

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of virtual meeting held at 10.00am on 3 March 2022.

Present:

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

Provost Fletcher in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Louise Pringle, Director of Business Operations and Partnerships; 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); Anthony McReavy, Chief Executive, East Renfrewshire Leisure and Culture Trust; Phil Daws, Head of Environment (Strategic Services); Sharon Dick, Head of HR and Corporate Services; Murray Husband, Head of Digital and Community Safety; Joe McCaig, Head of Education Services (Performance and Provision); Siobhan McColgan, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Gillian McCarney, Head of Environment; (Planning Officer) Barbara Clark, Chief Accountant; Graeme Smith, Communications Manager; Colin Hutton, Senior Communications Officer; Mary Docherty, Quality Improvement Officer; Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager; John Burke, Committee Services Officer and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

Introductory Remarks

Provost Fletcher welcomed everyone to the meeting and intimated that an emergency motion relating to the Russian invasion of Ukraine had been included as item 6(b) on the agenda. He indicated that an event had been planned to raise the Ukrainian flag at the Council Headquarters at 3.30pm on 4 March 2022. Any elected member who wished to be present at the raising of the Ukrainian flag was welcome to attend.

Apologies:

Councillor Jim Swift.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1896. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2021

1897. The Council considered and approved the Minute of the meeting held on 15 December 2021.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES

1898. The Council considered and approved the Minutes of the meetings of the undernoted:-

- (a) Licensing Committee – 18 January 2022;
- (b) Planning Applications Committee – 19 January 2022;
- (c) Local Review Body – 19 January 2022;
- (d) Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 20 January 2022;
- (e) Cabinet – 27 January 2022;
- (f) Education Committee – 3 February 2022;
- (g) Licensing Committee – 15 February 2022;
- (h) Planning Applications Committee – 16 February 2022;
- (i) Local Review Body – 16 February 2022;
- (j) Cabinet (Police & Fire) – 17 February 2022; and
- (k) Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 17 February 2022

CABINET – 27 JANUARY 2022 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT (SCOTLAND) ACT 2015 – COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

1899. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 27 January 2022 (Pages 1760 - 1761, Item 1872 refers), when it had been agreed to remit to the Council consideration of a Community Transfer Asset Review Panel, its terms of reference and membership, the Council considered a report by the Director of Environment seeking approval to amend the Council's policy for Community Asset Transfers (CAT) as governed by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

Councillor Buchanan outlined that the remit of the panel was to review requests for the transfer of community assets where the decision of Cabinet had been to refuse the request, or grant subject to conditions. Applicants had the right to request a review of such decisions within a set timescale. He indicated that the proposed panel would comprise of Provost Fletcher and Councillors Aitken, Macdonald, O'Kane and Wallace. In the event that any member of the Panel was unavailable, or was unable to participate due to having expressed an interest in the CAT being reviewed, it was proposed that the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships be authorised to identify a suitable replacement, taking account of any involvement in the original Cabinet decision or any subsequent call-in to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Ireland welcomed the establishment of the Panel and particularly welcomed the inclusion of Councillors Aitken and Macdonald following their earlier resignations from all committees. She asked if the members of the Panel, before any review meeting, would be asked to declare any interest in the CAT being reviewed. The Democratic Services Manager pointed out that, in terms of the establishment of the process it was clear that any member of Cabinet who ruled on the initial application and any Member who had made a statement in

public with regard to the application would be expected to declare an interest and not take part in any decision. With that in mind, Provost Fletcher reminded Members to have care to the public statements they make with regard to these sorts of applications, similar to statements they might make in relation to planning applications.

Councillor Miller asked for assurance to be given that any group taking on a Council property in this way be made aware of their full responsibilities. He referred to the specific case of the former police station in Clarkston at 60 Busby Road, indicating that there had been issues around the leasing of that property that had led to disputes between Council departments around responsibility for various issues around the property. He stressed that anyone taking on ownership of buildings or other property should be made aware of their responsibility for the upkeep of the property. In reply, the Director of Environment indicated that the policy was to help facilitate the process but it would be made clear to groups during the process what was involved in taking on a property.

In response to Councillor Ireland's earlier point, Councillor Aitken reminded Members that he had e-mailed them indicating that he was happy to take on committee work, however it was his opinion that the main parties did not want independent voices on committees.

Councillor Wallace also noted that the chair of Audit and Scrutiny Committee was an independent councillor.

Councillor Macdonald then clarified the reasons he had resigned from the 2 committees to which he had been appointed. He stressed that he had been willing to serve on other committees but had not been considered when any vacancies had arisen. He further remarked that the independent councillor who Chaired the Audit and Scrutiny Committee had been a Conservative councillor at the time of his appointment.

The Council agreed:-

- (a) to establish a Community Asset Transfer Review Panel;-
- (b) that the Panel's terms of reference be to review requests for the transfer of a community asset in terms of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 where the decision of the Cabinet was to refuse the transfer request or to grant the request subject to different conditions to those on the transfer request, and the applicant has within the prescribed timescale asked that the Council review the request;
- (c) that membership of the Panel comprise Provost Fletcher, and Councillors Aitken, Macdonald, O'Kane and Wallace; and
- (d) that in the event of any of the members of the Panel being unavailable to attend, the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships be authorised to identify a suitable replacement, taking account of any members involved in the original Cabinet decision or any possible subsequent call-in.

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 17 FEBRUARY 2022 – TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REPORT FOR 2022/23

1900. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of Audit and Scrutiny Committee of 17 February 2022 (Page 1791, Item 1893 refers) , when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/23 be approved, including the

amended list of organisations for investment of surplus funds in accordance with Annex F to the report, and that the policy on the repayment of Loans Fund advances as specified in Section 3.4 of the report be approved, and the forms of investment instruments for use as permitted investments in accordance with Annex D to the report be approved, the Council considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer, reporting on the Treasury Management Strategy for the financial year 2022/23.

Councillor Miller clarified that, in accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee was responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the Strategy, including the approved list of investors and the policy on the repayment of Loans Fund advances. He reported that clarification on various matters had been provided, highlighted that the report set out the parameters within which the treasury function operated, highlighted that the strategy explained various fiscal flexibilities available to the Council to help address COVID-19 pressures, and confirmed that related mid-year and annual reports would be submitted to the committee in due course.

The Council agreed:-

- (a) that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2021/21 be approved, including the amended list of organisations for investment of surplus funds in accordance with Annex F to the report; and
- (b) to approve the policy on the repayment of loans fund advances as specified in Section 3.4 of the report.
- (c) to approve the forms of investment instruments for use as permitted investments in accordance with Annex D to the report.

NOTICE OF MOTION – SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT 2021/22 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SCHOOL CENSUS

1901. In accordance with Standing Order 25, the following notice of motion had been submitted by Councillor Wallace, seconded by Councillor McLean.

This motion requests that East Renfrewshire Council does not participate in the Scottish Government's 2021/22 Health and Well-being School Census without the proposed final version being presented to councillors at a full council meeting and its suitability for use in East Renfrewshire determined thereafter by way of a vote.

Councillor Buchanan, seconded by Councillor Lafferty, moved an amendment in the following terms:-

That the full wording of the motion be deleted and the following be inserted instead:-

Councillors have now had the opportunity to view the final version of the proposed Census. Education Department have addressed many of the concerns such as anonymity, timing and parental consent. We are satisfied that the Education Department can now proceed with the Census.

Provost Fletcher invited Councillor Wallace to speak in terms of the motion.

