

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 26 February 2025.

Present:

Councillor Andrew Anderson
Councillor Caroline Bamforth
Councillor Tony Buchanan
Deputy Provost Kate Campbell
Councillor Betty Cunningham
Councillor Danny Devlin
Councillor Paul Edlin
Councillor Annette Ireland
Councillor Chris Lunday

Councillor David Macdonald
Councillor Jim McLean
Councillor Colm Merrick
Provost Mary Montague
Councillor Andrew Morrison
Councillor Owen O'Donnell (Leader)
Councillor Katie Pragnell
Councillor Gordon Wallace (*)

Provost Montague in the Chair

Attending:

Steven Quinn, Chief Executive; Caitriona McAuley, Director of Environment; Louise Pringle, Director of Business Operations and Partnerships; Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Anthony McReavy, Chief Executive, Culture and Leisure Trust (*); Julie Murray, Chief Officer, Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP); Lesley Bairden, Head of Finance and Resources, HSCP; Kirsty Stanners, Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer); Mark Rodgers, Head of Environment (Housing and Property); Gerry Mahon, Chief Officer (Legal and Procurement); Graeme Smith, Communications Manager; Barry Tudhope, Democratic Services Manager; John Burke, Democratic Services Officer; and Lesleyann Burns, Democratic Services Officer.

(*) indicates remote attendance.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1121. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

PROVOST'S REMARKS – ORDER OF MEETING

1122. The Provost indicated that, to facilitate the smooth running of the meeting, the items would be considered in the order shown below.

DEFERRAL OF DECISION TO COUNCIL: HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP – CHARGING FOR NON-RESIDENTIAL CARE SERVICES IN 2025/2026

The lead signatory to the call-in, Councillor Buchanan, outlined the reasons for the call-in of the Cabinet decision on this matter. He stated that he and the other signatories felt that, given the impact on residents and the budgetary position, it was important that the Council look at the matter and find a better way forward. He was pleased to note that, following cross-party discussions, an amendment to the decision had been reached and asked that Councillor O'Donnell be allowed to outline that amendment.

Councillor O'Donnell spoke on the proposed amendment, outlining the difficulties in reaching the decision given the financial challenges facing the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). He indicated that neither the Integrated Joint Board (IJB) or the Cabinet had wanted to make the decision, explaining that Cabinet had deferred the decision initially to give greater analysis to the HSCP budget and to ascertain if further support would become available from Scottish Government. On considering the matter again, no such support had been indicated and they felt it was needed to assure that the HSCP could set a balanced budget.

Councillor O'Donnell conceded that, given the public interest in the proposals, it may have been preferable to defer the issue to a decision of Council.

Councillor O'Donnell went on to outline the proposed amendment to the initial decision, a paper copy of which was circulated to those members present. He also indicated that he would be writing to the First Minister, alongside the Convener of the IJB, in order to request clarity on the Scottish Government's intentions in terms of any potential abolishment of such charges as were proposed.

Councillor O'Donnell, seconded by Councillor Buchanan moved the following:

“That the Council defer the introduction of charging for non-residential care services until 1 April 2026 and ask that the HSCP reviews the impact of the deferral.

The deferral should allow sufficient time for financial assessments to take place alongside income maximisation and right to appeal.

Funding for the deferral of the implementation to 1 April 2026, where appropriate, to be taken from expected current year revenue budget underspends.

By 1 April 2026, we will also know if the Scottish Government intends to abolish or modify such charges in their budget for 2026/27.

We further propose that the IJB prepares a report for October's full Council meeting. That report should:

1. provide an updated equalities impact assessment on those service users actually asked to contribute;
2. provide an analysis of the income maximisation efforts made to support all potentially affected users; and
3. include an analysis of the amount of revenue expected to be generated and the taper level recommended.”

Councillor Buchanan then spoke in support of this motion, indicating that it afforded time for the necessary scrutiny to take place and ensure that the best way forward was found.

Councillor Wallace first received clarity that the amended proposal was the motion that was before the Council. He then proposed an amendment to the motion as follows:

“Council agrees to replace the original motion with the following:

1. that the policy on charges for non-residential care services shall not be reconsidered for the remainder of the current Administration’s term, ensuring clarity and stability for service users and their families;
2. that the Council supports the HSCP by mitigating the costs of non-residential care services through the allocation of predicted underspend from the 2024/25 financial year;
3. that the anticipated review by the Money and Rights Team, in collaboration with other partners, aimed at maximising income for users of non-residential care services, proceeds without delay; and
4. that the Council commits to prioritising the protection of non-residential care service funding when setting the budget for the 2026/27 financial year, ensuring that financial pressures do not undermine the sustainability of this support.

