



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

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Minute of Meeting held in Council Chamber,
Council Offices, Stornoway on Tuesday 20
February 2024 at 4.30pm

PRESENT

Mr Kenneth Macleod (Convener)	Mr Norman Macdonald
Mr Paul Steele (Leader)	Mr John Norman Macleod
Mr Duncan MacInnes, MBE, Depute Leader	Mr Donald Macsween
Mr Kenneth J Maclean	Mr Donald F Crichton
Mr Iain A MacNeil	Mr Calum Maclean
Mr Iain M Macleod	Mr Iain M Macaulay
Ms Susan Thomson	Mr Malcolm K Macdonald
Mr Mustapha Hocine	Mr Gordon Murray
Mr Uisdean Robertson	Mr Rae Mackenzie
Mr Grant Fulton	Mr Angus McCormack
Mr Robert Mackenzie	Dr Frances Murray
Mr Angus Morrison	Mr Norrie Macdonald
Mr Ranald Fraser	Mr Finlay M Stewart

APOLOGIES

Mr Paul Finnegan	Mr George Murray
Mr John A Maciver	

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Malcolm Burr	Mr Sandy Gomez
Mr Calum Iain Maciver	Mr Derek Mackay
Mr Donald A Macleod	Mr James Mackinnon
Mr Calum Mackenzie	Mrs Marina Macaulay
Mr David Macleod	

Prayer

The Meeting was preceded in prayer, led by Duncan MacInnes.

Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

REPORT OF MEETING

The Chairman ruled the following item as urgent in order to enable the Comhairle to set a balanced budget for 2024/25.

Report of Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee of 20 February 2024 at 3.00pm

Mr Paul Steele, seconded by Mr Duncan MacInnes, presented the Report of the Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee of 20 February 2024 at 3.00pm and proposed that the Comhairle:

- (1) agree to accept the 2024/25 Settlement from the Scottish Government as set out in the Finance Circular in Appendix A to the Report;
- (2) approve the Budget Strategy for 2024/25 as set out in Sections 5, 6 and 7 of the Report;
- (3) approve the draft Budgets for 2024/25 at Budget Item B of the Agenda, including:

the following recommendations from the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee:

- (a) to continue the Broadbay and Westside evening bus services funded from Crown Estate Funding, subject to the approval of the distribution of Crown Estate Revenues for 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27;
- (b) that the Broadbay and Westside evening bus services be considered as part of the next round of tendering for the School and Public Bus Contracts as a distinct priced item;
- (c) the Head of Municipal Services consults with passengers and operators to design a peak passenger evening service for Broadbay and Westside; and
- (d) the Head of Municipal Services continues to explore alternative funding sources for the provision of evening bus services.

the following recommendation from the Sustainable Development Committee:

to fund the exit strategy for creative industries through Crown Estate Funding, subject to the approval of the disbursement of Crown Estate Revenues for 2024/25 and 2025/26.

- (4) agree the delegated Budget for Cùram is Slàinte nan Eilean Siar as detailed in Section 10 of the Report;
- (5) agree to freeze Council Tax at 2023/24 levels (£1290.75 for Band D properties);
- (6) agree to allocate additional funding to the provision of the Winter Maintenance contract, in the event of any increases to General Revenue Grant;
- (7) note the capital allocation for 2024/25 and that progress with the Capital Programme will continue to be monitored quarterly through the Policy and Resources Committee;
- (8) note the financial risks in Appendix C to the Report and agree to maintain the level of uncommitted reserves at £3.5m;
- (9) agree that the Budget and Strategy Board monitor progress with the implementation of Savings Plans;
- (10) note that the preparation of a Medium-Term Financial Plan is in progress;
- (11) note the draft Budget Book;
- (12) agree that a Budget Strategy update be provided to the June 2024 meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee;
- (13) agree to a flat rate increase of 12.5% across all sections of the Harbour Rates and Dues;
- (14) agree to a 6.6% increase to Harbour Dues levied on CalMac Ferries Ltd;
- (15) agree that the mark up of the fuel at fishery pier service be increased by 2 pence per litre to 11 pence per litre from 1 April 2024;

- (16) agrees that the Chief Officer, Assets and Infrastructure, retains authorisation, in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer, to make further future adjustments to the markup as required, providing at all times that it is sustainable and Prudential Borrowing can be adequately supported; and
- (17) agree to the Municipal Services Fees and Charges as detailed in Appendix 1 to the Municipal Services Fees and Charges Report.

Mr Iain M Macaulay, seconded by Dr Frances Murray, moved the following amendment:

The Comhairle agrees to make representation to CoSLA to lobby the Westminster Government to re-examine and modify the public Loans Board mechanism whereby long-term council debt is handled.

All councils have historic debts with payment periods ongoing well into the future with a payment to the capital sum being paid via revenue each year, which in part represents repayment of interest on these loans. As a result of the high interest rates that were in place at the time, we are now paying excessive amounts of interest. We are seeking that the interest element of these historic loans are now re-examined and either:

- (1) written off in full;
or
- (2) re-profiled over a longer period with no additional interest, thus reducing the annual payment for all councils.

Mr Paul Steele and Mr Duncan MacInnes, MBE, indicated that they were willing to accept the amendment proposed by Mr Iain M Macaulay, seconded by Dr Frances Murray.

Ms Susan Thomson, seconded by Mr Rae Mackenzie, moved the following amendment:

That the Comhairle agrees not to implement the following savings proposals:

- No.3 Bus Station (£60k)
- No.5 Community Transport (£120k)
- No.30 Libraries (£20k)
- No.37 Special Education Transport (£30k)

The above to be funded by increasing the assumption on savings through the non-filing of vacant posts from £300k to £530k, with the caveat that no ASN post be included in this number.

The Comhairle proceeded to debate the motion against the amendment.

The Comhairle then proceeded to vote on the matter.

The vote was taken by roll call as follows:

MOTION

Mr Paul Steele
Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE
Mr Kenneth John Maclean
Mr Iain A MacNeil
Mr Iain M Macleod
Mr Mustapha Hocine
Mr Uisdean Robertson
Mr Robert Mackenzie
Mr Angus Morrison
Mr Ranald Fraser

AMENDMENT

Mr Kenneth Macleod
Ms Susan Thomson
Mr Grant Fulton
Mr John N Macleod
Mr Iain M Macaulay
Mr Gordon Murray
Mr Rae Mackenzie
Dr Frances Murray

Mr Norman Macdonald
Mr Donald Macsween
Mr Donald F Crichton
Mr Calum Maclean
Mr Malcolm K Macdonald
Mr Angus McCormack
Mr Norrie Macdonald
Mr Finlay M Stewart

The Motion, having received the majority of the votes cast, became the finding of the meeting.

The Convener paid tribute to the work of the Chief Executive, Chief Financial Officer, Accountancy Team and Officers in preparing the budget papers.