



SNP REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2010/2011



sustainability in tough times

VERSION 1.e



Foreword

2009 has proven to be a difficult time for everyone. Difficulties have faced our environment, our country and our economy. The next few years are likely to see the challenges facing the public sector to be the most difficult ever experienced since the late 1970s.

The UK treasury figures show that the UK is borrowing £178bn this year and that level is likely to continue for the foreseeable future to support current spending plans.

Public sector funding over the last 10 years has been sustained through rising tax revenues, strong employment and one off windfalls, such as the 3G phone licences, which generated over £22bn for the UK treasury. However that funding is now drying up and the Scottish Government has already seen a reduction of over £800m in its projected budget for this financial year as a consequence of the UK treasury cuts.

Our country needs strong leadership now and the looming election is causing political paralysis at a time where swift action is needed. As a council we must take action now and prepare for a radical and unprecedented shake up in the public sector.

It is likely that immediately after a UK election that the government, whoever it is, will call a mini budget, adding to our concerns. If this happens, this council may require to review our budget mid year if the government budget affects Scottish Finances.

This council has agreed 8 strategic priorities for the organisation and continue to explore better integration options with the NHS and other councils. These strategies will be essential in helping to bridge the current identified gaps for the forthcoming years.

Trading in Carbon will also add another dimension to our challenges and by exploring innovative solutions like a Leisure Trust we can work to develop first class facilities to tackle our local area's bad health record.

There are tough times ahead and we must make the tough decisions and find innovative solutions to ensure that services are sustained for the long term.

This budget gap might be one of the smallest in recent years, but it still presents a significant challenge to bridge. However despite these challenges West Dunbartonshire has achieved a balanced budget has continued to protect frontline services.

This budget also recognises the vast amount of work needed over the next year in particular. We have geared recommendations in a way that they link up and expand on existing work strands in order not to overstretch staff resources.

Sustainability is the new goal for the council, our economy and more importantly our environment.

Craig McLaughlin

Convenor of Corporate Services on behalf of the SNP group





FINANCE & RESOURCING

• Council Tax 2010/11

We have always criticised the Council tax system as it remains a most unfair and repressive tax system. The principle problem with council tax is that those who live in family sized houses stand to be the most affected by any increases, regardless of their income. People and families on the breadline (those who just earn above the benefits thresholds), are the most penalised by any increase in council tax levels.

The commitment in 2008 by the Cabinet Secretary John Swinney and the Scottish Government to provide finances, allowing Councils to freeze council tax levels has been continued for the third year in succession.

In difficult times tax rises are never welcomed. Given that the special fund for freezing the council tax remains in place, we are delighted to agree that for the 3rd year in a row Council Tax Levels are frozen.

1. Council agrees that council tax levels are FROZEN for the 3rd year in a row.

• Collection Rates

It is important that the council collects the money that it is owed. Despite the financial hardships faced by most in the area, staff have continued to increase our collection rates and they should be praised for their continual year on year improvements. It is also important that the council adopts a strong but sensitive approach to debt collection. We believe that this council sets the standard that other councils wish to aspire to – continuous improvement should be the ultimate goal and our collection teams are achieving this. The focus now needs to be the cost of collection which has risen over recent years.

The cost of collecting our council tax requires to be addressed. Recent trends have shown that on comparison with our family group of authorities our costs have shown increases.

2. We agree a Council tax collection rate for the coming year of 97%.
3. We further agree that the cost of collection of council tax will be kept under continual review.

Action Plan					
Department:	Corporate Services	Lead Officer:	Joyce White	Timescale:	Ongoing





Band D Properties & Water Rates

Despite the number of recent planning applications and building sites in the area the total number of houses in band D has only changed slightly. We believe that the number of Band D properties is likely to remain static, as most of the developments that are either in progress or due to be completed are of a relatively small scale.

Scottish Water has indicated that water and sewerage bills are likely to be frozen for the coming year.

4. We therefore agree a Band D equivalent of 34,207.

• Contingency Fund/Reserves

Audit Scotland recommends that the council has a general fund balance of around 2% of the council's total annual budget. The reserve is there to protect the council from serious unforeseen circumstances. The last few months are exactly the situation that our reserves are for.

As a council we are anticipating a rebate in VAT. We have purposefully under budgeted for this income as we are not yet sure what our rebate will be. The remainder of the rebate should be transferred to the council's reserves, in order to work towards restoring them.

We have been criticised for having an extremely low reserve. This position is likely to continue as economic uncertainty and central government funding cuts take affect. The CMT is currently drafting a report to the SFWG looking at how the prudential reserves target should be calculated.

