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MINUTE
of
AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 20 February 2020.

Present:

Councillor Stewart Miller (Chair)
Councillor Barbara Grant (Vice Chair)
Provost Jim Fletcher
Councillor Annette Ireland

Councillor Charlie Gilbert
Councillor Jim McLean
Councillor Jim Swift

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Attending:

Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Barbara Clark, Chief Accountant; Michelle Blair, Chief Auditor; and Linda Hutchison, Clerk to the Committee.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1205. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REPORT FOR 2019/20

1206. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 21 November 2019 (Page 1022, Item 1105 refers) when, having considered a report on treasury management activities for the first six months of 2019/20, it had been agreed to recommend to the Council approval of organisations for the investment of surplus funds and to note the unexpected increase in the cost of borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board, the committee considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) explaining that, in line with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice 2017, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee were responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the Council's treasury management strategy and policies.

In accordance with that requirement, a copy of the Treasury Management Strategy Report for 2020/21 was attached for consideration in advance of its submission to the Council. The Strategy Report included a proposal to amend treasury management practices in accordance with Annex F accompanying the report which listed organisations approved for the investment of surplus funds, in respect of which information was provided on related issues such as credit ratings and limits. It was also proposed that a policy on the repayment of loans fund advances, as specified in Section 3.4 of the report, be approved.

Whilst commenting on the overall purpose and content of the report, the Chief Accountant referred to economic background information within it, explained that the same operational approach as before was being followed, and clarified that the report set out the parameters

within which the treasury function operated, making reference to mid-year and annual reports to be submitted to the committee. Whilst itemising key sections of the Strategy, she clarified that the Council could only borrow to fund capital expenditure, and that the Prudential Indicators had been established to ensure funding of capital expenditure was affordable and sustainable.

The Chief Accountant drew attention to Section 3.4 of the report on the Council's policy for the statutory repayment of debt which required to be approved before the start of the next financial year, the Chief Accountant highlighted that Council policy was to repay advances using an annuity method in keeping with previous years. She explained that the Scottish Government had reviewed legislation allowing greater flexibility when calculating loans fund repayments, confirming that, in agreement with the Council's External Auditor, the Council's loans fund had been revised, ensuring that the amount to be repaid each year was prudent and reasonably commensurate with the period and pattern of benefits. Citing the example of building a new school, she clarified that the related loan could be repaid over 50 years, rather than 30 years as had been the case previously.

The Chief Accountant also referred to the use of reserves to fund capital expenditure, as had been the case for a number of years, which was considered prudent to minimise risk, whilst highlighting the need for care to be taken by the Council to take advantage of the historically low interest rates available at present. She also referred to the gradual rise in the base interest rate anticipated over the next 2 years, and a list was provided of the limits set for treasury activity which were consistent with previous years. Having clarified that it remained the case that the primary objectives of the investment strategy were security and liquidity, she referred to information provided on the types of investment the Council could use and their associated risk; the proposed list of investors itemised in Annex F to the report; the importance of investing with bodies with good credit quality; and related monitoring arrangements.

The Chief Accountant confirmed that she would be happy to arrange further treasury management training for Elected Members if that would be considered useful, requests for which could be made through the Clerk, Councillor Grant expressing the view that further training on treasury management issues would be valuable.

Further in response to Councillor Grant, the Chief Accountant clarified why the Clydesdale Bank was listed amongst the organisations for the investment of surplus funds, this being the bank the Council used, and why the limits deposit and transaction level for it were recorded as zero. In response to Councillor Swift, she confirmed that 7.2% of borrowing by the Council was exposed to variable interest rates, this level falling well below the long-standing upper limit set for this of 30%. Having expressed the view that it was arguable that the upper limit of 30% was too high, Councillor Swift added that this limit was acceptable however, subject to the level of such debt being managed appropriately. The Head of Accountancy and Chief Accountant confirmed this was the case and that, historically, the level of such debt had fallen well below the upper threshold.

The committee agreed:-

- (a) **to recommend to the Council** that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2020/21 be approved, including the amended list of organisations for investment of surplus funds in accordance with Annex F to the report;
- (b) **to recommend to the Council** that the policy on the repayment of loans fund advances as specified in Section 3.4 of the report be approved;

- (c) to note that further training on treasury management issues could be arranged by the Chief Accountant who would liaise further with the Clerk regarding this; and
- (d) otherwise, to note the report and related comments made.

CHAIR

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock, on 27 February 2020.

Present:

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| Provost Jim Fletcher | Councillor Alan Lafferty |
| Depute Provost Betty Cunningham | 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 Jim Swift |
| Councillor Barbara Grant | Councillor Gordon Wallace |
| Councillor Annette Ireland | |

Provost Fletcher presided

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive; Mhairi Shaw, 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); Phil Daws, Head of Environment (Strategic Services); Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources); Barbara Clark, Chief Accountant; Graeme Smith, Communications Manager; Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager; and Linda Hutchison, Senior Committee Services Officer.

Also Attending:

Superintendent Hilary Sloan and Chief Inspector Bryan McGeoch, Police Scotland.

Apology:

Councillor Paul Aitken.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1207. Provost Fletcher and Councillors Grant, Merrick and O’Kane declared non-financial interests in relation to Items 1216 and 1218 by virtue of the fact that they were members of the East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust Board.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1208. The Council considered and approved the Minute of the meeting held on 18 December 2019.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES

1209. The Council considered and approved the Minutes of the meetings of the undernoted:-

- (a) Planning Applications Committee – 15 January 2020;
- (b) Local Review Body – 15 January 2020;
- (c) Licensing Committee – 21 January 2020;
- (d) Appeals Committee – 22 January 2020;
- (e) Education Committee – 23 January 2020;
- (f) Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 23 January 2020;
- (g) Cabinet – 30 January 2020;
- (h) Cabinet – 6 February 2020;
- (i) Civic Hospitality Committee – 12 February 2020;
- (j) Local Review Body – 12 February 2020;
- (k) Cabinet (Police and Fire) - 13 February 2020;
- (l) Licensing Committee – 14 February 2020;
- (m) Appointments Committee – 18 February 2020;
- (n) Licensing Committee – 18 February 2020;
- (o) Appointments Committee – 19 February 2020; and
- (p) Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 19 February 2020.

POLICE SCOTLAND – EAST RENFREWSHIRE LOCAL POLICING PLAN 2020-23

1210. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet (Police and Fire) of 13 February 2020 (Page 1094, Item 1187 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that the East Renfrewshire Local Policing Plan 2020-23 be approved, the Council considered the plan, which set out local policing priorities for East Renfrewshire over that period.

The Council approved the East Renfrewshire Local Policing Plan 2020-23.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2020/21

1211. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of 20 February 2020 (Page 1109, Item 1206 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2020/21 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, the Council considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer, reporting on the Treasury Management Strategy for the financial year 2020/21.

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, and confirmed that related mid-year and annual reports would be submitted to the committee in due course.

Councillor Swift having commented that accruing further debt would place more pressure on the Council's revenue budget which was already overstretched, Provost Fletcher referred to the difficult financial position facing local government whilst Councillor Bamforth highlighted that the Council borrowing was below the limits in place.

The Council agreed:-

- (a) that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2020/21 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.

STATEMENTS BY REPRESENTATIVES ON JOINT BOARDS/COMMITTEES

1212. The following statement was made:-

(a) Integration Joint Board – Councillor Bamforth

Councillor Bamforth referred to a presentation made on the HSCP's public engagement strategy at the most recent Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) Integration Joint Board (IJB) meeting. She also reported that the IJB had agreed to invite Scottish Care to nominate a member to join the Board to strengthen partnership working and reflect their contribution within the area. It had made a commitment to establish a system locally to ensure they were truly representative of the sector by communicating directly and regularly with local providers.

The IJB had also received a progress report on Talking Points, these being places in communities where people can attend for information, support and advice about adult health, wellbeing and local activities. In the first 6 months 590 conversations had taken place and approximately 11,000 people had been reached through Facebook.

A report had also been provided on the impact of new legislation for Children and Young People on Continuing Care and related issues, such as the implications for looked after children and young people, and advice, guidance and assistance now provided to them up to age 26. Councillor Bamforth highlighted that looked after and care leavers would be encouraged to remain in positive care settings until they were ready to move on.

Other matters discussed had been actions in the Strategic Improvement Plan which had consolidated actions from the recent Joint Strategic Inspection of Adult Services, the Ministerial Strategic Group self-evaluation and the findings of the Audit Scotland report on Health and Social Care Integration; and Care at Home on which an update by the Chief Officer, HSCP had been provided and discussed and on which further updates would be provided.

The Council noted the statement.

PROVOST'S ENGAGEMENTS

1213. The Council considered and noted a report by the Deputy Chief Executive providing details of civic engagements attended and civic duties performed by Provost Fletcher since the date of the last meeting.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

1214. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 19 May 2019 (Page 1109, Item 1206 refers), when it had been agreed to note the updated outcomes, capabilities and values which made up the overarching "Vision for the Future Strategy" that sought to begin an ongoing dialogue on the long-term ambitions for the Council's work over the next 10 years and beyond; and to approve the further development of the Strategy taking into account ongoing work such as on the Local Development Plan (LDP), the refreshed Capital Investment Strategy and City Region economic planning, the Council considered a report by the Chief Executive proposing a revision to "Vision for the Future". A copy of the revised document was appended to the report.

It was explained that since May 2019 a range of feedback had been provided through LDP2 consultation, engagement with Members, and discussions with the Council's leadership team. In addition the underpinning analysis had been strengthened in light of new research such as in relation to updated versions of Planning for the Future; the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation; and a detailed transportation study for the Community Planning Partnership.

The redrafted document reflected a general theme of 'connections' viewable various ways, such as physical connections across East Renfrewshire via greenspace development; and transport connectivity. Key themes, which were itemised, emerging from conversations over the last 6 months had been around the Council's continued and developing ambitions on a range of issues such as for empowering communities; reducing social isolation and loneliness; and eliminating poverty. Detailed action plans would be developed covering 3-year time periods through the Budget Planning and Outcome Delivery Plan process; and following Council approval the document was to be finalised and designed, with case studies added to demonstrate progress and a diverse communications programme progressed. It was clarified that the underpinning analyses would be updated regularly, the aim being to update the document itself at least once every 3 years.

Having commented on related issues including how consultation was being progressed, the report concluded that "Vision for the Future" was intended to be a living document, with it being a direction of travel rather than a detailed strategy. It was highlighted that the Council did not claim to have all the answers and genuinely wanted to hear ideas about how best to work together to improve the lives of people across East Renfrewshire over the next 10 years. Reference was made to a range of powerful, interesting and challenging themes emerging from early conversations, the goal being to continue that dialogue with a broad range of stakeholders as the vision, of a modern, ambitious Council creating a fairer future with all, continued to be built and shaped.

Councillor Grant expressed concern that opening up connections on green spaces, such as new paths, would lead to further building development in adjacent areas over time. The Chief Executive emphasised this was not intended, with discussions having centred instead on helping people to become more active, such as through the provision of road paths for cycling and running.

Having heard Councillor Merrick welcome the emphasis placed on improved mental wellbeing of children, Councillor Ireland commended the report and highlighted various matters, such as the importance of building and empowering local communities further, maintaining green space, and active travel provision through safe and sustainable infrastructure.

Councillor McLean referred to comments within the document on strengthening the Council's commitment to reducing local CO₂ emissions and encouraging electric car use. He highlighted the low number of charging points in the area, despite grant to install these from Transport Scotland for the preceding 2 years, and the lack of certainty over further such funding. He also referred to the Scottish Government's vision to almost completely decarbonise road transport by 2050; the Council's response to a freedom of information request in October 2018 which had reflected that there had been no plans to install charging points by either 2020 or 2032; and statistical information, such as on the number of houses to be built locally by 2029 and related car ownership and CO₂ emissions. Against this background, he questioned how the Administration could claim it would strengthen its commitment to reducing local CO₂ emissions; and sought further clarification on plans to increase the number of charging points, which he argued would encourage the purchase of electric cars.

Having referred to the use made of the grant received thus far to install charging points, the Director of Environment undertook to check and confirm to Councillor McLean the position on the issues he had raised.

Having questioned if equality of outcomes as specified in the document was achievable, Councillor Swift highlighted reference within it to providing more support for vulnerable children at an earlier age to ensure more progressed in line with their age, also questioning how this was achievable in light of the proposed budget reduction for support for the lowest performing, least able, 20% of pupils. Whilst acknowledging that some roads improvement had been made, he also sought clarification on how cyclists could be protected better, referring to the need to address potholes and cars parking in cycle lanes. In reply, Provost Fletcher referred Councillor Swift to the budget to be discussed later in the meeting.

Councillor Buchanan referred to the importance of the "Vision for the Future" document and how it was dynamic and would change over time, expressing the view that some proposals within it were about protecting cyclists and citing examples of cycle paths planned to address some of the issues Councillor Swift had raised. He emphasised that the document looked at issues such as these which made East Renfrewshire a great place to live and work. Referring to the delayed confirmation on the level of grant funding allocated to local authorities by the Scottish Government, he added that only time would tell what further funding for initiatives would become available.

Councillor Macdonald raised a range of matters, expressing the opinion that the prioritisation of improved mental wellbeing of children was at odds with the practice of asking children to bring their own devices to school, and referring to research findings which suggested this increased anxiety amongst some children. He also queried how reducing the amount of green space available for play at a nursery school in his ward was linked to the Vision; credited attainment and achievements not only to the Education Department but also support from parents, some of whom paid for private tuition which was not affordable by others; and expressed concern that some libraries were only open a few days a week which would impact on realising aspects of the Vision. He also referred to the concerns raised regarding the time it had taken to reinstate Rouken Glen Park following an event in 2019, suggesting further safeguards were needed to protect such assets when used for events.

Regarding the collection of household waste for recycling, Councillor Macdonald also questioned how the closure of recycling points, such as the one at Clarkston, was environmentally friendly, as residents had to drive elsewhere to dispose of material.

In reply, Councillor O’Kane acknowledged the value of parental support for pupils, but referred to the importance of the Education Department’s approach and how performance had improved at various high schools, including Barrhead and St Luke’s High Schools, as a result. Regarding the use of personal devices, he stated that Councillor Macdonald’s description did not match actual experience in East Renfrewshire schools, where the approach had been constructive and pupils were managing their own learning and use of the technology. Having heard Councillor O’Kane highlight that outdoor learning was a daily element of early learning establishments, Councillor Merrick suggested that Councillor Macdonald might value taking advantage of presentations for Elected Members on issues such as this.

Councillor Lafferty highlighted the high recycling rates in East Renfrewshire, clarifying that the introduction of local recycling facilities had pre-dated the weekly uplift of recyclable waste from households. He added that some businesses had used the local facilities inappropriately, that a shift to households recycling had followed the introduction of the new uplift arrangements, and that if any constituent held a concern regarding the uplift of recyclable material they could contact the authority for assistance.

Responding to Councillor Swift’s comments about the proposed budget reduction for support for the lowest performing 20% of pupils, Councillor Bamforth referred to the aim of supporting vulnerable children in the “Vision for the Future”, and suggested that he had supported capping expenditure on the budget for learning for children with disabilities at an IJB seminar. Taking issue with this comment, Councillor Swift clarified that he had commented on the lack of a cap on the budget whereas one existed for medicine and the imbalance between these different approaches.

Having heard Provost Fletcher highlight that the “Vision for the Future” document would develop and be altered over time as referred to earlier in the meeting, the Council:-

- (a) agreed to the further iterative development of ‘Vision for the Future’, based on an ongoing dialogue with a range of stakeholders and taking into account ongoing work, including on the Local Development Plan, the refreshed Capital Investment Strategy and City Region economic planning; and
- (b) noted the initial focus on the themes of environment/climate change and building communities.

FINANCIAL PLANNING 2020-2026

1215. Under reference to the Minute of meeting of 28 February 2019 (Page 740, Item 803 refers), when the Outline Revenue Financial Plan for 2019-25 had been approved, the Council considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer seeking approval of the updated Outline Revenue Financial Plan for 2020-26.

The report explained that in view of the significant financial and demand pressures facing the Council in the current and following 6 years, it was essential that its financial plans were updated regularly. This was in line with the Council’s agreed financial policy on basing decisions on an assessment of medium to long-term needs and consequences.

The report explained that despite a recent move to annual budgets by the Scottish Government and significant shifts in the local government budget allocation which made long-term planning challenging, the Council had continued to plan its detailed revenue budgets over a 3 year time horizon, updating them annually. The Scottish Government had been unable to move to publishing multi-year settlements from 2020/21 as intended due to the General Election, but hoped these would recommence from 2021/22 which would facilitate the Council's revenue planning. The Plan had taken account of the 2020/21 draft settlement, which was subject to change when the final Scottish and UK budget plans were confirmed on 5 and 11 March respectively. The Council's Outcome Delivery Plan and outline multi-year plans for 2021/22 onwards would be refined once the impact of the final figures was known.

