



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

BUDGET AND STRATEGY BOARD

Minute of Meeting held in Committee Room 1 /
MS Teams, Council Offices, Stornoway on
Thursday 24 October 2024 at 10.00am.

PRESENT

Mr Paul F Steele (Chair)	Mr Angus Morrison
Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE	Mr Iain M Macaulay
Mr Kenneth Macleod	Dr Frances Murray
Mr Iain A MacNeil	Mr Angus McCormack
Mr Mustapha Hocine (substitute member)	Mr Norrie Macdonald
Mr Paul Finnegan	

APOLOGIES

Mr Donald F Crichton	Mr Ranald Fraser
Mr Uisdean Robertson	

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Norman Macdonald	Mrs Shona Hadwen
Mr Derek Mackay	Mrs Anne Macdonald

MINUTES

Minute of Meeting of 19 August 2024	1	The Minute of Meeting of 19 August 2024 was approved .
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FINANCE

It was agreed that the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 of Schedule 7A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 namely, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (other than the Comhairle) would be disclosed.

Budget Strategy 2025-26	2	The Chief Executive submitted a Report advising Members of the anticipated financial position in respect of the 2025/26 Budget and seeking approval of an agreed approach to budget consultation and preparation.
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The Report indicated that Members were informed at the Budget Seminar, held on 14 September 2024, of the projected financial gap for 2025/26 of £7m and advised of options for agreeing a balanced budget in February 2025. These options included: increases in fees and charges; increase in Council Tax; modest use of balances and reserves; and also indicated the clear need to reduce expenditure through either transformation of service delivery or planned reduction of services. The Budget Seminar Presentation made it clear that achieving financial balance would require very difficult decisions.

The Report further stated that Members agreed at the Budget Seminar that a programme of public engagement would take place in November and December 2024, recognising that the Scottish Government Budget would not be announced until 4 December 2024, with detailed figures for the Local Government Settlement and the Comhairle, not being

known until later in December 2024. Nevertheless, the likely difficult choices which the Comhairle was likely to face made it imperative that public engagement take place before all the details of the Settlement are known. In order that consultation is meaningful, it was necessary that the Comhairle identify not only its strategy for achieving a balanced budget for 2025/26, but which areas of service may be considered to be at a higher risk of reduction in revenue.

Discussions were held under each of the following budget areas:

Deputy Chief Executive – Assets and Infrastructure

The 2024/25 savings in Bus Operations (Evening Services) and Community Transport were funded through Crown Estate and Islands Cost Crises Funding. A source of funding would be required to continue these services in 2025/26.

Renewable Energy – explore further options to maximise income from renewables generation. Discuss opportunities for Comhairle with MP.

Car Parking in Stornoway Town Centre – explore options to maximise income from parking charges.

Public Convenience in Stornoway Town Centre – Introduce a cashless system was seen as a potential way forward to derive more income.

Deputy Chief Executive – Sustainable Development and Community Safety Board

Archaeology Services – explore opportunities to charge for archaeology services.

Museums and Heritage – explore options to increase income and examine potential for annualised hours to increase capacity during summer months. Explore options to digitise Local newspapers and local community papers to generate income streams.

Education, Sport and Children's Services

Schools Maintenance Contract with FES: look at reviewing contract with a view to identifying savings.

E-Sgoil – Explore potential for relocating service to main Comhairle building. Explore options to increase income streams through adult learning courses.

Slainte Math – consider increasing monthly membership costs.

IT – Consider the amalgamation of Schools and Corporate IT.

ASN – Retain ASN staffing budget but review criteria and definitions of ASN.

Chief Executive

Explore the potential for amalgamating the Communications and Multi-Media Teams.

Town Hall – explore options for increasing revenue, including increasing charges..

Finance

Crown Estate Funding – Review distribution for Year 6 award.

The Board were informed that Heads of Service will be asked to develop savings options based on the appendices to the Report, taking account of the views of the Board. The outcomes would be reported to a Members Seminar in mid- November (date to be confirmed).

Following the Seminar the Comhairle would undertake community engagement in relation to service options.

It was agreed that the Budget and Strategy Board:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) note that Heads of Service would identify service options based on the appendices to the Report and taking account of the comments from the Board with the exception of the following areas:**
 - **Early Years**
 - **ASN Staffing**
 - **Planning Service**
 - **Air Services**
- (3) note that the Comhairle would undertake a programme of public engagement on the Budget Strategy for 2025/26 and later years.**