

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of virtual meeting held at 7.00pm on 15 December 2021.

Present:

Provost Jim Fletcher	Councillor Alan Lafferty
Deputy Provost Betty Cunningham	Councillor David Macdonald
Councillor Paul Aitken	Councillor Jim McLean
Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)	Councillor Colm Merrick
Councillor Angela Convery	Councillor Stewart Miller
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Councillor Paul O’Kane
Councillor Barbara Grant	Councillor Gordon Wallace
Councillor Annette Ireland	

Provost Fletcher in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive; Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Andy Cahill, Director of Environment; Julie Murray, Chief Officer - Health and Social Care Partnership; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Sharon Dick, Head of HR and Corporate Services; Louise Pringle, Head of Communities, Revenues & Change; Alison Tait, Executive Assistant to Chief Executive; Colin Hutton, Senior Communications Officer; Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager; Sharon McIntyre, Committee Services Officer and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

Introductory Remarks

Provost Fletcher welcomed everyone to the meeting and intimated that this would be the last Council meeting attended by Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive, prior to her retirement in January 2022. Time would be taken at the end of the meeting to look back on her career and give Elected Members the opportunity to thank her for her time with the Council and in public service.

Apologies:

Councillors Caroline Bamforth, Danny Devlin and Jim Swift.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1837. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

1730

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 27 OCTOBER 2021

1838. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Council of 27 October 2021 (Page 1678, Item 1787 refers), Councillor Wallace requested that the Minute be approved subject to the following amendments:-

First Paragraph, line 3

That the words “the Council had done a good job in the area of recycling” be replaced with the words “it was thanks to the awareness and work of residents that the Council had been seen to do a good job in recycling”.

First Paragraph, line 7

That the words “which had destroyed” be replaced with the words “which would destroy”.

The Council approved the Minute subject to the foregoing amendments.

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 25 NOVEMBER 2021

1839. The Council considered and approved the Minute of the meeting held on 25 November 2021.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES

1840. The Council considered and approved the Minutes of the meetings of the undernoted except as otherwise referred to in items 1841 and 1842 below:-

- (a) Planning Applications Committee – 3 November 2021;
- (b) Local Review Body – 3 November 2021;
- (c) Appointments Committee – 9 November 2021;
- (d) Education Committee – 11 November 2021;
- (e) Cabinet – 18 November 2021;
- (f) Cabinet – 25 November 2021;
- (g) Audit & Scrutiny Committee – 25 November 2021;
- (h) Cabinet (Police & Fire) – 2 December 2021; and
- (i) Licensing Committee – 7 December 2021

CABINET – 25 NOVEMBER 2021 - GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021-22

1841. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 25 November 2021 (Pages 1702 - 1703, Item 1811 refers), Councillor Wallace sought clarification that the percentage figure detailed in the first paragraph of page 1703, was in fact 1.06% and not 1.6%, the latter figure having been quoted at the meeting.

The Democratic Services Manager having requested the opportunity to check this figure in the Minute and update it if required, the Head of Accountancy confirmed that the 1.06% as detailed in the Minute was accurate.

CABINET – 25 NOVEMBER 2021 - A RISK-BASED APPROACH TO ROAD ASSET SAFETY INSPECTIONS

1842. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 25 November 2021 (Page 1706, Item 1816 refers), Councillor Wallace acknowledged that this proposed new approach should minimise the exposure of danger or serious inconvenience to road users of the network or wider community (i.e. non-East Renfrewshire residents using main roads). However, the Minute did not record any of the discussion that took place around speed of travel being one of the factors on which repair prioritisation would be based, and that a consequence of this would be that repairs to side roads which would normally have been repaired based on the pothole dimensions would now be left unattended for unspecified periods of time.

Referring back to the risk-based approach to road asset safety inspections, Councillor Buchanan noted that this was to improve the service and to ensure that the Council tackled any dangerous potholes quicker. It was not suggesting that potholes would be left unidentified or unrepaired, it was simply prioritising them. Councillor Buchanan noted the recent significant investment in side roads to bring these up to a high specification. The new approach was simply prioritising the potholes with the most significant risk but still attending to all road repairs as quickly as possible albeit with a different process of prioritisation.

Councillor Merrick agreed with the position as set out by Councillor Buchanan. He advised that he had sought clarification on this point at the meeting regarding work on side roads and that this was a method of prioritisation and not an approach to ignore side roads or less used roads.

Councillor Wallace again commented that no time limit was given on the timescale for the repair of potholes in side roads, with priority given to main roads and those potholes that could potentially cause an accident. He noted the question was asked at the meeting as to what would happen to the side roads and that these would be left unattended for an unspecified period of time with the prioritisation on the main roads. He noted the Environment Department was not prepared to put a time limit on filling potholes in side roads.