It was highlighted that financial planning was extremely difficult in the present economic and political situation, that Brexit uncertainty further complicated matters, and that there was a need to plan for a range of scenarios. Having commented on the financial outlook, the report summarised the position on various demand pressures, making reference to issues such as demographics, capital infrastructure, the City Deal and legislative change in addition to wider political, societal, and economic change. Issues pertaining to the Outline Revenue Financial Plan and a range of mitigating actions open to the Council, such as through its Modern Ambitious Programme, partnership working, service reductions, income generation and the use of reserves were commented on.

The Council:-

- (a) noted the increasing budget pressures anticipated in the next six years and the mitigating actions proposed; and
- (b) approved the Outline Revenue Financial Plan 2020-26.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL REVENUE ESTIMATES 2020/21

1216. The Council considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer relative to the proposed Revenue Estimates for 2020/21 of income and expenditure as the basis for the Council Tax declaration for 2020/21. A copy of the Revenue Estimates 2020/21 was appended to the report.

The report outlined the revenue budget process, commented on the Scottish Government's Grant Funding for 2020-21, 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 £0.764m by way of deduction from Aggregate External Finance (AEF) grants in 2020/21. This was slightly less than in recent years and was reflected in the figures in the report.

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 the expected multi-year Scottish settlement was not yet available and as 2020/21 was the last year of the Council's current 3 year budget cycle, it was proposed to agree plans only for 2020/21. Officers would continue to model departmental figures for 2020/21 to 2022/23 and update figures as set out in the Council's report on Financial Planning 2020-2026 for longer-term planning purposes. It was anticipated that a further 3 year budget would be set in February 2021 when multi-year figures were announced by the Scottish Government.

Taking account of a range of matters, the report referred to a total initial budget shortfall of £18.059m for the coming year. This was higher than expected when the indicative budget had been estimated with the main reasons for this being summarised.

The report explained that the Council was permitted to increase Council Tax by up to 4.84% in 2020/21, but that in the 3-year budget plans prepared following public consultation in February 2018, a 3% Council Tax increase had been included for each of the 3 years thereafter. Due to sustained financial challenges, a 4.84% Council Tax increase for 2020/21 was proposed. This would increase income by £2.722m, and reduce the budget gap to £15.337m.

It was explained that savings of £6.807m for 2020/21, agreed in February 2018 following consultation, remained available to reduce the outstanding budget gap, but clarified that this had been reduced from the original savings identified of £7.036m to reflect a restriction on the level of savings that could be applied to IJB budgets. Taking these savings into account a reduced shortfall of £8.530m remained. Further savings of £3.752m, including £2m from using loans fund repayment flexibility, had been identified in the current year and were proposed to assist in addressing the remaining shortfall. The revised savings proposed, including those previously agreed in the original 3 year budget plans, were set out in Appendix A to the report.

The latest 2019/20 monitoring forecast was that there would be an underspend of £1.622m by the year end, which had been taken into account when considering scope to draw on reserves. As a result it was proposed that a further £2m of the remaining savings requirement be deferred on a short-term basis by a drawdown of the unallocated general reserve funds, in addition to the £1.5m utilisation of unallocated general reserve already agreed for 2020/21. The net effect of these actions would be to reduce the budget shortfall to £1.278m. It was confirmed that Directors, other than the IJB Chief Officer, would compile further savings plans to close the remaining gap but that given the late availability of the settlement figures, detailed proposals were not yet in place.

Related issues commented on included scope for further changes to the grant settlement, the intention to await details of the final figures before identifying further savings, the possibility of savings being deferred subject to the final budget settlement, the efforts being made to minimise the impact on front line services, savings from efficiencies and the Modern Ambitious Programme (MAP), and the focus on the Council's 5 capabilities.

The report explained that further cash reductions in grant were forecast for the years following 2020/21, producing ongoing shortfalls for the next 5 years. For 2021/22 a mid-range budget shortfall of £12.406m was forecast after applying an assumed 3% Council Tax increase for that year.

The report commented on the Revenue Estimates for 2020/21 following which specific reference was made to the impact of Welfare Reform on Council services and contingency provision to help the Council support change. Reference was also made to the assumed Council Tax collection rate for 2020/21 and reserves and balances issues, particularly the General, Modernisation, Insurance, Equalisation, and Repairs and Renewal Funds and Capital 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 1,289.96 being set for 2020/21, representing a 4.84% increase compared to 2019/20.

Councillor Buchanan was then heard on the proposals highlighting that during the last year significant progress had been made on delivering various ambitious projects, citing examples of building work underway on 6 new nurseries offering 740 places from August

2020, and the opening of Maidenhill Primary School in August 2019. He also commented on the number of new tenants in the new council houses in Barrhead; that work was to start on further properties as part of the Council's plans to build 240 homes for rent; that some of the authority's most vulnerable residents would move into vastly improved facilities at Bonnyton House; and that further expenditure of £3m on roads per annum announced last year would continue.

However, Councillor Buchanan also referred to the financial challenges to be faced. He welcomed the additional £8.5m received from the Scottish Government for the new nurseries, to fund changes to teachers' pay, boost pupil counselling, and meet responsibilities of the Carers Act. He reported that until 26 February, the funding received for vital services was to have been reduced by approximately 1% on a like-for-like basis. However additional information now provided by the Scottish Government indicated that funding closer to a flat cash settlement was to be received. Whilst welcoming this additional funding Councillor Buchanan highlighted that difficult decisions remained to be made to ensure children, the elderly and most vulnerable were supported, and services such as road gritting continued. He stressed that the Administration would do its utmost to ensure the Council continued to deliver its pledges.

He thanked Accountancy staff and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) for their hard work bringing forward the Budget which delivered an ambitious programme of capital investment and continued to help those most in need. He also thanked the Trade Unions for the representations they had made on behalf of their members.

Councillor Buchanan explained that following the latest Scottish Government announcement the Council's 2020/21 grant settlement was now expected to be slightly higher than the £189.4m referred to in the report. However new conditions were attached to expenditure, with 60% of the Council's budget ring-fenced for national initiatives and policy priorities such as education and social care. This had related consequences for other core services.

Councillor Buchanan was then heard on the budget shortfall and some of the contributory reasons for this including inflation, pay rises and an increasing local population. He clarified that plans outlined at the start of the 3 year budget in 2018 had been further developed, with savings, reserves and a Council Tax increase to be used to contribute to addressing the shortfall, and as referred to in the report that only £6.8m of around £7m savings identified before could now be used due to the protection of the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) budget.

Referring to the steps being taken to address the budgetary shortfall Councillor Buchanan reported that further £3.7m of new savings had been identified, including reduced funding for the East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust (ERCLT), savings from devolved school management budgets, and reducing extra support for the lowest performing pupils. A plan to identify a further £1.3m of savings during 2020/21 was no longer required given the recent funding announcement by the Scottish Government, and some of the most challenging savings identified were to be reviewed regarding which a report would be submitted to a future meeting. In addition he explained that £3.5m, rather than £1.5m of reserves would also be used to bridge the funding gap. This was not a long-term solution but would delay reductions to vital services. This was possible due to the estimated 2019/20 budget underspend of £1.6m. Over the 3 year budget cycle, £6.2m of reserves would be used, reducing reserves by approximately 60% by the end of 2020/21.

To meet the remaining shortfall, a difficult decision had been made to recommend a Council Tax increase of 4.84%, generating £2.7m of extra income. Councillor Buchanan acknowledged this placed an extra burden on residents, but clarified it avoided further

funding reductions on services such as schools, recycling and public infrastructure. He highlighted that the 2019/20 Council Tax increase had been well below the maximum allowable, the Council having been one of a minority to have had such a low increase and having set its Band D Council Tax below the Scottish average. The 4.84% increase proposed was to address funding to be received, meet savings challenges over successive years, and protect services.

Councillor Buchanan also commented on timing of the Scottish and UK Government budgets, the lack of multi-year settlements the consequential effect being the Council was only able to set a budget for 2020/21. Notwithstanding, forecasts for 2021/22 and 2022/23 already indicated a budget shortfall of £12.4m based on a Council Tax increase of 3%. This would require further difficult decisions to be made.

He stressed that the Council remained committed to protecting valued frontline services through increasing efficiencies, referring to the contribution streamlining of processes was making to savings. He also referred to the updating of computer systems and the Council's website to enable residents to communicate with the Council more easily. In 2020/21, 59% of required savings would come from the Modern Ambitious Programme (MAP) and other efficiencies, with 67% of savings coming from efficiencies as part of the current 3-year budget.

Councillor Buchanan then referred to the Council's ongoing commitment to delivering ambitious projects, confirming that over the next 10 years £209m would be spent on capital plans, with two thirds being spent and the most ambitious projects due to be completed in the next 3 years. Whilst itemising expenditure on various projects, he referred to the six new, high quality nurseries being constructed to help deliver the Scottish Government's flagship policy of almost doubling early learning and childcare provision. Other projects referred to as part of the commitment to deliver the best outcomes in learning, life and work included, the £15m Maidenhill Primary School; and the ambitious £30.4m project, being progressed in partnership with the Scottish Government, to replace Neilston and St Thomas's Primary Schools, and build the Madras Family Centre, as part of which a new swimming facility and a community and well-being hub would also be created. Whilst commenting on pupils' achievements and rising attainment, Councillor Buchanan highlighted that inspection reports confirmed St Ninian's High School and Our Lady of the Mission Primary School to be the best secondary and primary school in Scotland respectively, referring to the aim of providing access to modern educational and leisure facilities across the area. He added that young people's life chances in care were also greatly improving by the long term commitment to the Champions' Board, which allowed them to directly influence officers and Elected Members.

The Council's commitment to providing much improved new leisure facilities in Eastwood Park was also referred to, in respect of which at least £26m had been set aside for the project and plans were to be progressed when the Council had considered options. Councillor Buchanan confirmed ERCLT Board Members and staff would be involved in deciding what facilities would be provided in the new amenity.

Reference was made to work in partnership with other authorities, in support of the economy and environmental protection, to convert household waste to low carbon energy which would complement the authority's recycling achievements. These environmental protection commitments extended to the Council's housebuilding programme, to the new, environmentally friendly homes built in Barrhead for rent, others to be constructed there and in Newton Mearns, and would help to address the needs of those facing homelessness and create local employment, apprenticeships and work placements. Opportunities for local economic growth at the Greenlaw Business Centre, Newton Mearns, and more generally the role of an improved transport network and the funding provided by the Council in recent years to improve local roads and pavements were also highlighted.

Councillor Buchanan was also heard on overall quality of life for East Renfrewshire residents, indicating that, in partnership with Police Scotland, East Renfrewshire continued to have the lowest crime levels in mainland Scotland, that the Citizens Panel Survey found 95% of residents to be satisfied living in the area, and that the HSCP was working tirelessly to improve the lives of the most vulnerable. Extra investment in home care provision, a related recruitment campaign, work done to support residents return home from hospital without delay, and work at Bonnyton House to improve and create facilities were highlighted, with such projects reported to play a major role in improving peoples' lives.

In conclusion Councillor Buchanan referred to the challenges faced, highlighting that a range of measures would tackle the savings gap, balance the budget, and protect front line services. He stressed that the Council would continue to press for further funding and look at new and innovative ways to make savings. It was projected that the number of jobs in the authority would fall by approximately 290 by 2021, which would be offset by the creation of more than 200 roles in nursery care. No compulsory redundancies would be made in 2020/21. Councillor Buchanan stressed that staff were the authority's best asset and played a key role in delivering the very best services to residents, adding that the range of capital projects to be taken forward would also help realise this ambition. Having referred again to various projects, he stated that the Council was one that delivered. He moved that the Council:-

- (a) approve the 2020/21 revenue estimates;
- (b) approve the proposed actions should there be a late change to the grant settlement;
- (c) approve the recommended level and use of reserves;
- (d) determine the 2020/21 Council Tax Band D level at £1,289.96; and
- (e) note that the management of the Council's finances and service plans would continue to be undertaken on a longer-term basis.

Seconding the motion, Councillor O'Kane highlighted that the Budget was set in the difficult context of the financial settlement becoming known late, commenting that the Administration had worked hard to deliver it in the circumstances and against a background of financial uncertainty and ongoing local government funding reductions. He added that all Elected Members had a duty to argue, as he would, for better long-term local government settlements and parity of esteem amongst spheres of government to assist with planning, as the future of high quality services was at risk. He argued in support of the Government taking cognisance of the spending pressures councils faced, such as to address the growing elderly population and with new initiatives to be delivered.

Councillor O'Kane referred to the need to make difficult decisions, use additional funds to close the funding gap and revisit challenging savings, such as those impacting on schools and the most vulnerable. He referred to the Administration's commitment to securing services, protecting the most vulnerable, and safeguarding jobs and terms and conditions, highlighting the Council was often the last line of defence against austerity. He cited the example of Universal Credit as an issue on which the Council had been required to pick up the pieces, such as through the MART team and Citizens Advice Bureau. He added that as much as possible had been done to mitigate cuts by using reserves and powers to increase Council Tax, which he considered necessary to protect valued services and investment, such as on roads. He reported that local people often told him they would be willing to pay more rather than lose services.

Councillor O’Kane was heartened to observe progress on many ambitious capital projects, including nurseries which would give young people a great start, commenting that education remained one of the Council’s greatest successes. He welcomed the capital investment for future generations, including on the all-weather running pitch and track at Mearns Castle High School, on improved fit for purpose learning environments in pursuit of excellence and equity, and on cultural, leisure and community facilities. Having acknowledged that investment in educational facilities would take time, he explained that learning environments would be upgraded meantime to meet modern requirements, such as to support the emphasis on STEM subjects and the playful pedagogical approach in Early Years. He referred to the types of adaptations that would be made based on a pilot project at Braidbar Primary School which had been well received and in which children had been central to the developments that had been introduced.

Councillor O’Kane considered the £209m capital programme to be wise investment for everyone and to improve services that mattered most to residents. Having added that the Council’s budget remained to be refined, he expressed the view that a balanced budget had been developed, that every effort had been made to sustain services and project jobs, and that everyone needed to continue to fight East Renfrewshire’s corner as residents expected.

Thereafter, Councillor Miller, seconded by Councillor Swift, moved as an amendment that the Estimates be approved, subject to the details set out in Appendix 1 accompanying this Minute.

Councillor Miller thanked the Head of Accountancy and Chief Accountant and their teams for their hard work over the past months and weeks. He also thanked the Chief Executive and CMT for their work to produce the budget, and Councillor Swift for his work on the amendment. He added that the amendment figures could be a little out of date as they had been prepared prior to the most recent funding announcements by the Scottish Government.

Councillor Miller suggested Councillor Buchanan had not been completely candid in his comments, as the nationalist Scottish Government continued to underfund local authorities for services they were expected to provide. Whilst acknowledging that councils were receiving more funds than before, he highlighted that the Government was placing more burdens on their budgets annually, with the local authority once again receiving a 1% cut in real terms equating to a flat cash settlement. This was despite £0.5bn extra being allocated to the Scottish Government by the United Kingdom Government last year, and an additional allocation of £1bn being received for the forthcoming year. He acknowledged difficulties faced by the Scottish Government as its budget remained to be confirmed, but added that the Welsh Assembly had produced its budget in December 2019 with the same information at its disposal. He depicted the allocation to local government by the Scottish National Party as austerity.

Councillor Miller stated that the Opposition had reviewed the amendments it had proposed previously. He reported that in 2008 the Administration had included in their budget a new leisure centre in Eaglesham which had been welcomed then but which had never been developed there or elsewhere. The Opposition Leader had also proposed a business incubator to encourage new business then and subsequently, adding that he had been delighted therefore to attend the opening of Greenlaw Works, the same incubator the Opposition had proposed.

Councillor Miller referred to a fully funded £10m proposal made by the Opposition in 2018 on roads expenditure to be implemented over 3 years in recognition of their infrastructural importance. This had been rejected at the time. However the Opposition had welcomed the subsequent allocation of £3m per annum from 2019/20 onwards. In view of this continuing commitment it had not been considered necessary for the Opposition to include further funding in their amendment.

Councillor Miller also referred to other examples where Opposition proposals rejected in the past now appeared to be accepted by the Administration. By way of example reminded Members that in 2019 the Opposition, having taken advice and spoken to some teachers who considered schools to be too warm in winter, had proposed a reduction in schools utilities consumption which was rejected. Having referred to comments made against that proposal by the Convener for Education and Equalities at the time, he highlighted a £50k reduction proposed in utilities consumption by the Administration in its 2020/21 budget.

