

Getting Councils to Support Services

Briefing on ...

Political Statement for Councils

Introduction

Councils are in the position of having to make deep and painful cuts to services, and jobs. Not because Councils have developed a dislike of providing services. Decisions taken elsewhere mean councils have to implement cuts. The aim of this note is to provide a draft statement that branches can try and get passed by Councils which will help build support for public services and help build the 'Public Works' campaign

Background

If we are to defend Public Services - and the jobs of those who provide them then we should be looking for support from wherever we can find it. This includes Councils. Responses to the current crisis will vary from Local authority to Local Authority. This briefing outlines the minimum actions we should be able to expect from Councils. ie A series of

requests so reasonable that they should be difficult to refuse. Specifically; to express unhappiness at having to put through cuts, to prepare an alternative budget, to calculate the damage to the local economy as well as to services by the cuts & to make these available in a publicly accessible form.

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Model Local Authority Statement

We are no longer able to provide services to the people of XXX at the level we have aspired to. Decisions taken elsewhere mean that the people of XXX are facing a reduction in the quality of the services they enjoy.

We believe these cuts will be damaging to all of the people in our community. The cuts will reduce the quality of education we provide for our children, the care we provide for our vulnerable, the quality of our leisure time and the fabric of our society.

We were elected to preserve and improve the services provided to the people of XXX but the cut in council finance allocations makes this impossible.

We will continue to work extensively with our communities and with Trade Unions representing our staff to mitigate the worst impact of these cuts. It is clear that the scale of the cuts in the money available to the council are such that they cannot be compensated for by more efficient use of the resources left to us. The only choice we have is between which of the services provided will have to be run down, scaled back or withdrawn. The cuts we make will have inevitable consequences for other public bodies.

These cuts in services and jobs will damage the local economy. Unemployment will increase as the Council employs fewer people. Local businesses will lay off staff as money is withdrawn from the local economy. We recognise that just as every job loss will represent an individual tragedy, so it will be a blow to the local economy. We will as a consequence do everything we can to minimise job losses avoid compulsory redundancies.

We believe that public services can be afforded if everyone in the country is required to pay their fair share. It is wrong, at a point when the richest in society are becoming wealthier, and tax avoidance widespread that those served by this Council will see the quality of their services decline.

The people of XXX deserve better.

The cuts being imposed on the council mean fewer services of reduced quality. Those imposing these cuts know this. We can only conclude that a poorer service for the people of XXX is the outcome they seek.

We call on Government in Edinburgh and Westminster to ensure that resources are

Further information

UNISON Scotland Public Works

<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks/index.html>

STUC "There is a Better Way" campaign

<http://www.thereisabetterway.org/>

provided to the people of XXX which are adequate to meet the needs of the people.

We resolve to not to seek to conceal the nature of the difficulties that financial cutbacks will impose on the people of XXX - but to make these known to people in an

accessible way. We will seek to quantify and publicise the damage that cutbacks will cause on the local economy. .

We will support the Scotland wide "There Is A Better Way" Campaign launched by the STUC.

Councils should tell it like it is

There is a temptation for Councils to try and downplay the impact of the shortfall in resources. But this isn't really a viable strategy. Councils leave themselves open to criticism if they are simultaneously trying to claim that that they are being severely underfunded - and at the same time saying things are (more or less) OK.

Equally if Councils are saying that the cuts won't really have an impact but peoples experience on the ground indicates otherwise the council will face a loss of trust and credibility. Councils should also be upfront about the possibility of greater demand on other public services - eg Health or Police

Budgets - The one they want & the one they'll get

One way for Councils to distance themselves for responsibility for reductions in services in their areas is to highlight the difference between their aims and intentions - and the reality of what the resources permitted to them will deliver.

If councils prepare a draft budget which outlines what they would have delivered in differing circumstances (eg last years settlement) as well as the budget

derived from this year's allocation then the difference will be plain. People will see that any disparity in the services they are used to is not the fault of the council. This will be made even clearer if the council publish a guide pointing out the differences between the two budgets. This guide could be combined with economic and equality impact assessments of the cuts (see below)

We're all in this together – counting the cost of cuts

Taking significant money away from the council is to take a significant sum of money out of the local economy. This will have a knock on effect on businesses and employment. Councils should make every effort to try and quantify this. Economic

development departments should be able to do this and councils could publish an assessment of the economic impact of cuts. As required by law, councils should also carry out full equality impact assessments.

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The political blame game as to who is driving the cuts, isn't one we need to get involved with. For the Council as an institution (and certainly for most local people) what matters is not enough money is being provided to deliver services – whether this is the fault of

Holyrood or Westminster is neither here nor there. The Council is making a protest that they are being under resourced. How we got here is in many respects irrelevant. What matters is getting the situation addressed.

Action for Branches

Try and get your council to pass a version of the model statement. If they won't, tackle them on each individual element. Will they say publicly they are being under resourced? Will they prepare an alternative budget? Will they outline the cuts in publicly accessible way? Etc. Branches should encourage members to lobby their own councillors asking them to support the statement.