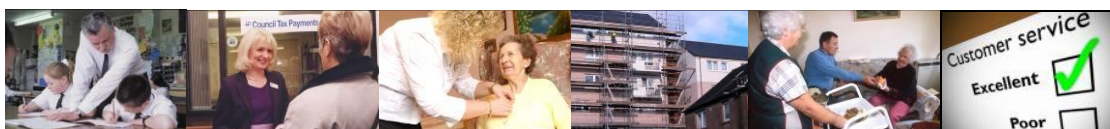
5. Council agrees that the CMT in conjunction with the Strategic Finance Working Group develops a revised reserves policy, taking account of requisitions and other circumstances.

Action Plan					
Department:	CMT	Lead Officer:	Chief Executive	Timescale:	Feb 2010

• Frontline Services & Sustainability

The underlying goal of this year's budget is to deliver continual sustainability for jobs and frontline services across the council.

As such this budget will be achieved in line with the Organisational Change policy by seeking to achieve savings in appropriate services through retraining, redeployment, early retirement and voluntary severances.





• Finance Settlement

Our Council, like others, has seen fit to begin budget preparations earlier than in previous years, in order to better prepare for the challenges we face. Obviously this delivers significant benefits for West Dunbartonshire as it enables a wider review of finances and budget pressures.

The actual finance settlement is dependant on the Scottish Parliament agreeing its published budget. This is due to be confirmed in early February. In the unlikely event that the council's settlement changes, a report should be prepared for the strategic finance working group.

Action Plan					
Department:	Corporate Services	Lead Officer:	Joyce White	Timescale:	March 2010

• Corporate Finance

Our council has a number of employees across the organisation who are responsible for the monitoring of budgets and financial spend. It is important, given the challenges facing the organisation, that a more strategic, rather than departmental view, is taken by these finance officers.

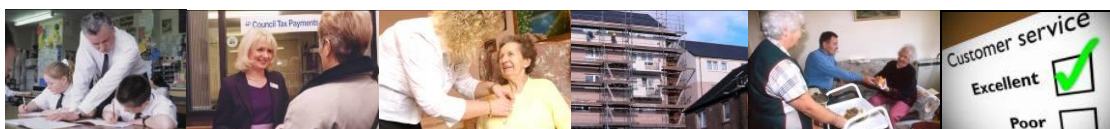
We should now be moving to a position where we seek to further improve the financial controls and processes within the organisation.

The recent debate over regarding the overspend within the Education budget highlighted the need for a corporate approach to financial accounting, monitoring and control.

In time we should examine the reporting lines for the new look Audit & Risk Section once the new structure has been embedded.

- 6. Council agrees that the CMT should investigate and conduct an options appraisal examining the transfer of staff who have a responsibility for departmental financial control and monitoring being transferred to the Corporate Services Department.**
- 7. Council also agrees that once the new service has bedded in that the CMT conduct an options appraisal for the reporting lines of the Audit, Risk & Security.**

Action Plan					
Department:	Chief Executive	Lead Officer:	David McMillan	Timescale:	April 2011





Budget Preparations 2011/15

It is critical that we continue to build on our long term financial planning processes. By preparing now for the challenges that are ahead we can work to minimise the impact on frontline services and jobs. We need to change the way we do things; the same old tired processes are not fit for the challenges that this organisation must tackle.

We need an approach that defies convention and focuses people on what matters and what's important. We believe that this organisation should develop a departmental ZERO BASED BUDGETING pilot for next year's budget and beyond.

Zero-based budgeting is a technique of planning and decision-making which reverses the working process of traditional budgeting. Most public sector agencies operate an incremental budget process. The weakness of this approach means that departmental managers are required to justify increases over the previous year's budget.

No reference is made to the previous level of expenditure. By contrast, in zero-based budgeting, every department function is reviewed comprehensively and all expenditures must be approved, rather than only increases. Zero-based budgeting requires the budget request be justified in complete detail by each division manager starting from the zero-base.

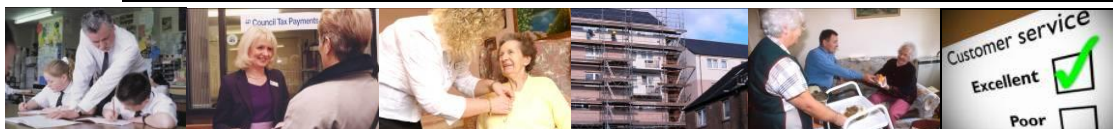
The zero-base is indifferent to whether the total budget is increasing or decreasing. The term "zero-based budgeting" is sometimes used in personal finance to describe the practice of budgeting every pound of income received, and then adjusting some part of the budget downward for every other part that needs to be adjusted upward.