Councillor Wallace referred to a recent Education Committee meeting where members were advised that 90 to 95% of questions included in the Census were similar to ones already asked through other different forums. He indicated that it was the remaining 5 to 10% that had caused understandable unrest and concern. He referred to the proposed "named

persons" policy and stated that, having lost the argument on that policy, the Scottish Government was now attempting to find a route to undermine the role of the parent in family life. In relation to the amendment, he pointed out that the questionnaire had arrived at the same time as a 602 page Council agenda, and for 3 days of that time there was no access to the Council's e-mail system. He stated that he believed Members should be allowed time to scrutinise such important matters and vote on them.

In seconding the motion, Councillor McLean stated that he fully endorsed Councillor Wallace's comments. He stated that he could see no problem with allowing further time for Members to scrutinise the Census and for the matter to be brought back to the Council for a decision.

Councillor Buchanan was heard in support of his amendment, agreeing with Councillor Wallace in that 90 to 95% of the Census was normal information gathered routinely. He noted that the areas of concern were particularly around anonymity, the nature of the questions and around parental consent. He felt that these concerns had been addressed by the key changes made by the Education Department. In particular, the scheme was now opt-in and children could opt out of answering questions if they wished, both the pupil and school would have complete anonymity in terms of the answers given, and the timing of the Census in relation to exams had also been addressed. Councillor Buchanan felt that the concerns had been listened to and addressed and the Council was now in the position to allow the Education Department to move ahead to gather the information to help future service delivery and the needs of children.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Lafferty reiterated his opposition to the motion and his hope that the Council adopt the amendment. He stated that East Renfrewshire Council had emerged as the leading authority in education in Scotland and its schools were among the most effective and committed to continuous improvement. He noted that issues around parents and children were very important and was pleased to note the changes made, to the Census referred to by Councillor Buchanan. In particular, where children would have the choice to answer questions in whole, in part, or not at all, depending on their preference. He believed that the Census would allow the Education Department to collect valuable information on the children and young people in East Renfrewshire.

Councillor Merrick then commented. He noted that the Census had initially been developed by the Scottish Government, and the Education Department had then consulted with various partners and stakeholders, including children's services partners, head teachers, parents and the Diocese of Paisley as well as taking account of comments by other local authorities to address any concerns, and had adapted the Census appropriately. He noted the most important changes made were that the Scottish Candidate Number was no longer required as part of the Census so it was completely anonymous, the process to participate was opt-in so children and parents could refuse to participate if they wished, and surveys would be made available to parents prior to completion of the opt-in process. He mentioned that the most contentious questions had been around the sexual health section for S4 to S6 pupils, noting that the emphasis of the Census was in identifying coercive behaviour which had been identified as a priority in partnership working. He stated that 2 surveys were now being offered to S4 to S6 pupils, one of which did not include the sexual health questions. He stressed that, in his opinion, there was no untoward motive in conducting the Census.

Councillor Ireland noted that she had attended a number of Parent Council meetings and that the Census had been raised a number of times. She noted that staff from the Education Department had held a meeting with all Parent Council Chairs and was pleased that the Education Department had listened to the concerns raised and made changes. She felt it was incredibly important to gather this information to allow the Council to plan services and understand the needs of children and young people. She further noted that it would be

displayed on the survey that, at the commencement of submissions, should pupils wish to discuss any of the matters raised, they should speak to a trusted adult or member of staff, with educational psychologists available. She asked if the Director of Education could confirm that pupils who found the questions difficult would be offered support and what form that support would take, and also why the survey was required and what the information would be used for.

Councillor Miller stated that he and all Members had seen the e-mail from the Director of Education providing the revised Census, and most of the questions were fairly innocuous. However, he expressed concern that some of the questions asked were questions that he would not consider should be asked of adults, let alone children. He expressed his disgust that children should be asked if they had sexual relationships. He remarked that children may collaborate to give certain answers to the Census and so skew the data, making it not particularly useful. He asked why this information would improve schools and which services it would improve.

Councillor Macdonald stated that such a material change and sensitive matter should be put before Members for discussion and he would be supporting the motion on that basis. He stated that the content of the Census should be circulated to parents and guardians first. He believed that they were the filter who should be making the decision on whether or not children participate in the Census. He remarked that while young people were being given the choice to participate or not, this would be an impossible decision as they had not seen the content to know if they should participate. He remarked that the content was extremely sensitive and had the potential to embarrass and cause stress. He noted that while anonymity was helpful, the main concern was about how it would affect participants when they realised that it was something they didn't want to participate in.

Councillor Aitken also expressed his support of the motion. He said he was not assured that teenagers being given these very sensitive questions would be given the option to opt-out. He questioned the usefulness of the information provided if only a small number of pupils completed the survey.

In relation to the issues raised by Councillor Macdonald, Councillor Bamforth noted that parents would be given access to the survey prior to the opt-in process. She noted that there were no explicit questions in the Census as those had been removed.

The Director of Education, in responding to questions asked by Members during the debate, explained there would be clear guidance setting out the support required for each child completing the Census. Pupil support staff, trusted adults and educational psychologists would all be available depending on the support required. He further noted that there would be no follow up or analysis of individual responses. He stated that the reason for asking for this information was that the Education Department had a duty to provide and plan services that supported health and wellbeing of young people, more so than ever given COVID-19. Planning those services appropriately and monitoring the impact of those services going forward required data gathering to take place.

The Head of Education (Equality and Equity) further clarified the position. She stated that the Education Department had worked closely with children's services partners and had lengthy discussions with Parent Councils and other partners on the content of the Census. She noted a growing national concern around gender based violence and coercive behaviour and the need for further information to be gathered on these topics. By asking questions focused on those issues, the Council could identify where resources needed to be targeted, such as at certain age groups or ethnic groups. If so, interventions could be put in place where required. She noted that information had come to the Education Department that

children as young as 12 were asking questions regarding risky behaviours around drugs, alcohol, smoking and sexual behaviour and it was important to target resources to support young people in that regard.

At this stage, Provost Fletcher invited Councillor Wallace to sum up.

Councillor Wallace noted that certain questions had been removed. He asked if nobody was at all worried that they had been asked in the first place. He expressed his concern on what would have happened if it had not been an election year. In terms of coercive behaviour, he felt that the remarks made amounted to a sort of “thought police”. He shared the concerns of other councillors on gender based violence, however, he felt that all the Census did was bring violence against family life. He stated that the direction of travel was bad and that this Census would simply be the thin end of the wedge.

The Democratic Services Manager clarified that in light of current circumstances voting would be by roll call vote.

On the roll being called, Councillors Aitken, Grant, Macdonald, McLean, Miller and Wallace voted for the motion. Provost Fletcher and Councillors Bamforth, Buchanan, Convery, Cunningham, Devlin, Gilbert, Ireland, Lafferty, Merrick and O’Kane voted for the amendment.

There being 6 votes for the motion and 11 for the amendment, the amendment was declared carried.

NOTICE OF MOTION – RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

1902. In accordance with Standing Order 18(d), Provost Fletcher agreed to accept as a matter of urgency the following notice of motion been submitted by Councillor Buchanan, seconded by Councillor Cunningham.