Regarding the amendments proposed this year, Councillor Miller commented that no Elected Member would be happy reducing by £442k support for the lowest performing 20% of school pupils, highlighting that the Scottish Government had requested and supplied funds for investment in this. The Opposition did not support the Administration's proposed reduction in this budget in the interests of improving attainment, holding the view that education was the best way out of poverty. Councillor Miller added that the lowest performing pupils often lived, but not always, in the least affluent areas. He implored the Administration to use some of the further funding coming from the Scottish Government, which he anticipated would be used to fill the unfunded budget gap, to minimise the proposed reduction in support or eliminate the reduction altogether.

Councillor Miller then queried the affordability of a Council Tax increase of 4.84%, commenting that few would have had a 5% increase in their income, that the Administration had said it would limit the increase to 3% which some would have budgeted for, and that the increase was particularly hard on those with a fixed income, such as pensioners and those with young children which equated to almost half the local population. He clarified that the Opposition proposed limiting the increase to 3%, which was not easy for some residents, but better than 4.84%. He acknowledged why the Administration had proposed what it had, attributing blame to the failing nationalist Scottish Government.

Whilst expressing the view that the proposed amendments were largely self-explanatory, he commented on each one. He referred to a sum allocated for concert income, suggesting it was not unreasonable to budget for a further event, not necessarily in Rouken Glen Park. Other proposals advocated included achieving a modest sum through advertising income; a 5% reduction in the use of Agency staff, and the same reduction in overtime costs. He also commented on the reorganisation of the CAB and MART team to provide a one stop shop for all rights advice through a properly funded CAB, and the proposal to extend, with some exceptions such as for teachers, the average time taken to recruit new staff from 74 to 135 days. He stated that if this was implemented, no jobs would be lost and posts would be filled over time, acknowledging that stress levels of existing officers could rise when covering tasks meantime, but adding that some posts could be filled immediately, if required.

In conclusion, Councillor Miller commented that his understanding was that the Council was duty bound to publish a balanced budget by 11 March, observing that the Administration's proposed budget left an unfunded gap of £1.278m. He acknowledged that individuals had not sought elected office to make savage cuts forced on the authority by the Scottish Government. Councillor Miller added that the Opposition also had an unfunded financial gap which was slightly less than that of the Administration, but highlighted that further funding had just been announced which could close the gap and leave some funding left over. He urged the Administration to allocate this to supporting the lowest 20% of pupils.

Seconding the amendment, Councillor Swift thanked the Head of Revenues and Chief Accountant for their assistance. He stated that the budget amendments improved upon the Administration's proposals regarding fairness in education and levelling up for the least advantaged; more and better use of resources to raise money; and less reliance on increasing Council Tax by more than twice the rate of inflation, which punished residents, to fund services the Scottish Government would not fund.

Councillor Swift commented that, under the SNP's charge locally, in Barrhead the Council would be rebuilding changing rooms and pavilions that had been knocked down shortly after being built. He highlighted that the Scottish Government demanded that the authority build more houses, but neither funded schools required for the young people in them nor expenditure on roads, doctors surgeries or nurseries which were only partly funded centrally. He added that while resources provided to the Scottish Government had increased despite claims of Conservative austerity, local government funding was being cut, not just in real terms, and that residents wondered how the Scottish Government received more funds per capita than the rest of the UK, whilst local government remained underfunded. Councillor Swift also commented that despite various taxation changes, there was a tax shortfall whilst funds were wasted on issues such as ferries and hospitals that did not operate or at least properly.

Whilst commenting that the Council proposed construction in parks, Councillor Swift reported that the SNP planned to build leisure centres in Neilston and Eastwood, but had looked at neither adequately. Furthermore, he referred to a three-fold increase in borrowing by the Council and the related interest to be paid, whilst current services could not be maintained.

Councillor Swift highlighted that it was not proposed to do much differently as the Scottish Government had left the Council little room for financial manoeuvre, whilst the SNP locally would not fight the national stance to support local people and services.

The amendment proposed not cutting the pupil support budget, and increasing Council Tax by a rate closer to inflation as the Administration had proposed last year. Councillor Swift said that such proposals reflected that only the Conservatives stood with those who believed education was the gateway to equalising outcomes and improving society, and believed people should be judged by their character not the funds their parents had. He argued that the proposed 4.84% Council Tax increase punished hardest the least affluent, that many local residents were asset rich but cash poor, and that their pensions had not necessarily increased by 5%.

Councillor Swift also suggested that the Administration had wanted to cut the IJB budget and had been prevented from doing so by the Scottish Government. This would have put services for the elderly at peril when they were already in crisis because of lack of funds. He expressed hope that any new resources the authority was allocated would be used to support vulnerable people, adding that the Opposition was looking after them, both young and old.

In conclusion, Councillor Swift stated that in sharp contrast to political opponents, the Opposition believed in opportunity for all, referring to the duty that fell to the Council to look after older and vulnerable residents well.

Thereafter a full discussion on the proposals took place.

Councillor Grant commented that support for school education was commendable, but argued for the removal of the cap on places for Scottish students at Scottish universities. Councillor Devlin highlighted that this was not a matter under local control by the Council.

Commenting on the amendment, Councillor Lafferty stated that the Opposition had provided a lack of detail regarding the proposal to generate advertising income, emphasising he did not support advertising on roundabouts which he considered distracting.

Councillor Macdonald reported he would have preferred the Administration Budget to place less emphasis on ambitious capital projects and more on normal services, arguing that a progressive revenue programme was not being pursued. Having cited the example of

parking problems, such as in Clarkston, he suggested that the introduction of parking charges should now be explored further, contrasting income from these in Glasgow and locally. Whilst acknowledging differences in the types of authorities these were, he suggested a review was merited in the face of a 4.84% Council Tax increase.

Council Bamforth stated that the Scottish Government grant settlement was a refund in part of what was paid, that not all funds were passed on by the UK Government, and that nobody wanted to increase Council Tax, contrasting the level of Council Tax in East Renfrewshire with higher levels paid in some other Scottish and English authority areas. She attributed the utilities budget reduction in schools to fuel efficiency in new build properties, and referred to comments made at one point by Councillor Swift on the learning disability support budget.

Referring to the comments made by Councillor Swift, Councillor Ireland referred to the authority's investment in local roads. Regarding comments made by Councillor Macdonald, she referred to the work recently completed by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on income generation. She did not support the Opposition's proposal to reorganise the CAB and MART team, referring to extensive work both did, such as on Universal Credit.

Summing up, Councillor Buchanan was heard in response to some of the issues raised during debate. He emphasised that austerity since 2008, led by the Conservative Party, continued to impact on local government.

Commenting on the suggested review of parking charges, he reminded the Council that this had been explored about 5 years ago, reporting that the vast majority of Clarkston residents had not favoured change then, but that if they had changed their minds this could be revisited. He clarified that the position at the goods yard there, which had been mentioned by Councillor Macdonald, had been examined at that time.

Regarding the Opposition amendment, Councillor Buchanan reported that the additional funds secured would impact on what could be done, and that there may not be a need to make some savings. He considered the proposed Council Tax increase valid in the current circumstances, and cited examples of exemplary services provided by the authority based on an Administration that was delivering for local people.

Councillor Buchanan confirmed that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations on income generation were under consideration, and commented further on the use of income and reserves, following which he dismissed the suggestion made regarding the CAB and MART services, especially at a time when Universal Credit was being rolled out. He did not consider any of the proposed Opposition amendments acceptable, and referred to the plans being made to examine the remaining funding gap and related issues.

On a vote being taken, 10 Members voted for the motion, 6 Members voted for the amendment and there was 1 abstention.

The motion was accordingly declared carried and it was agreed to:-

- (a) approve the 2020/21 revenue estimates;
- (b) approve the proposed actions should there be a late change to the grant settlement;
- (c) approve the recommended level and use of reserves;
- (d) determine the 2020/21 Council Tax Band D level at £1,289.96; and
- (e) note that the management of the Council's finances and service plans would continue to be undertaken on a longer-term basis.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

1217. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 28 February 2019 (Page 751, Item 805 refers, when an update to the Capital Investment Strategy had been approved, the Council considered a report by the 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 Treasury Management Code of Practice 2017.

Having clarified that the Strategy adopted a long-term approach to 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 it would be driven forward by the CMT 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 to be 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.

The Council approved the updated Capital Investment Strategy.

GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PLAN 2020/21-2029/30

1218. The Council considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer, seeking approval of the General Fund Capital Plan covering the 10 years from 2020/21 to 2029/30. A copy of the Plan, prepared in line with the approach within the Capital Investment Strategy, accompanied the report.

The Council, having heard Councillor Swift comment that the all-weather pitch and running track at Mearns Castle High School would be welcomed by the local community:-

- (a) approved the Programme for 2020/21 and authorised officers to progress the projects contained therein; and
- (b) agreed to revise the Plan during the year in the light of updated information relating to detailed plans for Eastwood Leisure Centre.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2020/21

1219. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 28 February 2019 (Page 753, Item 807 refers), when the Council had approved the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2019/20, the Council considered a report by the Director of Environment making recommendations in relation to the proposed rent increase for council housing for 2020/21.

Having referred to the need to review legislative requirements, local priorities, related costs and what would be sustainable, affordable and acceptable to tenants when determining the level of rent increase required, the report clarified that a key legislative challenge for the Council in recent years had been meeting and maintaining the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), in addition to which sustainability improvements to the energy efficiency rating of its housing stock under the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH) were required by 2020 on which ongoing investment was needed. These challenges were in addition to addressing routine requirements. Having commented on considerable service improvements in recent years but also related challenges, such as in relation to Universal Credit, the report explained that approval of the proposed rent increase of 3.4% for 2020/21 effective from April 2020 would assist the Housing Service address some of the issues tenants considered priorities. It was explained that the Council was also keen to continue to provide new homes for local residents. 59 had been built thus far, the Cabinet having also approved an expansion of the Council's house building programme.

The report commented on a range of related matters further, including affordability, the impact of the rent increase, staffing, loan charges and additional investment. It was also explained that the Housing Service was currently undertaking a significant redesign, which included procurement of a new in-house IT system, a key driver of the redesign being the utilisation of better digital technologies to benefit both customers and officers.

Councillor Devlin was heard in support of the proposals during which he referred to the balance needed between making improvements to the housing stock, such as to enable them to be heated more efficiently, and keeping rent levels reasonable. He confirmed that the authority's rent levels were lower than other local landlords, and that the service performed above the Scottish average in 5 of 8 performance indicator categories used.

Councillor Wallace welcomed that the service performed well in 5 performance categories, but expressed concern regarding the remaining 3, such as the rent collection rate where performance was 1% below the Scottish average of 99.1%. He referred to the adverse financial consequences of both this and the failure to let some vacant properties or delays in re-letting which he had raised before. Having also referred to the time taken to address some non-emergency repairs, he encouraged the service to address these issues.

In response Councillor Devlin commented on hard work that had been done and was ongoing to reduce voids, discouraged a focus being placed on small performance differences reported between authorities, and referred to the quality of the housing service.

The Council agreed that a rent increase of 3.4% be applied for the financial year 2020/21 with effect from April 2020.

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2020/21 TO 2024/25

1220. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval of the proposed 5-year Housing Capital Programme for 2020/21 to 2024/25.

The report clarified the position on various matters, including how the programme had recently been dominated by the need to invest to meet the Scottish Quality Housing Standard (SQHS) and first Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH1) by 2020/21. Having clarified that the Scottish Government was introducing further energy efficiency targets for social housing to be achieved by 2025 (ESSH2), and commented on related investment requirements, the report explained that funds had been carried forward to the 2020/21 programme linked to some project delays in 2019/20, with some further delay and additional carry forward being possible.

Having commented on the need to achieve a difficult balance between tenants' aspirations regarding housing improvements, investment affordability, and the implications of the age of the Council's housing stock, the report provided details of key areas on which the Housing Capital Programme would focus for the next 5 years, including investment of £30.3m to complete the delivery of 240 new council houses; of £3.8m in central heating; of £2m primarily in house re-wiring and the upgrading of smoke detectors; of £9.5m in external structural projects; and of £5.1m in the installation of internal elements such as kitchens. Other projects itemised included investment of £150k to fund house purchase opportunities such as through the Scottish Government's Mortgage to Rent Scheme; of £1.5m in sheltered housing; and of £91k on the further development of the new Housing Management IT system.

The report commented on a range of further matters, including how the programme was financed, related issues and monitoring arrangements. It was concluded that the levels of investment within the programme were essential to allow the Council to continue to meet the SQHS, to meet the future requirements of EESSH, and to provide homes that would address the needs and aspirations of current and prospective tenants. It was emphasised that although continued investment was affordable and would be welcomed by tenants, resources were tight and prudent financial management was required.

Councillor Wallace commented on slippage regarding the house building programme, expressing frustration that it had taken 4 to 5 years to build the first 59 houses. Having emphasised that the Opposition supported council house building, he encouraged those involved to ensure targets were met.

Councillor Devlin highlighted the number of council houses on which construction would start during the forthcoming year. Councillor Buchanan referred to tenants' previous right to buy and the authority's ability to build new houses offering life-long tenancies, but highlighted that there was limited land in the Council's ownership, such as due to its sale by the former Eastwood District Council, which in turn limited what could be done.

The Council:-

- (a) approved the proposed 2020/21 to 2024/25 Housing Capital Programme; and
- (b) authorised the Director of Environment to progress the projects contained with the 2020/21 programme.

CHANGES TO PRE-DETERMINATION HEARING PROCEDURE

1221. The Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive advising the Council of legislative changes which would mean that any major planning applications subject to a pre-determination hearing would no longer need to be determined by the full Council, and seeking the Council's view on how to proceed.

The report clarified that Section 38A of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 required a pre-determination hearing to take place for planning applications for major developments that were significant departures from the development plan. It was for individual planning authorities to decide on their hearing procedures. Having summarised the Council's current arrangements for such applications, the report explained that under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, from 1 March 2020 the requirement for the full Council to decide any major planning application subject to a pre-determination hearing was removed, requiring the Council to decide how to proceed. Three options were considered worthy of consideration, the first being for the standard 7 member Planning Applications Committee to

deal with them, and the second being for an extended Planning Applications Committee comprising all 18 Elected Members to deal with such applications. The third was for the applications to be dealt with by the standard Planning Applications Committee, but to extend its membership to include those Elected Members in whose ward the application was located if they were not already members of it. Arguments for and against each option were summarised.

Having referred to the decision taken to webcast full Council meetings only, the report explained that it had become practice to webcast pre-determination hearings and the full Council meeting which followed these when the final decision on applications was taken because of the link between the business transacted at both. Due to the likely controversial nature of the applications in question, the level of interest in them, and as a precedent had been set, it was proposed that meetings where such applications were considered should continue to be webcast.

Councillor Ireland, supported by Councillor O’Kane, expressed support for the second option, referring to related issues such as how such applications were often controversial and the importance of transparency regarding them. She was also heard in support of the proposal to continue to webcast the proceedings for such applications and, requested that training on the legislation be made available.

In response to Councillor Miller, the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that if Option 2 was approved, there would be no requirement for a full Council meeting to be convened following the meetings of the extended Planning Applications Committee.

The Council:-

- (a) noted the legislative changes that would no longer require any major planning applications subject to a pre-determination hearing to be determined by the full Council;
- (b) agreed that an extended Planning Applications Committee, comprising all 18 Elected Members, be established to deal with the applications referred to at (a) above;
- (c) agreed that, as at present, meetings dealing with major planning applications that are subject to a pre-determination hearing continue to be webcast;
- (d) agreed that the Scheme of Administration and Scheme of Delegate Functions be amended accordingly; and
- (e) noted the request for training on the new legislation to be made available to all Elected Members.

POST OF DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

1222. The Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive requesting that, following notification of the retirement of the Director of Education with effect from 23 August 2020, arrangements be put in place to ensure continuity and stability within the Education Department, and seeking approval for the establishment of an Appointments Committee for the Director of Education post.

The report summarised the contribution the Director of Education had made in the field of education, not only within the Council in her current and previous posts, but also out with it.

The Council, having heard Councillor O’Kane, supported by Councillor Buchanan, refer briefly to the Director of Education’s long and successful career and welcome the length of time the Director had made available to appoint a new Director and ease the transition:-

- (a) noted the retirement of the Director of Education with effect from 23 August 2020;
- (b) approved the recruitment procedure proposed as detailed in the report and agreed to the appointment of an external advisor;
- (c) authorised the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chief Executive, to make the necessary arrangements;
- (d) agreed that membership of the Appointments Committee comprise Councillors O’Kane (Chair), Buchanan, Merrick, Miller and Wallace; and
- (e) authorised the Chief Executive to put in place appropriate interim management arrangements for the Department if required.

