

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council : 28 January 2010

Subject: Budget Public Forum Meetings Feedback – 12, 13 & 14 January 2010

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report provides members with feedback for consideration in setting the budget including:

- points raised by community representatives and members of the public at the public forum meetings held to discuss the Council's revenue budget for 2010/11 and
- points raised via the Council's budget website proforma.

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 and budget savings options for 2010-11 via three public meetings held on 12th, 13th and 14th January in Dalmuir Community Centre, Alexandria Community Centre and Dumbarton Burgh Hall respectively. Information on the meetings and the budget savings options was also posted on the Council's website with an opportunity to return a proforma outlining any questions and priorities.

2.2 A total of 99 members of the public attended the meetings as follows:

Clydebank area	31
Vale of Leven area	39
Dumbarton area	29

There was a mix of individuals and those who were representing wider community and voluntary sector organisations. Details of the meeting arrangements and publicity are attached as appendix 1.

2.3 The meetings 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 each 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 meetings, or by post in the following days. Priorities and issues from the meetings and proformas are set out in paragraphs 3.1 – 3.10.

2.4 It is not possible to reproduce each comment in this report. The following information sets out the points raised with a balance of illustrative comments. A fuller note of each meeting and copies of the questionnaires and website proformas are available on request.

3. Main Issues

Feedback from Budget Public Forum Meetings (including website proformas)

Key Issues

3.1 Some key issues stimulated a high level of discussion at the Budget Public Forum meetings and in the proformas (the listing order attempts to reflect the number of times issues were mentioned):

- Proposed closure of Community Work Service – strong views expressed against closure
- Community Care – concerns about loss or reduction of services in areas such as care homes, day care units, homecare, sheltered housing, mental health services
- Libraries – concerns about loss of libraries
- Voluntary Sector – concerns about the support for the sector including Community Work support, the proposed introduction of transport charges and related matters
- Charges already introduced – concerns about charges agreed at December Council – many of which affect vulnerable people
- Teaching and support posts – concerns about loss or reduction)
- Anti-social behaviour – concerns at any reduction of police presence)
- Front line services – views that these should be protected over others

3.2 Voluntary Sector (also mentioned in relation to specific service areas)

Comment: Unpaid volunteers do a lot of valuable work – many voluntary sector groups need funding and we must not lose this.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council fully acknowledged the importance.

Comment: Charges for services will impact on voluntary sector providers. Council is often sole funder of voluntary sector services. There is concern that council employees are being protected at expense of voluntary sector.

Comment: Voluntary organisations provide backbone of community support.

Comment: We need to prioritise community groups and carers.

Note: Senior Forum representatives and Community Care Forum representatives were among those raising points.

3.3 Education Related

3.3.1 Libraries: EC02 – EC05 Ladyton, Gavinburn, Faifley and Parkhall (eight people raised concerns about closure of libraries)

Comments: these are used by many elderly people and young – please retain; can't we keep these – even part time; Libraries proposed are mostly in remoter areas and provide a lifeline to people there. Please look at this seriously; libraries play an important role in promoting education and social

inclusion. Can't library services be integrated into a community centre, sharing costs?

Answer: IR, Leader of Council - most elected members are concerned too. However, libraries aren't as well used as in the past. We are well provided for libraries. Those proposed for closure are small and there are others within reasonably easy reach.

Answer: CMcL, Convenor of Finance (Corporate and Efficient Government) We have to weigh up options. All council buildings cost money to run (community centres, libraries and the like). We need to look at how to bring services together.

3.3.2 EC11 Removal of all Specialist Primary School Teachers

Comment: We need these teachers for music, drama and art (important for children as well as 'academic' teaching)

Answer: TL, Executive Director of Education explained that Education has the biggest share of the Council's budget and has to contribute to the savings. As 84% of budget is for staffing, savings can't be found without affecting staffing. The primary heads' views are mixed – some can offer this activity through the core staffing, others not. Training has been made available for core teachers on these activities.

3.3.3 EC11, 12, 18 and 25 - Loss of teaching/support posts

Comment: I am very sorry to see these up for savings.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – quality of education in WDC is improving all the time. HMIE reports are very good. We have brand new schools. We wouldn't make these reductions if they were to be detrimental to children's education.

3.3.4 EC12 Reduce Early Intervention Network Support team by 6.5 from August 2010.

Comment: Concern about reduction of early intervention support teams, especially regarding impact on attainment at secondary level.