East Renfrewshire is appalled at the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, noting that the waging of aggressive war is a criminal act under both international law and the Russian constitution. The Council joins with the civilised world in condemning the actions of President Putin in initiating the war which is taking an increasing toll on military personnel and non-combatant civilians alike. The Council fully backs the UK Government in partnership with other nations’ allies in deploying measures aimed at ending the illegal Russian invasion and supporting the government and people of Ukraine in the defence of their country and the lives and liberties of their people. The Council stands ready to assist in all appropriate ways with humanitarian support and refuge to the people of Ukraine in this ordeal. East Renfrewshire is reminded that peace, stability and democracy cannot be taken for granted, even in Europe, and stresses the value and importance of international institutions including the United Nations, the European Union and NATO in continuing to safeguard and advance liberal democracy, mutual security and economic prosperity in Europe and beyond. The Council requests the Chief Executive to write to Andrey Yakolev, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Scotland, conveying the Council’s condemnation of the actions of his government.

No amendment was proposed to the motion and Provost Fletcher opened the floor to discussion and debate.

Councillor Macdonald stated his support for the motion and asked that the Local Government Pension Scheme be looked at to ensure there was no investment in the Russian Federation in any way.

Councillor Miller remarked that the scenes witnessed via the media were very emotional for all and expressed his gratitude that the Council was unanimous in supporting this motion. He praised the work of Clarkston Scouts in gathering materials to send to Ukraine. Their appeal had been oversubscribed and he asked that if any other local groups were doing similar work they be notified to allow them to be work with the Scouts to maximise the amount of materials that could be sent to Ukraine.

Councillor Ireland added her thanks to the 121st Scouts and remarked that so much support had come that they had to suspend donations. She noted that everyone was appalled at what was happening in Ukraine, and men and women were dying defending democracy. She remarked upon the large campaign of misinformation being orchestrated by Russia on social media, however, the indefensible nature of their actions was clear. She raised the publishing by Amnesty International of a full list of international law violations and expressed her disgust at the situation and her pride at what was taking place locally to support those affected by the war.

Councillor Convery echoed the other comments made and noted that the amount of children who had died was tragic, with young adults being used as cannon fodder on the pretence of a training exercise.

Councillor McLean also offered his support to the motion and remarked upon his horror at the situation. He expressed his pleasure at the fact that politicians from all sides joined together when situations like this arose.

Councillor Merrick reflected upon how lucky people in East Renfrewshire were to live in a democracy. He stated that in Russia a megalomaniac had disregarded democracy to start a war where people were being slaughtered. He further stated that if raising a flag and passing this motion offered even a small degree of succour and support to people facing the Russian onslaught then it was worth it.

Councillor Bamforth also expressed her support for the motion and was pleased to see cross party agreement. She remarked that the long-term damage to the people of Ukraine would be unimaginable. She noted her work with asylum seeking families and stressed that the psychological damage done to people in these situations goes on for years after with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among other issues. She asked that Members always remember the Ukrainians, even after the conflict.

Provost Fletcher, in closing the discussion, thanked everyone for their contributions and was delighted to see that the motion had been passed unanimously. He reminded members of the raising of the Ukrainian flag which would take place on 4 March 2022 at 3.30pm at the Council Headquarters.

**STATEMENTS BY CONVENERS/REPRESENTATIVES ON JOINT
BODIES/COMMITTEES**

1903. The following statement was made:-

(a) Councillor Bamforth – Integration Joint Board

Councillor Bamforth explained that the agenda at the last Integration Joint Board (IJB) had been shorter than usual due to COVID-19 pressures. However, the Chief Officer had provided an overview of the current state of play on the pandemic and had noted that it was an ever changing picture. The NHS was focused on recovery prior to the onset of the Omicron variant and had shifted their response to address the difficult winter period.

She indicated that the Pandemic Management Team were meeting 3 days a week to help coordinate the response to the developing situation. The IJB was pleased to note the situation was improving following real capacity worries over the festive period. Board members had recognised the commitment of staff over the period to address the serious issues that arose. However, she noted that the impact on residents was becoming apparent with increased demand for services and increase in complex needs cases as many services were paused during the lockdown period. Neurodiversity was a big challenge for children's services due to the pressure on families and carers and the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) was supporting both throughout the pandemic in bespoke ways. HSCP were inviting unpaid carers to their local unscheduled Care Planning Group and it had been recognised that individual budgets had made a real difference to carers.

A revenue update had been provided by the Chief Financial Officer which noted that the HSCP was assuming full spend of the £2.84m winter funding with any unused monies earmarked to support growth in demand in line with Scottish Government advice. The costs of nursing and residential care had reduced, however, this was more than offset with increased activity in the care at home service and the long-term trends were unclear at this time. The IJB had approved the use of reserves to fund the family wellbeing service for a further 2 years following the cessation of the Robertson Trust funding, which would end in May 2022. This service had supported a number of children during the pandemic, as well as exceeding the success criteria agreed at the outset to reduce repeat presentations at GP practices, contact 90% of families within 2 weeks of referral and work with a minimum of 178 children and young people per year.

The Council noted the statement.

PROVOST'S ENGAGEMENTS

1904. 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 15 December 2021.

The Council noted the report.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE CULTURE AND LEISURE TRUST 2022-23 BUSINESS PLAN

1905. The Council considered a report by the Director of Education, seeking approval for the East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust (ERCL) 2022-23 Business Plan.

Provost Fletcher noted that the Business Plan had been approved by the ERCL Board, but that if the Council's proposed budget was not approved later at the meeting it could impact upon the Business Plan. Following this, he opened the floor for debate and discussion.

Councillor Miller remarked that he understood why the ERCL needed to be financially viable. However, he understood that East Renfrewshire now had the most expensive facilities in the west of Scotland. He noted that amateur youth groups had found the increased costs unbearable and were now using facilities in neighbouring authorities at a third of the cost. He believed that ERCL should nurture local youth groups.

Provost Fletcher replied that, as an ERCL Board member, this was not the information he had been given and the Trust didn't make any money from the types of performances mentioned by Councillor Miller. He stated that he would welcome any investigation into that situation and would be happy to discuss with the Trust's Chief Executive outside of the meeting.

Thereafter, the Council approved the proposed East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust 2022-23 Business Plan subject to the confirmation of the Council budget.

FINANCIAL PLANNING 2022 – 2028

1906. The Council considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer), on the updated Outline Revenue Financial Plan for 2022 – 2028.

The Council agreed:-

- (a) that the continuing budget pressures anticipated in the next 6 years and mitigating actions proposed be noted; and
- (b) that the Outline Revenue Financial Plan 2022 – 2028 be approved.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL REVENUE ESTIMATES 2022-23

1907. The Council considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) on the outline revenue estimates of income and expenditure as the basis for the Council Tax declaration for 2022-23. A copy of the Revenue Estimates 2022-23 was appended to the report.

The report outlined the revenue budget process, commented on the Scottish Government's Grant Funding for 2022-23, and explained that in determining the grant distribution the Scottish Government had again put in place the "Floors" arrangement to ensure year-on-year grant stability at individual council level. Under this arrangement, the Council would contribute £3.271m by way of deduction from Aggregate External Finance (AEF) grants in 2022-23. This was £1.472m higher than in the current year and reflected the high level of support distributed to a small number of other councils.

Having commented on Non-Domestic Rates income, the report referred to the financial outlook and the practice in recent years of setting multi-year budgets. Given the ongoing financial outlook, it was proposed that the Council continued to adopt a longer-term financial planning approach, but as multi-year Scottish and UK Government settlements were not available, it was proposed to agree plans only for 2022-23. Officers would continue to model departmental figures for 2022-23 to 2024-25 and update figures as set out in the Council's report on Financial Planning 2022-28 for longer-term planning purposes. It was anticipated that a further 3-year budget would be set in February 2023 once multi-year figures had been announced by the Scottish Government.

