

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting held at 7.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock, on 25 October 2017.

Present:

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

Provost Fletcher in the Chair

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); Louise Pringle, Head of Business Change and Revenues; Jim Sneddon, Head of Democratic and Partnership Services; Kate Rocks, Chief Social Work Officer; Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager; and Linda Hutchison, Senior Committee Services Officer.

Also Attending:

Chief Superintendent Brian McNulty and Chief Inspector Angela Carty, Police Scotland.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

184. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

MINUTE OF MEETING OF 13 SEPTEMBER 2017

185. Having heard Councillors Grant and Swift the Council:-

- (a) considered and approved the Minute of the meeting held on 13 September 2017 subject to the following amendments:-
 - (i) Item 128, paragraph 1 (Page 120) in the interests of clarity, the word ‘timeously’ being moved from the second last line to line 5 immediately after the phrase ‘to address’;

- (ii) Item 129 paragraph 1 (Page 121) that the phrase “..science, maths and literacy.” be amended to “.. science, maths and reading.”;
 - (iii) Item 129 paragraph 2 (Page 121) that the reference to “Ireland” be amended to “Northern Ireland”; and
- (b) noted comments made by Councillor Swift to the effect that, since the previous meeting, Councillor Buchanan had acknowledged that he had been incorrect to refer to Councillor Swift having made comments at a community council meeting about cutting the education budget by 5% and transferring it to the roads budget; and that it was his view that Councillor Buchanan should make a public apology regarding this.

MINUTE OF MEETING OF 28 SEPTEMBER 2017

186. The Council considered and approved the Minute of the meeting held on 28 September 2017.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES

187. The Council considered and approved the Minutes of the meetings of the undernoted, except as otherwise referred to in Item 188 below:-

- (a) Cabinet – 14 September 2017;
- (b) Cabinet (Police and Fire) – 21 September 2017;
- (c) Education Committee – 28 September 2017;
- (d) Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 28 September 2017;
- (e) Licensing Committee – 3 October 2017;
- (f) Planning Applications Committee – 4 October 2017;
- (g) Cabinet – 12 October 2017; and
- (h) Social Work Committee – 19 October 2017.

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 28 SEPTEMBER 2017 - EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL ANNUAL ACCOUNTS, DRAFT ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT AND RELATED ISA 260 REPORT FOR 2016/17

188. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of 28 September 2017 (Page 146, Item 157 refers), when the committee had agreed to seek further clarification on dates linked to a key control failure and a related investigation; and to explore if in future, Members could be advised of key control failures over a certain financial threshold, possibly £50,000, at an early stage and at the same time as the Corporate Management Team (CMT) was advised, Councillor Grant asked why senior officers were not ensuring that there was adherence to control mechanisms in place to help prevent fraud, given the potential implications of this.

Provost Fletcher reiterated that there had been no financial loss to the Council in the case of the recent control failure and referred to the tightening up of controls, following which the Deputy Chief Executive commented on associated matters including when Internal Audit had been made aware of what had happened in that particular case, and the related investigation required to determine what had happened and if internal controls in place were adequate. Having commented on the human error that had occurred, she referred to the full report on the matter submitted to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee after the facts had been established.

Having heard Councillor Grant refer to the potential for further such issues to arise, Councillor Aitken commented on the failure of internal controls in the case in question, highlighting that the potential fraud had been prevented due to action by the Council's bankers.

Councillor Swift, having acknowledged the human error that had occurred; referred to the lack of checks made by the Creditors section about various bank details, and to the general prevalence of related fraud in the public sector, sought clarification if the problem was attributable to a person, sufficiency of resources within the Creditors section, or the adequacy of the systems currently in place. Supported by Councillor Macdonald and Councillor Aitken, he asked why it had taken the length of time it had to inform the police.

Whilst commenting further, the Deputy Chief Executive referred to changes required to the purchase to pay process; the small scale of the Creditors team; the extent of changes being pursued and related challenges; and the priority afforded to ensuring that financial controls were adequate. Having referred to the goals shared by all of making improvements to the process and meeting suppliers' expectations, she stressed the importance that had been attached to establishing the facts of what had happened in the case under discussion and subsequently addressing issues identified and making any changes considered required. She added that the reporting of the matter to the police had been discussed and that the pace of change being pursued could be reviewed if considered appropriate.

