

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

At a Hybrid Meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council held in the Civic Space, 16 Church Street, Dumbarton on Wednesday, 6 March 2024 at 4.06 p.m.

Present: Provost Douglas McAllister and Councillors Jim Bollan, Ian Dickson, Diane Docherty, Gurpreet Singh Johal, Daniel Lennie, David McBride, Jonathan McColl, Michelle McGinty, June McKay, John Millar, Karen Murray Conaghan, Lawrence O'Neill, Lauren Oxley, Chris Pollock, Martin Rooney, Gordon Scanlan, Hazel Sorrell, Clare Steel and Sophie Traynor.

Attending: Peter Hessematt, Chief Executive; Alan Douglas, Chief Officer – Regulatory and Regeneration (Legal Officer); Laurence Slavin, Chief Officer – Resources, and Section 95 Officer; Peter Barry, Chief Officer – Housing and Employability; Amanda Graham, Chief Officer – Citizen, Culture and Facilities; Gail Macfarlane, Chief Officer – Roads and Neighbourhood; Laura Mason, Chief Officer – Education; Beth Culshaw, Chief Officer – Health & Social Care Partnership; Victoria Rogers – Chief Officer, People and Technology; Michelle Lynn, Assets Co-ordinator; Alan Stewart, Housing Asset and Investment Manager; John Kerr, Housing Development and Homeless Manager; Carol Alderson, Finance Manager; Michael McDougall, Manager of Legal Services; George Hawthorn, Manager of Democratic and Registration Services; and Carol-Ann Burns, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies: Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillors Craig Edward and James McEhill.

Provost Douglas McAllister in the Chair

STATEMENT BY CHAIR

Provost McAllister advised that the meeting was being audio streamed and broadcast live to the internet and would be available for playback.

REQUEST FOR DEPUTATION – JOINT TRADES UNION

The Provost advised that a late request had been received to hear a deputation from GMB, Unite, Unison and EiS in relation to the item 'General Services Budget Setting 2025/26 and 2028/29 - 2027/28 Budget Estimates'.

Having heard the Provost, the Council agreed to suspend Standing Orders 18 (b) and (e) in order to allow the deputation which, the Provost advised, would be taken immediately prior to the aforementioned item of business.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that there were no declarations of interest in any of the items of business on the agenda.

RECORDING OF VOTES

The Council agreed that all votes taken during the meeting would be done by roll call vote to ensure an accurate record.

OPEN FORUM

The Provost advised that an Open Forum question had been received from Ms Amy Unitt. It was noted that Ms. Unitt was not in attendance to address Council. Having heard the Legal Officer Council agreed that a written response would be provided to Ms. Unitt.

DEPUTATION – JOINT TRADES UNION

The Provost invited the delegation, namely Mr Mick Dolan (EiS), Mr Norman King (Unite the Union), Mr David Scott (GMB), and David Smith (UNISON) forward to join the meeting, and each was heard in relation to their concerns regarding potential budget cuts.

The Provost thanked the Representatives for their contributions and invited them to remain in the meeting for its duration.

GENERAL SERVICES BUDGET SETTING 2024/25 AND 2025/26 TO 2028/29 BUDGET ESTIMATES

A report was submitted by the Chief Officer – Resources:-

- (a) summarising the key issues relating to the revenue budget estimates and setting of Council Tax for 2024/25 and providing budget estimates for 2025/26 to 2028/29;
- (b) advising of the mid-range estimates, with the best case and worst case estimates summarised in paragraph 4.14.1 of the report; and

- (c) seeking approval to set the General Services Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2024/25 through approval of options to close the 2024/25 revenue budget gap.

It was noted that a revised version of Reducing the Occupational Health Budget - saving option PT10, page 67 of the papers had been circulated to Members immediately prior to the meeting.

After discussion and having heard the Chief Officer – Resources, in further explanation and in answer to Members' questions.

Councillor Rooney moved:-

Council thanks the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer of Resources for the detailed report at item 6 comprising a comprehensive covering report and appendices. Council also thanks the Chief Officer of Resources for the verbal update following any changes to the budget gap and the report. This report shows the level of work that has gone into the budget setting process this year.

