

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock, on 12 February 2015.

Present:

Provost Alastair Carmichael	Councillor Gordon McCaskill
Deputy Provost Betty Cunningham	Councillor Stewart Miller
Councillor Tony Buchanan	Councillor Mary Montague
Councillor Danny Devlin	Councillor Paul O’Kane
Councillor Jim Fletcher (Leader)	Councillor Tommy Reilly
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Councillor Ralph Robertson
Councillor Barbara Grant	Councillor Jim Swift
Councillor Elaine Green	Councillor Gordon Wallace
Councillor Alan Lafferty	Councillor Vincent Waters
Councillor Ian McAlpine	

Provost Carmichael in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive; Julie Murray, Director of Community Health and Care Partnership; Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; Andy Cahill, Director of Environment; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (School Performance and Provision); Barbara Clark, Chief Accountant; Frank White, Head of Health and Community Care; Phil Daws, Housing Services Manager; Louisa Mahon, Communications Manager; Siobhan Martin, Communications Assistant; Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager; and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer.

Apology:

Councillor Kenny Hay.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1404. No declarations of interest were intimated.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1405. The Council considered and approved the Minute of the meeting held on 17 December 2014.

MINUTE OF SPECIAL MEETING

1406. The Council considered and approved the Minute of the special meeting held on 21 January 2015.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES

1407. The Council considered and approved the Minutes of the meetings of the undernoted other than as referred to in Items 1408 and 1409 below:-

- (a) Local Review Body – 14 January 2015;
- (b) Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 15 January 2015;
- (c) Licensing Committee – 16 January 2015;
- (d) Cabinet – 29 January 2015;
- (e) Licensing Committee – 4 February 2015;
- (f) Education Committee – 5 February 2015;
- (g) Planning Applications Committee – 11 February 2015; and
- (h) Local Review Body 11 February 2015.

ELIMINATION OF BED AND BREAKFAST USAGE FOR HOMELESS APPLICANTS

1408. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 29 January 2015 (Page 1294, Item 1379 refers), when reference had been made to the use of sheltered accommodation to house homeless applicants, Councillor Robertson expressed concern over the lack of communication with sheltered housing complexes on this issue. In response, the Housing Services Manager accepted that on this occasion communications had fallen short of the standard expected but that a letter was being sent to the sheltered housing complexes explaining the position and emphasising that no-one under the age of 60 or anyone who had a history of antisocial behaviour would be accommodated within a sheltered housing complex. He also explained the very limited circumstances under which sheltered accommodation would be used to house homeless applicants.

Having heard Councillor Robertson welcome the action being taken, the Council noted the position.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE – 11 FEBRUARY 2015 - ONLINE PLANNING INFORMATION

1409. Under reference to the meeting of the Planning Applications Committee held on 11 February 2015, Councillor Miller again raised his concern regarding the lack of information available to Members online with respect to representations of parties making comment on planning applications. In response, the Democratic Services Manager referred Councillor Miller to the Minute of the meeting of the Council held on 29 October 2014 (Page 1210, Item 1268) when the Director of Environment had explained the reasons why the changes had been introduced and explained that a folder containing the letters of representation received in respect of the applications to be considered at the meeting was available for inspection in the Members' Lounge prior to the meeting.

The Council noted the information.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REPORT 2015/16

1410. The Council considered a report by the Chief Executive seeking approval of the Treasury Strategy Statement Report 2015/16, including the amendment of treasury management practices in accordance with Appendix C accompanying the report, which set out those organisations approved for the investment of surplus funds, required credit ratings, limits, and deposit periods.

The report explained that in terms of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice 2011, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, who were responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the treasury management strategy and policies, had considered the attached report at its meeting on 15 January 2015, with comments made in relation to the strategy contained in the Minute of that meeting (Page 1276, Item 1357 refers). Thereafter, the annual investment strategy which set out treasury management activities for the coming year was being submitted to the Council for consideration.