Having referred to discussions at an early stage on referring the matter to the police, the Chief Executive commented on priority given by the police to fraud matters in cases where financial loss had occurred; and reporting mechanisms at a national level regarding fraud made use of by Internal Audit.

In reply to Councillor Macdonald who asked about police practice in cases of the type that had occurred, Chief Superintendent McNulty indicated he could not comment on the particular case as the details were unknown to him but, speaking in more general terms, referred to complex cases taking a lengthy time to investigate. The Chief Executive cited an example of a case when her signature and that of another former member of the CMT had been forged which had taken several years to investigate and secure a conviction.

In response to Councillor Aitken who indicated he remained dissatisfied, Provost Fletcher expressed the view that the explanations provided had been sufficient but that a timeline for reporting the matter to the police could be made available. Councillor Macdonald commented that he was perplexed about the time taken to report the matter to the police, expressing the opinion that time was of the essence in such cases and clarifying that he regarded the attempted fraud to be a separate matter to the reporting of it to the police.

Whilst commenting on the issue, Councillor Devlin reiterated there had been no financial loss in the case concerned, referred to attempted frauds against other organisations, and expressed concern at the suggestion being made that officers had been negligent.

Having heard Provost Fletcher confirm that the matter had been referred to the police, it was agreed to note the position.

POLICE SCOTLAND – EAST RENFREWSHIRE LOCAL POLICING PLAN 2017-20

189. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet (Police and Fire) of 21 September 2017 (Page 134, Item 147 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that the Police Scotland Local Policing Plan for East Renfrewshire 2017-20 be approved, the Council considered the Plan.

The Plan clarified that the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 set out policing principles for Police Scotland, stating that the main purpose of policing was to improve the safety and well-being of persons, localities and communities. The Plan set out how work would be undertaken to achieve this through setting local priorities shaped in consultation with partners, communities and the most current data available to the police. It was clarified that the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 also required each Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to produce Local Outcome Improvement Plans, with a focus on delivery of shared outcomes locally. These were reflected in the document and outlined Police Scotland's commitment to a collaborative approach with communities, partners and stakeholders.

Having heard Provost Fletcher formally welcome Chief Superintendent McNulty and Chief Inspector Carty of Police Scotland to the meeting, a number of Members were heard in relation to the Plan. In response to Councillor Miller, Chief Inspector Carty referred to the recent deployment of police horses in an area for several weeks to help address a youth disorder issue, explaining that she needed to bid for the use of these resources.

Councillor Wallace referred to the lack of reference to tackling child abuse in the local policing priorities itemised in the Plan, seeking clarification on the extent of liaison on this between the Police and social work. Chief Superintendent McNulty, having referred to his remit as Divisional Commander, commented that his experience of partnership working in East Renfrewshire since being appointed to his current post had been the best he had experienced in many years, emphasising the strength of the formal and informal working relationships that existed. He clarified that no one disagreed on the need to prioritise child protection, referring to the growth of cyber related issues and related discussions at a Chief Officers Group he attended. Chief Inspector Carty endorsed the comments, referring to the emphasis placed on prevention and detection regarding on-line issues and, amongst other things, to the fear of children being exposed to inappropriate material.

Whilst also commenting on the strength of local partnership working, the Chief Executive referred to the work of the East Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee and its related sub-committees; the positive Care Inspectorate report on Children's Services in East Renfrewshire published in 2014; and the value of and personal commitment demonstrated at the regular meetings she attended with Chief Superintendent McNulty, NHS colleagues, the Chief Officer - Health and Social Care Partnership; and the Chief Social Work Officer, at which both child and adult protection and offender issues were discussed.

Other matters discussed included the level of police resources available to combat on-line crime and the role of the Cyber Crime Unit; vehicles used for off-road related police work; the quick speed of the police response to an anti-social behaviour issue in the Clarkston, Netherlee and Williamwood ward which had been welcomed; and the high visibility and value of police horses when used as a resource for which Chief Inspector Carty intended to submit further bids routinely with the hope of securing them for use in East Renfrewshire.

