

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock, on 13 February 2014.

Present:

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

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; Norie Williamson, Director of Finance; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy Services; Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (School Performance and Provision); Barbara Clark, Chief Accountant; Phil Daws, Housing Services Manager; Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager; and Paul O’Neil, Committee Services Officer.

Apology:

Councillor Jim Swift.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

925. No declarations of interest were intimated.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

926. The Council considered and approved the Minute of the meeting held on 11 December 2013.

MINUTE OF SPECIAL MEETING

927. The Council considered and approved the Minute of the special meeting held on 29 January 2014 except as otherwise referred to in Item 928 below.

PROPOSED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN – RESPONSE TO REPRESENTATIONS

928. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting (Page 869, Item 915 refers), Councillor Grant stated that comments she had made about traffic management and road safety in the vicinity of the proposed school site on South Waterfoot Road, Newton Mearns had not been recorded in the Minute.

Councillor Devlin sought clarification whether the person referred to as an objector to the non-inclusion of land at Patterton for housing and around Ryatt Farm and Ryatt Linn for mixed use developments was a Mr David Jesner. In reply, the Director of Environment confirmed this to be the case.

Referring further to the Minute (Page 873), Councillor Wallace requested that the word “supportive” be removed.

The Council:-

- (a) noted the comments made and the additional clarification provided; and
- (b) approved the Minute, subject to the amendment requested by Councillor Wallace.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES

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

- (a) Appointments Committee – 12 December 2013;
- (b) Planning Applications Committee – 13 December 2013;
- (c) Appointments Committee – 16 December 2013;
- (d) Local Review Body – 8 January 2014;
- (e) Cabinet – 16 January 2014;
- (f) Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 16 January 2014;
- (g) Education Committee – 23 January 2013;
- (h) Licensing Committee – 23 January 2014;
- (i) Cabinet – 30 January 2014;
- (j) Local Review Body – 5 February 2014; and
- (k) Appeals Committee – 11 February 2014.

PROVOST ENGAGEMENTS

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

STATEMENTS BY CONVENER

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

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

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

PRUDENTIAL CODE FOR CAPITAL FINANCE

933. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 7 February 2013 (Page 387, Item 406 refers), the Council considered a report by the Director of Finance, 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 2013/14 to 2016/17 were appended to the report.

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

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL REVENUE ESTIMATES 2014/15

934. The Council considered a report by the Director of Finance, together with the proposed Revenue Estimates for 2014/15 of income and expenditure as the basis for the Council Tax declaration for 2014/15.

The report explained the process for constructing the budget proposals for 2014/15 where departments were required to provide detailed budget information by August 2013 in respect of the cost of services to be provided in 2014/15. 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, and Revenue implications of the Capital Programme.

The report further explained that Scottish Government grant funding for 2014/15 (i.e. Aggregate External Finance (AEF)) which was the mainstream grant support for the Council and was determined by the Scottish Government and that the Council's total grant for 2014/15 would be £169.267 million which incorporated funding to support a Council Tax freeze and the delivery of Change Funds. The grant included additional resources to meet a number of additional responsibilities, such as the costs associated with the Children and Young People Bill. Excluding these additional resources, the core grant level for next financial year was in line with that assumed in the February 2013 indicative budget for 2014/15.

It was noted that the previous Council Tax Benefit arrangements had been replaced by the Council Tax Reduction scheme. Funding for that scheme would be provided through Scottish Government grant. However, an arrangement had been agreed at a national level whereby a shortfall in funding transferred from the DWP to the Scottish Government would be funded on a 23:17 basis between the Scottish Government and local government. The Council's share of this unfunded element would be met from the Welfare Reform contingency provision.

Details of the conditions that councils had to agree to apply over the current Spending Review period to ensure receipt of the headline grant level were outlined in the report. These were noted as a Council Tax freeze, and maintaining teacher numbers in line with pupil numbers and securing places for all probationers who required one under the teacher induction scheme. If the Council had not agreed to deliver these commitments, the grant would be reduced by £2.285 million.