Having Heard the Head of Accountancy confirm that only British based organisations were used for the investment of surplus funds, the Council approved the Treasury Strategy Statement Report 2015/16, including the amendment of treasury management practices in accordance with Appendix C accompanying the report.

PROVOST ENGAGEMENTS

1411. The Council considered and noted a report by the Deputy Chief Executive, providing details of the civic engagements attended and civic duties performed by Provost Carmichael since the last meeting.

STATEMENTS BY CONVENER

1412. Provost Carmichael intimated that no statements had been received.

STATEMENTS BY REPRESENTATIVES ON JOINT BOARDS/COMMITTEES AND COMMUNITY JUSTICE AUTHORITY

1413. Provost Carmichael intimated that no statements had been received.

PRUDENTIAL CODE FOR CAPITAL FINANCE

1414. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 13 February 2014 (Page 883, Item 933 refers), the Council considered a report by the Chief Executive seeking approval of a series of prudential indicators which had to be set before the start of each financial year and which would help confirm that the Council's capital investment plans and treasury management decisions were affordable, prudent and sustainable. The report also set out proposed procedures for monitoring the indicators. Details of the prudential indicators for the period 2015/16 to 2017/18 were appended to the report.

In response to a question from Councillor McCaskill in respect of Indicator 2, Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream, in particular the 2016/17 estimate, the Head of Accountancy explained that this was anticipated to reduce thereafter.

The Council approved the prudential indicators and monitoring arrangements as set out in the report.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL REVENUE ESTIMATES 2015/16 AND 2016-2018

1415. The Council considered a report by the Chief Executive, submitting for consideration proposed revenue estimates of income and expenditure as the basis for the Council Tax declaration for 2015/16, and indicative estimates of income and expenditure for the 2016/17 and 2017/18 financial years..

The report explained that in his Autumn Statement 2014, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had reviewed his financial forecasts and had indicated that public sector funding restraints would likely continue until 2020. Recognising these ongoing financial pressures, as well as considering and approving the revenue budget for 2015/16, it was proposed that indicative budgets for 2016/17 and 2017/18 were also approved. These would be finalised at Council meetings in February 2016 and 2017 once the grant for these years had been confirmed. In keeping with a longer term financial strategy, modelling of the Council's financial position would continue internally beyond the budget period.

The report went on to explain the process for constructing the budget proposals for 2015/16 where departments were required to provide detailed budget information by August 2014 in respect of the cost of services to be provided in 2015/16. In practice, this represented the cost of maintaining approved service levels and in addition providing for amongst other things the impact of inflationary pressures; Scottish Government initiatives; revenue implications of the Capital Programme; and increased demand for services from a growing population.

The report further explained that Scottish Government grant funding for 2015/16 (i.e. Aggregate External Finance (AEF)) was the mainstream grant support for the Council and was determined by the Scottish Government and that the Council's total grant for 2015/16 would be £175.958 million which incorporated funding to support a Council Tax freeze. The grant included additional resources to meet a number of additional responsibilities, such as the costs associated with the Children and Young People Bill and the introduction of free school meals for all children in primaries 1 to 3. The grant settlement had also readjusted the baseline figure for the Council by around £4 million to recognise increasing population trends but did not make provision for any inflationary pressures which would require to be self-funded by the Council.

As part of the grant settlement for 2015/16, the Scottish Government had outlined certain conditions that councils were required to agree to apply over the current Spending Review period to ensure receipt of the headline grant level. These were a Council Tax freeze which equated to a grant of £1.343 million per annum for East Renfrewshire Council to assist in the delivery of the Council Tax freeze; and the maintenance of teacher numbers in line with pupil numbers and securing places for all probationer teachers who required one under the teacher induction scheme. Negotiations were still continuing between COSLA and the Scottish Government with regard to the exact nature of this condition. The Scottish Government had indicated that it would not be possible for councils to select elements of the funding on offer. If the Council's budget was not designed to meet the conditions, the grant would be reduced accordingly. The budget proposals submitted for Council's consideration assumed delivery against the identified grant commitments in 2015/16.