The Democratic Services Manager reminded Members that Minutes were not a verbatim record of meetings, but a summary of discussion that took place. However Councillor Wallace's comments and the further discussion which had taken place at this meeting would be recorded in the Minute.

GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/22

1843. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 25 November 2021 (Page 1702, Item 1811 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that the proposed adjustments to the General Fund Capital Programme 2021/22 be approved, the Council considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer), recommending adjustments to the 2021/22 General Fund Capital Programme as at 30 September 2021 in light of developments that had arisen since the programme had been approved.

Councillor Wallace noted the mention of the City Deal, which arose from £500 million from the UK Government, match funded by the Scottish Government, referred to a number of other UK Government funding streams available totalling over £5B for Scottish Local Authorities to access, and enquired as to the Council's position regarding these funds.

Also referring to the programme, Councillor Miller noted that £0.046m to support installation of electric vehicle charger points would be prioritised for Council fleet. He reported that he had received some complaints from residents about broken charging points, such as at the Eastwood Health and Care Centre, and questioned if there was any action the Council could take in relation to individuals leaving their vehicles attached to charging points overnight restricting their use by other users.

In response, the Director of Environment advised that the Council was currently investigating The Levelling Up Fund in particular. Government guidance on the fund was expected soon. It was anticipated that bids for funding would need to be submitted between April and June and any proposals would be the subject of a report to Cabinet.

In relation to charging points, the Director confirmed that the Council did receive Scottish Government funding. There were some dated charging points across the area which broke down frequently and officers were addressing this. In relation to overnight charging, the Director advised that he was not aware of anything the Council could do to prevent this.

Councillor Buchanan noted that he was aware of the issues regarding the charging points and a work order for repairs had been issued a number of weeks ago. He also referred to the theft of one of the charging points. Reviewing the infrastructure of charging points and their maintenance would be essential moving forward, especially given the increase in electric vehicles across the area. In this regard, Provost Fletcher noted a presentation from Scottish Futures Trust to the Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE) members on the ambitious roll out of charging point facilities, and highlighted the level of thought at a senior level to the delivery of this with a view to provide an infrastructure similar to Norway with charging points throughout the country.

Councillor Wallace thanked the Director of Environment for his earlier response although raised that the Council, designated as a Priority Two Local Authority in the Community Renewal Fund did not receive any funding whilst nine other Local Authorities in this category had received funding. The Council was therefore one of three local authorities who did not receive any funding. He hoped lessons would be learned when applying for the £4.8B Levelling Up Fund and the £150m Community Ownership Fund.

Councillor Buchanan advised that these Funds fell well below the levels of European funding previously available and were slow in being brought forward, with concerns having been expressed by local authorities across the UK with regard to levelling up processes. The lack of regional assistance programmes and maps highlighting areas which would be able to access the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) were no longer in existence or were not being used, and this gave rise to concern as to the criteria that would be used to allocate funding from the new Funds.

Councillor Aitken having commented on the overall funding provided to the European Union in relation to levels of European grant funding that had been available, Councillor Wallace reiterated there was funding available and he was simply encouraging that the Council learn from the previous approaches when attempting to access it, as failure to obtain this funding would have a detrimental impact on the Council's overall financial position.

The Council:-

- (a) noted and approved the movements within the programme; and
- (b) noted the shortfall of £0.443m and that income and expenditure on the programme will be managed and reported on a regular basis.

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/22

1844. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 25 November 2021 (Page 1703, Item 1812 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that the proposed adjustments to the Housing Capital Programme 2021/22 be approved, the Council considered a joint report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) and Director of Environment, monitoring expenditure as at 30 September 2021 against the approved Housing Capital Programme 2021/22.

The Council:-

- (a) noted and approved the current movements within the programme;
- (b) noted the shortfall of £0.160m and that income and expenditure on the programme will be managed and reported on a regular basis.

INTERIM TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2021-22

1845. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of 25 November 2021 (Page 1714 - 1715, Item 1824 refers), the Council considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) providing details of the Council's treasury management activities for the period 1 April to 30 September 2021 and seeking approval of the use of the organisations specified in the report for the investment of surplus funds.

The Council:-

- (a) noted the interim Treasury Management Report 2021/22; and
- (b) approved the use of the organisations listed at Appendix II of the report for the investment of surplus funds.