Taking account of a range of matters, the report referred to a total initial budget shortfall of £9.533m for the coming year. After applying the assumed 3% increase in Council Tax income used in budget planning, this left a budget gap of £7.729m. This was around £0.4m higher than initial budget planning figures and was the result of the higher than forecast grant support being more than offset by new unfunded pressures, in particular the new National Insurance levy. The position was, however, still subject to change as further inflation and interest rate pressures may arise during the year with consequential detrimental impacts on the Council's finances and service provision.

The report explained that the 2022-23 settlement did not include restrictions on Council Tax levels and that the Council's published forecasts had been based on an assumed 3% Council Tax increase. However, with inflation running at 5.4% and the Scottish Government settlement close to flat cash, this would require difficult service reductions to be introduced.

Consequently it was being recommended that the Council agree to a Council Tax increase of 3.5%. This would increase income by £2.104m per year and reduce the budget gap to £7.429m.

It was explained that budgets were closely monitored throughout the year and the latest monitoring had forecast a non-COVID related underspend of £1.507m by the year-end. It was also expected that the year-end position would confirm a further increase in underspend as Cabinet on 27 January 2022 had instructed Directors to avoid all non-essential expenditure for the remainder of the financial year. This had been taken into account when considering the scope for a draw on reserves. As set out in the report, the general reserve was forecast to be at least £9.427m at 31 March 2022. It was therefore considered that a further £5.253m of the outstanding 2022-23 savings requirement could be deferred on a short-term basis by a drawdown from unallocated general reserve funds, whilst still observing the Council's minimum Reserves Policy of around 2%. As a result, the budget shortfall for 2022/23 could be reduced to £2.176m. Annex B accompanying the report set out proposed departmental savings to close the remaining gap.

It was highlighted that whilst the Council continued to make every effort to minimise impact on front line services, the cumulative impact of successive real terms cuts in grant settlements meant that the scope for further efficiencies to be identified was significantly reducing. Nevertheless, £0.376m (16%) of the Council's savings proposals for 2022-23 related to efficiencies or to the Council's Modern Ambitious Programme and the focus on the Council's 5 capabilities.

The report then summarised total proposed departmental budgets for 2022-23. Reference was also made to the continuing impact of Welfare Reform on council services. As these changes, particularly Universal Credit, were still being rolled out, the budget for 2022-23 included contingency provision to help the Council make the necessary investment to support the changes and to progress measures to mitigate their impact on the public. As the financial impact of the changes was clarified in future years, the contingency provision would continue to be allocated to appropriate service areas.

Reference was also made to the assumed Council Tax collection rate of 98% for 2022-23 and reserves and balances issues, particularly the General, Modernisation, Insurance, Equalisation, and Repairs and Renewal Funds, Capital Reserve and Devolved School Management Reserve. Having referred to efficiency issues and the equality impact assessment carried out on the budget saving measures, the report concluded by indicating that the Revenue Estimates appended to the report were based on a Council Tax Band D level of £1,335.11 being set for 2022-23, representing a Council Tax increase of 3.5% compared to 2021-22.

Provost Fletcher then invited Councillor Buchanan to speak on the proposals outlined in the report.

Councillor Buchanan gave a presentation to Members to accompany the report and highlight the key points for consideration. He noted the life changing challenges of COVID-19 and the impact the extra services the Council had been asked to provide had made on the work of the Council.

He thanked all staff and members of the Council for their work in ensuring that, despite the many additional responsibilities, vital services had continued to be delivered to a very high standard for the people of East Renfrewshire. This was a remarkable achievement against the backdrop of a global pandemic.

The Council had also been able to continue planning for the future, with tenants moving into the latest batch of new council houses in the immediate future, and new schools and a new leisure centre in Eastwood to be delivered in the next few years.

Councillor Buchanan went on to remark upon the Council's role in spearheading the recovery from COVID in East Renfrewshire, referring to the significant challenges to be faced, not least of which would be financial. He had shared the disappointment of others in local government when he was informed of the initial funding settlement before Christmas 2021. He had since met with Kate Forbes, Scottish Government Finance Secretary, and others as part of constructive discussions to increase funding for local services. He was pleased at the announcement of an additional £120m for councils, which meant that £2m of the most severe savings required could be removed from the proposed budget. Whilst the funding position remained challenging, the Council remained committed to protecting the services relied upon by the most vulnerable in the community.

Councillor Buchanan referred to the public consultation launched in October 2021, seeking the views of residents on what the spending priorities should be. Along with the results of 2 other public consultations carried out earlier in the year, this informed the proposals outlined in the report.

He highlighted that the Scottish Government grant settlement remained the largest source of funding, accounting for the majority of income and, by contrast, Council Tax payments amounted to 20% of spending on key services. He noted that, increasingly, the settlement came with conditions as to what the money could be spent on. For that reason, 60% of the Council's budget was effectively ring-fenced for Scottish Government initiatives and priorities. While the Council was happy to support these, it meant that the Council had far less flexibility on where to make savings. This meant that unprotected services such as services for the homeless, money advice, roads and refuse collection faced increasing pressure.

Councillor Buchanan noted that the Scottish Government grant of £207.696m did not include provision for inflation or other core pressures faced by the Council. However, it was £2.2m more than the initial grant announced. He welcomed the extra funding, but noted that this would not close the gap in the Council's budget. He also stressed that this settlement was for one year only and so prevented further financial planning at this stage.

As a result of this settlement, the Council was required to make savings and had little choice but to look at options which would have a direct impact on services. It was proposed to address the budget shortfall of £9.5m, by savings of £2.2m, a 3.5% increase in Council Tax and a significant use of the Council's reserves of £5.2m. This reduced the Council's reserve balance to 1.53% of budget, close to the minimum limit of the Council's reserves policy. While this reduced the amount available in future years, it would protect the services on which the people of East Renfrewshire relied most. Contributions would also be made to the Integrated Joint Board and East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust to allow those organisations to plan their spending for the year ahead.

Councillor Buchanan explained that the proposed increase to Council Tax was not being proposed lightly, particularly in light of increasing cost of living pressures. However, if the Council did not opt to raise Council Tax it would require to make further cuts to vital services. The proposals made amounted to an increase of £45 annually for a Band D house in East

Renfrewshire, Councillor Buchanan highlighting that the most vulnerable would be protected by Council Tax reduction schemes. He noted that Council Tax bands in East Renfrewshire had been below the Scottish average and would remain around average for the coming year.

He also referred to the 18,000 households in East Renfrewshire, amounting to 45% of households in the area, who would receive a £150 cost of living payment.

Councillor Buchanan then stated that despite these pressures, the Council continued to invest in its communities and remained committed to delivering a range of ambitious projects to improve the lives of all in East Renfrewshire. In particular, he remarked upon the Overlee Family Centre which had opened in August 2021, 5,000 healthy lunches a week being served to nursery-aged children, and the upgrading of dining facilities at existing centres.

It was noted that, despite challenging circumstances, there had been another year of record breaking SQA exam results in East Renfrewshire, with vocational qualifications at double the national average. Councillor Buchanan referred to the two new primary schools planned to be built in Neilston and the new state-of-the-art leisure centre and theatre in Eastwood Park which had just received planning approval. Work on the centre would begin in January 2023.

It was further announced that all new buildings would meet or exceed energy targets in a bid to help tackle climate change, with the Council declaring a climate change emergency in October 2021. In response, 11,000 trees had been planted in 25 new small woods as the Council's COP26 legacy project. The Council's "Get to Zero" plan would be published later in 2022 to help the Council reduce its own emissions and £1m had been spent upgrading the Council's parks to make them more attractive to visitors and residents.

