

Briefing on . . . Local Government Budgets

Local Government Budgets

Introduction

The Scottish Government budget will be resolved quickly. Local authorities (and health boards) will soon have confirmation of their budget settlements for 2009-10 and will then confirm their plans for the year. Most authorities are proposing to set their budgets on February 12th. Authorities have had notice of their provisional allocation. They have used these figures to inform their current planning. This briefing gives branches initial guidance on how to respond to budget cuts. A more detailed campaign pack will follow

Impact on jobs and services

Although the full impact of the budgets is not clear this is going to be a difficult year for public services. The 2010-12 budgets are expected to be more difficult. UNISON needs to monitor the impact of these proposals closely in order to coordinate our response. There will be job losses. Budgets will be "salami sliced":

vacancies will not be filled, less people will be doing more work. This means that it is vital that branches are organised to proactively campaign in their local areas. Branches need to collate information on job losses, vacancy freezes, plans for outsourcing and service cuts and closures.

Impact of the Recession

Budgets are not just under pressure from the level of settlement and the council tax freeze. The business rate cuts agreed with the Tories mean less money. Income from land sales is falling because of the falling value of property/land. The recession also has an impact on people spending so that services that charge may find their income

going down as people economise. Other services will see an increase in demand, not just those who provide direct support to people suffering from job losses like welfare rights. Libraries are noting an upsurge in users for IT and books as people seek out ways to cut their own costs. Leisure centres may see people moving away from private gyms.

Coordinating our campaign

Branches will have been in discussions with their employers about their proposals. Send details of any proposed service cuts or job losses to the P and I team as soon as possible (k.sillars@unison.co.uk). This will support the development of

campaign packs. Branches should be collating information and organising meetings to share this information with members. This should include, job losses, vacancies, freezes and reorganisation of work and services. Authorities may also be

Contacts list:

Kay Sillars
k.sillars@unison.co.uk

Dave Watson
d.watson@unison.co.uk

@ The P&I Team,
14 West Campbell Street,
Glasgow G2 6RX
Tel 0845 355 0845
Fax 0141-331 1203

planning to outsource services. This needs to be closely monitored. If a campaign will be necessary in your area then start

Single Outcome Agreement

The Single Outcome Agreements for individual authorities give a guide to the spending priorities in your area. They also show which services are most at risk. See briefing 196. The SOAs can also be a campaigning tool particularly if cuts contradict the targets in

contacting local service users groups in preparation for building support for campaigns.

the SOA . For example Angus has set a target of increasing the number of people volunteering through the Volunteer Centre in Angus by 25% it could be argued that any cuts in its budget would mean the councils target could not be met.

Campaigning locally

Well-organised and focused branches have been successful in fighting cuts. It is essential to develop a branch strategy. Do not start writing press releases and designing leaflets until you have a strategy in place. Act early don't wait for the issue to gather momentum

- Most proposals originate from managers and consultants so make sure councillors, (MSPs and MPs) know about the proposals and our case against them
- Be ready, gather evidence to challenge the argument that cuts are "inevitable"

or "the only way to balance the budget"

- Members may be divided and confused about what they believe is in their long-term interest. A regular flow of information, analysis of the issues and full explanation of the implications of alternative policies is essential
- Keep service users informed of the plans and our campaign against them. Service cuts and closures are unpopular make it clear that this is what plans mean.

Developing a plan

When your employer produces plans read through the detailed proposals. Work out which service/s are affected directly and indirectly.

- Gather information in order to inform and consult members.

- Collate and discuss key points in proposals
- Decide on the make up of your negotiating/campaigning team

Key information checklist

There will be differing issues depending on your own local conditions.

- What is being proposed?
- What other organisations will be involved in delivering the services?

- How does this match with the Single Outcome Agreement
- What are the proposed cost savings?
- How many jobs will be cut?

- What are the costs incurred, are these realistic? Are they taking into account all costs?
- What problems have others encountered with similar plans?

Key concerns: job losses, relocation, changes in terms and conditions, deskilling, stress de-motivation of staff. There will be others in your workplace depending on the detail of the proposal.

Further info

Briefing 196
SOAs
<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/signgleoutcomeagreements196.pdf>

Briefing 177
on fighting
privatisation
<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/externalisation.html>

Briefing 192
2009-10
budget
<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/scotlandbudget2008.html>

Briefing 172
concordat
<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/briefing172concordat.pdf>

Briefing 195
Health board
budgets
<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/healthspending195.html>

Organising your campaign

Branches should inform and consult with members about the proposals as soon as possible. Branches could also consider joint meetings other workplace unions to ensure a coordinated approach. It is important to use a variety of communications methods to contact members: branch meetings, newsletters notice boards etc. This will be an excellent opportunity to recruit new members so ensure you inform as many staff (and not just members) as possible of concerns about any proposals and are prepared to deal with membership enquiries. Will the local media be interested? They are valuable tool in informing members and users of our case.

Do not just say no: offer alternative proposals. Staff are well placed to put together proposals for genuine efficiency improvements in service delivery. Consult with members to draw up alternative proposals and research other solutions.

