

CONTESTING EDINBURGH CITY CUTS, 24.1.18

Duncan Smith - Chairperson of City of Edinburgh Unison (ipc)

Apologies - Susan Rae (Greens)

Facilitator - Pete Cannell

Duncan gave the following presentation on the impact of the austerity

A) in Scotland

- The budget allocation from the Scottish Government to Local Authorities in December 2017 saw a revenue cut of £225m – this has been partly mitigated by changes to Council Tax bands and the ability to raise the CT by 3% - but still leaves a shortfall of at least £55m
- Between 2010-11 and 2017-18 funding for local government has fallen 8% in real terms – funding for core services has reduced by £590m
- Some 30,000 council jobs have gone in this period – nine out of ten jobs lost across the public sector in Scotland have been in LA's
- Councils have responded to austerity by a combination of increased local taxation, increased regressive service charges (up by 13%), and workforce and service cuts
- They also have attempted outsourcing of services as the then Lib-Dem/SNP coalition in Edinburgh attempted a few years ago - fortunately our successful 'Our City's not for Sale' campaign stopped big private companies like Carillion taking over important council services

B) In Edinburgh

- Our Council boasts it has saved(cut) £240m since 2012, including £40m in 2017-18
 - The forecast is for £151m to be cut in the period to 2022-23
- Proposed cuts for this coming year amount to £21m – including £3m from Health and Social Care – while the Chief Social Worker admitted last year that there was 7000 hours of unmet need in social care
- Since the Council's Transformation plan began some 1000 jobs have been lost – many highly skilled experienced have left making it difficult to maintain the quality of services – in some areas there is a lack of supervision and support for staff who are trying to maintain continuity of their service to the public despite years of disruptive departmental reorganisations
 - Demand for many services is rising while the number of staff is steadily diminishing – bullying, stress and sickness are on the rise – this was recently revealed in a Unison survey of members in Health & Social Care
- A telling statistic is that at any one time 500 staff are absent and almost a third of those are

off with stress or other mental illness

- Current reviews threaten the conditions of school janitors, cleaning staff, and the library service – where staff-less libraries are to be piloted two areas
- Unison has balloted janitors who are facing reduced hours and covering multiple premises – schools and community centres – community groups may be left with responsibility of locking up and Unison has real concern about health and safety in this situation
- School cleaners are also faced with cuts to their hours, changes to shift patterns and working across schools – this is a largely female part-time workforce - these are some of the lowest paid staff, earning £6000 per year on 38 week contracts – these proposals could mean that schools are not cleaned every day – while it is recognised by health professionals that daily cleaning is essential for stopping the spread of sickness caused by, for example, the highly contagious Norovirus
- There is also a recruitment crisis in Building Control – given the experience of Grenfell Tower tragedy and collapse of walls in local schools– you would have thought that maintaining building standards would be a priority
Consequences :
- I'm always amazed at the complacency of our elected officials – they are proud to produce a balanced budget but remain shy about admitting the consequences of year after year of cuts
- Summing up – budget cuts have serious consequences not only for staff but for the safety and well being of the citizens of Edinburgh
- The Council Coalition has many fine pledges on record – to reduce poverty and inequality for example – but we all know that cuts to public services hit the poorest and most vulnerable people the hardest – and they also affect women disproportionately
- Edinburgh is a wealthy city and the super-rich in Scotland are doing very well – on the other hand the number of people dependant on food banks, including people in work, has grown massively - we need to see a return to progressive taxation that makes rich individuals and big business pay their fair share so that public services get the funding they need
- Both parties in the ruling coalition - the SNP and Labour Party - claim to be anti-austerity – but up to now they have simply managed the impact of austerity locally – instead they need to join with the unions and community groups to pressure both Holyrood and Westminster to provide the funding necessary for the kind of high quality public services that we all deserve.

After discussion it was agreed to circulate Following the discussion it was agreed to circulate RIC-Edinburgh supporters with notice of the Edinburgh TUC meeting on 3.2.18