THE EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL (DISABLED PERSONS’ PARKING PLACES)(ON-STREET PARKING) ORDER 2020

1223. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment proposing that the Council approve the making and confirmation of “The East Renfrewshire Council (Disabled Persons’ Parking Places)(On-Street) Order 2020”.

The report explained that the Disabled Persons’ Parking Places (Scotland) Act 2009 required local authorities to designate and control the use of all disabled persons’ parking places, referring to related duties that fell to the Council and clarifying that advisory bays were no longer permitted and the related consequences. Having referred to consultation on the proposed Order which would prevent misuse of parking places designated for the exclusive use of Disabled Blue Badge holders, the report clarified that the Council had not received any related objections. It was clarified that the related financial implications of implementing the Order would be met from the Parking Account.

Having heard Councillor Lafferty in support of the proposal, Councillor Swift and Depute Provost Cunningham asked for further clarification on the right that had existed until now to enforce parking restrictions in places designated for disabled persons and issue related fines, some of which were known to have been issued.

Referring to comments made earlier in the meeting, Councillor Ireland having suggested that there could be merit in doing a wider piece of work on parking issues in Clarkston, the Council agreed:-

- (a) to approve the making and confirmation of “The East Renfrewshire Council (Disabled Persons’ Parking Places)(On-Street) Order 2020” and to delegate to the Director of Environment the implementation of the Order in accordance with the associated statutory procedures; and
- (b) that further clarification be provided on the right that had existed prior to the implementation of the Order to enforce parking restrictions in places designated for disabled person and issue related fines.

THE EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL (ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING PLACE)(ON-STREET AND OFF-STREET CAR PARKS) ORDER 2020

1224. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment proposing that the Council approve the making and confirmation of “The East Renfrewshire Council (Electric Vehicle Charging Place)(On-Street and Off-Street Car Parks) Order 2020”.

The report referred to the Scottish Government’s vision of almost completely decarbonising road transport by 2050, associated with which it was encouraging local authorities to participate in a project to provide a network of plug-in charging points for electric vehicles. Reference was made to related funding and procurement issues, following which the report clarified that the Order was to ensure charging points were reserved for the exclusive use of electric vehicles whilst they were being actively charged, and allow Parking Attendants to enforce any contraventions of the Regulations. Having referred to consultation on the proposed Order, the report clarified that no related objections had been received. It was clarified that the related financial implications of implementing the Order would be met from the Parking Account.

Councillor Lafferty was heard in support of the proposal and, in response to Councillor Swift, on how it would be determined that appropriate vehicles were using the spaces in accordance with the Regulations.

The Council agreed to approve the making of “The East Renfrewshire Council (Electric Vehicle Charging Place)(On-Street and Off-Street Car Parks) Order 2020” and to delegate to the Director of Environment the implementation of the Order in accordance with the associated statutory procedures.

THE EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL (C9 AURS ROAD, BARRHEAD TO NEWTON MEARNS)(30 MPH & 40MPH SPEED LIMITS) ORDER 2020

1225. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment proposing that the Council approve the making and confirmation of “The East Renfrewshire Council (C9 Aurs Road, Barrhead to Newton Mearns)(30mph & 40mph Speed Limits) Order 2020”.

The report referred to the profile and features of the C9 Aurs Road between Springfield Road, Barrhead, and the northernmost access lane to Ryat Lynn Reservoir, including in terms of access provided to areas such as residential development sites. To reflect current and future features of this stretch of road, it was proposed to extend the existing 30mph speed limit from the junction with Springfield Road approximately 910 metres towards a point approximately 150 metres northwest of the northernmost access land to Ryat Lynn Reservoir. Similarly, reflecting features of the road between the Reservoir and the B769 Stewarton Road, and taking account of proposed recreational development forming part of the City Deal programme, the report proposed introducing a 40mph speed limit at a point approximately 150 metres northwest of the northernmost access land to Ryat Lynn Reservoir and the existing 40mph speed limit northwest of the junction with the B769. It was clarified no related objections had been received, and concluded that the new limits would improve safety and promote safer travel, in line with aims of the Council’s Local Transport Strategy.

The report also explained that under the Council’s Scheme of Administration, all Roads Orders required to be dealt with by the full Council, which had timing implications for the introduction of Orders, particularly those that were urgent. It was proposed that Roads Orders be dealt with by the Cabinet in future, and highlighted that the Cabinet “call in” procedures would apply to such proposals.

Whilst commenting further regarding future Roads Orders, Councillor Lafferty proposed that where relevant Local Members expressed concerns in relation to such an Order that the matter be referred to the full Council as a matter of course.

The Council, having heard the Democratic Services Manager in further clarification, agreed:-

- (a) to approve the making and confirmation of “The East Renfrewshire Council (C9 Aurs Road, Barrhead to Newton Mearns)(30 mph & 40mph Speed Limits) Order 2020” and to delegate to the Director of Environment the implementation of the Order in accordance with the associated statutory procedures;
- (b) that subject to consultation having taken place with the relevant Local Members and no concerns having been raised, the making of Roads Orders be delegated to the Cabinet;
- (c) that where Local Members had expressed concerns in relation to a proposed Roads Order, the making of such Orders be submitted to the full Council; and
- (d) that the Scheme of Administration be amended accordingly.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE HSCP INTEGRATION SCHEME

1226. The Council considered a report by the Chief Officer, Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), presenting draft revisions to the Integration Scheme for the East Renfrewshire HSCP which had been developed in consultation with partner HSCPs in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board area.

It was explained that the Public Bodies (Joint Working)(Scotland) Act 2014 had established the legal framework for integrating health and social care in Scotland, and that the legislation required territorial NHS health boards and local authorities to integrate strategic planning and service provision arrangements for adult health and social care services, whilst providing local discretion to include other functions, such as children’s health and social care services. The Council and Health Board had jointly prepared, consulted on and sought approval of the first Integration Scheme in May 2015, which was subsequently approved by the Scottish Government in June 2015 leading to the establishment of the Integration Joint Board (IJB).

Reference was made to the requirement for the Integration Scheme to be reviewed and revised after five years. In consultation with partner HSCPs in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board area, a draft of the revised Scheme had been prepared, a copy of which was appended to the report. Having clarified that the Scheme detailed the role and responsibilities of the IJB, the Council and the Health Board, in enabling the IJB to discharge its functions, the report itemised amendments proposed, the majority of which were technical drafting changes, such as changes of tense following the establishment of the HSCP and operational issues.

It was clarified that further consultation would take place with stakeholder groups in March and April 2020 as required under the 2014 Act, with further changes made to reflect the outcome. A timeline for this and the approval of the revised Scheme by the Scottish Government was provided, which included provision to resubmit the revised Scheme to the Council at the end of April if required. It was concluded that the revised Scheme provided a light touch update and did not result in any changes to the powers and functions of the IJB.

The Council:-

- (a) approved the current draft Integration Scheme to allow a period of consultation to commence;
- (b) agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Officer, HSCP, in consultation with the Council and NHS Chief Executives, to submit the final revised Integration Scheme following the consultation exercise; and
- (c) noted that if during the consultation process any significant issues were to arise, the Chief Officer, HSCP would report back to the Council for a decision on these.

PROVOST

1136

CONSERVATIVE AMENDMENT PROPOSALS 2020/21

| | Administration | Conservative Proposals |
|--|----------------|------------------------|
| | Savings £000s | Savings £000 |
| Support for Lowest Performing 20% Pupils | £ 442 | £ 0 |
| Council Tax Increase (4.84%) | £2,722 | |
| Conservative Council Tax Increase (3%) | | £1,687 |
| Concert Income | | £ 50 |
| Advertising Income | | £ 50 |
| Property Strategy | | £ 50 |
| 5% Reduction in Agency Staff | | £ 50 |
| 5% Reduction in Overtime | | £ 40 |
| CAB/MART Reorganisation | | £ 80 |
| Extending Recruitment Time by 2 Months | | £1,230 |
| <u>Total Budget Savings</u> | £3,164 | £3,237 |
| <u>Unfunded Gap</u> | £1,278 | £1,205 |
| <u>Final Total</u> | £4,442 | £4,442 |

MINUTE
of
APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 1.30pm in the Eastwood Health and Care Centre, Drumby Crescent, Clarkston, on 11 March 2020.

Present:

Councillor Caroline Bamforth
Councillor Paul O’Kane
Councillor Jim Swift

Flavia Tudoreanu
Anne-Marie Monaghan

Councillor Bamforth in the Chair

Attending:

Julie Murray, Chief Officer – HSCP; Kate Rocks, Chief Social Work Officer; and Sharon Dick, Head of HR and Corporate Services.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1227. No declarations of interest were intimated.

Resolution to Exclude Press and Public

At this point in the meeting, on the motion of the Chair, the committee unanimously resolved that in accordance with the provisions of Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A to the Act.

HEAD OF RECOVERY AND INTENSIVE SERVICES

1228. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Appointments Committee of 11 February 2020 (Page 1099, Item 1192 refers), the committee took up consideration of applications for the readvertised post of Head of Recovery and Intensive Services.

Following full consideration the committee agreed to shortlist 2 candidates for assessment and also agreed that if any candidates failed to meet the essential criteria for the role during the assessment centre process that Julie Murray (Chief Officer, HSCP) and Kath McCormack (HR Manager) could make the decision not to progress them to interview.

CHAIR

MINUTE

of

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 11 March 2020.

Present:

Councillor Annette Ireland (Chair)
Provost Jim Fletcher

Councillor Stewart Miller

Councillor Ireland in the Chair

Attending:

Gillian McCarney, Head of Environment (Chief Planning Officer); Sean McDaid, Principal Planner; Ian Walker, Senior Planner; and Derek Scott, Planner, Development Management; Graham Shankland, Principal Strategy Officer (Regulatory and Strategy); and Paul O'Neil, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies:

Councillors Betty Cunningham (Vice Chair); Angela Convery; Jim McLean; and Jim Swift.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1229. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

APPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING PERMISSION

1230. The committee considered reports by the Director of Environment, on applications for planning permission requiring consideration by the committee.

It was agreed that the applications be determined as indicated at Appendix 1 accompanying this Minute, particular reference being made to the following:-

- (i) 2019/0370/TP – Erection of residential development (comprising 316 units) with associated access roads, parking and SUDS areas and associated engineering and landscaping works; alterations to Springhill Road/Springfield Road junction (major) at land at Netherton Farm, Springfield Road, Barrhead, East Renfrewshire by Taylor Wimpey West Scotland and Wallace Land Investments

The Principal Planner explained the reasons why the application had to be considered by the committee and indicated that having assessed the terms of the application in accordance with the policies contained in the Local Development Plan it was being recommended for approval, subject to conditions and the conclusion of a legal agreement to secure the delivery of affordable housing and development contributions.

Councillor Ireland referred to the comments made by the Council's Environmental Services section to the effect that parts of the site were predicted to be subject to noise levels from road traffic exceeding acceptable guidelines. She also referred to the proposed mitigation measures which included the formation of acoustic barriers and achieving acceptable internal night-time noise levels with bedroom windows closed and the installation of trickle vents to provide sufficient ventilation with windows closed.

However, Councillor Ireland noted that the advice from the Environmental Health Service was that the proposed mitigation measures were not acceptable as the current policy was that satisfactory noise levels should be achieved with the bedroom windows open at least 10-15cm for ventilation. In view of this, she noted that the service had accordingly recommended that further mitigation measures should be incorporated into the site including acoustic barriers and sought clarification whether the recommendation could be attached as a condition to the consent.

In reply, the Principal Planner referred to the five areas within the development where it was proposed to install 2 metre high acoustic fencing particularly in areas 2 and 3 to mitigate noise levels. He confirmed that the terms of Condition 7 as detailed in the report could be amended to include reference to acoustic barriers. In reply to a question by Provost Fletcher, he confirmed that the application did comply with the policies contained in the Local Development Plan.

At this stage, the committee agreed that the application be approved, subject to the:-

- (a) conditions detailed in the report;
- (b) terms of Condition 7 being amended to include reference to acoustic barriers; and
- (c) conclusion of a legal agreement to secure the delivery of affordable housing and development contributions.

CHAIR

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND) ACT 1997
AS AMENDED BY THE PLANNING ETC (SCOTLAND) ACT 2006
PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS) (SCOTLAND) ACT 1997**

Index of applications under the above acts determined by the Planning Applications Committee on
11th March 2020

Reference No: 2018/0791/TP

Ward: 5

Applicant:

Robertson Homes Ltd
Robertson House
Castle Business Park
Stirling
Scotland
FK9 4TZ

Agent:

Site: Land at Maidenhill (bounded by Ayr Road to the east and M77 to the west), Newton Mearns, East Renfrewshire

Description: Erection of residential development (comprising 46 dwellinghouses and 10 flats) and associated roads, SUDS and landscaping (major)

Decision: The recommendation to approve subject to conditions following the conclusion of a legal agreement relating to the delivery of affordable housing and payment of development contributions was agreed.

Reference No: 2019/0370/TP

Ward: 1

Applicant:

Taylor Wimpey West Scotland and Wallace Land Investments.
Lightyear Building
Marchburn Drive
Paisley
PA3 2SJ

Agent:

Geddes Consulting
Quadrant
17 Bernard Street
Edinburgh
EH6 6PW

Site: Land at Netherton Farm, Springfield Road, Barrhead

Description: Erection of residential development (316 units) with associated access roads, parking and SUDS areas and associated engineering and landscaping works; alterations to Springhill Road/Springfield Road junction (major)

Decision: The recommendation to approve subject to conditions following the conclusion of a legal agreement relating to the delivery of affordable housing and payment of development contributions was agreed.

MINUTE
of
LOCAL REVIEW BODY

Minute of Meeting held at 2.30pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 11 March 2020.

Present:

Councillor Annette Ireland (Chair)
Provost Jim Fletcher

Councillor Stewart Miller

Councillor Ireland in the Chair

Attending:

Graham Shankland, Principal Strategy Officer (Regulatory and Strategy)(Planning Adviser);
Siobhan Wilson, Solicitor (Legal Adviser); and Paul O'Neil, Committee Services Officer
(Clerk).

Apologies:

Councillors Betty Cunningham (Vice Chair); Angela Convery, Jim McLean; and Jim Swift.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1231. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

NOTICE OF REVIEW – REVIEW 2020/04 – ERECTION OF TWO STOREY SIDE EXTENSION AND SINGLE STOREY FRONT EXTENSION AT 66A STAMPERLAND GARDENS, CLARKSTON (REF NO: 2019/0639/TP)

1232. The Local Review Body considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive, relative to a 'Notice of Review' submitted by Mrs L Haig, against the decision taken by officers to refuse planning permission in respect of the erection of a two storey side extension and single storey front extension at 66A Stamperland Gardens, Clarkston.

The decision had been made in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation made in terms of Section 43A of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended.

In accordance with the decision taken at the meeting on 10 August 2016, the Local Review Body had carried out an unaccompanied site inspection of the application site immediately prior to the meeting.

1144

The Local Review Body, having considered the information previously circulated, agreed that it had sufficient information to determine the review without further procedure.

Following discussion, it was agreed to uphold the decision of the Appointed Officer as set out in the decision notice of 16 December 2019 and refuse planning permission.

CHAIR

MINUTE
of
CABINET

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 12 March 2020.

Present:

Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)
Councillor Caroline Bamforth
Councillor Danny Devlin

Councillor Alan Lafferty
Councillor Colm Merrick
Councillor Paul O’Kane

Councillor Buchanan, Leader, in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Andy Cahill, Director of Environment; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Louise Pringle, Head of Communities, Revenues and Change; Murray Husband, Head of Digital and Community Safety; Phil Daws, Head of Environment (Strategic Services); Mark Waugh, Principal Accountant (Capital); Robert Spencer, Principal Accountant (Revenue); Debbie Hill, Chief Procurement Officer; Stuart Free, Principal Officer (Asset Management); Morag Brown, Strategic Services Lead; and Paul O’Neil, Committee Services Officer.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1233. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

CHARTER AGAINST MODERN SLAVERY

1234. The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Executive, seeking approval for the Council to sign the Charter against Modern Slavery.

The report explained that one of the Council’s obligations in terms of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, details of which were outlined in the report, was to approve and sign the Charter at a senior level within the business. Whilst noting that the Charter had already been signed by eight out of Scotland’s 32 councils, the report detailed the actions the Council would take to ensure modern slavery was not part of the procurement supply chain in line with the requirements of the Charter.

The report explained that by signing the Charter the Council would be committing itself to ensuring that the risks of modern slavery within procurement and the wider supply chain for goods, works and services were understood and that the Council showed leadership in promoting a human rights approach towards procurement.