An ambitious City Deal project had been undertaken to create a new promenade in Dams to Darnley Park. Walkers, cyclists and motorists would all benefit from a new link between Barrhead and Newton Mearns. In addition, the Council was also on track to complete 128 roads projects using the £15m capital investment announced in 2019 to fund resurfacing.

Turning to COVID-19 recovery, Councillor Buchanan announced that £22.3m in grants to local businesses and self-employed people had been disbursed, encouraging people to shop, dine and take part in activities in East Renfrewshire.

In relation to the Council's house building and renovation programme, Councillor Buchanan indicated that 130 new homes in Barrhead and Newton Mearns had been constructed and, in the coming year, 200 new kitchens would be installed and 180 new boilers and central heating upgrades would be delivered.

Councillor Buchanan praised the work of the Health and Social Care Partnership on their front line delivery over the course of the pandemic. He thanked them for the work they had done and continued to do. It was noted that 63 new Home Carers had been recruited and 1,225 people had been supported to return home from hospital, with 93% of those discharged without delay. Furthermore, 650 new high-tech telecare alarms had been fitted allowing the most vulnerable to continue to live at home.

In conclusion, Councillor Buchanan thanked the efforts of all Council staff and expressed his confidence that many residents would continue to benefit from their hard work. He praised the constructive approach of Trades Unions in discussions around the savings and indicated that a commitment to no compulsory redundancies remained in place. However, 36 full time equivalent posts could be affected by the proposals made. He remarked on the significant financial challenges at the same time as many extra COVID services had been established. He stressed his commitment to continue to push for increased funding for local government. He asked for approval of the revenue estimates at Annex A of the report, approval of the

recommended level and use of reserves, approval of the Council Tax Band D level for 2022/23 to be set at £1,335.11 and that the Council note that management of the Council's finances and service plans would continue to be undertaken on a longer-term basis.

Councillor Lafferty seconded Councillor Buchanan's motion and commended the proposals. He stated that this was a demonstration of a responsible Council being prepared to take the necessary decisions, but prioritise service delivery. He recognised the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable and stated that the Council was doing all it could to focus its support. At the same time, the Council continued to deliver on planned investments in Early Learning and Childcare and in schools, as well as the major regeneration plans in the City Deal schemes. He indicated his pleasure at the continued excellent attainment by children and young people in East Renfrewshire in their education. In conclusion, he stated that the budget demonstrated a Council that prioritised the limited resources to address significant challenges.

It having been confirmed that in accordance with Standing Order 28 Councillor Wallace had submitted his proposed amendment to the Chief Financial Officer in advance of the meeting, Provost Fletcher then asked Councillor Wallace if he wished to propose an amendment, Councillor Wallace indicated that he did and seconded by Councillor McLean moved the following amendment:-

The Council's staff absence rates have historically been above average. An increased focus on the Council's staff absence levels could generate further efficiencies. By recruiting two additional HR staff at an estimated total cost of £110k, annual absence rates could be reduced by 1 day per employee, saving £315k each year. This would produce a net annual efficiency of £205k. £15k for lowland reserve cadets at Woodfarm, £190k to take the proposed £583k reduction in the education budget for the lowest attaining 20% down to £393k. After applying the new Scottish Attainment Challenge funding of £135k which we expect to receive in 2022/23, the net saving on the lowest 20% budget would be reduced to £258k. This smaller reduction should be easier for Head Teachers to manage, particularly as they have access to devolved school management reserves of over £3.5m.

Speaking in support of his amendment, Councillor Wallace stated that the proposed budget put a huge draw on reserves and a further demand on local taxpayers while also indicating huge cuts. In particular he referred to £580,000 in cuts to education funding for the lowest 20% attaining children. He stated his belief that this would not sit well with any councillor. He noted that it was Council policy, in February 2021, to aim for the non-earmarked reserve to be 4% of net budgeted revenue. The proposals made it clear that, unless there were exceptional circumstances, the Council would aim for this reserve to be a minimum of 2% of the net budgeted revenue expenditure. He noted that the administration was proposing to reduce the reserves to 1.53%, well below that minimum level, thus declaring that the Council was in exceptional circumstances.

Councillor Wallace noted that the UK Government's autumn budget created £3.5 billion in additional consequentials and the Scottish Government, none of which had been passed on to councils. Despite reductions in funding to councils by the SNP Government, he quoted the 1999 SNP manifesto as stating that underfunding local authorities had led to huge increases in Council Tax. In agreeing with this statement, he noted that there had been a 20% real terms reduction in Council funding alongside a 35 to 40% increase in Council Tax. This was reflected in a reduction in satisfaction levels in the Citizens' Panel survey results.

Councillor Wallace then stated that the £9.5m budget shortfall represented a real terms reduction in funding to East Renfrewshire Council from the Scottish Government. He pointed

out reductions of £8.5m in 2021, £16.2m in 2020, £14.4m in 2019, £7.4m in 2018 and £11.3m in 2017. He stated that these budget reductions had led to a cumulative £58m cut in funding over 6 years.

Councillor Wallace noted that non-administration opposition members had received their first sight of the proposed budget as part of a 602 page pack of papers for the meeting which was received on 25 February 2022, the previous Friday. This, he said, left them only 4 days in which to scrutinise the proposals and submit amendments, during 3 of which the Council's e-mail system was out of operation. For that reason, his amendment focused on the removal of £583,000 of funding from the lowest 20% attaining pupils. He noted that absenteeism in East Renfrewshire was in the lowest quartile of all local authorities in Scotland, with the last set of figures finding an average of 11 days FTE, and East Renfrewshire Council recording 13 days in the same year, leaving them 26th out of 32. He further noted that in 2017-18 the Council was 8th in the same measure. He suggested this was due in some measure to the Human Resources team being depleted that year as part of the £11m of cuts in the budget. The cuts particularly affected staff with specific duties to monitor and manage absenteeism. The amendment he proposed would put the Human Resources Department back on an even keel with 2 members of staff brought in with a remit to reduce absenteeism by 1 day. This would provide efficiencies as stated in the amendment.

Councillor Wallace then proposed that the savings realised should be spent as proposed in the amendment. He remarked on his work as the Council's representative on the Lowland Reserve Forces and Cadets Association. He noted a presentation given in January where members of the Association were informed of the benefits of participation in the Cadet Expansion Programme, intended to make the Cadet experience more accessible to a greater number of young people between 12 and 18 years old. This would bring awards at SQA levels 4, 5 and 6. A proof of concept model had been agreed with Broxburn Academy and Hawick. Both schools had noted significant benefits. Councillor Wallace noted that Woodfarm High School's Head Teacher, Gillian Boyle, was an enthusiastic advocate of the programme and was looking to introduce it to S2 and S3 pupils. This required recruitment of a Cadet Officer, with the army subsidising the cost at £5,000 per cohort. With the investment of £15,000, there would be 5 cohorts within 3 years, meaning the army would fully subsidise the post by that time. Additionally, there would be savings to the public purse due to the benefits of the scheme.

Councillor Wallace stressed that this was not an army recruitment scheme and, in the schools where this programme was in place, there had been no increase in army recruitment among pupils leaving the school.

The additional funding being directed to reduce the reduction in funding to the lowest 20% attaining pupils would allow, combined with funding from the Scottish Attainment Challenge, a significant reduction in the proposed cut. Councillor Wallace believed that more could be achieved, and additional funding redistributed. In particular he mentioned directing additional funding to addressing loneliness in East Renfrewshire.

