

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

At the Special Meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council held in the Council Chambers, Council Offices, Garshake Road, Dumbarton, on Thursday, 26 January at 2.00 p.m.

Present: Provost Denis Agnew and Councillors George Black, Jim Bolland, Jim Brown, Geoff Calvert, Gail Casey, Jim Finn, William Hendrie, Douglas McAllister, David McBride, Jonathan McColl, Ronnie McColl, Jim McElhill, Patrick McGlinchey, Craig McLaughlin, Willie McLaughlin, Marie McNair, Lawrence O'Neill, Iain Robertson, Martin Rooney and May Smillie.

Attending: Joyce White, Chief Executive, David Amos, Interim Executive Director of Corporate Services; Terry Lanagan, Executive Director of Educational Services; Elaine Melrose, Executive Director of Housing, Environmental & Economic Development; Keith Redpath, Director of West Dunbartonshire Community Health & Care Partnership; Malcolm Bennie, Manager of Corporate Communications; Lorraine Coyne, Head of Audit, Performance & Strategic Planning; Andrew Fraser, Head of Legal, Democratic & Regulatory Services; Jim McAloon, Head of Regeneration & Economic Development; Laura Mason, Head of Service (Quality); Stephen West, Head of Finance & Resources; and Christine McCaffary, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apology: An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Councillor John Millar.

Provost Denis Agnew in the Chair

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that there were no declarations of interest.

OUTCOMES OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON BUDGET SAVINGS OPTIONS 2012/13

A report was submitted by the Chief Executive providing the Council with an overview of the public assessment of the budget savings options selected for 2012/13, including:-

- (a) the collective results of the public's response through the budget consultation questionnaire;

- (b) a summary of the feedback and issues raised by community representatives and members of the public at the public forum meetings; and
- (c) a summary of feedback gained through the Council's website budget portal.

The Council agreed to note the contents of the report.

GENERAL SERVICES REVENUE ESTIMATES AND COUNCIL TAX

A report was submitted by the Interim Executive Director of Corporate Services providing the Council with sufficient information to:-

- (a) approve the General Services Revenue Estimates for 2012/13; and
- (b) set the Council Tax level for 2012/13.

It was noted that the draft Revenue Estimates book, as referred to in the aforementioned report, had been circulated to all Members in December 2011.

At this point the SNP Group's Budget proposal document was circulated and is attached as Appendix 1 to these Minutes.

Councillor C. McLaughlin, seconded by Councillor R. McColl, moved:-

That the Council approves the SNP Revenue Budget proposals for 2012/2013 as detailed in the document entitled 'Administration Revenue Budget Proposals – A Strategy for Local Economic Growth'.

Therefore I am recommending that Council agrees:-

- (1) to set the band D tax level for 2012/13 at £1,163 which represents a 0% increase and assumes a collection rate of 97.25% thereby generating £38.863m;
- (2) the growth projects or savings options identified in the SNP Revenue Budget proposals be incorporated into the budget for 2012/13 which produces a balanced budget and does not breach the Council's Prudential Reserve level of £4.2m;
- (3) to remit consideration of the forecast funding position for financial years 2013/14 and 2014/15 to the Strategic Finance Working Group and report to all Elected Members; and
- (4) to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment & Sustainable Growth no later than 11 March 2012, to confirm that the budget approved by Council includes provision to deliver across all the specified commitments in the November offer.

At this point the Labour Group's Budget proposal document was circulated and is attached as Appendix 2 to these Minutes.

As an amendment, Councillor McGlinchey, seconded by Councillor Rooney, moved:-

This Council agrees the Labour Group budget as appended to this amendment, subject to appropriate Equality Impact Assessments and where required consultation with the recognised Trades Unions and the wider public.

Council also notes that the SNP Administration had already made significant service cuts and job cuts as a result of the last four budgets and the emergency budget in October 2010. The SNP cuts and charges have disproportionately affected vulnerable people in West Dunbartonshire.

Council condemns the SNP Government's continued attack on West Dunbartonshire Council. After suffering amongst the lowest budget settlement for the past four years West Dunbartonshire has received 'flat cash' meaning that the Council will receive no inflationary uplift over the next three years.

Given that the inflation rate is around 5% for this year alone, this represents a massive reduction in Councils share of public resources.

