

Dumfries and Galloway Council

SNP Group Budget Proposal

2025/2026





Introduction

In 2022 we were elected on our manifesto commitments and in forming the first Administration we agreed to support our communities with the increased cost of living pressures and need to improve the region's roads as immediate priorities.

We developed the Council Plan which sets out the principles by which Dumfries and Galloway Council will safeguard our future, support our citizens and communities and be a responsive Council.

This budget continues to follow these principles so that we can offer a fairer, better alternative to the current administration in delivering sustainable outcomes for everyone within our communities across the region.

Lobbying

We know there are financial challenges and competing priorities for local government, so we continue to lobby for support from the Scottish Government that provides the majority of our funding directly.

We will continue to lobby the UK government on Employer National Insurance Contributions (ENICs) which will affect our Council budget to the tune of £6 million before we even start the working day in the new financial year, and will have a significant impact on other public sector bodies and employers across the region, including our vital third sector and commissioned service delivery partners.

We will also lobby the UK Government that sets the limits on devolved funding to Scotland in order to seek support for any burdens to the region created by Westminster decisions. Where possible we will try to influence UK Government reserved legislation and responsibilities in favour of our Dumfries and Galloway citizens, including matters of energy, inflation targets for the Bank of England, postal services and the Post Office, transport, trade and industry, employment law and industrial relations.

We will lobby through COSLA for layby litter to be part of the maintenance responsibility of the relevant public body so that trunk roads are maintained in full by Transport Scotland or their contractor.

The Financial Challenge

To protect vital services for the public we must continue as a Council to transform and modernise how we work. In recent years we supported the new Chief Executive in modernising the Council and this budget will continue to support that modernisation, ensuring the values on which we were elected are met.

We recognise that the Scottish government has provided some £144m mitigation funding to help offset the impact of the UK Government's National Insurance changes, of which Dumfries and Galloway Council will get a share. Although this is welcome, it does not fully remedy the problem at its source while it remains reserved to the UK Government.

The Council's budget decision last year, supported by the resources made available to the Chief Executive, was to generate £7.5m of transformational savings. Unfortunately, only £5.2m of Officer-led savings were published as part of the public consultation.

The demographics of our region mean we have a reducing school roll. This presents challenges on how best to maintain the right number of teachers to support our children and young people. Teacher numbers is often a national political issue but our primary concern is delivering for Dumfries and Galloway so we have only agreed in our budget to take the Officer template that reflects the case for change based on that reducing school roll, and not other templates that would have a significant material impact on teacher numbers.

We know we have one of the lowest Council Tax incomes in Scotland but also that we also have one of the lowest average wages in the region. Recognising the ENICs impact from the UK Government, we calculated that a 9% increase for 2025/26 will help to protect services against these additional pressures, and prudent use of Council reserves would help offset the shortfall in the Officers' target agreed by Members last year, and reduce the potential impact on the public.

Our 2025/26 Council Budget Motion

That Dumfries and Galloway Council agrees:

The SNP Group Revenue and Capital Budget and Council Tax Proposal for 2025/26, and indicative Budget Plans for 2026/27 and 2027/28, as published on 20 February 2025, including investments, savings, and fees and charges.

That the budget to be delegated to the Dumfries and Galloway Integration Joint Board for Adult Social Care Services for 2025/26, will be the 2024/25 recurring budget level, plus the full share of the additional funding reflected in the 2025/26 Local Government Funding Settlement for these services.

That this Council agrees, by considering through the relevant service committee or Council deliverables to:

1. Review and make recommendations for the best use of School Estate that will provide sustainable delivery of high-quality education to children, acknowledging geographical and rurality challenges, allowing for special exceptions, as well the need for sustainable transport connectivity to schools.
2. Review the Framework for Inclusion, along with other existing centralised management service models within Education Skills and Community Wellbeing, so that resources can be applied closer to where the need is.
3. Develop and improve the waste collection services, following the roll-out of the Garden Waste Collection Service on 1 March 2025, taking into account options for the region wide network of Household Waste Recycling Centres, Eco Deco, and the new Zero Waste Park development.
4. Lobby through COSLA for layby litter to be part of the maintenance responsibility of the relevant public body so that trunk roads are maintained in full by Transport Scotland or their contractor.