Information gathering

It is important to research and collate information to inform members about how the changes impact on them but it is also important to look for information that will help you build wider support in your communities. People need to know that their services will not just stay the same and if there are less jobs in the area other businesses will be affected.

Contacting the media

Some basic lines for the media/publicity:
Leaving vacancies unfilled is not a soft option. It means cuts in services. Services are already under pressure. That pressure is increasing as people turn to public services to support them in the recession.
Less staff means more cuts. Increased pressure on services mean less service, longer waiting times, and increased risk of corner-cutting and mistakes.
The difference between cuts in 'Backroom' and 'Frontline' staff is artificial. Cuts in admin staff mean more admin work piled onto 'frontline' staff, and less direct service to the public.

Budgets are under pressure for three reasons:
Budget deal with the Tories to cut business rates means less money
Income from sales and service charges is dropping due to the recession.
Money from the Scottish Government has been ring-fenced to pay for the council tax freeze
All this at a time when demand for public services is increasing due to that same recession!
Equal pay is being used as a scapegoat. It is the law that men and women should be treated equally. Councils and Government have known they

needed to deliver this for at least ten years.

Use real examples where possible. E.g. cuts in people who produce court reports for social

workers, mean the social workers will have to produce these and cannot deal with families and children (or other service).

Budgets

The budgets and the final settlement for local government should be set by 12th February. The provisional figures given to councils are on page 4. The share of the £70 million figure indicates

the money that councils will lose if they decide to raise council tax. Any rise would therefore need to raise more than this amount to be worthwhile

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The local government budget allocation has now been finalised and most authorities have set their 2009-10 budget. The table below replaces the table in briefing 197 and shows the actual budget allocations as well as last year's to support your analysis of council budgets.

Local government budget allocation 2009-10

Local Authority	Assumed Council Tax Contribution	Proposed General revenue funding 2009-10	actual General revenue funding 2009-10	General revenue funding 2008-09	Share of £70m	proposed Total	Actual Total
Aberdeen City	79.044	240.905	241.402	232.603	3.300	360.785	361.814
Aberdeenshire	91.193	300.497	300.344	291.109	3.533	424.610	425.866
Angus	38.634	156.391	156.107	150.241	1.392	215.112	215.707
Argyll and Bute	35.324	176.753	176.458	171.425	1.414	228.421	229.042
Clackmannanshire	17.149	71.038	71.046	67.337	0.648	99.185	99.381
Dumfries and Galloway	53.593	232.374	232.079	222.453	1.866	313.960	314.925
Dundee City	43.373	228.745	228.303	221.223	1.762	318.086	318.822
East Ayrshire	37.430	174.084	173.674	168.875	1.471	242.011	242.747
East Dunbartonshire	42.341	197.307	137.099	128.573	1.651	191.617	192.372
East Lothian	36.925	124.298	124.381	121.354	1.363	174.320	174.857
East Renfrewshire	36.355	133.541	133.278	127.632	1.388	178.850	179.382
Edinburgh (city)	182.033	548.825	550.572	530.080	6.898	816.150	821.285
Eilean Siar	8.560	96.531	93.725	93.800	.294	112.118	112.307
Falkirk	51.305	206.389	206.667	195.392	1.831	288.669	289.470
Fife	123.275	483.370	484.717	468.045	4.690	681.429	683.358
Glasgow City	196.880	1055.863	1052.332	1018.124	7.783	1461.684	1464.773
Highland	82.432	364.674	365.674	353.087	3.235	486.641	487.826
Inverclyde	25.798	133.606	133.308	129.208	1.041	184.772	185.290
Midlothian	27.426	117.729	117.494	115.750	1.107	160.995	161.450
Moray	29.312	120.839	120.887	117.259	1.142	167.808	168.237
North Ayrshire	45.600	209.464	208.987	201.970	1.733	287.264	288.097
North Lanarkshire	103.077	475.633	474.467	456.146	3.672	661.810	663.777
Orkney Islands	6.828	61.125	61.074	58.368	0.231	71.752	71.864
Perth and Kinross	56.022	180.748	180.374	173.241	2.154	256.211	256.971
Renfrewshire	60.969	24702	246.565	244.071	2.366	345.979	347.025
Scottish Borders	41.611	166.299	166.041	156.912	1.524	277.473	228.119

Shetland Islands	7.141	83.858	83.750	81.520	0.256	97.260	97.377
South Ayrshire	42.939	152.914	152.553	146.648	1.664	213.379	214.080
South Lanarkshire	106.836	424.056	422.996	408.041	3.922	594.197	596.062
Stirling	33.069	130.284	130.359	125.012	1.373	179.336	179.690
West Dunbartonshire	31.160	157.366	158.156	148.731	1.208	215.717	217.489
West Lothian	56.068	222.257	221.928	211.198	2.091	312.386	313.355
Total	1829.700	7.614.963	7609.796	7335.428	70	10569.988	10602.816

For more information: papers on Scottish Government website:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/919/0077503.pdf>

