

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of meeting held at 7.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 14 December 2022.

Present:

Councillor Andrew Anderson	Councillor Chris Lunday
Councillor Caroline Bamforth	Councillor David Macdonald (*)
Councillor Tony Buchanan	Councillor Colm Merrick
Deputy Provost Kate Campbell	Provost Mary Montague
Councillor Angela Convery (*)	Councillor Andrew Morrison
Councillor Danny Devlin (*)	Councillor Owen O'Donnell (Leader)
Councillor Paul Edlin	Councillor Katie Pragnell
Councillor Annette Ireland	Councillor Gordon Wallace

Provost Montague in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Julie Murray, Chief Officer – Health and Social Care Partnership (*); Louise Pringle, Director of Business Operations and Partnerships; Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Anthony McReavy, Chief Executive, East Renfrewshire Leisure and Culture Trust; Phil Daws, Head of Environment (Housing and Property Services); Gillian McCarney, Head of Environment (Chief Planning Officer); Gill Darbyshire, Chief Executive's Business Manager; Alison Ballingall, Senior Revenues Manager; John Adam, Project Manager (*); Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager; John Burke, Committee Services Officer; and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

Also Attending:

Iain Marley, Hub West Scotland (*).

(*) indicates remote attendance.

Apologies:

Councillors Betty Cunningham and Jim McLean.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

264. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

Variation in Order of Business

In accordance with the terms of Standing Order 20, and with a view to making the most effective use of officers' time, Provost Montague agreed to vary the order of business in order to facilitate the conduct of the meeting.

EASTWOOD LEISURE CENTRE/THEATRE OPTIONS

265. The Council considered a report by the Chief Executive on the impact of construction cost inflation, energy price inflation and increased interest rates on a range of options with regard to the delivery of a new Eastwood Leisure Centre and Theatre.

Councillor O'Donnell introduced the report and indicated that the decision had been postponed at the meeting of the Council in October (Page 262, item 200 refers). Given the importance of the impact of the project on the Capital Plan, it was important to decide on a favoured option to allow the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) to prepare the Capital Plan for approval in March 2023.

The report detailed the 6 options that were available to the Council in terms of progressing the matter. It was noted that the range of options went from a completely new build maintaining the original brief; new build with reduced specification to maintain the original approved cost; refurbishing the existing facility, retaining the facility and carrying out essential maintenance only.

Councillor O'Donnell stated that the current centre was at end of life and did not meet the needs of the growing population of the area. He further pointed out that following the COVID-19 pandemic and inflationary pressures, the costs of construction and energy had increased considerably. However, he also stated that the Council had a duty to provide for the health and wellbeing of residents and that consideration must be given to what would happen when the current centre could no longer operate.

Councillor Wallace expressed concerns that in his view the decision was being rushed and that it seemed that Option 2 in the report, which was to build a new centre and theatre but with reduced pool and games hall provision, was the only realistic option available. He also sought clarification if £40 million was a realistic cost to refurbish the current centre.

Iain Marley of Hub West responded that the refurbishment cost was difficult to quantify due to issues in dealing with old buildings and this came with greater risk. He also noted that the existing centre had an area of 4,800 square metres, whereas the new centre would have a far larger area at 7,500 square metres, allowing for more amenities to be included. He also pointed out that a new build facility would have a life of 50 to 60 years, whereas refurbishment would only offer a 30 year lifespan.

Councillor Anderson indicated that a refurbishment would also mean the centre being closed for a period of 3 years to enable all of the works to take place. It was also clarified that in respect of Option 2, this would see a smaller theatre and larger main auditorium compared to Option 1.

Councillor Buchanan expressed his view that Option 1 was the optimum choice but recognised the difficulties in delivering that with the increase in costs. The basis on which the estimated reduction in revenue due to a reduction in pool size from 50 metres to 25 metres was explained.

A discussion on levels of contingencies took place, these being set out in the report. It was clarified that if additional funds were required, it would require Council approval.

Responding to a question from Councillor McDonald on why there was no special meetings of the Council to discuss the matter before this meeting the Chief Executive pointed out that there had been a large number of reports and discussions that had taken place on the project over a number of years. However, the landscape had changed in terms of the energy costs and interest rates, and with inflation raising the cost from £55 million to £67 million.

