

Cllr Douglas Lumsden: Aberdeen City Council budget meeting 2018/19

It is a great pleasure to be standing here as a Co-Leader and Convener of City Growth and Resources to deliver the administration's 'No Cuts Budget'.

Before doing so can I thank my coalition partners for their input into this budget and thank all members of the coalition for the way in which we have worked for the good of the city since the election in May.

Lord Provost, this process becomes more and more difficult each year as local authorities across Scotland face setting their budget in challenging circumstances. Demand for Council services is growing, funding is diminishing - Aberdeen City Council remains the lowest funded local authority in Scotland. Something that is finally recognised across the chamber.

Our budget settlement from the Scottish Government this year has been reduced by an eye watering 22 million pounds. We cannot control central funding but we are vocal in our concern about the impact it has on our city and that is why our budget today includes the opportunity for all elected members to put party politics to one side as part of our commitment to Civic Leadership and Urban Governance to work with partners including our ALEOs, Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, Opportunity North East, Scottish Enterprise and others on a campaign to put pressure on CoSLA and the Scottish Government to ensure Aberdeen City Council receives its fair share of Scottish Government funding.

In the face of challenge our responsibility is to find ways to innovate and to deliver on behalf of all those we serve. Protecting frontline services will continue to be a priority, despite the obstacles we have to overcome.

In this budget I will outline the aspirations and the ambitions we have for the year ahead and the way in which we intend to mitigate the reduction in budget which without proactive and innovative measures would threaten the progress being made in Aberdeen's transformation.

Lord Provost, we as elected members have a responsibility to be honest with the public about the future. There is no sign of an improvement in the financial constraints we work under – the expectation is it will worsen and we have to be prepared for that. The necessity to make 125 million pounds of savings over five years is a stark illustration of the scale of the task facing officers and elected members.

We have to push forward and fundamentally change the way in which we operate. It is certainly not the easy option – but it is the best option. Aberdeen City Council cannot and will not stand still. We will continue to demonstrate the proud traits of the city - innovation and resilience.

Key budget commitments

Turning now to our intentions for the next financial year.

Firstly I can confirm we do intend to raise Council Tax by 3 per cent which will raise 3.34 million pounds to meet a small portion of the funding shortfall we face.

However, we do not propose adopting the increases in fees and charges contained within the report before us today – in fact rather than raising parking fees, our intention is to fund a reduction for evening parking, with the aim of stimulating the night time economy.

We will outline plans for new investment in mental health services for children and young people as well as in tackling period poverty in city schools.

The commitment to additional staff resources to support our next generation will also be continued and funding for the innovative school meal provision in holiday periods is earmarked.

We will continue to invest in our schools by retaining the level of funding which saw 60 additional Pupil Support Assistants in our schools.

Our emphasis on the city and its communities will also come through clearly.

I will outline a new initiative to bring empty properties back into use in Aberdeen to support our efforts to address housing challenges and underline our intention to press forward with developing plans for an Energy Service Company to drive energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty.

Sustainable transport too is high on the agenda – today we bring forward a new push to think differently and to encourage more Aberdonians moving on two-wheels instead of four, as well as for the expansion of provision for electric vehicles and expansion of the hydrogen fleet.

The economy of the city and wider region is also central to today's budget. The comprehensive capital programme we can see transforming Aberdeen is a major part of that - but we also bring forward new initiatives to support businesses and employees. Promoting our growing cultural and tourism offering and securing Aberdeen's place as a destination of choice is imperative.

Review: 2017/18

Before we turn our attention to the detail of those proposals for 2018/19, it is important we take time to reflect on the achievements of 2017/18 and recognise the hard work, energy and commitment that has driven so many important projects forward for the benefit of all those we serve as a Council.

So much has been delivered in the past year and that should give us great optimism for the next 12-months.

Teams and individual officers across all of our services work tirelessly day in and day out, so often going above and beyond the call of duty. As Co-Leader can I express my thanks to the thousands of staff who represent the Council and I'm sure I do so on behalf of every member in the chamber today.