At this point Councillor Black's Budget proposal document was circulated and is attached as Appendix 3 to these Minutes.

As a second amendment, Councillor Black, seconded by the Councillor Bolla, moved:-

Some facts

Given the fact that we suffer from mass unemployment in this area I would propose to release a sum of £1.15 million pounds from reserves to set up and sustain a programme of job creation through a community business initiative which would support and sustain the employment of 200 people over a two year period and sustained beyond that. In this Council area we have 1740 VAT registered companies in comparison with the Scottish average we have a shortfall of 450 businesses when compared to the Scottish Figure and 230 when compared to Inverclyde which is comparable with us in many ways this funding would also set aside 500K to match fund the Scottish Government scheme to create modern apprentice ships our estimate of these apprenticeships for this Council is 200.

Key strategic drivers

The two drivers which are key to community business development are stimulating economic growth improving the skills of our people and assisting them into sustainable employment by creating and supporting 20 community businesses over a 2 year period the Council could create up to 200 jobs with a potential for and additional 200 volunteer places supported by reasonable expenses the services delivered would be focuses on serving the local community.

Scale of the project

To create 20 sustainable community businesses which would also have good prospects of growth. 2 years should be the timescale set for achievement. It is worth noting that this project could be replicated for succeeding 2 year periods at the same cost £650K per period. Community wide promotion of the support being made available to new ideas for community businesses would be carried out with support being provided to interested parties to develop sensible and sustainable business plans. I envisage a Dragons den type assessment of the potential bidders to identify the best or most practical ideas this type of assessment could also benefit spin off operations from existing businesses.

Funding

Up to £25K in support costs to establish their business over a two year period (rent, equipment, transport, utilities, phone, computers etc. a total of £650K over the two year period.

Wage funding

Through Employability programmes, Community planning employability, Jobcentre plus and Skills development Scotland for example.

Support

All community businesses could be supported by Business Gateway but there are specialist organisations such as C.E.I.S. and first post which can advise on funding availability from external partners and these companies can actually access loan funding for community businesses.

With the proper support in place and good ideas it is envisaged that up to 20 sustainable community businesses could be created employing 200 people and giving them a future in the economic performance of West Dunbartonshire Council and also servicing the needs of the local community the work up costs for this project would be no more than £2K total and perhaps additional business support per business of £5K per business over the initial 2 year period a total of £102K.

Ethos

The ethos and indeed the driving force behind all of this is sustainability and added value to the local community.

ADJOURNMENT

After hearing Provost Agnew, the Council agreed to adjourn for a period of 15 minutes to allow consideration of the three budgets.

The meeting reconvened at 3.00 p.m. with all those Members shown on the sederunt in attendance.

On a vote being taken between the first amendment (Councillor McGlinchey) and the second amendment (Councillor Black), 4 Members voted for the second amendment and 8 for the first amendment.

On a further vote being taken between the first amendment (Councillor McGlinchey) and the motion (Councillor C. McLaughlin), 9 Members voted for the amendment and 11 voted for the motion which was accordingly declared carried.

ADJOURNMENT

After hearing Provost Agnew, the Council agreed to adjourn for a period of 10 minutes.

The meeting reconvened at 4.50 p.m. with all those Members shown on the sederunt, except Councillor McGlinchey.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) ESTIMATES 2012/13

A report was submitted by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental & Economic Development making recommendations in respect of the HRA Estimates and rent levels for 2012/13.

Note:- Councillor McGlinchey returned to the meeting at this point.

Councillor Hendrie, seconded by Councillor McElhill, moved:-

Council agrees a weekly rent increase of not less than £2.47 on a 52 week basis equating to a 4.5% in order to meet planned net revenue HRA budget as detailed in Appendix 1 of the Executive Director's report; and

Agree to maintain the existing level of lock up rent levels at the same levels as for 2011/2012.

In addition the Council agrees to set aside a fund of £350k, from reserves for the creation of an environmental action fund.

The fund should invite bids from tenants and community groups on potential projects. Clearly the fund requires to be for the benefit of housing areas.

The department should develop criteria for assessing bids for the fund and those projects with match funding should be prioritised.

The bids should be submitted to a future HEED Committee for agreement.

