

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council : 12 February 2009

**Subject :- Budget Priorities Citizens' Panel Survey, December 2008
Budget Public Forum Meetings – 13, 14 & 15 January 2009**

1. Purpose of Report

This report provides members with information on:

- the key priorities identified in the WD Citizens' Panel Budget Priorities Survey
- points raised by community representatives and members of the public at the public forum meetings held to discuss the Council's revenue budget for 2009/10 and
- points raised via the Council's budget website proforma.

2. Background

- 2.1** A Citizens' Panel Survey early in December sought feedback on budget priorities (based on areas put forward for savings in last year's budget savings options, as detailed current proposals were not available at the point of survey).
- 2.2** Meetings to discuss the budget setting process also took place with Trade Unions and Elected Members.
- 2.3** Community representatives and individual citizens were also offered the option of asking questions and commenting on issues relating to the Council's budget and budget savings options for 2009/10 via three public meetings held on 13th, 14th and 15th January in Dalmuir Community Centre, Alexandria Community Centre and Dumbarton Burgh Hall respectively. Information on the meetings and the budget savings options were also posted on the Council's website with an opportunity to return a proforma outlining any questions and priorities.
- 2.4** A total of 105 people attended the meetings. The Dalmuir meeting was attended by 45 members of the public, The Alexandria and Dumbarton meetings by 30 each. There was a mix of individuals and those who were representing wider community organisations. Details of the meeting arrangements and publicity are attached as appendix 1.
- 2.5** The meetings opened with an introduction from the Leader of the Council and a presentation on the budget situation from the Head of Finance. The main part of each meeting then took the form of an open discussion, during which many of the attendees took the opportunity to contribute. Attendees were also given the opportunity to make comments on a questionnaire which could

be returned at the end of the meetings, or by post in the following days. Priorities and issues from the meetings and proformas (40 of the latter received from meetings and 9 from the website) are set out in paragraphs 3.1 – 3.4.

3. Main Issues

WD Citizens' Panel Budget Priorities Survey

3.1 Services scoring **highest in terms of being a 'top priority'** among Panel members have a strong focus on:

Environmental services, especially **winter gritting (89%) road and pavement repair (82%)** and **refuse collection (82%)**

Economic development in the form of **bringing jobs to the area (88%)**

Social services for vulnerable adults and children, especially **residential homes (79%)**, **care and protection of children and young people (78%)**, **home care services (77%)** and **day care services (77%)**

Some interesting differences in priorities between residents living in regeneration areas and those in the rest of West Dunbartonshire emerged. See **Appendix 2** for more detailed information on priorities.

Feedback from Budget Public Forum Meetings (including website proformas)

3.2 Three issues which stimulated a high level of discussion at the Budget Public Forum meetings and in the proformas were:

- The proposed closure of Lennox EE&CC and amalgamation with Auchnacraig EE&CC
- The proposed closure of Garshake Nursery
- The proposed closure of the Vale of Leven Swimming Pool

3.2.1 Education Related

- **Proposed closure of Lennox EE&CC and amalgamation with Auchnacraig EE&CC:** Concerns were voiced at the meeting followed up by 9 questions and 18 comments in favour of retaining the Lennox EE&CC. Some key reasons included: the high quality of pre school education; favourable Inspection reports; support to families and children (including working parents and vulnerable families); fears that amalgamation would result in too large a centre/overcrowding; Lennox provides a good layout and great outdoors space; loss of under three nursery would be significant.
- **Garshake Nursery**
 - Flagship Nursery. Concerns were voiced about potential closure and loss of services. Clarified two corrections: number of staff affected 13 and proposed closure date August.