The Change Funds made available to the Council were also outlined in the report. In particular, the budget proposals incorporated the following assumptions in relation to each of the Change Funds. The Early Years Change Fund where the approved 2013/14 budget included a contribution from the Council of £558,000 with the budget proposing an increase in this contribution to £785,000 in 2014/15. In relation to the Health and Social Care Change Fund where the approved 2013/14 budget included a contribution from the Council of £336,000 it was proposed to maintain the contribution at that level in 2014/15.

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 £862,000 by way of deduction from AEF grant in 2014/15 and this contribution had been reflected in the grant figure.

Whilst noting the savings proposals and one-off investment flexibility in 2014/15, the report highlighted that the draft revenue estimates for 2014/15 provided for net expenditure of £213.587 million. The net expenditure figures reflected additional provision of £2.144 million in 2014/15 to meet client service demand pressures being experienced by the Community Health and Care Partnership (CHCP) service. Demand pressures were particularly being experienced in older people (where the population aged over 85 was increasing by 4% each year), looked after children, and people with learning disability.

Setting aside earmarked reserves, the balance on the unallocated General Fund as at 31 March 2013 stood at £8.519 million and it was anticipated that in closing the 2013/14 accounts £95,000 would be used from the Fund resulting in an estimated balance at 31 March 2014 of £8.424 million. It was not planned to budget for a further contribution to the General Fund Reserve in 2014/15 and the closing balance on the General Fund at 31 March 2015 was projected to remain at £8.424 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 Public Service Excellence (PSE) Programme and transformation activity. It was anticipated that in closing the 2013/14 accounts a contribution of £500,000 would be made to the Fund. The report proposed to incur Spend to Save expenditure of £400,000 and Transformation expenditure of £400,000 in 2014/15 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 2014/15 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 will be drawn down if next year's winter is more adverse than "average". Finally, the Capital Reserve where it was anticipated that in closing this year's financial accounts a contribution of £2.7 million would be made to the Reserve. In the budget for 2014/15 it was proposed to incorporate a contribution of £150,000 to the Reserve. This would assist in maintaining capital investment during the current economic downturn and in managing the impact of the Scottish Government rephasing the Council's capital grant over the current 4 years.

The revenue estimates appended to the report were based on a Band D Council Tax level of £1,126 being set for 2014/15 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 and in particular the identification of efficiencies in the preparation of the Revenue Estimates 2014/15. Finally, he thanked the staff in the Finance Department for their professional advice and co-ordination. He also paid special thanks to Mr Norie Williamson, Director of Finance as this was his last budget meeting before his retirement.

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 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 7 February 2013. At that meeting, an indicative budget for 2014/15 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 2013. Given the limited financial resources available to the Council these had been invested wisely and directed to Council priorities.

Councillor Fletcher highlighted that efficiency savings had been maximised through the Public Service Excellence (PSE) Programme, and that 70% of these savings that had been achieved over the 2 year budget were in the form of efficiencies. He stated that the Council was now a leaner organisation with PSE delivering a reduction of 231 FTE posts over the last 4 years with the number of Chief Officers being reduced from 27 to 17 (i.e. 37%). Similar to previous years, the Council Tax would be frozen at £1,126 remaining unchanged since 2007/08 and continuing to be the lowest Council Tax in Scotland where the average was noted as £1,149.

He also referred to the findings of the Christie Commission which had recognised growing public sector demands combined with continuing financial constraints meaning that fundamental consideration had to be given to reshaping public service provision into the future. The Council had already embarked on radical changes to the Community Health and Care Partnership (CHCP) services giving residents more autonomy and control through self directed support; through re-ablement, delivery of early intensive support when an elderly resident left hospital to assist in speedy return to their home. In addition, investment in early intervention measures would not only help in addressing future years' demand pressures on services but also deliver more fundamental change in society. It was recognised that the benefits from such investments might take many years to be realised, however, the Council was fully committed to invest in this change with investments of £785,000 for Early Years and £336,000 for Health and Social Care.