In closing, Councillor Wallace thanked the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) and Chief Accountant for their assistance in providing him with information relative to his amendment.

Speaking in support, Councillor McLean fully endorsed the amendment. He also commented on the proposed new leisure centre. He acknowledged that he had endorsed the project at the Planning Applications Committee, however, he had some concerns over the deliverability of the project. He was not convinced that an Olympic sized pool was required. He noted that the project had initially been mooted as costing £26 to £30m, and had now risen to £50m to

£60m. This could increase further with inflation. He remarked that he would prefer to see a renovation of the existing facility rather than a new facility and he would like to see money borrowed put into revenue projects to fund refuse collection and roads repair instead.

Provost Fletcher then invited comments from other Members.

Councillor Aitken stated that he shared Councillor McLean's concerns about the cost of the new leisure centre. He referred to plans to spend significant funds on projects such as this whilst at the same time introducing charges for other services such as brown bin collection. He stated that in his view the bin collection scheme was a very regressive form of taxation with all residents paying the same regardless of household income, and so it hit the poorest hardest. He stated that he could not support the budget as it rested upon this standard charge and Barrhead would not benefit from a £60m new facility in Giffnock. Further, he stated that the increase in Council Tax was a concern. While recognising the offsetting measures for the very poorest, he stated that this would not support people who were currently just getting by, on top of increasing inflation and increased cost of living.

Councillor Bamforth commented that the new leisure centre was a capital project and so was not included in the revenue estimates. She also noted that the Council could not borrow to increase revenue spending. Furthermore, she stated that UK Government funding for English councils had fallen by 41.6% in 6 years adjusted for inflation. She particularly remarked on councils in England that had declared bankruptcy and faced massive cuts. She felt that criticism of the Scottish Government was unfair when it was happening throughout the UK. Finally, she noted that Council Tax in Scotland was £400 less on average than in England and it would be even more so when new tax changes came into force.

Councillor Ireland supported Councillor Bamforth's comments. She welcomed the comments by Councillor Buchanan and the importance of protecting front line services. In particular, she highlighted the role of Council staff in taking on additional responsibilities and dealing with COVID. In light of that, she was disappointed to see Councillor Wallace focus on absence management, proposing to spend £110,000 on that. Councillor Ireland pointed out that the figures on days lost to absence was now 10.4 days, compared to the 13 quoted. In her opinion, those figures decreasing during COVID was remarkable.

Councillor Macdonald referred to the proposed saving of £5,000 in relation to the redesign of the Isobel Mair School extended school day service and asked the Director of Education to clarify how this would be realised.

Responding to Councillor Bamforth's comments, Councillor Miller stated that he would prefer to concentrate on East Renfrewshire. He stated that he had sympathy for SNP councillors as they must be aware that the cuts proposed were the fault of the Scottish Government. He remarked that Council Tax had risen by 14.5% over the life of the current administration. He acknowledged that staff were finding it difficult to find savings but had done tremendously well. However, he expressed concern at how the cuts would work in practice. He highlighted the £0.5m cut to winter roads maintenance as the most ill-considered of all. He noted free bus travel being put in place for under 22s by the Scottish Government while school bus services were being reduced in East Renfrewshire. He also noted that the school meal charges would disappear when the Scottish Government would move to fund those also. Referring to Councillor Macdonald's question regarding Isobel Mair School, he remarked upon the Audit and Scrutiny Committee's visit to the school. Members of the committee were extremely impressed by the work being done by the staff there with the most disadvantaged children in society, this made a £5,000 saving there very concerning. His biggest concern remained the winter roads maintenance reduction. He noted that the Roads Service staffing levels were already extremely stretched. Given that, he was interested to know where these additional cuts would be made as they had the potential to cost lives. He stated that he had

expected the Scottish Government to move to support their local councillors in the run up to an election, however it seemed to him that the Scottish Government did not care about local government.

Responding to Councillor Macdonald, the Director of Education then explained the background to the proposed £5,000 saving at Isobel Mair School.

Councillor Buchanan then summed up and addressed some of the points raised over the course of the debate. In particular, he stated that while Councillor Aitken had mentioned what he disliked about the proposals, he had provided no detail on what he would do differently. On Councillor Miller's comments, he stated that all decisions taken by the Council were material and, despite the papers being issued on the previous Friday, he had only received Councillor Wallace's amendments to the proposal at this meeting. In terms of the political points made, he noted that the only ones making political points were the Conservative Group who, in his view, blamed the SNP for all of the Council's issues. Councillor Buchanan believed that the Council was in a good position, unfortunately, there was a Conservative government in Westminster. He highlighted how the Council had faced significant funding challenges in the past and continued to deliver effective services. In considering the amendment, he noted that the first part of the amendment was trying to get more out of staff who had worked incredibly long and hard over the past few years and turned their hand to various new responsibilities to help the people of East Renfrewshire. He felt that Councillor Wallace's quoted figures were inaccurate and an attack on staff. He further noted that a huge amount of money would go to tackling the attainment gap, with further money from the Scottish Government coming to deal with this specific issue and devolved school budgets in a good position. In conclusion, he stated that he saw nothing in the amendment proposed that could even be considered to be taken forward and so he was happy to continue with his motion as proposed.

On the roll being called, Provost Fletcher and Councillors Bamforth, Buchanan, Cunningham, Convery, Devlin, Ireland, Lafferty, Merrick and O'Kane voted for the motion and Councillors Aitken, Gilbert, Grant, Macdonald, McLean, Miller and Wallace voted for the amendment.

There being 10 votes for the motion and 7 votes for the amendment, the motion was declared carried and the Council:-

- (a) approves the revenue estimates for 2022-23;
- (b) approved the recommended level and utilisation of reserves;
- (c) determined the Council Tax Band D level for 2022/23 at £1,335.11; and
- (d) noted that management of the Council's finances and service plans would continue to be undertaken on a longer term basis.

It was noted that in the course of the vote, Councillors Cunningham and Devlin had been initially unable to cast their vote due to technical issues. Provost Fletcher stated that it was essential that all Members should be able to cast a vote in Council, and that appropriate safeguards should be put in place to prevent a recurrence.

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Councillor Aitken left the meeting at this point.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

1908. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 15 March 2021 (Page 1471, Item 1580 refers), when an update to the Capital Investment Strategy had been approved, the Council considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) seeking approval of a new Capital Investment Strategy.

Taken together with the Treasury Management Strategy report, it provided background information on the scale, objectives, affordability and risks associated with the Council's capital plans. A copy of the revised Strategy, which all councils were required to prepare, was appended to the report specifying the long-term capital ambitions of the Council and associated resource implications and risks, having been compiled with regard to these requirements, the Prudential Code 2017 and the Treasury Management Code of Practice 2017.

Having clarified that the Strategy adopted a corporate approach to long-term capital planning beyond the span of the Council's current capital plans, taking direction from the Outcome Delivery Plan and other key plans and strategies, the report confirmed that Council-determined objectives within the strategy would be driven forward by the Corporate Management Team working with partner organisations and local communities to ensure investment aligned to strategies, and that performance was measured against expected outcomes. A long-term strategic and financial view was considered essential for resilience in uncertain times and the strategy would be updated as required. A prudent approach to affordability and risk would continue to be taken with delivery of projects being closely monitored at officer and Elected Member level. Against the background of the Council's significant capital investment ambitions, the strategy, together with the Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Plan and Revenue Estimates and financial planning reports, set out how these would be funded and managed.

Councillor Ireland noted that Carolside and Cross Arthurlie Primary Schools were currently the buildings with highest priority in terms of investment. She also noted the Council was intent on addressing this but there was a question around when the 3rd phase funding would come forward.