Answer: It had always been the intention to mainstream these services - this is now happening.

3.3.5 EC13 Withdrawal of free school milk

Comment: please keep this as some children depend on it.

Comment: couldn't we do away with this and with free school meals (or means test for free meals)?

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – many of the children in WD need the free school meals service and it wouldn't be feasible to means test for it.

3.3.6 EC25 – Reduction in Learning Assistants

Comment: concerns that this could impact on children with learning disabilities.

Comment: Keep learning-assistants for children with special needs – necessary for social inclusion.

Comment: The need for equality impact assessment was raised in relation to cuts which will affect children with disabilities.

Answer: TL, Executive Director of Education acknowledged that the services provided by Learning Assistants are highly valued, but indicated that WDC is more generous than most Councils in its provision of Learning Assistants. If this saving was taken, the loss of 20 Learning Assistants would be spread across 40 schools.

3.4 Social Work & Health

3.4.1 *General Comment (questionnaire)* – prioritise front line services in Community Care – supported living; bathing services; tucking in services; day care support and homecare.

3.4.2 SWK01 Community Work Service (eleven references) *Note:* Senior Forum representatives and Community Care Forum representatives were among those raising points.

Comment: This service is vital for support to the Voluntary Sector – many groups couldn't continue without this. The service was highly recommended in the recent Social Work Inspection (SWIA).

Answer: IR, Leader of Council - This is a saving option because it is a non statutory service. This is about a re-design of service and looking at providing community support via Community Planning Partnership structures.

Answer: CMcL, Convenor of Finance (Corporate and Efficient Government) - Across the Council and partners there are a number of workers who provide community work and development support. We need to look at how people can work more efficiently to deliver services.

Comment : Looks like privatisation of services.

Comment : Concern about impact on carers if Community Work Services close (vital service for carers).

Comment (questionnaire): highly important service which supports vulnerable, disabled and elderly people

Comment (questionnaire): the suggestion that this service could be carried out through community planning's new engagement processes is procedurally unacceptable.

Comment (questionnaire): vital services – non-filling of posts has already resulted in groups closing.

3.4.3 SWK03 Closure of 2 WDC Care Homes/Closure of one Day Care Unit

Comment : We need these services for our senior citizens.

Question: (Trade Union representative) SWK03 Closure of 2 WDC Care Homes and SWK04 Closure of one Day Care Unit

The Chief Executive's letter pays tribute to staff for doing extra work resulting from unfilled posts and voluntary redundancies. How much longer can staff keep taking on more work? It's time to tell the Government we won't put up with the reductions in funding.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – the Trade Unions have met with the Corporate Management Team and Administration. It is very important to work together with everyone including staff. The financial settlement is outwith our control. There are always better ways of working and we need the Unions to work with us on this.

Answer: DMCM, Chief Executive – our care homes for elderly are not fit for purpose. We need to work in partnership with the private sector to improve the provision for our older people. We want to work with the Trade Unions on how to provide services. We can't maintain the current level and the Government is telling us there is no more money.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – the current care approach is to provide services that help to keep older people in their own homes with appropriate support. By doing this well, we should need fewer residential homes.

Comment: Stopping home care won't help this.

Comment: We have already lost one day care centre in Clydebank. There is a big waiting list for day care. We can't afford to lose more as people become isolated without this.

Question: Which are scheduled for closure?

Answer: Willox Park and Boquhanran House (the reason being these buildings can't be brought up to the required standard).

3.4.4 SWK03,04,06 Homecare, Residential Care and Daycare

Comment: Concern about changes to Night Teams; Care Homes and Day Centres. There are doubts that NHS will be able to meet needs.

3.4.5 SWK06 Remove night teams

Question: How will this affect service users?

Answer: SW, Acting Exec Co-Director of Social Work

Homecare Management believe they can deliver the service more efficiently by providing the service earlier in the evening – but this would be subject to review if any risk was perceived.

Comment: It seems to be a contradiction to remove this if you want to keep people in their own homes.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council: this will involve using telecare and other ways of getting services to people. The level of need is growing, but the pot of funding isn't keeping pace.

Comment: Suggest that Council stops paying overtime to home carers and have them on a 24/7 working arrangement.

3.4.6 SWK08 Sheltered Housing – removal of overnight cover in 2 complexes and increase mobile attendant cover.

Question: Where is the saving in replacing night shift supervisors with mobile attendants? (and this could discriminate against any current night shift supervisors who don't drive).

