

MINUTE
of
CABINET

Minute of meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 7 November 2024.

Present:

Councillor Owen O'Donnell (Leader) Councillor Danny Devlin (*)
Councillor Andrew Anderson (Vice Chair) Councillor Katie Pragnell

Councillor O'Donnell, Leader, in the Chair

Attending:

Steven Quinn, Chief Executive; Caitriona McAuley, Director of Environment; Siobhan McColgan, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity)(*); Mark Rodgers, Head of Housing and Property; Kirsty Stanners, Head of Finance; Michaela Sullivan, Head of Place; Paul Parsons, Principal Accountant; and John Burke, Democratic Services Officer.

(*) indicates remote attendance

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1029. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

ESTIMATED REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2024/2025

1030. The Cabinet considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) detailing the estimated projected revenue budget out-turn for 2024/25 and providing details of the expected year-end variances together with summary cost information for each of the undernoted services as at 31 August 2024 and subsequent assessment of pressures arising.

- (i) Education Department;
- (ii) Contribution to Integration Joint Board;
- (iii) Environment Department;
- (iv) Environment Department – Support;
- (v) Chief Executive's Office;
- (vi) Chief Executive's Office – Support;
- (vii) Business Operations and Partnerships Department;
- (viii) Business Operations and Partnerships Department – Support;
- (ix) Other Expenditure and Income;
- (x) Joint Boards;
- (xi) Corporate Contingency;
- (xii) Health and Social Care Partnership; and
- (xiii) Housing Revenue Account.

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The Principal Accountant advised that on the basis of the information, and taking account of forecast Council Tax collection, a year end operational underspend of £768k was forecast on General Fund services with an operational overspend of £160k on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The reasons for departmental variances were set out in the report. She outlined that any such operational underspend at this year-end would assist the Council in meeting future years' budget challenges.

It was noted that the above figures reflected that £1,351k of forecast COVID-related pressures would be covered by drawing on the Council's COVID grant resources and as a result did not impact on the operational budget position.

It was noted that the forecast outturn position could still be subject to significant change, for example if COVID pressures increased again. Conversely, it was hoped that management action to avoid any non-essential expenditure could increase the underspend at year end.

In addition, the report sought approval for a number of service virements and operational budget adjustments, details of which were outlined.

Following a brief discussion, where the reduction in costs for PFI/PPI and the overspend in Community Safety were discussed, the Cabinet agreed:-

- (a) to note the forecast underlying General Fund Operational underspend of £768k and the HRA operational overspend of £160k before any contribution from the HRA reserve; and
- (b) to note the continued financial pressures on operational services arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and that it was expected to cover those from the COVID grant reserve; and

CHARGING FOR SERVICES – ISOBEL MAIR OUT OF SCHOOL CARE (OSC)

1031. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Education setting out a proposed approach to developing an Out of School Care (OSC) provision in Isobel Mair School.

The Council had committed £60,000 to support families of children who attended Isobel Mair School, Carlibar Communication Centre and Williamwood Communication and Support Service out with school times through the participatory budgeting approach. To that end, the Specialist Provision Out of School Care and Holiday Support Short Life Working Group had been established to explore opportunities for engaging with external providers to develop an OSC and holiday provision for children with complex additional support needs.

The report outlined the details of a consultation that had taken place with parents/carers from all relevant services, explaining that they had agreed that an OSC service should be based in Isobel Mair School and accessible for all specialist provision pupils.

External operators had been contacted, and the report outlined detailed discussions that had taken place with Indigo Childcare, with the conclusion that they were unable to provide the required service. Thereafter, a feasibility exercise had been carried out to the possibility of the Council providing its own service. The full findings of the scoping exercise were provided in the report.

Members thanked the Education Department for their work in developing the proposed approach.

The Cabinet:-

- (a) noted the actions taken to date in trying to source an external OSC provision;
- (b) agreed to the establishment of an East Renfrewshire Council run Term Time Additional Support Needs After School Care in Isobel Mair School;
- (c) agreed to the charge of £22.50 per session for 2024/2025 to access this term-time OSC; and
- (d) agreed to review charges for this service as part of the annual Charging for Service exercise.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – 30 YEAR BUSINESS PLAN

1032. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment on the 2024/25 review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan and the implications for service delivery and investment.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 required local authorities to prepare a HRA, separate from the General Fund of East Renfrewshire Council, which was self-financing and balanced each year. The HRA was responsible for all social housing owned by the Council, including sheltered housing, lock-ups and garage sites, as well as related open spaces, roads and footpaths which were not adopted by the Roads Service. The HRA also included a number of commercial buildings and shops. The Council was expected to prepare a 30 year business plan to address all of those areas.

In addition to key income and expenditure needs, the business plan would ensure that the Council met its statutory obligations as a social landlord, and some of those were outlined in the report.

The content of the 30 year business plan was summarised in the report and a 10 year capital plan would be submitted to the Council each February.

Following discussion, in which members received clarification on points around the commercial buildings held within the HRA, the Cabinet:-

- (a) noted the current financial status of the HRA and key activity areas for focus in 2024/25 and 2025/26;
- (b) noted the assumptions made for future years around rent increases and the HRA debt affordability ratio;
- (c) noted future investment pressures and the impact of the 30 year business plan; and
- (d) noted the annual submission of a detailed 10 year capital programme to the Council.

HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2026

1033. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment seeking approval for the updated Housing Asset Management Plan 2024-2026

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The Council's Housing Asset Management Plan (HAMP) had been updated to fit into the hierarchy of the Corporate Asset Management Plan, and outlined the work being undertaken by the Council in relation to management of its housing stock and the Housing Revenue Account's assets..

The updated HAMP was attached as Appendix 1 to the report and its high level vision, key challenges and approach to management of housing stock were summarised in the report.

In discussion, members asked questions about the sorts of assets that were within the HAMP and within the wider Council accounts, and the age of housing stock and the associated challenges. There was also a point raised around organisational challenges with the commercial properties held within the HRA.

Thereafter, the Cabinet approved the Housing Asset Management Plan 2024-2026.

CHILD POVERTY PRACTICE ACCELERATOR FUND 2024-2026

1034. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment informing members of the award of Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund (CPAF) funding from the Scottish Government for the delivery of employability in 2024-2026.

CPAF was launched by the Scottish Government in July 2023, aiming to provide support to enhance an area's approach to tackling child poverty. CPAF was a competitive scheme that local authorities could submit bids to.

The Council had submitted a successful bid to CPAF in July 2024, relating to the Flexible for Families Employer Programme. It had been developed in partnership with Flexibility Works, who would undertake the day-to-day delivery of the project. They were a social enterprise who specialised in encouraging flexible and new ways of working in Scotland.

The project would provide support for up to 30 local employers, including support assessments, mentorships and other actions as appropriate, supporting up to 15 families. The expected outcomes were summarised in the report.

Members welcomed the funding and were given some clarity on the specific work that would be undertaken.

Thereafter, the Cabinet noted the content of the report and the grant award from the Scottish Government and approved the use of the award for the Flexible for Families Employer Programme as outlined in the report.

CHAIR