The Council approved the Police Scotland Local Policing Plan for East Renfrewshire 2017-20.

GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2017/18

190. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 12 October 2017 (Page 163, Item 177 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that the proposed adjustments to the General Fund Capital Programme 2017/18 be approved, the Council considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer, recommending adjustments to the

2017/18 General Fund Capital Programme in light of issues that had arisen since the programme had been approved.

In reply to Councillor Swift and Councillor Wallace respectively, Councillor Buchanan confirmed that everything possible was being done to address slippage within the programme, adding that some factors were outwith the Council's control; and that a date had not been finalised yet when the Eastwood Park Leisure Master Plan would be forthcoming, but a report on it would be submitted to the appropriate body as soon as possible.

The Council:-

- (a) approved the movements with the programme; and
- (b) noted that the shortfall of £279,000 would be managed and reported on a regular basis.

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2017/18

191. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 12 October 2017 (Page 164, Item 178 refers), when it had been agreed to recommend to the Council that the proposed adjustments to the Housing Capital Programme 2017/18 be approved, the Council considered a joint report by the Chief Financial Officer and Director of Environment recommending adjustments to the 2017/18 Housing Capital Programme in light of issues that had arisen since the programme had been approved.

The Council:-

- (a) approved the movements within the programme; and
- (b) noted that the shortfall of £64,000 would be managed and reported on a regular basis.

NOTICE OF MOTION

192. In accordance with Standing Order 25, the following Notice of Motion had been submitted by Councillor Convery seconded by Councillor Ireland.

Council welcomes the Scottish Government's announcement to provide free sanitary products in education establishments.

Council also commends the recent initiatives run by other local councils to provide their secondary and primary schools with free sanitary products in a cross party bid to stamp out period poverty.

Periods affect women differently but women and girls, who experience menstruation, all have a common need for access to female hygiene products.

Council recognises that sanitary products are a necessity and not a luxury and it aims to ensure that all female pupils in their secondary and primary schools are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve regardless of their personal circumstances.

Council will therefore take the necessary action to provide free sanitary products in all of the East Renfrewshire schools.

In doing this, East Renfrewshire Council is showing that they are a leader in ending period poverty.

At this stage, no amendment to the Motion having been proposed, Provost Fletcher invited Councillor Convery to speak to the terms of the Motion.

Councillor Convery stated she was delighted to propose the Motion, commenting that not every girl could afford sanitary products and referring to the impact of this when this was the case, including from a hygiene perspective. She added that approving the Motion would be a leading and progressive step.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Ireland indicated she was equally delighted to do so, concurring that approval of it would be a progressive step.

Whilst supporting the Motion, Councillor Swift referred to the cost and affordability of sanitary products and related savings for individuals; and Councillor Macdonald referred to the importance of implementing related legislation, the necessity of such products, and the modern and progressive step that would be taken if the Motion was approved. Furthermore Councillor O’Kane referred to the importance of the issue, commending the Members who had raised the matter and highlighting that related issues for the Education Department to consider were the subject of on-going work and discussion. He also stressed the importance of ensuring that access to these products was not prevented on the basis of need.

The Motion was unanimously approved.

QUESTION TO CONVENER

193. In accordance with Standing Order 24, Councillor Swift submitted a question regarding failures in financial control and the release of related information to Members as follows:-

The Council has had a significant number of substantially large failures in its financial controls over the last few years.

Information has not been released to elected members about these failings in as timely a fashion as I would like, most recently bypassing an election until released.

What financial threshold does the Council feel is reasonable above which a failure in financial controls should be notified to elected members and how quickly should it be released?

In reply, Councillor Buchanan stated that the Council had clear processes and timescales in place for the notification of potential frauds, thefts or irregularities. He clarified that notification was first to the relevant line manager and then the Chief Auditor or Head of Accountancy; and that subject to the materiality of the matter it would be reported to the relevant committee once investigative work was complete or a loss identified. He stated that as material financial losses would have an impact on the operation of the Council, should such losses occur these would be brought to the attention of councillors through Cabinet and then Council by the Head of Accountancy, clarifying that a significant material loss was considered to be anything over £30,000.