The 2017/18 year actually began with national awards recognition for the cross-service team that delivered the success of the £370million bond issue - a first for local government in Scotland and

something, as we know from the Bond Investments conference we hosted last week, has created interest from far and wide in Aberdeen City Council's financial innovation.

The requirements of the bond process have brought our finances under closer scrutiny and more stringent examination than any other Council in the country and I take great pride in the external endorsement we have received for the strength of our internal governance and financial performance. Our credit rating was renewed during the course of 2017/18 – demonstrating confidence in our own processes and fiscal approach as well as in the city and region's economic outlook.

There was further good news at the start of the financial year when SMG Europe took on the operation of the Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre and began planning for the opening of the new complex, which is making such great progress. The 333 million pound development will anchor existing international events and compete for new ones, raising the city's profile. It is expected to generate 113 million pounds of visitor spend and 63 million net GVA to the Scottish economy annually.

In May, Tour Series cycling brought the city centre to life in a new and exciting way – drawing thousands to watch elite competitors in action as well as giving local riders the opportunity to test themselves on the course.

The event was broadcast worldwide and is just one of the array of events that are transforming our city as a visitor attraction thanks to the investment we are making as a Council.

In the past year we've also seen the incredible success of Nuart, the inaugural Great Aberdeen Run and the continued impact of SPECTRA. These are bringing Aberdeen's communities together as well as attracting visitors from home and abroad, as part of our economic strategy of diversification.

In June the facilities at the 15.2 million park and ride facility at Dyce opened their doors to the public, another important piece in the jigsaw as far as our transport strategy is concerned. The big picture is about investment in roads infrastructure to reduce congestion, the promotion of sustainable transport and the fostering of low emission technology.

In the past year Aberdeen's role as an innovator in the field of hydrogen has been reinforced, with the fleet expanding in new and diverse ways – the first hydrogen taxi in Europe can be found on the roads of Aberdeen thanks to our commitment and soon we'll have the world's first hydrogen street sweeper, with plans for a third refuelling station to serve the growing number of vehicles gathering pace.

What we must never lose sight of as a Council is our core aim of serving the people – it isn't always about multi-million-pound investment, it's the impact it makes on lives.

A great example is the work that has been done in bringing our parks and gardens to life and that was demonstrated by the wonderful response to the 750,000 pound refurbishment of Pets Corner at Hazlehead. When it opened in July, record visitor numbers turned out. Our greenspaces continue to win national awards and are a credit to the teams involved.

On a community level extensive upgrades to play parks throughout the city took place as a comprehensive programme was rolled out on the back of our pledge in the 2017/18 budget.

In August, the 18 million pound Orchard Brae School welcomed its first pupils and the investment in the school estate underlines the commitment we have to Aberdeen's next generation. Innovation is as crucial as funding, with Orchard Brae providing a tremendous example of that - the first of its kind in Scotland and a centre of excellence for best practice in supporting pupils with additional support needs from across Aberdeen.

In September the Council pledged 1 million pounds of funding to the Aberdeen Science Centre, part of a 4.3 million pound redevelopment, and the autumn also brought preparatory work for two important but very different projects - the Berryden Corridor and Union Terrace Gardens. Both will move forward in the year ahead, continuing to shape our city.

October brought the completion of the 27 million materials recycling facility at Altens, with a new fleet of waste vehicles also taking to the roads after a seven-figure investment. That is all part of our progress towards ambitious recycling targets.

In the same month, Andy Scott's impressive sculpture Poised was unveiled as part of the phased opening of Marischal Square – with major new tenants signing up throughout 2017/18 as the landmark development was completed. With the Broad Street project continuing, very visible strands of the City Centre Masterplan are making a positive impact on Aberdeen.

In November the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme for Union Street was also launched, providing up to 2 million pounds to help restore the street to its former glory. Following a deep clean in the summer, as part of Operation Union Street Rejuvenation, there's a real desire amongst the Council and fellow stakeholders to drive forward.

The first anniversary of the 826 million pound City Region Deal was also marked in the winter of 2017, with several positive developments through the course of the year – not least the launch of the innovative and ambitious Oil and Gas Technology Centre, a key City Region Deal project.

