

SOUTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL.

Minutes of a hybrid webcast meeting
on 5 March 2026 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, Stephen Ferry, William Grant, Wullie Hogg, 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.

Apology: Councillor Martin Dowey.

Attending in County Buildings: S. Penman, Chief Executive; K. Braidwood, Depute Chief Executive and Director of Housing, Operations and Development; J. Bradley, Director of Communities and Transformation; M. Inglis, Director of Health and Social Care; C. Caves, Chief Governance Officer; T. Baulk, Chief Financial Officer; M. Alexander, Service Lead - Housing; J. McClure, Committee Services Lead Officer; J. Chapman, Committee Services Officer; and C. McCallum, Clerical Assistant.

Attending Remotely: 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 apologies had been received from Councillor Martin Dowey.

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.

Councillor Saxton declared that he held a golf season ticket, however, he did not believe that this precluded him from contributing to the setting of the budget.

Section 112 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

The Chief Executive

- (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. General Services Revenue Budget 2026/27 and Common Good Fund Budget 2026/27

There was submitted a [report](#) (issued) of 23 February 2026 by the Chief Financial Officer advising of the issues to be considered in setting the General Services revenue budget for 2026/27 and setting a Common Good Fund budget for 2026/27; and recommending that the Council

- (1) notes the funding proposal as outlined by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government's letter of 13 January 2026 (attached as Appendix 1 to the report);
- (2) notes the funding levels included within Finance Circular 1/2026 remain provisional until the Finance Order was approved by the Scottish Parliament;
- (3) notes the anticipated budget gap for 2026/27 of £8.463m, as agreed at Council of 19 February 2026;
- (4) agrees the following specific budget items to be used to address the budget gap noted in (3) above and balance the 2026/27 budget:
 - (i) any additional investment in services that would increase the budget gap noted at (3) above;
 - (ii) the savings options to be selected from Appendix 2;
 - (iii) the use of any uncommitted reserves; and
 - (iv) the appropriate Band D Council Tax levy for 2026/27 and associated level of bad debt provision for non-collection of Council Tax; and
- (5) agrees the proposals for Common Good budgets for 2026/27 as provided in Appendix 4.

The Chief Financial Officer introduced the report and outlined the issues that required to be considered when setting the General Services Revenue Budget; advised that the Common Good budget required to be approved; advised that the budget gap for 2026/27 was £8.463m; outlined that Section 4 of the report identified the actions available to address the budget gap to ensure a legal budget was set; and advised that all Councils required to set the Council Tax by 11 March each year.

Councillor Ian Davis, seconded by Councillor Brian Connolly, moved that the Council approve the General Services Revenue Budget 2026/27 and Common Good Fund Budget 2026/27 proposals of the [Administration](#) (issued) and accept the recommendations at (1) to (5) above.

By way of Amendment, Councillor Julie Dettbarn, seconded by Councillor George Weir, moved that the Council approve the General Services Revenue Budget 2026/27 and Common Good Fund Budget 2026/27 proposals of the [SNP Group](#) and accept the recommendations at (1) to (5) above.

By way of Counter Amendment, Councillor Cameron Ramsay, seconded by Councillor Duncan Townson, moved that the Council approve the General Services Revenue Budget 2026/27 and Common Good Fund Budget 2026/27 proposals of the [Labour Group](#) and accept the recommendations at (1) to (5) above.

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

- (1) the Administration budget when officers were thanked for providing information to assist in developing the budget; thanking members of the public for completing the Budget Builder consultation and advising that this budget had been compiled to align with the feedback from the consultation; outlining that it had been challenging to attempt to bridge the budget gap, however, attempts had been made to reduce this gap; advising that the Council's budget was made up of 80% Scottish Government funding and 20% Council Tax and that, while additional monies had been confirmed in the Scottish Government settlement, this was short of what was required by Scottish local authorities, therefore, difficult decisions required to be taken to balance the books; that the increase in Council Tax would have been lower, however there had been a disappointing health and social care settlement, therefore, the most vulnerable must be shielded from cuts and it was proposed that Council Tax be increased by 8%; that the additional funding to the health and social care budget would be reviewed in the 2027/28 budget setting process to ascertain if future settlements and the Council's overall budget position allowed the Council to guarantee further permanent funding; that further difficult decisions would require to be taken in next year's budget and measures would be explored throughout the financial year; and that the administration budget set out a way to bridge the gap while supporting essential services and set out the approach to begin to bridge the budget gap for 2027/28 to provide the best services to the people of SA within the resources available;

