

MINUTE

of

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of meeting held at 5.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 11 December 2024.

Present:

Councillor Andrew Anderson	Councillor David Macdonald (*)
Councillor Caroline Bamforth	Councillor Jim McLean
Councillor Tony Buchanan	Councillor Colm Merrick
Deputy Provost Kate Campbell	Provost Mary Montague
Councillor Betty Cunningham (*)	Councillor Andrew Morrison (*)
Councillor Danny Devlin (*)	Councillor Owen O'Donnell (Leader)
Councillor Paul Edlin	Councillor Katie Pragnell
Councillor Annette Ireland	Councillor Gordon Wallace
Councillor Chris Lunday	

Provost Montague in the Chair

Attending:

Steven Quinn, Chief Executive; Caitriona McAuley, Director of Environment; Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Julie Murray, Chief Officer, Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP); Kirsty Stanners, Head of Finance; Sharon Dick, Head of HR and Corporate Services; Mark Rodgers, Head of Environment (Housing and Property); Gerry Mahon, Chief Officer (Legal and Procurement); Barry Tudhope, Democratic Services Manager; Linda Hutchison, Senior Democratic Services Officer; Jennifer Greenshields, Chief Executive's Business Manager; and John Burke, Democratic Services Officer.

(*) indicates remote attendance.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1068 There were no declarations of interest intimated.

PROVOST'S AWARD – CITIZEN OF THE YEAR 2024

1069 Provost Montague announced that Stephen Byars had been named as East Renfrewshire's Citizen of the Year for his lifesaving work as the dedicated coordinator of the Neilston & Uplawmoor Community First Responder Group, where his voluntary work had spanned a decade. Having highlighted that he had been an integral part of the group since its inception, she referred to his role and commitment to ensuring public access defibrillators were readily available in the community. She also referred to his motivation and dedication to educating as many people in the local community as possible on potentially life-saving cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) skills, and the impact of his work.

Mr Byars responded in appropriate terms, during which he highlighted the impact the Group and its volunteers had had in the community.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1070 The Council considered and approved the Minute of the meeting held on 23 October 2024.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES

1071 The Council considered and approved the Minutes of the meetings of the undernoted:-

- (a) Cabinet – 24 October 2024;
- (b) Appeals Committee – 29 October 2024;
- (c) Appeals Committee – 29 October 2024;
- (d) Special Planning Applications Committee – 31 October 2024;
- (e) Appeals Committee – 6 November 2024;
- (f) Appeals Committee – 6 November 2024;
- (g) Cabinet – 7 November 2024;
- (h) Education Committee – 14 November 2024;
- (i) Cabinet – 21 November 2024;
- (j) Audit & Scrutiny Committee – 21 November 2024;
- (k) Planning Applications Committee – 27 November 2024;
- (l) Cabinet (Police & Fire) – 28 November 2024; and
- (m) Cabinet – 5 December 2024.

STATEMENT BY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL: EAST RENFREWSHIRE - A PLACE TO GROW

1072 Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 11 September 2024 (Page 931, Item 939 refers), when it had been agreed to approve the ambitious strategic vision, East Renfrewshire - A Place to Grow as East Renfrewshire's Community Plan, Councillor O'Donnell reported that it had been adopted by the Community Planning Partnership Board. Having highlighted that it set out the shared hopes and aspirations for East Renfrewshire until 2040, he itemised its three pillars, confirming it had been shared with employees and publically on the Council's website and social media channels earlier in the week.

Councillor O'Donnell commented that the vision would be a key part of the conversation with residents about building a brighter future for everyone in East Renfrewshire, stressing the need for a vision for the area's long-term future which looked beyond short-term challenges and delivered on huge ambitions to achieve even more for residents. He clarified that there would be further community engagement events in the New Year, referring to joint working to be done to shape a brighter future for East Renfrewshire. He urged all Elected Members to continue to support A Place to Grow and share information on this with their constituents.

The Council noted the statement.