This is the most challenging financial period in the Council's history and with the cost of living crisis impacting on ever increasing numbers of our residents, we are acutely aware of the need to protect services and jobs for local people. The funding gap may be lower than this time last year but rapidly reducing budgets every year mean the options available to us to continue to provide services in the same way are becoming more and more limited.

The pressures this Council is facing are a direct result of sustained cuts to its revenue funding since 2007. This has cumulatively amounted to over £30million of recurring savings having to be made in our area over the period, as well as the near exhaustion of the Council's reserves.

The Scottish Government's claim that a Council Tax freeze helps the least well off is simply not credible. In addition, its claim that the Council Tax freeze is fully funded is false.

This extreme financial landscape, coupled with the ever increasing lack of flexibility for councils due to Scottish Government interference in democratic decision making, results in very limited choices in how councils deliver services. This will inevitably impact on the provision of vital community services.

Council regrettably agrees that the Scottish Government in power since 2007 has demonstrated contempt for local government in Scotland. It seems to have entirely given up on any pretence of partnership working or recognition of councils' legitimate authority to make decisions on services they deliver on behalf of valued local communities. Their stated commitment to the Verity House Agreement has no credibility and emphasises their disdain for local democracy and the communities that councillors are elected to represent.

Council agrees that the Scottish Government has specifically acted against the interests of West Dunbartonshire by amending the floor mechanism in the distribution which results in a less well-off Council like West Dunbartonshire losing out. As a result of the actions of the Scottish Government, West Dunbartonshire Council has required to identify an extra £1.7m of savings.

This continued ill-considered approach by the Scottish Government to centralise decision making and impose spending restrictions poses a very real threat to the continued ability of the Council to maintain the range of high-quality services our communities need. Despite this unhelpful political and financial context, the Council is still legally required to set a balanced budget.

Given the above the Council agrees:

- (1) to retain the full amount of Scottish Government funding for pay to help protect local services. As at 31st March 2024, the HSCP will have £2.454m of un-earmarked reserves; and £15.451m of earmarked reserves. In addition, it will benefit over the next three years from a reduction in employers contribution to SPF and can use these to support their budget.
- (2) to note the management adjustments set out in Appendix 3 to the report will be used to set the General Services revenue budget for 2024/25 and assist with future projected budget gaps.
- (3) that the Council Tax will be frozen for financial year 2024/25. This means that the Band D Council Tax rate will remain at £1,398.98.
- (4) the proposed updated capital plan as set out in Appendix 5 to the report from 2024/25.
- (5) to approve the 2024/25 West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust management Fee of £3,658,373.
- (6) to note the Council had already committed £5.332m of reserves at the December Council.
- (7) the additional use of reserves to help balance the 2024/25 budget as follows:
 - a. Permanent use of reserves of £934,000.
 - b. Temporary use of reserves £3.077 million.
- (8) a report will be brought to Council in June to provide an update on the £62.7m of additional funding to be distributed to local government and for options to replenish the Council's reserves.

- (9) the Administration's savings, growth items and other measures to close the budget gap as appended to this motion (shown as Appendix 1 to these Minutes).
- (10) to note that option RN06 relating to Bowling Club savings will not be taken for 2024/25, but agree Council Officers will work with the bowling clubs to assess how best to support their long term future as some clubs have very few members and significant running costs.
- (11) EDU05: The introduction of the Early Start Clubs, costs will be reduced from those proposed to a charge of £2 per session for pupils not entitled to free school meals and to abolish the charge for those pupils who are entitled to free school meals. The Education Service will consult with service users on fee rates including any possible variation for siblings.
- (12) EDU09: The proposal was to close St Eunan's and Linnvale Out of School Care services due to low usage. However, feedback suggests that parents really value the service and would be willing to pay more to retain it. Therefore, the fees will increase by £3 per session from April 2024. Thereafter for 2025/26 the fees will increase to cover the cost of the service.
- (13) the underfunding of Local Government is unlikely to change over the next three years and all community organisations, whether impacted by savings or not, should be aware of the Council's expected financial challenges. It would be prudent for them to proactively explore alternative funding sources to help ensure their future sustainability.
- (14) to note the Council has established four new funds designed to support communities and help those community organisations affected by changes to their funding. These include:
 - a. A £250,000 Community Success Revenue Fund;
 - b. A £100,000 Youth Success Revenue Fund;
 - c. A £150,000 Community Success Capital Fund; and
 - d. A £250,000 Community Sports Success Capital Fund
- (15) in terms of the additional increase to sales, fees and charges, this will apply to all services with the exception of School Meals which will have the 4% applied that was agreed at Council in December.