- (2) the SNP Group budget when the Chief Financial Officer and his team were thanked for assisting with providing information to compile the proposed budgets; outlining that the Council was in a financially very challenging time and that there were no easy options for Members attempting to set a balanced budget for the year while striving to maintain vital frontline services; advising of the various proposals within the SNP Group budget including additional funding to the H&SCP to address increasing demographic pressures in the care system and to support the ongoing programme of transformation in health and social care focusing on early intervention and prevention which had already achieved significant savings while resulting in better outcomes for people; that it was important that the Council was a good partner of the H&SCP and provided additional funding where possible to assist the Partnership to meet pressures; advising that the three proposed budgets were similar in nature as all Members were choosing from a small range of options; outlining the various services that had not been affected in the SNP budget; advising that the SNP Group proposed a Council Tax increase of 7.5% to achieve a balanced budget which was not an easy decision, however, this budget recognised the additional funding this would provide to minimise service reductions and maintain vital services; outlining the proposed reduction to the Air Show budget; and that Members required to consider what could be afforded and the Council required to protect the people in need of support;
- (3) the Labour Group budget when Council Officers, Trade Union representatives and colleagues were thanked for their assistance during the budget setting process; that the proposals put forward by the Labour Group were difficult decisions, however, put the people of South Ayrshire first; that within the budget jobs had been prioritised as working people were the lifeline of this organisation and should not pay the price of the financial pressures placed on the Council; outlining that, whilst difficult choices had to be made in setting the budget, fairness was at the heart of every decision taken; outlining the facilities not affected in the budget; that a Council Tax increase of 6.5% was proposed which was difficult at a time when working people's finances were stretched, however, in order to present a balanced budget to protect jobs and ensure that vital assets within communities remained open, this was the unfortunate step taken; outlining the proposed funding allocated to the H&SCP; advising that this budget was not about making easy choices but of standing on the side of working people in South Ayrshire and recognising that communities were strongest when services were protected and those most in need were supported; and outlining that Members had a collective responsibility to put the people of South Ayrshire first;
- (4) the hard work and dedication of officers, Trade Union representatives and Members and thanking the Chief Financial Officer for guiding Members during the budget setting process; that savings proved harder to make each year; that a substantial amount of funding was required to fill the budget gap as the funding received from the Scottish Government was below the rate of inflation; that the only removal of posts within the Labour Group budget were for redeployment; and that it was hoped that the administration would identify options in the next twelve months to increase the Council's revenue streams to ensure there were no future job losses;
- (5) that the settlement figure from the Scottish Government each year was far lower than required to sustain services to residents of South Ayrshire; that the Scottish Government was also not fully funding the H&SCP resulting in local authorities requiring to find extra funds to support the health and social care budget; that the Finance Secretary had outlined that over 11,000 jobs were being cut within Scottish local authorities including South Ayrshire Council; and that the Labour Group did not accept some of the administration's proposals, including compulsory redundancies;

- (6) the proposed discontinuation of protected tee times at golf courses in the administration budget which would open up priority to visitors and would reduce the tee times to members; and that season ticket holders had been subsidising golf in South Ayrshire courses for years and there was a risk of losing season ticket holders which would in turn reduce revenue to the Council;
- (7) the proposed Council Tax increases within the three budgets and the proposed reduction in the current cleaning programme across all Council premises within the administration budget which would result in a reduction in lower paid employees;
- (8) the withdrawal from the ground floor of the Grain Exchange and whether this would result in job losses; and the Director of Communities and Transformation advised that it was casual staff who worked in the Grain Exchange and there would be a reduction of two FTE posts from within the casual staffing budget;
- (9) the future use of the Grain Exchange; and the Director of Communities and Transformation advised that the top two floors of the building were used for staffing accommodation and the ground floor would be used for an alternative purpose, which officers would decide on;
- (10) whether the savings from the grant funding for small business was dependent on any additional funding from Central or Scottish Government; and the Director of Communities and Transformation advised that the business grant reductions were mainstream budget and any external funding was utilised to supplement that;
- (11) what work was being carried out within communities at risk of losing public facilities to assist them in taking ownership of these facilities; and the Director of Communities and Transformation advised that a substantial amount of work had been carried out in the past few years by the Assistant Director – Communities and his team to support community associations to build capacity and resilience to take on their local assets which could be very challenging;
- (12) commending each of the proposed budgets and welcoming the recognition of the difficulties being experienced in health and social care in each of the budgets;
- (13) expressing disappointment in the reductions in various grants and budgets within the Administration and Labour budgets and seeking clarity on why the carbon budget was not included within the papers; and the Chief Financial Officer advised that he had not been requested to include the carbon budget for a few years, however, this could be included if members were so minded;
- (14) that the aim of the administration was to steer a steady and consistent course and this budget was an indication of the progress which had been made; that the proposed 8% Council Tax increase in the Administration budget was without the closure of any community facilities or removal of senior golf concessions or school crossing patrols; that it was requested that the Chief Executive ensure that work continued to rationalise the Council's estate as the organisation would soon be in a position where there would be no choice but to close community facilities as local authority financing was unsustainable which was highlighted by the current national status of the H&SCPs; that the Council was proud of its partnership with the H&SCP and accepted its role in this vital relationship which was why the medium term financial plan and workforce management plan would be vital to the future progress of the Council; that, along with the essential transformation programme, these three plans were vital to the Council becoming a more efficient and streamlined organisation; that the Council would continue to fund the improvement of education and sports and leisure estates; and that this proposed prudent budget was rebuilding the Council's reserves to place the Council in the best position to deal with future year budget turbulence;

