

SOUTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL
JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a hybrid meeting on 13 November 2024 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillors Martin Dowey (Convener), Iain Campbell, Julie Dettbarn and Cameron Ramsay.

Apology: Councillor Lee Lyons.

Present from Employer's Side: Mike Newall, Chief Executive; Lyndsay McRoberts, Depute Chief Executive and Director of Education; Kevin Braidwood, Director of Housing and Operations, Tim Eltringham, Director of Health and Social Care; Tim Baulk, Chief Financial Officer; Catriona Caves, Chief Governance Officer; Wendy Wesson, Chief HR Officer; Stephanie Roger, Risk and Safety Co-ordinator; and Eleanor Eade, Risk and Safety Officer.

Apologies: Jane Bradley, Director of Strategic Change and Communities; and Carol Boyd, Service Lead – Risk and Safety.

Present from Employee's Side: Callum Robertson, Gillian McCormick and Adrian Moore, UNISON; Thomas Robertson and Howard Wilkin, GMB; and Louisa Maestranzi, SSTA.

Present Remotely From Employee's Side: Gary Laird, EIS; and Connie Lobban, Unite the Union.

Apologies from Employee's Side: Billy Cooper and Kimberley Cloherty, UNISON; Paul Bennett, Stuart Graham and Peter Sturgeon, Unite the Union; Alan Scott, EIS; and Ruth Nicoll, SSTA

Also Attending: Janice McClure, Committee Services Lead Officer.

1. Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting.

The Minutes of the meeting of 3 May 2024 (issued) were submitted and approved as a correct record.

3. **2025-26 Budget Update**

The Chief Financial Officer provided an update to the Committee on the 2025/26 Budget advising

- (1) that a briefing had taken place in late July 2024 updating members on the 2025/26 budget and of the £6.7m budget gap;
- (2) that the medium term financial plan would be considered by Council at its meeting on 12 December 2024;
- (3) that the Scottish Government had indicated that the additional 2024/25 funding received from the Barnett consequential was already earmarked to meet current commitments with no additional funding for this financial year beyond those commitments;
- (4) that it was still to be decided how much funding local authorities would receive in 2025/26;
- (5) that for 2025/26 the NIC rate of 13.8% would increase to 15%; and that the starting threshold for National Insurance for employers had been reduced from £9,100 to £5,000 which would be an additional burden of £5.5m to the Council;
- (6) that, following the impact of the National Insurance contribution on employers, there was a risk that supplier costs would therefore also be increased.

Following a question from an Elected Member on private providers, particularly carers, the Chief Financial Officer advised that costs would increase and that it was unclear if the expected funding from the UK Government would cover these costs.

The Director of Health and Social Care further advised that there were anxieties across the care system, including from GPs due to funding concerns.

Following a question from a Committee Member regarding whether a "worse case scenario" projection had been carried out by the Council; the Chief Financial Officer advised that the figures were at a point in time prior to the announcement of the UK budget and that this was an estimate based on prior experience, however, he was not confident that the Council would receive the total monies required to cover the additional National Insurance contributions

The Joint Consultative Committee noted the update from the Chief Financial Officer.

4. **Organisational Development Update – 2024.**

There was submitted a report (issued) of 5 November 2024 by the Chief Executive outlining the key work undertaken by Organisational Development (OD) during the period April to October 2024.

The Chief HR Officer gave an overview of the report and advised

- (1) that OD had transferred to HR and Payroll in September 2024 and were working with colleagues to get a better understanding of the team;
- (2) that there had been much debate regarding the recent afternoon tea to celebrate those employees with 35 years service following a decision taken at ELT earlier in the year; that there was a group of staff with 36 to 39 years service and discussions would take place to ascertain the numbers of staff concerned and what approach could be taken to recognise their long service; and
- (3) that during the last six months one employee from Organisational Development and two Digital Skills Graduate Interns had moved into the Transformation service.

The Joint Consultative Committee noted the update from the Chief HR Officer.

5. Health and Safety Update

There was submitted a report (issued) of 5 November 2024 by the Chief Governance Officer providing an update on the current position in respect of Health and Safety issues across the Council.