At this point in the meeting Councillors Dickson, McColl, Scanlan and Docherty each requests¹ an adjournment of the meeting to allow consideration of the motion. The Provost declined the request.

As an amendment, Councillor Dickson moved:-

¹ As corrected by West Dunbartonshire Council at its meeting on 6 March 2024

Council agrees the recommendations at 2.1 of the report, subject to the following provisions.

Council agrees to freeze Council Tax and accept the Scottish Government's £2.219m of funding to do so. This funding, which has been baselined for future years and is recurring in terms of our budget gap projections, offsets a potential Council Tax rise of more than 5%; this Council Tax freeze is fully funded this year and going forward into future years.

Council notes the £8.366m budget gap and agrees the £1.719m growth items alongside political decisions to balance the budget appended to this motion (shown as Appendix 2 to these Minutes).

Westminster policies designed to benefit London and the Southeast of England continue to damage the wider economy, and it is our citizens who are suffering.

As a Council we have a moral obligation to do everything we can to protect public services and make things easier for people in the face of the cost of living, or more accurately the cost of the union crisis.

To that end, this SNP budget includes no cuts to services and no redundancies.

The SNP budget also provides £403k for an in-year community investment fund. The purpose of this fund is twofold.

Firstly, it provides free reserves for the Council to spend on activities that will benefit our communities. Councillors and Officers bring proposals to Council and Committee through motions or reports throughout the year, and this funding will be available to assist in delivering these policy proposals.

Secondly, it will allow the Council to slow down the current rush to transfer or lease community facilities and enable a more open and transparent process to be developed.

To this end, Council asks that a report be brought to a future Council or IRED Committee for the purpose of:

- Outlining the current process being followed for leasing/community asset transfer.
- Proposing changes to the process to facilitate proper discussions with current users of facilities prior to bringing reports to committee for agreement.
- Proposing any further changes that can make the process more transparent and provide Councillors with the information we require to make informed decisions.

In agreeing this 2024/25 budget, Council notes that we are reducing the projected 2025/26 budget gap by £3.961m and the 2026/27 budget gap by £4.011m.

At this point in the meeting, Councillor Rooney's motion was seconded by Councillor McGinty and Councillor Dickson's amendment was seconded by Councillor Scanlan.

On a roll call vote being taken 8 Members voted for the amendment, namely Councillors Dickson, Docherty, McColl, Murray Conaghan, Oxley, Pollock, Scanlan and Traynor, and 11 Members voted for the motion, namely Provost McAllister and Councillors Johal, Lennie, McBride, McGinty, McKay, Millar, O'Neill, Rooney, Sorrell and Steel. The motion was accordingly declared carried. One Member abstained from voting, namely Councillor Bollan. The motion was declared carried.

Councillor Bollan, having failed to find a seconder for a proposed second amendment asked for his dissent to be recorded in respect of this item.

CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25 TO 2032/33

A report was submitted by the Chief Officer – Resources providing an updated Capital Strategy for the period 2024/25 to 2032/33 and seeking its approval.

After discussion and having heard the Chief Officer – Resources in further explanation and in answer to Members' questions, the Council agreed to approve West Dunbartonshire Council's updated capital strategy for the period 2024/25 to 2032/33.

Note: Councillor McKay left the meeting at this point.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME, REVENUE BUDGET, AND RENT LEVELS FOR 2024/25

A report was submitted by Chief Officer – Housing and Employability:-

- (a) seeking approval of the proposed HRA Capital Investment Programme and the HRA Revenue Budget for 2024/25; and
- (b) seeking agreement of the level of weekly rent increase for 2024/25.