STATEMENTS BY CONVENER/REPRESENTATIVE ON JOINT BOARDS/ COMMITTEES

1846. The following statement was made:-

- (a) **Councillor Merrick – Convener of Community Services & Community Safety**

Councillor Merrick provided an update on East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust recovery during the pandemic. He explained that in relation to sports and physical activity, swimming lessons had almost 2000 participants, which was 77% of pre-Covid levels. He noted that both Barrhead Foundry and Neilston had recovered to 100% of pre-Covid numbers.

Gym membership was at 1875 members, which was 75% of the March 2019 figure. Finally, following the resumption of out-of-hours bookings in schools in November, Community Sports classes now had over 900 participants, which was 64% of pre-Covid levels.

He advised that mass vaccination continued at Eastwood Park and the vaccination centre would continue at Carmichael Hall until at least March, with some classes relocated to Clarkston Hall and Netherlee during this period.

He further advised that bookings were now in place in all of the Council's Community Halls, and out-of-hours bookings in schools were now restored for clubs and groups.

Councillor Merrick then provided an update on library and information services, advising that following the completion of works to Busby Library, the Council had turned its attention to repairs to Mearns Library, with these works expected to be completed in mid-January.

Eastwood Theatre had also recovered its services, with the Trust's annual pantomime, despite being produced at short notice following the permission to reopen coming in only August, breaking all records. 15,000 tickets had so far been sold 4,000 more than the previous record. This continued the Trust's successful turnaround of the theatre from one which made a regular £100,000 annual loss, to one which now generated a sustained profit.

The Council noted the statement.

PROVOST'S ENGAGEMENTS

1847. The Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive, providing details of civic engagements attended and civic duties performed by Provost Fletcher since the meeting on 27 October 2021.

Having heard Provost Fletcher report that in addition to the events detailed in the report, on 11 December he attended the Young Enterprise Scotland Fair in Rouken Glen Centre, the Council noted the report.

COVID-19 RECOVERY UPDATE

1848. The Council considered a report by the Chief Executive, providing Elected Members with a further update on response, recovery and renewal work taking place across the Council and the Trust.

Councillor Buchanan noted the significant challenges posed by the Omicron variant of COVID-19 and thanked staff for their hard work and dedication throughout a challenging year. He advised that a COSLA meeting had taken place earlier in the day with all local authorities and the Deputy First Minister, and he was present at this meeting with the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive then outlined a number of changes that had occurred since the report was written. These related to advice on reducing socialising; changes to isolation requirements; identification by local authorities of suitable premises for mass vaccinations; additional pressures on the HSCP, increasing levels of staff absence and the impact on critical services; and the anticipated requirement for further isolation support to be provided.

In support of the Chief Executive, Councillor Buchanan outlined that further disruption to Council services was anticipated as a result of the spread of the new variant at a time when residents would be looking to the Council and other public sector bodies for support. As part of this the Council, along with local partners, would continue to support the increased vaccination programme and humanitarian support.

Councillor Macdonald commented on the report stating that he was seeing a tangible difference in the willingness of the public to comply with restrictions in the community, especially in light of the news reports of the possible disregard within the UK Government to some of the restrictions in place.

Councillor Aitken concurred with the comments made by Councillor Macdonald and noted the initial evidence that suggested the Omicron variant was less harmful than previous variants of the virus. As such he suggested that both the UK and Scottish Governments had been unnecessarily heavy handed with some of the restrictions that had been introduced. He then referred to a recent report in the Barrhead News that 1,027 complaints had been made to the Council during 2020/21, a 43% increase in complaints in comparison to the previous year, and requested a breakdown of these complaints.

The Chief Executive advised that a breakdown of complaints received across all of the complaints categories would be provided to Councillor Aitken. However she noted that organisations across the public and private sectors had not been able to deliver services to the levels they would normally do in light of COVID-19 and through requiring to support critical services and the NHS.

The Chief Executive advised that some of the information from the Scottish Government was in the form of guidance rather than legislation and a balance was trying to be struck by the Scottish Government between public health and the economy. She outlined that the Council would continue to follow the guidance and information provided by the UK and Scottish Governments and noted at this stage the transmissibility of the Omicron variant appeared greater with the severity of symptoms less severe. However this was still to be confirmed. Members were also referred to information previously circulated by the Chief Executive on the analysis of the Omicron variant.

Councillor Buchanan highlighted the close link between the Scottish Government and COSLA throughout the pandemic and that briefings had taken place as early as possible. He noted the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant, and that Omicron was likely to be the dominant variant in Scotland shortly. This gave an insight into the expected increase in infection levels and the resulting hospitalisations and impact on staffing levels in all areas of business. He referred to the population difference in South Africa with 5% of the population over 60 in contrast with 30% over 60 in the UK and noted that the severity of the symptomatic outcomes was unclear, therefore a preventative approach was appropriate to protect lives. He encouraged people to think of others and receive their booster. He noted that this was a sobering situation and the current spread of the Omicron variant in London and its impact on services provided an insight to what may happen across the rest of the country.