- (15) previous statements made regarding golf season tickets advising that the increase in golf season tickets and reduced concession for season ticket holders in the administration budget was to provide positive revenue; and thanking all Members and Officers involved in the budget setting process, especially Councillor Ian Davis;
- (16) whether golf was sustainable as the majority of golfers were pensioners; that the increase in national insurance contributions would have an effect on the economy; that the cost of living crisis was not improving and oil prices were dramatically increasing which would also have an effect on the economy; referring to the cuts in the administration budget for anti-social behaviour mediation and small business grants which was disappointing; and outlining that the Air Show should have been included within the administration budget for consideration to adjust spending on this;
- (17) previous comments on the administration budget not supporting Town Centres and advising that the administration had invested in many town centres in South Ayrshire, were supporting businesses as well as libraries and leisure facilities, supporting staff and ensuring services were provided to members of the public;
- (18) transparency being very important when approving the budget and that the change in process left those Members not in the administration making a decision with scant information; that Members had a duty as a Council to ensure that they were well informed and aware of the implications and impact of the decisions being made, however, none of the implications were included within the administration budget; that the Labour Group budget was fundamental in its principles with a clear commitment to the people of South Ayrshire and there were no job losses; and that the level of Council Tax in the Labour Group budget was the lowest which was an achievement and prioritised the people of South Ayrshire;
- (19) it being incorrect to state that adequate information was not provided on the savings within the administration budget as Members were presented with information prior to the 2025 festive recess with the budget options for the 2026/27 budget, an explanation of each option and the officer responsible for this to allow Members to seek more information if required; and that this approach was welcomed by the SNP Group;

Point of Order

A Point of Order was raised by Councillor McGinley that Councillor Dettbarn had spoken twice on this item and the Standing Orders only allowed for a Member to ask a question and make a comment; and Provost advised that Councillor Dettbarn had previously spoken to move the SNP Group budget and was now responding to a comment made.

- (20) whether the Equalities Training Budget had been deleted from the Labour Group budget; and Councillor Ramsay confirmed that this budget line had been removed, however, the Labour Group would be happy to make an amendment to this;
- (21) the question at number (16) above on whether golf was sustainable; and it was outlined that the main objective of this Council was to make a pathway into golf and encourage more young people and ladies into golf as it was currently weighted towards pensioners; and that it was hoped to improve facilities to attract more people into golf;

- (22) whether the reduction in the winter gritting service throughout rural communities as accepted in the Administration and SNP Group budgets had an impact assessment carried out; and the Depute Chief Executive and Director of Housing, Operations and Development advised that this would be fully risk assessed by Ayrshire Roads Alliance by means of a route optimisation process;
- (23) whether there were job losses within the Administration and SNP Group budgets; and Councillor Davis advised that there was a reduction in FTEs within the administration budget, however a number of these were vacant posts; and Councillor Dettbarn advised that there were job losses within the SNP Group budget; and
- (24) that a range of views had been incorporated into the final administration budget, however, it would be advantageous for all Members to work together to produce a joint budget; that a number of difficult decisions had required to be made, including in relation to the H&SCP which was extremely important and required additional funding; and that next financial year also required to be looked at when setting this year's budget to ensure the budget gap was not increased.

A Member requested a roll-call vote.

In accordance with the terms of the Council's Standing Orders, the Council firstly proceeded to vote on the terms of the Counter-Amendment moved by Councillor Ramsay and seconded by Councillor Townson 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
Stephen Ferry	Counter Amendment
William Grant	Amendment
Wullie Hogg	Abstain
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 fourteen 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 Connolly 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	Abstain
Alec Clark	Motion
Ian Cochrane	Amendment
Brian Connolly	Motion
Chris Cullen	Motion
Ian Davis	Motion
Julie Dettbarn	Amendment
Stephen Ferry	Abstain
William Grant	Motion
Wullie Hogg	Motion
Hugh Hunter	Motion
Martin Kilbride	Motion
Alan Lamont	Motion
Lee Lyons	Motion
Craig Mackay	Amendment
Brian McGinley	Abstain
Bob Pollock	Motion
Cameron Ramsay	Abstain
Philip Saxton	Abstain
Gavin Scott	Motion
Bob Shields	Motion
Duncan Townson	Abstain
George Weir	Amendment

Five Members voted for the Amendment, sixteen voted for the Motion with six Members abstaining; 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.