- **Question:** Query the savings figures of £168,958 (last year proposed saving from closure was only £81,000). Request detailed breakdown of the £168,958.
- **Response from Executive Director of Education:** *Garshake Nursery is recognised as first class. However it is heavily subsidised for a small number of children and is not a statutory provision. Costs described are accurate.*
- **Question:** Has an exercise been carried out to see how the gap between income and running costs can be bridged e.g. raising fees?
Response from Executive Director of Education: *raising fees would not bridge the gap (as amounts needed would not be affordable for parents).*
- **Question:** Do Council Staff get subsidised childcare at Garshake Nursery?
Response from Executive Director of Education: *it is at the same cost as other Council childcare provision, but cheaper than some private provision.*
- **Question:** Have there been any discussions with private sector about purchasing the nursery?
- **Response from Executive Director of Education:** *No discussions have taken place with private sector.*
- **Mobile Creche Facilities at Auchnacraig** - concern about proposed closure
- **Out of School Care** - need to keep arrangements for working parents.
- **Dalmonach Community Centre, proposed closure:** the Centre serves three housing estates and is very well used. Closure would have a significant impact on the community.
Question: Has an impact assessment been carried out and what would happen to the users?
Response from Executive Director of Education: *if this option were to be selected, work would be done to minimise the impact and relocate the services currently available in Dalmonach.*
- **Proposed closure of St Martin's Primary School:**
 - Question and discussion about potential for sale and capital receipt. No decisions have been made on this.
 - **Proposal to transfer 58 pupils from St Martin's to St Mary's** – opinion this result in too many pupils and will incur additional costs.
Response from Executive Director of Education: *St Mary's would easily accommodate this number and equipment would be transferred – the only additional costs would be for transport*
- **School Budgets:** it is getting more and more difficult for schools to find ways of making savings.

3.2.2 Social Care

- **Day Care – Older People** – concern that if one centre is closed, others may not be able to take up the slack.
- **Homecare Services – Review of Shopping Tasks including collection of pension and prescriptions.** Clarification requested.

Response from Executive Director of Social Work & Health: Emphasis is on using skilled staff for personal care and looking at other ways of doing practical tasks e.g. pension payments could be done more efficiently.

- **Question re Proposals to introduce charges for Housing Support Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities** - fear that Adults with Learning Disabilities will lose out.

Response from Executive Director of Social Work & Health: with work being done on maximisation of benefits, it is not expected that the introduction of a £20 per week charge will be problematic for service users.

- **Question on increase charges for Blue Badges and Community Alarms and charges or reduction in Special Needs equipment:**
- **Response** from Executive Director of Social Work & Health: Savings have to come from somewhere and these proposals are considered to be manageable for service users.

- **Disability:** concern about equipment for children with disabilities
- **Question Boquhanran Care Home – proposed closure:** where will current residents go?

Response from Executive Director of Social Work & Health: WDC get good reports on standard of care in homes, but the physical structure of buildings is inadequate for current standards. The cost of care in our homes is also higher than in private sector. The future points to a private/public partnership and to keeping people in their own homes longer with investment in homecare. The current residents of Boquhanran would be worked with individually to find the right solution for them.

- **Charges for services for elderly:** concern that charges could result in putting older people at risk and concerns about levels of staffing to ensure care is adequate.
- **Closure of Old People's Homes:** hope that Care for the Elderly will have a future.

3.2.3 Leisure & Sport

- **Proposed closure of Vale of Leven Pool and Gym:** concerns voiced at meeting and in subsequent proformas. Points included:
 - Pool and gym well used and important for people's health
 - Meadow Centre, Dumbarton, is not a viable alternative for swimming as it is a leisure pool only and the Meadow Centre Gym is full to capacity
 - People wouldn't travel to Dumbarton or Clydebank
 - Loss of classes e.g. aerobics
 - PHIN Club – swimming for disabled – has been going for 27 years. If Vale pool closes it would end and that would be a great loss.
 - Seniors would pay something to retain swimming
 - Loss of Swimming lessons (100 on waiting list) would be a great loss
 - Cut in staffing/hours would be preferable to closure
 - Gym facilities available VOL Academy, but much better to have pool and gym located together

- **Sports and Leisure Facilities/Implementation of Sports Strategy** important to promote health and well being. Issues about cost of facilities in new schools and 'bank' of hours.