Councillor Fletcher also stressed the importance of treating staff fairly. He recognised the impact that the savings measures had on staff at a time of minimal pay rises and pressure on pensions. He stated that the Council was committed to no compulsory redundancies and had a long standing commitment to low paid staff. In this regard, it was proposed to increase the living wage to £7.65 per hour from April 2014 which would see 483 Council employees benefit.

Furthermore, the Council proposed to invest in each of the 5 Single Outcome Agreement priorities. He then outlined details of the proposed investment in respect of each priority including the re-modelling of the Glen Family Centre for full provision of under 3 year olds

providing better facilities for staff and children; the proposal to build a new £3.4 million early years family centre and community hub on the site of the former Auchenback Primary School; and the proposed construction of a primary school in the Newton Mearns area to include 60/60 nursery provision. Other investment proposals would include the construction of a new replacement Barrhead High School together with plans for two new primary schools in the Newton Mearns area. It was also proposed to provide additional investment of £211,000 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. Proposals to invest in the highly successful graduate internship programme with £50,000 of additional funding were also outlined.

Councillor Fletcher then referred to the proposed investment in the award winning mixed tenure estates programme. In this regard, £200,000 would be invested from the General Fund and £100,000 from the Housing Revenue Account. Furthermore, the Council would continue to improve waste services to make more efficient and maximise re-cycling potential. Whilst highlighting that the Council's recycling rate of 53% was ahead of the Scottish Government target of 50% and that the Council was one of the best performing councils in Scotland, Councillor Fletcher stated that investment in parks as social spaces would continue, referring in particular to significant investment in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund within Rouken Glen Park which would see a £2.3 million investment and through the masterplan for improvement of Cowan Park.

The transformation of Barrhead Sports Centre into Barrhead Foundry was cited as another investment proposal where the Council would invest £3.8 million. It was anticipated the new facility would be open during 2014/15. This would extend the sports centre to create a state of the art community hub with improved sports facilities, new library, business and back to work support, café and flexible community and learning spaces.

Councillor Fletcher also emphasised the considerable demand pressures being experienced within CHCP services including Children and Families, and physical/sensory disability clients. Additional investment was being proposed to recognise these demand pressures. Community Warden and Campus Cop budgets had again been protected and full implementation of self-directed support would apply from April 2014 giving people greater control over their support. He also made reference to the uncertainties surrounding Welfare Reform changes. Recognising the uncertainties but more significantly the impact they would have for some of the most vulnerable members of local communities, contingency provision had been included in the budget to be drawn down during the year following clarification of the impact of the changes. The Council would also be investing £6.5 million as its contribution towards funding of the new Eastwood Health and Care Centre. It was noted that as with other areas of CHCP provision, service demand for older people was being experienced with the over 85 population being the biggest consumer of CHCP services and increasing 4% every year. Again, additional investment had been available to the CHCP to recognise this demand. In addition, the aids and adaptations budget was proposed to increase by £100,000 to assist people to remain in their own homes,

Turning to the financial outlook, Councillor Fletcher suggested that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement clearly set out that the UK Government had no intention of changing its programme of austerity measures. He emphasised that the Council was in the middle of long period of cuts and financial difficulties and that based on external commentaries on the Chancellor's statement, it was projected that the Council could face a shortfall in funding of around £25 million over the 3-year period 2015/16 to 2017/18.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, Councillor Fletcher emphasised that the Council would not turn away from taking tough financial decisions emphasising the importance of the public understanding why decisions were being made as a direct result of cuts in government grant which was the main source of Council funding. Given the financial difficulties the Council would face he highlighted that it would take bravery and cross party collaboration to ensure everything possible was done to protect the Council's essential front line services. The Council had a sound level of reserves to assist in addressing financial difficulties and it was re-assuring that the Council had the lowest level of debt of any Scottish council.

