

Draft

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of meeting of Falkirk Council held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Wednesday 22 January 2020 at 9.30 a.m.

Councillors:

David Alexander	Fiona Collie	Cecil Meiklejohn
David Aitchison	Joan Coombes	Lynn Munro
David Balfour	Jim Flynn	Laura Murtagh
Lorna Binnie	Paul Garner	Malcolm Nicol
Robert Bissett	Dennis Goldie	Alan Nimmo
Allyson Black	David Grant	John Patrick
Jim Blackwood	Nigel Harris	Pat Reid
Gary Bouse	Gordon Hughes	Depute Provost Ann Ritchie
Provost William Buchanan	James Kerr	Robert Spears
Niall Coleman	Adanna McCue	

Officers:

Jack Frawley, Team Leader - Committee Services
Rhona Geisler, Director of Development Services
Kenny Gillespie, Head of Housing
Kenneth Lawrie, Chief Executive
Colin Moodie, Chief Governance Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Pete Reid, Manager (Growth & Investment)
Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate & Housing Services
Bryan Smail, Chief Finance Officer

Also

Attending: Maureen Campbell, Chief Executive, Falkirk Community Trust

FC59. Sederunt

The sederunt was taken by way of a roll call. Apologies were intimated on behalf of Councillor McLuckie.

FC60. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

FC61. Referral from Executive – 10 December 2019
Treasury Management Interim Review 2019/20

Council considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which, in line with the Treasury Management Code of Practice reporting requirements, provided an interim review of the Treasury Management function. The Executive had agreed to refer the report to Council at its meeting of 10 December 2019.

The report provided an update in regard to:-

- the economic and interest rate outlook
- the borrowing strategy
- the investment strategy
- Treasury Management Prudential Indicators
- Treasury Management Advisers, and
- Member Training.

The report also provided benchmarking information which showed that Falkirk Council was 18th out of 32 Scottish Local Authorities in regard to investment balances at 30 September 2019.

Decision

Council noted the:-

- (1) progress of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2019/20, and**
- (2) reduction in the long term borrowing requirement for 2019/20.**

FC62. Revitalising Falkirk Town Centre – Update Report

Council considered a report by the Director of Development Services which provided an update on the immediate measures being taken to support Falkirk town centre, as requested by Council at its special meeting of 12 November 2019.

The Revitalising Falkirk Town Centre Partnership was established to help produce and deliver a Town Centre Action Plan. The action plan set out a series of measures to deliver transformational change for the town centre. A copy of the action plan with an update of progress was provided as an appendix to the report.

At the special meeting of Council on 12 November 2019 concerns over town centre access and the potential of opening up the east end of the High Street were raised. This included the potential to amend the pedestrianised area of the High Street. These measures were included in the action plan.

Decision

Council noted the progress of the work taking place to revitalise Falkirk town centre.

FC63. Housing Revenue Account & Council House Rents 2020/21 – 2024/25

Council considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which provided options relating to council house rent and other rental charges for 2020/21. Information was also provided on indicative rent levels for the years 2021/22 to 2024/25 to align with the Medium Term Financial plan.

Falkirk Council was landlord to over 16,000 tenants. The cost of providing council housing had to be self-financing from rents and other income. There was a statutory duty to review the level of council house rents annually. The average rent was £68.41 per week. Nationally Falkirk Council had:-

- the 6th lowest rent
- the 7th highest level of repairs and improvement expenditure per house
- the 10th lowest supervision and management costs.

A consultation had been carried out with tenants on a range of potential rent increase options for 2020/21. There had been 1,463 responses which represented a 9% response rate. The consultation feedback showed that preferences were as follows:-

	Option 1 2.0%	Option 2 3.0%	Option 3 4.0%
Responses	655 (45%)	421 (29%)	241 (16%)

The report advised that the Administration's position was to raise the rent level by 3.0%.