Councillor Morrison asked if there was sufficient demand to make best use of the new centre and it was clarified that as well as increasing the floor space, the space would have higher intensity usage than the previous centre. Furthermore, a new centre would likely bring a rush of new visitors who wanted to see the new facility and what activities were available. It was also noted that there was currently a large waiting list for swimming lessons.

In conclusion, Councillor O'Donnell recognised some of the unease expressed by Members and stated that it had been appropriate to review the options before making a decision.

Thereafter, seconded by Councillor Anderson, Councillor O'Donnell proposed that Option 2 be selected, keeping the original budget approval of £55 million and deferring the start of construction for 2 years to allow further scrutiny and £5 million of revenue savings within years 2 and 3 of the original plan.

Councillor Buchanan stated that, while he agreed with the majority of the points raised by Councillor O'Donnell, he felt there was a risk in delaying for 2 years, as was the case with Option 2. On that basis Councillor Buchanan, seconded by Councillor Merrick, moved as an amendment that Option 2 be selected, but that work begin as soon as possible to deliver the new facility.

Thereafter, on the roll being called, Councillors Anderson, Campbell, Devlin, Edlin, Provost Montague, Morrison, O'Donnell, Pragnell and Wallace voted for the motion. Councillors Bamforth, Buchanan, Convery, Ireland, Lunday and Merrick voted for the amendment. Councillor McDonald abstained.

There being 9 votes for the motion and 6 for the amendment, with 1 abstention, the motion was declared carried.

PROVOST'S REMARKS – CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

266. The Provost advised the Council that Stan Esson had been named as East Renfrewshire's Citizen of the Year for his work with East Renfrewshire Foodbank in Lowndes Street, Barrhead. While Mr Esson had not been available to attend, the Provost would visit the foodbank to present him with his award.

The Council noted the position and that the Provost would pass on the Council's congratulations to him on presenting the award.

MINUTE OF MEETING OF COUNCIL – 26 OCTOBER 2022

267. The Council considered and approve the minute of the meeting held on 26 October 2022.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS FOR THE PERIOD 26 OCTOBER TO 13 DECEMBER 2022

268. The Council considered the meetings of the undernoted:-

- (a) Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 26 October 2022;
- (b) Full Council – 26 October 2022;
- (c) Appointments Committee – 7 November 2022;
- (d) Licensing Committee – 8 November 2022
- (e) Planning Applications Committee – 9 November 2022;
- (f) Local Review Body – 9 November 2022;
- (g) Cabinet – 10 November 2022;
- (h) Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 10 November 2022;
- (i) Education Committee – 17 November 2022;
- (j) Cabinet (Police and Fire) – 24 November 2022;
- (k) Cabinet – 1 December 2022;
- (l) Licensing Committee – 6 December 2022;
- (m) Planning Applications Committee – 7 December 2022;
- (n) Local Review Body – 7 December 2022; and
- (o) Education Committee – 8 December 2022.

The Democratic Services Manager noted comments from Councillor Ireland and Edlin that at the meeting of the Planning Applications Committee on 7 December 2022 they had expressed concerns about the reduction in meetings of the Planning Applications Committee but that these had not been recorded in the Minute.

The Democratic Services Manager reminded Members that Minutes were not a verbatim record of proceedings and clarified that the comments would be noted within the Minute for this meeting rather than as an amendment to the committee Minute. He also reminded Members that the meeting in question was recorded and Members' verbatim comments could be directly viewed in that way.

The Council approved the Minutes.

INTERIM TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2022-23

269. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of 10 November 2022 (Page 295, Item 230 refers), the Council considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) on treasury management activities for the first six months of 2022-23.

The Council:-

- (a) noted the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2022/23; and
- (b) approved the list of organisations at Appendix II for investment of surplus funds.

GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

270. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 1 December 2022 (Page 311, Item 242 refers), the Council considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) monitoring expenditure against the approved General Fund Capital Programme as at 30 September 2022 and recommending adjustments where possible.