Concluding his remarks, he moved that the Council:-

- (a) approve the 2014/15 revenue estimates;
- (b) approve the recommended level and utilisation of reserves;
- (c) approve the 2014/15 Council Tax Band D at £1,126; and
- (d) 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 2014/15 to the Council. He paid tribute to Mr Norie Williamson, Director of Finance and all his staff for their work in the preparation of the budget. He also stated that without doubt the Council would face difficult decisions in the future. However, the budget that had been prepared was responsible and would address priorities for the residents of East Renfrewshire. He highlighted the measures being taken by the Council to address the economic downturn. In particular, he cited as an example the successful graduate internship scheme where 60 graduates had benefited from the scheme with 94% achieving positive outcomes at the end of their internship.

Thereafter, Councillor Wallace, seconded by Councillor Gilbert moved as an amendment that the Administration's budget be accepted in full, subject to the following alterations:-

- (a) that savings in the Council's Revenue Estimates 2014/15 totalling £760,000 be made as follows:-
 - (i) Social Work "Lean" Re-organisation – 5% of 1st year recovery on Social Work restructure - £40,000;
 - (ii) Application of Maximising Attendance Policy:
 - (15% x £2.3 million) Reduction in overtime requirement - £345,000
 - (15% of £365,000) Reduced Agency staff - £55,000.
 - Total saving of £400,000;
 - (iii) Community Planning Facilitative Programme: (0.05% of £210 million expenditure) - £105,000;
 - (iv) Public Relations and ER Magazine - £55,000; and
 - (v) Implementation of Recycling Payback Policy - £160,000.

- (b) that the savings identified be reinvested as follows:-
- (i) Occupational Health Investment - £40,000;
 - (ii) Home Care Restructure Career Path - £20,000;
 - (iii) Council Asset – De-Risk Initiative - £65,000;
 - (iv) Street Cleaner Pilot - £50,000;
 - (v) Vocational Careers Initiative - £20,000;
 - (vi) Eastwood Leisure Centre - £175,000;
 - (vii) Recycling Community Payback Policy - £240,000; and
 - (viii) Technology Accelerator Initiative for Schools - £150,000.
- (c) that a further £500,000 be invested in roads projects to be funded from the Repairs and Renewals Fund; and
- (d) that a further £500,000 in terms of Future Years' Commitments – Funded from the Regeneration Provision in the Capital Plan for Food Grade Business Incubation.

Commenting on the amendment, Councillor Wallace outlined a range of savings that in the opinion of the Conservative Group could be achieved in the Revenue Estimates 2014/15. He began by stating that without question the most challenging factor the Council faced this year and would continue to face was the growing demand on the Community Health and Care Partnership (CHCP). He suggested that savings of £40,000 could be achieved in the CHCP by what he described as a 'lean' re-organisation of Social Work. He cited as an example a similar re-organisation that the City of Manchester had carried out where through a process of job evaluation and redesign it was found that a third of a social worker's workload could be safely broken down into simple jobs that could either be given over to the Council's Customer First or to younger less qualified staff.

He also referred to the Council's absenteeism levels which were highlighted in 2013 and more recently had formed a key part of the Chief Social Work Officer's report which revealed some 10,000 days were being lost in the CHCP through absenteeism. This figure was the equivalent of 50 full time employees. To address this problem, he proposed that the Council should double the Occupational Health budget from £40,000 to £80,000 in line with other councils who seemed to fare significantly better in terms of reduced absenteeism. He also highlighted the Council's reliance on overtime and employment of agency staff to cover absences which had not changed over the last year. He suggested that investment in the Occupational Health budget and continued enforcement of and adherence to the Council's revised Maximising Attendance policy would yield significant savings as reflected in the Conservative Group's amendment.

Whilst acknowledging that absenteeism was a problem not just for the CHCP, he highlighted that it was recognised that 70% of the Council's Home Care staff were over 50 with 15% being over 60. This age profile, with a higher pre-disposition to ill health, together with the nature of the work carried out would skew the absence figures. He also questioned how the Council might attract younger people into the Home Care service and suggested that the service should try to take on young people on a modern apprenticeship-style training programme where Home Care became an integral part of the training process. He proposed that this could be achieved by investing £20,000 for a curriculum professional to explore, prepare and deliver a Scottish Qualifications Authority accredited curriculum specifically designed to meet the needs of the CHCP. He acknowledged that the results might not be immediate but in the longer term this line of work could be afforded the recognition it deserved.

