ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CUSTOMER AND SUPPORT SERVICES October 2023

BUDGET SIMULATOR EXERCISE – FINDINGS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Argyll and Bute Council aims to work with, as well as for, the people of Argyll and Bute. We therefore sought the views of our citizens, via a budget simulator, on high level priorities for the council's budget.

1.2 Overall we received nearly 400 responses, involving around 17,000 choices from communities. We also received 170 comments and suggestions, via the simulator and other routes.

1.3 This report outlines the feedback provided.

ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CUSTOMER SUPPORT SERVICES October 2023

BUDGET SIMULATOR – FINDINGS

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report outlines feedback from local communities on their priorities for bridging a budget gap of £10 million+.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that Councillors take into account the budget simulator results when considering and preparing the budget for 2024/25.

4.0 DETAIL

Simulator exercise

4.1 To raise awareness of the financial challenges facing the council, and get high level priorities from communities, the council ran a budget simulator exercise from June to August.

4.2 The simulator provided more than 40 options to consider for reducing budget spend or increasing income.

4.3 Overall we received nearly 400 responses, from people aged 16 to 75+, from mainland and island communities, with respondents making 17,000 choices to balance budgets.

4.4 As well as via the simulator, people gave views by contacting us at planningourfuture@argyll-bute.gov.uk, and via social media. We received around 170 comments and suggestions.

4.5 Responses overall provide mixed views with services receiving support for both budget increases and decreases; with lower level areas of spend being frequently chosen for reductions but comments supporting savings from the bigger areas of spend or for income generation.

4.6 Findings are presented here for consideration in planning the budget.

Findings – awareness of financial challenges

4.7 Comments reflected the considerable difficulties in balancing the budget, and support for more funding for councils. For example:

- no more cuts, government funding increase would be best;
- there should be fair funding for councils,
- you should campaign for more funding; are you just accepting budget cuts?

Findings – raising income to balance the budget

4.8 As well as comments about campaigning for more funding, all options for raising income – through property leases, fees and charges or council tax - received support for average increases of between 4.4% and 5%.

4.9 We received a number of comments about council tax:

- Most were in favour of increasing council tax – let's not sacrifice our local services; this means everyone pays a bit more for services they use; tough but do-able.
- Lower number saying low income families could not afford an increase or that the council tax system is outdated.

4.10 Suggestions for how the council could raise income are listed in Appendix 1. Here are recurring suggestions:

- Increase tax on second homes
- Live Argyll should be financially independent; it's a charity and can get grants councils cannot;
- Share/outsource central services
- Tourist tax/Air bnbs tax
- Use buildings efficiently: switch lights/boilers off when not in use; make schools energy efficient (eg switch boilers off in summer); sell closed schools/vacant buildings.
- Fees – the users of services should pay for them

Findings – cutting service budgets to balancing the council budget

4.11 Service options received some support for increasing their budget, and all options were chosen for budget cuts to varying degrees.

4.12 As well as making choices about individual service areas, people provided comments on cuts overall:

- Make cuts from the big ticket service areas
- Aim for a balance between cuts and income generation, protect services

4.13 The order in which services were most often chosen by respondents for some level of reduction is outlined in Appendix 2. The four service areas most often allocated a budget cut are:

- Councillors
- Committee services and support to councillors
- HR & OD (Human Resources and Organisational Development)
- Corporate Communications

4.14 Additional comments on the council's financial position, and ideas for the council and communities working together, are listed in Appendix 3.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Many people gave time and thought to this year's budget planning process. Overall there is a wish for more funding for councils, for efficient use of the resources we have, and recognition of how difficult the situation is for councils.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

This reports sets out findings for consideration rather than decisions for action therefore there are no implications at this stage.

6.1 Policy: None

6.2 Financial: None

6.3 Legal : None

6.4 HR : None

6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:
5.5.1 Equalities – None
5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – None
5.5.3 Islands – None

6.6 Climate Change – None
6.7 Risk – None
6.8 Customer Service – None.

For further information contact:

Jane Jarvie, Communications Manager 01546 604323
David Forshaw, Finance Manager 01546 604 721

Appendices
Appendix 1: Income generation support and suggestions
Appendix 2: Service areas most frequently chosen for a reduction
Appendix 3: Additional comments

Appendix 1 – Income generation support and suggestions

Service	Activity	Average increase allocated	Rank
Income	Property Lease Income (£0.656m)	5.0%	1
Income	Fees and Charges (£10.069m)	4.8%	2
Income	Council Tax Income (£59.277m)	4.4%	3

Council tax comments summary

- Increase tax – 'let's not sacrifice our local services'; this means everyone pays a bit more for services they use; tough but do-able.
- Lower number saying lower income families could not afford an increase or that the council tax system is outdated.