After discussion and having heard the Chief Officer – Housing and Employability in further explanation and in answer to Members' questions, Council agreed.

- (1) to note the progress made in the HRA capital programme for 2023/24 as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) to approve the HRA Capital Investment Plan 2024/25 – 2028/29 as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report;

- (3) to approve the HRA revenue budget for 2024/25 as detailed in Appendices 3 and 4 to the report;
- (4) to approve a 6.7% weekly house rent increase for 2024/25 at an average £5.94 on a 52-week basis (£6.58 on a 47-week basis) inclusive of homes used as emergency homeless temporary accommodation;
- (5) to approve a 6.7% weekly Gypsy Travellers site rent increase, increasing pitch rent by £5.37 to £85.46 on a 52-week basis (£5.94 to £94.55 per week on a 47-week basis);
- (6) to approve a 6.7% lock up rent increase, increasing rent by £0.38 to £6.04 per week on a 52-week basis (£0.42 on a 47-week basis to £6.68);
- (7) to note the outcome of the tenant consultation process as detailed in Appendix 5 to the report ;
- (8) to note the increase in the prudential reserve target for 2024/25 (from £0.984m to £1.064m);
- (9) to note that the HRA continues to face considerable cost pressures and that the latest forecast is for HRA to draw reserves of £2.140m to balance the 2023/24 revenue budget with closing reserves forecast at circa £0.500m; and
- (10) to note that work will continue in 2023/24 and 2024/25 to identify and deliver further general efficiencies across all areas of the housing budget that will allow reserves to be replenished and maintained in line with the prudential target (as detailed in Appendix 3 to these Minutes).

DUMBARTON COMMON GOOD BUDGET UPDATE 2024/25

A report were submitted by the Chief Officer – Resources:-

- (a) providing an update on the 2023/24 Dumbarton Common Good budget; and
- (b) seeking approval for a revised 2024/25 budget and indicative budgets for 2025/26 and 2026/27.

After discussion and having heard the Chief Officer – Resources in further explanation and in answer to Members' questions, the Council agreed:-

- (1) to note the Dumbarton Common Good 2023/24 outturn is currently projected to be a deficit of £126,791;

- (2) to approve the indicative 2024/25 budget of £455,949 expenditure against projected income of £322,446 representing a budgeted deficit of £133,503;
- (3) to approve the inclusion of a budget of £53,465 in 2023/24 reducing to £31,494 in 2024/25 to fund ongoing security costs at 7 Overburn Ave;
- (4) to note the indicative budgets to 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 1;
- (5) to note the projected balances available for carry forward of £498,105 at 31 March 2024 and £364,602 at 31 March 2025 (based upon the revised draft 2024/25 budget); and
- (6) to note that a comprehensive review of the recurring annual grant awards will be carried out during 2024/25.

The meeting closed at 8.03 p.m.

ITEM 6 GENERAL SERVICES BUDGET SETTING 2024/25 & 2024/25 & 2025/26 to 2028/29 BUDGET ESTIMATES

Council thanks the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer of Resources for the detailed report at item 6 comprising a comprehensive covering report and appendices. Council also thanks the Chief Officer of Resources for the verbal update following any changes to the budget gap and the report. This report shows the level of work that has gone into the budget setting process this year.

This is the most challenging financial period in the Council's history and with the cost of living crisis impacting on ever increasing numbers of our residents, we are acutely aware of the need to protect services and jobs for local people. The funding gap may be lower than this time last year but rapidly reducing budgets every year mean the options available to us to continue to provide services in the same way are becoming more and more limited.

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Council regrettably agrees that the Scottish Government in power since 2007 has demonstrated contempt for local government in Scotland. It seems to have entirely given up on any pretence of partnership working or recognition of councils' legitimate authority to make decisions on services they deliver on behalf of valued local communities. Their stated commitment to the Verity House Agreement has no credibility and emphasises their disdain for local democracy and the communities that councillors are elected to represent.

Council agrees that the Scottish Government has specifically acted against the interests of West Dunbartonshire by amending the floor mechanism in the distribution which results in a less well-off Council like West Dunbartonshire losing out. As a result of the actions of the Scottish Government, West Dunbartonshire Council has required to identify an extra £1.7m of savings.