This amendment seeks to reaffirm the Council’s commitment to upholding the principle that living within this Council’s boundaries means being part of a fair, supportive, and compassionate community – one that prioritises the well-being of its residents and protects essential services for those who need them most. By taking this approach, the Council provides certainty to service users while ensuring the sustainability of these vital services. Furthermore, deferring any decision on charges beyond the May 2026 Parliamentary elections will allow the Council to make informed policy choices with a full understanding of the national legislative framework, ensuring that future decisions align with government policy and best serve the needs of our residents.”

In order for the members to receive the text of Councillor Wallace’s amendment, Provost Montague called for the meeting to be adjourned.

Following the adjournment, it was indicated that the amendment proposed by Councillor Wallace initially had been withdrawn and a new amendment proposed. Thereafter, Councillor Wallace, seconded by Councillor Edlin, proposed the new amendment as follows:

“Council agrees to replace the original motion with the following:

1. that the policy on charges for non-residential care services shall not be reconsidered for the remainder of the current Administration’s term, ensuring clarity and stability for service users and their families;
2. that the Council supports the HSCP by mitigating the costs of non-residential care services through the allocation of predicted underspend from the 2024/25 financial year, plus additional savings or income generation opportunities to be found within the Council for the following financial years;
3. that the anticipated review by the Money and Rights Team, in collaboration with other partners, aimed at maximising income for users of non-residential care services, proceeds without delay; and
4. that the Council commits to prioritising the protection of non-residential care service funding when setting the budget for the 2026/27 financial year, ensuring that financial pressures do not undermine the sustainability of this support.

This amendment seeks to reaffirm the Council’s commitment to upholding the principle that living within this Council’s boundaries means being part of a fair, supportive, and compassionate community – one that prioritises the well-being of its residents and protects essential services for those who need them most. By taking this approach, the Council provides certainty to service users while ensuring the sustainability of these vital services. Furthermore, deferring any decision on charges beyond the May 2026 Parliamentary elections will allow the Council to make informed policy choices with a full understanding of the national

legislative framework, ensuring that future decisions align with government policy and best serve the needs of our residents.”

The Provost asked for a short adjournment while the revised amendment was considered by members. Following that adjournment, the Provost invited the Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) to comment on the amendment in terms of Standing Order 29(a), as it could involve the Council incurring expenditure.

The Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) outlined the position in terms of reduced income arising from the proposals before the Council. In particular, she indicated that there would be a requirement for further income generation as a result of the proposal.

Councillor Ireland expressed her disappointment that the charges were deferred rather than removed. She stated that the decision should have been delayed until October when further information would be available.

Councillor O'Donnell indicated that the report to Council in October would provide clarity and further information. In his view, the motion did not seek to implement any decision before that information would be considered. He also highlighted that it would allow the income maximisation work and financial assessments to be carried out.

Councillor Buchanan highlighted some points of concern with the amendment as proposed, stating that it lacked specifics in terms of how the additional income requirements would be met. In particular, he felt that the amendment looked to ring fence money in the 2026/27 budget, which was a budget that was not yet known.

Councillor Macdonald, stated that he disagreed with charges being levied at all. He stated that funding was found to pay for the Leisure Centre and for upgrades to Council Headquarters and so the funding should be found to defer those charges.

Thereafter, Councillor O'Donnell summed up the discussion. He recognised that it was a difficult issue and agreed that all parties would prefer not to apply the proposed charges. He expressed disappointment that the cross-party discussions, which he felt had led to agreement on the proposed motion, had not come to fruition in the meeting.

On the roll being called, Councillors Anderson, Bamforth, Buchanan, Convery, Cunningham, Devlin, Lunday, Merrick, O'Donnell, Pragnell and Provost Montague voted for the motion.

Councillors Campbell, Edlin, Ireland, Macdonald, McLean, Morrison and Wallace voted for the amendment.

There being 11 votes for the motion and 7 votes for the amendment, the motion was declared carried and the Council:-

Deferred the introduction of charging for non-residential care services until 1 April 2026 and asked that the HSCP reviewed the impact of the deferral.

The deferral should allow sufficient time for financial assessments to take place alongside income maximisation and right to appeal.

Funding for the deferral of the implementation to 1 April 2026, where appropriate, should be taken from expected current year revenue budget underspends.