Responding to a question from Councillor Ireland on the increase in ICT infrastructure projects and ICT general provision, the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) confirmed that because work had been disrupted in the past few years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a backlog of projects were being rolled forward to the current year. The 10 year Capital Plan would be set on 1 March 2023 and the levels would remain stable unless there was a proposal to increase the figure.

The Council approved the movements within the 2022/23 programme and noted the shortfall of £0.345m.

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME

271. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Cabinet of 1 December 2022 (Page 312, Item 243 refers), the Council considered a joint report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) and Director of Environment, monitoring income and expenditure as at 30 September 2022 against the approved Housing Capital Programme 2022/23, and recommending adjustments where required.

Councillor Ireland expressed concern that a central heating tender for 2 sheltered housing complexes had been delayed, asking which complexes would be affected and when the works would be carried out.

Councillor Devlin responded that he would give further information to Councillor Ireland on those matters in consultation with Housing Services, the Chief Executive confirming that residents would not be left without central heating and the works proposed were upgrades.

The Council agreed:-

- (a) that the revised level of borrowing required to support the programme from £9.965m to £11.465m, an increase of £1.5m about the level approved by Cabinet on 1 September 2022, be approved; and
- (b) that the current movements within the programme be approved.

STATEMENTS BY CONVENERS/REPRESENTATIVES ON JOINT BOARDS/COMMITTEES

272. The following statements were made:-

(a) Councillor Pragnell – Convener for Social Work and Health

Councillor Pragnell paid tribute to Dr Henry Stafford, a partner at Carolside Medical Centre who had served the Clarkston community for over a decade. She offered the condolences of all at the Council to his family at this sad time.

Councillor Pragnell then provided the Council with a summary of the matters discussed at the meeting of the Integration Joint Board on 23 November 2022.

She reported that at the meeting the annual report and accounts for 2021/22 were approved, following a very good report from Audit Scotland. The IJB had recognised that it had been a challenging and complex year and had passed on their thanks to the Council's Chief Financial Officer and wider Finance team.

The IJB's revenue monitoring report for the current year was presented, showing a potential overspend of £500k, which would be met from reserves. There had been discussion around concerns that front line services may be affected by savings required in the coming year. The Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) had committed to looking at service redesign where possible, however, it was clear that difficult choices may lie ahead.

A presentation had been given by the Head of Adult Services, Community and Wellbeing. It highlighted the Scottish Government's 8 priority areas and updated the IJB on the approach to each. In particular, the use of community resources to monitor and support those being discharged from hospitals was discussed.

Significant demand pressure in care at home services had been recorded. The service had a robust system for prioritising cases and was offering additional telecare solutions where appropriate. There were also wellbeing resources available for staff and a dedicated Staff Wellbeing Officer had been recruited to further improve use of those resources.

The IJB had endorsed the HSCP proposal to contact service users and their families to notify them of the current pressures and ask families to provide additional support where appropriate, letters were issued on 25 November 2022.

The HSCP Workforce Plan had been presented and the IJB had agreed that the Plan was well written and robust. There had been discussion around information available on the protected characteristics of the workforce. An update on the Plan would be presented to a future meeting of the IJB.

Finally, the IJB had received a presentation on the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership. HSCP were looking to secure accommodation to provide a recovery space without stigma.

(b) Councillor Anderson – Convener of East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust

Councillor Anderson reported that he had attended the Culture and Leisure Trust Board in his first meeting as a Board member, and provided a summary of the matters discussed at the Board.

The Board had considered the CLT draft business plan, which would come to the Council for approval in the new year. It had been noted that 89% of Scottish Trusts were at risk financially, with 69% currently discussing closure of facilities. Despite this, the East Renfrewshire CLT continued to perform well.

Attendance figures had shown that gym memberships were back to 97% of the pre-COVID figure, with leisure centre attendances at 95%, hall and school out of hours bookings at 106%, swimming lessons at 120% and community sports at 88%, despite the later reopening of the school estate. Councillor Anderson paid tribute to the hard work of staff in enabling these figures.

Libraries were at the forefront of the "warm and welcome spaces" initiative and a programme of activities had been developed over the winter period, as well as providing space for partners like the Money Advice and Rights Team (MART).