This continued ill-considered approach by the Scottish Government to centralise decision making and impose spending restrictions poses a very real threat to the continued ability of the Council to maintain the range of high-quality services our communities need. Despite this unhelpful political and financial context, the Council is still legally required to set a balanced budget.

Given the above the Council agrees to:

- a) Retain the full amount of Scottish Government funding for pay to help protect local services. As at 31st March 2024, the HSCP will have **£2.454m** of un-earmarked reserves; and **£15.451m** of earmarked reserves. In addition it will benefit over the next three years from a reduction in employers contribution to SPF and can use these to support their budget.
- b) Note the management adjustments set out in Appendix 3 will be used to set the General Services revenue budget for 2024/25 and assist with future projected budget gaps.

- c) Agree that the Council Tax will be frozen for financial year 2024/25. This means that the Band D Council Tax rate will remain at £1,398.98.
- d) Agree the proposed updated capital plan as set out in Appendix 5 from 2024/25.
- e) Approve the 2024/25 West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust management Fee of £3,658,373.
- f) Note the Council had already committed £5.332m of reserves at the December Council.
- g) Agree the additional use of reserves to help balance the 2024/25 budget as follows:
 - Permanent use of reserves of £934,000.
 - Temporary use of reserves £3.077 million.
- h) Agree a report will be brought to Council in June to provide an update on the £62.7m of additional funding to be distributed to local government and for options to replenish the Council's reserves.
- i) Agree the Administration's savings, growth items and other measures to close the budget gap as appended to this motion.
- j) Note that option RN06 relating to Bowling Club savings will not be taken for 2024/25, but agree Council Officers will work with the bowling clubs to assess how best to support their long term future as some clubs have very few members and significant running costs.
- k) EDU05: The introduction of the Early Start Clubs, costs will be reduced from those proposed to a charge of £2 per session for pupils not entitled to free school meals and to abolish the charge for those pupils who are entitled to free school meals. The Education Service will consult with service users on fee rates including any possible variation for siblings.
- l) EDU09: The proposal was to close St Eunan's and Linnvale Out of School Care services due to low usage. However, feedback suggests that parents really value the service and would be willing to pay more to retain it. Therefore, the fees will increase by £3 per session from April 2024. Thereafter for 2025/26 the fees will increase to cover the cost of the service.
- m) The underfunding of Local Government is unlikely to change over the next three years and all community organisations, whether impacted by savings or not, should be aware of the Council's expected financial challenges. It would be prudent for them to proactively explore alternative funding sources to help ensure their future sustainability.
- n) Note the Council has established four new funds designed to support communities and help those community organisations affected by changes to their funding. These include:
 - Text A £250,000 Community Success Revenue Fund;
 - A £100,000 Youth Success Revenue Fund;
 - A £150,000 Community Success Capital Fund; and
 - A £250,000 Community Sports Success Capital Fund

- o) In terms of the additional increase to sales, fees and charges, this will apply to all services with the exception of School Meals which will have the 4% applied that was agreed at Council in December.

SNP Budget 2024/25*

Projected budget gap	£8,336,000
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Growth Items		Comments / Instructions to Officers
HSCP pay award share	£1,256,000	The HSCP are asked to self-fund £350k of the staff pay award with the remaining £1.256m being funded by the Council.
Cancel plans to move Balloch and Parkhall Libraries	£60,000	There is no need to damage these well used services. This money will enable the libraries to continue to operate in their current locations.
In year Community Investment Fund	£403,000	This fund will be available for Council to use throughout the year (see motion text for details).
Total Growth Items	£1,719,000	
Updated Budget Gap	£10,055,000	

Balancing Items		
Management Adjustments	£1,082,000	These are savings identified by officers that can be made without redundancies or detriment to service level.
CCF20 - Review EE menus to reduce waste	£60,000	Sensible option with no detriment to nutrition. Some reduced choice, but still providing healthy meals.
EDU02 - Increase use of PEF to fund support service costs	£70,000	Use of Scottish Government funding releasing Council funds to avoid cuts to the Education budget. Knowledge and skills already developed in establishments, along with other resources will be used to mitigate potential detriment.
EDU05 - Introduce Early Start Clubs	£187,000	Income generation while still providing a free service to those in low-income households. The EIA makes it clear that no child will miss out on breakfast as those who need it will be catered for by other means. Further to this, officers will bring a report to a future Council/Committee meeting with costed proposals for a multi-child family discount.
EDU18 - Reduce use of SMS text messages with schools communicating with parents using Groupcall.	£10,000	No reduction in service. This has been confirmed as simply a challenge to schools to make texts more concise to save on the cost of sending multiple SMS messages.