By 1 April 2026, the Council would also know if the Scottish Government intended to abolish or modify such charges in their budget for 2026/27.

It was further agreed that the IJB should prepare a report for October's full Council meeting. That report should:

1. provide an updated equalities impact assessment on those service users actually asked to contribute;
2. provide an analysis of the income maximisation efforts made to support all potentially affected users; and
3. include an analysis of the amount of revenue expected to be generated and the taper level recommended.

Councillor Wallace left the meeting following the conclusion of this item of business.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1123. The Council considered and approved the Minute of the meeting held on 11 December 2024.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES

1124. The Council considered and approved the Minutes of the meetings of the undernoted:-

- (a) Special Licensing Committee – 10 December 2024;
- (b) Cabinet (Police & Fire) – 23 January 2025;
- (c) Audit & Scrutiny Committee – 23 January 2025
- (d) Education Committee – 6 February 2025;
- (e) Cabinet – 6 February 2025;
- (f) Licensing Committee – 11 February 2025;
- (g) Local Review Body – 12 February 2025;
- (h) Special Planning Applications Committee – 13 February 2025;
- (i) Appeals Committee – 14 February 2025;
- (j) Appeals Committee – 18 February 2025

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 23 JANUARY 2025 – INTERIM TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2024/25 – QUARTER 3

1125. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of 23 January 2025 (Page 1058, Item 1087 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that the organisations for investment of surplus funds be approved in accordance with Appendix 8 to the report, the Council considered a report by the Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) on treasury management activities for the third Quarter of 2024/25.

The Council approved the organisations for the investment of surplus funds in accordance with Appendix 8 of the report.

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 FEBRUARY 2025 – TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2025/26

1126. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of 20 February 2025 (Page 1087, Item 1118 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 be approved, including the Prudential and Treasury Indicators and the amended list of organisations for investment of surplus funds in accordance with Annex E to the report; that the policy on the repayment of

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loans fund advances as specified in Section 3.4 of the report be approved; and that the forms of investment instruments for use as permitted investments be approved in accordance with Annex C to the report, the Council considered a report by the Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) on the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26.

The Council agreed:-

- (a) that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 be approved, including the Prudential and Treasury Indicators and the amended list of organisations for investment of surplus funds in accordance with Annex E to the report;
- (b) that the policy on the repayment of loans fund advances as specified in Section 3.4 of the report be approved;
- (c) that the forms of investment instruments for use as permitted investments be approved in accordance with Annex C to the report;

PROVOST'S ENGAGEMENTS

1127. The Council considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships, providing details of civic engagements attended and civic duties performed by Provost Montague since the meeting on 23 October 2024.

The Council noted the report.

Following consideration of this item, the Provost adjourned the meeting for a short time to allow members to take a break before reconvening. The meeting was then reconvened.

BEST VALUE – EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL: REPORT BY CONTROLLER OF AUDIT

1128. The Council considered a report by the Chief Executive on the East Renfrewshire Council's Controller of Audit Report for Best Value, published by the Accounts Commission in February 2025.

Delivery of Best Value was a statutory requirement for all local authorities in Scotland, and this was scrutinised by the Accounts Commission, who reported on whether councils were delivering on this duty.

In 2023, Audit Scotland had announced a change to the national approach to auditing Best Value, integrating it into the wider scope of audit work completed annually by each Council.

The report was attached as Appendix 1 to the report and it concluded that the Council had made consistently good progress with actions from previous Best Value reports, developing action plans to address previous recommendations. The report's headline findings were detailed in the report.

Members welcomed the report and acknowledged the hard work of both officers and the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to deliver on the recommendations of previous reports in this field.

The Council:-

- (a) noted the Controller of Audit's Best Value Report attached as Appendix 1 to the report; and

- (b) commended the positive findings of the Accounts Commission on Best Value delivered by East Renfrewshire Council as detailed on pages 4-5 of Appendix 1.

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2025-2030

1129. The Council considered a report by the Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) on the financial outlook facing the Council and seeking approval of a Medium Term Financial Strategy covering the five years from 2025/26 to 2029/30, which was attached as an appendix to the report.

The Council had undertaken long-term financial planning for a number of years, including producing a Financial Planning document each year, forecasting resource levels for the next 6 years. Capital planning was undertaken over a rolling ten-year period, reflecting the contents of the Capital Investment Strategy and the need to plan infrastructure over a longer period.

