

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of meeting held at 5.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 25 September 2025.

Present:

Councillor Andrew Anderson
Councillor Tony Buchanan
Deputy Provost Kate Campbell
Councillor Danny Devlin(*)
Councillor Paul Edlin
Councillor Annette Ireland
Councillor Chris Lunday(*)
Councillor Julie Ann McHale

Councillor Colm Merrick
Provost Mary Montague
Councillor David Macdonald(*)
Councillor Julieann McHale
Councillor Jim McLean
Councillor Andrew Morrison
Councillor Owen O'Donnell (Leader)

Provost Montague in the Chair

Attending:

Steven Quinn, Chief Executive; Alexis Chappell, Chief Officer, Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP); Caitriona McAuley, Director of Environment; Louise Pringle, Director of Business Operations and Partnerships; Kirsty Stanners, Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer); Gerry Mahon, Chief Officer (Legal and Procurement); Siobhan McColgan, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Barry Tudhope, Democratic Services Manager; Colin Hutton, Senior Communications Officer; Jennifer Greenshields, Chief Executive's Business Manager; Paul Parsons, Principal Account; John Burke, Democratic Services Officer; and Bethany Mitchell, Assistant Democratic Services Officer.

Also Attending:

Rob Jones, Ernst & Young

(*) indicates remote attendance.

Apologies:

Councillors Caroline Bamforth, Angela Convery, Katie Pragnell and Gordon Wallace.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1336. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

2024/25 ANNUAL ACCOUNTS AND DRAFT ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT FOR EAST RENFRESHIRE COUNCIL

1337. Under reference to the minute of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee held earlier that day (Page 1268 , Item refers 1329) the Committee considered a report by the Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) regarding the Annual Accounts for 2024/25; the associated draft Annual Audit Report prepared by the External Auditor, which provided an overview of the main issues arising from the 2024/25 audit and would be issued in final form after the financial statements had been certified; and the associated Letter of Representation from the Council to the External Auditor.

The Council had received an unqualified audit certificate. It had operated within its operation budget, returning departmental surpluses totalling £2.5m, with the main drivers behind this detailed in the report.

Transfers of £1m had been made to the Capital Reserve, as anticipated in the Revenue Estimates report, leaving the balance of £1.5m in the Council's un-earmarked General Reserve, which equated to 2.7% of the overall net budgeted revenue expenditure, which was in accordance with the Council's reserves policy to hold a minimum of 2%.

Details were also provided on the Council's overall reserve balances and capital expenditure.

A copy of the Letter of Representation from the Council to Ernst & Young, the external auditors, was attached as Appendix 2 to the report for the Council's consideration.

The Council agreed to:-

- (a) approve the Council's Annual Accounts for 2024/25, including the Management Commentary, Annual Governance Statement, Accounting Policies and Audit Certificate, for signature on behalf of the Council;
- (b) noted the draft 2024/25 Annual Audit Report, including the related Action Plan, the finalised copy of which would be circulated to Elected Members; and
- (c) approved for signature the Letter of Representation to be sent from the Council to Ernst & Young.

QUESTIONS TO CONVENERS OF WHICH NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN

1338. The Council heard questions submitted to the Leader of the Council, Convener for Health and Social Care and Convener of Education.

Councillor Morrison submitted the following question to the Leader of the Council:-

"To ask the relevant Convener for a progress update on the survey undertaken to tackle poor mobile phone coverage in Newton Mearns, and wider East Renfrewshire, following announcement on 6th March 2025 of a partnership with Glasgow City Region to install surveying equipment to East Renfrewshire Council refuse collection vehicles."

The Leader of the Council responded to the question, indicating that the survey of mobile phone coverage that had been announced earlier in the year was part of a Glasgow City Region programme, known as the Smart and Connected Social Places Programme. He provided some details of that programme and the projects involved in it. He indicated that the survey was the largest of its type in Scotland.

A handout was circulated, giving details of the outcome of that survey, with areas of low signal highlighted. Those areas of poor coverage had been flagged to mobile phone providers.

The providers had indicated that coverage was expected to increase through use of shared infrastructure and a follow-up survey was planned, with timescales to be agreed.

East Renfrewshire Council would continue to liaise with the dedicated Telecoms Unit within Glasgow City Council to address areas of poor coverage to address any issues.

Councillor Morrison asked, as a supplementary question, if the Leader would undertake to hold the networks responsible for areas of poor coverage. The Leader responded that the Council could only influence decision making in this area and, working at City Region level, would continue to work to influence those decisions to address any problems that arose.

Councillor Macdonald submitted the following question to the Convener for Health and Social Care:-

"Can you provide a progress update for the financial assessments being carried out for the introduction of charges for adult social care?"

The Leader, on behalf of Councillor Pragnell, Convenor of Health and Social Care, who had submitted apologies to the meeting, stated that extensive engagement had been carried out with residents through drop-in sessions, written and video communications; as well as collaboration with third sector providers. There had also been staff training and development of robust processes around the administration of those assessments.

Elected members had received a briefing session on the topic on 23 September 2025, in preparation for the forthcoming paper to Council on the subject.

It was reported that income maximisation work had, on average, seen an annual income increase in excess of £5,000 and, for some, significantly more. The Leader thanked the Council's Money Advice and Rights Team (MART) for their work in assisting HSCP in carrying out the financial assessments.

Of the 515 people identified as being in scope for charging, it was noted that all had received three letters, over 100 had engaged with drop-in and other sessions, 67 had contacted MART for financial assessment and 15 of those assessments had been completed with the remainder still in progress.

The Leader noted that, despite significant efforts to engage, there had been understandable reluctance to fully engage with the financial assessments at the time, with many users waiting for a full and final decision before disclosing any financial details.

A comprehensive report would be presented to Council in October with papers published on the Council website on 14 October.

Councillor MacDonald asked, as a supplementary question, if financial estimates revealed if the charging policy had yielded the revenues expected.

The Leader, and Chief Officer – HSCP, clarified that the outcome had been in line with what was previously stated.

Councillor Macdonald submitted the following question to the Convenor of Education:-

"Does the Convener of Education recognise that allowing smartphones in our schools is causing our young people a great deal of unnecessary harm both to their mental health and

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to the quality of the education they receive in the classroom and is obstructing educators from carrying out their jobs properly?"

Councillor Anderson, the Convener of Education, stated that the Council currently had a live consultation ongoing where children and young people, as well as parents, carers and school staff were being asked to share their views around mobile phone use in East Renfrewshire schools. Councillor Anderson detailed some of the key themes of that presentation and acknowledged the strength of feeling on the topic, with over 5,000 responses received with just over a week of the consultation still to run.

Councillor Anderson went on to discuss some of the benefits and drawbacks of mobile phone use in schools, referring to various studies and articles that had been produced discussing the topic. He noted that a wide range of evidence had been made available on both sides of the argument.

Councillor Anderson stressed the importance of the role of families in shaping digital habits and the- need to hear the voices of the community before making any decisions. However, he reassured the Council that a range of data, including external scrutiny, highlighted the overall wellbeing and educational experience of children and young people in East Renfrewshire continued to be an area of focus. He provided details of some recent inspections which had shown very good and excellent practices across the Council area.

Councillor Anderson looked forward to the outcome of the consultation and seeing how it translated into policy, encouraging anyone who had not yet engaged with the consultation to do so.

Councillor MacDonald asked, as a supplementary question, what the likely outcome would be in terms of policy changes.

Councillor Anderson, and the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) responded that they would have to wait to see the outcome of the consultation before making any decision in that respect. However, scrutiny on those outcomes would be given by the Education Committee.

PROVOST