RN23 - New approach to road defect repairs	£200,000	Since Labour came to power and severely defunded the road and pavement repairs and maintenance budgets, the standard of our roads and footpaths have deteriorated at an alarming rate. This option from officers reflects the urgent need for change. The SNP still believe the purchase of a JCB PotholePro, ultimately cancelled by the Labour Administration, would have avoided this deterioration while saving the Council millions of pounds in the medium to long term. This option may not deliver the same quality or savings, however it will bring improvements for our residents and allow us to capitalise costs previously charged to revenue.
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Use of free reserves	£1,366,000	Labour have failed to make best use of the reserves available to Council, to provide maximum benefit to our communities. This SNP budget will use this money to protect public services and jobs.
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Part use of voluntary redundancy reserve	£3,200,000	The SNP will use all available funds to protect public services and jobs.
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Restore prudential reserve to 2%	£1,880,000	The Labour Party's decision last year to increase the reserve to 3% saw the Council put millions in the bank while making cuts to Council services. This is unacceptable. The SNP recognises the need for a prudential reserve, however we believe that the 2% reserve we have held for decades is adequate. We need to be using all the funds we have at our disposal to protect public services and jobs at a time when people are really struggling.
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Balance of Smoothing Fund	£2,000,000	The SNP will use all available funds to protect public services and jobs.
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Total Balancing Items	£10,055,000
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Remaining Budget Gap	£0
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**The SNP budget is subject to staff consultation and EIA as appropriate.*

WDC HRA BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2024/25

March 2024

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

AS the Council's Housing Convenor, my ambition is to make West Dunbartonshire Housing service the best it can be. When I took on this role, I recognised we were facing several challenges and knew a proactive approach was required. I met with Officers and other members of the workforce to fully understand how we were implementing change, and it was immediately clear to me how motivated they were. Working with officers alongside participation and engagement with the Joint Rent Group and West Dunbartonshire Tenants and Residents Organisation, I now have a great insight into how well our housing service is performing and can help identify areas for change while taking account of tenants' concern. I believe together we can lead the Housing Sector and successfully introduce more housing to meet our tenants' needs, including those with larger families and medical or health needs. Together we are working towards identifying solutions to issues faced in our area, with my focus firmly on eradicating damp and mould and addressing homelessness. Solutions are what our tenants deserve, together with the knowledge, skills and experience of our officers and input of our tenants, we can and will succeed. I have actively engaged with appropriate Scottish Government Ministers on these issues when required, including requesting additional funding to represent the best interests of our tenants.



TENANT REPRESENTATIVES

The Council and West Dunbartonshire Tenants and Residents Organisation (WDTRO) successfully campaigned for social rented housing to be excluded from the Land and Building Transaction Tax Additional Dwelling Supplement. (LBTT ADS). As a result, from 1st April 2024, the Council will be exempt from LBTT ADS. The Council benefits hugely from having tenant representatives. We have forged good relationship with our representatives, and I have personally experienced how active and passionate they are in ensuring the best for the tenants. I always welcome the constructive dialogue our tenant representatives provide. I am grateful for Tenant Participation Officers who provide real support to tenant representatives, ensuring they are supported to ask questions and address tenants' needs. These representatives are engaged in the

WDC HRA BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2024/25

Involving You Strategic Approach, which is a Tenant Participation statutory requirement. We currently have the WDTRO, 12 Independent Tenant Resident Associations and an Interested Tenants Register. We liaise with the WDTRO, Joint Rent Group; hold Pre-Housing and Communities Committee meetings to discuss upcoming reports with tenants in advance, attend the Sheltered Housing Forum, the Scrutiny Panel and Estate Walkabouts. We also distribute tenant magazine Housing News on a quarterly basis and have Consultation Frameworks in place.

