

MINUTES of MEETING of POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held ON A HYBRID BASIS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, KILMORY, LOCHGILPHEAD AND BY MICROSOFT TEAMS on THURSDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2024

Present: Councillor Robin Currie (Chair)

Councillor Gordon Blair	Councillor Liz McCabe
Councillor Audrey Forrest	Councillor Yvonne McNeilly
Councillor Kieron Green	Councillor Ross Moreland
Councillor Fiona Howard	Councillor Gary Mulvaney
Councillor Andrew Kain	Councillor Alastair Redman
Councillor Reeni Kennedy-Boyle	

Also Present: Councillor Jan Brown
Councillor Graham Archibald Hardie
Councillor Jennifer Kelly
Councillor Paul Kennedy
Councillor Tommy MacPherson
Councillor Peter Wallace

Attending: Pippa Milne, Chief Executive
Douglas Hendry, Executive Director
Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director
Anne Blue, Head of Financial Services
Fergus Murray, Head of Development and Economic Growth
Ross McLaughlin, Head of Commercial Services
Jane Fowler, Head of Customer and Support Services
Shona Barton, Governance Manager
Carolyn Cairns, HR and OD Manager
Matt Mulderrig, Development Policy and Housing Manager
Lorna Byrne, Revenue and Benefits Assistant

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Amanda Hampsey, Willie Hume, Jim Lynch and Dougie Philand.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ross Moreland advised in relation to item 8 of the agenda (Strategic Events and Festivals Fund - Round 6 2024/2025) that he had been appointed to the group "Dunoon Presents" by the Council who had involvement in the funding request for "Doon the Water Revival Music Festival". Having taken note of the updated Standards Commission Guidance in relation to declarations (issued on 7 December 2021) with specific reference to section 5.4(c) he did not consider that he had a relevant connection and as such would remain in the meeting.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 7 December 2023 were approved as a correct record.

Councillor Gordon Blair joined the meeting during the consideration of the following item of business.

* **4. FINANCIAL REPORTS MONITORING PACK - 31 DECEMBER 2023**

The Committee gave consideration to a report providing a summary of the financial monitoring reports as at the end of December 2023. There were five detailed reports setting out the position as at 31 December 2023 which included the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report; Monitoring of Financial Risks; Capital Plan Monitoring Report, Treasury Monitoring Report and Reserves and Balances.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee –

1. noted the revenue budget monitoring report as at 31 December 2023;
2. noted the financial risks for 2023-24;
3. noted the capital plan monitoring report as at 31 December 2023 and approved the proposed changes to the capital plan outlined in Appendix 4 of that report;
4. noted the treasury monitoring report as at 31 December 2023;
5. noted the reserves and balances report as at 31 December 2023; and
6. agreed to recommend to Council that the revenue virements over £0.200m during November and December 2023 were approved.

(Reference: Report by Section 95 Officer dated 12 January 2024, submitted)

* **5. BUDGETING PACK 2024-2025**

The Committee gave consideration to the full package of papers included in the budgeting packs in relation to the revenue and capital budgets for 2024-2025.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee agreed to refer consideration of the Budgeting Pack 2024-2025 to the Council meeting on 22 February 2024, without recommendation.

(Reference: Budgeting Pack 2024-2025 dated 15 February 2024, submitted)

* **6. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee gave consideration to a report presenting the draft Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy for approval. The report also set out the policy for the repayment of loans fund advances for 2024-25.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee agreed to refer to Council to -

1. approve the proposed Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy and the indicators contained within. Note that the figures within the Strategy will be updated to reflect the budget decisions agreed at Council;
2. approve the continued use of the asset life method for the repayment of loan fund advances using a 5.1% annuity interest rate, with the exception of spend to save schemes where the funding/income profile method could be used;
3. approve the proposed asset repayment periods as detailed within section 2.7 of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement; and
4. approve the ability to continue to use countries with a sovereign rating of AA- and above, as recommended by the Council's external treasury management advisors.

(Reference: Report by Section 95 Officer dated 24 January 2024, submitted)

* **7. SCOTTISH WELFARE FUND - FINANCIAL POSITION**

The Committee gave consideration to a report advising of the financial challenges faced by local authorities in managing the Scottish Welfare Fund, with rising costs and demand for support.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee –

1. agreed the continuation of Financial Services' commitment to uphold the existing High Priority status for Scottish Welfare Fund applications throughout the 2024/2025 period;
2. agreed to refer the consideration of a cost pressure amounting to £250,000 to the Council as part of the budget setting process to address the anticipated overspend;
3. noted that officers were not recommending a move to High Most Compelling (HMC) priority level due to the impact this will have on housing; and
4. agreed to making representations to lobby the Scottish Government for more funding to support the fund in future years or alternatively to amend the guidance to restrict spend in future.

(Reference: Report by Head of Financial Services dated 15 February 2024, submitted)

The Chair ruled and the Committee agreed to adjourn for a comfort break from 12.00pm to 12.10pm.

