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### **Aberdeenshire Council sets budget for 2017/18**

Aberdeenshire Council has agreed its budget for 2017/18. The budget supports local services worth £546 million and the delivery of an ambitious capital programme for building new schools, leisure centres and roads projects.

Co-Leader Cllr Alison Evison proposed the motion to agree the budget proposals. She said: “We must balance our responsibility for the delivery of these services, alongside the very real challenge of dealing with increasing costs, greater pressures on our services and a reducing financial settlement from the Scottish Government.”

Councillors agreed to raise Council Tax for the first time in nine years. A rise of 2.5% was agreed, costing the average Band D taxpayer an extra £28 a year.

Following publication of the budget proposals last week, the Scottish Government announced an additional £160million to local government – with Aberdeenshire’s share just over £8 million – split £6.3 million in Revenue and £1.8m Capital.

As a result of the additional money, the Administration’s motion suggested changes to the savings required.

Some of the extra money will be used to lessen the impact of the savings on education – in particular, the Early Learning & Childcare review and the strategic review of libraries, arts and heritage services which will proceed without any reduction to their budgets; the savings required as a result of a review of the pricing structure in leisure and sporting facilities were reduced and concessionary schemes protected.

There will be new investment to support teacher and early learning recruitment, and additional incentives for people wanting to teach in Aberdeenshire. There will also be grants for the third sector and investment in sports development and local tourist attractions like Macduff Marine Aquarium.

The council recognised the importance of health and social care and the need to provide services that meet the needs of an ageing population. As a result, councillors decided to pass across all the funding for the Integrated Joint Board, which supports health and social care services.

Money was found to protect road maintenance programmes and waste collection schedules, along with the mini Household Waste and Recycling Centres and the seasonal garden waste skips. There was also a commitment to invest in active travel and passenger transport.

Councillors also discussed a package of savings required to deliver a balanced budget. Savings in excess of £20 million were agreed including more effective procurement, treasury management and a re-profiling of the delivery of capital plan savings.

Co-Leader Cllr Richard Thomson seconded the motion and reflected on the concerns of local businesses following the recent business rates revaluation. He said: “We have heard from businesses

across Aberdeenshire who will be affected by the rise in business rates. We are committed to sustaining businesses in the North East and will continue to support them in a measured way.”

He instructed officers to bring a report to the March meeting of Full Council with a detailed scheme for supporting businesses in need and which will consider the impact of the business rates increase in Aberdeenshire.

The Opposition put forward an alternative budget which included no rise in Council Tax over and above the rise implemented by the Scottish Government on Bands E-H. Cllr Jim Gifford called on the council to deliver more savings from within by delivering greater efficiencies and by re-allocating money set aside in reserves.

Cllr Gifford added that there was a lack of certainty around the additional funding promised by Scottish Government and stated that he wouldn't allocate any of the £8.3million until the position was confirmed.

In seconding the alternative budget from the Opposition, Cllr Karen Clark called it a 'responsible and balanced view of the budget ... without inflicting more pain on our residents.'

Cllr Martin Ford welcomed the Administration's budget, in particular focusing on the rise in Council Tax saying that it would be dishonest for the council to say that it could continue to deliver a high level of services without people contributing to the payment of these. He also welcomed the extra money into youth work, traffic calming and speeding reduction and active travel.

Following a lengthy and robust debate, the Administration's budget was agreed by 33 to 32 votes.

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### Capital budget set 09/02/2017

A total of £132 million is to be spent on capital projects across Aberdeenshire in the coming year, with the approval of the 2017/18 Capital Plan.

Councillors discussed the spend at their budget setting meeting today (Thursday 9 February) and approved the report which laid out the plans for the coming year, and beyond.

It represents a significant building programme, and a considerable investment in communities the length and breadth of Aberdeenshire.

Programmes which will benefit include new schools such as the ones at Uryside and Kintore, the Hill of Banchory sporting facilities and significant investment in the AWPR which is of huge significance to communities and businesses and is the largest road building project in the UK. There will be investment in street lighting, parks and open spaces, development of the council industrial portfolio and in waste collection services.

Meanwhile the council is also progressing toward the official opening of Midmill School by HRH Princess Anne and the full opening of the Banff and Macduff Sporting Facilities in the near future.

The plan also includes a number of projects to modernise the council office estate in order to generate financial efficiencies.