A vote of thanks had been given to Andy Allan, who had stepped down as the Independent Board Member. He had chaired the Audit and Risk Committee for the trust and Councillor Anderson hailed his excellent work in that role. A new Independent Board Member would now be recruited.

In conclusion, Councillor Anderson referred to the pantomime at Eastwood Park Theatre, which featured a large professional cast as well as Primary School children. Councillor Anderson outlined the excellent feedback that had been given on both the production and the venue.

PROVOST'S ENGAGEMENTS

273. The Council considered and noted a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships, providing details of civic engagements attended and civic duties performed by Provost Montague since the meeting on 26 October 2022.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE PUBLIC ACCESS DEFIBRILLATOR STRATEGY

274. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Council on 26 October 2022 (Page 263, Item 201 refers), when it had been agreed that officers be instructed to formulate a Council-wide strategy for the deployment and maintenance of public access defibrillators (PADs), and to lobby the Scottish Government to provide additional funding to allow it to partner with voluntary, charity, and community groups to implement this policy, the Council considered a report by the Chief Executive on the deployment and maintenance of Public Access Defibrillators (PADs), including the current position, current costs involved and the options of funding to support it.

Having provided some statistical information in relation to the benefits of defibrillators the report explained that 80 defibrillators were available in East Renfrewshire, with 62 PADs, available 24 hours a day. 26 of those were in Council buildings. The Council was working with partners to identify both funding and suitable locations for additional defibrillators.

The draft East Renfrewshire Council Public Access Defibrillator (PAD) Strategy 2022-2027 accompanied the report.

Commenting on the report, Councillor Pragnell noted that the Strategy called for the appointment of a Defibrillator Champion for the Council and, seconded by Councillor Anderson, nominated Provost Montague for this role.

Councillor Ireland welcomed the paper and thanked Councillors Lunday and Bamforth for their work on this issue in particular. She applauded Renfrewshire Council's approach where PADs were installed at all primary schools and would be installed at secondary schools where they were not already publicly available.

Provost Montague having indicated that the report and strategy was the culmination of work carried out by many people within the Council over a number of years, the Council agreed that:-

- (a) the East Renfrewshire Public Access Defibrillator Strategy 2022 – 2027 be approved;
- (b) the Council encourage the Scottish Government to provide additional funding to support the purchase, installation and maintenance of defibrillators across East Renfrewshire; and

- (c) Provost Montague be appointed as the Defibrillator Champion for East Renfrewshire.

COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION

275. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Council held on 26 October 2022 (Page 267, Item 202 refers), when the Council approved a motion to investigate the changes implemented to East Renfrewshire Council's Council Tax collection and the capacity in East Renfrewshire to establish repayment instalment schedules and report back at this meeting, The Council considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships on Council Tax Collection for East Renfrewshire Council and the process of Council Tax arrears recovery and mitigations in place to support those in financial hardship.

Councillor O'Donnell introduced the report and referred to the Council's 2 competing objectives of collecting Council Tax, which formed 18.3% of its budget, supporting the most vulnerable in the community.

Further mitigation actions had been suggested as a result of the investigation and it was also suggested that a Common Financial Framework be established to ensure that the Money Advice and Rights Team (MART) and Sheriff Officers were working to the same standard. In exceptional circumstances, recovery action could be paused and intervention could take place with MART or the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Having heard the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships, in response to a question from Councillor Ireland, detail the mitigation measures that would be put into place, the Council:-

- (a) noted the steps of the debt recovery process for Council Tax;
- (b) noted the key supports already in place to support vulnerable customers experiencing Council Tax arrears, especially the role of MART and CAB in assisting customers; and
- (c) approved the suggested further mitigations for cases of exceptional financial hardship, recognising that there may be impact to deliverability of proposed savings if demand outstrips staff capacity or additional system development costs were incurred on a cost/benefit basis.

THE EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL (BUSBY)(ON-STREET)(WAITING AND LOADING) ORDER 2022

276. The Council considered a report by the Head of Environment (Chief Planning Officer) recommending that the Council approve the making and confirmation of "The East Renfrewshire Council (Busby) (On-Street) (Waiting and Loading) Order 2022".