The report explained the "Floors" arrangement whereby in determining grant distribution the Scottish Government had again put in place an arrangement to ensure year-on-year stability

in grant at individual council level. The cost of bringing local authorities up to the “floor” was borne by the remaining councils. Under this arrangement East Renfrewshire would contribute £1.052 million by way of deduction from AEF grant in 2015/16 and this contribution had been reflected in the grant figure.

Whilst noting the savings proposals and one-off investment flexibility in 2015/16, the report highlighted that the draft revenue estimates for 2015/16 provided for net expenditure of £220.028 million. The net expenditure figures reflected additional provision of £3.129 million in 2016/16 to meet the Council’s contribution to the provision of free school meals for all children in primaries 1 to 3; additional early learning and childcare provision for 2, 3 and 4 year olds; and additional provision for the Community Health and Care Partnership (CHCP) to reflect demographic pressures from an increasing client population.

Setting aside earmarked reserves, the balance on the unallocated General Fund as at 31 March 2014 stood at £8.508 million and it was anticipated that in closing the 2014/15 accounts £41,000 would be transferred to the Fund resulting in an estimated balance at 31 March 2015 of £8.549 million. It was not planned to budget for a further contribution to the General Fund Reserve in 2015/16 and the closing balance on the General Fund at 31 March 2016 was projected to remain at £8.549 million.

In terms of the Modernisation Fund, this was earmarked funding which had been identified to enable the upfront investment required to drive forward the Council’s transformation activities. The report proposed to incur Spend to Save expenditure of £400,000 and Transformation expenditure of £400,000 in 2015/16, this being supported by robust business cases in respect of that investment. It was noted that the Repairs and Renewals Fund was established to enable a continuing programme of repairs and renewals to roads, properties and other infrastructure.

Expenditure proposals for 2015/16 from the Fund were noted as £600,000 for targeted property repairs to education premises; £500,000 for road repairs and £300,000 as a contingency that would be drawn down if next year’s winter was more adverse than “average”. Finally, the Capital Reserve where it was anticipated that in closing this year’s financial accounts a contribution of £1.2 million would be made to the Reserve. In the budget for 2015/16 it was proposed to incorporate a contribution of £1.01 million to the Reserve. This would assist in maintaining capital investment during the current economic challenges.

The revenue estimates appended to the report were based on a Band D Council Tax level of £1,126 being set for 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 representing a cash standstill when compared to the current year’s level.

Councillor Fletcher, Leader of the Council, was then heard on the proposals. Having thanked his Administration Group colleagues, representing the Budget Strategy Group, he thanked directors on how they had approached the process. Finally, he thanked the staff in Accountancy Services for their professional advice and co-ordination in the preparation of the proposals.

Whilst emphasising that the Council would continue to face difficult financial circumstances in the future, he stated that the budget demonstrated a commitment by the Administration to work corporately to address the financial challenges facing the Council transparently and in a prudent manner. He highlighted that in preparing the estimates, the Council had agreed to longer term planning with a 2-year budget being agreed at the meeting of the Council on 13 February 2014. At that meeting, an indicative budget for 2015/16 had been set and although that budget had been refined, the proposals before the Council had not been the result of a

fundamental review. The budget was a balanced one delivered without applying additional savings beyond those agreed at the meeting in February 2014. Given the limited financial resources available to the Council these had been invested wisely and directed to Council priorities. He also emphasised that the Council had prepared a detailed budget for 2015/16 with indicative budgets for the following 2 years whilst acknowledging that the wider landscape could change in years 2 or 3, especially following the forthcoming UK General Election. This approach had enabled the Council to spread savings and to maximise the lead-in time for those that would prove most difficult to implement.

