

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

At the Special Meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council held in the Council Chambers, Council Offices, Garshake Road, Dumbarton, on Thursday 8 February 2007 at 2.00 p.m.

Present: Depute Provost McColl and Councillors Denis Agnew, George Black, Jim Bolland, Margaret Bootland, Dennis Brogan, Geoff Calvert, Gail Casey, Tony Devine, James Flynn, Jackie Maceira, Margaret McGregor, Craig McLaughlin, Marie McNair, Iain Robertson, Martin Rooney and Andy White.

Attending: David McMillan, Chief Executive; Ronnie Dinnie, Acting Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services (Land and Environmental Services); Irving Hodgson, Acting Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services (Housing and Regeneration Services); Liz McGinlay, Director of Education and Cultural Services; Bill Clark, Director of Social Work Services; David Connell, Head of Finance; Stephen Brown, Head of Legal and Administrative Services, Terry Lanagan, Head of Service (Schools Estate); Lynn Townsend and Sandra Love, Heads of Service, Education and Cultural Services; John McKerracher, Head of Housing and Property; Joe Reilly, Section Head (Resources), Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services; and George Hawthorn, Senior Administrative Officer.

Apologies: Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Provost Alistair Macdonald and Councillors James McCallum, Duncan McDonald and Connie O'Sullivan.

Depute Provost McColl in the Chair

BUDGET FORUM MEETING – 11 JANUARY 2007

A report was submitted by the Chief Executive providing information on the points raised by community representatives at the public forum held to discuss the Council's revenue budget for 2007/08.

Having heard Councillor Rooney in further explanation, the Council agreed to note the contents of the report.

GENERAL SERVICES REVENUE ESTIMATES AND COUNCIL TAX 2007/2008

A report was submitted by the Chief Executive providing Council with sufficient information to:-

- (a) approve the General Services Revenue Estimates for 2007/2008;
- (b) set the level of prudential reserves for 2007/2008; and
- (c) set the Council Tax level for 2007/2008.

It was noted that the draft Revenue Estimates book, as referred to in the above report, had been circulated to all Members on 10 January 2007.

At this point, copies of the Labour Administration's proposals for the General Services Budget (shown as Appendix I to these minutes) were circulated to all those present.

Thereafter, Councillor Devine, seconded by Councillor Rooney, moved:-

That this Council agrees:-

- (1) to approve a net General Services Revenue Budget of £213,583,240, based on the draft estimates book issued by the Chief Executive in January 2007;
- (2) to approve the service enhancements, totalling £626,000, as detailed in Section 3 of the Labour Administration's Budget Proposals for 2007/2008 (Appendix 1);
- (3) to approve efficiency savings of £2,306,310 as detailed in Section 4 of the Labour Administration's Budget Proposals for 2007/2008 (Appendix 1);
- (4) to transfer the sum of £1,500,000 from the Housing Revenue Account to the General Fund Reserves and that £2,019,690 be applied to the budget; and
- (5) that the 2007/2008 Council Tax Band D should be set at £1,163 which represents an increase of 2.2% and assumes a collection rate of 96.75%.

The Head of Finance, Director of Social Work Services and the Director of Education and Cultural Services were heard in answer to Members' questions.

As an amendment, Councillor McLaughlin, seconded by Councillor Robertson, moved:-

That the Opposition's budget (as shown in Appendix II to these minutes) be approved resulting in Council Tax Band D being set at

£1,167 which represents an increase of 2.5% and assumes a collection rate of 96.75%.

This budget clearly indicates that the Opposition are willing to look at the re-opening of the Christie Park and Levensgrove Park toilets in addition to the proposal for the Balloch Toilets.

In addition the Council agrees to the creation of a Spending Sub-Committee to review and implement the savings targets highlighted.

The Opposition budget makes it clear that no compulsory redundancies are included or proposed and that full union consultation takes place.

In addition the Opposition budget does not agree to the transfer of £1.5 million from the HRA Reserve to the General Fund.

Finally the Council agrees that an additional £1.011m is added to the Capital Account on a purely spend to save basis. Departments are requested to submit bids for the fund and these bids should be considered by the CMT and submitted to the Spending Sub-Committee for final approval.