The Council approved the making and confirmation of "The East Renfrewshire Council (Busby) (On-Street) (Waiting and Loading) Order 2022" and delegated to the Director of Environment the implementation of the Order in accordance with the associated statutory procedures.

PUBLIC HOLIDAY – KING'S CORONATION 2023

277. The Council considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships seeking approval for the public holiday on Monday 8 May 2023 to mark the coronation of King Charles III.

Having heard the Director of Education confirm that, should the Council approve the report, an application would be made to close schools on the day of the public holiday, the Council agreed to treat Monday, 8 May 2023 as a public holiday for employees to mark the coronation of King Charles III.

CHANGE TO COUNCIL MEETING TIME

278. The Council considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships proposing a change to the timing of those meetings of the Council that normally took place at 7pm.

Following a brief discussion on the accessibility of the meetings to members of the public, the Council agreed that those meetings of the Council that were scheduled to start at 7pm, instead be rescheduled to start at 5pm.

NOTICE OF MOTION – SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

279. In accordance with Standing Order 27, the following notice of motion had been submitted by Councillor Ireland, seconded by Councillor Macdonald.

There are very real concerns from East Renfrewshire residents around Climate Change in general and the use of single-use plastics in particular.

This Council resolves to work towards developing a robust strategy to make East Renfrewshire Council a 'single-use plastic free' authority and encourage East Renfrewshire Council's institutions, businesses, tenants and citizens to adopt similar measures.

Council will also engage with teachers and pupils in our Primary and Secondary schools on the climate change emergency and the actions which can be taken to tackle it, including which measures can be taken to remove the sale of water in plastic bottles from within our schools and replacing this with a more sustainable alternative.

Councillor Ireland pointed out the minor amendment to the second sentence of the motion in comparison to the one printed in the agenda. She also took a moment to praise the efforts of Emilia Hamilton who had been working to raise awareness of this with her local councillors and in her community.

In the absence of an amendment, the motion was declared carried.

NOTICE OF MOTION – SUPREME COURT DECISION OF 23 NOVEMBER 2022

280. In accordance with Standing Order 27, the following notice of motion had been submitted by Councillor Morrison, seconded by Councillor Wallace.

Council notes the decision of the Supreme Court of 23rd November 2022 stating there is no legal constitutional basis on which the Scottish Government can proceed with their planned re-run referendum on Scotland leaving the United Kingdom.

Council welcomes the certainty offered by this decision, noting recent discussions of the Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee on the importance of 'horizon scanning' of possible risks to be added to the Council's Strategic Risk Register, following a recommendation by Audit Scotland on 7th April 2022.

Further, Council welcomes this opportunity for public funding, civil service and Scottish Government resources to now focus on public service improvement, enhancing the services provided by local councils, and in the true spirit of devolution, protecting the autonomy of local government in Scotland.

The Council welcomes stronger prospects for good faith cross-party working and better collaboration across all tiers of government in Scotland, to the benefit of all of our residents.

Councillor Merrick, seconded by Councillor Bamforth, moved an amendment in the following terms:-

Council notes the decision of the Supreme Court of 23rd November 2022.

Council therefore calls on Council Leader to write to UK Prime Minister and ask that they grant a section 30 order so that Scottish Democracy is respected and the will of the Scottish people is expressed.

Provost Montague then invited Councillor Morrison to speak to the terms of the motion.

Councillor Morrison referred to the effects of the COVID-19 and cost of living crisis on Scotland. He stated that, instead of dividing the people of Scotland, its governing institutions should be focused on more important priorities. In particular, he referred to a recent rejection of a planning application where one of the reasons given was that the inclusion of 6 additional houses to the area could cause issues for educational capacity in the area.

He stated that the proposed referendum on independence was the SNP's referendum, not the referendum of the Scottish people, and added that it was a distraction from the SNP's record in Scottish Government. While noting that the SNP had a mandate to govern due to the result of the Scottish Parliament elections in 2021, he stated his opinion that this was not a mandate for another referendum.

