

THE INVERCLYDE COUNCIL – 23 JANUARY 2025

The Inverclyde Council

Thursday 23 January 2025 at 4pm

Present: Provost McKenzie, Councillors Armstrong, Brennan, Brooks, Cassidy, Clocherty, Crowther, Curley, Daisley, Hellyer, Jackson, Law, McCabe, McCormick, McGuire, McVey, Moran, Nelson, Quinn, Reynolds, Robertson and Wilson.

Chair: Provost McKenzie presided.

In attendance:

Louise Long	Chief Executive
Lynsey Brown	Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services
Alan Puckrin	Chief Financial Officer
Stuart Jamieson	Director Environment & Regeneration
Ruth Binks	Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development
Kate Rocks	Chief Officer, Inverclyde Health & Social Care Partnership
Matt Thomson	Finance Manager (Environment & Technical)
Angela Edmiston	Finance Manager (Corporate Services & Strategic Finance)
Karen MacVey	Members' & Committee Services Team Leader
Diane Sweeney	Senior Committee Officer
Colin MacDonald	Senior Committee Officer
PJ Coulter	Corporate Communications Officer (Media Relations)

The meeting was held at the Municipal Buildings, Greenock with Councillors Armstrong, Daisley, Hellyer, Law, McCabe, McCormick and Reynolds attending remotely.

40 Apologies and Declarations of Interest

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No apologies for absence or declarations of interest were intimated.

At the commencement of proceedings, the Provost being of the opinion that the report 'Recruitment Process for the Chief Executive' by the Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications was relevant, competent and urgent moved its consideration to allow the Council to take a view on the matter at the earliest opportunity. This was unanimously agreed in terms of the relevant Standing Order.

41 2025/26 Budget Update

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There was submitted a report by the Chief Financial Officer (1) providing an update on the position of the 2025/26 Budget following the receipt of the draft 2025/26 settlement for Inverclyde Council, and (2) thereafter seeking a number of decisions regarding the Council's 2025/26 Budget.

The Chief Financial Officer provided a verbal update and confirmed (1) the decision of the Education & Communities Committee on 21 January 2025 to approve the Community Learning & Development (CLD) workstream saving referred to in the report, and (2) that appendix 7 to the report 'Budget Overview – January 2025' therefore reflected the latest overall position on the basis that all recommendations contained within the report were approved.

Councillor Nelson joined the meeting during consideration of this item of business.

Decided:

THE INVERCLYDE COUNCIL – 23 JANUARY 2025

- (1) that the contents of the report be noted, including (a) the improved funding settlement for 2025/26 plus associated conditions, and (b) that the figures in the report are expected to be firmed up as matters are clarified at both a local and national level;
- (2) that the Council notes (a) that clarity is awaited on the level of Scottish Government support to offset the costs associated with the increase in employers' National Insurance, and (b) the interim assumption factored into the 2025/26 Budget;
- (3) that, due to the advised timescales for the Scottish Parliamentary process, it be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Provost to arrange a Special meeting of the Inverclyde Council on 6 March 2025 to approve the 2025/26 Budget and Band D Council Tax;
- (4) that the Council approves the allocation of (a) the £700,000 Budget pressures allowance, as detailed at appendix 3 to the report, and (b) a further £500,000 to address existing budget pressures within ASN Transport (£400,000) and winter gritting (£100,000);
- (5) that it be noted that the Chief Executive will present proposals relating to Phase 3 of the Management Restructure to the next meeting of the Council;
- (6) that (a) the write-back from earmarked reserves totalling £1.368million, as detailed in appendix 4 to the report, be approved, and (b) it be noted that decisions on the use of any remaining unallocated reserves will be taken at the Budget Setting Council meeting;
- (7) that the Council notes (a) the latest position of the savings workstreams, as detailed at appendix 5 to the report, and (b) that the £520,000 saving relating to teachers will now be substituted by an equivalent amount from the £41million increased funding for teachers announced as part of the 2025/26 Scottish Budget;
- (8) that the savings listed in appendix 6 to the report, for which Elected Members received detailed savings sheets and Equality Impact Assessments on 17 December 2024, be approved;
- (9) that the Council note the verbal update provided by the Chief Financial Officer advising (a) of the decision of the Education & Communities Committee to approve the CLD workstream saving, and (b) that appendix 7 to the report 'Budget Overview – January 2025' therefore reflected the latest overall position on the basis that all recommendations contained within the report were approved;
- (10) that it be noted that the Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services will present a report to the February Council meeting seeking approval to implement the Scottish Local Authority Remuneration Committee recommendations in respect of elected members remuneration; and
- (11) that the latest position of the 2025/28 Budget, as detailed at appendix 7 to the report, be noted.