The financial planning document had been refreshed to form the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025-2030. It set out the Council's approach to the management of its finances and the wider context within which those plans had been developed, linking with the Community Planning Partnership's shared vision set out in "A Place to Grow". The MTFS also included the Council's reserves policy, which would no longer be presented as a separate document.

The report went on to summarise the financial outlook for the Council and the key strategic areas that the Council would concentrate on to address the significant challenges it would face over the period of the report.

The strategy would be updated on an annual basis.

The Council:-

- (a) noted the financial outlook, budget projections and key assumptions for financial planning from 2025/26 to 2029/30, set out within the appendix; and
- (b) approved the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-2030.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL REVENUE ESTIMATES 2025/26

1130. Councillor O'Donnell delivered a presentation regarding the Council's budget for 2025/26, indicating that there were grounds for cautious optimism regarding the Council's finances, though there were still significant challenges ahead. He believed there was a path to a more positive future for the Council.

He expressed his delight at the Accounts Commission report, discussed in the previous item, that stated that East Renfrewshire Council was an example other local authorities could learn from. Councillor O'Donnell summarised the many areas that were praised, as well as the financial prudence of the Council over many years.

Councillor O'Donnell stated his belief that East Renfrewshire Council was the best run Council in the country, but reiterated that the Council was not complacent and would work to continue to provide the best possible services to residents.

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In discussing the financial challenges facing all Councils, Councillor O'Donnell welcomed record levels of funding for Scotland announced in the UK Government's budget and subsequent Scottish Budget, the Council had received the best funding settlement for many years. He stressed that this was key to ensuring the continuation of high quality services. Despite this, he expressed disappointment that, with record Scottish budget funding going into the NHS and social care, none of that money had come to the Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCP).

In terms of grant settlement, the Council would receive £271.3m, an increase of £14.7m on previous years. It was stressed that the grant remained the biggest source of Council funding, with Council Tax accounting for only 21% of the Council's budget. The additional funding had allowed £1.6m to be passed on to the East Renfrewshire HSCP.

Councillor O'Donnell went on to outline the budget gap, which had reduced from £15m to £7.1m due to the higher than expected funding settlement as well as work carried out by officers and elected members to address the budget gap. He outlined some of the savings proposals which would address the remaining gap. The full details were included in Annex B of the Revenue Estimates report.

Councillor O'Donnell welcomed the decision to lift the Council Tax freeze to allow Councils to raise further funding to pay for vital services. He referenced consultation exercises which had shown residents were prepared to pay a bit more to protect services. To that end, an 8% increase in Council Tax was proposed. Councillor O'Donnell stated that this was more than he would like, however, it would protect the vital services that residents rely on. He subsequently advised that Scottish Water had decided upon an increase in water and sewerage rates of 9.9% and that this was a central decision not made by the Council.

Money from the Council's reserves would also be used to address the remainder of the Council's budget shortfall for the year.

Councillor O'Donnell went on to detail how the Council would continue to support the East Renfrewshire HSCP against a backdrop of increasing demand and complexity of needs driving serious financial challenges for the HSCP. £79.1m would be allocated to HSCP from the Council, more than a fifth of the Council's budget.

Councillor O'Donnell commented on the future challenges facing the Council, with budget gaps for the next 2 years estimated at £5m per year. He called for a 3 year budget cycle which would provide more certainty on budgeting and allow long term projections on funding to be carried out more easily. Councillor O'Donnell took a moment to praise the cross-party work carried out through the Budget Strategy Group.

Councillor O'Donnell went on to detail many projects being carried out across the Council across each Council Department, including improvements to educational facilities, local infrastructure, meeting challenges in housing and the launch of the new East Renfrewshire Community Plan, "A Place to Grow".

After thanking the Council's workforce on their exemplary work to deliver services against the backdrop of financial challenges, Councillor O'Donnell stressed that there would be no compulsory redundancies as a result of the savings proposed within the budget. He concluded that the Council would continue to invest in services and the workforce to improve the lives of all residents of East Renfrewshire.

In response, members joined in praising the work of the Budget Strategy Group in preparing the budget over the year, and agreed with calls for a 3 year budget settlement should it be possible. Some concerns were expressed around the National Insurance Contributions.

Information was also provided relating to points of clarity around producer responsibility income, some reductions in spend around some staff groups, as well as information on crossing guard patrols. The Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) also provided further information on the situation with the National Insurance increases.

