

Facing up to tough choices that are “painful but necessary” will be the approach taken by South Ayrshire Council as it works to set a balanced budget for 2018/19.

That was the message from the Council today (*date*) as it revealed proposed budget savings for its revenue budget – the monies that cover the day-to-day costs of providing Council services.

The proposed savings – designed to bridge an anticipated, and unprecedented, funding gap of around £17 million for 2018/19 as well as further savings for 2019/20 – will go out for consultation in the new year and the Council is keen that as many people as possible have their say. These will be considered along with other measures, including the use of surpluses.

No decisions have been made on any of the proposals as yet and it will be the 28 Councillors elected to serve the people of South Ayrshire who will decide which ones go ahead and which ones don't when the Council sets its budget in March next year.

The savings proposals have been categorised under the following themes:

Service Closures/Reductions – This is where proposals would reduce operating hours/level of service, stop a service altogether or close certain facilities. This could mean services are not available when customers want to use them or people have to travel further to access the service/facility they want. The proposals are:

Description	2018/19	2019/20
Reduce funding for road surfacing and revise inspection regime	£106,500	£165,000
Reduce street lighting costs through LED lighting replacement and stopping evening street lighting patrols between October and March	£79,000	£184,000
Transferring Council buildings to communities		£72,143
Reduce cleaning and janitation services and staffing in line with reduction in numbers of Council buildings	£50,000	£552,374
Review sport, leisure and golf provision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close Maybole golf course and consider future development for alternative leisure use • Close Muirhead and Whitletts activity centres and consider options to transfer them to local community club/organisation • Close Prestwick swimming pool • Reduce swimming pool opening hours to reflect customer demand 	£225,147	£119,162
Close Maybole recycling centre	£13,000	
Stop South Ayrshire local grant funding	£69,000	
Remove all school crossing patrol provision across South Ayrshire	£128,383	
Close all public toilets in South Ayrshire		£208,335

Remove outdoor learning provision, including Dolphin House and Duke of Edinburgh programme	£95,262	£171,905
Stop accepting cash and cheques at Customer Service Centres	£70,000	
Close Maybole and Prestwick Customer Service Centres	£104,934	
	£941,226	£1,472,919

Charges/Income – This is where proposals would increase charges or introduce new charges. This could mean it will cost more for the services customers want to use, or even introduce charges for services that are currently provided free of charge. The proposals are:

Description	2018/19	2019/20
Increase charges for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allotment rental • burials and cremations • casual swimming • commercial waste • football pitches • garden waste • Girvan Harbour • licensing fees • parking • pitches/halls/school lets • planning • roads permits and orders • schools meals • special uplifts 	£659,026	£352,943
Introduce new charges for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parking in Council car parks that are currently free of charge 	£243,000	£90,000
Increase income through expansion of sport and leisure programmes, concessions, increasing numbers of customers, increased number of weddings and maximise opportunities to charge for services	£152,584	£41,250
	£1,054,610	£484,193

Staffing – This is where proposals relate to reductions in staffing or working hours, which are expected to have an ultimate impact on service delivery as there will be less people/resource to carry out these duties. This could mean increased waiting times for services; less availability of services; increased demand for services; or changes to how services are delivered. The proposals are:

Description	2018/19	2019/20
Review teaching allocation and provision, including number of schools and teachers, which could result in bigger class sizes and the consideration of closure/merger of two primary schools	£4,246,969	£2,821,183

(possible schools not identified as yet)		
Reduce the numbers of school support staff, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reductions in school assistants • removal of Home Link Service • removal of school librarians and school library assistants 	£1,040,585	£801,335
Review and reduce staffing provision within a number of service areas, the majority of which are 'back office' roles that support frontline service delivery. Services included are: Communities, Educational Services central management and administration, Employee and Customer Services, Finance and ICT, Housing, Legal and Democratic Services, Neighbourhood Services, Policy and Performance, Property and Risk	£1,225,284	£716,650
One day's unpaid leave – where feasible – for employees on 24 December 2018 to facilitate extended holiday closure for relevant employees	£300,000	
Revise overtime payment rates	£200,000	
Reduce the working week by one hour – where feasible – for relevant employees.	£2,381,190	
	£9,394,028	£4,339,168

General Budget Reductions – This is where proposals would mean the funding for – primarily – non-essential budget lines is taken out of the equation. This could mean there will be less money to fund support services like administration or provide back-up funding from centralised budget lines that can be used across a particular service. The proposals are:

Description	2018/19	2019/20
Reduce funding in budget lines that will have some impact on service delivery by reducing funding for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School resources and materials • School campus cops • Housing support and homelessness contracts • Addressing community safety and antisocial behaviour issues 	£40,000	£130,000
Reduce funding to support events and tourism and business and sector development	£55,000	£40,000
Reduce funding for various budget lines with no/minimal impact on service delivery	£975,790	£535,111
	£1,070,790	£705,111

In addition, a proportionate reduction in the amount of money given to the South Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership is proposed for 2018/19. If approved by Councillors, it

will be for the Partnership's Integrated Joint Board to decide how it will manage this reduction in funding and to determine what this will mean in practice and how it will impact on people and communities.

Chief Executive Eileen Howat said: "In an environment of continuous reductions in grant funding from the Scottish Government, increased inflation, and an increase in our overall wages bill, it's getting harder and harder to balance the amount of money we have to spend against the money we need to deliver Council services.

"Over the last eight years, we have saved an incredible £53 million and we have achieved that while minimising the impact on our public services as far as possible. However, there is only so far we can go before the impact of the financial challenge really does start to bite.

"That's exactly where we are now and why officers were asked to come up with wide-ranging proposals that can then be considered in detail once we know how much money we're getting from the Scottish Government.

"And I would stress that these are proposals – no decisions have been taken as yet and Councillors will consider a number of factors before making any determination, including the feedback from the public consultation on the budget that will take place in the new year."

Council Leader, Councillor Douglas Campbell added: "No politician gets elected to cut or close services that will impact on our people and communities; however these are the painful but necessary choices we need to face head-on if we are going to balance the books and target the limited resources we have where they are needed most.

"A key part of our considerations will be listening to what the public have to say about these proposals and how they will impact on them. And just because a proposal is currently on a list does not mean that it will happen and that's why it's so important that people let us know their views when the consultation gets underway next month.

"Yes, we need to balance the budget, but we need to ensure we do that in the right way that protects services where we can and ensures we can deliver on our commitment to the people of South Ayrshire. That's certainly what I'll be focusing on and I look forward to discussing these important issues with our communities."