To step away from budgetary matters for a moment, I am sure I speak for all elected members when I say a highlight of 2017/18 fell in November when we welcomed Denis Law home to bestow the Freedom of the City upon our most famous sporting son. It was a memorable weekend and brought Aberdeen together in celebration, something all of us in the chamber were privileged to be part of.

It came in the same year as the Cruyff Court Denis Law was opened, through our partnership with the Denis Law Legacy Trust.

The calendar year was rounded off with my Co Leader Councillor Laing being honoured by being named as the Local Government Politician of the Year and the appointment of four new directors to join the Chief Executive in leading the transition to the Target Operating Model. In 2017/18 many

important decisions in relation to the plans to build the council of the future were built and in the year ahead many more will follow.

In January the first properties in the 80 home development of Council houses at Manor Walk were completed, with tenants now settling in. Earlier in 2017/18 the initial phase of the 99 property development at nearby Smithfield was handed over as our programme of council house construction makes a tangible difference to the lives of families.

The highlight of February was the announcement Aberdeen will become Scotland's first gigabit city, with private investor CityFibre paying tribute to Aberdeen City Council's commitment to digital transformation and citing that as one of the key drivers in its 40 million pound project. The plans demonstrate the power of the partnership working approach we are embracing.

This month we will officially launch our £100,000 fund for Year of Young People projects – rounding off 2017/18 on a positive note as we invite youth groups and young people to take the opportunity to inspire the city. Support for the next generation is crucial to the bright future we aspire to for Aberdeen.

That outline of accomplishments 2017/18 doesn't even scratch the surface in terms of the day to day business of the Council – the vital services and support provided 24-hours a day, every day of the year. It is in those areas that the unsung achievements of Aberdeen City Council can be found and again can I reiterate the appreciation of members for the work carried out in the past year and of course in the year ahead.

Turning to the budget proposals, each element is aligned to the Local Outcome Improvement Plan. This 10-year plan is designed to embrace partnership working to break cycles of deprivation and ensure that Aberdeen is a place where all people can prosper. The LOIP provides the vision for Aberdeen for the period 2016-26. Our challenge as a Council, working closely with our partners, is to deliver on that vision across the themes of people, place economy and digital.

Budget commitments: People – Children are our future / People – Are resilient, included and supported when in need

There are two strands to the Local Outcome Improvement Plan's support of people – the first of which relates to young people, acknowledging children represent the future of Aberdeen.

I have spoken about some of the progress made in 2017/18 in giving our young people the best start in life and more will follow this year, with the 13 million Stoneywood School and the 46 million Lochside Academy both set to welcome their first pupils. The Council continues to invest in education, with over 22 million pounds allocated for new schools in Torry and Tillydrone. This capital investment is hugely significant, but it is also supported by revenue commitment.

In addition, through today's budget we earmark one percent of our council tax increase to provide funding to roll-out the ambitious and innovative project to provide free meals and activities to children in school holidays in key communities in our city.

We are acting on feedback from parents themselves, who have reinforced our own understanding of the issues around food poverty.

Similarly, period poverty is an issue which has quite rightly been brought to the fore. We propose Aberdeen City Council introduces a free distribution scheme in schools to ensure the dignity and wellbeing of young people is enhanced. We want every young person to have equality, to feel valued and understood. There are also the added advantages of improving attainment, attendance and participation in education for the benefit of individuals, communities and the city as a whole.

This approach is a common theme in our desire to increase support for the next generation. The mental health of young people is a priority and although we have been able to partially respond through our commissioned services, it must be stressed that demand outweighs current provision.

Through today's budget we propose resourcing two additional counsellors to provide early support to young people. Whilst it is acknowledged that the NHS has a key role to play in the provision of mental health support, it can only deal with the most serious cases.

For many of our young people, the symptoms of early trauma as a result of child abuse, anxiety and stress do not meet the criteria and there is a gap in provision. The addition of two further counsellors will go some way to preventing the need for more intensive intervention. In addition we pledge today to continue with the programme to add 60 vital Pupil Support Assistants to our education staff.