CONSULTATION

The Council held meetings with tenant representatives and launched consultation to seek tenant's views on our proposals around rent. The outcome of the consultation was that 76% of respondents supported Option 1 and 24% of respondents supported Option 2. The Chief Officer's recommendation within the report reflects the feedback and as a result the Administration will also support Option 1.

Option 1: Under this option, there will be a 6.7% rent increase to maintain current level of service, deliver the capital programme, continue with the new build programme, retain a tenant priority budget of £200k, and a £150k combined tenant support fund.

ENHANCED CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME SUCCESS

The Enhanced Housing Capital Investment Programme was developed in partnership with the WDTRO and approved by Council last year.

As part of this, work to install environmental sensors in all Council properties is underway. A minimum of 200 will be installed before the end of March and a further 2000 installed each year thereafter. The sensors will help the Council to proactively tackle any potential damp and mould concerns by monitoring air quality in homes, leading to improved living standards for tenants.

Through the Buyback Programme, the Council will add 44 new homes to its housing stock to meet identified housing need this year. The Buyback programme will secure over 300 new Council homes in the next five years.

To upgrade CCTV provision in all our multi storey homes, the Housing Service will invest £750k in 2024/25, improving safety and providing reassurance for our tenants.



WDC HRA BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2024/25

Further capital improvements are set out under Operational Highlights below.

MORE HOMES PROGRAMME



The Council's More Homes West Dunbartonshire approach has overseen the beginning of construction of 114 high quality, attractive and net zero new Council homes in 2023/24, with a further 107 going on site later in 2024.

The Council's first fully net zero development at Clydebank East will complete in 2024/25 delivering 88 new high-quality homes.

OPERATIONAL SUCCESSES

The Housing service has significantly improved performance around void properties, reducing the number by over 250. The length of time to let properties in West Dunbartonshire is now among the best of any Council landlord in Scotland.

The Council has maintained Gold Accreditation for its commitment to tenant involvement in the delivery of housing services, placing our tenant participation activities as the best in Scotland.

In addition, the Council has implemented a sector-leading approach to eliminating damp and mould issues in its homes.

We developed a new approach to improving the living experience for our multi storey tenants.

SUPPORTING TENANTS IN 2024-25

In order to support tenants throughout the next financial year, a tenant support fund of £150k will be introduced with the aim of helping tenants successfully sustain their tenancies. In addition a Tenant Priority Budget of £200k will be available to support tenant led improvement initiatives within Council housing areas.

HRA CAPITAL SUCCESSES

There has been a range of capital improvements to our homes. As at 31st January, the HRA Capital Investments included:

- New Heating Systems - 914
- External Wall Insulations - 320
- New kitchens - 286
- Medical Adaptations - 197
- Improvements to paths and back courts -186
- New bathrooms - 84
- New showers - 85

WDC HRA BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2024/25

The in-year works are still ongoing and we will get the final totals in April which will be confirmed in the end of year report.

PLANNED 2024/25 IMPROVEMENT WORKS

We will invest around **£18m** in improvement works to our homes in 2024/25.

- New heating systems - **850**
- EWI - **420**
- UPVC window improvements - **400**
- New roofs - **330**
- New kitchens - **300**
- Medical Adaptations - **250**
- Improvements to paths and back courts - **220**
- New bathrooms - **200**
- New showers – **200**

BUYBACK SCHEME

There is a national shortage of social housing across Scotland which has led to increases in homelessness applications and demand for social housing both locally and nationally.

In West Dunbartonshire, there is a particular need for larger family housing as well as one-bedroom properties. A dedicated officer has now been appointed to lead and progress the BuyBack programme. Empty homes officers and housing officers working in the community will also be

looking to identify properties which could be purchased by the Council.

The initiative has now been running for more than 10 years, having been approved by the committee in 2013.