The Cabinet approved the signing of the Charter against Modern Slavery.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BENCHMARKING FRAMEWORK - 2018/19 PERFORMANCE

1235. The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Executive, providing an update on the national Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) together with an overview of the Council's performance against the LGBF indicators from 2017/18 to 2018/19. A summary of the LGBF performance report was appended to the report.

The report explained that since 2010, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Convention of Local Authorities (COSLA) worked with the Improvement Service to develop and review a set of benchmarking indicators on behalf of Scottish councils. The key criterion of the indicators was that they were comparable across all 32 councils.

Whilst noting that benchmarking data from the LGBF had been recorded and publicly reported by all Scottish councils as a statutory requirement since 2010/11, the report highlighted that over 80 measures were included in the data set split across eight key service areas including Children's Services; Adult Social Care; Corporate; Culture and Leisure; Environmental; Housing; Corporate Assets and Economic Development. It was noted that five new measures had been added since 2017/18 covering Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE).

The report highlighted that the 2018/19 data showed that the Council continued to perform strongly in key outcome areas where it was making differences to people's lives including educational attainment, high quality early years provision, energy efficient housing, protecting consumers and supporting those in need of money and benefit advice. Furthermore, the Council was improving the environment with the highest rates of recycling and helping more residents into employment. The report indicated that where the Council's costs were above the national average there were clear policy intentions explaining what the Council aimed to achieve as a result of its investment.

Whilst emphasising that the LGBF indicators set was only one means of recording and measuring the Council's performance, the report explained that to achieve a balanced picture, the outcomes the Council was reporting on over the next year through its Community Plan, incorporating Fairer East Ren, Outcome Delivery Plan and through various audits, inspections and self-assessments should be noted. Furthermore, there was a wide range of performance information scrutinised and reported by the Council which was not statutory and provided detailed information on performance at mid-year and year-end points.

The Cabinet, having heard the Head of Communities, Revenues and Change refer to a correction to the figure recorded in respect of Teacher Absence, noted:

- (a) that the figure reported in respect of Teacher Absence should have been recorded as 6.1 days and not 5.7 days as detailed in the report; and
- (b) the Council's performance against the Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicators and the action taken by departments to address any performance issues.

ESTIMATED REVENUE BUDGET OUT-TURN 2019/20

1236. The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer, detailing the projected revenue budget out-turn for 2019/20 and providing details of the expected year-end variances together with summary cost information for each of the undernoted services as at 31 December 2019:-

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

Whilst noting that as at 31 December 2019, the estimated year-end position showed a net favourable variance on net expenditure of £1,511,000 based on current information, the report indicated that for General Fund services the projected underspend was £1,618,000 and that the Council Tax collection position was in line with budget at this time.

Approval was sought for a number service virements and operational budget adjustments, details of which were outlined in the report.

The report concluded by highlighting that a number of operational variances required management action to ensure that expenditure would be in line with budget at the end of the financial year. At this time, it was expected that management action would lead to all overspends being recovered, that all underspends were consolidated wherever possible and that spending up to budget levels did not take place.

The Cabinet, having noted the probable out-turn position, agreed that:-

- (a) the service virements and operational adjustments as set out in the report be approved;
- (b) management action be taken to remedy any forecast overspends; and
- (c) all departments continue to closely monitor their probable out-turn position and consolidate and maximise underspends wherever possible.

GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2019/20

1237. The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer, monitoring expenditure as at 31 December 2019 against the approved General Fund Capital Programme 2019/20 and recommending adjustments where necessary in light of issues that had arisen since the programme had been approved.

The report highlighted the latest developments relating to the programme, including the latest income and expenditure movements and cash flow management issues and indicated that the projected shortfall of £425,000 which represented 0.97% of the resources available was within manageable limits. Detailed explanations of the reasons for the major movements within the programme were outlined in the report.

The Cabinet agreed to:-

- (a) **recommend to the Council** that the movements within the General Fund Capital Programme 2019/20 be approved; and
- (b) note that the shortfall of £425,000 and that income and expenditure on the programme would be managed and reported within the final accounts for the year.

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2019/20

1238. The Cabinet considered a joint report by the Chief Financial Officer and Director of Environment, monitoring expenditure as at 31 December 2019 against the approved Housing Capital Programme 2019/20 and recommending adjustments where necessary in light of issues that had arisen since the programme had been approved.

The report highlighted the latest developments relating to the programme, including the latest income and expenditure movements and cash flow management issues and indicated that the projected shortfall of £88,000 which represented 0.9% of the resources available was within manageable limits. Details of the costs associated with phases 1 and 2 of the Council house building programme were also outlined in the report. It was noted that a further report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet with regard to this matter.

The Cabinet agreed to:-

- (a) **recommend to the Council** that the movements within the Housing Capital Programme 2019/20 be approved;
- (b) note that the shortfall of £88,000 and that income and expenditure on the programme would be managed and reported within the final accounts for the year; and
- (c) note that a further report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet with regard to the increased costs associated with phases 1 and 2 of the Council housebuilding programme.

TRADING UNDER BEST VALUE

1239. The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer, requesting that consideration be given to the classification of Council activities in terms of trading operations as defined by the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 and as modified in June 2013 by the Local Authority (Scotland) Accounts Advisory Committee (LASAAC). Details of the review of services that had been undertaken; a summary of trading operations and the criteria used to determine if they were “significant” were appended to the report.

The report explained that in terms of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, the Council was required to consider its trading operations on an annual basis and determine those which should be regarded as “significant”. Having noted the criteria that required to be met for a trading operation to be considered as “significant” and a further test of significance that required to be taken into account, the report explained that having taken these conditions into account, the result of the review for 2019/20 was that the Council had no Significant Trading Operations.

The Cabinet noted that in terms of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 that there were no trading services operated by the Council that should be classified as “significant”.

INCREASED CHARGES FOR FACTORING SERVICE

1240. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 19 February 2015 (Page 1343, Item 1427 refers), when it was agreed that an annual fee of £90.00 plus VAT be introduced for factored owners and a call out fee for non-factored owners who requested a service of £30.00 plus VAT be approved, the Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval for an increase in the annual factor fee charged for factored customers in return for factoring services.

The report explained that the current annual factor fee of £90.00 generated an income of approximately £70,000 excluding VAT each year. However, gross staffing costs for the factoring service were approximately £83,000 in 2019/20 and consequently a contribution of £13,000 from the General Fund had been required to cover the staffing costs of the service. Whilst noting that for 2020/21 the staffing costs for the service were budgeted at £85,500, the report proposed that by increasing the fee to £99.00 plus VAT, income of around £78,000 would be generated leaving a contribution of £7,500 being required from the General Fund to maintain the service.

The report concluded by indicating that by increasing the factor fee to £99.00 plus VAT per annum over the next three years, this would generate extra income to ensure the Council could continue to provide an efficient and customer focussed service and meet the Code of Conduct as set out in the Property Factors (Scotland) Act 2011. There were no plans to increase the call out fee for non-factored customers.

The Cabinet approved an increase in the factor fee for the factoring service to £99.00 plus VAT per annum from April 2020.

LAND TO THE FRONT AND REAR OF NEILSTON SHOPS

1241. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 15 August 2013 (Page 624, Item 667 refers) when it was agreed to dispose of the Council’s entire lease interest in the land including the land on which the Neilston shops were situated, the car park to the rear and the open space to the front of the shops, the Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval for: (a) the acquisition of a portion of the privately owned car park at the rear of the shops in the centre of Neilston in order to provide a 14 space public car park; and (b) the frontage of the shops in order to provide a public space for community events and to support future town centre regeneration master planning through improving the overall quality of civic space in the centre of Neilston village. A plan showing the areas of ground involved was appended to the report.

The report explained that following the previous decision of the Cabinet, the sale of the land had been negotiated in January 2016 and subsequently agreed whereby the shopkeepers would buy the land on which their shops were located, the car park to the rear and the open space to the front of the shops at a cost of £50,000. At that time, it was hoped that the process would resolve the issue of maintenance and upkeep of the area although it had failed to do so.

Whilst noting that the car park to the rear of the shops and the civic square area to the front had not been well maintained, the report indicated that currently the shopkeepers were of the view that they were required to maintain a car park that was used as a public car park for the whole village and a frontage that was similarly used by the wider public. Furthermore, the frontage was commonly used by local groups as a community resource for displays and weekend activities including markets.

The report highlighted that having taken into consideration the concerns expressed by the shopkeepers and the measures they could take to restrict access to the car park which would be to the detriment of the wider village, it was concluded that the best resolution would be to avoid at all costs restricted access to the car park and that it would be detrimental if the shopkeepers tried to restrict use of the area to the front of the shops.

Furthermore, the Directors of Education and Environment were currently progressing the agreed school campus and library element in Neilston and that a master plan for regeneration proposals was currently being developed and would be the subject of community consultation. In view of the foregoing issues, the report proposed that there would be considerable advantages in the Council taking into ownership both the car park to the rear of the shops and the area to the front of the shops. However, the ownership of the shops and the land upon which they were situated would remain with the shop owners.

By approving the proposal, the Council would then have direct control over key strategic areas in the village centre and this would clearly facilitate the wider regeneration/master planning of the village in the future including the provision of high quality civic space and public parking in Neilston village centre. More importantly, the area could form a strategic access point into the St Thomas' primary school site when it was vacated.

The report indicated that should the Cabinet approve the proposal, it was proposed to upgrade the car park to the rear of the shops as a matter of urgency given its condition and that consideration would be given to making improvements to the area in front of the shops. Details of the upgrading works and associated costs were outlined in the report. However, it was noted that the upgrading works would also include the loading bay for the shops which would remain in the shopkeeper's ownership. In view of this, the shopkeepers would pay 25% of the costs of upgrade to cover the loading bay. The cost to the Council would therefore be around £30,000 it being noted that the new car park and frontage would be managed and maintained by the Environment Department.

The Cabinet:-

- (a) approved the transfer of ownership of the land to the front of the Neilston shops to the Council as detailed in the report at nil acquisition cost;
- (b) approved the transfer of ownership of the private car park (excluding the loading bay for the shops) to the rear of the Neilston shops to the Council at nil acquisition cost; and
- (c) agreed that delegated powers be granted to the Director of Environment, in consultation with the Chief Officer – Legal and Procurement to finalise negotiations and conclude the acquisition.

NEILSTON LEARNING AND LEISURE CAMPUS AND WIDER REGENERATION

1242. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Education Committee of 4 October 2018 (Page 572, Item 632 refers) when it was agreed to approve the education statutory consultation report on Learning in Neilston, the Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval for proposals in relation to learning in Neilston and providing details of the possibilities and opportunities for the wider regeneration of the Neilston area.

The report highlighted that an indicative provision of £30.4m had been made within the Council's General Fund Capital Programme to support the Neilston Learning and Leisure Campus and wider regeneration. The financial provision was a marker to take forward a Learning and Leisure campus approach in Neilston renewing both Neilston and St Thomas' Primary Schools and Madras Family Centre on a joint site in the locale of Neilston Primary School and Madras Family Centre.

Whilst noting that in September 2019, the Council had been advised that it would receive revenue funding for the project as part of the first phase of a £1billion Scottish Government investment programme, the report indicated that discussions were currently being held with Scottish Futures Trust with regard to the actual level of support.

Given that statutory education approval had been given to the new build replacement of Neilston and St Thomas' Primary Schools and Madras Family Centre as a campus in the locale of Neilston and Madras, the report highlighted that the inclusion of a new library and swimming pool was also initially planned as part of this campus. However, subsequent developments had emerged which made the new location of the swimming pool at the current St Thomas' Primary School site a better solution as part of the wider regeneration of the village it being noted that the library would remain part of the learning campus.

The report proposed that the Learning and Leisure campus would take a two stage two site approach whereby the first phase would include the building of a learning campus (in the immediate vicinity of the current Neilston Primary School) comprising the two schools, family centre and library. The second phase would include a new swimming pool as the foundation of a potential community hub on the current site of the St Thomas' Primary School.

Furthermore, it was expected that the detail of the design consultation process would be announced shortly and that it was anticipated that the new schools and family centre would be opened for the August 2022 school session. The second phase would be implemented following the demolition of St Thomas' Primary School with design proposals worked up and agreed well beforehand.

The Cabinet:-

- (a) agreed to proceed to design stage for the learning campus, subject to final agreement on funding from Scottish Futures Trust;
- (b) noted the timescales involved as detailed in the report; and
- (c) noted that further work would be done to develop proposals for the leisure campus taking into consideration the opportunity to regenerate Neilston.

PROPOSED SALE OF LEASED GROUND AT SPIERSBRIDGE WAY, THORNLIEBANK

1243. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval for the proposed sale of two areas of Council-owned ground leased to Spiersbridge Property Developments Limited (SPDL). A plan showing the two areas of ground was appended to the report.

The report explained that the first area of ground leased by the Council to SPDL extended to some 1.6 hectares or thereby for 125 years from 1 March 2004 until 28 February 2129. Whilst noting that SPDL had developed the Spiersbridge Business Park at Spiersbridge Way, Thornliebank on this plot at a rental of £30,500 per annum as indicated at Plot 1 on the plan appended to the report, the report explained that the Spiersbridge Council property rented by the Council from SPDL and occupied by the Environment Department was located on this plot.

The second area of ground was leased to accommodate further possible development of the business park, and that this area of ground extended to 1.53 hectares or thereby with the lease running for 124 years from 23 May 2005 until 28 February 2129 at a rental of £11,000 per annum. This area of ground was shown as Plot 2 on the plan appended to the report.

The report explained that in terms of the ground leases the tenant (SPDL) had the option to purchase the ground after the 8th anniversary of the date of entry and on each anniversary date thereafter and that this option to purchase was an inalienable right which could not be denied. Whilst noting that in 2019, SPDL had formally notified the Council, as ground lease landlord, of its intention to exercise its option to purchase, the report highlighted that this required the landlord's interest in the two ground leases being valued, subject to the terms set out within the leases and a value being agreed.

The report explained that SPDL had appointed an agent to negotiate on its behalf the purchase the ground whilst the Council had appointed the District Valuer to value its landlord's interest and pursue negotiations in close liaison with the Council. It was noted that following complex negotiations and successive increased offers from SPDL an amount of £665,000 for the sale had been provisionally agreed with the company, subject to Council approval.

The Cabinet:-

- (a) approved the proposed sale of two leased areas of Council owned ground to its tenant Spiersbridge Property Developments Limited (SPDL) for the sum of £665,000; and
- (b) agreed that delegated powers be granted to the Director of Environment, in consultation with the Chief Officer – Legal and Procurement to finalise negotiations and conclude the sale.

WRITE-OFF OF IRRECOVERABLE FORMER TENANT RENTS

1244. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 26 January 2017 (Page 2197, Item 2361 refers), when the new rent arrears policy had been approved, the Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval to write-off former tenant rental debt which could not be recovered through the debt collection process.

The Cabinet:-

- (a) approved the write-off sum up to the value of £69,025.58 of former tenant irrecoverable rents whilst acknowledging these could be pursued and recovered in future should additional information and opportunities arise;
- (b) noted that £47,812.16 of this amount was written off against the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the remaining £21,213.42 was written off against the Non-Housing Revenue Account (Non- HRA) as this was accrued by homeless households placed in temporary accommodation; and
- (c) noted that the write-off of these historic unrecoverable debts would have no impact on the Council's accounts as provision had been made for the debt, in full, in previous years.

CHAIR

MINUTE
of
AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 12 March 2020.

Present:

Councillor Stewart Miller (Chair)
Councillor Barbara Grant (Vice Chair)

Provost Jim Fletcher
Councillor Annette Ireland

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Attending:

Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Michelle Blair, Chief Auditor; Gill Darbyshire, Chief Executive's Business Manager; Linda Hutchison, Clerk to the Committee; Charlie Leleux, Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer; and Jennifer Graham, Committee Services Officer.

Also Attending:

Pauline Gillen and Morven Fraser, Audit Scotland.

Apology:

Councillor Jim Swift.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1245. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

CHAIR'S REPORT

1246. Councillor Miller referred to concerns he had expressed in 2018 at this committee and the Council on the extent to which external consultants were being used by the authority, confirming that the committee had agreed then that it would be useful to look at this further. In the first instance, as agreed, the Clerk had submitted a report on work undertaken by the committee during the term of the previous Administration on such expenditure during 2013/14 and 2014/15 which was noted, as was the fact that the Council had agreed under its Contract Standing Orders to reduce the threshold for allowing Directors to appoint consultants from £50k to £10k and to approve related logging arrangements.

Having heard Councillor Miller remind the committee that it had been agreed to review the log at the end of the 2019/20 financial year, the committee noted that the Clerk had requested information on this for submission to a future meeting.

