

SOUTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL.

Minutes of a hybrid webcast meeting
on 27 February 2025 at 10.00 a.m.

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

Present Remotely: Councillors Kenneth Bell, Ian Cochrane and Lee Lyons.

Attending in County Buildings: L. McRoberts, Depute Chief Executive and Director of Education; J. Bradley, Director of Strategic Change and Communities; K. Braidwood, Director of Housing; T. Eltringham, Director of Health and Social Care; C. Caves, Chief Governance Officer; T. Baulk, Chief Financial Officer; J. McClure, Committee Services Lead Officer; A. Gibson, Committee Services Officer; J. Chapman, Committee Services Officer; and C. McCallum, Clerical Assistant.

Attending Remotely: C. Cox, Assistant Director – Planning, Development and Regulation; C. McGhee, Chief Internal Auditor.

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 no apologies had been received;

2. Sederunt and Declarations of Interest.

The Depute Chief Executive and Director of Education 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.

Section 112 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

The Depute Chief Executive and Director of Education

- (1) referred to the note on the agenda calling the meeting, to the effect that Members were subject to the provisions of Section 112 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 which provided that a Member of the Council could not vote on a range of Council Tax issues, including setting or adjusting the rate of Council Tax, if he or she was three months or more in arrears with payment of Community Charge (Poll Tax) or two months in arrears with Council Tax;
- (2) indicated that if Section 112 applied to any Member, he or she was required to disclose that fact; and

- (3) gave the opportunity to any Member to disclose the fact that Section 112 applied to him or her and indicated that failure to disclose was also an offence.

No Members so declared.

3. **Revenue Estimates 2025/26, Capital Estimates 2025/265 to 2036/37 and Carbon Budget 2025/26**

There was submitted a [report](#) (issued) of 18 February 2025 by the Chief Financial Officer advising of the issues to be considered in setting revenue budgets for 2025/26, setting capital budgets for 2025/26 to 2036/37 and setting a Carbon Budget for 2025/26; and recommending that the Council

- (1) notes the funding proposal as outlined by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government's letter of 4 December 2024 (attached as Appendix 1 to the report);
- (2) notes the funding levels included within Finance Circular 10/2024 remain provisional until the Finance Order is approved in March 2025;
- (3) presents and approves budget proposals for revenue and capital for 2025/26 taking account of the conditions of the settlement that required to be met and incorporating:
 - (a) planned net revenue expenditure on services for 2025/26;
 - (b) the level of reserves and fund balances held and contributions to/ from these;
 - (c) the appropriate Band D Council tax levy for 2025/26 and associated level of bad debt provision for non-collection of Council tax;
 - (d) the proposed capital programme for 2025/26 and beyond and associated debt charge implications; and
 - (e) consideration of the financial projections for 2026/27 to 2029/30;
- (4) notes the required remuneration for Councillors, as determined by The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 (Remuneration) Amendment Regulations 2025/8, and include appropriate budget provision for all Elected Member remuneration for 2025/26;
- (5) presents and approves proposals for Common Good budgets for 2025/26; and
- (6) presents a Carbon Budget for the period 2025/26 in support of the Council's policies on Climate Change.

The Chief Financial Officer introduced the report and advised that all Councils required to set the Council Tax by 11 March each year; that, at the time of writing the report, funding from the Scottish Government had been provisional and was still to be confirmed following publication of the Finance Order 2025 which was expected shortly; and that, once again, Councils had been offered a financial settlement predicated on delivering a number of commitments and requirements outlined in the letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor Ian Davis, seconded by Councillor Martin Dowey, moved that the Council approve the General Services Revenue Budget 2025-26 and Capital Investment Programme 2025-26 to 2036-37 proposals of the [Administration](#) (issued) and accept the recommendations at (1) to (6) above.

Provost then made reference to an addition to the Motion by Councillor Chris Cullen, seconded by Councillor Mark Dixon which Councillors Davis and Dowey, as Mover and Seconded of the Motion agreed to accept into the terms of the Motion provided the Chief Financial Officer confirmed that this was a competent addition. The Chief Financial Officer outlined that this was indeed a competent addition to the Motion which would reduce the contribution to reserves by £125,000.