42 Appointment of Vice Chair of the Integration Joint Board

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There was submitted a report by the Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services requesting that the Council appoint the Vice Chair of the Inverclyde Integration Joint Board (IIJB) following the agreement that the NHS Board take over the Chair of the Board from January 2025.

Decided:

- (1) that Councillor Francesca Brennan be appointed as the Vice Chair of the IIJB; and
- (2) that it be noted that the current Councillor membership of the IIJB is:

Councillor Brennan	Councillor Clocherty as proxy
Councillor Jackson	Councillor Hellyer as proxy
Councillor Quinn	Provost McKenzie as proxy
Councillor Reynolds	Councillor Robertson as proxy

Save ScotRail Ticket Offices – Notice of Motion by Councillor Cassidy

There was submitted a report by the Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services on a Notice of Motion by Councillor Cassidy, countersigned by Councillor Brennan, in the following terms as amended at the meeting:

“This Council Notes:

- That the Scottish Government owned rail operator ScotRail, announced on 31st October 2024 plans to reduce ticket office hours at 101 (70%) of its 143 staffed stations. This means weekly ticket office hours across the ScotRail network would reduce by around 2800 hours a week.
- ScotRail has commenced a 12-week internal staff consultation on the proposals which ends in February 2025.
- Wemyss Bay Station, the 2023 winner of Best UK Station is one of the stations affected by this announcement which will see its hours cut by 61% to 45 hours a week with a loss of 70 hours per week.
- Greenock Central station will see its current hours cut by 62% to 32 hours a week with a loss of 55 hours per week; Gourock station will see its current hours cut by 43% to 70 hours a week with a loss of 53 hours per week; Port Glasgow station will see its current hours cut by 41% to 72 hours with a loss of 50 hours per week and Greenock West station will see its current hours cut by 38% to 77 hours with a loss of 47 hours per week.
- According to Transport for All disabled people are less likely to travel by rail than non-disabled people and that around two-thirds of ScotRail stations are un-staffed.
- There is an ongoing campaign by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) to Save ScotRail Ticket Offices.
- These proposals would close ticket offices for significant portions of the day, amounting to a reduction of one-third of overall hours at affected stations, totalling a loss of around 2,900 hours per week.
- That these controversial proposals were first introduced in early 2022 by former operator Abellio following a 21-day public consultation run by passenger watchdog Transport Focus on proposals for cuts to ticket office hours.
- These proposals in 2022 faced overwhelming public opposition with 98% of respondents objecting to the plans to reduce ticket office hours.
- That at the time, the process that the passenger watchdog had to follow when reviewing the consultation responses, meant that it could only object to proposals under a ‘narrow’ criteria relating solely to ticket sales.
- That since then ScotRail is now owned by the Scottish Government, and guidelines for ticket office closures have changed. Under the new process, Transport Focus, the passenger watchdog, must assess any closure proposals according to accessibility, safety and service quality criteria.
- That during the 2022 Public Consultation, a poll by Disability Equality Scotland of its members found that 95% objected to the proposals.
- That the RMT has highlighted that ScotRail’s plans were initially consulted on under outdated procedures, rendering them illegitimate by today’s standards.
- The Scottish Government 2022 report into women's and girls' views and experiences of personal safety when using public transport found that –women and girls feel safer when there are staffed ticket offices open during their journeys.
- Ticket office staffing is the only regulated staffing at stations, meaning cuts could lead to broader unregulated staffing reductions without future public consultation.