In 2013, he had suggested the introduction of a voluntary facilitative programme which sought to harness the resources of the young at heart. He cited as an example, the Age Concern Eastwood Dementia Project which recently worked with the Mearns Kirk Church Group to establish a social lunch club for people in the early/moderate stages of dementia run solely by local volunteers. He stated that he had applied a notional one twentieth of 1% of the Council's annual spend in the delivery of services presently subsumed under the responsibility of the Council, which when properly allocated could see savings in excess of £105,000 a year. Finally, he suggested that savings in the region of £55,000 could be achieved by reducing the Council's public relations resource and ERC Magazine and that the public would see no appreciable difference.

Comparing and contrasting the fortunes of the town centres throughout East Renfrewshire, Councillor Wallace highlighted the major regeneration works in Barrhead town centre in recent years, whereas Clarkston town centre was struggling to meet the challenges of the current economic climate. He congratulated the councillors in Barrhead for what had been achieved and suggested that there was now a need to address the problems being faced in other town centre areas. He referred to the significance of the decision to locate the Council Offices, Leisure Centre, and Health and Social Care Centre all on Barrhead Main Street, and to the positive impact this decision had. He highlighted that this contrasted with the various moves out of Clarkston Town Centre, referring in particular to the closure of both the Clarkston Medical Centre and the GP practice in the town as part of the establishment of the new purpose built complex on Drumby Crescent. Effectively, the town centre's footfall would dramatically drop and existing businesses were either closing or re-locating in anticipation of the move. A similar situation existed at The Avenue shopping centre in Newton Mearns.

To counter this he proposed that the Council move the Council's entire Customer First team into the Council owned premises at Clarkston and Lygates at The Avenue shopping centre. By doing so, not only would Clarkston and/or The Avenue benefit from employees purchasing goods locally but all the customers that use the service would be drawn into the respective town centres, increasing footfall, and the potential for increased trade for local businesses. He also questioned the rationale of locating business incubation units in industrial estates. Whilst acknowledging that some of these units were more suited to that environment, he suggested as an example that a small IT repair or business service unit in the centre of Clarkston would not only benefit from the existing footfall but other businesses would benefit from the increase in passing trade. In this regard, he proposed that the Council invest £65,000 and this would allow the Council to expand opportunities for development of this type and include Clarkston Medical Centre, Burnfield Road, Busby Gate, and Lygates at the Avenue and prepare them for sale to developers who specialised in this sector.

He also expressed concern about the problem of litter in town centre areas and suggested that perhaps it was time for the Council to invest more in manual rather than mechanical sweeping. By reinvesting £50,000 from the proposed savings, he suggested that a pilot scheme could be run to address this problem.

He reiterated the earlier remarks made by Councillors Fletcher and Buchanan concerning the great success of the graduate trainee scheme and proposed that by expanding the scheme further it could include modern apprentices. He suggested that the Council could use its powers to influence developers by expanding the concept of planning gain and engineer in community benefit whereby for example if a developer wanted to build a supermarket they would be required to provide the environment and resources to deliver amongst other things pre-employment skills workshops to get individuals ready for work; and work experience and on-site training placements to provide real training to increase their chance of getting a job.

He also emphasised that it was not just pupils that needed inspiration their parents too had to understand that vocational training/modern apprenticeships were just as important in terms of stimulating the economy as degree qualifications. In this regard, he proposed the development of a vocational careers initiative where £20,000 of the savings identified could be re-invested.