3.2.4 Housing, Economic & Environmental Services Related

- **Gritting Footways:** retain footways gritting for safety of elderly and the general public.
- **School Crossing Patrol – Removal of Service Provision:** concern about this on safety grounds. Certain areas highlighted including Middleton Street, Park Street, Hill Street (for children leaving Christie Park).
- **Parks/savings on grass cutting:** this is already poor and further cuts would make it worse.
Response from Executive Director of HE&ED: focus of cutbacks would be on the lowest impact areas.
- **Introduce charges for Care of Gardens (single charge £60 p.a.) –**
Question: would Greenspace lose jobs?
Response from Executive Director of HE&ED: No. Charges would be introduced.
- **Innovation Centre:** With better promotion and marketing it could train people and develop jobs in times of economic pressures.
Response from Leader of Council: The Centre has not been generating new business and opportunities hoped for.
Response from Executive Director of HE&ED: the intention would be to replace this with a grant scheme and develop arrangements which would provide a better outcome.

3.2.5 Other

- **Question: Why doesn't Council raise Council Tax** and prevent cuts, secure jobs and services?
Response from Leader of Council: the Council Tax freeze has provided £1.3 million additional sum (equivalent to 3%). To gain any benefit, Council would have to raise Council Tax by 4%.
- **Question Housing Revenue Account:** will money be taken from it for the budget gap?
Response: Assurance given by Covenor of Finance that this will not happen.
- **Question Community Planning Budget:** is any of this available?
Response from Chief Executive, clarified that it is a separate and currently work is on-going to assess projects.
- **Question Clydebank Shopping Centre:** why don't Council sell their share?
Response clarified that it is currently in the Council's interests to maintain its share and collect the annual income.
- **Question Capital Receipts for Land:** How will Council get capital receipts for land and do it quickly? (Bank Street – interest declared by questioner).

Response: Council must not sell at low values. However, this year capital receipts are likely to be lower because of the economic climate.

- **Police** – funded from central budgets, but are some communities benefiting more than others?

3.3 An overview of Proforma Priorities is laid out in Appendix 3

Suggested Savings Options

3.4 One or two people put forward suggestions for savings/income generation. These included:

- West Dunbartonshire Newsletter
- Subsidy to Staff Canteen
- Convenors Hospitality
- Charges for breakfast clubs (for working parents)
- Policy and Performance suggested savings options where there is no impact on service
- Carers Centres: one opinion proffered on Carers Centres being wasted money. (not in Savings Options).
- Cut mobile Creche and tender it to a private company

3.5 It was noted for future reference that, while it was good to have the information on proposed savings options available at the meeting, it would be preferable to have had prior notice of and access to the detailed information (not just on the Council website).

4. **Personnel Issues**

4.1 There are no personnel issues.

5. **Financial Implications**

5.1 Any financial implications will relate to the costs of any proposals which are pursued.

6. **Risk Analysis**

6.1 Any risks will relate to the proposals which are pursued.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The Citizens' Panel Survey has indicated broad priorities to be taken into account when setting the budget.

7.2 The Budget Forum has raised both some specific and some general points to be taken into account in setting the budget.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1** Council is requested to give consideration to the findings of the Citizens' Panel Budget Priorities Survey.
- 8.2** Council is requested to give consideration to the points noted above when making its decision on the budget for 2009/10 and to the priorities listed from the proformas.

