that public safety should, wherever possible, be fully paid for by event organisers and passed on to ticket prices if necessary.

Citizens advocated for:

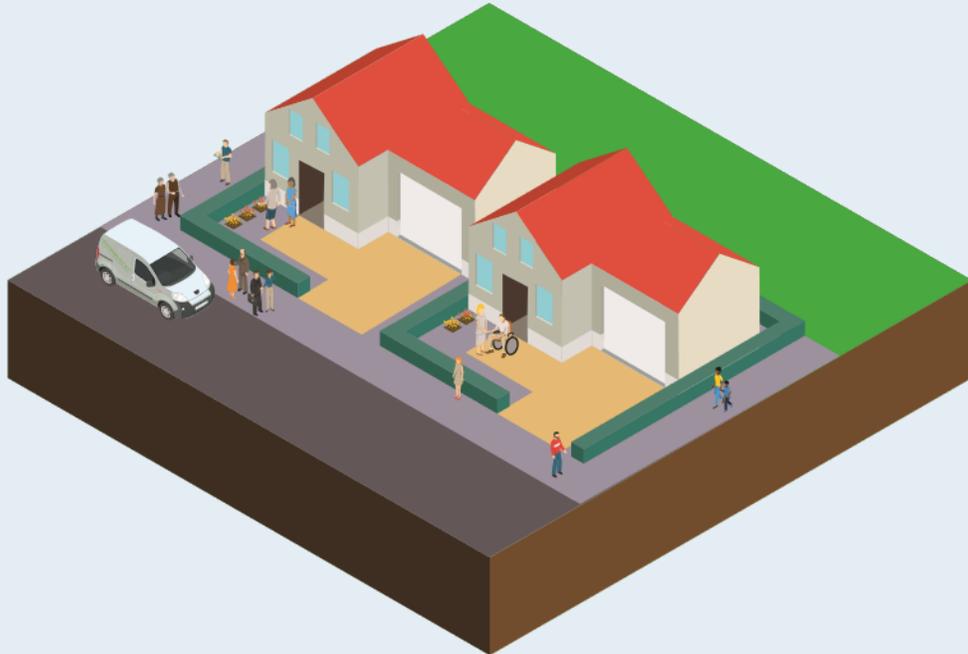
- **Shifting funding into programme for young people** who were often felt to be responsible for vandalism and anti-social behaviour because there was nothing else to occupy them
- **More officers** instead of more cameras, though existing cameras should certainly be operational
- **Charging those responsible**, whether this was businesses organising events or individuals who had caused damage to public property



“The idea of homelessness is people sleeping on the streets, but there's loads of people who don't have a permanent address.”

“The Council needs to start thinking outside the box... you've got to start thinking different ways, like the social bite, or modular housing which has taken off in some other parts of Europe. It's a cheaper way of getting houses up quicker for families and older single people, which is becoming a rising thing.

“I'm a student so I'm part of the problem... The rate that especially the University of Edinburgh has expanded over the last few years is completely unsustainable... Rents, especially in the centre, have gone up so much in the last few years for students, but obviously that means there's fewer and fewer houses for the rest of the population... Now students are being forced to pay £500, £600 for a room in the city centre... a lot of students who come here can afford that, that's fine for them, but it means everyone else is getting pushed farther and farther out... It's not really working for students or the rest of the population.”



Citizens generally fully funded homelessness services. There was a strong belief that homelessness had become worse in Edinburgh over time and this was linked to high housing costs and limited supply of all housing, but especially Council housing. There was criticism of the EdIndex letting system, but this appears to be due to long waiting periods and limited choice.

Citizens advocated for:

- **Radical new house building** to provide affordable homes quickly
- **More charges for student accommodation** – such as £1 per room, per night for student housing, or for overseas students to pay Council Tax
- **Better access to mid-market rental** – while the idea was popular, providing references and demonstrating income were barriers for some

“There's a lot of museums and galleries in Edinburgh and the Edinburgh ones which are run by Edinburgh Council clearly lack investment and therefore aren't that appealing to go into. There's a good exhibition at the City Art Centre at the moment, it's a paid exhibition, but apart from that, the ones you go further down the hill - the Museum of Edinburgh, the People's Story - those two, it feels like something hasn't been touched in there in about twenty-five years.”