Copies of the Opposition Councillors' Budget together with an Explanation Information Pack (as shown in Appendix III to these minutes) were circulated to all those present.

On a vote being taken, 6 Members voted for the amendment and 11 for the motion which was accordingly declared carried.

Having heard Councillor Devine and Councillor McLaughlin, the Council agreed to express its thanks and appreciation to all those officers involved in the preparation of the revenue estimates.

Note: Councillor Calvert left the meeting at this point.

GENERAL SERVICES CAPITAL PLAN 2007/2008

A report was submitted by the Chief Executive presenting the Council with the recommendations of the Corporate Management Team in respect of the General Services Capital Plan for 2007/2008.

Councillor Devine informed the Council:-

- (a) that the recommendations within the report did not take into account the additional one-off capital funding of £1.1 million approx. from the Scottish Executive, which could only be used on projects that would result in efficiency savings; and

- (b) that a report would be submitted to the April meeting of Council making recommendations in respect of such projects.

Councillor Devine, seconded by Councillor Rooney, moved:-

That the Council approves the recommendations of the report, as follows:-

- (1) to note the committed bids as shown in Appendix II of the report;
- (2) to note that, including recommended prudential borrowing, the funds available for uncommitted capital bids total £6.666m;
- (3) to note that projects recommended for approval totalling £6.666m as detailed in Appendix III to the report, and include bids linked to both the Best Value Improvement Plan and Revenue Savings options;
- (4) to approve the £26.124m Capital Plan for 2007/08 (as shown in Appendix IV to these Minutes) including the prudential borrowing requirement and recommended projects as outlined above;
- (5) to note that the draft Capital Plans for 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 would be presented to Council in August 2007; and
- (6) to note that a report would be submitted to the Council in April making recommendations in respect of spend to save projects.

The Director of Education and Cultural Services and the Head of Service (Schools Estate) were heard in answer to Members' questions.

As an amendment, Councillor Robertson, seconded by Councillor McGregor, moved:-

That the recommendations of the report (shown as paragraphs (1) to (5) above) be approved. However, the Spend to Save monies of approximately £1.011 million should be included as part of the Capital Programme which was submitted by the Corporate Management Team.

Furthermore, this Council should establish a Sub-Committee to consider, approve, monitor and review the bids submitted by departments with a view to assessing the projected savings over a timescale of 5 to 10 years to ensure that each bid recoups at least 60% of the capital invested.

On a vote being taken, 6 Members voted for the amendment and 10 for the motion which was accordingly declared carried.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) ESTIMATES 2007/2008

A report was submitted by the Acting Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services (Housing and Regeneration Services) making recommendations in respect of the HRA Estimates and rent levels for 2007/2008 and HRA Prudential Reserves for 2007/2008.

Having thanked all those officers involved in the preparation of the HRA Estimates, Councillor Flynn, seconded by Councillor Rooney, moved:-

There have been significant improvements made over recent years to ensure that rent payers in West Dunbartonshire receive a quality service at an affordable price.

During 2006/2007 the Council was 10th lowest (12th lowest in 2005/2006) in the league table for average weekly rents. We will continue to keep our rent levels low.

The Labour Administration has continued to invest in our housing stock, and our level of void houses is continuing to fall.

Our pending file is now an average of £12,000, which is a significant improvement when compared to the previous Administration.

The surplus at 31 March 2007 is estimated at £2,719,610. We are required to maintain a Prudential Reserve of £611,660 and this leaves a surplus of £2,107,950. We have considered very carefully our obligation to prepare a balanced General Services budget and have recommended at item 3 that we transfer £1.5m to the General Fund. This leaves a balance of £607,950.

The Labour Administration will always listen to our tenants. The message from the recent Rent Setting meetings held on 5 December 2006 and 16 January 2007 was very clear. The tenants want improved services and are of the opinion that a rent increase is not required because of the level of HRA Reserve which should be used to freeze the rents. However, because of our obligation to approve a balanced General Services budget this is not possible.

