

SOUTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL (SPECIAL)

Minutes of a hybrid webcast meeting
on 17 January 2024 at 10.00 a.m.

Present in County Buildings: Councillors Mary Kilpatrick (Depute Provost), Kenneth Bell, Laura Brennan-Whitefield, Ian Cavana, Alec Clark, Ian Davis, Brian Connolly, Julie Dettbarn, Martin Dowey, Stephen Ferry, William Grant, Hugh Hunter, Martin Kilbride, Alan Lamont, Lee Lyons, Bob Pollock, Cameron Ramsay, Philip Saxton, Gavin Scott, Bob Shields, Duncan Townson and George Weir.

Present Remotely: Councillors Iain Campbell, Ian Cochrane, Chris Cullen and Craig Mackay.

Apologies: Councillors Mark Dixon and Brian McGinley.

Attending in County Buildings: M. Newall, Chief Executive; L. McRoberts, Depute Chief Executive and Director of Education; J. Bradley, Director of Strategic Change and Communities; C. Caves, Head of Legal and Regulatory Services; T. Baulk, Head of Finance, ICT and Procurement; K. Dalrymple, Assistant Director – Housing and Operations; M. Alexander, Service Lead – Housing Services; J. McClure, Committee Services Lead Officer; A. Gibson, Committee Services Officer; C. McCallum, Committee Services Assistant; and E. Moore, Committee Services Assistant.

1. **Depute Provost.**

The Depute Provost

- (1) welcomed everyone to the meeting, outlined the procedures for conducting this meeting and advised that this meeting would be broadcast live;
- (2) intimated that apologies had been received from Councillors Dixon and McGinley; and
- (3) advised that the Provost had written, on the Council's behalf, to express the Council's warmest congratulations to the following recipients of an award in the New Year's Honours List:-
 - Blair Parham, Principal Conductor and Joint Musical Director of the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra who received an MBE for his services to Scottish Music;
 - Detective Constable Jodie McFarlane, Police Scotland who received a BEM for her services to Children and Families in Ayrshire;
 - Robert Douglas McCrae, Poppy Appeal Organiser who received a BEM for his services to veterans;
 - Ian Watson Holland, Chair of Ayr Branch of Enable Scotland who received a BEM for his services to people with disabilities in Ayr and Prestwick;
 - Shendl Harvey, Teacher and Dancer, Royal Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing who received a BEM for her services to dance; and
 - Roy Claxton, Founder of Parkinson's Scottish Table Tennis Association who received a BEM for his services to people with Parkinson's Disease.

2. **Sederunt and Declarations of Interest.**

The Chief Executive called the Sederunt for the meeting and having called the roll, confirmed that there were no declarations of interest by Members of the Council in terms of Council Standing Order No. 17 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

3. **Remit from Meeting of South Ayrshire Council of 7 December 2023 – 'C' Paragraph in Minutes of Cabinet of 28 November 2023 – "Communications Strategy 2023-28 and Communications Team Staffing Proposals"**

Reference was made to the Minutes of:

- (1) Cabinet of 28 November 2023 (Page 9, paragraph 19) which was subject to call-in; and
- (2) South Ayrshire Council of 7 December 2023 (Page 13, paragraph 14) when it had been decided to continue consideration of the recommendations as contained in the 'C' paragraph to this meeting.

There was submitted

- (a) a [report](#) (issued) of 22 November 2023 by the Director of Strategic Change and Communities seeking approval for: the Communications Strategy 2023-28; the Communications Team staffing required to deliver the service and the strategy; and for revised guidance on Managing Work Related Social Media and Media Relations; and
- (b) the [Minute Excerpt](#) for this item from the minutes of Cabinet of 28 November 2023.

The Head of Legal and Regulatory Services outlined the background to this report and advised that, in the absence of the Member who had objected to the terms of the Strategy, consideration of this matter would proceed.

Councillor Martin Dowey, seconded by Councillor Lee Lyons, moved the recommendations as outlined in the report.

The Council

Decided:

- (i) to approve the Communications Strategy 2023-28 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
- (ii) to approve the conversion of two temporary Communications Assistant posts to permanent posts to support the delivery of this strategy and to ensure the continued delivery of the service;
- (iii) to approve the Managing Work Related Social Media Guidance for Employees, as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report;
- (iv) to approve the Media Relations Guidance, as detailed in Appendix 5 of the report; and
- (v) to agree that officers conduct a Review of the activities undertaken by the Communication Team and the evaluation of them, engage with Members and report back to Cabinet with the results of this Review within six months.

Connectivity

Following connectivity problems experienced by Provost Iain Campbell, the Head of Legal and Regulatory Services clarified that he was unable to use his microphone, however, he had confirmed in the “chat box” that he was present and had no Declarations of Interest.

4. Setting of Council House Rents and Other Rents and Charges (2024/25 – 2026/27) and Proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Revenue Budget 2024/25 and Capital Budget (2024/25 - 2028/29)

There was submitted a joint [report](#) (issued) of 11 January 2024 by the Assistant Director – Housing and Operations and the Head of Finance, ICT and Procurement seeking approval to set an appropriate level for council house rents, lock-up and garage site rents and other charges for the period 2024/25 – 2026/27; and to approve the proposed HRA revenue budget for 2024/25 and the proposed 5 year capital budget for 2024/25 – 2028/29.