Answer: AR, Acting Exec Co-Director of Social Work. Some sheltered housing complexes require very little night cover. These could be covered by a smaller number of mobile staff than night shift supervisors.

Comment: Care in the community – older people are not being sufficiently cared for in their homes and not all staff are well trained. This puts a responsibility on neighbours to look after them.

Comment: Support for some people with special needs has to be 24 hour – if it is not adequate people could be hurt.

Answer: AR, Acting Exec Co-Director of Social Work – there is no plan to reduce the level of care for people with complex disabilities.

Question: Which complexes are involved?

Answer: SW, Acting Exec Co-Director of SW - This will be decided on level of call outs and will be one from each end of the authority.

3.4.7 SWK21 Children's Services (Closure of one residential home) and SWK22 (Reduce level of groupwork opportunities in the community).

Comment/Question: These two clash – which is the preferred option?

Answer: AR, Acting Exec Co-Director of Social Work. It's quite clear we can't do both of these. We have 4 children's homes. If we close one, we can't reduce services to children in the community. We have already closed Hillpark previously and introduced Alternatives to Care (intensive support in the community). That has proved successful and if we adopt the closure proposal, we would extend it.

3.4.8 SWK24 Mental Health – Reduce level of Mental Health Officers –

Comment: Concern about change in Mental Health Officer Services.

Answer: Assurance given that statutory requirements would be met.

Comment: (from questionnaire) – it is already very difficult at times to access Mental Health Officer services. With increasing likelihood of statutory intervention (e.g. Adults with Incapacity with increasing elderly population) this appears unwise.

3.4.9 SWK27 Older People Day Care – review potential for merging day care and day hospital facilities with a view to delivering an integrated service

Comment: Older people will not like this integration of day care with hospital.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council– this isn't with about integration with hospital but with primary care day care in the community.

3.5 HEED

3.5.1 HEED 4 – Roads – Footway Gritting

Comment: Gritting paths and pavement is very important.

3.5.2 HEED 7 Grounds Maintenance – Review of Service Provision

Question: There is already poor maintenance in public park areas – surely this will just get worse?

Answer: EM, Exec Dir of HEED– there is a higher spend and quality in WDC than in many other local authorities.

3.5.3 HEED 8 Grounds Maintenance (remove winter staffing of Balloch Public Toilets)

Comment: This area is promoting tourism and needs good toilets. Removing staffing of the toilets during winter will lead to vandalism. This is a false saving.

Answer: I R ,Leader of Council – this is not a statutory service, but councillors will consider your views.

3.5.4 HEED 12 Halls & Events

Question: Which communities have overprovision of meeting space and how do you expect communities to take on WDC's legacy?

Answer: EM, Exec Dir of HEED – the review of Halls and Community Learning and Development estate is part of our wider review of assets. No specific decisions have been made, but a detailed exercise is on-going to gather the information we need to rationalise and deliver services in a value for money way and we believe there is an opportunity to generate savings in this area.

3.5.5 HEED 14 – Reduce Christmas Lighting and remove Switch On Events

Question: Why is this included?

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – This is included because it is a non statutory service and, as such, can be removed.

Comment: Suggested that this should be discussed with Community Councils (agreed)

Two comments: agree with reducing this/this isn't essential.

3.5.6 HEED 15 – Transport – Reduce provision of buses or introduce charges (raised by 5 people)

Question: This would put an end to some groups run by volunteers. Some groups may be able to pay £1 or £2, others not. Will there be an impact assessment before charges are introduced?

3.5.7 HEED18 Remove free school meals for teachers (this was raised by 6 people)

Comments: We should never have had this – remove it; teachers should pay for their lunches.

Answer: TL, Executive Director of Education. This is only given to teachers who give up their 45 minute lunchtime to supervise the pupils. The supervision is necessary and the cost of a school lunch (£1.70) is very small compared to paying staff to do this.

3.5.8 HEED 20 Removal/reduction of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) Police Overtime (two people raised this)

Comment: We need this service because of the anti social behaviour problems in our community.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – The new Chief Constable feels there are better ways to use funding to tackle the problems (than on overtime payments). Last year money was allocated to appoint 8 community police and an analyst to look at 'hot spots'. Councillors will take on board the points made about the need for effective anti social behaviour services.

Comment: The Council also needs to consider where to re-house anti social tenants (sometimes moved to another flat in the same block).

