

SOUTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL (SPECIAL)

Minutes of a hybrid webcast meeting
on 23 May 2025 at 10.00 a.m.

Present in County Buildings: Councillors Iain Campbell (Provost), Laura Brennan-Whitefield, Ian Cavana, Alec Clark, Brian Connolly, Ian Davis, Julie Dettbarn, Mark Dixon, Stephen Ferry, William Grant, Hugh Hunter, Martin Kilbride, Mary Kilpatrick, Alan Lamont, Brian McGinley, Bob Pollock, Cameron Ramsay, Philip Saxton, Gavin Scott and Bob Shields.

Present Remotely: Councillors Ian Cochrane, Chris Cullen, Martin Dowey, Lee Lyons, Craig Mackay and Duncan Townson

Apologies: Councillors Kenneth Bell and George Weir.

Attending in County Buildings: M. Newall, Chief Executive; C. Caves, Chief Governance Officer; T. Baulk, Chief Financial Officer; J. Bradley, Director of Strategic Change and Communities; K. Braidwood, Director of Housing, Operations and Development; J. McClure, Committee Services Lead Officer; A. Gibson, Committee Services Officer; and C. McCallum, Clerical Assistant.

1. Provost.

The Provost

- (1) welcomed everyone to the meeting, outlined the procedures for conducting this meeting and advised that this meeting would be broadcast live; and
- (2) intimated that apologies had been received from Councillors Bell and Weir.

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. Appointments to Panel and Representation on Outside Bodies, Working Groups and COSLA.

There was submitted a [report](#) (issued) of 22 May 2025 by the Chief Executive seeking approval to make alterations to the membership of Panels, Outside Bodies, Working Groups and COSLA.

The Chief Governance Officer introduced the report and advised that, following the appointment of Councillor Iain Campbell as Provost and Councillor Brian Connolly as Leader, this necessitated changes to the Panels, Outside Bodies, Working Groups and COSLA.

Councillor Brian Connolly, seconded by Councillor Alec Clark, moved the recommendations as outlined in the report.

Comments were made and questions raised by Members in relation to:

- (1) congratulating Councillor Connolly on his appointment as Leader and wishing him well in his efforts to take South Ayrshire forward in a positive direction focussing on the priorities of the Council Plan and on the priorities of the people of South Ayrshire, however, insisting on an immediate stop to the culture of bullying and intimidating behaviour which had been prevalent within the Council over the past few years of the previous administration; outlining that Portfolio Holders were not Directors of Departments as the Council employed highly skilled and qualified professionals as Directors but were in place for political and strategic guidance and to enable, support and empower Officers, to create a space for them to do their job and that it was hoped that all Members agreed on this going forward; that a Shadow Administration was being formed with twelve Members from outwith the Administration and that Shadow Portfolio Holders would be appointed with guidance from the Chief Governance Officer; and that they welcomed Councillor Saxton being reinstated as Chair of the Service and Partnerships Performance Panel and were heartened to note that Councillor Connolly would now be joining the Community Planning Partnership Board;
- (2) the Council having been in turbulent waters over the past year or so and there still being work to do, however, it was time to draw a line under what had gone before and move on; that Portfolio Holders under the new Leader required to show up to meetings, show their integrity and provide the direction and substance that had been lacking recently; that there were no significant changes to the Panel structure as the Leader was limited in the changes he could implement as the former Administration was obviously supporting him; that it had been outlined that this would be a new Independent Administration, however, some Conservative Members had retained their positions on Cabinet; that officers would not get 100% comfort from the proposed changes as they were seeking a complete change in direction to carry out their job without interference from Members; and that Councillor Connolly would bring his own leadership style to the Council and the opposition supported him in this, however, they would also be holding him to account;
- (3) whether Councillor Connolly would be offering two places on Cabinet in non-Portfolio roles but with voting rights to the opposition members; and Councillor Connolly advised that, following the Council meeting of 20 May 2025 when he had been appointed Leader, he had met with the Leaders of the SNP and Labour Groups and advised them that this offer was on the table;
- (4) whether the Leader was proposing to have a wider restructure of the Administration as a number of the Portfolios were not delivering the value for money that they could; and that there were now nine Portfolio Holders which had led to the maximum number of paying positions of Members; and the Chief Executive advised that he had met with the Leader to discuss opportunities for examining the Portfolio structure and that those conversations would continue and a report would be submitted to a future Council meeting for consideration;
- (5) whether a review of attendance of Members at meetings could be carried out; and the Chief Executive advised that he would liaise with colleagues to ascertain if this could be carried out and brought back to Council;
- (6) whether any of the Ayrshire Growth Deal Projects within Councillor Cullen's portfolio under the previous administration had come to fruition; and the Chief Executive advised that he would liaise with colleagues and respond in writing on this matter;