WILLOX PARK



In February the Housing Committee agreed to the rebuilding of properties at Willox Park Sheltered Housing in Dunbarton. The decision follows detailed investigatory works at the properties to address dampness and mould, with environmental sensors fitted in occupied properties allowing the Council to closely monitor conditions. A thorough consultation exercise was also carried out to ensure everyone had the chance to ask questions and to share their views on how they would like to progress. Following the committee's decision, the 36 homes within the Willox Park Sheltered Housing Complex will now be designated as surplus to requirements and work will start on procurement for the delivery of

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the redevelopment. Existing tenants will have a personalised housing plan prepared and priority given to existing tenants for the new homes being delivered at the adjacent former care home site.

STRATEGIC HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME



The Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2024-2029 (SHIP) details the projects, both from Council and housing associations, which are likely to receive Scottish Government grant funding. Despite economic uncertainty and high inflation, the SHIP will deliver an ambitious programme of new build homes across West Dunbartonshire. The plan sets out the aim of developing 500 new affordable homes, and buying back 300 properties. Priority will continue to be given to regeneration areas and all projects will be required to provide at least 10% specialist or fully wheelchair accessible housing. Both the new build and the BuyBack programmes will prioritise house types which contribute to identified need including the supply

of larger family homes and preventing homelessness. The details of the priority projects within the SHIP Plan are set out below:

West Dunbartonshire Council will build a total of 546 homes

- Clydebank East **88 homes**
- Pappert **26 homes**
- Willox Park **17 homes**
- Mount Pleasant, Old Kilpatrick **19 homes**
- Clydebank Health Centre **38 homes**
- Bank St, Alexandria **22 homes**
- Bonhill Gap Sites **34 homes**
- Gilmour Avenue **2 homes**
- Acquisition Programme **300 homes**

Dunbritton Housing Association will build 8 new homes as follows:

- 19 Brown St, Haldane 1
- Golfhill Drive, Dalmonach 7

Caledonia Housing Association will build 213 new homes as follows:

- Bellsmyre Regeneration 110 homes
- Dalquhurn, Renton **75 homes**
- Bellsmyre Regeneration **28**

Knowes Housing Association will build 27 new homes as follows:

- Abbeylands Road, Faifley - 27

This level of development continues the growth of new affordable house building in West Dunbartonshire. The delivery of this ambitious plan will depend upon the support of our

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developing RSL partners and funding from the Scottish Government.

WDC – VETERANS PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS

West Dunbartonshire Council has enhanced its support for veterans by designating two properties and associated support specifically for allocation to those who have served in the Armed Forces. A nomination agreement with Veterans Housing Scotland will mean the homes will be available each year, with the veteran also offered tailored support from both the charity and the Council.

The charity currently has 650 homes to offer veterans across the country, including eight in West Dunbartonshire.

The partnership with the Council will strengthen the support available in West Dunbartonshire, raising awareness of the challenges faced as a result of service and helping reduce the number of veterans who are facing homelessness. Veterans Housing Scotland is working with local authorities to find homes for more of the veterans they support. Many experience mental or physical challenges following time in the armed forces, and are therefore at a greater risk of experiencing homelessness.

LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY SUCCESS

West Dunbartonshire Council has exceeded targets for the delivery of new affordable housing in the area. The Local Housing Strategy 2022-27, which was created to assess housing needs and conditions in order to address any identified issues, outlined ambitions to deliver 230 homes of all tenures, with a minimum of 80 being for social rent. West Dunbartonshire is in the top ten of all UK local authorities for most social housing delivered.

DESIGN STANDARD

A refreshed Design Standard for all new West Dunbartonshire Council homes has been introduced to ensure continued high quality accommodation across the area. As well as exceeding statutory requirements for floor space, accessibility and energy efficiency, Council homes will also help address the need for larger family homes by encouraging developers to develop a better match of housing mix with identified need. In addition, the updated Design Standard will ensure all newly developed homes will be net zero; have measures which improve accessibility to bathroom and shower facilities as tenants' needs change; and have environmental sensors fitted to allow tenants to track temperature and humidity to prevent condensation. The new Standard was agreed at a Housing and Communities Committee and will be applied to any new projects receiving funding approval from the Affordable Housing Supply Programme from 1