Whilst there is an understandable focus on what we must deliver for our young people, the commitment to the people of Aberdeen reaches all ages. The aim is to ensure all those we serve are resilient, included and supported when in need.

Equality and diversity underpin those objectives and I'm pleased through today's budget to confirm our full support as a Council for Grampian Pride – a new event which will promote Aberdeen as a safe, welcoming and inclusive city for all. We are fortunate to have a number of organisations working to promote LGBT issues and services in the area - Grampian Pride is a welcome addition. The inaugural event on May 26 will bring communities together to celebrate and I thank the organisers for their hard work in bringing this to fruition.

When we consider support for all of our communities, facilities are vitally important.

The capital budget for 2018/19 includes an investment of over £5m in the new Tillydrone Community Hub as well as in completing the Station House Media Unit extension.

As Co-Leaders, Cllr Laing and I recently signed the Activate the City pledge and we took that opportunity to underline the importance of health and wellbeing in supporting our wider aims. Today

we can announce that we propose to demonstrate that priority by working in partnership to enhance facilities, specifically the refurbishment of Northfield swimming pool.

With Sport Aberdeen we make a firm commitment to invest in a multi-million pound extension and enhancement of the facility through the Condition and Suitability budget.

The social care estate has been enhanced by the acquisition of Kingsmead care home and there is multi-million pound funding for participatory budgeting – enabling people and communities to determine how money is spent to best serve their needs.

The Council is embracing Participatory Budgeting and it will continue to grow and evolve in the months and years ahead.

Budget commitments: Place – empowered, resilient and sustainable communities

Those are some of the measures to support the people of Aberdeen in this year's budget – but importantly the place itself must be at the core of our plans.

The focus on place is about ensuring Aberdeen has empowered, resilient and sustainable communities.

In line with that commitment, the capital budget contains major infrastructure projects - notably our significant 75 million pound contribution to the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route.

A further 5 million pounds is earmarked for investment and renewal in roads infrastructure and over 2 million pounds for street lighting enhancements. The City Centre Masterplan funding in 2018/19 will focus on the redevelopment of Union Terrace Gardens, completing the Broad Street works, and beginning the restoration of Provost Skene's House.

Our Capital plan shows that we will provide an additional 10 million pounds to be spent on improving our roads and pavements following concerns by citizens.

Cllr Laing will outline the Housing Revenue Account budget later this afternoon, but the plans for housing do cross into the general fund revenue budget.

I can confirm today that we are proposing a new approach for the city to improving housing supply by introducing a role dedicated to identifying vacant private properties and working in partnership to bring these back into use. We want to work with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, under the umbrella of Shelter Scotland, to focus on more than 1,500 homes in Aberdeen alone which sit empty and unused at a time when we know supply is outstripped by demand. By being proactive we aim to make positive change. This initiative will bring social benefits but also financial benefits for us as a local authority.

Similarly, the creation of an Energy Service Company is another multi-pronged approach. Through today's budget we are committing to the principles of an ESCo and request the process moves forward with a business case being considered at the earliest opportunity.

Our vision is for a self-sustaining entity, operating at arms-length from the Council, to address fuel poverty, reduce city-wide carbon emissions, establish secure and economic local energy supplies and create employment by delivering cost-saving and income-generating activities.

The issue of emissions is one we continue to tackle as a local authority and today's budget proposals showcase the innovation we are employing in this area.

The capital budget includes 3 million pounds to expand our hydrogen programme and on the theme of sustainable transport I'm pleased to table a new project which we're confident will capture the imagination of the Aberdeen public.

Following the success of similar projects in UK cities, we have instructed officers to provide a business case around the introduction of a cycle hire scheme with the potential to bring a real sea-change in attitudes to transport in the city.

Some would say that we do not have the climate of some of European cities in which bikes outnumber cars on city centre roads - but we have a growing number of people eager to embrace sustainable transport and by promoting and investing we hope that will continue to increase.

Coupled with the proposed expansion of the network of charging points for electric vehicles in the city, the year ahead promises to continue the advances we have made in reducing emissions and implementing our sustainable transport strategy.