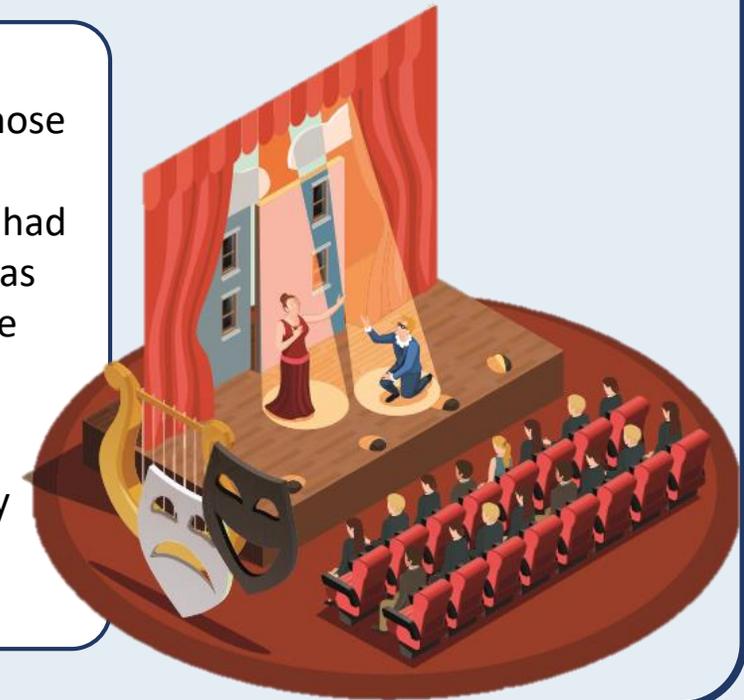
“I'd be interested to know how much is spent to keep [museums] open when the retail stores inside them bring in very little - you know £50 a day, £100 a day if you're lucky - that doesn't even cover one member of staff... never mind visitor assistants... if you were to close that building that would save a lot of money.”

“There are so many people that when you've taken them once to see something like that, it becomes something they want... Once they've been, they know that it's for everybody.”

Culture funding was generally reduced by citizens. Alongside a low awareness of what Council provides, there was a strong belief that large cultural events should be self-sustaining, and that those who were interested in cultural activity could generally afford to pay for them without any public subsidy. Council museums were compared unfavourably to the national collections by those who had visited, though most citizens were unaware of many of the Council's museums. However, there was great affection for the Museum of Childhood and a belief that once citizens were exposed to more cultural activity they would value it more.

Citizens advocated for:

- **Introducing a tourist tax** and ensuring other tourism related businesses were paying their way
- **Charging non-residents a nominal sum for entry** to museums and galleries. While charging any UK residents was strongly opposed, some tourist contribution was acceptable.



“Libraries are more than libraries now... it's not just a place to borrow a book, it's the activities that go on round the libraries. What I'm saying is that it shouldn't be a library anymore, it should be a community centre.”

“The local library... actually it's quite a mess, they don't even allow people to use the toilet... when I go there, on the few occasions, only to print out stuff may I add because I do everything else at home... it's like the workers there are childcare as well.”

“It's a free, accessible space for anyone in the community to go where you're not obliged to hand over money to be there... it's not a private building owned by a private company - it's a public resource.”

“I work at Stockbridge and I pass the library and I've very rarely seen it open... I've never been in it.”

“You can find everything online.”



Citizens generally made large cuts to libraries. Most citizens had not recently been to any library in the city and did not believe that libraries offered any services they would personally need. There was a belief that book lending had been made obsolete by a combination of factors including online resources, low cost of books, and the easy affordability of second-hand books to buy. However, there was strong belief that libraries currently functioned as much valued community facilities for other purposes, which citizens traditionally associated with community centres.

Citizens advocated for:

- **Merging libraries** with other local facilities such as community centres
- **Opening school libraries** to the public to save money

“My mother-in-law died six weeks ago and she initially had a home in sheltered housing, but it got to the stage where she couldn't look after herself... She had carers coming in four times a day which was fantastic, but it got to the stage where she couldn't do anything.

“She had to wait on the carers coming. She had to wait virtually to somebody died in a nursing home before she got a place. She was only in it for five weeks before she died. She had to wait because there was no space available... It was like a conveyor belt, you know?

“The day she died the nurses were actually collecting stuff while she was still lying and my wife was sitting with her. She was still lying there on the bed and the nurses were putting her stuff in bin bags to get it all moved out because somebody needs that bed. It seems cold hearted but that's the reality. You cannae blame the nurses, because that's the way things are.”