Having referred to the Audit Scotland recommendation that the Council conduct horizon scanning for potential risks, he believed that a second referendum would be a major risk to the Council, leading to a deep cut in resources due to the loss of pooling and sharing with the rest of the UK. He also indicated that the Scottish Government had underspent its budget by £2 billion and questioned the commitment of civil servants and government officials to pursuing independence rather than improving local government.

Having referred to comments by the Auditor General calling for more transparency and a more vigorous framework for Scottish Government financial interventions in what he referred to as "pet projects" of the SNP, Councillor Morrison concluded by calling for Members to take the opportunity to work together to fight for a better settlement for local authorities.

Councillor Wallace commended Councillor Morrison's comments and reiterated his willingness to second the motion.

In support of his amendment, Councillor Merrick pointed out that he believed the motion was not competent as there was a legal basis to proceed with a second referendum, which was a Section 30 order, as called for in his amendment. He indicated that there would be no rerun of the 2014 referendum as the landscape had changed utterly since that time.

Councillor Merrick referred to what he called the broken promises of the UK Government and that the Labour Party had pledged to "make Brexit work" and restated his belief that there was a clear mandate for an independence referendum. He stated that democracy could be delayed, but never denied. He believed that the more Scotland was denied a referendum, the more support for independence grew.

In conclusion, Councillor Merrick referred to the cost of living crisis, he stated the blame for this was on the policies of the UK government under the Conservative Party, particularly austerity policies. He commended his amendment to the Council.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Bamforth indicated that she was bemused by the motion as there was still the legal process of a section 30 order by which a referendum could be secured. She referred to the Smith Commission, which stated that nothing in the report prevented Scotland from becoming an independent country if the Scottish people so chose. The question was on calling a referendum without a section 30 order.

Councillor Bamforth pointed out a number of recent polls which showed a majority of Scottish people now supported independence. She also criticised the management of UK finances under the Conservative Party and that they blamed the situation in Ukraine for all of the issues. She referred to Labour and Conservative politicians, in her view, working together in local government and said this made any notion of cross-party working meaningless and shallow.

In conclusion, Councillor Bamforth referred to mitigation spending by the Scottish Government to mitigate UK Government welfare cuts. She also pointed out that, in terms of the Council's Strategic Risk Register, Brexit remained a major risk while independence was not on the Register. She called for Councillors to support the amendment.

Councillor Ireland stated that she agreed that East Renfrewshire Council was collaborative, but that this collaboration was between Labour and the Conservatives. She also noted that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee did discuss horizon scanning in terms of the Strategic Risk Register. She stated that the Conservatives had tried on numerous occasions to add independence to the Register, but this had not happened. Risks would only be added to the Register when the Corporate Management Team deemed it appropriate and that it was not felt necessary to add independence to the Register at this time. In conclusion, she stated her belief that there was no union of equals, as shown by the Supreme Court decision, and supported the amendment.

Councillor Buchanan said that he felt it was strange to hear talk of collaboration on a motion that questioned everything he believed in. He felt that the motion was an attempt to deflect attention from the real issues caused by the UK Government, who were responsible for the economic crisis and the spike in energy prices. He listed a range of scandals, including Brexit, PPE contracts, ventilators and others as evidence of his belief that independence was necessary, rather than a major risk.

Councillor Lunday also supported the amendment and indicated that the SNP had won a number of elections and there was currently a majority in the Scottish Parliament who supported independence.

Councillor Macdonald stated that many of the people who voted to remain in the UK in 2014 were Europeans who felt lied to after Brexit and that a second referendum was now required, via a Section 30 order.

Councillor O'Donnell stated that he didn't believe that East Renfrewshire residents wanted the Council to spend any more time debating independence in the chamber and would prefer all parties to work together to deal with local priorities, such as the cost of living crisis and the educational attainment gap.

After hearing Councillors Edlin and Anderson support Councillor O'Donnell's comments and call for all parties to work together to deliver local priorities, Provost Montague invited Councillor Morrison to sum up his motion.