These measures will improve the environment across Aberdeen and another important initiative in relation to the LOIP theme of place will do likewise.

I'm pleased within our budget to include provision for the expansion of a project piloted in Torry to address the blight of dog fouling. Local school children were the driving force in changing behaviours in their area and, led by the Torry Community Group, continue the good work. We will use the experience gained in that project to take the approach into other communities – engaging with communities to the benefit of everyone. It's an age old issue but one that we're addressing with positive action and investment.

Budget commitments: Economy – Aberdeen prospers

Our priorities in supporting the people and place ultimately also underpin our ambitions for the economy.

Our role as a Council is to ensure Aberdeen prospers and the budget we are proposing has a number of established and new measures to help meet that goal.

From a capital perspective, over 100 million pounds is set aside for the continued construction of the new Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre and the scale of investment is reflective of the impact the complex will have on our regional economy.

The new AECC will attract bigger and better events to add to those we already proudly host and will bring in visitors from across the globe.

Diversification remains at the heart of the economic strategy and tourism is a central strand. Aberdeen City Council will aim to promote and celebrate its growing cultural offering by continued investment in the Events365 strategy.

Today I can confirm our plans to bid for prestigious UNESCO Creative Cities Network membership, which would give us an international platform as we set about sharing our success story to the widest possible audience. Having considered a UK City of Culture bid, we view the UNESCO membership to be a more efficient and effective route to go down.

Increasing footfall in the city will support the business community across many sectors and with that in mind we are exploring different avenues to stimulate the local economy.

Great play was made of the potential to increase parking charges as part of the budget setting process – but that is not an option we plan to take. Instead our intention is to subsidise parking after 5pm in the city centre. By reducing the cost to motorists we expect to see an increase in evening visits and clearly this will have a positive impact not only for individuals but for the businesses reliant on a buoyant night-time economy. Aberdeen City Council working with Aberdeen Inspired and supporting city centre businesses, another example of partnership working.

Continuing on the economic theme, through today's budget we also propose establishing a co-operative business development fund. This will support small businesses, enabling them to explore new ways of working as well as building skills and targeting new markets. Start-up businesses as well as established enterprises will be able to tap into a new source of funding.

Budget commitments: Digital – innovative and integrated future

Digital is the final strand within the LOIP – an area we can see in the commercial sphere is changing Aberdeen for the better. As an organisation we are committed to playing our part in shaping an innovative and integrated future for the Council and the wider city. Following the recent announcement Aberdeen will become Scotland's first city with gigabit connectivity, 2 million pounds is committed in the year ahead to technology requirements and investment in the Council's digital strategy in today's budget.

Budget summary

All of these positive commitments to the year ahead are set against the financial constraints already outlined. In order to counter the reduction in funding, we reluctantly are proposing a 3 per cent rise in

Council Tax for 2018/19. It is a difficult choice, one of many which has to be made in setting a balanced budget for the year ahead.

Having resisted any increase last year, at a time when many Aberdeen households were already being affected by legislation passed in the Scottish Parliament for an increase for properties in bands E-H, the need to protect frontline services has driven the proposed increase and is an option that our fellow local authorities across the country have also exercised.

Today is about being positive in the face of the funding challenges we face. Setting a budget of near to 1 billion pounds is complex and difficult choices have to be made – it is essential we make the right choices. Decisions that are right for individuals, communities, businesses and the city we are determined to see continuing to prosper.

Our proposals make clear our priorities in supporting our next generation – aiming to ensure every child and young person in Aberdeen has the opportunity to flourish.

They make clear our commitment to wider communities – giving residents of all ages a greater opportunity to shape their future and embrace opportunities.

The budget makes clear our commitment to improving infrastructure and facilities - so the city is one we can continue to be proud of.

It also makes clear our intention to lead the economic development of Aberdeen and the wider region by innovating and investing - strengthening our place as a global and forward thinking city, with a focus on a digital future.

I commend this budget to you and look forward to delivering on these commitments in what promises to be an exciting and productive year ahead.