

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Executive

Special Council Meeting: 14 February 2008

Subject:- Budget Public Forum Meetings – 15 & 17 January 2008

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1** This report provides Members with information on the points raised by community representatives and members of the public at the public forum meetings held to discuss the Council's revenue budget for 2008/09.

2. Background

- 2.1** Community representatives and individual citizens were offered the option of asking questions and commenting on issues relating to the Council's budget for 2008/09. The main opportunity was by means of two public meetings held on 15th January in Dalmuir Community Centre and 17th January in Dumbarton Burgh Hall. Information and an invitation to question and comment were also posted on the Council's website.
- 2.2** The meetings were attended by 40 members of the public (20 at each meeting), some of whom were representing wider community organisations. Details of the meeting arrangements and publicity are attached as appendix 1.
- 2.3** The meeting opened with an introduction from the Leader of the Council and a presentation on the budget situation from the Head of Finance. The main part of the meeting then took the form of an open discussion, during which many of the attendees took the opportunity to contribute. Attendees were also given the opportunity to make comments on a questionnaire which could be returned at the end of the meeting, or by post in the following days. Comments from the meeting and proformas are set out in paragraphs 3.2.1 to 3.2.11.

3. Main Issues

3.1 Questions asked and issues raised

A range of questions were asked and issues raised about the Council's financial position and aspects of service delivery. A more detailed note of the discussion, including the responses to questions, has been circulated to participants, and is available on request. Specific points for action have been raised with departments.

3.2 Comments made

During the discussion and on the returned proformas, community representatives made a number of points which they believed to be important for the Council to consider as part of the budget setting process. These were as follows:

- 3.2.1** Maintenance of housing stock - important to check standard of workmanship. Need to learn lessons.
- 3.2.2** Half price leisure facilities for partners of WDC employees not a priority. Breakfast club payments of 10 pence - parents could pay more. Save on catering for meetings. Save on paperwork (e.g. for this meeting).
- 3.2.3** Concern was expressed about grants for elderly groups being cut back. The opinion was expressed that the grants budget is spread thinner every year. However, it was also suggested some groups are too reliant on grants year after year and should be supported to become more sustainable. There were cuts on grants over Christmas.
- 3.2.4** Denny Civic Theatre – any cuts would have a detrimental effect on Dumbarton.
- 3.2.5** Concern about movements in payment dates for Council Tax – and in particular the effect on the elderly.
- 3.2.6** Concern about the Network Support Team being cut. Synthetic phonetics has worked well in improving literacy. Vulnerable groups will suffer if cuts are made.
- 3.2.7** Enhancements: Dance studio – question the money spent on this (£72 000).
- 3.2.8** Concern about Community Centres (specifically Bonhill and Dalmonach).
- 3.2.9** Absenteeism is a significant cost to the Council. The Council should be developing measures and quantifying savings. Management should solve this immediately and also tackle staff Council Tax arrears.
- 3.2.10** Priorities outlined in the budget proformas:
 - Recycling: Reducing landfill – much more recycling
 - Transport: Improving public transport access, cycle tracks and pavements to reduce car use
 - Alcohol Abuse/Anti-social behaviour: Reducing alcohol abuse and anti social behaviour by any means available from budget
 - Policing:
 - Improving police presence on the street and response to calls from public
 - Safe and strong communities (more policing)

- Community police are rare on the beat at Old Kilpatrick but needed. Vandals are unrestricted since two police officers were withdrawn. (2 comments)
- General environmental improvements in council schemes – green spaces, play spaces, foot paths, litter, dogs, street furniture etc.
- Pavements and roads (5 comments summarised below):
 - Spend more money on maintenance of pavements and roads (including in housing estates)
 - Infrastructure of roads throughout West Dunbartonshire. Need to be upgraded to support tourism industry and population growth from house building projects. Spend more money on maintenance of pavements and roads in housing estates
 - Sustainable environments (roads, walkways)
- Maintain Dalmuir Golf Course and Bowling Facilities (7 comments)
Maintain Dalmuir Golf Course and Park.
- Protect the traditional Christmas bonus payments to pensioners in Clydebank (6 comments)
- Social Care: Try and spend more money on Social Care (4 comments)
- Vale of Leven Hospital: concerns about the closure of Vale of Leven Hospital – and difficulties in emergency services reaching an alternative hospital (if Erskine Bridge is closed as happened before Christmas).
- Education/Lifelong Learning
 - Importance of planning for future increases in school rolls
 - Education and Lifelong Learning is a key priority including
 - disability education
 - proven success in literacy
 - Community Learning and Development Services
 - Libraries
 - Community Centres
- Housing and related
 - Regeneration of Social Housing (affordable housing)
 - Kitchens and Heating: delays in up-dating these for very elderly residents.
- Letting charges: e.g. Playdrome. It is important to support people to live healthier, better lives. (For example, for pain relief session costs £30 apparently due to hire charges).

3.2.11 Congratulations on pulling together budget information tonight - very useful and congratulations on care and repair and bus passes.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 There are no personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 Any financial implications will relate to the costs of any proposals which are pursued.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 Any risks will relate to the proposals which are pursued.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Budget Forum has raised both some specific and some general points to be taken into account in setting the budget.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Council is requested to give consideration to the points noted above when making its decision on the budget for 2008/09.

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David McMillan
Chief Executive
Date: 6 February 2008

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Appendix: 2008/2009 Budget - Public Forum

Background Papers: A detailed note of the discussion at the meeting with responses is available on request.

Wards Affected: All

2008-09 Budget – Public Forum

Two meetings were held, one in Dalmuir Community Centre on Tuesday 15th January and the other in Dumbarton Burgh Hall on Thursday 17th January. Both were widely publicised, with 1500 A4 posters and 1500 A5 flyers going out to a wide range of people and places including:

Included in distribution:

- Over 700 Community Groups
- Agencies including West Dunbartonshire Partnership
- Churches
- Citizens' Advice Bureaux
- Council Offices, Garshake
- Council Offices, Rosebery
- Community Centres
- Fast Food outlets
- Health Centres and Health Groups
- Housing & Social Work Offices
- Libraries
- Registration Offices
- Schools (secondary and primary)
- Supermarkets
- WDC Halls
- WDC Main Offices Receptions
- Youth Workers

Quarter page adverts were placed in the local press and information was posted on the WDC Website, with the option of completing a proforma outlining priorities and/or posing questions.

Members of the Community Participation Committee, including community representatives, were also given advance notice of the meetings.

In addition a global e-mail was sent to elected members and staff.

Arrangements for the meetings provided an accessible venue, a loop system and signage, a public address system and information packs in large print.

A crèche and assistance with transport were available on request.