Councillor Morrison addressed some of the points raised in the debate, stating that people resident in Scotland had voted in 2014 to remain as part of the United Kingdom and that leaving the EU was not sufficient to trigger another referendum. He argued that the motion was competent as the finest legal minds in the United Kingdom had made the judgement to which it referred. He noted that 3 items on the agenda for this meeting were raised in conjunction with SNP members and indicated this was proof of collaboration within the Council and he would welcome more of the same. He called for Members to put people before politics.

Thereafter, on the roll being called, Councillors Anderson, Campbell, Devlin, Edlin, Provost Montague, Morrison, O'Donnell, Pragnell and Wallace voted for the motion. Councillors Bamforth, Buchanan, Convery, Ireland, Lunday, Macdonald and Merrick voted for the amendment.

There being 9 votes for the motion and 7 for the amendment, the motion was declared carried.

NOTICE OF MOTION – COUNCIL FUNDING

281. In accordance with Standing Order 27, the following notice of motion had been submitted by Councillor O'Donnell, seconded by Councillor Anderson.

East Renfrewshire Council is facing unprecedented cuts in budget funding over the next three financial years amounting to over £30m in the core Council budget with additional cuts facing the East Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) of around £20m and East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust (ERCLT) of £2m. Council acknowledges that this scale of cuts will undoubtedly result in significant job losses and reduction in services to our residents including Education, Social Care and the Environment.

Council notes that no one in the Council wants to implement this level of cuts but the Council and its officers have no choice but to produce a legally balanced budget. Council further acknowledges that the Council is efficiently managed and controlled as evidenced by Audit Scotland and the results of the Local Authority Benchmarking review where East Renfrewshire is consistently shown to be a top council performer particularly with respect to Education and the East Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership being recognised as one of the best performing Partnerships in Scotland.

In simple terms, this level of cuts is down to a flat cash budget settlement from the Scottish Government when inflation is currently at 11.1% and unlikely to approach close to 2% over the period of this 3 year budget cycle. Council notes that this settlement continues the trend of less than inflationary budget settlements over the last 15 years which makes this year's budget savings targets much harder to deliver.

Council supports and agrees with COSLA's negotiating and budget lobbying position with the Scottish Government as agreed on 25th November and in particular:

- *Seeking a meeting of Political Group Leaders with the Deputy First Minister to impress on the Scottish Government the seriousness of the financial situation facing Local Government;*
- *Seeking a meeting of Political Group Leaders with local government trade union representatives to discuss a joint approach to budget lobbying and the protection of local public services; and*
- *COSLA officers to work up a detailed case for budget ask based on the need for £1bn+ additional funding to sustain vital local services.*

Council asks for the Chief Executive to write to the Scottish Government, demanding a fairer budget settlement for East Renfrewshire that takes account of inflationary pressures, the impact of local government cuts on job losses and local service delivery, and the consequential recessionary impact, not just in the local East Renfrewshire economy, but across Scotland nationally.

Councillor Lunday, seconded by Councillor Buchanan, moved an amendment in the following terms:-

Council supports and agrees with COSLA's negotiating and budget lobbying position with the Scottish Government as agreed on 25th November.

Council notes the Scottish Government are not responsible for UK inflationary pressures.

Council instructs the Leader to write to the UK PM to seek a fairer block grant for Scotland's government so that Scottish councils are not penalised by decisions taken far from Scotland.

Provost Montague invited Councillor O'Donnell to speak to the terms of the motion.

Councillor O'Donnell stated that he was disappointed that there was an amendment to the motion as it was an opportunity for the whole Council to give a strong message to residents that they would resist the budget cuts. He felt that opportunity was now lost. He outlined the history of cuts to local government funding, with £30m of additional cuts to the Council, £20m for the Health and Social Care Partnership and £2m for the East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust. He pointed out that the scale of the cuts made it difficult to protect any service and put the Council's proud standing as one of the best performing councils in Scotland at risk.

He believed that the Scottish Government had made a conscious decision to offer a flat cash 3 year settlement. He pointed out that 72% of the Council's budget came from the Scottish Government grant, with only 18% from Council Tax. He welcomed the support of all Council leaders in COSLA, stating that the support cut across party lines.