Referring to suspected financial control failures that did not result in a financial loss to the Council, Councillor Buchanan stated that the situation would be audited to ascertain what had happened and what, if anything, had gone wrong. He added that action would be taken by officers to tighten controls if required; that the matter would be highlighted through the Chief Auditor's quarterly reports to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee as had happened generally for many years; and that information would be included in public annual reports, such as the Annual Accounts and the Chief Auditor's "Statement of Internal Controls".

Councillor Buchanan explained that in the case of the unsuccessful fraud attempt all timescales had been adhered to adding that, furthermore, officers had voluntarily provided very detailed additional reports to the first available meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee after completion of the Internal Audit report on the matter, the committee papers being in the public domain. He stated that it had to be kept in mind that information had also been passed to the External Auditors who were also looking at this, the priority then being to find out if there had been internal or external fraud. He stated that a much bigger picture therefore had to be looked, referring to the investigation as vital and adding that at this stage the matter would be passed to the police who would potentially have an interest in it.

Having commented that External Audit had reviewed the matter in some detail and had been kept fully informed, Councillor Buchanan reiterated that no financial loss to the Council had occurred.

Councillor Buchanan commented on Councillor Swift's question which asked what the threshold was for a failure in financial controls and when it should it be notified to Members, confirming that arrangements in force at that time meant that any confirmed loss over £10,000 would be notified to Cabinet. He added that what was equally open for discussion, perhaps for the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to bring forward views on, was that External Audit were notified of any loss greater than £5,000, this being the threshold normally used.

Councillor Buchanan commented that where no loss was incurred, officers had to be given the time to investigate fully the circumstances in suspected control failures and to be able to provide sufficient information to allow the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to carry out its scrutiny role. He reported that officers had suggested they consult with other councils to determine what happens elsewhere to ensure that the authority gets the best balance between carrying out audits confidentially and the necessary transparency and scrutiny to ensure processes were as good as they could be.

In conclusion he said that if the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in their scrutiny role could add value to the work on strengthening financial controls further, their input would be welcomed, referring to the extent to which the committee's views on issues in the past had been taken on board. He said his comments reflected the processes in place at present and rules currently worked to which had been applied in the case in question.

Councillor Swift commented that the lack of a material loss had not been attributable to effective financial controls, on the bank's identification of the issue, and that it would have been useful in the case of a serious failure if Members were informed hence his comments on timelines and thresholds. He welcomed Councillor Buchanan's comments on thresholds, but expressed the opinion that he had been less clear on timescales. Having added that it would have been helpful if all Members had been advised on the issue prior to the May 2017 elections in view of the potential public interest, he asked why the Opposition Leader and 1 independent Member had not been told at the same time as Administration counterparts.

Councillor Buchanan reported that the Administration Leaders had been told of the issue at a meeting convened for another purpose; that they had asked questions such as on internal controls, the investigation and referral of the matter to the police; and had requested that

everyone be advised as soon as possible on the outcome of the investigation. He said he and his colleagues understood that the Opposition Leader was to be spoken to as Chair of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, and that a report was to be submitted to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. He recalled that this happened about mid-June.

Councillor Miller clarified that he had not been advised of the position until about a week before the Audit and Scrutiny Committee scheduled in August 2017.

The Council noted the position.

PROVOST'S ENGAGEMENTS

194. 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 last meeting.

STATEMENTS BY CONVENER

195. The following statements were made:-

(a) **Eastwood Park Leisure Centre**

Councillor Merrick referred to recent misleading stories in social media, confirming that, in addition to the swimming pool at Eastwood High School, there would always be a swimming pool for Eastwood residents, either refurbished or new build. He stressed that the Council had already clarified that Eastwood Park Leisure Centre was not being run down, referring to a minimum capital investment of £6million already identified to improve and modernise the facility. He said that, as Convener, he was keen however that all options were considered to ensure future investment achieved the best for residents.

Councillor Merrick added that the Council was continuing to work closely with East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust, which operated the facility, to consider the best way forward and explore options to improve services, which would include a swimming pool, before presenting any proposals to the Council for consideration.

The Council noted the position.