The addition to the Motion read as follows:

"it is proposed that the budget be amended to include: a sum of £125,000 per annum shall be allocated to directly contribute to tackle poverty and inequality in South Ayrshire. This is to be met by reducing the planned 2025/26 general uncommitted reserves contribution. This funding shall be administered and monitored by the Financial Inclusion and Growth Strategic Delivery Partnership (SDP)".

By way of Amendment, Councillor Julie Dettbarn, seconded by Councillor George Weir, moved that the Council approve the Capital Investment Programme 2025-26 to 2036-37 proposals of the [SNP Group](#) and accept the recommendations at (1) to (6) above. Councillor Brennan-Whitefield, on behalf of the SNP Group advised that she was happy to accept Councillor Cullen's addition into the terms of the SNP Group budget; and requesting that, with the inequality and poverty in Ayr North, Wallacetown Initiative receive a proportion of these monies; and that the Working Group be reflective of the make-up of the Council.

By way of Counter Amendment, Councillor Duncan Townson, seconded by Councillor Brian McGinley, moved that the Council approve the Revenue Budget 2025-26 and Capital Investment Programme 2025-26 to 2036-37 proposals of the [Labour Group](#) and accept the recommendations at (1) to (6) above. Councillor Towson, on behalf of the Labour Group, advised that he was also happy to accept Councillor Cullen's addition into the terms of their budget.

Questions were raised by Members and comments made in relation to:-

- (1) thanking all Members who had attended the Budget Working Group; thanking the senior officers who had assisted members when setting the budget by providing the options available; and thanking the Chief Financial Officer for his assistance when setting the budget as this process would have been much more difficult without his advice and assistance;
- (2) the Administration budget for financial year 2025/26 setting out measures to ensure that this was a balanced budget in the upcoming financial year but was also to reduce forecast deficits in the coming years; that, in recent years, this Council like other Scottish Local Authorities had to make millions of pounds of savings by making difficult choices in the face of demographic pressures, increased service demands and recent high levels of inflation; and that, as representatives of South Ayrshire, it was the duty of Members to set a budget to deliver the best services with the resources available for the people across the authority;
- (3) that the coming financial year should be thought of as a transitional one and that whilst the Council benefited from substantial temporary savings brought about by a reduction in pension contributions, current estimates of the gap for 2026/27 were around £17.5m which would be one of the biggest single year gaps the Council had ever faced;
- (4) that, in setting the budget, the 703 respondents to the budget survey should be thanked with many of the results of the survey broadly aligning with the approach taken in the Administration budget; and that many respondents provided suggestions for further cost saving measure which would be discussed when setting future budgets;

- (5) that, despite additional money being announced for local government, South Ayrshire Council still faced a challenge to address budget gaps with new pressures also being faced in addition to knock on issues from past Council Tax freezes and the substantial ring fencing of this Council's budget restricting where savings could be considered, however, measures to address this were set out in the medium term financial plan and through the Council's ongoing transformation work seeking to save money and improve the service the Council could provide;
- (6) that the proposed Council Tax rates for the next three years in the Administration budget would be reviewed in future budget considerations depending on received settlements;
- (7) that, whilst the budget challenges must be acknowledged, the many positives in the Financial Plans must also be emphasised;
- (8) that the Administration budget acknowledged the pressures the Council faced and set an approach to address them and best deliver the aims of the Council plan and the best services possible for the people of South Ayrshire;
- (9) that in March 2024 Cabinet had agreed to the Financial Inclusion Fund being supported by unspent Covid-19 funding which was due to finish at the end of this year, however, the need for targeted financial support was as pressing as ever; that the statistics for child poverty were unacceptable with this authority currently the eleventh highest in the country; that regular update reports should be submitted to the Service and Partnerships Performance Panel on this matter for scrutiny; and that a Member/Officer Working Group should be established to ensure the funding was being utilised effectively to address poverty and inequality;
- (10) which Independent Councillors were included in submitting the Administration budget; and Councillor Dowey advised that this would be apparent when the vote was concluded;
- (11) that, as the three proposed budgets were very similar, it made a case for re-examining the prospect of having one Council budget with all parties contributing;
- (12) that the SNP budget was a simple and straightforward budget which focussed on the people's priorities, protected vital frontline services and attempted to keep Council Tax increases to within manageable limits; and outlining the SNP's spending plans for this year;
- (13) that this Council was facing another very challenging financial period; that the funding from the Scottish Government which was not ring fenced was welcomed for 2025/26; that this funding made up approximately 80% of the Council's income and the remaining 20% was obtained through Council Tax, and while more money from the Scottish Government this year meant service reductions were kept to a minimum, Council Tax still required to be raised; that the raise in Council Tax would be used to cover the increase in employer's National Insurance contributions which in turn protected jobs and vital frontline services; that the pressure on local authorities would continue to build unless the Westminster Government was persuaded to reimburse the National Insurance contributions in full;
- (14) that a significant amount of work went into setting the budget annually; that the increased funding from the Scottish Government was welcomed, however fell short of allowing Councils to operate fully under increased costs; that in this time of constant cuts, the priority was to protect vital services; and outlining the Labour Group's spending plans for this financial year;