STATEMENTS BY CONVENER AND REPRESENTATIVES ON JOINT BODIES AND COMMITTEES

The following statements were made:-

(a) **Councillor Anderson – Convener for Education, Culture and Leisure**

Councillor Anderson reported that a presentation to the most recent Education Committee meeting on local schools' performances in the Broad General Education and senior phase had demonstrated how children and young peoples' learning had flourished in terms of attainment, attendance, inclusion, engagement and participation. The Committee had been especially pleased about the exceptionally high primary literacy and numeracy performance and with strong Secondary 4, 5 and 6 results, with local schools consistently performing better than their virtual comparators. Having highlighted that Scottish Government statistics just published had demonstrated that East Renfrewshire continued to be the highest performing authority for literacy and numeracy (based on Primary 1 to Secondary 3), he paid tribute to the relentless efforts of staff and outstanding leadership in schools which continued to enable such high standards to be achieved.

Councillor Anderson commented that East Renfrewshire libraries had celebrated Book Week Scotland in November, welcoming audiences and writers who had participated in fun, interactive events, examples of which he cited.

He reported that issues discussed at the most recent East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Board meeting had included impressive performance in 2024 regarding library and community halls attendances; record numbers enrolled in community sports coaching programmes; and increased participation in Live Active and Vitality programmes. Having highlighted that box office receipts at Eastwood Theatre and gym and fitness memberships were at all-time highs, and cited the example of the 2024 pantomime which had broken the Theatre's box office record and exceeded its income target, Councillor Anderson congratulated the Trust on the results and strength of its performance.

(b) **Councillor Pragnell – Convener for Social Work and Health**

Councillor Pragnell reported that on 20 November the East Renfrewshire Integration Joint Board (IJB) had received an update on the revenue budget, the latest projected overspend for 2024/25 being £1.784m which was just over 1% of the HSCP's total budget. The projection by partner contribution showed an overspend of £2.497m against NHS funded activity, driven by prescribing costs which was to be discussed further at the next IJB seminar. Social care currently showed an underspend of £0.713m.

She reported that, taking account of the financial challenges faced, the IJB had submitted proposed changes to existing charges and the introduction of non-residential charging to the Cabinet on 5 December, consideration of which had been deferred to February 2025, pending the implications of the Scottish Government budget becoming clear.

Other issues discussed at the IJB meeting had been an update on the HSCP Strategic Plan for 2025-28 to be finalised by March following consultation; annual clinical care governance and care home assurance reports and related issues; and an update on the redesign within the Care at Home service to

support growing demand, improve efficiency and achieve necessary cost reductions whilst maintaining quality of care. There was an expectation that the new practice model for Care at Home would be fully implemented by April 2025.

The Council noted the statements.

PROVOST'S ENGAGEMENTS

1073 The Council considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships, providing details of civic engagements attended and civic duties performed by Provost Montague since the meeting on 23 October 2024.

The Council noted the report.

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 21 NOVEMBER 2024 – INTERIM TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT FOR 2024/25 – QUARTER 2

1074 Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of 21 November 2024 (Page 1022, Item 1047 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that organisations for investment of surplus funds be approved, the Council considered a report by the Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) reporting on Treasury Management activities for the quarter ending 30 September 2024.

The Council, having heard Councillor Morrison comment that the position had changed very little since Quarter 1 other than to reflect the completion of the recent takeover of the Clydesdale and Virgin Money Bank by the Nationwide Group, agreed that the organisations for investment of surplus funds be approved in accordance with Appendix 8 to the report.

CABINET – 21 NOVEMBER 2024 – GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

1075 Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 21 November 2024 (Page 1017, Item 1041 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that proposed adjustments to the General Fund Capital Programme be approved, the Council considered a report by the Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) monitoring income and expenditure as at 30 September 2024 against the approved Programme and recommending adjustments to it where possible.

The Council:-

- (a) approved and noted the movements within the 2024/25 Programme; and
- (b) noted the shortfall of £0.053m and that income and expenditure on the Programme would be managed and reported on a regular basis.

CABINET – 21 NOVEMBER 2024 – HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME

1076 Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 21 November 2024 (Page 1018, Item 1042 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that proposed adjustments to the Housing Capital Programme be approved, the Council considered a report by the Head of Finance (Chief Financial Officer) monitoring income and expenditure as at 30 September 2024 against the approved Programme and recommending adjustments to it where required.