In reply, the Director of Education clarified that the funding had been announced and would progress over 2022 with bids or submissions expected in the summer.

Thereafter, the Council agreed to approve the updated Capital Investment Strategy.

GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PLAN 2022-23 – 2031-32

1909. The Council considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) seeking approval of the General Fund Capital Plan covering the 10 years from 2022/23 to 2031/32. A copy of the plan, prepared in line with the approach within the Capital Investment Strategy, accompanied the report.

Provost Fletcher noted that Councillor Wallace had submitted proposals under Standing Order 28 and could submit an amendment if he so wished.

Having heard Councillor Buchanan move the report, and Councillor Lafferty second the report, stating that there was a need to grow the local economy and focus on recovery from the pandemic, Councillor Wallace, seconded by Councillor Macdonald proposed an amendment in the following terms:

Instead of the £55m proposed new leisure centre in Eastwood Park, the existing facilities could be refreshed and upgraded at a lower cost of £20m, saving £35m of capital expenditure over the next 2 years. £10m of this saving could be used to refresh and upgrade a number of local community hubs, including providing mini gyms. This would be in keeping with the Council's 20 minute neighbourhood aims and, by encouraging local residents to submit bids or proposals for their area, could also contribute to participatory budgeting. A further £15m could be invested in restructuring local roads infrastructure to provide separate bike lanes and safer walking routes. This leaves a total net reduction in planned capital spend of £10m over the next 2 years and this would reduce loan charges by more than £200,000, so reducing pressure on future years' revenue budgets.

Speaking in support of his amendment, Councillor Wallace, stated that just under 10 years prior he had delivered a budget amendment to the Council highlighting concerns about the state of repair of the Eastwood Leisure Centre and earmarked a refurbishment fund to tackle the primary maintenance problems that were being overlooked at that time. The Council having ignored that amendment, it was now being proposed to demolish the existing building and replace it with a £55m facility that had no place in East Renfrewshire and presented significant problems in terms of climate change. He noted that there were references to the benefits of outdoor learning, but it was being proposed to spend a large amount of money to attract more people indoors. Furthermore, it would only be available to those with ready access to transport. He highlighted the 20 minute neighbourhoods policy that was, in his opinion, a post-pandemic necessity as it promoted the concept of community. The policy was as important to business as it was to residents as it encouraged people to stay local when accessing services and to buy from local businesses. Having made reference to the Scottish Government providing money to install bollards on roads in East Renfrewshire to create cycle lanes, he remarked that had it not been for pressure from local groups they would have become a permanent feature. He stated that these were pet projects dreamed up by Holyrood but of little use to local people. However he acknowledged that officers not making any effort to obtain some of the funding made available for these projects would face criticism. He proposed that instead of earmarking the £55m for the new leisure centre, the existing facilities be upgraded, saving £35m over 2 years. Having outlined the spending of that saving, as outlined in his amendment, and the saving to loans fund charges, Councillor Wallace stated that local decision making on health and social care was about to be removed from councils. With education provision tied up in bureaucracy and ring fencing, control over environment was all that was left to councils. He stated that the Council should set itself on the right course while it still had the power to do so. He concluded by thanking the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) and the Chief Accountant for their assistance.

Councillor Macdonald added that he supported the amendment as it was logical and smart going forward in terms of what could be used in the existing estate.

Provost Fletcher then invited comments from other Members.

Councillor Cunningham stated that an initial proposal had been made to relocate the leisure centre, but a new build in Eastwood Park had been the preferred option. All the work in relation to relocation had been abandoned. Councillor Wallace was now suggesting that a new build was not suitable and so the work to plan that would need to be scrapped and officers would have to return to the drawing board. She acknowledged that £55m was a significant amount, but the Council had made a decision.

Councillor McLean, stated that in the current climate, things had changed quite considerably. He stated that the fact a new or refurbished leisure centre was required was not in question. However the money could be far better used on a number of other projects.

Councillor Bamforth commended Councillor Wallace for agreeing that there was a climate emergency after voting against the motion at Council declaring it. She referred to the road bollards stating that these were a temporary measure and had never been intended to be permanent. She highlighted that similar schemes had been introduced by councils across the UK, including in England, with funding for such schemes provided by both the Scottish and UK Governments. She noted that Councillor Wallace was a member of the Member/Officer Working Group on the new Leisure Centre and asked if his concerns had been raised there as it had never come up in Council until now. Given the current centre, which was a 50 year old facility that provided an income keeping services such as libraries going, she questioned what would occur if the centre was to become unusable.

Councillor Grant indicated that she was a member of the East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust Board and was in favour of localism. However, she felt that as she was about to retire as a councillor and was a member of the Board, it would not be appropriate for her to participate in the decision.

Councillor Ireland reiterated that the bollards referred to by Councillor Wallace were temporary and this had been the position from the outset. She noted that she had chaired the Planning Applications Committee meeting where the application for the new leisure centre had been unanimously approved, and she welcomed work starting on it. In her opinion, new cultural facilities were desperately needed in the area.

Councillor Miller referred to the comments made by Councillor Bamforth regarding schemes introduced by English councils and stated that he was only interested in East Renfrewshire. He noted that in the past he had had discussions with Councillor Wallace about Eastwood Swimming Pool not being fit for purpose. He stated at that time he supported proposals to demolish the existing centre and build a new one. Councillor Miller suggested that a refurbishment of the existing facility still had the potential for further, more costly repairs to be required in future years. In relation to the decision taken by the Planning Applications Committee, he confirmed that Councillor McLean was present and did approve, but did state at the time that he had reservations. Having supported the planning application, Councillor Miller felt that he could not support the amendment.

Councillor Merrick stated that in his view, Councillor Wallace's amendment was out and out electioneering. He asked why people in East Renfrewshire should not have the very best facilities available and why councillors wouldn't want the very best for their residents.

Councillor Buchanan, in summing up, stated that the Council was there to deliver for the people of East Renfrewshire and had done that at all times. He believed that the new leisure centre would be a huge asset in the toolbox that the Council had to deliver for residents. Not only would it provide additional space and capacity, but also first class services for residents that would be enjoyed for years to come. He stated that East Renfrewshire was leading on recovery and renewal and this project would continue to do that.

On the roll being called, Provost Fletcher and Councillors Bamforth, Buchanan, Convery, Cunningham, Devlin, Ireland, Lafferty, Merrick and O'Kane voted for the motion, Councillors Gilbert, Macdonald, McLean and Wallace voted for the amendment. Councillors Grant and Miller abstained.

There being 10 votes for the motion and 4 for the amendment, with 2 abstentions, the motion was declared carried and the Council:-

- (a) approved the programme for 2022-23 and authorised officers to progress the projects contained therein; and

- (b) agreed to earmark any capital receipts secured by 31 March 2022 for use in addressing ongoing COVID pressures, noting that if these are not required for this purpose they will be returned to the capital reserve on 31 March 2023

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2022-23

1910. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 25 February 2021 (Page 1431, Item 1545 refers), when the Council had approved the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2021-22 and an increase in rents for both 2021-22 and 2022-23, the Council considered a report by the Director of Environment to seek approval for the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2022-23.

Provost Fletcher indicated at this point that no proposals under Standing Order 28 had been received and so, should any amendment be proposed, it would require a suspension of the Standing Orders which required a two thirds majority of members to agree.

Having referred to the fact that the presentation of the HRA budget was normally accompanied by a proposal to approve a rent increase, the report clarified that it would not be required to do so as the Council had approved a 1% increase for 2022-23 in its previous report. However, approval was still required for the proposed HRA budget for the year.