REVIEW OF STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER AND RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS

1247. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 26 September 2019 (Page 969, Item 1046 refers), when the position on the Strategic Risk Register (SRR) and progress with risk management across the Council had been noted, the committee considered a report by the Chief Executive regarding the most recent biannual update of the register and general progress on risk management.

The SRR, a copy of which was appended to the report, itemised key risks that required to be considered and associated actions put in place to manage these. Having referred to related operational risk registers in place, the report confirmed that several strategic risks had been amended to include additional control measures and rescored for significance, clarifying that a thorough review of all the strategic risks had been undertaken by the Corporate Management Team (CMT). In total there were now 31 strategic risks, 14 of which were evaluated as high and 17 as medium. Risks evaluated as low had been removed from the SRR and would be monitored within departmental or operational registers as appropriate. Relevant significant risks which could impact on achieving the Council's outcomes regarding the work of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) and Culture and Leisure Trust had been considered.

In addition to referring to risks added to the SRR, information was provided on risk scores that remained high; risks that had been added to the register; risks that had increased from medium to high; and those that retained the same score but where the risk descriptions had been amended to reflect the current position or provide further clarity. It was confirmed that although reports on the SRR were submitted to the committee every 6 months and the Cabinet annually, the register was considered to be a live document and updated continually, with the review of the SRR playing a fundamental role in ensuring that the Council met its objectives as detailed in Fairer East Ren, the Modern Ambitious Programme and the Outcome Delivery Plan. A risk owner for each strategic risk had been identified from amongst the CMT.

The Business Manager highlighted key aspects of the report and, in response to Councillor Grant, confirmed that the current total number of high risks on the SRR was similar to that in 2019. Regarding the risk added on the emergence of a pandemic disease, Councillor Miller referred to the fluidity of the situation regarding Covid-19.

The committee noted the development of the SRR; that it was considered to be a live document; and that it would be updated and amended by the CMT.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL – ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN 2019/20

1248. The committee considered a report by the External Auditor regarding the 2019/20 Annual Audit Plan. The Plan provided an overview of the planned scope and timing of the audit to be carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs), the Code of Audit Practice and other relevant guidance. It was confirmed that the Plan set out the work necessary to allow the External Auditor to provide an independent report on the annual accounts and meet the wider scope requirements of public sector audit, including the audit of Best Value. Reference was also made to the way in which the wider scope of public audit contributed to assessments and conclusions on the audit dimensions of financial management; financial sustainability; governance and transparency; and value for money, and also the way added value was achieved for the Council through external audit work.

Based on discussions with staff, attendance at committee meetings and a review of supporting information, the report highlighted the main financial statement risks and issues

as well as risks of a wider dimensional nature identified for the Council, and audit work planned in relation to these. Various reports to be prepared, including the Annual Audit Report, were referred to as were the audit of trusts registered as Scottish charities, the audit fee, and the responsibilities of the committee, the Head of Accountancy and the appointed Auditor. Having summarised the approach to be adopted on the Annual Accounts, it was clarified that an opinion on them would be given on a range of issues, including whether they gave a true and fair view and were properly prepared in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards and legislative requirements.

Further issues commented on included other information in the Annual Accounts to be reviewed and reported on; materiality values; and the annual assessment of the Internal Audit function to ensure it operated in accordance with the main requirements of Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). Having referred to the reliance it was proposed to place on Internal Audit's work and related issues, detailed reference was made to the four audit dimensions framing the wider scope of public sector audit requirements, conclusions on which would help contribute to an overall assessment and assurance on Best Value.

Whilst making further comments on Best Value, the report highlighted that work planned during the year included focusing on the Council's arrangements for demonstrating Best Value in Partnership Working and Empowering Communities in line with the external auditor's agreed Best Value Plan. Other planned work included considering the Council's arrangements for carrying out aspects of options appraisals, focussing on service redesign through the Council's Modern Ambitious Programme and Transformation Programme and also in major capital works; and the ongoing impact of workforce planning arrangements within the authority. More generally, issues on independence and objectivity; and quality control were commented on.

Councillor Miller welcomed Ms Gillen and Ms Fraser to the meeting, following which Ms Gillen made some general comments on the audit approach that had and would be adopted. Thereafter she referred to various key aspects of the report. Whilst itemising and commenting on the key audit risks identified which required specific audit testing and on which an update would be provided in the Annual Audit Report, she clarified that a number were not specific to East Renfrewshire. She also commented on the audit timetable, the audit fee, and the review of Internal Audit.

Whilst commenting on the new payroll system which was listed under financial statements risks, the Head of Accountancy advised that the position on the introduction of the new payroll system, which had been expected to go live in March 2020, continued to change. She added that although this was disappointing, its introduction was close but had been delayed allowing further testing of the system to take place. In the interim, the current system would be used to deliver the payroll function in March. The Head of Accountancy added that resilience planning to deal with Covid-19 was ongoing, that its impact could be significant, and that it was possible that some audit related timetables may require to be changed as a result.

The Committee noted the 2019/20 Annual Audit Plan and timetable for the publication of related documents, including the Annual Audit Report for 2019/20.

INTERNAL STRATEGIC AUDIT PLAN 2020/21 – 2024/25

1249. The committee considered a report by the Chief Auditor on the Internal Audit Strategic Plan for 2020/21 to 2024/25 which included the proposed Annual Audit Plan for 2020/21. It was clarified that the Internal Audit function operated in accordance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS)

The report explained that the plan had been prepared following consultation with key partners, referred to risk related issues, and clarified, amongst other things, that new audits added to the audit universe included new council houses. Similarly, some audits had been deleted from the universe as they were no longer applicable, had low risk assessments, or had been merged with other audits. It was clarified that 20 audit days had been included in the plan for providing an internal audit service to the East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust (ERCLT), the scope of audits to be carried out using these days having been agreed with the management of ERCLT and members of its Finance, Audit and Risk Committee. Resulting audit reports would be issued directly to the Trust's Chief Executive.

Referring to audit needs compared to resources available, the report explained that over the 5-year period of the plan there was a projected shortfall of 91 audit days which was considered manageable but would be kept under review. The current staffing levels of the Internal Audit section were considered adequate at present, subject to a vacant post being filled and an ongoing secondment terminating during the year, both having been assumed when calculating the number of audit days available. Whilst making reference to one of the performance indicators for the section measuring direct audit days as a percentage of the total days available the target for which was 75%, the report explained that there was a possibility that this would not be fully met. This would be kept under review and reported on quarterly to the committee.

Whilst highlighting key aspects of the report, the Chief Auditor clarified that as well as the report specifying the plan for 2020/21, a schedule reflecting which audits were to be undertaken up to and including 2024/25 had been provided. She clarified that the estimated number of audit days available did not take account of any impact which Covid-19 could have on the implementation of the plan, in respect of which she undertook to keep the committee informed. The Chief Auditor confirmed that, as for every year, the degree to which contingency time would be used could vary.

The committee agreed to approve the Internal Audit Strategic Plan for 2020/21 to 2024/25.

NATIONAL EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SCOTLAND – FINANCIAL OVERVIEW 2018/19

1250. The committee considered a report by the Clerk on the publication by Audit Scotland of a report entitled *Local Government in Scotland – Financial Overview 2018/19* which under the committee's specialisation arrangements had been sent to Provost Fletcher and Councillor Ireland for review. The Head of Accountancy had been asked to provide comments and a copy of her feedback was attached to the report.

It was explained that the Audit Scotland report covered councils' income; their financial position; the financial outlook for local authorities; and an IJB overview, on each of which the Head of Accountancy had provided comments. The audit report had found that although revenue funding from the Scottish Government, the largest element of local authority income, had increased by 1.1% in 2018/19, this equated to a reduction of 0.7% in real terms. It was clarified further that since 2013/14 there had been a grant reduction of 7.3% in real terms, whilst funding for other areas had fallen by only 0.4%, with a growing proportion of local government funding committed to national policy initiatives. The report explained how Grant-Aided Expenditure (GAE) was calculated, based on population, deprivation, crime and rurality factors. Although East Renfrewshire had previously benefited from GAE being distributed in terms of ongoing local population growth, there had been an increased focus in recent years on deprivation, crime and rurality as a result of which East Renfrewshire could no longer assume that its share of the national grant would increase in this way as before.

Whilst commenting on the financial position, the report made reference to the use made of reserves, such as how £1.5m and £4.312m of these had been used to help bridge the budget gap in 2018/19 and 2019/20 respectively, in addition to which a further £1.5m had been committed for the same purpose in 2020/21. This would leave the unallocated general reserve level at 2.6% as at March 2021, which was still within the acceptable 2-4% level. The Council continued to spend more capital on housing, economic development and education, and monitoring of capital projects was being increased with new reporting mechanisms being introduced. Major capital investment plans would result in increased levels of capital debt and the Council would manage annual loans fund costs to ensure that the revenue repayments remained affordable. Whilst commenting on the financial position further, the report explained that staffing structures would continue to be reviewed for both operational and financial reasons. Reference was also made to retirement issues and it was highlighted how the Council had been cited by Audit Scotland as demonstrating exemplary practice in terms of its management commentary setting out the Council's strategic priorities, key risks and financial and operational performance.

Regarding the financial outlook, it was reported that although funding for councils had risen by 2.9% in 2019/20 in cash terms and 0.9% in real terms, this was insufficient to cover inflation increases, growing population demand and the range of new duties the Government expected councils to undertake. It was expected that councils would continue to be faced with significant savings gaps in the coming years. The 3-year budgeting approach adopted by the Council, the publication of its Financial Plan and Capital Investment Strategy, and the way in which the Council balanced its budget were amongst a range of matters commented on. Reference was also made to the possibility that both Brexit and the coronavirus could have a significant budget impact on all councils which was being monitored closely by the Corporate Management Team and Corporate Resilience Management Team.

The Audit Scotland report also included an overview on Integration Joint Boards (IJBs) for 2018/19. It was confirmed amongst other things that responsibility for the operation, finances and governance of integrated health and care services lay with the IJB rather than the Council, that unlike some others the East Renfrewshire IJB had not reported a deficit for 2018/19, and that no additional funding had been required from the Council. Other matters commented on included that the IJB had recently agreed its medium-term financial plan for 2019/20 to 2023/24.

It was concluded that the Council was well placed in terms of addressing the challenges referred to, but that it would continue to face substantial challenges in future.

The Head of Accountancy commented on and highlighted key aspects of the report, including the pressures the Council continued to face to produce a balanced budget, capital expenditure and related borrowing issues, the financial outlook, service demands, and long-term financial planning.

In response to Councillor Grant who, supported by Provost Fletcher, expressed concern regarding the proportion of funds allocated to local authorities which were ring-fenced by the Scottish Government which they considered unsustainable, especially when more was demanded of councils, Councillor Miller commented that this issue was already under consideration by COSLA. Provost Fletcher, supported by Councillor Grant, argued for giving local authorities more flexibility to determine expenditure priorities locally, and referred to the on-going challenges of austerity and unavoidable need to continue to make cuts. He stressed the importance of local government receiving a good and adequate financial settlement for 2021/22 and beyond, and asked if securing further borrowing for key facilities was achievable.

The Head of Accountancy confirmed that the Council faced huge challenges ahead, including in terms of capital investment, but added that as interest rates were at historically low levels, borrowing could be more affordable. She added that the Council would continue to pursue adequate contributions towards local facilities from developers, and commented on the limited land in the Council's ownership for development. She also referred to ongoing discussions between the Scottish Government and COSLA on local authority funding, including on grant distribution and a possible replacement for the Council Tax. The importance of lobbying for a good outcome was stressed.

The committee noted the report and comments made.

NATIONAL EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – SCOTLAND'S CITY REGION AND GROWTH DEALS

1251. The committee considered a report by the Clerk on the publication by Audit Scotland of a report entitled *Scotland's City Region and Growth Deals* which under the committee's specialisation arrangements had been sent to Councillor Miller and Councillor Grant for review. The Director of Environment had been asked to provide comments and a copy of his feedback was attached to the report.

The Audit Scotland report provided an early assessment of city deals in Scotland and included 15 recommendations for councils and the Scottish Government. It was reported that the Leader of East Renfrewshire Council was a member of the inter-authority Glasgow City Region – City Deal Cabinet, and that a comprehensive report on the key messages within the Audit Scotland report had been submitted to that body in February. The report had provided an overview of the key recommendations covering councils; and the current status of the Glasgow City Region City Deal arrangements in relation to those recommendations.

The report highlighted key messages which were positive; areas for improvement; and an overview of the arrangements already in place or those being developed to ensure Audit Scotland's recommendations were being addressed. Positive messages included how the City Deal brought additional long-term funding; increased collaboration; and resulted in job creation. However, areas for improvement included the need to be able to measure long-term success and value for money; and how City Deal projects would contribute to the outcomes in the National Performance Framework. The need for improved transparency and the ability to hold public bodies to account were also amongst issues referred to.

During related discussion Members expressed their frustration regarding delays to major City Deal projects as a result of ongoing discussions with a range of stakeholders including quangos, such as on the proposed new rail halt on an existing line in Barrhead. This would benefit the local community but progress had been much slower than the Council hoped. Other matters referred to included the basis on which projects had been approved thus far, the importance of transparency and local community involvement, and the hope that work could be progressed on projects more quickly in future.

The committee noted the report and comments made.

INVESTIGATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

1252. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 21 November 2019 (Page 1026, Item 1109 refers), when the proposed scope and timeline of the investigation on climate change, which would be carried out in support of the refreshed Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan, had been approved, the committee considered a report by the Chief

Executive providing a final draft report on the committee's investigation into climate change within East Renfrewshire Council, a copy of which was appended to the report.

The investigation had been carried out using evidence from national organisations and initial discussions with Council departments on their current and planned activities in relation to climate change. Members of the committee had met with officers from various departments and services to discuss issues, and had visited Isobel Mair School to see the children's work there on the environment and recycling. The results of a national survey had also been shared with the committee as part of the review and discussions with trade unions had taken place on the possibility of joint working. The review was wide ranging and considered topical due to ongoing media coverage of climate change.

Further information was provided on the scope of the investigation; methodology; and findings which had led to various recommendations being proposed for submission to the Cabinet. In total, 24 draft recommendations were proposed including on raising awareness levels further on the importance of addressing climate change across the Council and the wider community; to further support agile working; to renew the Council's strategy on climate change, setting out the Council's future priorities with clear actions; and asking the Council to set a date by which it should be carbon neutral, amongst other things.

Councillor Grant referred to ongoing projects on the environment within the area, including the replacement of recently felled conifer trees with 800 deciduous trees near Mearnskirk, and a project by Mearns Community Council to plant saplings in Broomburn Park. The Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer referred to one of the recommendations made on planting a tree for every East Renfrewshire resident.

Thereafter, discussion took place regarding the Council's responsibilities in terms of climate change, and reasons cited by the scientific community for it, some of which conflicted with each other.

The committee agreed:-

- (a) to approve the final draft of its report on its investigation into climate change within East Renfrewshire Council, including the related recommendations made, for submission to the Cabinet; and
- (b) that a progress report on the implementation of the recommendations on climate change accepted by the Cabinet be requested and submitted to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee at a future date.

VALEDICTORY

1253. The Chair reported that this was the final meeting which Provost Fletcher would attend as he had tendered his resignation from the committee; and that this was also the final meeting the Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer would attend as he was leaving the authority at the end of March.

The committee, having noted comments made thanking both for their contribution to its work, noted that a replacement for Provost Fletcher would be sought, the appointment of whom required to be considered by a future meeting of the full Council.

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock, on 23 March 2020.

Present:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Provost Jim Fletcher | Councillor Colm Merrick |
| Councillor Paul Aitken | Councillor Stewart Miller |
| Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader) | Councillor Paul O’Kane |
| Councillor Alan Lafferty | Councillor Jim Swift |
| Councillor David Macdonald | |

Provost Fletcher in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; and Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager.

Apologies:

Depute Provost Betty Cunningham and Councillors Caroline Bamforth, Angela Convery, Danny Devlin, Charlie Gilbert, Barbara Grant, Annette Ireland, Jim McLean, and Gordon Wallace.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1254. There were no declarations of Interest intimated.

PROPOSED EMERGENCY DECISION-MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

1255. The Council considered a report by the Chief Executive seeking agreement for proposed emergency decision making arrangements to reduce the need for face-to-face meetings during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.

The report referred to current and changing government guidance in relation to public gatherings and social distancing and the need in view this to reduce the need for committee and other meetings.

The report proposed a temporary suspension on the delegations to all committees and the extension of delegated powers for the Chief Executive, directors, heads of service and the Chief Officer – Legal and Procurement to enable them to take operational decisions in respect of matters within their service areas that would in normal circumstances required Council or committee approval.

The report did clarify that there would be a number of limited matters where Elected Members would still require to be involved in the decision-making process. Examples quoted were if a potential decision was contrary to existing Council policy, proposed a new or amended policy or was any other matter where a political decision was appropriate.