Councillor Fletcher highlighted that efficiency savings had been maximised, and that over 50% of the savings identified were in the form of efficiencies. Efficiency savings would contribute £10.3 million and would considerably change how the Council operated. A new change programme would be introduced in April to help drive down costs further whilst improving service to customers. This would be achieved by reducing numbers of staff and buildings through agile working; service re-design; digital innovation; and by eliminating bureaucracy. He confirmed that staff numbers had reduced by 250 FTE posts since 2009 and would continue to reduce by a further 200 FTE over the next 3 years without the need for compulsory redundancy and with a commitment to deliver the Living Wage for the Council's lowest paid staff. Similar to previous years, the Band D Council Tax would be frozen at £1,126 remaining unchanged since 2007/08 and lower than the Scottish average of £1,149.

He went on to refer to the significant increase in demand for services to pre-five children in terms of pre-school care and child protection. There had also been increased demand on schools from families, especially those with children who require additional support, who relocate to East Renfrewshire to benefit from high quality education services and ongoing support as adults. East Renfrewshire was also home to an elderly population who were living longer and wanted to remain independent at home and required additional support and care to do so. The number of residents aged over 85 was forecast to increase by 44% over the next 10 years placing considerable pressure on the CHCP.

Councillor Fletcher reiterated that the Council was facing an unfavourable financial situation in future years. The Council would receive a cash reduction in the grant it received in 2016/17 and 2017/18. The AEF grant represented around 80% of the Council's overall funding with the balance frozen through the Council Tax standstill. This meant real terms reductions at a time of increasing demand for services. All spending pressures such as general inflation and pay awards would require to be absorbed by the Council. The result was that savings of £22 million required to be found.

He also explained that in order to receive the full grant, the Council needed to deliver on certain conditions set by the Scottish Government over and above the freeze on Council Tax. It was proposed that teacher numbers would be maintained in 2015/16 in line with pupil numbers but it was hoped to be able to re-examine this in future.

Referring to capital investment, Councillor Fletcher explained that there would be significant investment of £80 million over the next 3 years across the Council's 5 Priority Outcomes.

The Council was committed to the prevention agenda and understood the impact that could be made when issues were prevented from arising in the first instance rather than fixing what was already broken. It would continue to invest in Early Years provision in order to provide very young children with the best start in life and one that was safe from harm. It would also continue to focus on closing the inequality gap between local children and ensure that all children, including those that needed to be looked after, were cared for and educated within East Renfrewshire where it was believed that the best outcomes could be achieved for

them. Investing in Early Years provision would help to address future years' demand pressures on services and also deliver a fundamental change in society. The foundations for ground breaking Early Years projects designed to build community resilience and keep children safe had already been laid.

In terms of education and learning, proposals would include the construction of a new replacement Barrhead High School; plans for two new primary schools in the Newton Mearns area; and continued investment in the existing school estate so that all young people would benefit from a safe and modern school environment. It was also proposed to provide additional investment of £278,000 to support initiatives targeted at raising attainment levels of the lowest performing 20% of children and young people where such support last year had helped to further improve attainment levels for this group of pupils. The Council was also supporting young people to access further and higher education within East Renfrewshire through its partnership with West College Scotland and the University of the West of Scotland and through continued investment in the highly successful graduate internship programme which had supported 77 graduates to date.

He then referred to the proposed investment in the award winning mixed tenure estates programme. In this regard, £400,000 would be invested from the General Fund and £100,000 from the Housing Revenue Account.

The recent transformation of Barrhead Sports Centre into Barrhead Foundry was cited as a major investment where the Council had invested £3.8 million to deliver an extension of the sports centre to create a state of the art community hub with improved sports facilities; a new library; business and back to work support; and a café and flexible community and learning spaces making it easier for local people to access a range of services with modern multi-purpose facilities being brought together under one roof.