The Council:-

- (a) noted that the revenue estimates for 2025/26 (Annex A) have been prepared with the budget gap of £7.066m, closed on the basis of a 8% Council Tax increase, the utilisation of £0.385m of resources made available through Service Concession Flexibilities agreed by the Scottish Government and savings proposals of £1.235m (Annex B);
- (b) noted that £0.844m of the listed 2025/26 savings have already been agreed by Council;
- (c) noted that a 1% change to the level of Council Tax set would produce an adjustment of £0.681m to the level of income available;
- (d) noted that the budget gaps for 2026/27 and 2027/28 have been estimated at £5.019m and £5.001m respectively, with a cumulative budget gap of £10.020m over this two year period, on the basis of an assumed 3% Council Tax increase each year but before application of any new savings or draw down from general reserves in those years;
- (e) noted the estimated funding gaps of £0.332m, £5.187m and £5.216m also faced by the Integration Joint Board (IJB) in respect of social care in 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28, with a cumulative budget gap of £10.735 over this three year period;
- (f) noted that where a funding gap is closed through the use of recurring measures, this will reduce the funding gap in the following and subsequent years;
- (g) agreed that the management of the Council's finances and services will continue to be undertaken on a longer term basis;
- (h) agreed the Council Tax Band D level of £1,528.44 for 2025/26;
- (i) agreed the utilisation of reserves and the savings to be implemented for 2025/26; and
- (j) agreed that, where possible, savings for implementation in 2026/27 which require significant preparatory work should be brought back for approval later in the year to permit this to be undertaken timeously.

David Macdonald left the meeting during the consideration of this item of business.

GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PLAN 2025/26 – 2034/35

1131. The Council considered a report by the Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) on the General Fund Capital Plan covering the 10 years from 2025/26 to 2034/35, prepared in line with the approach set out in the Capital Investment Strategy.

Details of the funding strategy for the Plan, as well as key projects and programmes planned for the period were detailed in the report and attached appendices.

In response to a question from Councillor Ireland relating to spending which had already taken place on the Eastwood Park Leisure Centre, the Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) indicated that she would provide a breakdown on the figure to Councillor Ireland outside of the meeting.

There was also discussion around other aspects of the Plan, including works on Carolside Primary School and the Aurs Road project.

The Council approved the programme for 2025/26 and authorised officers to progress the projects contained therein.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – RENT SETTING 2025/26

1132. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment on proposals to increase rent for council housing for 2025/26.

The report detailed the various drivers and legislative challenges that had led to the proposal to increase rents by 4.9%. It was stated that, following an affordability assessment, it was established that the proposed increase was affordable and that East Renfrewshire Council's housing would remain the most affordable available social housing in the area in comparison with other providers.

There was discussion among members around the figures presented, in particular, around the increase in Void Rent Loss Provision, increase in purchase and hire of equipment as the standard of stock was increased and the increase in payments to sub-contractors.

The Council approved a 4.9% rent increase be applied for 2025/26

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26 – 2035/36

1133. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment on the Housing Capital Programme 2025/26 and the proposed ten-year programme.

The report detailed the pressures placed upon the current Housing Capital Programme, as well as key areas for investment in the next 10 years. Full details were provided in the appendices to the report.

There was discussion around the limitation on land sites and possible use of the Vacant and Derelict Land Fund to bring some sites into use. There was also discussion of the Shanks site in Barrhead and barriers to development on that site due to issues with landowners.

The Council approved the Housing Capital Programme for 2025/26 to 2034/35 and authorised officers to progress the projects listed in Appendix A for 2025/26.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE CULTURE AND LEISURE TRUST 2025/26 BUSINESS PLAN

1134. The Council considered a report by the Director of Education on the East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust 2025/26 Business Plan.

The Business Plan was attached as Appendix 1 to the report and was presented to the Council for approval. The operational highlights within the plan were detailed in the report.

Members welcomed the report and the work of the Culture and Leisure Trust, which was performing well.

The Council approved the proposed Business Plan for 2025/26.

UPDATED CIVIC EVENT PROTOCOL (INCORPORATING FLAG FLYING PROTOCOL)

1135. The Council considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships on the updated Civic Events Protocol (incorporating Flag Flying Protocol).

Officers responded to members questions regarding the flying of the Union Flag during Workers' Memorial Day, indicating that this was the flag traditionally flown on that day.

The Council approved the updated Civic Event Protocol (incorporating Flag Flying Protocol).

LICENSING COMMITTEE – APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

1136. The Council considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships on the appointment of a Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee.

The Council approved the appointment of Councillor Colm Merrick as the Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee.

PROVOST