Adjournment

The time being 11.15 a.m. the Council adjourned.

Resumption of Meeting

The Council resumed at 11.30 a.m.

4. **Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Revenue Budget 2026/27 and Capital Budget 2026/27 to 2030/31**

There was submitted a joint [report](#) (issued) of 5 February 2025 by the Depute Chief Executive and Director of Housing, Operations and Development and Chief Financial Officer seeking approval of the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Revenue Budget for 2026/27 and the proposed 5-year Capital Budget for 2026/27 – 2030/31.

The Service Lead – Housing Services introduced the report.

Councillor Martin Kilbride, seconded by Councillor Bob Shields, moved the recommendations as outlined in the report.

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

- (1) the budget lines for Major Component and for Structural and Environmental; and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that there had been some carry forward from the current year to next year to complete some ongoing programmes; that all of the addresses identified for modernisation had been submitted to Professional Design Services and scheduled for surveys for modernisation; that where there was an unallocated amount within the budget because programmes had not yet been let, all of the upfront survey work in the profiling and scoping of those properties was underway and similarly for the Structural and Environmental, that this covered a lot of external fabric upgrade work so an element of carry forward from 2025/20 26 had been agreed as part of Capital Programme monitoring reports;
- (2) the Council house new builds; and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that discussions had taken place around the profiling of the new build expenditure over the five year period and the Service Lead - Housing Strategy and Regeneration had convened a group to examine this, to ensure that, in terms of the existing new buildings identified, there was forward planning arrangements in place for the future to take this forward so there may be future reprofiling over the five year period and it was very unlikely there would be a year with no recorded expenditure against new builds;
- (3) the position regarding the Buy Back Scheme and whether this was a cost effective way of increasing the Council's housing stock; and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that the Council had significant success with the Buy Back programme and had exceeded targets over the past few years and was on track to exceed the target set within the SHIP for this year; that there had been some challenges in terms of the Buy Back Programme as a number of properties required significant investment as they were historically properties purchased through the Right to Buy Scheme but had not benefited from any improvements over that time; and that these properties provided a valuable additional to the housing stock and, in terms of financial viability the buy back scheme is a cost effective way to increase the supply of affordable housing however, could come with significant investment over and above the purchase price; and

- (4) footpaths and the Service Lead – Housing Services advised that good working relationships had been established with Ayrshire Roads Alliance in terms of their area engineers identifying footpaths that fell within the responsibility of the Housing Revenue Account that required work through their cyclical inspection programme; that the core budget in the Capital Programme for footpaths was also supported by the budget from Environmental Improvements and where there was an identified need for footpath repairs and it could not be met from the footpaths budget then there was scope to use the environmental improvement budget; and that, as part of the next review of the HRA business plan work would be carried out with colleagues in Ayrshire Roads Alliance to ensure that there was sufficient financial provision going forward, taking account of the ownership profile of footpaths across the Council area.

The Council, having thanked the Service Lead – Housing Services for his work on this matter,

Decided

- (a) to note the decision taken by South Ayrshire Council on 17 January 2024 which approved a 4.5% increase each year for the 3 year period from 2024/25 – 2026/27 for council house rents, and for other rents and charges recovered through the HRA (including:- lock-up rents, garage site rents, garden maintenance charges, communal heating and amenity charges). In accordance with the statutory requirements, tenants had already been notified of their 2026/27 rental charge which would be effective from 2 April 2026;
- (b) to approve the proposed 2026/27 HRA Revenue Budget outlined in section 4.3 of the report and Appendix 1 and the proposed 5 year capital budget as outlined in section 4.5 of the report and Appendix 2;
- (c) to note the requirements as outlined in paragraph 4.4 of the report to review and update the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and conduct consultation with tenants on options for rent setting proposals for 2027/28 onwards; and
- (d) to note that, following future tenant consultation during Autumn 2026, a further report would be presented to a future meeting of South Ayrshire Council, outlining rent consultation results and proposals on rent setting for 2027/28 onwards, and seeking a decision on setting rent and other charges to be applied from 1 April 2027.

5. Closing Remarks.

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

The meeting ended at 11.45 a.m.