The Council:-

- (a) approved and noted the movements within the Programme; and
- (b) noted the shortfall of £0.121m and that income and expenditure on the Programme would be managed and reported on a regular basis.

COMMUNITY SAFETY 24/7 RESPONSE CENTRE AND OVERLEE HOUSE UPGRADES

1077 The Council considered a joint report by the Director of Business Partnerships and Operations and Director Environment providing an update on property projects regarding the Community Safety 24/7 Response Centre environment, and aimed at increasing capacity at Overlee House.

The report referred to the need for additional capital resourcing for each project, clarifying that the upgrading of the Response Centre and enhancing the capacity of Overlee House had been long-held ambitions. Since funds for the projects had been approved initially, both projects had been impacted by changes in legislative requirements and significant cost increases. Upgrading the facilities within the Response Centre would enhance capacity to deliver critical safety interventions, such as telecare, whilst providing adequate facilities for staff to discharge their duties safely and effectively. Enhancing capacity at Overlee House would, not only reduce reliance on hotel and bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation, but also be critical considering the unprecedented homelessness crisis facing East Renfrewshire. It was considered likely that costs for both projects would increase further if they had to be revisited in future years.

In response to Councillor Bamforth, the Director of Environment confirmed that the proposed financial provision for Overlee House was separate from the £1m approved previously for housing acquisitions to address the housing emergency declared by the Council. In reply to Councillor Ireland, the Head of Environment (Housing and Property) clarified the accommodation it was intended to build, that the properties should be ready to hand over around December 2025, the current status of the contract which provided greater certainty on costs, and that the next stage would be the appointment of a contractor. In response to comments and queries raised by Councillor Wallace, he referred to the prioritisation of cases for housing, explained that single people were those most likely to remain in B&B accommodation taking account of risk assessments, and reported on the recovery of costs from the Scottish Government.

The Council approved an increase of:-

- (a) £61k to the existing budget within the Capital Programme for the refurbishment of the Community Safety Response Centre project; and
- (b) £297k to the existing budget within the Capital Programme for the Overlee House project.

EASTWOOD HEADQUARTERS REFURBISHMENT – UPDATE

1078 Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 13 December 2023 (Page 707, Item 694 refers) when proposals regarding modernisation works at Eastwood Headquarters, Giffnock had been approved, the Council considered a report by the Director of Environment providing an update on the project.

It was clarified that the structure of the building was sound, but that much of its core infrastructure was obsolete, life expired and/or in an unsatisfactory condition, creating a threat to business continuity or service provision if left unmanaged and requiring the building to be upgraded to extend its useful life. The report commented on a range of related issues, including employee welfare facilities in the building, the planned relocation of staff from Spiersbridge to the building and related implications.

Having referred to updated cost projections following an invasive survey and other developments and opportunities identified, the report clarified that to deliver fully the originally desired outcomes would require the approved budget of £4.86m to increase to £7.20m. Against this background, 4 options for proceeding were summarised together with the related budgetary requirements of each, the recommended course of action being to approve Option 4 which involved a reduced schedule of works and aimed to reach a reasonable compromise between outcomes and available resource. Whilst Option 4 would incur a significant increase in budget of £1.30m, that investment remained £1.04m below the increased cost of delivering the whole project as originally envisaged. It would deliver many originally envisaged benefits and a revenue costs saving, extend the life of the building for at least 20 years, and much improve the working environment for the increased number of staff to be based in the building.

Subject to approval of the proposal, it was estimated that work would start on site during the summer of 2025 and be completed in early 2026. The programme would be subject to final agreement on designs and any works additionally discovered upon commencement on site. Further updates would be provided to the Governance Board, Corporate Management Team and Elected Members periodically on progress and issues of interest.

Councillor Ireland referred to concerns she had expressed previously on costs, acknowledged the need for some work to be done, but confirmed she held concerns regarding the proposed increased expenditure when other projects were not proceeding. She welcomed clarification provided on the reduced work to be done on the Council Chamber, and also that updates to Elected Members were to be provided moving forward. In response to issues raised by her, the Head of Environment (Housing and Property) confirmed that Hub West Scotland would be involved in the project and, regarding the £0.6m contingency provision for the project, highlighted that the project costs were now more certain than at the end of 2023, given the current stage of the project.