(b) **Barclay Report**

Councillor Merrick reported that, following the publication of the Barclay Report which suggested charitable trusts delivering sport, leisure and cultural services on behalf of councils should no longer receive non-domestic rates relief, the Cabinet Secretary had announced in September to the Scottish Parliament that following stakeholder engagement he believed a small number of recommendations needed further thought and engagement, the recommendations being those that removed charity relief for certain recipients, including Arms Length External Organisations (ALEOs). He added that consultation, which was expected to conclude later in 2017, was being jointly co-ordinated for the sector by the National Association of Leisure Trusts (Sporta) and the National Association for Culture and Leisure managers (VOCAL) on both of which the Culture and Leisure Trust was represented.

Councillor Merrick reported that initial signs were that the Government intended to implement the changes, which could require a parliamentary vote or change to primary legislation. He clarified that one proposal in the report was to remove the non-domestic rates allowance from local authority budgets from 1 April 2018.

The Council noted the position.

(c) **Summer Reading Challenge 2017**

Councillor Merrick stated he was pleased to report that the annual Tesco Bank Summer Reading Challenge in East Renfrewshire libraries, through which children aged between 4 and 12 were challenged to read 6 books throughout the summer, had been a great success. He clarified that those who had successfully completed the challenge had received certificates and medals presented at ceremonies in libraries across the authority; that the theme this year had been Animal Agents; and that the challenge was a great way to help children keep up their reading skills and confidence over the holidays. He reported that almost 1400 children had participated from across the authority, in line with 2016.

The Council noted the position.

(d) **Reduction in Teenage Pregnancy in Barrhead**

Councillor Merrick reported that an initiative to reduce teenage pregnancy in Auchenback, Barrhead led by the Council's Young Persons Services Team had recently been recognised at COSLA's Annual Convention Award Ceremony on 5 October, winning a Gold Award under the category of Achieving Better Outcomes in Partnership. Having commented on the teenage pregnancy rate in Auchenback, he clarified that by combining data analysis and improvement science with community learning and development techniques, and working in partnership with local young parents and high schools, the teenage pregnancy rate had fallen by 60% in the area. East Renfrewshire now had the lowest teenage pregnancy rate in Scotland and there had been a fall in the percentage of first time mothers aged 19 or under from 22% to 9%, which was faster than the corresponding reductions nationally.

Having referred to related issues, Councillor Merrick highlighted that the initiative focused on prevention to improve outcomes for young adults and reduce demand for reactive social work, health and justice services. Having stated that the initiative was a superb example of the benefits of partnership working and prevention, he referred to the Award which was on display, thanked all staff who had contributed to this successful approach and, on behalf of the Council, congratulated those concerned.

The Council noted the position.

(e) **Integration Joint Board and Chief Social Work Officer**

Councillor Bamforth reported that at the most recent meeting of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) on 27 September she had formally signed the Annual Accounts for the Board for 2016/17 on its financial performance and referring to its governance arrangements. She explained that copies were available for any Member who wished to scrutinise them.

She reported that later in the meeting the Chief Social Work Officer would be reporting on the delivery of safe, effective and innovative social work, adding that the IJB regularly benefitted from her professional advice and extensive experience whilst

acknowledging that her role was a statutory one reporting to the Council. She explained that, as a member of the Council, she was looking forward to hearing about and discussing that report.

The Council noted the position.

STATEMENTS BY REPRESENTATIVES ON JOINT BOARDS/COMMITTEES

196. Provost Fletcher intimated that no statements had been received.

CLYDE AND LOCH LOMOND LOCAL PLAN DISTRICT JOINT COMMITTEE

197. The Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive, requesting that the Council consider the appointment of a substitute representative for Councillor Lafferty who had been appointed by the Council in May as its representative on the Clyde and Loch Lomond Local Plan District Joint Committee. Such a step would help ensure that meetings of the joint committee were quorate.

The Council agreed that Councillor Paul O'Kane be appointed as substitute representative for Councillor Lafferty on the Clyde and Loch Lomond Local Plan District Joint Committee.

LOWLAND RESERVE FORCES' AND CADETS' ASSOCIATION

198. The Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive, seeking the appointment of a representative from the Council to serve on the Lowland Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association. Information on the role and membership of the Association and the commitment required was attached to the report.