The City Region Deal features in the Capital Plan, with investment in transportation, digital infrastructure, and boosting our wider economy with a focus on oil and gas, food and nutrition and life sciences.

Within the last week the Scottish Government announced an additional £8m in funding for Aberdeenshire Council, of which £1.8m is reserved for capital projects. The future of the Capital Plan was also discussed, and there was recognition of the huge amount of projects coming down the pipeline, amounting to £878 million up to 2031/32.

Co-leader of Aberdeenshire Council Cllr Richard Thomson said: "This paper, and the plan it reflects, shows a real commitment to the building blocks of the region. We recognise the importance of investing when times are hard, and ensuring that Aberdeenshire gets the investment it deserves. This plan is efficient, proactive and reflective of what the community needs and I am pleased we gave it the backing of this committee."

RE: Banchory Burgh office

Gail Smith

Fri 10/02/2017 11:07

Cllr Karen L. Clark &lt;cldr.kclark@aberdeenshire.gov.uk&gt;

Hi

As a result of the Registrars review the cash collection role was no longer part of their remit and I had to appoint a temporary member of staff to take up this role and find budget for this post until a service point was in place.

We were advised in Autumn last year that a service point was no longer viable in Banchory so we looked at the volumes of payments being received and payment method to identify if a cash collection service was cost effective. Based on our figures the cashier spends 14% of his time taking payments, the remainder of his time is spent dealing with the mail for other services, dealing with keys for housing, some phone calls and general reception duties. He is not being paid to do this work therefore on discussions with Alan Wood and Janelle Clark it was agreed that we would withdraw this service from 1 April 2017. Hence the flyers, posters etc on display.

When looking at the payment methods, see below, taking August last year as an example out of 145 hours staff time only 20.4 hours were spent processing payments. We felt there are other alternatives customers could use without having to travel to Stonehaven or Inverurie.

Over a 4 week period commencing 8 August 2016:

	Cash		Cheque		Debit Card		Credit Card		Totals		Processing in hours
	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	
Rent	84	11,626.29	17	3,226.76	54	8,800.72	2	86.38	157	23,740.15	
Council Tax	130	14,572.80	88	18,854.76	119	16,410.18	4	404.00	341	50,241.74	
CARS	4	20.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	20.00	
Invoices	32	1,030.82	72	17,965.40	24	1,355.09	0	0.00	128	20,351.31	
Nominal	75	2,282.35	27	438,184.65	43	1,780.94	5	340.56	150	442,588.50	
Business Rates	2	245.65	23	15,155.64	0	0.00	0	0.00	25	15,401.29	
Card Charge	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	11	16.62	11	16.62	
	327	29,777.91	227	493,387.21	240	28,346.93	22	847.56	816	552,359.61	

61% of the 816 total payments indicate that the customers have bank accounts and should therefore be able to transfer over to an alternative payment method.

18% of the 816 total payments are Miscellaneous Income (predominantly Registrars Income) from Aberdeenshire Council Services located in or around Banchory which we would work with to put in place a suitable alternative.

65% of the CASH customers are Rent and Council Tax payers and could be offered Allpay cards to pay at the local post office or shops/outlets with the Paypoint facility.

We will try and help customers migrate over to other payment methods and that is why we have displayed the change as early as possible. The cashier will give as much help as possible to customers to find alternative payment methods and although there is the post office in the Co-op, paypoint is also available.

If you need further information please get back to me

Kind Regards

Gail

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From: Cllr Karen L. Clark  
Sent: 10 February 2017 10:14  
To: Gail Smith <gail.smith@aberdeenshire.gov.uk>  
Subject: Banchory Burgh office

Hi Gail

I wonder if you can help on this query ?

There is a notice up at the council's Burgh Office in Banchory saying they will no longer be accepting payment of council tax, rent etc from this office and you will have to go to Inverurie or Stonehaven or you can pay at the post office in Banchory. Now whilst the latter is at least still a location in the town itself, it is really not great.

The counter is squeezed into the back of the Co op in the High Street and there is always a huge queue ! The lady who called me is elderly and is not on a computer and she has no car to go to Inverurie or Stonehaven, there is no public transport to these towns so frankly these two places are not an option for the elderly. I

do understand we want to migrate folks onto our online services or pay by direct debit but it is more difficult for older people. Could you help clarify what the situation is ? When will this be operational ?

Thank you

Karen

Councillor Karen Clark

Ward 16: Banchory &amp; Mid Deeside