**Media Release**

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**UNISON Slams Clackmannanshire Council Budget Cuts**

Last week Clackmannanshire Council set its budget for the coming year, cutting more than £5 million from its budget.

UNISON is extremely concerned about the effect these cuts will have on jobs, the ability on provide existing service and indeed services ceasing completely.

UNISON Clackmannanshire Branch Secretary Kevin said “many of the cuts were ill thought out, are unlikely to achieve the desired savings and some are potentially discriminatory or are morally indefensible.

There are examples like reducing footpath gritting and refusing to pay back pay for those who did the work but have left the organisation after being forced out of their jobs through redundancy or have been let go due to ill health.”

Kevin goes on to say that “at the same time there seems to be a growing trend of outsourcing work which costs more and delivers less for the people of Clackmannanshire.”

UNISON Clackmannanshire Services and Conditions Officer David Wilson said that “the decision to accept a council tax freeze over maintaining jobs and services was the wrong thing to do for the people of Clackmannanshire.” He also said “in addition to the ‘death by a thousand cuts’ service reductions we also need to consider another trend in public services, the outsourcing of council work to the private sector and the use of consultants at the cost of millions to the public purse.”

These savings are presented to councillors as the only way to achieve goals by council officers bereft of ideas, however, like everything else it is a political choice. UNISON has continually argued for employing more staff from the local area rather than offloading the responsibility to expensive private companies. In a recent case trade unions were informed that Clackmannanshire Council didn’t have enough staff to repair houses and get them back out to tenant’s quickly enough and so a contract was signed with a private company instead. The reason we didn’t have the staff to undertake this work, is because those services have been cut back to the bare bone and there was no plan in place to deal with the work we had.

Clackmannanshire Council, like many others, is spending obscene amounts of public money with private sector companies because it can’t manage the work itself. Somehow, our Council can afford a private company to organise the work and take a nice little profit margin on top. UNISON strongly believes employing our own staff to do the work is more cost effective way to deliver services.

These things don’t add up and everyone should be worried that bit by bit councils are turning over services to the private sector. It may take a few years but at some point, we’ll all be paying the price when it becomes easier to have private companies run the majority of local services for the profit of these companies and their CEO’s. This extends to Social Care, IT Systems and other services and it’s something UNISON is vehemently opposed too.

In an additional proposal which angered trade unions councillors voted to accept a proposal that in UNISON’s opinion is ethically and morally questionable. As we’ve seen in recent years, Councils have taken many months to agree pay deals. Part of this years agreed budget was to stop staff who have left before a pay award is agreed from claiming back the difference. That means that those staff will have been underpaid for the work they carried out. In our opinion this is the council setting its budget by taking money from staff that may well be ill or have been made redundant. This money will have, in the main, been funded by the Scottish Government and agreed by COSLA to be paid to staff, it is not for Councils to pocket it for themselves.

As many will have noted, part of the plan for this year’s budget was to slash the library services within Clackmannanshire. While this proposal wasn’t taken this year, it was still left open for the following year’s budget and the library service will likely see reductions in available services to members of the public with amended opening times and key services being moved out of the library buildings. This represents a trend across many councils in Scotland where services are reduced which leads to fewer people having access to them, then a year or two down the line the reduced use of a service is used as an excuse for removing that service entirely. While councillors are hard pressed to save money due to a reduction in core funding from central government, they make short term decisions which, sooner or later, leads to the destruction of key services which are relied upon by members of the public.

UNISON Clackmannanshire Branch Secretary Kevin McIntyre said: “Local Government workers provide the key services that the public rely on. When they are cut or their jobs are sent out to private firms instead it is the members of the public who suffer. Councils must do more to keep work in house and less to line the pockets of private shareholders and wealthy CEO’s.”

UNISON Clackmannanshire Services and Conditions Officer David Wilson said: “UNISON Clackmannanshire is in disbelief that some of these political parties’ state that they are socially progressive. Staff in Clackmannanshire Council have witnessed the reintroduction of compulsory redundancies and now some of those who will be made redundant may not be able to claim back pay for hours they have worked.”

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Notes for editor

1. UNISON is the public service union for the UK. It is the biggest trade union in Scotland and the biggest trade union representing local government staff in Clackmannanshire Council

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