Suggestions for raising income – recurring

- Increase tax on second homes
- Make cuts from the big ticket items
- Live Argyll should be financially independent; it's a charity and can get grants councils cannot;
- Share/outsource central services
- Tourist tax/Air bnbs
- Use buildings efficiently: switch lights/boilers off when not in use; make schools energy efficient (eg switch boilers off in summer); sell closed schools.
- Fees – the users of services should pay for them

Other suggestions

- Efficiency – streamline processes and be more efficient with resources
- Cemeteries –use wild flowering as a support for reducing current maintenance approach
- Crossing patrollers – put zebra crossings at schools, and add more 20 mph zones
- School transport – charge pupils using it outside their catchment area; avoid duplication with service buses
- Public toilets – charge for them
- Cutting and cutting isn't a viable solution. Aim for a 50:50 balance between revenue spend reduction and income generation.
- Develop a commercial culture to raise income
- Maximise commercial waste income
- Charge for support provided in organising events

Appendix 2 – Service areas most frequently chosen for a reduction

Service	Activity	Rank
Elected Members	Councillors (£1.261m)	1
Legal & Reg Support	Committee Services and Services to Councillors (£1.060m)	2
CSS	HR & OD (£2.714m)	3
CSS	Corporate Communications (£0.324m)	4
Legal & Reg Support	Procurement, Commissioning and Contracts (£1.511m)	5
Commercial Services	Property Services (£2.993m)	6
Legal & Reg Support	Legal Services (£1.076m)	7
Legal & Reg Support	Information Management (£0.239m)	8
CSS	Financial Services (£4.991m)	9
DEG	Community Planning and Development (£0.597m)	10
DEG	Business Start-up and Support Assistance (£0.380m)	11
CSS	Customer Service Centers and Registration Services (£1.553m)	12
RIS	Parking (£0.400m)	13
Commercial Services	Live Argyll and contributions to other privately run Leisure Facilities (£4.692m)	14
Legal & Reg Support	Trading Standards and Advice Services (£0.687m)	15
RIS	Fleet (£5.821m)	16
RIS	Environmental Warden Services (£1.734m)	17
DEG	Economic Growth and Regeneration Services (£1.372m)	18
Legal & Reg Support	Health and Safety (£0.357m)	19
DEG	Planning (Development Policy and Management) (£2.318m)	20
Legal & Reg Support	Civil Contingencies (Emergency Planning) (£0.109m)	21
DEG	Building Standards (£1.054m)	22
RIS	School and Public Transport (£9.001m)	23
RIS	Cemeteries and Crematorium (£1.102m)	24
RIS	Parks (£1.399m)	25

RIS	Roads and Bridges Design (£1.077m)	26
Education	Schools (excluding the cost of teachers) (£9.649m)	27
Education	Early Learning and Childcare (Pre-School Age) (£7.818m)	28
RISs	School Crossing Patrollers (£0.139m)	29
DEG	Environmental Health and Regulatory Services (£2.046m)	30
Education	Education Contribution to Special Provision outwith A&B (£1.240m)	31
CSS	ICT (£4.875m)	32
Commercial Services	Catering & Cleaning (predominantly within schools) (£10.333m)	33
DEG	Airports (£1.324m)	34
DEG	Housing Support and Homelessness (£4.647m)	35
RIS	Waste Collection (£4.424m)	36
RIS	Street Cleaning (£0.981m)	37
RIS	Roads Maintenance (£17.603m)	38
RIS	Public Toilets (£0.470m)	39
Education	Children with Additional Support Needs (£6.901m)	40
RIS	Coastal and Flood Protection (£0.151m)	41

Appendix 3 – additional general comments

Support for council funding

- Campaign for more funding
- Fundamental underfunding of councils by central government
- Councils not receiving fair funding
- Most areas in the council are under-funded
- Not happy about any cuts but an overspend and government funding increase would be best. Council tax rise would be hard but doable.

Recognition that the council's position is not easy

- This is very difficult; I hadn't realised how much everything costs
- What is the function of a local authority when budgets are reducing? What's needed from you in the modern world?
- Push back on roles that should be delivered by others
- No easy answers, but savings can only come by tackling the big ticket items

Ideas for council and communities working together

- Gift public toilets to communities to run
- Live Argyll to be self-financing; give halls to communities
- Appeal for environmental volunteers to help with park maintenance etc
- Involve the public in dealing with issues they create eg litter, or street cleaning