Contrasting the poor condition of Eastwood Leisure Centre with the leisure facilities at Barrhead and Neilston where millions were being spent, he referred to a list of problems at the centre that needed immediate attention which were as a result of years of neglect. He suggested that a sum of £175,000 be re-invested at the centre to cover the cost of remedial works. He also congratulated the Council for its performance in terms of recycling where at 53% the Council was 12% above the Scottish national average and well on its way to the Scottish Government's 2020 target of 60%. He indicated that every tonne of material that the Council recycled provided a net benefit of £160 (£100/tonne from avoiding landfill tax and a further £60 from the sale of the recycled material). Whilst indicating that £160 might not sound much, every percentage point equated to 500 tonnes of material which in turn translated into £80,000 for every 1%. Based on the Council's current performance, this equated to £960,000. A figure of 3% equates to £240,000. That money would be ring fenced for recycling initiatives only.

He also proposed that £150,000 be reinvested to accelerate the implementation of wi-fi technology throughout the school estate. Given that a pilot scheme was already operating at Mearns Castle High School which was nearing fruition, Councillor Wallace stated that no doubt Parent Councils throughout East Renfrewshire would be expecting this in their own schools in the future.

Turning to the condition of the roads in East Renfrewshire, Councillor Wallace questioned why the road repairs budget was being reduced. He indicated that in 2013, the Council had made a greater investment which resulted in a reduction in the level of complaints due to the fact that people could see that the Council was trying to do something to address the problem. However, he was now beginning to receive complaints from constituents and suggested that the Council needed to keep on top of this problem. In this regard, he proposed that £500,000 be used from the Repairs and Renewals Fund to at least keep the roads from further deterioration. Concluding his remarks, he emphasised that the Conservative Group's amendment adopted the Administration's budget but included the savings and investments as outlined. He commended the amendment to the Council for its approval.

Councillor Lafferty was heard in support of the motion in the course of which he acknowledged the difficulties being faced by the Homecare service as referred to by Councillor Wallace. However, he indicated that measures were being taken by management to address the issue. He also expressed concern about the proposal put forward by Councillor Wallace regarding the 'lean' reorganisation of the work of social workers. Concluding his remarks, he emphasised that the Council needed cross party support to face up to the financial difficulties in the future.

In reply to the criticism levelled by Councillor Wallace about the condition of the Eastwood Leisure Centre, Councillor Montague explained that a programme of works were being drawn up to address the problems that had been highlighted at the centre. Whilst acknowledging the issues that had been raised, she stated that officers were working to deliver a package of improvements.

Councillor Robertson did not support Councillor Wallace's proposal to move the Council's Customer First team to Clarkston although he did support the idea of more manual street cleaning. He commented on the poor condition of Cathcart cemetery and expressed disappointment that the Council had reduced the budget for cemeteries from £59,000 in 2013/14 to £44,000 in 2014/15.

In reply to a question by Councillor McCaskill about the “Floors” arrangement, the Director of Finance explained that the Council’s contribution was not imposed as it was agreed at a national level and the arrangement was designed to recognise those authorities that required more assistance.

Referring to Councillor Wallace’s comments on vocational training, Councillor O’Kane highlighted that there already existed an excellent vocational training programme in East Renfrewshire where there were courses for S5 and S6 pupils. In reply to the proposal in the amendment to expand the wi-fi pilot to other schools in East Renfrewshire, he suggested that it was important to first ascertain what the impact of doing so would have on the safety of pupils and teachers.

In reply to the concerns expressed by Councillor Robertson about Cathcart Cemetery, Councillor Waters explained that there was a need to make reductions across all budgets. He offered to meet Councillor Robertson with a view to addressing some of the concerns he had raised. In reply to the proposal in the amendment to run a pilot for cleansing operatives to be issued with brushes, he saw no benefit in doing so given that the service would have to be withdrawn in the future.

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

In summing up, Councillor Fletcher commented on the new initiatives proposed by Councillor Wallace in the course of which he highlighted that no explanation was given as to how these would be paid for in the future. He indicated that any member of the Council could raise proposals with departmental directors and they would be given due consideration. He also suggested that there had been a change of thinking by the Conservative Group in terms of vocational training given that they had argued against the establishment of a college in Barrhead. In terms of absenteeism levels, he accepted that these needed to be addressed. However, he did not accept the criticism levelled against the ER Magazine given that the publication was welcomed by Council residents.