To facilitate this, the report proposed the establishment of an Emergencies Committee the membership of which would comprise the Leader and Depute Leader of the Administration and the Leader of the main Opposition Group. The terms of reference of the committee were set out in the report.

Commenting on the report, the Chief Executive commented on the background to its preparation and the importance of putting in place arrangements that would enable the Council to act quickly to protect the health of local residents.

Referring to civil contingencies legislation, she explained that the Council was a Category 1 responder, with particular responsibilities in an emergency situation. In this regard she referred to the plans already in place and staff training undertaken to deal with eventualities such as the one currently being faced. She commented on the extensive range of services provided by the Council, referring in particular to care at home, registration, cemeteries, refuse collection and homeless services amongst others, and the need for the Council to ensure that it could continue to provide these services in support of the NHS and other public sector bodies. She also referred to the range of grants and other financial measures in place that the Council needed to continue to deliver to support the most vulnerable, as well as continued opening of schools for the children of workers in priority groups.

She highlighted that the Council was being expected to deliver these services at a time when its workforce was also affected either directly or indirectly by the virus. These numbers were expected to increase further severely impacting many services, despite which staff had been working constantly to continue to deliver services, recognising the physical impact this was already having on staff. She clarified that those staff who were at home continued to work where possible and referred to the high numbers of staff who had already volunteered to help where possible and to take on different roles.

In light of the life changing circumstances of the previous few weeks and the challenges ahead, she explained that the support of Elected Members was sought to enable the Council's senior management team to make decisions quickly, which would ensure quick reactions to changing circumstances and the continued delivery of the most essential services.

The Chief Executive also emphasised the role residents had in recognising that normal delivery of services could not continue in the current environment and that certain services would need to take priority over other non-essential services. She welcomed the number of offers of help from local people and that it was hoped the Council could work in partnership with these people and other agencies in the challenging times ahead.

Thereafter Councillor Buchanan seconded by Councillor O'Kane moved the proposals as set out in the report.

Speaking in support of the proposals Councillor Buchanan emphasised the need for the Council to put in place arrangements to make sure it could respond to rapidly changing circumstances. It was essential that the Council could continue to provide key local services whilst supporting other agencies and both the UK and Scottish Governments. Like the Chief Executive he highlighted the potential for a reduction in the range and levels of service provided by the Council in the coming months. However he highlighted that such decisions were only being taken to ensure the Council could continue to support those in most need.

He referred to the closure of schools in accordance with national guidelines and urged parents and carers only to send children to school if places had been confirmed by the school's senior management and not to contact schools or the Council as this had the potential to delay the implementation of necessary alternative arrangements. The Council would contact parents and carers if required and more information was available on the Council's website and social media channels. He outlined the steps being taken to ensure the continued provision of free school meals thanking all education staff for their continued efforts.

Furthermore, he referred to the ongoing efforts of staff across the Council in recent weeks despite being faced with the same challenges and worries as the public. He thanked them for this. He also referred to the ongoing work to co-ordinate volunteering activity in the area. More information on this would be made available in the near future.

Councillor Buchanan also emphasised the importance of continuing good relationships amongst Elected Members and between Members and senior staff. These positive relationships would ensure the Council could focus on tackling the challenges ahead. In concluding he thanked staff for all their work to date and for their continuing efforts in moving forward.

Seconding the motion Councillor O'Kane echoed the comments made by Councillor Buchanan. He referred to the unprecedented and grave nature of the current situation and that political differences needed to be put aside to ensure people were kept alive. He referred to the collaborative working across political differences taking place nationally and that it was important this was reflected locally, with councillors trusting senior officers to make quick decisions to protect people and save lives.

He referred to the comments made by Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister, to the effect that normal business could not continue, Councillor O'Kane stating that the only issue to be considered at present was tackling the challenges presented by coronavirus, keeping people alive, and ensuring that adequate resources were available to achieve this, particularly in health and social care and in education.

He commented on the efforts of staff in continuing to deliver services and the proposals outlined in the report would enable staff to take quick decisions in rapidly changing circumstances, whilst at the same time ensuring that there would still be the capacity for political input into decision-making when required. On behalf of the Labour Group group he thanked staff for their continuing efforts.

Thereafter Councillor Macdonald seconded by Councillor Aitken moved as an amendment to the recommendations in the report that the temporary arrangements be reviewed at 30 day intervals; that the membership of the proposed Emergencies Committee be extended to 5 with membership comprising 3 Members from the Administration Group, 1 Member from the Conservative Group and 1 Member from the non-Administration Independent councillors.

Speaking in support of the amendment Councillor Aitken stated that whilst the country was facing challenging times this did not mean that the Council should just approve any proposals submitted and that careful consideration should be given before reaching a decision. He expressed concern that the suspension of delegation to committees and the extension of delegated powers to officers was not time limited and that the arrangements could continue indefinitely with officers taking decisions with no checks and balances and no democratic accountability, with any political involvement restricted to only 3 councillors for the foreseeable future.

Commenting on the proposals, Councillor Swift agreed that there needed to be provisions in place to ensure quick decisions could be taken in response to rapidly changing circumstances. He did however agree that a time limit was required. Whilst accepting the proposed establishment of the Emergencies Committee and its purpose, Councillor Swift stated that the report was silent on how Elected Members would be kept updated on the activities of the Council and any decisions taken and he would be keen to understand how this would occur. Finally he suggested that the Council needed to look closely at using the technological solutions available to enable wider political participation in decision-making in the longer term.

Councillor Lafferty was then heard in the course of which he highlighted that what was being proposed was not unique to the Council with similar arrangements being made in councils across the country. Notwithstanding the powers being vested in the Emergencies Committee, Councillor Lafferty emphasised the continuing role for local councillors in supporting their constituents.

Councillor Merrick was also heard in support of the proposals. He reflected that one of the main reasons people entered local politics was to improve the lives of local people but that decisions being made now were about saving lives. Advice being issued by both governments was constantly being updated and the proposed arrangements would ensure the Council was able to respond quickly to changing circumstances. He stated that in his view the proposed arrangements for reviewing the temporary arrangements were adequate.

Councillor Miller referred to comments made by other Members regarding a time limit on the temporary arrangements, suggesting that in view of the limitless nature of the challenge facing the country a time limit was possibly something that should be considered. He further suggested that in respect of the membership of the Emergencies Committee the ability to appoint substitutes should be considered. He noted that news suggested that the UK was behind other countries in terms of the impact of the virus, referring to the high number of cases in Italy the previous week. The purpose of the report was to allow decisions to be taken quickly and if even 1 life was saved as a consequence then the proposals were worthy of support.

The Chief Executive was then heard in response to some of the issues that had been raised by Elected Members. In respect of communication with Members she explained that in the event the Emergencies Committee was convened, copies of the papers for the meeting would be circulated to all Elected Members. She also acknowledged the Council's investment in technology and how the use of this would be further expanded in the coming months. Furthermore in respect of the general business of the Council, the Communications Manager would be emailing regular updates to all Elected Members. This update would highlight any of the major decisions taken by officers using the extended delegated powers. Commenting on time limiting the temporary arrangements, the Chief Executive explained that there was no intention for the arrangements to be in force any longer than absolutely necessary.

Councillor Buchanan was also heard in response to the comments that had been made, welcoming the support that had been given to the proposals, but also expressing disappointment that this support was not unanimous. He referred to the undertaking given by the Chief Executive to keep Elected Members apprised of developments, and that he was sure Group Leaders would continue to have regular discussions with their own groups. He again emphasised the need for the Council to respond quickly to a changing picture and the proposals would enable officers to do this. Part of this was that Elected Members needed to have trust in the Council's senior management to make these decisions, with officers confident that they had apolitical support. He confirmed that the arrangements would be kept under review and would only remain in place for as long as was necessary. Concluding, he

paid tribute to the work of officers to date in extreme circumstances and how the proposals would help officers protect East Renfrewshire residents.

Councillor Macdonald then commented on his amendment. He recognised the efforts everyone was making and acknowledged the seriousness of the situation. However whilst recognising the reasons why the proposals had been brought forward he had felt that there were technological alternatives that could have been considered that would have allowed the continuation of normal decision-making arrangements and the continued participation in these by Elected Members. He also commented further on the open-ended nature of the proposals and the implications for both the current and potentially future Council of this, again encouraging a review on a 30 day basis.

Thereafter, it having been confirmed that the proposal to permit substitutes on the Emergencies Committee had been accepted and incorporated into the motion, on a vote being taken 6 Members voted for the motion, 2 voted for the amendment with 1 abstention.

Accordingly the Council agreed:-

- (a) to suspend on a temporary basis all delegations to committees with the exception of the Emergencies Committee referred to in (d) below;
- (b) that delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive all directors and heads of service, and the Chief Officer – Legal and Procurement to take operational decisions in respect of matters within their respective areas of operation that would normally require Council/committee approval;
- (c) that if the proposed decision would be contrary to existing Council policy, would be seeking an amendment to an existing policy, or for any other reason would require political approval, the matter be referred to the Emergencies Committee for a decision;
- (d) that an Emergencies Committee be established, the membership of which comprises the Leader and Depute Leader of the Administration and the Leader of the main Opposition Group or substitutes, with the terms of reference as set out in the report; and
- (e) that the temporary extension of the delegated authority be kept under review in order that it may be revoked at the appropriate time.

Concluding the meeting Provost Fletcher thanked everyone for their continuing efforts and wished everyone well for the future.

PROVOST

MINUTE
of
EMERGENCIES COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm on 14 May 2020.

Present:

Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)
Councillor Stewart Miller

Councillor Paul O’Kane

Councillor Buchanan, Leader, in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; and Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1256. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

RECOMMENCING MEETINGS

1257. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Council on 23 March when it had been agreed, amongst other things, to suspend formal meetings and to temporarily extend delegated powers to officers (Page 1161, Item 1253 refers), the committee considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive outlining and seeking agreement to proposals to restart formal meetings.

The report explained that it had been approximately 8 weeks since the temporary arrangements had been introduced and that over that time significant efforts had been required across all Council services to not only continue to deliver existing services, but also to deliver new services associated with tackling COVID-19.

Despite the additional work required, a degree of relative stability had been reached enabling the recommencement of formal meetings to be considered.

The report set out a proposed calendar of meetings to take place in June, explaining that these would be “virtual” meetings with all participants taking part remotely, as well as setting out some of the other issues to be resolved in respect of meetings of the Licensing Committee and Local Review Body before these meetings could restart.

The report further explained that it was intended for the normal calendar of meetings to resume after the summer recess with these meetings continuing to be held “virtually” until government guidance permitted otherwise.

The report also clarified that as a result of formal meetings restarting it would be possible for the extended delegated powers to be withdrawn with the exception of licensing matters in

respect of which the Chief Officer – Legal & Procurement would continue to exercise delegated powers until arrangements to recommence meetings of the Licensing Committee were in place.

Councillor Buchanan having welcomed the proposals set out in the report, Councillor Miller sought further information in relation to the recording of meetings and making these available to the public and how the Council's approach compared to other councils.

In response the Chief Executive explained that there were a variety of approaches being adopted across the country. She emphasised in particular to the need to ensure that the required technology and security was in place, referring to the issues that had occurred during a virtual meeting of another council in Scotland recently.

Councillor O'Kane supported the proposed approach suggesting that the meetings in June could be used to refine the process prior to the start of the normal schedule of meetings after the recess.

The Chief Executive having outlined some of the further challenges of remote participation in meetings, particularly the role of acting as meeting chair, the committee:-

- (a) approved the lifting of the suspension of delegations to committees and the proposals to recommence meetings as outlined in the report;
- (b) agreed that the temporary extension of delegated powers to officers be withdrawn on 30 June 2020 with the exception of licensing matters in respect of which the Chief Officer – Legal and Procurement would continue to exercise delegated powers until arrangements to recommence meetings of the Licensing Committee were in place.

CHAIR

MINUTE
of
EMERGENCIES COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm on 21 May 2020.

Present:

Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)
Councillor Stewart Miller

Councillor Paul O’Kane

Councillor Buchanan, Leader, in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive; Andy Cahill, Director of Environment; Julie Murray, Chief Officer – HSCP; Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); and Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1258. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

COVID-19 ACTIONS

1259. The committee considered a report by the Chief Executive providing comprehensive information on the actions taken by the Council and partners in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

By way of background the report referred to the Prime Minister’s lockdown announcement of 23 March, and explained that following the announcement the Council had moved into full emergency mode with the priorities being to keep residents and staff safe, continue to provide critical services and to support the work of the NHS.

The report set out some of the implications of the lockdown including restrictions on non-essential travel. This resulted in a significant proportion of Council staff working from home and many buildings being closed, and a change to the ways in which services were delivered.

It was explained that the Scottish Government had asked local government to take on a range of new duties at short notice such as shielding support for vulnerable residents, in addition to continuing to deliver normal services. This was at a time when large numbers of Council staff were themselves affected by coronavirus. In particular a number of critical frontline services were severely impacted.

The report highlighted that despite the challenges, staff had been exceptional with many working significant additional hours to ensure the safety and wellbeing of local residents; others volunteering to undertake new and additional duties, also while in many cases dealing with the additional challenges of home learning.

Thereafter, the report explained that the Council was a Category 1 responder in terms of civil contingencies legislation and explained that internal and external communications, officer decision-making and response arrangements to emergencies were already firmly established through existing strategic, tactical and operational meeting structures.

The report set out the operating structures in place explaining that the Council's emergency planning structures were part of a much wider regional and national structure, setting out the links between the Council, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and the six authorities within the health board area in addition to Argyll & Bute Council and other appropriate multi-agency partners.

The report clarified that 6 issue specific sub-groups of the Council's Corporate Resilience Management Team had been set up, each focussing on a unique facet of the response to COVID-19. Details of the composition, lead officer and area of responsibility of each sub-group were set out with information on the work of each group set out in Appendix 1 accompanying the report.

Thereafter the report set out the actions that had been taken by departments of the Council and the Culture and Leisure Trust in responding to the pandemic, both in respect of department specific actions and those being directed through the CRMT and its sub-groups. Details of the activities of the Culture and Leisure Trust were set out in Appendix 2 accompanying the report.

The report also referred to the decision taken by the Council to temporarily suspend delegations to committees and for these decisions to be taken by officers. A list of those decisions taken by officers using the extended delegated powers accompanied the report at Appendix 3.

The report concluded by explaining that despite the severe challenges that have faced the Council, it has continued to deliver existing services as well as quickly adapting to providing a variety of new services and supports for the local community.

It was highlighted that it had to be borne in mind that Council staff had not been immune to the effects of the virus and that this had added to the challenge of continuing to provide services, and emphasised that the efforts staff had been making to provide the services, particularly front line services where staff were most at risk of coming into contact with the virus, should not go unrecognised. It had been necessary to review service provision based on immediate need and that whilst this has seen a reduction in some existing service provision it has now been possible for some of these services to be reintroduced. This would continue to be the subject of review as the Council moved into recovery.

The Chief Executive was then heard further on the terms of the report. She praised the huge efforts made by staff across the Council to continue to deliver existing services as well as delivering additional new services, often whilst adapting to new ways of working. She explained that all efforts had been focussed on dealing with the impact of the crisis and summarised the governance structures in place referring in particular to the 6 sub-groups and to the work of the officers who had led each of these groups,

Thereafter the Chief Officer – HSCP; Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); Director of Environment; Deputy Chief Executive; and Chief Executive were heard further on the information contained in the report in respect of the work carried out by their respective departments. In addition the Chief Executive also highlighted the excellent partnership working with the Culture and Leisure Trust referring in particular to the childcare support that furloughed staff from the Trust would be providing over the summer months.

Having heard the officers, full discussion took place.

In response to comments from Councillor Miller the Director of Environment undertook to investigate possible fly-tipping at Cathcart Cemetery. He also explained in response to Councillor O’Kane the reasons why only Barrhead civic amenity site and not the Greenhags facility would be opened to the public on 1 June. A communications plan was in place for the reopening. He explained that a ward-based approach was being used with the public being encouraged to visit the site on specific days based on their Council ward, although it was recognised that non-compliance would be difficult to enforce. He also confirmed that he would share this information with councillors to enable them to share it on social media.

Having heard from the officers in turn Councillor Buchanan was heard in reply.

In respect of the HSCP he emphasised how the strong partnership arrangements already in place had helped in responding to the crisis. He explained that the learning that would flow from the way in which the service had responded would help in improving future service delivery. He also highlighted the potential for increased demand for certain services as lockdown restrictions were eased, particularly those provided by the HSCP, and that services needed to be prepared to deliver on these.

