

Budget Consultation Co-chomhairle Buidseit



Message from Council Budget Leader Councillor David Alston



Starting the conversation

Like every other Council in Scotland, we face the challenge of protecting the services we deliver for the people of the Highlands – services which include education, housing, support for frail older people, roads, transport, waste collection and economic development. We are also committed to the culture, natural landscape, sense of community and spirit of inventiveness and enterprise which make the Highlands both an attractive place to live and a viable economic region, capable of supporting its people and welcoming new residents.

Like every other Council, and like the rest of the public sector, we must now work together to deliver these services with fewer resources. The coming cutbacks in funding are a direct consequence of the near catastrophic failure of major banks and their rescue by British taxpayers, a rescue which has required public borrowing on a scale never seen before. Even once the economy recovers from recession, this money will need to be paid back – so the 'squeeze' on public sector expenditure beginning in 2010/11 may well last for ten years or more.

Having your say

When we surveyed the public in 2009 we were told that people wanted more of a say in how the Council spends its money. We are asking for views on budget savings ideas, with key budget questions on:

- how we can use our community facilities differently;
- how we can run services differently;
- how individuals and communities can take more responsibility for doing things; and
- how we can keep our staff and borrowing costs down.

These will challenge the way we do things now. We will look at how we can cope with reductions in some services and review charges and entitlements. **We are consulting widely until the end of June 2010 on budget savings ideas.** We are asking views through our new Citizens' Panel of 2,000 people, discussing this in several ward forums and in an Inverness city ward forum and in meetings arranged with other partners, staff and Trade Unions. Members of the public and community councils and groups can tell us what they think by taking part in the discussion forum on our website at:

www.highland.gov.uk/budgetquestions

What next

After the summer we will have firmer budget proposals developed and we will consult again. We will also assess any proposals for impact on different groups within our community e.g. in terms of age, gender, disability or ethnicity. This will help us to make budget decisions sensitively. We will also consider what the impact of any proposals might be on other public sector bodies and on local economies, especially those most fragile. We want to make decisions about these savings in the autumn of this year, 2010.

Total savings to be
made over 3 years =

£59m

Savings already
agreed =

£23m

Savings still to be found
(the budget gap)=

£36m