The proposed budget for 2022-23 was appended to the report and would provide an additional £384,000 in 2022-23. The report went on to highlight the main issues of: staffing; property costs; supplies and services; loan charges; modernisation; and income.

Having heard from Councillor Devlin, Convener for Housing and Maintenance Services, the Council agreed that the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2022-23 be approved.

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022-23 to 2031-32

1911. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval of the proposed 10-year Housing Capital Programme for 2022-23 to 2031-32.

Provost Fletcher indicated that no proposals under Standing Order 28 had been received and so, should any amendment be proposed, it would require a suspension of the Standing Orders which required a two thirds majority of members to agree.

The report clarified the position on various matters, including how the programme had been focused on the need to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH). The majority of expenditure for the housing capital programme during 2022-23 and beyond related to the need for housing to continue to meet SHQS and the new target for EESH2. 95% of housing stock had already been brought up to meet the standard with a target of 99% by March 2022. The remaining 1% would be temporarily exempt because of the building types it included and excessive costs required to achieve the standard. This would be continually reviewed with advances in technology and funding streams and legal parameters impacting on the compliance standard.

Planned improvements which were being implemented included upgrading heating and telecare systems in sheltered housing accommodation and the commitment to provide 370 new Council homes. To date, 84 had been built and 14 purchased from the open market with 104 new homes under construction, 77 of which were due to be completed in the first half of 2022. It was further noted that a further 160 were in development for future years.

Having heard from Councillor Devlin, Convener for Housing and Maintenance Services the Council approved the proposed Housing Capital Programme for 2022-23 to 2031-32 and authorised the Director of Environment to progress the projects listed within 2022-23.

DRAFT NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4

1912. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment on the publication for consultation by the Scottish Government of the Draft National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and the Council's formal response.

The report noted that the planning system in Scotland was undergoing a substantial transformation and the context for preparing the next Local Development Plan (LDP3) had changed significantly. LDP3 would be prepared under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, which introduced a new statutory process for local authorities in preparing local development plans together with enhanced status for the National Planning Framework. This would require future LDPs to be reviewed every 10 years rather than 5, under the current system. NPF4 was a long-term plan that would run until 2045 and which set out where development and infrastructure was needed. It would guide spatial development, set out national planning policies, designate national developments and highlight regional spatial priorities.

The 4 parts of the NPF4 were outlined in the report and the Council's response to it was attached as an appendix to the report.

Councillor Grant stated that she was concerned about national frameworks and preferred a local approach. She asked if the Council would still be able to deal with local issues without referring to a national body. She also asked for clarification on the idea of 20 minute neighbourhoods.

In reply the Director of Environment clarified that national planning policies had been in place in the past and weren't totally proscriptive in terms of what the Council wished to develop. He noted that LDP3 would remain the main document. On 20 minute neighbourhoods, he stated that it referred to the ability for people to be able to access services and facilities by walking or cycling for 20 minutes. This was to ensure locality of services. The Head of Environment (Chief Planning Officer) further added that there had always been a national policy, the Scottish Planning Policy, which had been replaced by the National Framework. There was a regional framework below this and then the LDP3. This approach had been in place for a number of years. The main change brought about by the new legislation was that the LDP3 would remain in place for 10 years instead of 5. In response to other questions the Head of Environment (Chief Planning Officer) confirmed that the new process would not disadvantage the Council when compared to current arrangements.

Councillor Ireland welcomed the paper and stated that there were many good policies in the framework, especially around climate change and biodiversity.

Councillor Miller stated that this was just another step on the road to the nationalisation of councils. Whereas before there were regional development authorities, now it was a national framework. He agreed that there were good policies in the framework, but East Renfrewshire faced challenges as most brownfield sites had already been developed. He expressed concern that developers would turn their eyes to greenfield sites to fill mandatory quotas. He remarked upon the lack of infrastructure, need for more secondary school places, also the lack of doctors, dentists and pharmacies. He stated that the 3 main areas of carbon capture were peatland, woodland and grassland and those should not be destroyed.

Thereafter, the Council agreed:-

- (a) that the publication of the draft NPF4 and its consultation timeline be noted; and
- (b) that the formal response to the draft NPF4, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved and submitted to the Scottish Government.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

1913. The Council considered a report by the Chief Executive on strategic planning within East Renfrewshire Council, specifically with a focus on the impact of the pandemic and the outlook for a refresh of “Vision for the Future” later in 2022.

Having confirmed that “Vision for the Future” was published in September 2015 and gave a forward direction for the Council over a timeline of 10 years, the report confirmed that the Council had approved an updated version of the document in February 2020. It provided a platform and context to deliver the Community Plan, Local Outcome Improvement Plan and the wider family of strategies that guided the work of the Council and partner services.

Further updates were given in the report on the pandemic response and recovery, highlighting the next steps to be taken in that regard in terms of the priorities highlighted in “Vision for the Future”. It was noted that, despite the pandemic, the key outcomes remain as relevant as ever and, arguably, the theme of “connections” had been moved forward due to the pandemic. There was an opportunity to build on that in future.

Councillor Wallace referred to the Council’s “Get to Zero” proposals as outlined at paragraph 42 of the report stating that in his view that everything that was suggested was rejected by the Council when it voted against his amendment to the proposals on the Eastwood Leisure Centre.

Thereafter, the Council agreed to:

- (a) note the background to the development of “Vision for the Future”; its purpose and ambitions; that the pandemic would have cross-cutting short, medium and long term impacts; and to recommit to refreshing “Vision for the Future” to take account of those challenges as well as the opportunities that lay ahead as it worked alongside partners and communities to shape and progress East Renfrewshire’s post-pandemic recovery and renewal; and
- (b) approve the use of outputs of the budget engagement, Citizens’ Panel and Humanitarian research to inform future strategic planning, including “Vision for the Future”.

SCHEME OF DELEGATED FUNCTIONS

1914. The Council considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships on proposed amendments to the Scheme of Delegated Functions that had been prepared in the light of the creation of the Business Operations and Partnerships Department.

It was further noted that the amended Scheme also included a number of proposed additional delegated powers across Council departments to increase resilience within services, for which approval was sought.

1820

The amended Scheme was attached as Appendix 1 to the report, with the additional powers outline in paragraph 9 of the report.

Councillor Grant suggested that, looking at the number of delegated functions, there was little need for councillors.

Thereafter, the Council agreed:

- (a) that the alterations that had been made to the Scheme of Delegated Functions to reflect the changes to departmental structures and designations and which had been approved under existing delegated powers be noted; and
- (b) that the delegated powers in respect of those new matters as outlined in paragraph 9 of the report be approved.

SCHEME FOR MEMBERS' REMUNERATION AND EXPENSES 2022-23

1915. The Council considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships on the Scheme of Members' Remuneration and Expenses for 2022/23. A copy of the Scheme was appended to the report.

The report explained that the Scheme provided details of the levels of basic salary payable to all councillors, and the increased salaries paid to the Leader and Civic Head (Provost), these amounts being prescribed in legislation. The Scheme also provided details of those positions in the Council that had been identified as Senior Councillor positions for the purpose of the regulations, and the levels of salary to be paid to each post holder. In addition, the Scheme provided details of those other categories in respect of which Elected Members were entitled to claim expenses, such as the performance of approved duties, travelling expenses, and subsistence allowances.

The Council agreed to approve the Scheme of Members' Remuneration and Expenses for 2022-23

PROVOST