* **8. STRATEGIC EVENTS AND FESTIVALS FUND - ROUND 6 2024/2025**

The Committee gave consideration to a report providing an update on Round 6 of the Council's Strategic Events and Festivals Fund (SEF) for 2024/25. The report provided details of the applications submitted and recommendations regarding all applications put forward to receive grant funding. The report also sought agreement to allocate funding of £90,000 to allow a future round (Round 7) for 2025/26.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee –

1. agreed to the award of eligible SEF Round 6 grants amounting to £114,700 as detailed in Table 1 of the submitted report;
2. agreed that any SEF Round 6 grant offer only be formally issued upon confirmation from the individual event organisation that the event is formally confirmed as going ahead, any match funding is in place and the event still meets the SEF Round 6 criteria;
3. agreed to continue delegation of powers to the Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth to allow any subsequent amendment to existing grant requests to be made brought about as a consequence of changes to the event/event budget. Any amendment to a current grant request/offer would only be considered if the amendment related to either the same level or a reduction in the request and constitute up to 75% of legitimate and eligible expenditure. Similarly if there was a reduction in the final event costs that would result in delivery of a profit in excess of £10,000 (all of which has to be reinvested) to the organisation and that this was sustained over a 3 year period the final retention (10%) would not be paid on the third year of the grant;
4. agreed to recommend to the Council that as part of the budget in February 2024, that they agree £90,000 base funding for Strategic Events and Festivals in order that the application process can commence during 2025/26 (Round 7), and that this fund be augmented by any underspend in Round 5 (23/24);
5. agreed to recommend to Council that any underspend from SEF Round 6 is earmarked and used to augment a future SEF round.

(Reference: Report by Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth dated 22 December 2023, submitted)

9. CROWN ESTATE 2023/24 ALLOCATION - UPDATE

The Committee gave consideration to a report advising of the remaining £590,409 of the Council's £1,590,409 allocation of Crown Estate Funding for 2023/24 still to be allocated. The report proposed that £130,662 was allocated from the £590,409 to top up the full Bellwin threshold amount of £528,662, which would leave £459,747 still to be allocated.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee –

1. noted the formal allocation of the £1million of Crown Estate funding for 2023/24 as approved under delegated powers and as detailed in Table 1 of the submitted report;
2. agreed to allocate a further £130,662 to make up the Bellwin threshold amount of £528,662;
3. agreed to allocate the remaining £459,747 as detailed in the submitted report at paragraph 4.7 and Table 2; and

4. agreed to a delegation of powers to the Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth to allow any subsequent amendment to approved Crown Estate grant allocations to ensure that any risk relating to having to payback any grant is minimised, noting that this could involve swapping Crown Estate allocations with Place Based Investment Programme (PBIP) allocations of grants against individual projects, but would not affect the projects identified but simply the grant source.

(Reference: Report by Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth dated 11 January 2024, submitted)

10. OBAN AND HELENSBURGH STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS

The Committee gave consideration to a report outlining in brief some of the work that would be involved in producing Strategic Development Frameworks for Oban and Helensburgh, and why resources were required to drive forward these tasks at pace.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee noted the content of the submitted report and agreed to the resource request of £450,000 from the Council's Priorities Budget to assist in driving forward the Strategic Development Frameworks.

(Reference: Report by Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth dated 17 January 2024, submitted)

11. ARGYLL AND BUTE - MOBILE COVERAGE MAPPING

The Committee gave consideration to a report which sought approval to utilise £25k from the Digital Exclusion Fund to enter a partnership project with Scottish Futures Trust.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee approved the provision of £25k funding from the Digital Exclusion Fund to enable the Council to match fund an equal contribution from our partner, Scottish Futures Trust, to undertake a Mobile Phone Coverage Map exercise covering Argyll and Bute.

(Reference: Report by Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth dated 10 January 2024, submitted)

12. PEOPLE STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING PRIORITIES 2024 - 2028

The Committee gave consideration to a report presenting the People Strategy and Strategic Workforce Planning Priorities for 2024 – 2028. The documents had been developed in consultation with management teams and reflected the principles of Connect for Success.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee –

1. approved the People Strategy 2024-2028; and
2. noted the Strategic Workforce Planning Priorities for the period 2024-2028.

(Reference: Report by Executive Director with responsibility for Customer and Support Services dated 9 January 2024, submitted)

13. CLIMATE CHANGE BOARD UPDATE AND DECARBONISATION TRACKER

The Committee gave consideration to a report outlining overarching activities of the Climate Change Board to the Council and providing an update of key contributors to the Council's climate actions.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee noted the updates contained at Section 5 of the submitted report; and the full Decarbonisation Tracker update contained at Appendix A to the submitted report.

(Reference: Report by Executive Director with responsibility for Commercial Services dated 15 January 2024, submitted)

14. ARGYLL AND BUTE HOUSING EMERGENCY - PROJECT OFFICER RESOURCE

The Committee gave consideration to a recommendation from the meeting of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee held on 30 November 2023 in respect of a proposal for the recruitment of a Project Officer to assist in the acceleration of the work to address the Housing Emergency in Argyll and Bute.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee agreed –

1. the recommendation from the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee that the Council recruit a Project Officer to assist in accelerating the work to address the Housing Emergency, with funding for the post being drawn from the Council's Priorities Investment Fund; and
2. that the Project Officer post would be recruited on a fixed term contract for a period of 3 years.

(Reference: Recommendation from Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee held on 30 November 2023; and report by Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth dated October 2023, submitted)

15. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

The Policy and Resources Committee workplan was before the Committee for noting.

Decision

The Policy and Resources Committee noted the content of the work plan.

(Reference: Policy and Resources Committee workplan dated February 2024, submitted)