

MINUTE
of
CABINET

Minute of meeting held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 6 February 2025.

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; Louise Pringle, Director of Business Operations and Partnerships; Kirsty Stanners, Head of Finance; Lesley Bairden, Head of Finance and Resources, Health and Social Care Partnership; Lee McLaughlin, Head Of Adult Services, Communities and Wellbeing; Kenny Markwick, Head of Environment (Operations); Mark Rodgers, Head of Housing and Property; Thomas McAuley, RCU Lead; Alison Ballingall, Senior Revenues Manager; Paul Parsons, Principal Accountant; Barry Tudhope, Democratic Services Manager; John Burke, Democratic Services Officer; and Bethany Mitchell, Assistant Democratic Services Officer.

CHAIR'S REMARKS – ORDER OF MEETING

The Chair indicated that, to facilitate the smooth running of the meeting, the items would be considered in the order shown below.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1094 There were no declarations of interest intimated.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP CHARGING FOR NON-RESIDENTIAL CARE SERVICES IN 2025/26

1095 The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Officer – Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) on the proposed charges for non-residential care in the HSCP for 2025/26, following discussion at Cabinet on 5 December 2024 (Page 1017, Item 1041 refers).

It was indicated that, while part of the suite of charging proposals outlined by HSCP had been agreed at the previous meeting of Cabinet, implementation of charging for non-residential care had been deferred to allow further clarity to be received on Scottish Government budgets.

The Integration Joint Board had considered the proposals and, with some reluctance, had endorsed the recommendations as follows:-

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- the introduction of charging for non-residential care, at that point with a proposed implementation date of 1 April 2025
- the charge set at £20 per hour, subject to the ability to pay
- the taper to consider the amount of a person's disposable income, after assessment, to be used towards the cost of care to be set at 60%

It was confirmed that all charges would be linked to the ability to pay, confirmed via financial assessment. It was also pointed out that this policy aligned with current COSLA national strategy and guidance on the matter.

The report further detailed the proposed policy and the engagement work that would take place on the implementation of the proposals.

Members raised a wide range of questions on the issue, particularly to clarify the range of tapers and charges applied by other HSCPs in implementing such charges, as well as clarifying that HSCP modelling indicated around 25% of those currently in receipt of non-residential care would be impacted by the charge. It was also clarified that failure to implement this charge would result in the need for savings to be identified elsewhere, which could lead to cuts in other HSCP services that were not currently under consideration.

Following confirmation that there was no commitment in the current Scottish Government budget to mitigate the need for the charge, the Cabinet agreed to the implementation of charging for non-residential care for 2025/26 as per the proposal outlined in paragraph 7 of the report, subject to the following amendments:-

- (a) the introduction of charging for non-residential care would have an implementation date of 1 July 2025;
- (b) the charge be set at £20 per hour, subject to the ability to pay;
- (c) the taper to consider the amount of a person's disposable income, after assessment, to be used toward the cost of care be set at 40%; and
- (d) Cabinet also requested that the Chief Officer/Chief Financial Officer of the Health and Social Care Partnership endeavour to mitigate the impact of any resultant deficit in setting the HSCP 2025/26 budget, whilst assuring that, should such steps not fully resolve any shortfall, the Cabinet would, on request, give positive consideration to address any in-year deficit.

[This decision was subsequently called-in to a meeting of East Renfrewshire Council to take place on 26 February 2025]

ESTIMATED REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2024/25

1096 The Cabinet considered a report by the Head of Finance 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 30 November 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.

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 £2.144m was forecast on General Fund services with an operational overspend of £80k 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.

The Cabinet agreed:-

- (a) to note the forecast underlying General Fund Operational underspend of £2.144m and the HRA operational overspend of £80k before any contribution from the HRA reserve; and
- (b) service virements and operational adjustments as set out in the notes to the tables on pages 15 to 32 and noted the reported probable out-turn position.

INVESTMENT FOR THE FUTURE RESERVE – PROPOSALS

1097 The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships on proposed further utilisation of the Investment for the Future reserve.