The Council agreed that Councillor Gordon Wallace be appointed as the Council's representative on the Lowland Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association.

SCOTTISH COUNCIL ON VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

199. The Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive, seeking the appointment of a representative from the Council to serve on the Scottish Council on Visual Impairment.

The Council agreed that Councillor Caroline Bamforth be appointed as the Council's representative on the Scottish Council on Visual Impairment.

SCOTTISH COUNCILS' COMMITTEE ON RADIOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

200. The Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive, seeking the appointment of a representative to serve on the Scottish Councils' Committee on Radioactive Substances. Having explained that the majority of councils were presented on the committee by both an officer and a Member, the Head of Environment (Operations) being the Council's officer representative, the report made reference to the value of membership. Having referred to information on the committee's remit attached to the report, the report proposed that Councillor Lafferty be appointed.

The Council agreed that Councillor Alan Lafferty be appointed as the Council's representative on the Scottish Councils' Committee on Radioactive Substances.

SUPPLIER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME BOARD

201. The Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive, seeking the appointment of a representative from the Council to serve on the Supplier Development Programme (SDP) Board, the SDP being a partnership of local authorities, Scottish Government and other public bodies working together to bring support to businesses in all aspects of tendering. The report proposed that Councillor Buchanan be appointed.

The Council agreed that Councillor Tony Buchanan be appointed as the Council's representative on the Supplier Development Programme (SDP) Board.

CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17

202. The Council considered a report by the Chief Social Work Officer, providing details of her Annual Report for 2016/17 and seeking approval of the report for submission to the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser, Scottish Government. A copy of the Annual Report was appended to the report.

The report, which was also to be submitted to the Clinical and Care Governance Committee on 1 November 2017, and Health and Social Care Partnership IJB on 29 November 2017, overviewed the professional activity for social work within East Renfrewshire for 2016-17 through the delivery of statutory functions and responsibilities held by the Chief Social Work Officer. Details of challenges and risks facing social work and the Council were outlined which included the continuing challenging financial climate and the uncertainty for all public services, and the increasing expectations and demands from the public and stakeholders.

The Chief Social Work Officer commented on a range of associated issues, including improvements made and achievements that impacted on the quality of life of vulnerable residents; and challenges and risks faced including in terms of the budget available, austerity and the complexity of cases dealt with. Having referred to an increasing demand for services anticipated in terms of adult and child protection, she thanked those working in her service and in partnership with it for their contribution and hard work.

Councillor Aitken challenged some of the remarks made by the Chief Social Work Officer on austerity and funding, including in terms of their accuracy. Thereafter, he sought clarification on statistics within the report which reflected an increase in the number of adult protection investigations of various types which he considered a dramatic increase. In reply the Chief Social Work Officer commented on issues such as earlier identification of matters including in liaison with Police Scotland and the authority's proactive approach to raising adult care and protection issues, adding that the increase in referrals was a positive development compared to before when some issues, such as sexual harm, were under-reported.

Having commented on various positive and encouraging aspects of the report and referred to budgetary matters including the level of resources available for public services in Scotland on a per capita basis compared to elsewhere, Councillor Swift expressed the view that including information on outcomes of investigations from year to year would have been useful. He sought clarification on the level of investment relative to issues being identified and if more or fewer issues were being uncovered. In reply the Chief Social Work Officer clarified that the opportunities and support mechanisms for adults did not match those for

children to the same extent, referring to the protective environment children had in school. Having commented that it was better to know of issues than not, and growing levels of confidence to refer matters concerning adults, she referred to consideration of themes and resources, including information, going forward.

Councillor Lafferty welcomed the increase in the rate of child registration, the reduction in the number of children in care some of which could be associated with the successful foster care initiative, and acknowledged the challenges facing the service which he considered appropriate to raise. In reply to Councillor Wallace, the Chief Social Work Officer referred to work undertaken with the police on a daily basis on addressing child abuse, tripartite discussions that took place on initial referrals and the hard work being done to maintain levels of child protection to help keep children safe and related challenges.

The Council approved the content of the Annual Report and authorised its submission to the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser, Scottish Government.

PROVOST