The Risk and Safety Co-ordinator provided background to the report advising

- (1) of the recent statistics from July to September 2024;
- (2) that, to ensure compliance, the risk and safety team carried out risk assessments on a rolling programme;
- (3) that 17 properties had fire risk assessments and health and safety audits undertaken;
- (4) that Health and Safety Action Plans were prepared for Service Leads on a quarterly basis using the Pentana reporting system; and progress against the Pentana action plans was reported as part of the wider quarterly Health and Safety Reports compiled corporately and for each Directorate;
- (5) that several generic health and safety training courses were available on Coast and there was face-to-face training for those with no access to a PC or laptop;
- (6) that in Quarter 2, July 2024 to September 2024, a total of 85 workplace accidents were recorded across the Council and 31 violence and aggression incidents; and that the risk and safety team continued to work with Services to progress risk reduction initiatives for accident and incident prevention; and
- (7) that all current policies, standards, reports, assessment forms and other related documentation was available on the CORE, however any staff member requiring assistance could contact the team.

A Committee Member commented on violent incidents in schools and outlined that it was pleasing to note the work being carried out in relation to reducing these, however advised that many incidents were not reported by staff members and therefore these were not filtering through to the Health and Safety Team; and the Risk and Safety Co-ordinator advised that her team were examining the statistics and providing support where this was required and encouraged staff to report all incidents.

An Elected Member referred to paragraph 4.1 within the report regarding automated alarm calls and enquired if the alarm panels could be accessed remotely; and a Committee Member advised that these panels could not be accessed remotely and that a keyholder required to attend the alarm call.

Following a question from a Committee Member regarding whether there was a programme to monitor stress levels, the Risk and Safety Co-ordinator advised that there was not an ongoing programme, however, she was liaising with HR to review the Health and Safety Stress Risk Assessment so that staff could be supported.

In response to a comment from a Committee Member that the Council tended to be reactive rather than pro-active, the Chief HR Officer further advised

- (1) that when an employee was on sick leave with mental health related absence, they were referred to Occupational Health, that HR worked with managers to develop a Stress Risk Assessment and that, if a member of staff was displaying signs of stress, they could be risk assessed;
- (2) that the Council had a new Occupational Health provider who was reviewing all aspects of stress related illness; and
- (3) that a new Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) was being launched via Vivup to support employees across a range of health concerns including stress. The EAP was an all year-round support which includes counselling as well as access to a range of online resources including tools and techniques to assist employees through the Vivup platform. Employees can access the EAP by telephone, via the Vivup app or online.

Following a question from a Committee Member on whether training could be provided on this, the Chief HR Officer advised that this would be possible.

Following a question from a Committee Member on violent incidents within schools and whether staff were given training to equip them with the skills to handle this and whether they were assisted to report these incidents; the Risk and Safety Co-ordinator advised that staff were encouraged to report and record incidents to enable statistics to be updated and these incidents to be followed up on.

The Depute Chief Executive and Director of Education further advised that these figures had been discussed at the recent Departmental JCC when she had expressed the importance of reporting any incidents; and that there was extensive ongoing training for staff which they were encouraged to attend.

The Joint Consultative Committee noted the update from the Risk and Safety Co-ordinator.

6. **AOCB**

Following a question from a Committee Member on the recent increase in the Government's threshold for means tested benefits and whether support was being provided for those staff who had fallen below the threshold, the Chief HR Officer advised that employees with concerns would be referred to the Money Advice Team which offered support.

Following a question from a Committee Member on whether services offered employees the option to increase their hours to 18 hours to meet the threshold if they did not already work 18 hours, the Chief HR Officer advised that there were a number of vacancies in Facilities Management, however, each case would be examined on its own merits.

Following a question from a Committee Member on the Council's current policy on no compulsory redundancies and whether this would remain, the Chair advised that the Council did not wish to make any staff members redundant, however since 2019 staff within the Council had increased by 14%, therefore, as staff retired, it may not be possible to replace them; that Councillors and Management would do everything possible to retain staff, however, it may not be possible to employ more staff; that the Councillors' job was to produce a balanced budget annually which was proving more difficult each year; and that the budget was approved at a meeting of full Council annually.

7. **Closing Remarks.**

The Chair thanked all those present for their attendance and contribution.

8. **Post Meeting**

Having received an e-mail from a Committee Member regarding two points which he had wished raised at the meeting, the Chair agreed to accept these comments as follows:

- (1) "There is real concern from SAC UNISON branch that the coming cuts in services and staffing are going to disproportionately hit front line and low paid staff. We would like an assurance that there will be work done, either through the transformation board or through service reviews to ensure delayering of management structures is addressed in equal measure."

The Chief HR Officer advised that, as this formed part of the Service Redesign process, she would liaise with Directors on this matter and report back to the Trade Unions.

- (2) "Considering the proposed changes and the assurances from both the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive that we are all in this together, we want to extend an invite for both to speak at the South Ayrshire Branch AGM in the new year. We will send a formal invite once the date is confirmed. "

The Chair and Chief Executive agreed to accept this invitation.

The meeting ended at 10.40 a.m.