Comment: Enhance police rather than spend money on Community Warden service.

Question: Anti Social problems – today's Lennox Herald said you're doing away with the Community Warden Team?

Answer: I R ,Leader of Council There has been a complete review of the Warden Service over the last 6-9 months, as part of the wider Anti Social

Behaviour review. Feedback was that wardens operating in vans was not judged to be the most effective process.

Answer: EM, Exec Director of HEED - ASB Services are being re-focused on prevention, early intervention and community engagement as well as partnership with the police. We've had good feedback from the Scottish Housing Regulator on ASB and the new arrangements will build on that. We will share developments with Tenants & Residents groups as we go forward.

Comment: The service hasn't worked – put the money into policing and make more effective use of the community wardens.

Answer: DMcM, Chief Executive – Negotiations are to take place with the Community Warden service around new arrangements. Our change management policy means there will be no compulsory redundancies.

3.6 C SERV 01 Corporate Services - Alexandria Registration Office

Comment: please retain

3.7 Charges already introduced in December

Comments were received about the introduction of charges and the way in which they were introduced (timing and notification).

Comment: These increases affect the poorest people.

Comment: Very worried about charges already introduced. These weren't consulted on and will affect the most vulnerable people e.g. transport, day care, learning difficulties.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – in last year's budget meetings, people indicated they would prefer to pay more to retain services, rather than lose them. It was felt introducing reasonable charges would be better than removing services.

Comment: Transport charges for daycare. Vehicles are poor and since charges are now made, vehicles need to be safer and more comfortable.

Answer: DMcM – we have a vehicle replacement programme, so I am surprised about reports of poor condition. This will be looked into.

Answer: IR – We have a benefits maximisation service to help people maximise income and this should help with paying charges. We have introduced small charges to maintain the service.

Question: I believed the projections from last year. What happened to make charges necessary from 1st January.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – a gap was identified last year. Some costs exceed projections e.g. children in care. The cost for each child is £200,000 - £250,000 and a bigger than expected number of children going in to care creates a budget shortfall (budget for 1-2 but now have 6). We have also had additional costs for utilities (gas and electricity and fuel). Whatever we set in January, things can still change.

Comment: Higher costs of disability services will mean people are unable to make use of services. This will lead to the services being stopped.

Comment: No notice of increase in charges (individual letters only going out next week – due to complex calculations needed re eligibility)

Comment: No transparency or consultation on increase.

Childcare Charges

There was an extensive discussion about childcare charges which included the following key points:

Comment: 70% increase in childcare charges isn't reasonable.

Comment: we have lost the reduction for the second child and this makes the situation unaffordable for me as a parent. The charges were published in the local press before parents knew about them and introduced with no warning.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – There is no statutory need to provide childcare of this kind (two neighbouring authorities only offer a very limited service).

Answer: TL, Executive Director of Education – even with the increased charges, this service costs more than it takes in. Only 9 families in Garshake and Gartocharn are affected by the removal of the second child reduction. Council employees who can't get a place in Garshake Nursery have to pay the private sector rate.

Childcare vouchers will help to defray the costs.

Comment: If charges take people out of employment, it's a negative.

Special Uplift Charges

Comment: £15 charge introduced. This is a false economy as it will increase fly tipping and result in other clear up costs for the Council.

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – WDC was one of the few Councils who didn't charge for this service. Dumping is a punishable offence.

Answer: DMcM, Chief Executive – people can also take rubbish to the official sites themselves. The message from last year's meetings was that people would be prepared to pay more to retain services.

3.8 Other Questions

3.8.1 *Question:* Every cut affects people directly – elderly and young. How will you keep up the level of services if you're doing away with jobs?

Answer: IR, Leader of Council – The Council has a no compulsory redundancies policy. We need to work better with partners including health services and neighbouring local authorities to deliver services more efficiently as outlined in the Clyde Valley Review, Arbuthnott Report. We are also currently looking at voluntary redundancies.

3.8.2 *Question:* Can you guarantee no compulsory redundancies over the next 12-18 months (if you don't get sufficient voluntary redundancies)?

Answer: DMcM, Chief Executive – the budget gap of £2.6 million for 10-11 will be manageable. The Council's change management policy includes pay protection and redeployment. There are, however, much bigger challenges ahead over the following three years 11-14 – on current estimates £38 million plus savings to be found (more than we've applied over the last 13 years). Councils are meeting these challenges through a variety of approaches including arms length services and redundancies. The key aim is to preserve front line services through integration with Health Service and working with partners and neighbouring authorities.

