



A New Year and a new Budget for: South Lanarkshire Council

As we enter the first quarter of 2019, the council enters the last quarter of its' Financial Year and this means budget setting for the next government FY: April 2019 to March 2020.

For the councillors, the annual budget setting process starts each October/November with a set of suggestions from the council officers. For the last few years, this has meant potential budget cuts and therefore: what services the officers think could be made to meet next year's potential settlement from the Scottish Government. It's then up to the various groups/parties to put forward their alternative proposals. At the 2018/19 Budget setting process: The Conservative and Labour groups put forward their proposed budgets, but they failed due to a coalition budget supported by the SNP and Independent Group.

As we enter the 2019/2020 budget setting process and as I write this piece: I have absolutely no idea what will happen. The Government in Westminster have increased the block grant to Scotland by more than a billion pounds, but I fear that the SNP government in Holyrood will continue to centralise and deliver yet another blow to local authorities across Scotland with another budget cut. Of course, I could be wrong but the news coming from my Conservative colleagues in Holyrood isn't good!

What could this mean for South Lanarkshire?

- 1) The SNP with the support of another group in the council, could potentially increase Council Tax by the maximum allowed 3%. This is something I cannot support because it would hit hard working families hard at a time of recovery from the austerity years. Also (and to be frank): you will see absolutely no improvement in local authority services with a 3% increase in council tax! Have you seen any improvement since last year? In this FY, roads continue to worsen and schools are left short of even the basics, never mind teaching staff: very nearly bringing one Strathaven primary school to its knees in spring 2018.
- 2) Even more non-legislative services get cut! Constituents have continuously complained to me about the closure of public toilets. I'm afraid given difficult choices: as councillors we are left with no option but to cut non-essential or legislatively required local services. When it comes to cuts: toilets will always go long before school books or pupil transport (1/2 miles instead of 2/3 miles).

The SNP led Scottish Government in Edinburgh should de-centralise and deliver more power and therefore budget to our communities. They promised this during the 2017 local elections but to date this has still not happened! They promised more digressionary spend at a community level but nothing so far so as we enter to 19/20 budget setting process I'm worried that we end up having to cut even more non-essential local services because of unnecessary cuts forced upon every Scottish local authority by the failure of an incompetent SNP government in Edinburgh.

In conclusion: more cuts aren't required! The block grant to Scotland has increased and the SNP have made Scotland the highest taxed country in the United Kingdom, yet our councils get strangled and more local services get culled due to grand centralised projects that continue to gobble-up vast

sums of tax payer's money in Scotland but deliver little to no benefit to majority of hard working people living in Scotland.

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