Councillor Macdonald highlighted that whilst increasing levels of vaccination of the population was to be welcomed, it had the effect of hiding symptoms and so regular lateral flow device (LFD) testing was a key part in the fight against the virus, and it was important that the Council continued to highlight to local residents the importance of testing.

In reply, Councillor Merrick confirmed that the Council was emphasising all COVID-19 measures including LFD tests, vaccination, and the relevant guidance and legislation. In response to Councillor Aitken's comments on restrictions he advised that responsible governments require to respond swiftly and highlighted that without appropriate restrictions in place one person with Omicron could infect up to a thousand people. He also noted that the severity of the Omicron variant was not clear at this stage and highlighted the pressures on the NHS and its staff.

Noting Councillor Merrick's comments Councillor Aitken highlighted the adverse impact that focusing on the pandemic was having on the treatment of other illnesses such as cancer and heart disease where many treatments had been postponed, and that in the longer term this cessation of other treatments may result in more lives being lost than the number saved from COVID. He also stated that at this stage it was not possible to say with any certainty whether the increased transmission of the virus would lead to increased hospitalisations.

Referring to Councillor Macdonald's comments on LFD testing the Chief Executive highlighted that guidance had been updated to the effect that a test should be taken whenever going to meet with others instead of twice a week which it was previously.

This approach was supported by Councillor Macdonald. He recognised that many people were uncomfortable about raising the issue of testing with friends and family and encouraged the Council to spread the testing message as widely as possible through all available channels. He also highlighted that constituents were struggling to access test kits.

In conclusion, Councillor Buchanan outlined that the Council had been active in informing constituents to take LFD tests regularly, particularly if socialising with others. He also noted pharmacies should be able to provide LFD tests if there were difficulties with ordering these online and that kits could also be obtained from mobile test facilities in the area.

The Council noted:-

- (a) the ongoing work on response, recovery and renewal;
- (b) that ongoing service delivery levels were still affected by staff involvement in response and recovery activities as well as the less efficient operating practices required to meet Coronavirus protocols; and
- (b) the continued additional workload of many staff.

DESIGNATION OF MONITORING OFFICER

1849. The Council considered a report by the Chief Executive, proposing that the Chief Officer – Legal and Procurement should be designated the Council's Monitoring Officer in terms of Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (the 1989 Act).

The report outlined that following the retirement of the Solicitor to the Council in 2010, Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive, had been appointed as the Council's Monitoring Officer. Given her retirement in January 2022, it was now necessary to designate another senior officer to perform this role.

The report explained that In terms of Section 5(7) of the 1989 Act, the Monitoring Officer may appoint a deputy to act in their absence. Ms Innes had appointed Mr Gerry Mahon, Chief Officer - Legal and Procurement, as her deputy. During her time as Monitoring Officer, Ms Innes had relied on the advice and support of Mr Mahon, who she had worked with closely.

The Council agreed to designate Gerry Mahon - Chief Officer – Legal and Procurement, as Monitoring Officer in terms of Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 from the end of January 2022.

VALEDICTORY – CAROLINE INNES, DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1850. Provost Fletcher advised that this would be the last Council meeting attended by Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive, who was due to retire in January 2022 after 37 years of public service. On behalf of the Council he thanked the Deputy Chief Executive for her involvement in East Renfrewshire Council over the years and wished her a long and happy retirement. This was echoed further in individual tributes from Councillor Buchanan as the Leader of the Council, Councillor Merrick, Councillor Wallace, Councillor Aitken, Councillor Lafferty and by all Members of the Council. The Deputy Chief Executive responded in suitable terms.

PROVOST'S AWARD - CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARD 2021

1851. The Provost announced that the recipient of this year's Citizen of the Year Award was Oonagh McKinnon. He advised that Ms McKinnon was integral to the start-up of the East Renfrewshire Additional Support Needs Parents Action Group, which supported young people who have autism and their parents. As chairperson of the Barrhead-based group, Ms McKinnon helped young people and their families become more confident in feeling part of the community and had continued this vital work throughout the pandemic. He noted he would be meeting her next week to present her with the award and thanked her for her hard work in the community which made a positive impact on the lives of so many families in the area. All Members offered their congratulations.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

1852. This being the last meeting of the Council prior to Christmas Provost Fletcher wished all councillors the compliments of the season.

PROVOST