3.9 Suggested Savings Options

- *Senior Management Savings* (3 people raised this issue)
Question: What will councillors do to look at management savings to divert money to front line services?
Answer: DMcM, Chief Executive - David Connell, Head of Finance has already mentioned £1.75 million of management adjustments made and posts have been deleted. The Education review will put forward other significant savings if Council approve them. Other savings will be made through the shared services agenda and joint ventures with the private sector.
Question: How do WDC's management costs compare to other Councils?
Answer: The Brodie's review showed that WDC had fewer chief officers than many other comparative local authorities.
- Ayr Flower show - cut Council's participation in this (3 people raised this)
- Charge for Ground maintenance at Loch Lomond Shores
- Scrap town twinning
- Save on Lomond Folk Festival - not essential
- Do away with employee canteen subsidy to protect front line services
- Cut back Councillors' expenses, trips abroad
- Better scrutiny of employee travel expenses

3.10 General Suggestions and Comments

- *Council Assets:* Use some of the Council's assets to fill savings gap and retain services
- *Council Tax Increase* (two people suggested this)
Question: Can this be raised to meet some costs?
Answer: IR, Leader of Council – an increase of 3% would raise a million. Because of the incentive payment from the Scottish Government of £1.208 million to keep Council Tax at current level, we would have to raise Council Tax by 7-8% to meet the funding gap.
- Protect front line services through non filling of back office jobs (2 comments)
- Spend to save: introduce a Short Breaks Bureau (respite care). For a modest administrative input, savings would accrue in
 - Full use of available respite resources, eliminating waste
 - Create choice for a more effective spend
 - Save Social Workers time in searching for
 - Save administrative time elsewhere by co-ordinating respite/short break resources
- Prioritise Health and Well Being (4 people) – one said especially community groups and carers; another said in partnership with other organisations to reduce costs. Instead of closing centres for older people, can they be combined as they are an important source of communication and well being.
- Prioritise clean and safe environments and recycling
- Prioritise education (x3) and libraries
- Prioritise support to vulnerable members of the community including people with sensory impairments, people with physical disabilities and carers
- Carers Services: Concern that £160K is being spent on two offices but these are no real benefit to carers.
- Services for people with sensory impairments: objection to non filling of front line vacancies in the Sensory Impairment Unit.

- With closure of Auchentoshan Centre nearly a year ago, the new replacement service in Clydebank for adults with a learning disability should be a high priority.
- What about promise of budgets being available for retraining etc to address detriment for red circled employees. HEEDs staff have been told there is no money for training (this will be investigated)
- Regeneration/Economic Development
 - WD should be focusing on expanding the economy and halting population decline. Suggested house builders should be given incentives (although others disagreed with this re selling off Council land / assets)
 - Regeneration should be a priority – both Dumbarton centre and other areas. Finding ways to encourage businesses to come to West Dunbartonshire and encourage growth in industry and housing.
 - Improvements are needed in the Hardgate area to encourage people to stop and shop. A community resource centre in the area might help to keep young people off the streets.
- Comments about Council selling assets / not protecting River Leven and Loch Lomond slipway for local use.

Consultation Process

3.11 Some comments about the consultation process were received:

- that the timescale for responding to the savings options is unacceptably short (this is affected by factors such as the time it takes to develop savings options internally and the budget settlement confirmation from Central Government)
- that the process for developing savings options needs to be more transparent.

Impact Assessment

3.12 A scanning of savings options has been carried out to identify areas where impact assessment may be needed. Further work may be required on some specific options.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 Any personnel issues will relate to the proposals which are pursued.

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 Forums have 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 2010-11.

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Date: 20 January 2010

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Appendix: 2010-11 Budget - Public Forum

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

Wards Affected: All wards

Appendix 1

2010-11 Budget – Public Forum

Three meetings were held, one in Dalmuir Community Centre on Tuesday 12th January, one in Alexandria Community Centre on Wednesday 13th January and the third in Dumbarton Burgh Hall on Thursday 14th January. Meetings were widely publicised, with 1500 A4 posters and 1000 A5 flyers going out to a wide range of people and places including:

Included in distribution:

- Around 300 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. A Press Release was also issued.

Your Radio bulletins were broadcast in the week leading up to the meetings.

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.