

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

At a Hybrid Requisitioned Meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council held in the Civic Space, 16 Church Street, Dumbarton on Wednesday, 8 November 2023 at 6.06 p.m.

Present: Provost Douglas McAllister and Councillors Jim Bollan, Karen Murray Conaghan, Diane Docherty, Craig Edward, Gurpreet Singh Johal, Daniel Lennie, David McBride, Jonathan McColl, Michelle McGinty, June McKay, John Millar, Lawrence O'Neill, Lauren Oxley, Chris Pollock, Martin Rooney, Hazel Sorrell, Clare Steel and Sophie Traynor.

Attending: Peter Hessett, Chief Executive; Alan Douglas, Chief Officer – Regulatory and Regeneration (Legal Officer); Laurence Slavin, Chief Officer – Resources and Section 95 Officer; Amanda Graham, Chief Officer – Citizen, Culture and Facilities; Laura Mason, Chief Officer – Education; Lauren Crooks, Strategic Communication, Culture & Performance Manager; Stephen Daly, Citizen & Digital Manager; George Hawthorn, Manager of Democratic and Registration Services; and Carol-Ann Burns, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies: Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillors Ian Dickson, James McElhill and Gordon Scanlan.

Provost Douglas McAllister in the Chair

STATEMENT BY CHAIR

Provost McAllister advised that the meeting was being audio streamed and broadcast live to the internet and would be available for playback.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that there were no declarations of interest in the item of business on the agenda.

RECORDING OF VOTES

The Council agreed that all votes taken during the meeting would be done by roll call vote to ensure an accurate record.

REQUEST FOR DEPUTATION

The Provost advised that a late request had been received to hear a deputation from Cara Thom and Hannah Redford in relation to the item 'Opposition to Relocation of Balloch Library'.

Having heard the Provost, the Council agreed to suspend Standing Order 18 (b) and to hear the deputation.

The Provost invited the delegation, namely Cara Thom and Hannah Redford to come forward and address the Council. Ms Thom and Ms Redford were heard in relation to their concerns regarding the relocation of Balloch Library.

The Provost thanked Ms Thom and Ms Redford for their contributions and they then returned to the public gallery.

OPPOSITION TO RELOCATION OF BALLOCH LIBRARY

It was noted that in terms of Standing Order 3 (b) Councillors James Bollan, Karen Murray Conaghan, Ian Dickson, Jonathan McColl, Lauren Oxley, Chris Pollock, Gordon Scanlan and Sophie Traynor had submitted the following motion:-

We the undersigned request that a requisitioned meeting be called to debate the following motion:

Council agrees that savings option CCF02 will not be progressed, excepting the already underway adaptation of Dalmuir CE Centre to house Dalmuir library as per savings option CCF01, and subject to any decisions taken at IRED in advance of this requisitioned meeting.

All remaining libraries that would have been impacted will continue to operate in their present locations with no reduction in hours, capacity, facilities, or service provision.

The £50k revenue benefit targeted for 2023/24 from taking this savings option will be met from reserves.

Any future proposals to change these services must be subjected to public consultation before being presented to elected members.

Councillor McColl was heard in support from the motion which he moved.

After discussion and having heard the Chief Officer – Citizen, Culture and Facilities in further explanation and in answer to Members' questions, Councillor Lennie moved, as an amendment:-

This Council notes that the Scottish Government has failed in its responsibility to properly fund local government.

This deliberate underfunding has meant Local Government share of resources have reduced over time and this has resulted in year on year reductions to council services and jobs.

The Council is legally required to set a balanced budget but it is limited in what it can do to address the funding gap. Council can either increase its income, reduce its services or a bit of both.

It can also generate reserves but can only use these on a one-off basis. The effect of this is to push back a decision for a single year and this simply increases the subsequent year's budget gap.

Councillors will recall that last year we had a £21million funding gap, and our early budget actions helped reduce this to £14million in December, with further reductions taken at the budget meeting in March.

We plugged the budget gap with reserves that we had created last year, we carried forward £7million of the 2023 revenue deficit, and additional cost pressures over the year, have increased our funding gap to £17.2million.

Councillors don't want to reduce any services but we have a duty to set a balanced budget.

A number of Council services are statutory services and are largely protected. Therefore, each Chief Officer is required to provide savings proposals to help share the burden across our services.

Given, the above, the Council agrees to note the Motion but to continue to progress with the budget decisions agreed in March this year.

Councillor McGinty then seconded the amendment and Councillor Traynor seconded the motion.

On a roll call vote being taken 11 Members voted for the amendment, namely Provost McAllister and Councillors Johal, Lennie, McBride, McGinty, McKay, Millar, O'Neill, Rooney, Sorrell and Steel, and 7 Members voted for the motion, namely Councillors Bollan, Murray Conaghan, McColl, Oxley, Pollock, and Traynor. One Member abstained from voting, namely Councillor Edward. The amendment was accordingly declared carried.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.