



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

EDUCATION, SPORT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE (BUDGET SETTING)

Minute of Meeting held in Council Chamber,
Council Offices, Stornoway on Tuesday, 25
February 2025 at 11.00am.

PRESENT

Mr Paul Finnegan (Chair)	Mr Iain M Macleod
Mr Mustapha Hocine (Vice-Chair)	Ms Susan Thomson
Mr Kenneth J Maclean	Mr Robert Mackenzie
Mr Paul Steele	Mr Norman Misty Macdonald
Mr Kenneth M. Macleod	Mr Donald Macsween
Mr Ranald Fraser	Mr Malcolm K Macdonald
Mr Kenneth Macleod	Mr Angus McCormack
Mr Calum Maclean	Mr George Murray
Mr Rae Mackenzie	Rev Hugh Stewart
Dr Frances Murray	
Mr Norman MacDonald	

APOLOGIES

Mr Finlay M Stewart	
Father Michael Macdonald	Rev Bruce Jardine

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Iain A MacNeil	Mr Iain Maclean Macaulay
Mr Uisdean Robertson	Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE
Mr Angus Morrison	

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Donald A Macleod	Ms Anne Macleod
Mr Norman Macdonald	Ms Anne Macdonald
Mr Tim Langley	Mr Calum Smith
Mr Jack Libby	Mr Sandy Gomez
Mr Neil Macleod	Mr Derek Mackay

Prayer

The Meeting was preceded in prayer led by Rev Hugh Stewart.

Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

FINANCE

Budget and Council Tax Setting 2025/26

The Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer submitted a Joint Report which sought approval of the Comhairle's Budget for 2025/26 and to set the Council Tax for 2025/26. The development of the Budget had been overseen by the Budget and Strategy Board, comprising of Councillors from all Wards and all political groups, reporting to the Policy and Resources Committee, with all other Members invited to contribute through participation in Members' Seminars and an invitation to discuss and submit options regarding specific elements of the budget.

The Report stated that the Draft Settlement announced on 12 December 2024 at Appendix A to the Report, allocated the Comhairle revenue funding of £118.037m, an increase of £5.567m, compared with the initial 2024/25 Settlement. However, the Settlement included funding of £4.661m for prior year commitments and Government priorities, with net changes of £0.440m within 2025/26, equating to a funding increase of £1.346m for core services.

In relation to Capital Funding, the Comhairle would receive £5.985m, compared to a headline figure of £8.297m in 2024/25. However, the 2024/25 Settlement included specific funding of £2m towards the expansion of free school meals, awarded following a bidding process. Recent years had seen a gradual reduction in the level of grant, and this had been reflected in the assumptions made in the development of the 2023-28 Capital Programme, as approved by the Policy and Resources Committee on 15 February 2023.

The Report indicated that at its meeting on 23 January 2025, the Budget and Strategy Board approved £1.4m of savings proposals, as detailed at Appendix B to the Report, to be taken forward for consideration as part of the Budget. Sections 6 and 7 of the Report detailed the main factors which had impacted on the costs and income included in the budget, and which, importantly, had enabled a balanced budget to be proposed for 2025/26. The Second Quarter Revenue Monitoring showed that there were £4m of reserves available to support the Budget process, with this reducing to £2m if these Budget proposals were approved. However, this needed to be considered in the context of the underlying deficit and the continued uncertainty on pay awards and known budget pressures within certain service areas.

The Report stated that the IJB Budget was still to be finalised, but current indications were that there was a funding gap of around £4.4m forecast for 2025/26. With reserves depleted, this represented a material risk for both the Comhairle and NHS Eileanan Siar.

It was recommended that, in light of the current financial risks, as detailed at paragraph 6.4 and in Appendix C to the Report, the level of uncommitted reserves be retained at £3.5m for 2025/26.

It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle:

- (1) agree to accept the 2025/26 Settlement from the Scottish Government as set out in the Finance Circular in Appendix A to the Report;**
- (2) agree the Budget Strategy for 2025/26 as set out in Sections 5, 6 and 7 of the Report;**
- (3) approve the draft Budgets for 2025/26 at Budget Item B of the Agenda;**
- (4) agree the delegated Budget for Cùram is Slàinte nan Eilean Siar as detailed in Section 11 of the Report;**
- (5) agree to a Council Tax increase of 8% (£1,394.01 for Band D properties);**
- (6) note the capital allocation for 2025/26 and that progress with the Capital Programme will continue to be monitored quarterly through the Policy and Resources Committee;**
- (7) note the financial risks in Appendix C to the Report and agree to maintain the level of uncommitted reserves at £3.5m;**
- (8) agree that the Budget Board monitor progress with the implementation of Savings Plans;**
- (9) note the preparation of a medium-term financial plan is currently being finalised; and**
- (10) agree that a Budget Strategy update be provided to the June 2025 meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee.**

Draft Budget Book 2025/26 2b

The Chief Financial Officer submitted a Report seeking approval of the Draft Budget Book for 2025/26. The Report detailed a total budget summary for all Departments. The initial Budget for the current financial year and the proposed Budget for 2025/26 was broken down by the major expenditure headings and a narrative provided on any changes in each service area.

It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle approve the Draft Budget book 2025/26.

FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26

Schedule of Rates and Dues at Comhairle Piers and Harbours 2025/26 2c(i)

The Chief Officer, Assets and Infrastructure submitted a Report seeking approval of the revised harbours Schedule of Rates and Dues for 2025/26. The Report stated that the Schedule of Rates and Dues at Comhairle Harbours was reviewed annually, and the Report proposed a new scale of dues for the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026.

It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle agrees to a:

(1) flat rate increase of 5.5% across all sections of the Harbours Rates and Dues; and

(2) 6.5% increase to harbour dues levied on CalMac Ferries Ltd.

Municipal Services Fees and Charges 2025/26 2c(ii)

The Head of Municipal Services submitted a Report seeking approval of the revised Municipal Services Fees and Charges for 2025/26. The Report stated the Fees and Charges applied for waste collection and disposal were based on the requirement of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 requirements to cover costs of disposal of commercial and industrial wastes.

The Report indicated that the standard rate for landfill tax had increased from £103.70 to £126.15 per tonne for 2025/26 (22% increase). A 10% uplift had been applied to waste disposal charges for material that would be affected by the ban on landfilling of biodegradable municipal waste, which comes into force on 1 January 2026.

The Report highlighted that Consumer and Environmental Services fees had also been included this year as they now fall under Municipal Services.

It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle agrees to the Municipal Services Fees and Charges as detailed the Appendix to the Report.