5. Provide options for making best use of our leisure facilities in line with capital investment commitments and by exploring alternative and local models of delivery.
6. Review the provision of public toilets, including Changing Places Toilets locations, across the region to determine what can be delivered in partnership with local organisations and businesses and where best to allocate resources to help improve the experience for residents and visitors to the region.
7. Bring regular and consistent reports to all Common Good Sub Committees detailing all assets that relate to that Common Good area, including the relevant leases, licences to occupy, service level agreements, maintenance arrangements, and any related income, fees or financial considerations that are currently in place, including Council caravan sites, so that Members can have proper oversight before making any recommendations about asset transfers or other matters.
8. Bring forward details of the internal service review of ELC Support to determine the best model for future delivery.
9. Review future funding models for Youth Beatz, acknowledging public feedback from the budget consultation, in order to help sustain future events.
10. Review the Taxi Card Transport Scheme so that unused cards are not renewed and are reallocated to new users.
11. Explore school meal income generation opportunities by offering a competitive range of school meal deal options and allow for individual headteacher flexibility to best reflect local lunch time arrangements for all our senior schools.
12. Maintain a commitment of 30% of annual Coastal Benefit funding from Crown Estate Scotland for improving and maintaining the coastal path network and Council harbour infrastructure.
13. Work with partners to develop a model for providing Health and Social Care that looks at pathways from schools, colleges, and funded "apprenticeship" posts to meet the need in Dumfries and Galloway and use as a basis for lobbying for additional resources.
14. Develop a proposal for a Visitor Levy model to generate local income and to determine the scope for use of collected funds.
15. Support local community resilience groups and work with third sector and business groups, following recent severe weather events impacting the region, to strengthen the breadth and depth of trained people and known local assets that are able and willing to respond or be put to use with more future likelihood of frequent and extreme weather events.
16. Explore opportunities to install PV at appropriate Council sites as part of developing local renewable energy generation and bring forward additional projects that will be able to utilise our share of the Scottish Government Climate Emergency funding commitment, estimated to be £1.5m.
17. Bring forward potential Play Park projects which can utilise the additional capital funding of £728k from Scottish Government.
18. Bring back options for use of additional Scottish Government ASL funding when details become available.
19. Review and make recommendations for the best use of Council's industrial property portfolio, including income generation, condition surveys, maintenance schedules and investment.
20. Work with interested local communities to pilot a new off-lead dog exercise park.
21. Review opportunities for a short-term mitigation fund from the Economic Recovery Service Reserve to support community groups with horticultural supplies during the closure of the Gardening Nursery.



COST OF LIVING

Dumfries and Galloway

22. Agree the Waste Bulky Uplift income generation template with details to be determined at the earliest opportunity on a simple, intuitive, and fair charging structure that meets the income target based on an initial single item charge, learning from local examples of effective charging structures.

23. Agree the Commercial Waste Contracts for Holiday Lets/NNDR income generation template with details of a proportionate and simple charging system to be determined at the earliest opportunity to may help streamline and improve existing Council systems, including short term let registrations, and records of commercial waste contracts being in place.

24. Bring the Schools Autism Provision through the Council's Gateway Process for Capital Project Development.

All to be carried out with the appropriate engagement with stakeholders, such as Service Users, Householders, Staff, Joint Trade Unions, Community Councils and recognised community bodies, Elected Members, and to report back to the relevant committees in 2025 for decision-making and ongoing implementation throughout the year, if within existing resources.

Cost of Living

We will invest £1.156m to support our communities with the increased cost of living.

Within this we will continue to fund £630k from our tackling poverty revenue budget on a recurring basis. This includes our highest priority projects:

- Direct payments to vulnerable young people: £40k
- FareShare memberships for community organisations: £50k
- Taxi card scheme: £130k
- Emergency energy payment assistance for older and vulnerable people: £100k

We will support projects including additional funding for:

- The Scottish Welfare Fund on top of expected funding from Scottish Government: £100k
 - Holiday Food schemes for those attending schools and early learning centres: £125k
 - Summer of Play: £264k
 - Community Transport: £53k
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Additional Investment

We continue to commit to previously agreed increases in key areas of concern, including support for:

- Roads Improvement - maintaining the increase of £1.05m per year to raise the base funding level to £16.95m along with the £20.6m capital investment for the previously agreed 4-year period.
- Children and Families Social Work budget will be increased annually by £3m to help address the significant pressure on the service and increased demand across the region.
- We will increase the roll out of free school meals as part of the Scottish Government's Scottish Child Payment (SCP) Free School Meals (FSM) expansion for P6 and P7 to support approximately 900 pupils across the region from February 2025, and continue to lobby for universal provision for all primary school pupils.
- We will continue to support and engage with young people across the region and value our Youth Council representatives and their contributions through our Committees and Community Planning arrangements.

Capital Investment Strategy Proposals

The SNP Group Budget Proposal recognises the funding challenges and the limited flexibility within the currently approved 10 year Capital Investment Strategy.

The key elements of the updated Strategy include:

- Provision of an additional £10 Million to support the estimated whole project costs of the Dumfries Academy/Loreburn Primary School Project.

Allocation of development costs in 2025/26 to support the progression of the following projects:

- Whitesands Flood Protection Scheme
- Newton Stewart Flood Protection Scheme
- Dumfries Academy/Loreburn Primary School Project
- Borderlands Funded Projects Including Stranraer Marina, Chapelcross
- and Business Infrastructure
- Thistle Grove Gypsy/Travellers Site
- Locharmoss Solar Array Project

The detailed funding allocations totalling £457 Million over the 10 year Capital Investment Strategy period are set out in the published SNP Group Budget.