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David McMillan
Chief Executive
Date: 4 February 2009

Person to Contact: Anne Clegg, Policy Officer, (01389) 737177

Appendix 1: Details of meeting arrangements and publicity
Appendix 2: Information on priorities
Appendix 3: Overview of Proforma Priorities

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

Wards Affected: All wards

Appendix 1

2009-10 Budget – Public Forum

Three meetings were held, one in Dalmuir Community Centre on Tuesday 13th January, one in Alexandria Community Centre on Wednesday 14th January and the third in Dumbarton Burgh Hall on Thursday 15th January. Meetings were widely publicised, with 1500 A3 posters and 1500 A4 flyers going out to a wide range of people and places including:

Included in distribution:

- Over 700 Community Groups
- Agencies including West Dunbartonshire Partnership
- Churches
- Citizens' Advice Bureaux
- Council Offices, Garshake
- Council Offices, Rosebery
- Community Centres
- Fast Food outlets
- Health Centres and Health Groups
- Housing & Social Work Offices
- Libraries
- Registration Offices
- Schools (secondary and primary)
- Supermarkets
- WDC Halls
- WDC Main Offices Receptions
- Youth Workers

Quarter page adverts were placed in the local press and information was posted on the WDC Website, with the option of completing a proforma outlining priorities and/or posing questions.

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

Members of the Community Participation Committee, including community representatives, were also given advance notice of the meetings.

In addition a global e-mail was sent to elected members and staff.

Arrangements for the meetings provided an accessible venue, a loop system and signage, a public address system and information packs in large print.

A crèche and assistance with transport were available on request.

WD Citizens' Panel Budget Priorities Survey Findings

Council Services Rated as 'Top Priority': Top Quartile

	Regeneration Areas	Rest of West Dunbartonshire	West Dunbartonshire
Winter gritting of roads and pavements	87%	90%	89%
Bringing jobs to the area	86%	89%	88%
Repair and maintenance of roads and pavements	80%	83%	82%
Refuse collection	74%	83%	80%
Residential homes for older people	78%	79%	79%
Children and Young People, Care and Protection	87%	75%	78%
Home Care/Home Help Services	74%	78%	77%
Day care services for older people	78%	77%	77%
Street Lighting	69%	73%	72%
Street cleaning	64%	75%	72%
Residential and Housing Support for people with Learning Disabilities, Physical Disabilities and Mental Health Problems	77%	69%	72%
School crossing patrols	66%	71%	70%
Road safety	68%	69%	69%
Council Tax Collection	62%	70%	67%
Services for Children with Disabilities and their Carers	70%	66%	67%
Short Break Respite Services for Carers	52%	63%	60%
Flood Protection	43%	65%	59%
Meals on Wheels	63%	58%	59%

Council Services Rated as 'Top Priority': Second Quartile

	Regeneration Areas	Rest of West Dunbartonshire	West Dunbartonshire
Waste disposal and recycling	59%	57%	58%
Sheltered Housing Warden Service	51%	57%	55%
Anti Social Investigation and Support Team (ASIST)	71%	44%	52%
Disabled Access to Council Buildings	64%	46%	51%
Environmental Health	47%	52%	51%
Network Support (supporting children and young people with additional support services)	53%	50%	51%
Supporting the unemployed into work	47%	50%	49%
Services for adults with learning disabilities, mental health and addictions	54%	47%	49%
Training young people for employment	43%	50%	48%
Educational Early Intervention	45%	44%	44%
Community Alarms Service	42%	41%	41%
Out of Hours Noise Enforcement Team	46%	38%	41%
Play Areas for Children School Breakfast Clubs	34%	42%	40%
Town centre improvements	39%	40%	40%
Care of parks	38%	39%	39%
Libraries	41%	38%	39%
Care of cemeteries	33%	40%	38%
Community Wardens	41%	37%	38%

Council Services Rated as 'Top Priority': Third Quartile

	Regeneration Areas	Rest of West Dunbartonshire	West Dunbartonshire
Pre-Five Services	38%	37%	37%
Pest Control Treatment Services	28%	41%	37%
Mobile CCTV	39%	32%	35%
Environmental Improvements	31%	35%	34%
Community Centres	36%	33%	34%
Welfare Rights Advice and Information Services	33%	34%	34%
Grants to community groups and voluntary organisations	27%	37%	34%
Assisting local businesses	36%	32%	33%
Concessionary charges for sport and leisure activities	44%	28%	33%
Outdoor access/core paths/footpaths and cyclepaths	31%	33%	32%
Special uplifts	30%	31%	31%
Youth Work	29%	31%	31%
Sport and leisure facilities	23%	34%	30%
Community Support Services (Community Development)	27%	29%	29%
Registration of births, marriages and deaths	29%	29%	29%
School Supported Study Initiatives	20%	31%	28%
Addiction Services	36%	25%	28%
Specialist Teaching Services	23%	28%	26%