- (15) that on reading the SNP and Labour Group budgets, it was disappointing to note the proposed closure of Maybole Golf Course and lack of funding for Dunure Heritage Project and seeking clarification on the reduction of £300,000 in the Neighbourhood Services Redesign Service Model; and the Assistant Director – Housing and Operations advised that this was a full service redesign of Neighbourhood Services examining digitalisation, statutory and non-statutory functions, delivery of services, etc; that the service had been filling posts on a temporary basis for over a year to assess which posts were required; that this review was now at the mid-point and was going into greater detail and, as part of that, Maybole and the Southern villages of South Ayrshire had been examined and all of the premises and projects within these villages. The Member then expressed concerns that this review would lead to job losses;
- (16) that having a budget from each party was advantageous as dialogue was healthy; that, as a Council, decisions had been put off and not tackled and the Council was not fastidious enough with regard to the transformation projects; that the Council's fundamental responsibility was to keep the Council Tax as low as possible for the people of South Ayrshire; that Members required to be satisfied that the savings proposed in their budget could be achieved; that the brown bin charge should be reduced; that the Council should not be returning to diesel vehicles from electric; and that, due to the proposed increase in bereavement prices in the Administration budget, people could not afford to live and now could not afford to die;
- (17) that the Administration had examined every line in its budget; that the Labour Group budget was proposing the loss of 7.5 FTE staff and the closure of the Maybole Recycling Centre and, due to the proposed 6% Council Tax raise in the Labour Group budget, there would be a shortfall of £14.5m next year;
- (18) that, as this was the best settlement the Council had seen in years from the Scottish Government, had the Administration ever had a shortfall of this level previously; and Councillor Dowey responded that it was a shortfall of £11.4m in the Administration budget for next year and not £14.5m as there would be in the Labour Group budget;
- (19) that next year's settlement was unknown and hopefully may increase; that the settlement from the Scottish Government did not meet requirements for this year; that the Labour Group felt that a 6% Council Tax rise was affordable for the public in the present climate; and that, following earlier discussions, the closure of Maybole Golf Course was not proposed in the Labour Group budget;
- (20) that consideration should be given to producing one Council budget which could be approved with amendments to cover any slight differences; and that it was welcomed that Councillor Dettbarn, as Leader of the SNP Group had attended the Budget Working Group meetings; and that this was a positive way forward;
- (21) questions on the various savings outlined in the SNP budget; and Councillor Dettbarn advised that, if the Member submit these questions in writing she would respond to any questions on the savings within the SNP budget in writing;
- (22) that had the increase in national insurance contributions not been imposed, the Council Tax increase would not have been so substantial and also for forthcoming years;
- (23) that the Administration budget did not show a move from electric vehicles to diesel in the vehicle fleet as previously suggested but was in fact changing from bio fuel which was more expensive than diesel; and that the increase in burial charges was to balance the disparity with cremation charges;