Councillor Martin Kilbride, seconded by Councillor Ian Davis, moved the recommendations as outlined in the report.

Discussion took place in relation to:-

- (1) this Council having the lowest rent increase in Scotland in 2023/24; the views of tenants being taken account of regarding the fixed rent increase of 4.5% each year for three years; and the Council taking account of the investment needs across the housing stock, together with considerations around maintaining affordability for tenants;
- (2) Council house rent being set at 1.5% for the past three years and the last rent increase being maintained at this level, at a time when inflation was higher and costs were increasing; the Council’s statutory obligation to consult with tenants with the majority of respondents supporting the 4.5% increase; and that those tenants who may experience financial hardship being encouraged to contact the Housing Service for information, advice and to check if any further help may be available ;
- (3) the proposed spend for the Housing Capital Budget in 2024/25 being £64.390m; and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that financing costs in the current year 2023/24 were approximately 12.8% of the overall revenue budget, based on proposed 2024/25 budget financing costs were proposed at £7.038m which equated to 20.9% of the overall proposed revenue budget for 2024/25, which was still below the 35% debt affordability level agreed with tenant representatives as part of the review of the HRA Business Plan;
- (4) the Affordable Housing Budget and the reduction in funding from the Scottish Government; and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that the Co-ordinator (Housing Policy and Strategy) had a meeting scheduled with Scottish Government officials to ascertain the impact of this reduction and whether any amendments required to be made to the Strategic Housing Investment Plan going forward; and following a request from the Member that the update be provided to Members following this meeting, this was agreed;
- (5) asbestos works and whether this was a significant problem for the Council; and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that routinely, as part of any capital works, asbestos testing was carried out in properties and that, if any asbestos required to be removed, this was done as part of the Capital Programme; that asbestos records were held by the Council for a significant percentage of housing stock, however, where situations arose where work required to be carried out to stabilise the situation or where wholesale removal works were required, this would be carried out during disruptive works;

- (6) lock-ups; and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that demand for lock-ups and the condition of them had been examined throughout South Ayrshire, that previously some lock-ups had been approved by Council for demolition and in most cases where these lock-ups had been demolished, alternative provision had been offered; and that presently supply and demand in Girvan was being examined and proposals would be submitted to Members in due course . The Member then requested that Members be kept updated of progress made with lock-ups;
- (7) cavity wall insulation; and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that cavity wall insulation had required to be removed from some premises following complaints from residents of dampness and water ingress and that, where external fabric work was being carried out through planned external fabric upgrade programmes, all cavities were inspected and, if the insulation required to be removed, that was being carried out and either refilling the cavities and applying new external render to the wall or applying external wall insulation rather than cavity wall insulation;
- (8) methods of contacting Housing Services; and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that in the majority of instances, the Housing Teams were operating a hybrid style of working, therefore, there were officers in offices providing services at all times; that contact methods had changed following the Covid-19 pandemic with a greater number of tenants requesting a home visit and that this service was provided where possible; and that where a face-to-face meeting was requested, this was carried out by appointment system; and
- (9) the response rate to the consultation; and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that the response rate was slightly higher than the last consultation carried out and that he would seek clarification on how these figures compared with consultations carried out by neighbouring authorities and provide these figures to the Member.

The Council

Decided:

- (a) having taken account of the consultation results and feedback from tenants as outlined at [Appendix 1](#), to agree to apply a fixed council house rent increase of 4.5% each year for three years from 2024/25 – 2026/27;
- (b) to agree to apply a 4.5% increase each year for three years from 2024/25 – 2026/27 to other rents and charges recovered through the HRA which included:- lock-up rents, garage site rents, garden maintenance charges, communal heating and amenity charges;
- (c) to agree to retain the existing rental charges for all types of homeless temporary accommodation;
- (d) to approve the proposed 2024/25 HRA revenue budget as outlined in section 4.2 of the report and [Appendix 2](#); and the proposed 5 year capital budget as outlined in section 2.3 of the report and [Appendix 3](#); and
- (e) to note the results from tenant feedback, as outlined in section 4.4 and [Appendix 1](#) of the report, on the preferred ways to contact the Housing Service and note that these results would be used to inform how teams were organised and any future considerations and proposals around shaping the model of service delivery.

5. **Notice of Motion**

A Notice of Motion was submitted in accordance with Council Standing Order No. 18, by Councillor Laura Brennan-Whitefield, seconded by Councillor Cameron Ramsay.

Councillor Brennan-Whitefield advised that, following discussion with Councillors Hunter and Shields, it had been decided, with the agreement of Councillor Ramsay as seconder of the Motion, to amend the Notice of Motion to read as follows:-

“As tensions rise in the Middle East and the onslaught of bombings continues in Gaza and elsewhere across the region, Council requests that the Chief Executive of South Ayrshire Council write to the UK government and request that they call for a ceasefire and the immediate release of all hostages, this is not a political response but a humanitarian response”.

A full debate took place regarding the terms of the Motion and the Council

Decided: by a majority, to agree the terms of the Motion.

6. **Formal Questions**

The Council noted that no Formal Questions had been submitted.

7. **Closing Remarks.**

The Depute Provost thanked all in attendance for their contribution.

The meeting ended at 10.45 a.m.