This Council believes:

THE INVERCLYDE COUNCIL – 23 JANUARY 2025

- Staffed ticket offices and stations are vital for making rail accessible for all, especially disabled and older people.
- These cuts will seriously impact passenger safety, accessibility and security, thus will worsen passenger service and have a detrimental impact on passenger experience of the ScotRail network.
- These cuts ignore the needs of the traveling public and put essential services at risk and will erode the quality of services in Inverclyde and around Scotland.
- That the Scottish Government, as ScotRail's owner and the body who authorised ScotRail to proceed with these cuts, must urgently intervene and instruct it to scrap the plans to cut ticket offices hours and maintain the services that passengers deserve.
- That ScotRail reliance on outdated processes renders these proposals illegitimate and warrants their immediate withdrawal.
- That protecting staffed ticket offices and stations is crucial to supporting local communities, tourism and Inverclyde's economy.

This Council agrees to:

- Voice support for RMT campaign to protect the vital services offered by staffed ticket offices and stations and commit to advocating for the vital role they play in Inverclyde alongside Trades Unions, campaign groups and disabled orgs.
- Request the Leader of the Council to write to the Scottish Government calling on them to intervene and reverse this decision and to seek a commitment to fully staffed ticket offices and stations to ensure safe, secure, and accessible railways for all.
- Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to ScotRail Managing Director to raise the Council's concerns and call on ScotRail to reverse this decision and publish the relevant Equality Impact Assessment. ScotRail will also be requested to provide a detailed impact assessment on the accessibility, safety, and economic consequences of these changes, with specific focus on Inverclyde.
- Voice its opposition to ticket office closures and to advocate for the vital role that Inverclyde ticket offices and stations play in supporting the community, tourism and Inverclyde's economy."

Following discussion, Councillor Cassidy seconded by Councillor Brennan moved that the terms of the amended Motion be approved.

As an amendment, Councillor Wilson seconded by Councillor Nelson moved that:

"This Council agrees to facilitate a meeting with ScotRail senior management, during which Elected Members can explore ScotRail's proposed development and challenges foreseen by the RMT.

The Leader of the Council is asked to write to ScotRail to organise a meeting within these Chambers within 31 days."

Following a roll call vote, 10 Members, Councillors Brennan, Cassidy, Clocherty, Hellyer, Jackson, McCabe, McCormick, McGuire, McVey and Moran voted for the motion, and 12 Members, Provost McKenzie, Councillors Armstrong, Brooks, Crowther, Curley, Daisley, Jackson, Nelson, Quinn, Reynolds, Robertson and Wilson voted for the amendment which was declared carried.

Decided:

- (1) that the terms of the amendment be agreed; and
- (2) that the Leader of the Council be asked to write to ScotRail senior management to organise a meeting within the Council Chambers within 31 days to explore ScotRail's proposed development and challenges foreseen by the RMT.

The Provost being of the opinion that the undernoted report was relevant,

competent and urgent moved its consideration in terms of the relevant Standing Order to allow the Council to make a decision on the matter at the earliest opportunity.

44 Chief Executive Recruitment Process

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There was submitted a report by the Head of Organisational Development, Policy and Communications seeking the approval of Committee to appoint an executive recruitment agency to support the recruitment process for a new Chief Executive following the current Chief Executive announcing her resignation to take up the position of Chief Executive NHS Lanarkshire from 5 May 2025.

Decided:

- (1) that the appointment of an executive recruitment agency to support the process of recruitment of a new Chief Executive be agreed; and
- (2) that a report on the procedure to be followed will be presented to a future meeting of the Council.