- (24) questions on the various savings in the Labour Group budget; and Councillor Townson advised that, if the Member submit these questions in writing, he would respond to these in writing;
- (25) whether works on the Newton Steeple were being stopped now that works on Prestwick Steeple were due to progress or if both projects were progressing, as outlined in the Administration budget; and Councillor Davis advised that this was clearly explained within the Administration budget and that the Prestwick Steeple works were not progressing at the expense of the Newton Steeple works;
- (26) whether there was a business case for the Dunure Heritage Project; and the Director of Housing, Operations and Development advised that, as an expression of interest has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund, a business case had not been completed at this time;
- (27) why the replacement of the Prestwick Steeple was part of the Administration Budget when a public consultation had been carried out and the results outlined that the people of Prestwick did not want the steeple replaced; and Councillor Dowe responded that the Administration budget was a competent one, that he was happy that the replacement of the steeple was within the budget and that it was for each Member to vote for whichever budget they wished;
- (28) why the people of Prestwick had been ignored following the consultation and the replacement of the steeple was still going ahead and this made no sense to keep this in the budget; and Councillor Dowe added that this was the Member's opinion;
- (29) why the Administration budget was prioritising new projects instead of maintaining existing Council buildings; and Councillor Davis advised that the Capital Plan outlined various buildings being upgraded and invested in, therefore, there was investment in the Council's assets and the maintenance of them within the Administration budget;
- (30) the recent investments within South Ayrshire for the benefit of all residents as the investments would bring visitors to the area and generate the economy; and the lack of investment through regeneration funding for Girvan and South Carrick within the proposed SNP and Labour Group budgets; and Councillor Dettbarn advised that, in relation to the SNP budget, there was ongoing investment through the ward capital programme which was significant for every ward; and that the SNP budget only included items that had been approved by CAMG;
- (31) how much money was secured from the World Bowling Championships; and the Director of Communities and Transformation advised that this event was run by Bowls Scotland who did not provide the Council with an Equalities Impact Assessment, therefore a figure was not known, however, this event had less of an impact on the town centre than other events as visitors tended to drive to the event and drive home following it;
- (32) that, during the national tournaments at Northfield Bowling Club, the local hotels and bed and breakfast premises were all fully occupied;
- (33) commending all members involved in compiling the three budgets; and highlighting that all members should be working together for the benefit of the public; that, with regards to the replacement of the steeple in Prestwick, it was something that the indigenous people of Prestwick were in favour of and the Member supported this;
- (34) that the regeneration funding for the Girvan ward was £2m more than other wards; that Dalmling Golf Course reducing to 9 holes was a saving; and the increase in golf fees for season ticket holders was a 3% or 4% increase; and the Chief Financial Officer advised that the Ayr ward received the most regeneration funding and Girvan received the second highest amount;

- (35) whether visitor fees could be increased for golf courses and a modest ticket price be charged for accessing the Low Green at the Ayr Show; and the Director of Communities and Transformation advised that there were modest proposals in the administration budget for visitors' fees at golf courses, however, two primary courses would be undergoing significant works which would have an impact on the playability of the courses, therefore, the fees could not be increased greatly; and that officers had been attempting to reduce costs for running the Ayr Show but running a ticketed event would be challenging as the costs of fencing the Low Green would be significant;
- (36) whether it was normal for £2.5m to be allocated for Dunure Heritage Project without a business case; and the Director of Housing, Operations and Development advised that an allocation had been put in the Capital Programme for this project; and that an expression of interest had been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund and a paper presented to Members on the development of this project which would require to be resubmitted to Council;
- (37) where the Christmas lights would be placed; and the Director of Housing, Operations and Development advised that the funding for Christmas lights would be used across all South Ayrshire communities;
- (38) how much the two hours free parking was costing the Council and was it adding to the regeneration of the town centre; and the Director of Housing, Operations and Development advised that the two hours free parking had an impact on the revenue income for Ayrshire Roads Alliance and that there was a reduction in the budget line to accommodate this;
- (39) all opposition members being invited to the Budget Working Group, however, on setting the budget, many members did not engage and then did not attend the Group, however, invitations would be issued for the setting of the 2026/27 budget and it was hoped there would be a more collegiate approach to budget setting;
- (40) that, whilst Members had indeed been invited to the Budget Working Group, upon the decision making of setting the budget, a Member advised that he had been excluded from the room, therefore, he had only viewed the administration budget on the morning of this meeting; that in relation to Councillor Cullen's addition to the Motion, the 8% increase in Council Tax in the administration budget was counter-intuitive to his proposals;
- (41) whether there was a business case for Dunure Heritage Project; and Provost advised that a comprehensive business plan had been submitted by Dynamic Dunure which was the amalgamation of all groups in Dunure;
- (42) welcoming the investments in sports and leisure in all three of the proposed budgets; and the investment in Belleisle Park and the Golf Development Centre within the Administration budget;
- (43) that the Budget Working Group required to be more collegiate; that the sharing of the three budgets on the morning of the budget setting Council meeting was not sufficient time to peruse each budget; and that the Administration budget was a robust budget with investments for the future;
- (44) in response to comments on the Labour Group and SNP budgets, Councillor Townson advised that the Labour Group budget was a competent budget; and Councillor Dettbarn advised that the Council Tax in the SNP budget was fixed over a three year period to avoid the rate being raised substantially in the next financial period;