The Executive Director of Housing, Environmental & Economic Development was heard in further explanation of the report and in answer to a Member's question.

As an amendment Councillor Black, seconded by Councillor Bollan, moved:-

That this Council applies a 4.5% rent increase funded in the following manner:-

1.5% on the weekly rent on a 52 week basis and the 3% difference to be funded from the surplus in the HRA.

The calculation for next year's increase will incorporate the combined figures and give a 4.5% baseline.

As a second amendment Councillor McBride moved:-

Council agrees a weekly rent increase of not less than £2.47 on a 52 week basis equating to a 4.5% in order to meet planned net revenue HRA budget as detailed in Appendix 1 of the Executive Director's report; and

Agree to maintain the existing level of lock up rent levels at the same levels as for 2011/2012.

In addition the Council agrees to set aside a fund of £350k, from earmarked reserves for the creation of an environmental action fund and a further £1.6m from earmarked reserves to the general reserve to be used for bringing houses up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

The fund should invite bids from tenants and community groups on potential projects. Clearly the fund requires to be for the benefit of housing areas.

The department should develop criteria for assessing bids for the fund and those projects with match funding should be prioritised.

The bids should be submitted to a future HEED Committee for agreement.

Council notes paragraph 9.5 of the Executive Director's report and notes the Director's prudence on the in-year surplus in relation to the unknown costs for the winter storm damage and therefore makes no use of this surplus at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

Following questions from Members on reserves, the Stock Transfer and whether Standing Orders required to be suspended, the Council agreed to adjourn for a period of 10 minutes to allow officers to clarify the position.

The meeting was reconvened at 5.30 p.m. with all those Members shown on the sederunt present.

The Head of Legal, Democratic & Regulatory Services confirmed that there was no requirement for Standing Orders to be suspended as the decision on reserves and the Stock Transfer was agreed by Council in February 2011.

Having heard the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental & Economic Development in answer to a Member's question, the Chief Executive advised that it would be appropriate to seek the opinion of the Council's Section 95 Officer, namely the Head of Finance & Resources.

The Head of Finance & Resources in his role as Section 95 Officer advised that the budget proposed by Councillor McBride would be insufficient to meet estimated and committed expenditure for 2012/13.

The Head of Legal, Democratic & Regulatory Services advised the Council that in circumstances where the budget does not meet the committed and estimated level of expenditure, a resolution in these terms would be illegal.

Provost Agnew, Chair, ruled that in terms of Standing Orders and by reason of illegality, the amendment would not be accepted or placed on the agenda.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Legal, Democratic & Regulatory Services confirmed that Councillor McBride could alter his amendment in order to propose a legal budget.

On this advice, Councillor McBride, seconded by Councillor Calvert, moved the following amendment:-

Council agrees a weekly rent increase of not less than £2.47 on a 52 week basis equating to a 4.5% in order to meet planned net revenue HRA budget as detailed in Appendix 1 of the Executive Director's report; and

Agree to maintain the existing level of lock up rent levels at the same levels as for 2011/2012.

In addition the Council agrees to set aside a fund of £350k, from earmarked reserves for the creation of an environmental action fund and a further £900k from earmarked reserves to the unearmarked reserve for the basis of the Council reaching the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

The fund should invite bids from tenants and community groups on potential projects. Clearly the fund requires to be for the benefit of housing areas.

The department should develop criteria for assessing bids for the fund and those projects with match funding should be prioritised.

The bids should be submitted to a future HEED Committee for agreement.

Council notes paragraph 9.5 of the Executive Director's report and notes the Director's prudence on the in-year surplus in relation to the unknown costs for the winter storm damage and therefore makes no use of this surplus at this time.

On a vote being taken between the first amendment (Councillor Black) and the second amendment (Councillor McBride), 7 Members voted for the second amendment and 13 for the first.

On a further vote being taken between the first amendment (Councillor Black) and the motion (Councillor Hendrie), 3 Members voted for the amendment and 10 for the motion which was accordingly declared carried.

PROVOST'S REMARKS

The Provost, on behalf of the Council, thanked officers for their assistance in preparing the budgets and also acknowledged that this would be last budget prepared by Councillor C. McLaughlin before his retirement from office in May 2012.

The meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.