With regards to education, he highlighted the positive feedback that had been received on the excellent online resources teachers had been providing which would continue to be used in future. He also commended the work being carried out to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable children, and welcomed that despite the current challenges the department would be able to provide 1140 of nursery provision from August even though the legal requirement to do so had been suspended.

Commenting on the Environment Department, he referred in particular to the vast variety of services provided, the challenges of continuing to provide these whilst at the same time developing arrangements to deliver new services, and paid tribute to the enthusiasm with which staff had been prepared to take on different roles and responsibilities.

In respect of the Corporate and Community Services Department, Councillor Buchanan referred to the ICT challenges of ensuring that those employees who had to work from home were able to do so, and also to the efforts of staff in contacting those local residents on the shielding list.

Having acknowledged the work of the Trust, Councillor Buchanan also referred to the work of the finance team in keeping track of the Council’s spending during the crisis. Commenting generally on the financial implications of crisis, he suggested that it would be some time before the true costs associated with dealing with the virus would be clear. There would be financial implications at all levels of government including local government, and it was vital that councils were able to accurately record any additional costs to ensure they were taken into account in future discussions with the Scottish Government on local government funding.

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In conclusion, Councillor Buchan, Councillor Miller and Councillor O’Kane thanked staff across the Council for their exemplary efforts. They acknowledged that despite extremely challenging circumstances the Council had not only continued to deliver services in many cases using innovative new methods of service delivery, but had in addition taken on and delivered numerous new services.

Councillor Buchanan having highlighted how the paper clearly demonstrated the huge amount of work carried out by the Council and partners, and it was important that it was widely publicised to ensure the public were aware of the challenges facing the Council and how these were being addressed, the committee noted the report.

CHAIR

MINUTE
of
APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm on 8 June 2020.

Present:

Councillor Caroline Bamforth
Councillor Paul O’Kane

Flavia Tudoreanu
Anne-Marie Monaghan

Councillor Bamforth in the Chair

Attending:

Julie Murray, Chief Officer – HSCP; Kate Rocks, Chief Social Work Officer; and Sharon Dick, Head of HR and Corporate Services.

Apology:

Councillor Jim Swift.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1260. No declarations of interest were intimated.

Resolution to Exclude Press and Public

At this point in the meeting, on the motion of the Chair, the committee unanimously resolved that in accordance with the provisions of Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A to the Act.

HEAD OF RECOVERY AND INTENSIVE SERVICES

1261. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Appointments Committee of 11 March 2020 (Page 1137, Item 1228 refers), the committee proceeded to interview those short listed candidates who had been selected for interview following the assessment centre exercise that had taken place.

Having conducted the interviews the committee, after discussion, unanimously agreed to offer the post to Lee McLaughlin, Interim Senior Manager, East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership.

CHAIR

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am on 11 June 2020.

Present:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Councillor Paul O’Kane (Chair) | Councillor Jim McLean |
| Councillor Colm Merrick (Vice Chair) | Councillor Gordon Wallace |
| Councillor Caroline Bamforth | Dr Frank Angell |
| Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader) | Ms Dorothy Graham |
| Councillor Charlie Gilbert | Ms Mary McIntyre |
| Councillor Alan Lafferty | Mr Des Morris |

Councillor O’Kane in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources); Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); Mary Docherty, Education Resources Senior Manager; Graeme Hay, Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager; and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1262. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

COVID-19 LOCAL DELIVERY PHASING PLAN

1263. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking endorsement for the Education Department’s COVID-19 Local Delivery Phasing Plan, following publication of the Scottish Government’s Route Map on 21 May 2020 and Coronavirus (COVID-19): Reopening of Schools Guidance. A copy of the plan accompanied the report.

The report outlined the background to the current circumstances following the closure of all schools and early years’ settings on 20 March. Scottish Government guidance had required local education authorities to continue to ensure educational provision for specific pupil groups including the children of certain identified key workers and those children deemed to be vulnerable or at risk of becoming so. The Council had continued to provide this emergency provision through 6 geographical hubs in communities across the authority which pupils had been able to access. In addition, Isobel Mair School had continued to support pupils and families throughout this period. Following on from the publication of the Scottish Government’s Route Map out of lockdown published on 21 May, a strategic framework had been produced to support local authorities with their own approaches to a phased reopening

of schools and early years' settings. Further and more detailed guidance from the Scottish Government had been published on 29 May and this would support the department and schools to prepare their recovery and action plans, provide details which would support the reopening of facilities, and guidance on the completion of risk assessments amongst other things. The guidance was subject to change and consequently the department and school plans would be continually reviewed and updated as the service moved through the phases of the relaxation of lockdown.

The report went on to explain that the Local Delivery Phasing Plan (the plan) set out the agreed principles underpinning the department's approach to recovery and the establishment of a local Education Recovery Group comprising senior officers, head teachers from all sectors, and Trade Union representatives to support the department's scenario planning and considerations for recovery. The plan set out the phased recovery approach being adopted locally consisting of 4 phases. Phase 1 saw schools and centres reopening in early June to an increased number of children and young people for transition purposes with Phase 2 set for 11 August with schools and centres opening for all staff with pupils attending on a part-time basis with a blended model of in-school and out-of-school learning. Phase 3 would involve schools and centres incrementally increasing the number of hours pupils spend in schools while reducing out of school learning; then eventually, in Phase 4, fully reopening to all pupils. Phases 3 and 4 would be implemented when it was safe to do so as informed by the Scottish Government.

The report concluded by explaining that throughout the period of lockdown free school meal provision had continued through the delivery of food bags to families entitled to this benefit. This model had been well received by recipients with approximately 1,350 parcels being delivered on a weekly basis. It was proposed that this scheme would continue to support families for the foreseeable future and the Council was working closely with the Scottish Government to secure this. The importance of maintaining good communication with parents and carers was crucial and this was recognised in the department's approach. The Director had written to all parents and carers and the Convener had chaired a virtual meeting of Parent Council chairs to consult with them on the plan. Many individual schools had met remotely with Parent Councils and would continue to consult with staff, pupils, parents and carers on their individual recovery plans.

Councillor O'Kane, supported by the Director, reported that the recent meeting with Parent Council chairs had been very well attended and had resulted in approximately 600 questions grouped around a number of common themes. There had been considerable discussion around recovery plans and those who had participated in the meeting had been generally supportive of the approach being taken.

Responding to Councillor Wallace who raised the issue of vulnerable children potentially falling behind in their studies and the quality of online teaching materials, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) confirmed that vulnerable children had been specifically targeted in terms of continued face-to-face access to teachers through the hub schools. Initial numbers attending the hubs had been relatively low but through engagement with the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and the Educational Psychology Service both tracking the engagement of this group, the numbers attending had increased steadily and now totalled more than 120 children and young people. The number had increased sharply since the closure of the hubs and the transfer of children back to their own schools. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) outlined the wide range of online resources available to schools and explained that the department was engaging with a number of specialist organisations and teachers in the field of online teaching through co-operation with the West Partnership, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), and the University of Glasgow, with a view to further

increasing the availability of resources and equipping teachers with the appropriate skills to develop and deliver online teaching. He also reported that over 90% of children and young people were regularly engaging with online learning.

The Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change) reported that over the past 3 years and prior to lockdown, more than 2000 digital devices had been provided by the department to disadvantaged children and young people along with a number of mobile wi-fi devices and that a further bid had been submitted to the Scottish Government to allow the purchase of even more equipment.

Mr Morris commended the hard work of all teachers during this extremely difficult period, commended the department for its ongoing support to teachers, and welcomed that the EIS was involved in the Education Recovery Group.

Councillor Buchanan added his thanks to the Director and all of her staff for the tremendous work which had been undertaken since March and made particular reference to the partnership working between the department and colleagues in the HSCP and the Environment Department. Recognising that major obstacles remained to be overcome, he expressed the view that the Council was in a strong position to quickly recover from this crisis and that previous capital investment in digital technology and infrastructure in schools stood the Council in good stead.

Having heard the Director explain that a blended approach involving both time in-school and online learning at home could constitute the “new normal” for some time to come, the committee agreed to endorse the Local Delivery Phasing Plan and the production of individual recovery plans for each school and early years setting.

PROGRESS ON PROVIDING THE SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY WITH ESTIMATES AS PART OF THE 2020 CERTIFICATION PROCESS

1264. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education updating members on the progress made with providing the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) with estimated grades as part of the 2020 certification process.

The report explained that following the Scottish Government’s decision to close schools from 20 March, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills had announced that for the first time in history, there would be no examination diet in 2020. As a result, the SQA had been asked to put in place an alternative certification model that would ensure that young people in schools and colleges who were unable to sit examinations would not be disadvantaged in any way. The SQA had subsequently set out arrangements for an alternative certification model based on teachers providing refined estimated bands and rankings for each learner entered at National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher stages. The model for certification would be based on the 3 broad principles of fairness to all learners; safe and secure certification of qualifications, following the latest public health advice; and maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualification system, ensuring that standards were maintained over time in the interest of learners.

It went on to explain that to support the provision of these refined estimates, schools had made use of previous estimate data, analysis of presentation levels and awards over the past 3 years, and prior learner attainment where this was available in S5 and S6. Schools had been supported in this process by the Quality Improvement Officer (QIO) team and the very effective systems already in place for analysing attainment, benchmarking, target setting, and tracking pupils. All of this was crucial in ensuring the integrity and credibility of

the results in 2020. It was further explained that following submission of the learner estimates, the SQA would moderate the information with results being issued individually to learners by 4 August.

The report concluded by explaining that schools had put in place a rigorous, evidence-based process to produce in excess of 19,000 SQA estimates for 2020. This had been hugely demanding for staff. However, as a result of the processes that staff had undertaken, their skills in assessment, and their knowledge of learners, the department was confident that schools had done their utmost to ensure that the hard work of all young people had been rightly and fairly recognised.

Responding to Councillor Wallace who sought clarification on how East Renfrewshire pupils actually achieved in previous SQA examinations compared to the estimates for the previous 3 year period, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the schools usually submit estimates to SQA. This year, SQA asked schools to submit estimates based on candidates demonstrated and inferred attainment. It was noted that ERC schools had historical data which demonstrated a significant increase from the prelims to the final examinations in the proportion of pupils achieving key school measures.

Councillor Buchanan, supported by Councillor Merrick, expressed the view that this was an extremely worrying time for both pupils and their parents and expressed thanks to teachers and other Education Department staff for the considerable amount of work they had put in to producing more than 19,000 estimates within a very short period of time. However, he also expressed the view that the work done this year could stand the department in good stead for next year as it was anticipated that a similar process may be required if examinations were again affected as a result of schools trying to catch up on lost teaching time. A decision on the 2021 examination diet was expected from the Scottish Government sometime in August.

Having heard Councillor O’Kane express his thanks to teachers and the departmental leadership team for their considerable efforts in completing this considerable piece of work within a very demanding timescale, the committee agreed to note the Education Department’s progress in providing the SQA with estimates as part of the 2020 certification process.

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE PROVISION FROM AUGUST 2020

1265. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval of the statutory offer of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in all East Renfrewshire settings from August 2020 in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report explained that the Scottish Government had set a transformational agenda for ELC by 2020 which had been published in March 2017. The vision had been to almost double entitlement to free ELC from 600 to 1140 hours per year by August 2020 for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds and was underpinned by the key principles of Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility, and Affordability. In September 2017 the Education Committee had approved East Renfrewshire’s expansion plan including the 1140 hours models of delivery for ELC. The Council had a reputation for providing high quality ELC which was flexible, affordable, and accessible to all families in their local community. Families had valued this model over the years and the expansion plan had built upon these principles. Subsequent reports had been submitted to the committee outlining ongoing progress. The most recent report in January 2020 had detailed the good progress the Council had made towards full implementation of 1140 hours of ELC with 4 key workstreams relating to Quality, Workforce, Delivery Models, and Infrastructure being on track to deliver this transformational agenda for local children and families from August 2020.

Referring to the delays in completing the major infrastructure programme required to fully deliver the Council's agreed delivery plan, the Director clarified that until such time as these works could be completed, it was anticipated that some children would have to be accommodated in alternative locations but that it was hoped that this would still be within their own local communities. For example, children previously accommodated at Crookfur Primary School and who were due to relocate to the new Crookfur Family Centre in order to free up space for catchment pupils at the school, would be accommodated at some other temporary location within Newton Mearns and would move, along with the relevant staff, to the new family centre once the building was completed. She also explained that further guidance on the re-opening of ELC facilities was expected to be issued by the Scottish Government within the following few days and that everything possible would be done to ensure that this vital service recovered as quickly as possible whilst taking account of this guidance and the related public health imperatives which remained in force.

Responding to Councillor Bamforth who sought clarification on whether or not places previously located at Crookfur Primary School would be reallocated across the local community once the new facility at Crookfur Family Centre was completed, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that this was unlikely as it was proposed that staff would move with the children to the new facility.

Councillor Buchanan, supported by Councillor Wallace, welcomed the decision to continue to work towards delivering 1140 hours of ELC in spite of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and recognised the amount of work that this had involved for the department and many partners across the Council. He continued by expressing the view that this would be welcomed by many parents as it would allow them to plan to get back to some form of normality albeit with possibly major changes to previous working patterns as a result of the restrictions imposed by public health guidance which were expected to remain in place for some considerable time yet. He concluded by looking forward to seeing work to complete the Council's major investment on infrastructure to support this initiative restarting in the near future.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) homologate the Director of Education's decision to continue to progress with plans to deliver 1140 hours of ELC for all eligible 2, 3 and 4 year old children from August 2020; and
- (b) approve the allocation of ELC places based on 1140 hours, recognising however that whilst social distancing remains children and families will not be able to access this full amount given the impact of COVID-19 on nursery attendance patterns.

SCHOOL EXCURSIONS IMPACTED BY COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1266. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education apprising members of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school excursions and refunds to parents/carers from travel providers and/or the settlement of insurance claims.

The report explained that a result of the pandemic, numerous school excursions had been cancelled and, given the expected ongoing restrictions around physical distancing and non-essential travel, it was unclear when any school excursions/trips would be able to go ahead over the summer and during the forthcoming school session.

At the point of lockdown, excursions by schools across the authority had been at different stages in the payment process, both in terms of payments made to the Council by parents/carers, and also in respect of funds paid to travel providers by the Council.

The report explained that a number of parents/carers had been in touch with schools requesting reimbursement of funds for cancelled excursions and/or those excursions currently still planned but without confirmation that they would proceed.

Councillor Buchanan, in fully endorsing the report, expressed the view that the steps proposed were the right thing to do as it would be easier for the Council to correspond with the various 3rd parties involved such as travel providers and insurance companies than to leave this to individual parents/carers. He also expressed the view that early repayment of monies paid by parents/carers would go a considerable way to relieving financial pressure on families which might already be coping with reductions in their household income caused by the lockdown restrictions.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the impact of COVID-19 on school excursions and refunds for parents;
- (b) endorse the proposal by the department to action full refunds to parents/carers for all school excursions cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- (c) remit the proposal to the Emergencies Committee for a decision on the financial aspects.

CHAIR

MINUTE
of
EMERGENCIES COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm on 11 June 2020.

Present:

Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)
Councillor Stewart Miller

Councillor Paul O’Kane

Councillor Buchanan, Leader, in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; and Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1267. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

SCHOOL EXCURSIONS IMPACTED BY COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1268. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Education Committee held earlier in the day, (Page 1181, Item 1266 refers), the committee considered a report by the Director of Education apprising members of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school excursions and refunds to parents/carers from travel providers and/or the settlement of insurance claims.

The report explained that a result of the pandemic, numerous school excursions had been cancelled and, given the expected ongoing restrictions around physical distancing and non-essential travel, it was unclear when any school excursions/trips would be able to go ahead over the summer and during the forthcoming school session.

At the point of lockdown, excursions by schools across the authority had been a different stages in the payment process, both in terms of payments made to the Council by parents/carers, and also in respect of funds paid to travel providers by the Council.

The report explained that a number of parents/carers had been in touch with schools requesting reimbursement of funds for cancelled excursions and/or those excursions currently still planned but without confirmation that they would proceed.

In response to these requests, and recognising the financial impact on many parents/carers, the report set out a proposed process to ensure that parents/carers could be refunded in full by the Council thus ensuring that they were not financially disadvantaged by any lengthy delays in repayment by travel providers and/or the Council’s insurers.

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Councillor Buchanan having commented on the potential financial impact on parents/carers, Councillor O'Kane reported that earlier in the week he had been in a meeting with Parent Council representatives when this issue had been discussed. The significant outlays incurred by many parents/carers had been highlighted and there was support for the proposed course of action, particularly in light of the financial uncertainty facing many people.

Councillor Miller also having welcomed the proposals, the committee supported the recommendation of the Education Committee and approved the proposal by the department to action full refunds to parents/carers for all school excursions cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

CHAIR