Councillor Fletcher emphasised the demand pressures being experienced for services that support children and families and vulnerable adults, explaining that the budget had identified additional investment of £651,000 to meet this demand. It was noted that as with other areas of CHCP provision, service demand for older people was being experienced with the over 85 population, which was forecast to rise by 44% over the next 10 years, being the biggest consumer of health and social care services. The budget included £25.6 million in 2015/16 to provide services to elderly residents and the Council had embarked on radical changes to the services it provided. In addition, it was proposed to increase the aids and adaptations budget by £100,000 to assist people to remain in their own homes. The Garden Assistance scheme would also be redesigned to ensure that it was integrated with ongoing reablement support to clients.

He went on to explain that the administration had shown real commitment to being open and honest about future funding and in seeking, where possible, alternatives to the proposals under consideration. More than 700 local people had taken part in the formal engagement process and numerous emails and letters had been received. As a result of this, two alternative proposals to the sale of Bonnyton House were being examined. These had been the subject of option appraisals and the Council had asked KPMG to provide independent and impartial scrutiny prior to a final decision being made. Similarly, a decision had been taken not to proceed with the closure of Barrhead Civic Amenity Site and to retain a level of Campus Police Officer provision in schools.

He also explained that the administration had accepted that in some cases, the Council may no longer be the best provider of services which it had previously delivered. Where this was believed to be the case and where the service could be secured whilst also offering some protection for staff, the Council would look to another provider to deliver the service. This would allow the Council to focus its efforts on what it did well while others delivered what they did best.

Referring to the new Local Development Plan (LDP) which had recently been approved by the Scottish Government Reporter, Councillor Fletcher explained that it would secure Barrhead's future as one of Scotland's most successful towns; provide opportunities for businesses to locate to East Renfrewshire; and help create jobs and increase business start-ups. The Council's holistic approach to planning meant that all communities would benefit from improved local amenities; employment opportunities; new schools and homes; and significant infrastructure improvements that would connect East Renfrewshire.

Many of these projects would be delivered through the City Deal project, a £44 million package of improvements that would grow and protect the local economy for an investment by the Council of £6 million.

Concluding his remarks, he moved that the Council:-

- (a) approve the 2015/16 revenue estimates;
- (b) approve the indicative revenue estimates for 2016/17 and 2017/18;
- (c) approve the recommended level and utilisation of reserves;
- (d) determine the 2015/16 Council Tax Band D at £1,126; and
- (e) note that management of the Council's finances and service plans would continue to be undertaken on a longer term basis.

Seconding the motion, Councillor Buchanan commended the Revenue Estimates to the Council. He reiterated that the Council had faced difficult decisions in drawing up the budget and would no doubt face further difficulties in future years. However, the budget that had been prepared was responsible and would address priorities for the residents of East Renfrewshire.

Thereafter, Councillor McCaskill, seconded by Councillor Swift moved as an amendment that the estimates be approved subject to additional savings in the totalling £1,244,750 being made as follows:-

- (i) Education - £53,250
- (ii) Environment - £128,500
- (iii) CHCP - £1,063,000

Commenting on the amendment, Councillor McCaskill outlined a range of savings that in the opinion of the Conservative Group could be achieved in the Revenue Estimates 2015/16. He began by stating that the most challenging factor the Council faced in the coming year was the continuing freeze on the level of Council Tax coupled with the need to provide ever more services which together placed an intolerable burden on the Council and required it to make ever more efficiency savings in order to preserve front line services. Assuming an inflation rate averaging 2.5% the Council would receive 20% less income from Council Tax than 8 years ago while prices had risen 20% over the same period.

He went on to explain that the Council Tax freeze was due to end in 2016 and expressed his concern that the Council had chosen to set indicative budgets for 2016/17 and 2017/18 when it was not clear whether Council Tax would still exist beyond 2016 and at what level, or if it would be replaced by some alternative funding method.

