

Fears for council services following Spending Review cuts to Scotland

Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) members across Scotland are concerned at the likely impact on local authority services following Comprehensive Spending Review announcements in Whitehall.

Councils are anxiously awaiting news of where the axe will fall as ministers determine how diminished funds will be allocated in the Scottish Spending Review next month.

Local government will undoubtedly see cuts affecting local communities and employment as Scotland faces an overall reduction in spending of 10.6% in cash terms, with the public sector budget cut from £28.2bn to £25.2bn for the next four years. This means a reduction of between £1.3bn and £900m in 2011-12. Capital programmes are taking the biggest blow, with budgets cut by 38%, or £800m, over the next four years.

Scotland's Finance Secretary John Swinney has predicted some 12,000 public sector job losses and politicians from other parties say this figure will be higher. Health spending is ringfenced and education spending is likely to be a priority, potentially leaving local government services badly hit.

APSE's Scottish chair, Cllr Jim McGuigan of North Lanarkshire Council, said: 'With ministers deciding how to slice up a much smaller pie, our members in local authorities across Scotland are understandably concerned what budget cuts will mean for their communities and economies. There are parts of Scotland that are already struggling and heavily dependent on public services and employment and there are fears they will be decimated by cuts.'

He added: 'We hope that in making their tough decisions about reducing expenditure, ministers will remember that local government plays a vital role not just in providing key services and supporting local communities, but also in underpinning local economies with the important knock-on benefits public employment and supply chains can generate. APSE's recent study of the 'local economic footprint' in West Lothian, for example, showed that every £1 of local government spending generated £1.71 in the local economy.'

APSE represents councils providing front-line services across the UK and all local authorities in Scotland are members.

While the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly Government and Northern Ireland Assembly are each determining their own spending priorities, the overall allocation made to them has been determined by the Barnett Formula covering the whole UK in the Comprehensive Spending Review announced by Chancellor George Osborne in London on 20th October. The overall sum of the settlement will reflect similar cuts to those experienced in England, so local decisions about cuts will need to be made to reflect the reduction in the overall settlement.

Discussions between the Scottish government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities are currently under way with a view to reaching a settlement.

Directors and heads of service from across Scotland met at an APSE round table event on 17th September at Dunblane Hydro, Stirling, to discuss the impact of forthcoming spending reviews. A range of approaches to transforming local government and service delivery to get the best use of remaining resources were identified during the debate. Reconfiguring services, sharing services between authorities, workforce development and generating more income were among the ways of making maximum use of minimal resources that were discussed.

For further information on APSE visit: www.apse.org.uk

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