The other message which came out loud and clear from the tenants was their desire to see the caretaker service re-instated especially within Multi Storey Flats. A considerable level of anti-social behaviour exists in some areas and the introduction of 5 more caretakers at the Multi Storey Flats should assist in combating such anti social behaviour. The additional caretakers would be engaged at Clydebank East, North Drumry, Westbridgend with 2 additional caretakers being engaged at Bellsmyre. The anticipated cost would be £100,000 which would be funded in the first year from the HRA Reserve.

We therefore propose to:-

1. A weekly rent increase of £0.99 on a 52 week basis, equating to 2.2% utilising £502,500 of the HRA Reserve;
2. Maintain the existing level of lock-up rentals;
3. The introduction of 5 additional caretakers at a total cost of £100,000 to be funded from the HRA Reserve; and
4. Retain the HRA Prudential Reserve of £617,110 which is slightly greater than the level recommended by Audit Scotland.

The Section Head (Resources), Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services was heard in response to Members' questions. At this point Councillor McLaughlin circulated a copy of the Opposition's proposed HRA budget to all those present.

As an amendment, Councillor McLaughlin, seconded by Councillor Robertson, moved:-

That the Opposition's HRA budget (as shown as Appendix V to these minutes be approved) resulting in a nil increase in the rent levels and a prudential reserve of £611,660.

In addition, an additional investment of £150,000 has been added to the HRA for an enhanced caretaker service as requested by the tenants.

On a vote being taken, 6 Members voted for the amendment and 10 for the motion which was accordingly declared carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Having heard Depute Provost McColl, the Council agreed to adjourn for a short period.

The meeting reconvened at 4.40 p.m. with all those Members on the Sederunt in attendance with the exception of Councillors Black, Brogan and McNair who arrived during the discussion on the undernoted item.

HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2007/2008

A report was submitted by the Acting Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services (Housing and Regeneration Services) seeking approval of the 2007/2008 Capital Programme.

Having heard Councillor Devine, it was noted that the issue of owner occupiers holding up certain types of housing repair work due to lack of grant monies, as referred to in paragraph 2.3 of the report, was still a concern and that he would meet with relevant officers to discuss these concerns.

Thereafter, the Council approved the HRA Capital Programme for 2007/2008 as detailed in Appendix VI to these minutes.

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE FUNDING FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES – ADDITIONAL GRANT FUNDING

A joint report was submitted by the Director of Social Work Services and the Director of Education and Cultural Services providing information on additional grant funding being provided to the Council by the Scottish Executive in 2006/07 for Children's Services and making recommendations thereon.

Having heard Councillor Casey and following discussion, the Committee agreed:-

- (1) to note the terms of the report; and
- (2) to approve the expenditure plan in paragraph 3.3 of the report, as follows:-

Education - small scale play equipment for pre-school and out of school.	£100,000
Social Work - foster carers / kinship carers for small scale equipment (including children affected by drug misuse in their families).	£30,000
Social Work – financial assistance to Child Protection Committee to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.	£30,000
Social Work/Education – staff training to promote capacity building and service continuity.	£20,000
Social Work/Education - Residential Care Costs (including spend to effect early rehabilitation).	£80,000
Social Work - Contribute to costs associated with service provided by Cornerstone/One Plus.	£68,000
Total	£328,000

CHANGES TO SERVICE SPOKESPERSONS, COMMITTEES AND OUTSIDE BODIES

The Council was invited to consider making changes to Service Spokespersons, Committees and Outside Bodies, etc.

Councillor Flynn, seconded by Councillor Maceira, moved:-

That this Council agrees to approve the changes to Service Spokespersons, Committees and Outside Bodies, etc as shown in Appendix VII to these minutes.

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

That the Council agrees to the Labour Administration's proposed changes with the exception of the following:-

- (1) that Councillor Margaret McGregor should chair of the Children's Services Committee;
- (2) that Councillor Iain Robertson should chair the Community Safety and Environmental Services Committee; and
- (3) that given the review of who should chair the Audit and Performance Review Committee, this Council agrees to the position being held by a citizen of West Dunbartonshire, not an elected Councillor.

On a vote being taken, 6 Members voted for the amendment and 10 for the motion which was declared carried.

The meeting closed at 5.05 p.m.