Referring to the Education Department, Councillor McCaskill highlighted that the amendment proposals included the full retention of Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) and also of Campus Police Officers within schools while increasing charges for the Easter Study School and school meals. Within the Environment Department he proposed increased efficiency savings; a reduction in advertising; the outsourcing of vehicle mechanic services; and an increase in cemetery income through the advance purchase of lairs. Finally, referring to the CHCP, he proposed savings generated through further outsourcing of the Care at Home service and the introduction of workforce planning within the Social Work service similar to that currently operating within the City of Manchester. He expressed his willingness to work on a cross-party basis in order to bring about a satisfactory resolution to the current situation regarding the future of Bonnyton House.

Concluding his remarks, he emphasised that the Conservative Group's amendment adopted much of the Administration's budget but included additional savings as outlined. He commended the amendment to the Council for its approval.

Councillor Swift, seconding the amendment, highlighted potential savings through the adoption by the Social Work service of the Manchester model which, amongst other things, would see routine administration carried out by administration staff at an appropriate grade or possibly by Customer First. He also expressed the view that major savings could be achieved through outsourcing the entire direct labour workforce at some future date. He also highlighted the change in policy which prevented the advance selling of cemetery lairs explaining that the proposal contained in the amendment was not intended to increase charges but to allow families to plan ahead for future expense.

Thereafter, full discussion on the proposals followed.

In response to the proposed increase in cemetery income due to the advance selling of lairs, Councillor Waters explained that the pre-purchase of lairs had been discontinued due to lack of sufficient capacity; that the Cabinet had recently agreed to increase cemetery charges by 20%; but that this increase would still leave charges 43% lower than the average across Scotland. He also condemned the proposal to outsource the Council's Fleet Maintenance service explaining that the service was widely regarded as being amongst the best in Britain and had won a number of awards at national level.

Responding to an enquiry from Councillor Grant regarding the level of Campus Police Officers proposed by the administration and the level of financial contribution being made by Police Scotland, Councillor Green confirmed that Police Scotland had agreed to make some financial provision towards the retention of this service. Thereafter, Councillor Lafferty, referring to the proposals contained in the amendment to outsource the Care at Home service and to introduce the Manchester model of workforce planning across the Social Work service, explained that self-directed support was still a very new concept and it was too early to gauge its success and as a result it was prudent to plan to effect efficiency savings as opposed to making cuts in the level of service to clients. Similarly, he expressed the view that the Manchester model of workforce planning could lead to a reduction in the number of qualified staff leading to increased caseloads with a corresponding knock-on effect on services to clients including child protection.

Councillor O'Kane explained that the Administration had strived to deliver a budget that protected jobs and, as far as was possible, the services upon which the majority of residents relied. This had been achieved whilst retaining a commitment to no compulsory redundancies; increasing the number of graduate jobs available; continued investment in the mixed tenure estates programme resulting in jobs being created, especially for young people; and the creation of new jobs that it was anticipated would flow from the City Deal

project. He went on to express the view that the Administration had invested to protect those members of the community who had been worst affected by welfare reform and other reductions in services as a result of the continuing financial pressures on the public sector. He also made particular reference to the proposed changes to day services for people with learning disabilities and highlighted the improved facilities which would be provided at the transformed Barrhead Foundry and the new Eastwood Health and Care Centre.

Responding to Councillor Miller who had commented on the effect of proposed reductions in expenditure on the roads infrastructure, Councillor Buchanan explained that the Council's ranking had improved over the past year and that once the worst of the weather related work had been cleared, the Roads Service would return to dealing with potholes and other defects. The Director of Environment explained that by committing to a programme of planned maintenance and further capital improvements it was hoped that this improvement would continue.

Councillor Robertson expressed concern at proposals to review the provision of centres for adults with learning disabilities noting that the proposed savings were very small in comparison to the overall budget and also to the benefit which the centres delivered to clients and their families. He also referred to the situation at Bonnyton House expressing the view that neither of the alternative proposals currently being scrutinised by KPMG addressed the concerns of the families of current residents. In response, Councillor Lafferty explained that the redesign of services for adults with learning disabilities would still result in the service being available to its client base but at a reduced cost and he commended the service for its role in integrating people with disabilities into the wider community. Referring to Bonnyton House, Councillor Lafferty explained that the centre was losing around £300,000 per annum and that the scrutiny by KPMG on behalf of the CHCP was designed to help eliminate this loss while still providing a high standard of care to its residents.