- (45) that the three proposed budgets all had investment in the school estate which was welcomed as all Members were in agreement that they wished to see the school estate being the best it could be; and
- (46) that it was important to debate the merits of each budget submitted; that other local authorities worked together to create one budget and it was hoped that political differences could be put aside and this could be possible in South Ayrshire; that the Administration was willing to listen to the opposition in adapting Motions to include the views of other members where required; that all local authorities across Scotland were facing similar pressures as this Council; and that the budget gap required to be addressed timeously.

A Member requested a roll-call vote.

In accordance with the terms of the Council's Standing Orders, the Council then firstly proceeded to vote on the terms of the Counter-Amendment moved by Councillor Townson and seconded by Councillor McGinley and the Amendment moved by Councillor Dettbarn and seconded by Councillor Weir.

The Chief Governance Officer took the vote by calling the roll as follows:-

Iain Campbell	Abstain
Mary Kilpatrick	Abstain
Kenneth Bell	Abstain
Laura Brennan-Whitefield	Amendment
Ian Cavana	Counter Amendment
Alec Clark	Abstain
Ian Cochrane	Amendment
Brian Connolly	Abstain
Chris Cullen	Amendment
Ian Davis	Abstain
Julie Dettbarn	Amendment
Mark Dixon	Abstain
Martin Dowey	Abstain
Stephen Ferry	Counter Amendment
William Grant	Amendment
Hugh Hunter	Abstain
Martin Kilbride	Abstain
Alan Lamont	Abstain
Lee Lyons	Abstain
Craig Mackay	Amendment
Brian McGinley	Counter Amendment
Bob Pollock	Abstain
Cameron Ramsay	Counter Amendment
Philip Saxton	Counter Amendment
Gavin Scott	Abstain
Bob Shields	Abstain
Duncan Townson	Counter Amendment
George Weir	Amendment

Six Members voted for the Counter-Amendment and seven Members voted for the Amendment with fifteen Members abstaining. The Amendment was accordingly declared to be carried and became the substantive Amendment.

The Council then proceeded to vote on the terms of the Motion moved by Councillor Davis and seconded by Councillor Dowey and the substantive Amendment moved by Councillor Dettbarn and seconded by Councillor Weir.

The Chief Governance Officer then took the vote by calling the roll as follows:-

Iain Campbell	Motion
Mary Kilpatrick	Motion
Kenneth Bell	Motion
Laura Brennan-Whitefield	Amendment
Ian Cavana	Amendment
Alec Clark	Motion
Ian Cochrane	Amendment
Brian Connolly	Motion
Chris Cullen	Motion
Ian Davis	Motion
Julie Dettbarn	Amendment
Mark Dixon	Motion
Martin Dowey	Motion
Stephen Ferry	Amendment
William Grant	Motion
Hugh Hunter	Motion
Martin Kilbride	Motion
Alan Lamont	Motion
Lee Lyons	Motion
Craig Mackay	Amendment
Brian McGinley	Amendment
Bob Pollock	Motion
Cameron Ramsay	Amendment
Philip Saxton	Amendment
Gavin Scott	Motion
Bob Shields	Motion
Duncan Townson	Amendment
George Weir	Amendment

Eleven Members voted for the Amendment, seventeen voted for the Motion and the Council, having thanked all officers involved in the budget setting process,

Decided: to accept the recommendations in the report by the Chief Financial Officer; and to approve the proposals of the Administration.

4. **Closing Remarks.**

The Provost thanked all in attendance for their attendance and contribution.

The meeting ended at 11.50 a.m.