Zero based budgeting also refers to the identification of necessary tasks and then finding resources to complete the tasks independent of current levels of funding.

It has to be noted though that Zero based budgeting is a more intensive process, which is why we are not recommending the entire budget is drafted in this way but every departmental budget process should be done at least once every 3 years using a zero based approach.

- 8. Council agrees that preparations for the 2011/12 budget and through to 2015 will adopt zero based budget pilots as part of our long term financial planning strategy.**
- 9. Council agrees that preparations will begin in February with briefings to the SMTs, and that appropriate training continues to be rolled out to all budget holders as part of the organisational development work plan.**

Action Plan					
Department:	All Directorates	Lead Officer:	Joyce White	Timescale:	March 2015





Prudential Borrowing

Since the relaxing of the regulations governing borrowing, previous administrations of this council have seen fit to borrow substantial sums of money. This strategy has had a serious negative impact on council finances. Firstly it costs this council in excess of £15m per annum to support its borrowing commitments. Secondly and more importantly, the money has not been applied in a strategic way, which has left the organisation with very little headroom to borrow to fund major capital projects, such as Primary School regeneration.

Over £1m has been set aside by this administration for prudential borrowing as part of the strategic plan for the schools estate. Continual prudential borrowing outside a strategic plan should not be considered without a full detailed options appraisal and regard to the impact on other projects.

Grants Budget

In recent months we have seen a rise in the size and number of grant applications which requires the budget to be reviewed to make more money available. This increase will bring the grants budget to its highest ever level and will ensure that community groups get the funding they need.

10. Council agrees to increase the community chest grants budget by a further £20,000.

Action Plan					
Department:	Corporate Services	Lead Officer:	Joyce White	Timescale:	April 2010

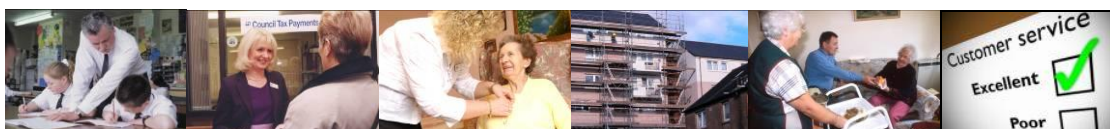
Spending Freeze

While the council always reviews its spending the need to offset the recent departmental overspends highlighted that the non essential spending lines within the budget are considerable.

Financial times are tight and therefore we believe that we need to continue that freeze to protect frontline services.

The CMT should draft a plan to determine the criteria for the non essential spending freeze. Committee agreed expenditure will be excluded.

11. Council agrees to continue the non essential spending freeze to achieve a target of £516,720.





CUSTOMER FIRST

• First Point Service

The diversity of this organisation means that it is very difficult to develop a single contact point that can deal with all enquiries.

The contact centre has gone a considerable way to laying the building blocks for a more integrated first point customer service centre.

Despite the benefits of the software and the high level of expertise of the staff, our contact centre still only deals with a fraction of our customer enquiries.

We still have numerous telephone numbers that customers are expected to navigate when dealing with the council. In order to improve our customer's experience of the council we must examine closely the point of contact routes and seek to streamline them into a new First Point Centre.

At the moment all calls routed to our main council number receive a switchboard and routing service. If they call our contact centre they receive a far superior service which is capable of dealing with a high proportion of enquiries at the first point.

It is important that we now develop and implement a new first point customer service standard that allows the contact centre to take over as the main point of contact for incoming calls. In addition further work is required to integrate out of hours services, housing repairs, emergency repairs and homelessness.

It is clear however that there are substantial infrastructure weaknesses that are preventing the council from realising significant service and financial improvements. We have set aside £20,000 from general services to start this work.

- 12. Council agrees in principle to develop a first point service centre for call handling.**
- 13. Council agrees that a further report detailing infrastructure and logistical issues is brought to the Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee by September 2010.**

Action Plan					
Department:	Corporate Services	Lead Officer:	Joyce White	Timescale:	September 2010





ENVIRONMENT

• Recycling – Internal Waste

The challenges that are ahead for our planet are huge and require all of us to make an effort to change. As the largest employer and organisation in the area we must lead by example.

As a Council we generate huge volumes of waste from our offices and facilities. As we ask householders to do more we must ensure that we play our part also.