In conclusion, Councillor O'Donnell noted that the Scottish Government continued to choose to reduce budgets for local government while centrally funded initiatives continued to bloat and referred to the Auditor General's comments that more transparency was needed around those projects.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Anderson stated his belief that no Councillor should accept cuts to local government. He noted that £80m of cuts had been implemented since 2015, while the Institute of Fiscal Studies had reported that the block grant to the Scottish Government was now higher than in 2010. He believed that the reduction in jobs and services as a result of the proposed cuts would be a disaster and a result of decisions made in Scotland.

Councillor Lunday stated that he felt it was right for the Council to call for more funding. However, he believed that the motion omitted the root cause of the issues, which was real-terms cuts in the Scottish Government budget by the UK Government. He stated that the Scottish Government had shown it was willing to work with Trade Unions to prevent strikes, unlike the UK Government. He also criticised what he believed was a lack of opposition from the Labour Party in Westminster.

In conclusion, he stated that despite the amount of natural resources produced by Scotland, people were freezing in the winter. He reiterated that he agreed with the substance of the motion to call for additional funding, however he felt it was disingenuous to disregard the role of the UK Government in bringing about the cuts.

Councillor Buchanan remarked that he was disappointed with Councillor O'Donnell's suggestion that there was not agreement across the chamber to call for more funding. He reiterated Councillor Lunday's point that while he didn't agree with everything the Scottish Government did, he believed that the UK Government had responsibility for both the decline in funding to devolved administrations and the inflationary pressures that exacerbated the scale of the funding crisis.

Following a clarification from Provost Montague that there was no coalition administration in East Renfrewshire Council, and that it was a minority Labour administration, Councillor Bamforth stated that this was an obfuscation. She indicated that the UK Government were to blame and the Labour Administration was unwilling to take responsibility for cuts they had to make and so were passing responsibility to the Scottish Government. She referred to 37% of cuts to English councils and that there was a £3.2bn Barnett shortfall to come in 2023, according to Unison. She highlighted that this was against a backdrop of a number of scandals where money was lost to fraud and PPE contracts during COVID lockdown. She concluded that despite protesting against the Conservative Party, Labour councillors were willing to vote alongside them.

Councillor Wallace felt it was depressing to hear the comments around the chamber. He stated that it was not easy for Labour or the Conservatives to try to work together on such matters and stated that he would support the motion.

Councillor Merrick stated that he agreed with the substance of the motion, but merely questioned the lack of blame attributed to the UK Government. He reiterated the point that councils across the UK would be hit by cuts and this wasn't because of the Scottish Government.

Councillor Morrison pointed out the £2bn underspend by the Scottish Government reported by Audit Scotland and that Scotland was the most highly taxed part of the UK. He indicated that the Scottish Government had spent more on Prestwick Airport than the whole East Renfrewshire Council deficit and this showed that the Scottish Government had the wrong priorities.

Provost Montague called for Councillor O'Donnell to sum up the debate.

In summing up, Councillor O'Donnell stated that the £1.5bn Barnett consequentials did not cover inflation, adding that it would be interesting to see if any of that funding was passed on at all. He felt that the language on obfuscation was unhelpful, and that residents would like to see a united front from their Council to resist cuts. He felt that the real obfuscation was from SNP councillors refusing to criticise the Scottish Government. While the UK Government did have a role to play, the Scottish Government were the Council's paymasters, and it was they who should receive the Council's representations on the funding. In conclusion, he called for members to support Council officers in their efforts to set a balanced budget and East Renfrewshire residents, looking for a unified front.

Thereafter, on the roll being called, Councillors Anderson, Campbell, Devlin, Edlin, Provost Montague, Morrison, O'Donnell, Pragnell and Wallace voted for the motion. Councillors Bamforth, Buchanan, Convery, Ireland, Lunday, Macdonald and Merrick voted for the amendment.

There being 9 votes for the motion and 7 for the amendment, the motion was declared carried.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

282. This being the last meeting of the Council prior to Christmas, Provost Montague wished all councillors the compliments of season and was joined by Councillor O'Donnell in thanking staff for their contribution over the year.

PROVOST