In setting the 2024/25 budget, East Renfrewshire Council had established a new Investment for the Future reserve to hold the resources arising from temporary reductions in employers’ contributions to the Strathclyde Pension Fund for the financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26, estimated at a total of circa £12.6m of one-off resource.

Criteria for the utilisation of the reserve had been agreed by Cabinet in May 2024 (Page 857, Item 851 refers), as well as the first tranche of projects to be allocated financial support, with a further report in October 2024 allocating funding for ICT infrastructure work (Page 975, Item 989 refers).

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The report outlined a series of new proposals for utilisation of the reserve: including the purchase of further temporary housing; a property condition survey; extension of the commitment to Community Capacity Building; and extension of the commitment to the Employee Wellbeing and Development reserve.

Following discussion, where members received clarification on measuring outcomes on the proposals, the Cabinet agreed the following commitments from the Investment for the Future reserve, totalling £3.7m:-

- (a) fund the purchase of a further £1m of temporary housing;
- (b) fund a Property Condition Survey at a cost of £0.5m;
- (c) extend the commitment to the Community Capacity Building reserve for a further 5 years at a cost of £1.2m; and
- (d) extend the commitment to the Employee Wellbeing and Development reserve for a further 5 years at a cost of £1m.

DEBT MANAGEMENT FOR COUNCIL TAX, NON-DOMESTIC RATES, SUNDRY DEBT INCOME, HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS AND EMPTY PROPERTY RELIEF, NON-DOMESTIC RATES

1098 The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships which sought approval to write-off as irrecoverable sums associated with Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates, sundry debt income and Housing Benefit overpayments. The debts recommended for write-off had previously been included in bad debt provision and, therefore, the write-off had no net impact on the revenue accounts of the Council. The report also sought approval to continue the current policy on empty relief for Non-Domestic properties.

The Senior Revenues Manager advised that every effort had been made to recover these sums and the decision to seek write-off was not taken lightly or without due cause. Should any future avenue become available by which to recover those monies, any decision taken by Cabinet would not prevent such opportunities being pursued, hence the recommendation of write-offs “up to” said amounts.

The Senior Revenues Manager outlined the proposed write-off sums and advised that these were in accordance with the Council’s Debt Recovery Policy.

The Senior Revenues Manager also explained that Empty Property Relief had been devolved from Scottish Government to local authorities on 1 April 2023, with the policy for dealing with this agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 23 March 2023 (Page 447, Item 380 refers). It was proposed that the policy continue for the coming year, for the reasons set out in the report.

In responding to members questions, the Senior Revenues Manager confirmed that the write-offs were taken into account in budget planning and would not affect services and plans for the future.

The Cabinet:-

- (a) approved the write-off of the following sums, totalling up to £502,716.11 without prejudice to subsequent recovery procedure:
 - Council Tax arrears totalling up to £318,624.97

- Non Domestic rates arrears totalling up to £90,800.96
 - Sundry debt income totalling up to £69,614.79
 - Housing Benefit Overpayments totalling up to £23,675.39
- (b) noted that write-off of those sums would have no net impact on the Council's accounts as provision had been made for the debt, in full, in previous years;
- (c) noted that Water and Sewerage charges, totalling up to £113,372.07 were also being written off in discussion with Scottish Water; and
- (d) approved the continuation of the current policy for Empty Property Relief for Non Domestic Rate properties until March 2028;

THE EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL (DISABLED PERSONS' PARKING PLACES)(ON-STREET) ORDER 2020 (AMENDMENT NO.3)

1099 The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment seeking approval for the making and confirmation of the East Renfrewshire Council (Disabled Persons' Parking Places)(On-Street) Order 2020 (Amendment No.3).

The Cabinet:-

- (a) noted the content of the report and approved the making of the East Renfrewshire Council (Disabled Persons' Parking Places)(On-Street) Order 2020 (Amendment No.3); and
- (b) delegated to the Director of Environment the implementation of the Order in accordance with associated statutory procedures.

CHAIR

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