In reply to Councillor Bamforth, the Chief Executive confirmed that approval of Option 4 would allow infrastructure work on the Council Chamber to be completed. Subsequently, it would be for the full Council to decide if further cosmetic work on it was to be done, if it wished, at some stage in future. Councillor Ireland highlighted that an original aim had been to develop the Chamber into a more flexible space that could be used more.

Councillor Wallace highlighted that, as for some other projects, the costs had increased from those anticipated and approved originally. In response to him, Councillor O'Donnell referred to the project's complexity, the age of the building and its current infrastructure on which there had been underinvestment, potential unknowns, and related challenges of managing such issues without allocating an unacceptable level of contingency to the project. He highlighted that, in contrast to what would be considered acceptable in the public sector, it was common for changes to be made to such projects in the private sector, but also for more funds to be invested in maintaining buildings in that sector on an ongoing basis.

Having heard the Chief Executive confirm that issues raised on the condition of the building had been accepted, the Head of Environment (Housing and Property) provided an update on work now underway in terms of the Capital Strategy to address such issues going forward. Amongst other things, he referred to the need to be more up front on potential costs, expressed the view that the costs approved for this project had been optimistic, and highlighted that no

guarantees could be given on costs until the latter stages of projects. He also commented on the importance of controlling issues which were under the Council's control, issues such as inflation and market conditions being out with those.

Further in response to Councillor Wallace, the Director of Environment confirmed that the costs specified in the report for Option 1 were for delivering the original project. Councillor Wallace highlighted various issues, including the almost unanimous support for proceeding with this option in December 2023, the lack of progress on making the building fit for purpose, and concerns he held that the project costs could change again. He suggested that a further option was to proceed with Option 1, but to develop funding proposals which could include using financial resources available to the Council following a reduction in employer contributions to the Strathclyde Pension Fund and take account of any overall budgetary underspend by the Council for the current financial year. Councillor Morrison expressed support for this approach, commenting on a range of matters, including the issues identified through the detailed survey and lack of space within the building at present for collaboration.

In response to Councillor Edlin who proposed some form of inquiry on the project, the Chief Executive stressed that it was not uncommon for project costs to exceed those approved initially. Supported by the Head of Environment (Housing and Property), he emphasised that the professionalism of officers involved in the project thus far was not being questioned.

Whilst commenting on the proposals within the report, Councillor Buchanan expressed support for Option 4, taking account of a range of issues, including the outcome of the detailed survey and importance of bringing the infrastructure of the building up to standard.

Adjournment

The Provost adjourned the meeting for a short period to allow some discussion amongst the Group Leaders to take place on the way forward, taking account of issues raised during discussion.

On the reconvening of the Council, Councillor O'Donnell confirmed that all of the political Group Leaders shared disappointment that the original vision could not be delivered, acknowledged the issues raised by Councillor Wallace which were considered fair, and referred to political alignment on the importance of delivering a good working environment for staff. He added that support had been expressed for approving Option 4.

The Council:-

- (a) approved increasing the Eastwood Headquarters refurbishment budget allocation by £1.3m to £6.16m;
- (b) approved the reduced scope of the works as set out in Option 4, and described in paragraphs 19, 20 and 21, of the report; and
- (c) agreed that the refurbishment works at Eastwood Headquarters proceed.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP CHIEF OFFICER RECRUITMENT

1079 The Council considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships informing the Council that the Chief Officer, Health and Social Care Partnership had intimated that she would retire from mid-May, and confirming that her successor would be appointed by the Integration Joint Board which had agreed to establish an Appointments Panel to progress this.

Having provided further details on how the recruitment was to be progressed, the report outlined arrangements put in place to ensure continuity and stability within the HSCP should a successor not be in place by May 2025.

The Council noted:-

- (a) the retirement of the Chief Officer, HSCP with effect from mid-May 2025; and
- (b) that the Integration Joint Board was responsible for the recruitment of the Chief Officer, HSCP post.

PROVOST