Dumfries and Galloway Council Education Services response to the Education and Culture Committee’s Call for written evidence on Scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2015-16

Q Given recent trends in local authorities’ spending on schools, what are likely to be the main pressures on education budgets in financial year 2015-16? Will there be any impacts on pupils and families; attainment; teacher numbers; the length and scheduling of the school week; teachers’ terms and conditions; developing and strengthening links between schools, colleges and employers; etc?

There are a great many areas where budgets are under pressure, particularly so when faced with high expectations from a range of stakeholders; the needs and wishes of all groups are often not mutually compatible. Some highlights are as follows:

Very small primary and secondary schools – challenges in educational and financial terms.

Expectations from consultation and engagement; community and parental wishes to be balanced with funding available.

Class sizes and school building capacities.

Rurality and fuel costs; for statutory transport and for vocational/school-college links.

Expectations from parents of pupils with Additional Support for Learning

RICCT – requirements bring limitations on continuity of learning and teaching as well as adding pressure on budget and available staffing.

Teacher numbers – related to falling rolls so ratio is important as is quality of workforce. Not overall numbers but subject shortages.

Support for Curriculum for Excellence in preparation for the new Highers.

Early Learning and Childcare (current funding model) –

- Pressure on our rural Voluntary Sector Early Learning and Childcare Providers – small voluntary providers closing as the salary costs for a Level 9 qualified manager prove to be not sustainable within the existing funding model.
- Increasing pressures on the Early Learning and Childcare Manager role (Head teacher) due to Care Inspectorate regulations. The increasing demands and expectations of the manager of childcare provision are impacting on the overall capacity of Head Teachers; any changes to the current management model will have significant cost implications.
- Capital provision for the major works required to deliver the expansion for 2015/16.

Q. How should schools, local authorities and the Scottish Government be preparing to deal with these spending pressures?

Developing capacity at local level to support staff, having flexibility of staffing to respond where required. Having responsive HR procedures to deal with staffing demands and opportunities to
consider registration of teachers 3-18 in partnership with GTCS to ensure the workforce is fit for purpose.

Consider GTCS accreditation routes such as dual qualification, local accreditation pathways.

Promote local autonomy innovation and creativity within clear framework of accountability. Prevent duplication of activity and reduce bureaucracy in quality assurance.

Focus on high leverage activities. Determine priorities - focus on reducing the gap but also in having high expectations for our highest achieving pupils. Prepare schools and parents for the need for reduced choices.

Early Learning and Childcare –

- Challenge the apparent increasing levels of inspection, bureaucracy and regulation that is impacting on the ability to deliver.
- Prioritise capital spending on ELC to ensure provision is available and suitable.

Q. Will the allocation to be provided via the 2015-16 Draft Budget be sufficient to enable local authorities to provide a quality education; meet all their statutory obligations in relation to schools; and deliver the Scottish Government’s national educational priorities?

This is difficult to quantify given the scope and scale of expectations; the delivery of statutory obligations is currently on the authority risk register. We will deliver services to children and families but the level to which needs and expectations can be met, and whose expectations to satisfy, is the core question.

Capital funding is insufficient to invest and improve our learning environments. Investment levels only allow a ‘fix on failure approach’ and increasing amount of backlog maintenance put risks of operational failure. Funding levels do not cover all areas that Authorities are expected/required to deliver – early years/language provision/sustainability/curriculum for excellence/sports Scotland et al.

Commentary on slippage with construction programme noted; new ‘HUB’ process and working with Scottish Futures Trust is complex and causing delays in executing works while Councils and Hub teams are learning.

Q. The Scottish Government’s national performance framework (NPF) “provides a strategic direction for policy making in the public sector, and provides a clear direction to move to outcomes-based policy making”. How has the NPF helped the Scottish Government and education authorities move towards ‘outcomes-based policy making’ in relation to schools?

The evidence based and outcomes based approach provides direction in that it is a high level message that outcomes for children are important and that input measures such as spend or activity should demonstrate impact. The NPF is at a very strategic level and gives only broad indicators, mainly attainment based.

Currently the indicator compares Scotland with the OECD average as measured every three years. This is a helpful overview showing Scotland maintaining levels since 2009 but not detailed as it
provides a snapshot only of maths, reading and science every three years and there is some international discussion over the validity of PISA. It is only one measure at a point in time with some pupils. It is useful that the national performance indicator does explicitly state that overall success in attainment needs:

- all pupils to experience and benefit from teaching which focuses on improved learning
- socio-economic influence on attainment and outcomes to be reduced
- outcomes of pupils from challenging backgrounds to improve

If improved attainment is the outcome sought – these areas of focus should be sustained.

The development of Insight (previously the Senior Phase Benchmarking Tool) will allow schools and teachers to look more closely on outcomes for groups of pupils in order to challenge policy and practice. As with all measures, there is the risk of what is measured is perceived as more important than what is not. It could be argued that there is not the same level of quantitative data available at a national level to consider attainment in primary schools. Many authorities have developed local standardised assessment arrangements to support and give teachers confidence in their professional judgements against CFE levels. These are funded locally.

It could be argued that the Quality Assurance indicators from the NPF are less helpful as these sit within the statutory duty of EAs to provide quality educational provision, not as outcomes for pupils.

**Increase the proportion of pre-school centres receiving positive inspection reports** – this is not an outcome (for children), it is a proxy indicator at best and does not sit comfortably in an outcomes based approach

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**Q. How do the Scottish Government and local authorities ensure that funding for schools is spent in a way that best delivers value for money?**

Benchmarking via Insight will offer evidence with virtual comparators which will be more robust. Having this data to compare how schools add value to pupils will provide support and challenge performance at class/school level. Teachers, schools and authorities need to develop skills in analysis and interpretation to make the most of the data as Insight develops.

The budget states the continued commitment to funding improvements in the quality of teaching and leadership in the teaching profession. The teaching profession must meet the expectations as set by Teaching Scotland’s Future, this will take time but there is good progress. There is clear evidence that links improved outcomes for pupils with the quality of teaching in the classroom and the quality of the leadership within the school. Authorities should ensure that professional learning of teachers and the development of schools leaders is sustained.

The shift to increasing curricular flexibility at senior phase and the increase in vocational activities could bring opportunity to review how schooling is delivered, how learning is supported in schools,
and by whom. There is a balance to be struck with a professionalised teaching workforce with clear responsibilities and accountability, and other staff who bring valuable, and different, skills.

Q. How will the draft budget advance the preventative spending agenda in relation to school spending?

Additional resources are not noted to support the delivery of the GIRFEC practice model. This underpinning preventative activity, as set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and including the role of the named person aged 5 to 18, comes with welcomed but significant additional expectations. Furthermore, it introduces statutory duties for schools and education authorities to deliver 52 weeks a year provision when schools are only open for three-quarters of the year. There appears to be no additional funds available to Education Services therefore this remains a considerable challenge in delivering getting it right for every child.