At this stage, Provost Carmichael invited Councillor Fletcher to sum up.

In summing up, Councillor Fletcher commented on the initiatives proposed by Councillor McCaskill in the course of which he highlighted that the bulk of the anticipated savings lay in the adoption of the Manchester model of workforce planning within the Social Work service. However, he expressed the view that the benefits of this model had not yet been fully proven. Similarly, he expressed the view that Councillor McCaskill had failed to provide any evidence to substantiate the claim of major savings through outsourcing either within the CHCP or in the case of the Fleet Maintenance operation. However, he explained that officers would continue to examine every service which the Council provided in the search for future savings. He concluded his remarks by explaining that the administration had been forced to make a number of very difficult decisions in its endeavours to find savings amounting to £22 million. In spite of there still being a shortfall in the longer term, he considered that the budget had been carefully thought out but conceded that there was still an ongoing requirement to pursue further reductions in spending.

Thereafter on a vote being taken, 12 Members voted for the motion and 6 Members voted for the amendment. The motion was accordingly declared carried and it was agreed:-

- (a) that the proposed Revenue Estimates for 2015/16 be approved;
- (b) that the indicative revenue estimates for 2016/17 and 2017/18 be approved;
- (c) that the recommended level and utilisation of reserves be approved;
- (d) that the 2015/16 Council Tax Band D at £1,126 be approved; and

- (e) to note that management of the Council's finances and service plans would continue to be undertaken on a longer term basis.

GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PLAN 2015/16 TO 2022/2023

1416. The Council considered a report by the Chief Executive seeking approval of the General Fund Capital Plan covering the 8 years from 2015/16 to 2022/2023. A copy of the plan accompanied the report.

The Council:-

- (a) noted the 2015/16 to 2022/23 General Fund Capital Plan; and
- (b) approved the 2015/16 programme and authorised officers to progress the projects contained therein.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - RENT SETTING 2015/16 – 2017/18

1417. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval for a 4.9% rent increase with effect from April 2015 with further increases of 4.9% being applied in April 2016 and April 2017.

The report outlined the process that had been undertaken in determining how the proposed level of the increase had been determined, highlighting that the Housing Service had contacted all tenants to advise them of the proposed increase and to seek their views. It was acknowledged that any increase was extremely regrettable especially given the fact that many households were struggling due to the current financial climate. However, it was noted that the increase was essential to ensure that the Council was able to meet its legal obligations and local priorities.

Subject to the approval of the 4.9% increase, the Council's rents would still be well below that of local housing associations and neighbouring local authorities. The proposed rent increase of 4.9% would provide the necessary resources to continue the investment in the Capital Programme that was required to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). The proposed increase was deemed affordable, was competitive in relation to other providers of socially rented accommodation and would provide the Housing Service with much needed investment to maintain the quality of service provided to East Renfrewshire tenants.

The report emphasised that without an increase of 4.9% and without compromising the need to meet the SHQS, significant reductions in service provision would be required. It was considered that such reductions in service would not be consistent with the expectations and aspirations of Council tenants. In previous years the Council had considered rent increases on an annual basis. However, a three year increase was being proposed in order to provide financial certainty for the Housing Service and to permit effective long term financial planning. A three year proposal would also provide financial certainty to tenants in that it would permit households to be able to anticipate future expenditure.

The report concluded by indicating that the proposed rent increase of 4.9% would ensure that the income from rents would be at a level which would be sufficient to meet the needs of tenants and the demands of the service; the emerging local priorities of tenants; the challenges associated with continuing to meet the SHQS; maintain an ageing stock portfolio;

and make initial provision for improving fuel efficiency and reducing fuel poverty as required by the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH). The proposed increase would take effect from April 2015 and would also apply to all lock ups and garage sites held on the Housing Revenue Account.