14. Council agrees that it should strive to cut waste produced by 50% within 3 years.

15. Current levels of waste being produced should be detailed from each facility and provide a benchmark to measure success in achieving real reductions.

Action Plan					
Department:	All Directorates	Lead Officer:	Chief Executive	Timescale:	March 2013

• Green Dream

Over the last few years the council has embarked on a “GREEN DREAM” – which is a month long programme of events highlighting the environmental issues facing us all.

Schools have featured heavily in this event and have provided some of the best examples of what we can do to raise awareness of environmental issues.

At last year’s Star Awards, the “green dream team” won an award in recognition for their work.

16. Council agrees to continue with the Green Dream and sets aside £5,000 for the programme for 2010.

Action Plan					
Department:	All Directorates	Lead Officer:	Chief Executive	Timescale:	June 2010





INFRASTRUCTURE

• Roads & Footways

Without doubt the recent weather has provided significant challenges for local authorities up and down the country. Even as the ice melts, new challenges are coming to light, from flooding to damaged footways and roads.

We believe that we need to take swift action to repair the damage to the footways and carriageways caused by the snow and ice.

We have therefore set aside an additional one off in year sum of £150,000 for repairs to damaged roads and paths.

17. Council agrees that an additional £150,000 is allocated to repair roads and footways damaged by the recent weather.

Action Plan					
Department:	HEED	Lead Officer:	Elaine Melrose	Timescale:	Immediate

• Regeneration

Regeneration is the key to unlocking the potential within communities. Despite the current financial climate, the prospect of future regeneration activity throughout our council area continues to be bright.

Projects such as the Clydebank Waterfront, Town Hall, Civic Quarter & Shopping Centre through to the Kippen Dairy, Mitchell Way & Dumbarton Harbour show the breadth of future developments.

Regeneration remains a key priority for this Council and Administration and we should make every effort to ensure strong leadership and financial support when it's needed.

18. Council agrees to work with all partners, agencies and funding bodies to secure and maximise regeneration opportunities for West Dunbartonshire.

Action Plan					
Department:	HEED	Lead Officer:	Elaine Melrose	Timescale:	On going





Leisure Trust

Trusts are increasingly being used by public sector agencies as a vehicle to deliver frontline public services.

The main advantages of adopting a trust model is the freedom of the trust to apply to funding streams and gain tax breaks which the public sector would be denied from accessing.

Numerous councils, including Glasgow, have now adopted the trust model for a number of services ranging from swimming pools to libraries and art galleries.

The sustainability of both the service and the jobs of the staff in these uncertain times are likely to significantly improve if they are run by such a trust.

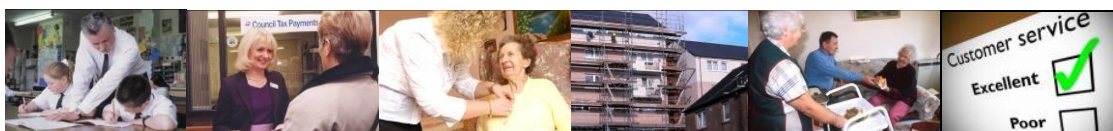
While some preparatory work has been done on the requirements of creating a trust, the council is yet to make a firm decision to develop a trust.

The new carbon trading agenda has already shown that Council's, whose leisure centres are held within a trust, are showing significantly better carbon footprints than those whose aren't.

While this option will not deliver any immediate savings for this financial year, it will help develop towards delivering future savings.

- 19. Council agrees to continue to fully explore the options of a Leisure Trust.**
- 20. Full Consultation with staff and unions will be an integral part of any discussions and appraisal.**
- 21. A further report to the HEED committee will be drafted for the March committee.**

Action Plan					
Department:	HEED	Lead Officer:	Elaine Melrose	Timescale:	March 2010





• Review of Lettings and Halls

At the present time we still continue to have mixed policies regarding hall lets and discounts. It is important that the council has a single transparent policy covering all lets across the entire council.

Fairness and transparency are essential to ensure that all community groups understand our letting policy and that it delivers equality.

- 22. Council agrees that there is a need to replace our letting policy covering all council facilities used by community groups.**
- 23. The policy will set out the discount schemes and qualifying criteria.**
- 24. The policy will cover all community facilities equally.**
- 25. A draft policy will be brought before the HEED Committee for approval.**

Action Plan					
Department:	HEED	Lead Officer:	Elaine Melrose	Timescale:	Summer 2010





LEARNING & COMMUNITY

• Education Review

The SNP were recently criticised as a result of the Chief Executive commissioning an external independent person to review our Education Department. The review is due to be completed soon, but early indications are that there is considerable headroom for structural changes to the way the service is delivered, without affecting teacher numbers or frontline services.