Decision

Council:-

- (1) agreed a rent increase of 3% for financial year 2020/21 together with a 3% increase in the charges set out in appendix 4 to the report for the same financial year;**
- (2) approved the Housing Revenue Account Budget for financial year 2020/21 as set out in appendix 2 of the report, and**
- (3) noted the indicative budgets and rent levels for 2021/22 through to 2024/25 as representing the best available information at this time.**

FC64. Housing Investment Programme 2020/21 to 2024/25

Council considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which provided details of housing investment requirements over the following five years which aligned with the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The Council was required to ensure that its housing stock met the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), as at 31 March 2019, 97.73% of properties met the SHQS. The 2.27% of properties which did not meet the standard related to either abeyances or exemptions. The Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH) aimed to reduce carbon emissions and eradicate fuel poverty. The target date to achieve the first EESH milestones was 31 December 2020, as at 31 March 2019 98.8% of the Council's stock was fully EESH compliant.

Decision

Council agreed the Housing Investment Programme set out in appendix 1 to the report covering the financial years 2020/21 through to 2024/25.

Council adjourned at 11.20am and reconvened at 12noon with all members present as per the sederunt with the exception of Councillors Goldie and Kerr.

FC65. Revenue Budget/Medium Term Financial Plan [MTFP]

Council considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which presented the business cases for Falkirk Community Trust (the Trust). Council was invited to provide feedback to the Trust on its business case.

The funding agreement between the Council and the Trust required that the Trust submit a draft business plan for approval by Council. The Trust's business case was provided as an appendix to the report and included:-

- cover letter from the Chief Executive
- Business Plan 2020/21
- Feedback on Community and Stakeholder Consultation
- Capital Programme
- Trading Review
- Grangemouth Golf Course
- Fees and Charges 2020/21

In line with the approved approach to the Medium Term Financial Plan, the Trust was allocated a specific savings target for 2020/21 of c£1.2m. The Trust's savings proposals for 2020/21 totalled £0.650m and were developed to avoid full service withdrawals from any location or venue and avoid conflict with the ongoing Strategic Property Review process.

Grangemouth Golf Club had expressed an interest in taking over the operation and management of the facility from April 2020. The handover was subject to the Club preparing a business case for approval by both the Trust and the Council. The Club had been unable to produce a business case, but requested a further extension to enable them to take over operational responsibility from April 2021. The Trust remained supportive of transferring the facility to the Club but could only do so if the Council continued to provide funding of £50,000 to cover the estimated deficit for 2020/21.

With the consent of the Provost a proposed amendment from Councillor Munro was circulated.

Councillor Meiklejohn, indicated that she would be prepared to incorporate the terms of the proposed amendment into her motion. Councillor Meiklejohn, seconded by Councillor Balfour, moved that:-

- (1) Council notes with disappointment the failure of the Community Trust to meet its requested savings targets;
- (2) It further notes that this is following a trend of previous years, thus putting an increased burden on other services;
- (3) Council therefore asks the Trust to look again at making savings to be brought forward at the Budget meeting and asks that in the longer term the Community Trust works with the Council within the context of the Strategic Property Review and the Council of the Future programme to find new ways of delivering services in a more effective way, and
- (4) Council defers consideration of an additional contribution to the Trust in 2020/21 to cover the Golf Club deficit to the Budget meeting.

Councillor Black indicated that she proposed to move an amendment to provide feedback to the Trust that the Council would not accept the proposals in relation to the reduction of winter opening hours at Kinneil Museum (£3,000) or the closure of Zetland Park kiosk (£8,000).

Councillor Meiklejohn, with the consent of the Provost and Councillor Balfour as her seconder, agreed to amend the terms of her motion to incorporate Councillor Black's proposed amendment into her motion.

Decision

Council:-

- (1) noted with disappointment the failure of the Community Trust to meet its requested savings targets;**
- (2) further noted that this was following a trend of previous years, thus putting an increased burden on other services;**
- (3) therefore asked the Trust to look again at making savings to be brought forward at the Budget meeting and asked that in the longer term the Community Trust works with the Council within the context of the Strategic Property Review and the Council of the Future programme to find new ways of delivering services in a more effective way;**
- (4) agreed that it did not accept the proposals in relation to the reduction of winter opening hours at Kinneil Museum (£3,000) or the closure of Zetland Park kiosk (£8,000), and**
- (5) agreed to defer consideration of an additional contribution to the Trust in 2020/21 to cover the Golf Club deficit to the Budget meeting.**