The Council:-

- (a) approved the recommendation that a 4.9% rent increase be applied from April 2015; and
- (b) agreed that further increases of 4.9% be applied in April 2016 and April 2017.

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2015/16 – 2019/2020

1418. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval of the proposed Housing Capital Programme 2015/16 to 2019/2020 and authority for officers to progress the projects programmed for 2015/16. A copy of the programme accompanied the report.

The Council approved the proposed Housing Capital Programme for the period 2015/16 to 2019/2020 and authorised the Director of Environment to progress the projects programmed for 2015/16.

APPOINTMENTS

1419. The Council considered a report by the Chief Executive seeking approval for a number of appointments and confirmation that a number of appointments were made not on a personal basis but by virtue of the position of the postholder.

Councillor Fletcher, seconded by Councillor Lafferty, moved the recommendations set out in the report including that with regard to the 2 additional members on the Integration Joint Board, Councillors Buchanan and McAlpine be appointed. Councillor Swift, seconded by Councillor Miller, moved an amendment that Councillor Swift be nominated for membership of Integration Joint Board.

On a vote being taken for the first vacant position, 12 Members voted for Councillor Buchanan, 7 Members voted for Councillor Swift and no Members voted for Councillor McAlpine. Councillor Buchanan was duly appointed.

On a vote being taken for the second vacant position, 12 Members voted for Councillor McAlpine and 7 Members voted for Councillor Swift. Councillor McAlpine was duly appointed.

Thereafter, the Council:-

- (a) confirmed that the positions listed in the report were held by virtue of the principal post held by the relevant Member;
- (b) agreed that in the event that an Elected Member no longer held their principal position, then all other appointments associated with that position would fall and automatically transfer to the new principal postholder;

- (c) agreed that the Leader of the Council and the Convener for Social Work be appointed as 2 of the 4 nominees to serve on the Integration Joint Board with the Convener for Social Work being the Council's nominee as Chair/Vice Chair of the Board, these appointments being by virtue of the positions held as Leader and Convener;
- (d) agreed that Councillors Buchanan and McAlpine be the Council's nominees as the remaining members of the Integration Joint Board;
- (e) agreed that consideration of a further 2 nominees as proxies for any of the nominated members of the Integration Joint Board be continued for further consideration;
- (f) approved the establishment of an Appointments Committee to interview and appoint to the posts of Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) and Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); and
- (g) approved the composition of the Appointments Committee as outlined in the report.

ETHICAL STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE ETC. (SCOTLAND) ACT 2000 - STANDARDS COMMISSION HEARING

1420. The Council considered and noted a report by the Deputy Chief Executive outlining the terms of the written decision made by the Standards Commission in relation to Councillor Grant.

CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2016 AND AMENDMENT TO 2015 CALENDAR

1421. The Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive seeking approval for changes to the 2015 calendar of meetings and approval for the 2016 meetings calendar.

The report explained that the Committee Services Team formed the core election team for the administration and delivery of elections in East Renfrewshire. Due to the increasing requirements associated with the delivery of electoral events, it had become increasingly difficult for the team to deliver the elections and also to continue to provide secretariat support for those meetings that take place in the run up to election day and those meetings that take place in the period just after election day.

In order to address this, and following consultation with the Corporate Management Team, it was proposed to move or cancel a number of meetings scheduled to take place around the date of the UK General Election on 7 May 2015. A list of the proposed changes was included in the report. The proposed changes would allow the team to focus on the delivery of the election. Similarly, in view of the fact that elections to the Scottish Parliament would take place on 7 May 2016, the 2016 meetings calendar, a copy of which was appended to the report, had been prepared on the same basis as the changes proposed for 2015.

The Council agreed to approve:-

- (a) the amendments to the 2015 calendar of meetings; and

1340

(b) the 2016 calendar of meetings.

PROVOST