“There's lots of old people round our way who are being looked after at home by carers. I'm walking the dogs at half-six, seven o'clock in the morning and they're getting these old people out of their beds, into their clothes, giving them their breakfast.

“They're plonking them into their sitting rooms, going away and leaving them, and that's them – stuck in that room until someone comes at lunchtime to do the next turnaround. They'd be far better off in a home with things going on.”



“When I just got married, it was normal for our older folk to be cared for at home, you just wouldn't dream of sending them to a home...”

“But now the culture's changing in our society as well - the Sikh community, before they even get married they want to know where the elders are going to stay, who are they going to stay with... in those days we all cared for our old folk at home...”

“I was the youngest daughter in law and I had my mother-in-law for twenty-eight years... It just didn't enter your mind to think that she would go elsewhere.”

“It can't just be about what's most cost effective - there's got to be an element of what people want... A lot of people will want to stay at home, in their own home for as long as they can.”

“The elderly have paid into the system all their lives... my husband and me have paid in, we've worked all our lives... Why, at the end of the day, do we have to lose out?”

Citizens tended to fully fund or close to fully fund care for older people and most knew someone currently receiving a service or were concerned about needing this service themselves. Citizens believed it was important to give older people choice, but questioned whether care at home was sustainable or really provided older people with increased freedom or dignity.

Citizens advocated for:

- **Faster arrangement of care packages** to enable older people to be moved out of hospital quickly
- **More staff dedicated to getting older people out of hospital** and back into their own home, wherever possible
- **More funding for elder care**, recognising that everyone expects to live longer and these costs should be shared

“I had a problem with my mum getting a care package... she spent most of her time in the hospital... she was well enough to be at home, there just wasn't enough money into the care package... About six months and then they did put a care package in place and then she had a fall and she got taken back to hospital...”

“It's strange, the Council took that care package away because she was in there for three days, then she had to stay in for another couple of months.”

“At the end of the day we're all going to get old... and if it means a government comes out and says we need to put up tax by three pence in the pound but it'll all go to care for the elderly, we'll need to face up to that.”



“Teachers are under increasing pressure, overworked and underpaid. I've got friends who are teachers who are working sixty or seventy hour weeks - it's crazy.”

“You can see how much schools... and the teachers in schools have been affected by the fact that they don't have learning assistants... those cuts are affecting how they perform in the schools.”

“The only way western economies can survive is by education. We can't compete with Brazil or China on labour costs.”



“You can't build a school in a week... the one at Portobello is an old, old building and there ins't room, physically, to have any more children and there's loads of people moving into Portobello... I don't know what you do... The new St John's they've just built isn't big enough for the amount of children that want to go and I don't think Portobello High School is either, because the council never have the foresight to see that actually you should have extra space, rather than building for the number you have at that point.”

Though citizens felt that primary and secondary education were important, these services generally had large reductions in their budgets. Citizens were unwilling to reduce funding for services such as roads, waste collection and especially care for the elderly to fund education.

Citizens were concerned about existing school buildings, but worried the current schools were too small and low quality as a result of bad planning, and questioned whether the location and catchments of new schools had been influenced by local 'snobbery' rather than what was best for Edinburgh's young people.

Pressures on teachers and teachers buying supplies out of their own pocket were also concerns for citizens, and they felt that reductions in non-teaching posts had impacted on the quality of teaching.

“It's so much more efficient to put money in earlier. If you put money into the first eighteen months, two years of people's lives, that's more efficient than putting it secondary schools... If primary is underfunded and early years is underfunded, there's less chance in recouping that loss in people, that gap later on.”

“I have friends who work and they do private nursery, which is £1,000 a month, which is ridiculous. If you're unemployed you get free nursery... If you're unemployed you're actually home, so I don't know why you're getting free nursery places.”

“If parents are able to access better pre-school, nursery provision then you see your tax revenue increase... A lot of this is about helping people try to be in work... so you can be in work for the whole day.”

Citizens generally reduced funding to nurseries. Some believed that care of young children was the responsibility of parents and that childcare should not be state funded. In particular, some felt it was unfair that people who were unemployed received free childcare hours, since they were at home anyway.

Attitudes towards this service may have been influenced by lack of personal experience. Most citizens do not have children in nursery and older citizens will not have attended nursery themselves, and may not have sent their own children to nursery schools.

However there was also a strong belief that early years education was disproportionately beneficial – that money spent on early education gave better returns than money spent on education in later years.



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