Thereafter on a vote being taken, 14 Members voted for the motion and 5 Members voted for the amendment. The motion was accordingly declared carried and it was agreed:-

- (a) that the proposed Revenue Estimates for 2014/15 be approved;
- (b) that the recommended level on utilisation reserves be approved;
- (c) that the 2014/15 Council Tax Band D at £1,126 be approved; and
- (d) 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 2014/15 TO 2021/2022

935. The Council considered a report by the Director of Finance seeking approval of the General Fund Capital Plan covering the 8 years from 2014/15 to 2021/22. A copy of the plan accompanied the report.

Whilst noting that capital receipts were limited in the current economic climate, the report emphasised that it was essential that the Council demonstrated Best Value in maximising the receipt to be generated from the disposal of an asset. In keeping with that, the proposed plan made prudent and cautious assumptions in both the level of receipts available and timescale for possible receipts.

The report highlighted that the Council had actively taken steps to build up its Capital Reserve to ensure that investment levels were maintained in light of the restrictions placed on the Council's capital investment from the constraints on resources. In closing the accounts in 2012/13, the Council had supplemented the Capital Reserve by £6.119 million. Similarly, it was anticipated that in closing this year's financial accounts, a further contribution of £2.7 million would be made to the Capital Reserve. The revenue budget for 2014/15 proposed a further provision of £150,000 to be directed towards the Capital Reserve to assist in supporting investment within the Capital Plan.

Despite the economic difficulties and the impact they were having on public sector funding, over the 8 year period of the Capital Plan, the Council would take forward additional investment on projects totalling over £100 million; £60 million of that being in the first 3 years. In this regard, the report provided details of a range of projects that would be undertaken across all Council departments. These would include the delivery of a new Eastwood Health and Care Centre with the Council investing £6.5 million; investing in early years preventative measures through £3.4 million in the Auchenback Family Centre and Community Hub; construction work beginning on a new Barrhead High School with the cost to the Council of this project being £11.2 million; committing to building two new primary schools for the Mearns area, one of these being a joint faith campus and would be the first in Scotland; continued investment in the Barrhead Foundry totalling £3.8 million; and continuing capital investment in roads projects totalling £10.6 million.

Whilst noting the investment proposals in the plan, Councillor Wallace remarked that there were no investment proposals for the Eastwood Leisure Centre as referred to earlier in the meeting by Councillor Montague. Councillor Lafferty welcomed the proposals in the plan, particularly the investment relating to the CHCP in terms of the new Eastwood Health and Care Centre and the Early Years Centre at Auchenback. Councillor O'Kane was also heard in support of the investment proposals especially those relating to the school estate and the Early Years Centre at Auchenback. However, Councillor Gilbert expressed disappointment about the level of investment directed towards roads projects which in his opinion did not reflect the funding that was needed to address road repairs across East Renfrewshire.

In reply to a question by Councillor Miller about the safe routes to schools initiative, the Director of Environment advised that the initiative was primarily targeted at primary schools but that consideration could be given to including Williamwood High School as part of the initiative.

The Council:-

- (a) noted the 2014/15 to 2021/22 General Fund Capital Plan; and
- (b) approved the 2014/15 programme and authorised officers to progress the projects contained therein.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - RENT SETTING 2014/15

936. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval of a 5% rent increase with effect from April 2014.

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 recession. 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 5% increase, the Council's rents would still be well below that of local housing associations and neighbouring local authorities. The proposed rent increase of 5% 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 Housing services with much needed investment to maintain the quality of service provided to East Renfrewshire tenants.

The report emphasised that without an increase of 5% 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.

The report concluded by indicating that the proposed rent increase was considered to be the lowest increase necessary to allow Housing services to continue to invest in its housing stock to meet the SHQS by 2015, whilst continuing to provide a high level of service to its customers and meeting the legal priorities of the tenants. The proposed increase would take effect from April 2014 and would also apply to all lock ups and garage sites held on the revenue account.

Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Fletcher moved that the proposed 5% rent increase be applied from April 2014 in the course of which Councillor Fletcher emphasised that whilst the 5% increase was challenging, the Council needed to invest in its housing stock.

Councillor Robertson moved as an amendment that the rent increases should be tied to the Consumer Price Index/Rate of Inflation and linked to the Housing Capital Programme. In the absence of a seconder, his amendment fell.

Councillor Robertson expressed concern about the impact the 5% increase would have on the Council tenants in his ward and in his opinion, the increase should not be above the rate of inflation.

Councillor Wallace whilst acknowledging the comments made by Councillor Robertson stressed that the Council was required to achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015 and the proposed increase would assist the Council in achieving that objective.

Councillor Buchanan highlighted that these were difficult economic times for everyone and whilst he had sympathy with the comments made by Councillor Robertson, the Council had to invest in its housing stock to achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.

The Council approved the recommendation that a 5% rent increase be applied for 2014/15 with effect from 1 April 2014 with the increase also being applied to all garage sites and lock ups held on the Housing Revenue Account.

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2014/15 – 2019/2020

937. The Council considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval of the proposed Housing Capital Programme 2014/15 – 2019/2020 and authority for officers to progress the projects programmed for 2014/15. A copy of the programme accompanied the report.

The report provided background details regarding the anticipated capital expenditure requirements for Housing services for the next 5 years. It was noted that the vast majority of expenditure on the Housing Capital Programme between the present time and 2015 would

relate to the need to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). The report also highlighted that the Scottish Government, in an attempt to drive an improvement in standards within the social rented housing sector within Scotland, was committed to the delivery of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard, which local authorities were expected to meet by 2015.

Whilst noting that at the end of September 2013 around 88.8% of the Council's housing stock was compliant with the SHQS and it was anticipated that by the end of this financial year Housing services expected to be 92% compliant, the report indicated that anticipated capital receipts mainly from Council house sales continued to be significantly lower than previous levels. The report indicated that from sales of about 100 Council properties per year in around 2005, sales were now expected to be no more than 10-15 per year. This had resulted in a decrease in income of over £1.5 million per annum. As a consequence, the Housing Capital Programme needed to be funded by borrowing or higher rents to allow the Council to meet the SHQS target date.

Referring to the Prudential Indicators report approved earlier in the meeting, Councillor McCaskill expressed the view that these indicators should correspond with the same period of time as the Capital Programme rather than the Council being asked to approve a programme when such indicators were not known. In reply, the Director of Finance explained that the Council followed professional advice regarding the prudential code for capital finance to the Council.

The Council approved the proposed Housing Capital Programme for the period 2014/15 to 2019/2020 and authorised the Director of Environment to progress the projects programmed for 2014/15.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REPORT FOR 2014/15

938. The Council considered a report by the Director of Finance seeking approval of the Treasury Strategy Statement Report 2014/15, 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 revised Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice 2009, 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 16 January 2014. With comments made in relation to the strategy contained in the Minute of that meeting (Page 851, Item 895 refers) thereafter, the annual investment strategy which set out treasury management activities for the coming year was being submitted to the Council for consideration.

The Council approved the Treasury Strategy Statement Report 2014/15, including the amendment of treasury management practices in accordance with Appendix C accompanying the report.

STATUTORY REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

939. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 11 December 2013 (Page 818, Item 873 refers), the Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive seeking approval of the new polling scheme for the East Renfrewshire area, a copy of which accompanied the report.

Whilst noting that the Council was required to conduct a review of polling places and polling districts by 2015, the report explained that the review had been carried out now to allow the new arrangements to be in place in time for the raft of forthcoming elections and Scottish Independence Referendum. Once the review had been completed and a final scheme approved, a further review would not be required until 2018. It was noted that consideration had been given to the comments received regarding alternatives to the current polling places but on balance it was not recommended that any changes be made.

The Council:-

- (a) approved the new polling scheme which was appended to the report; and
- (b) agreed that delegated powers be granted to the Chief Executive to alter or amend any polling place should it become unavailable or unviable for example due to fire or flood.

PROVOST