The SNP believe that the £12,000 is money well spent, and we have tasked the review with saving a minimum of £500,000 from service efficiencies found within the Education Department's £94million budget in the 2010/11 financial year.

We expect to see a much higher saving generated when the details of the work are reported to Council, however even this modest minimum saving represents excellent value for money, giving us a return on our investment in excess of 4000% in one year alone.

• Review of Free school meals to teachers

The option to stop providing free school meals to teachers seems like a savings option that is neither frontline nor essential and should be taken.

However further research highlighted that teachers are provided a meal in return for supervising the canteen during lunchtimes.

Head teachers, particularly in secondary schools detailed that if this option was taken that alternative supervision arrangements would have to be put in place in schools.

However we feel that the current cost seems prohibitive and requires further scrutiny to ensure that best value is being delivered by the current arrangements. We must ensure that the goodwill of the teachers is not affected by any review.

26. Council agrees to review the free school meals provided to teachers to ensure best value is being delivered.

Action Plan					
Department:	Education	Lead Officer:	Terry Lanagan	Timescale:	Summer 2010





Nursery Charge Transitional Scheme

The recent decision of the council in November to revise charges for non statutory nursery provision has caused concern among some parents.

Due to the complexity of the charging system within nurseries it was difficult to take into account the impact of the increases on every individual family.

Scrapping the charges at this time would make the service unsustainable in the long term, however a method can be achieved that protects people who face sharp financial increases.

Therefore a transitional relief scheme will be created which will ease the financial burden faced by some families.

27. Council agrees to establish a transitional relief scheme for nursery charges.

28. Council agrees to delegate to the Directors of Education and Corporate Services to draft the detail and administration of the scheme.

29. It should however remain within the allotted budget of £50,000 and should be open to those who face difficulties as a result of the increased charges.

30. The scheme will operate for a 1 year transitional period and seek to reduce any subsidies paid over the next 1 year.

Action Plan					
Department:	Education	Lead Officer:	Terry Lanagan	Timescale:	March 2010





Community Outreach & Support

Maximising the public pound is essential in times of financial difficulty. Being smarter at how we spend our resources is essential to ensure the best value for every pound we spend.

Our current community engagement work is carried out across the council on a departmental basis and lacks a strategic approach.

This needs to change – we provide services through Education, Social Work, Policy and Community Planning to name a few. We need a more joined up approach.

- 31. Council agrees to a wide scale review of how we deliver community support and outreach on a council wide basis.**
- 32. The review will seek to maximise services and remove duplication.**
- 33. The review will seek views from partners and community groups on how a new service should look. (should also include the CPP)**

Action Plan					
Department:	CMT	Lead Officer:	Chief Executive	Timescale:	March 2011

Social Work Information Sharing

This Council's Social Work department is among the best in Scotland, and we feel that our recognised high quality of care and support can be further enhanced through better information sharing and communication with our partners, particularly in health.

- 34. Council agrees to a review of information sharing procedures between the Social Work department and our partners with reports to come to relevant Committees mid year with recommendations for improvements.**

Action Plan					
Department:	Social Work	Lead Officer:	Ann Ritchie	Timescale:	Summer 2010





Police Resources

In 2008 the SNP provided an additional £200,000 for 8 extra community police officers, despite continual opposition from the Labour party.

Two years on we are now seeing the direct benefits of that new innovative partnership, with some of the lowest crime levels that our communities have seen in decades.

It is evident that through direct additional contributions to Strathclyde Police, we have seen increased police numbers in the street having a positive impact on crime in our communities.

Indeed this policy has been so successful that the Community Planning Partnership has agreed that it will now fund the project over the longer term.

The council also currently provides £100,000 for police overtime to target hotspots. However after recent meetings with senior police officers, it has been agreed that this could be better spent by providing a more strategic approach and more full time officers.

By allowing Police the operational tasking of the CCTV van, the police analyst and the additional resources allocated by this council we will enable the police to maximise their impact on crime levels across West Dunbartonshire.

Only by working with police and providing direct on the ground resources will we sustain the continual downward trend in crime figures across our communities.

35. Council agrees to a closer working relationship with Strathclyde Police.

36. Council also agrees to re-provision of a package of measures to support our anti-social behaviour objectives, including tasking of the CCTV van, police analyst and disclosure officers, including £100,000 allocated to support up to 4 additional police officers.

Action Plan					
Department:	CMT	Lead Officer:	Chief Executive	Timescale:	April 2010