Point of Order

Following further comments regarding Councillor Cullen, Councillor Hunter raised a Point of Order that that he was unhappy regarding these slurs on Councillor Cullen. Provost advised that, as these comments were personal, they should cease as it was unfair to criticise a fellow Councillor in an open forum. The Chief Governance Officer further advised that, as many of these reports referred to would have been exempt papers, should any Member have a series of questions they wished responses to, these should be intimated to her in advance of the meeting to allow officers to prepare so they were able to do so. If officers were not given prior notice of these questions, responses would be provided in writing. The Member then advised that he had merely wished to raise his concerns regarding the appointment of Councillor Cullen as a Portfolio Holder.

- (7) whether the questions raised at (5) and (6) above would be responded to by the Chief Executive at the next meeting of South Ayrshire Council; and the Chief Governance Officer advised that responses would be provided prior to the next Council meeting;
- (8) a Portfolio Holder earning £7,657 more than a basic Councillor;
- (9) an investigation by the Standards Commission; and the Chief Governance Officer advised that any investigation was confidential and questions on these matters should not be raised in this Chamber; that any allegations would be examined by the appropriate body and any findings then submitted to the Investigating arm of the Standards Commission and if they, in consultation with the Standards Commission, decided to proceed it became a public matter, however, every Councillor was entitled to confidentiality in these processes. Provost further advised that he was very disappointed that a question on this matter had been raised in an open forum;
- (10) welcoming the creation of Shadow Portfolio Holders as this had worked well in the past, and noting that any joint briefings minimised officer time and kept all Members informed; and
- (11) that the opposition members were looking forward to working with the new administration; confirming that Councillor Philip Saxton would be the Labour Group's nomination as the Chair of Service and Partnerships Performance Panel; that having members of the opposition as Chairs of the Scrutiny Panels was welcomed; and requesting that Councillor Connolly examine the membership of the Regulatory Panel and make appropriate amendments.

Having heard various Members congratulate Councillor Connolly on his appointment as Leader of the Council, Councillor Connolly thanked everyone for their kind words; advised that he welcomed and encouraged scrutiny; that he was encouraged by his discussions with the SNP and Labour Group Leaders for the future of the Council; and outlined that there were lots of developments presently within the Council which should be promoted.

Point of Order

Councillor Ian Cavana raised a Point of Order regarding whether the Council was voting on all recommendations within the report or on each recommendation separately; and the Chief Governance Officer advised that the vote would be on the whole report.

The Council

Decided: by 15 votes to 11,

- (i) to approve the amendments outlined at 4.1 of the report, namely
 - (A) Cabinet
 - (I) that Councillor Chris Cullen replace Councillor Bob Pollock as the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development;
 - (II) that Councillor Mark Dixon replace Councillor Brian Connolly as the Portfolio Holder for Sport and Leisure; and
 - (III) that Councillor Brian Connolly, as Leader of the Council, become the Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Strategic;
 - (B) Service and Partnerships Performance Panel
 - (I) that the Chair of the Service and Partnerships Performance Panel be a Labour Group Member following the resignation of Councillor Chris Cullen as Chair; and
 - (II) the resignation of Councillor Mark Dixon from the Service and Partnerships Performance Panel;
 - (C) Audit and Governance Panel
 - (I) the resignation of Councillor Chris Cullen from the Audit and Governance Panel; and
 - (D) Chief Officers' Appointments/Appraisal Panel
 - (I) that Councillors Brian Connolly and Alec Clark, as Leader and Depute Leader of the Council, become members of the Chief Officers' Appointments/ Appraisal Panel;
- (ii) to request that the Labour Group Leader confirm the appointment of the Chair to the Service and Partnerships Performance Panel as outlined in 4.2 of the report (confirmed as Councillor Philip Saxton);
- (iii) to request that the Independents confirm the appointments to the Service and Partnerships Performance Panel and to the Audit and Governance Panel outlined in 4.3 of the report (confirmed following the meeting as Councillor Stephen Ferry and Councillor Bob Pollock respectively)
- (iv) to request that the Conservative Group Leader confirms the appointment to the Chief Officers' Appointments/Appraisal Panel outlined in 4.4 of the report (confirmed following the meeting as Councillor Kenneth Bell); and
- (v) to agree the changes to the representatives appointed to the Outside Bodies, Working Groups and COSLA outlined in [Appendix 1](#).

The meeting ended at 10.35 a.m.