Council Services Rated as 'Top Priority': Bottom Quartile

	Regeneration Areas	Rest of West Dunbartonshire	West Dunbartonshire
Adult Learning and Literacies	24%	26%	26%
Outdoor sports pitches	29%	23%	25%
Care of gardens scheme	24%	25%	24%
Planning and building control	25%	22%	23%
Pulse Diversionary Activities for young people	25%	22%	23%
Outdoor Education Services	22%	18%	20%
Mobile Library	18%	18%	18%
Sports Development Services	17%	17%	17%
Biodiversity and Nature Conservation	9%	18%	15%
Public Halls	14%	14%	14%
Tourism and events	9%	14%	13%
Neighbourhood Mediation Service	9%	11%	11%
Council Events Programme (e.g. Gala Days, Pipe Band Championship)	10%	8%	9%
Festive Lighting and Trees	4%	10%	8%
Countryside Ranger	3%	9%	7%
Arts & Cultural Services	6%	7%	6%
Musical Instruction Services	8%	4%	5%

Budget Proforma Priorities: Priority 1

Early years education/support for families (mostly in support of retaining Lennox EE&CC)	18
Education and Lifelong Learning	10
Safe and Strong Communities/Anti-Social Behaviour	4
Education Early Intervention/Special Needs	3
Regeneration of Local Economy/Retaining Jobs	2
Retain Vale of Leven Swimming Pool	2
Health & Well being	1
Retain Gritting Footways	1
Protect Services for Youth	1
Sustainable Environment	1

Budget Proforma Priorities: Priority 2

Nursery Early Years Provision (issues about proposed closure of Lennox EE&CC)	14
Clean, safe, strong, healthy communities	5
Social Work/Community Care/Care and Homes for the Elderly	4
Health/Well Being/Happy & Healthy	4
Education and Lifelong Learning	4
Regeneration and Local Economy/Community	2
Anti Social Behaviour	1
Arts Budget	1
An Improving Council	1
Highly Motivated & satisfied Council workforce	1
Making current jobs more economical	1
Recycling (not having to access recycling yards)	1
Retain 4 sheltered housing officers	1
Retain School Patrol Crossing	1
Setting Youth on the Right Road	1

Budget Proforma Priorities: Priority 3

Early Years Education/Intervention – Support to vulnerable families, no closures of Early Education and Children’s Centres, Community Facilities, Nurseries, Creches (some specifically in context of Lennox EE&CC)	10
Health Wellbeing/Sport	4
Regeneration of Local Community (one specifically Faifley)	3
Social Work	2
An Improving Council	1
Education and Lifelong Learning	1
Cut mobile Creche and tender it to a private company	1
Make savings by updating antiquated payment systems	1
Policing	1
Redeployment of people affected by job cuts	1
Road Maintenance	1
Safe and Strong Communities	1
School Crossing Patrol	1
Sustainable Environment	1
Utilising Volunteers	1
West Dunbartonshire image and ‘kerb appeal’	1
Youth Clubs (must be kept local)	1

Budget Proforma Priorities: Priority 4

Safe and Healthy Environments	6
Closure of Lennox EE&CC/Choice of provision	3
An Improving Council	2
Health and Well Being	2
All taxes should be related to ability to pay	1
Care of the Elderly	1
Continued investment in new school building programme	1
Good clean, safe housing	1
Lack of teachers for Deaf Children	1
No school amalgamations	1
No relocation of Playdrome to riverside due to flood risk	1
Policing	1
Sustainable Environments	1