

Correction - Council Meeting – 15 November 2022 –

Verbatim Minute of the Debate included as requested at Midlothian Council Meeting
13 December 2022

8.1 Midlothian Council Strategic Plan 2023 – 2028

Report by the Chief Executive

Provost, Councillor McCall - Chief Executive Dr Vickers

Chief Executive, Dr Vickers

Thank you Provost

So following October Council last agreed by Members, the Strategic Plan was taken back to BTSG and today the revised draft Strategic Plan is presented for comment. The report has two recommendations, firstly to approve the appended draft Midlothian Council Strategic Plan 2023 to 28 for consultation and secondly if approved, the consultation and engagement with Midlothian Communities and stakeholders will take place during the winter of 2022 with consultation outcomes and recommended options will then be reported back to Council in February 2023.

Councillor McCall

Thank you - Councillor Parry

Councillor Parry

Thanks Provost, yes I am very happy to move the recommendation to go out to consultants and thank the Councillors that shaped it in the form that it is here today, I think we took some time to make sure we were setting out realistic expectations before we go out to consult the public but we are really looking forward to those consultation responses and hope that all our community partners can get involved in that exercise as well and look forward to this coming back in February.

Councillor McCall

Thank you

Councillor Milligan

Thanks Provost. Provost we have had much discussion on this paper and whilst we agree we really need to get a vision put out there, the reality is that vision needs to go out with a medium term financial strategy and we just genuinely believe that we are premature in issuing this before we agree at least a five year medium term financial strategy on this so we would actually ask that we continue consideration of this until we have agreed the five year financial strategy and we have a budget in place that gives an accurate and a realistic idea of where we are going, elected members have been given and discussions with officers that the full extent of this severe financial challenges that this Council is facing and with the severe reduction in non-statutory and statutory services that are likely to happen in the near future, I think it would be premature to go out with this plan so we would move that we

continue consideration of this until we have a five year financial plan in front of us. Further one of the other issues that gives us some concern is the use of the word

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participatory budgeting, we would absolutely like to make clear on participatory budgeting given the challenges that the Council has got and able to balance a budget and deliver even statutory services, we really need to be clear that participatory budgeting will be in the line that it has normally been and that is through major projects like new schools etc and the budgets set in captions that there will not be any big chunks of money here handed out for groups to decide where to prioritise it when we don't actually have enough money to deliver the statutory services we were set out to with so could I move that we move continuation of this.

Councillor McCall

Thank you for that Councillor Milligan, do you have a seconder, Councillor Virgo

Councillor McCall - Councillor Cassidy

Councillor Cassidy

Thank you Chair, I just agree with what Councillor Parry was saying and I would like to second her motion and proposal.

Councillor McCall - Councillor Russell

Councillor Russell

Thank you Provost. I have an issue with regards to the reliance we are putting on participatory budgeting given that a few years ago now this Local Authority decided to enter into participatory budgeting scheme, using Dalkeith as a prototype and a lot of work went into that, a lot of organisations were involved in it within Dalkeith and proposals put forward, voting took place etc, the whole how it should have worked, but at the end of that there was no result, there was no money paid out, there was nothing so to my mind at that time participatory budgeting was the like bee all and end all of everything but it turns out that it was rejected by this Council in the end so I don't know why we are doing it now.

Councillor McCall

Councillor Virgo

Councillor Virgo

Thanks Provost. Yes just to pick up on Councillor Milligan's points, I think yes I do struggle a little bit with the idea of a strategic paper, it feels a bit mute until we actually know what the short, not even the medium term financial strategy is but the short term financial strategy, you know the balancing of the budget for this year before we start considering strategy, I also share concerns about the participatory budgeting approach, absolutely in favour of the delivering on the outcome in the national performance framework about comparing communities absolutely but I said

it the last time we discussed this paper this feels too vague in general and absolutely possibly a bit too disingenuous in terms of the funding that is available for

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communities to decide on when we haven't even as a Council got enough money to deliver our services at the moment, so I get that is why I would second Councillor Milligan's motion that we continue discussing this and it go out complimenting a short term financial strategy, what I would also like to see in here is some revision of the wording around our commitment to passive house building, specifically in relation to large schools, I don't see that passive house is particularly suited to buildings of this nature and I think we should look at re-wording or re-phrasing our commitments in that regard to allow us a bit of scope to assess the suitability of passive house buildings in schools particularly when we are being told that building a school to that standard has something like a 15% uptake implication so yes that is kind of my thinking to my seconding of Councillor Milligan's motion. Thank you.

Councillor McCall

Thank you, Councillor Parry

Councillor Parry

Thanks Provost, I just wanted to make sure that we were quite clear about the timeously thing, so I take on board points that have been made but the timing of the final report coming back will be timed with the medium term financial strategy and I think it is really good that Councillors have got you know really clear visions about what they do want or what they don't want in the plan but as Councillors have been discussing this for almost two months and what we need to do now is to go out to the public and let them have their say so that when we are shaping our financial strategy that we do that in a participative way, for those of us that were at the Community Planning Conference last week it was an absolutely brilliant event, loads of community partners who were you know really looking forward to being able to consult on our Planning vision in Midlothian and the way forward and a few weeks before that we also had an event with hundreds of young people who were also contributing really clearly, really directly about what they want as part of their vision from Midlothian. This is not about finalising and signing off the wording today this is about going out to consultation, of course if that consultation says that we don't want participatory budgeting in it or if we have to make other exceptions then that is fine if that is what the consultation says but I don't think it is right that Councillors are having the final say on this and we should be speaking to our residents and our community partners so I stand by moving forward the report at this time because we do need to make sure that we consult as widely as possible, we might not want to do participatory budgeting but let's at least do the participatory democracy. Thanks Provost.

Councillor McCall

Thank you. Councillor Milligan

Councillor Milligan

Yes I agree with Kelly in the fact that we really do need to go out to the public and give them a say but we need to do with all information so that the public are aware when they are supporting one issue they are very much aware of other issues that are there and other cuts that are being proposed because the reality here is the stuff the officers are telling us that they are going to be coming forward with is stuff that we would never have considered either cutting, removing or stopping in our lives, none of us would have and we really need to out there with a full picture for the communities instead of just going out and saying we are going to do participatory budgeting and this is going to be what this Council is going to try and do and then not say actually we don't have the money to do most of what we have actually told you, it is all a wish list, just I think this does not wash with me, we have got to be honest with the public here and actually be clear to them what the challenges are for this Council and what this Council will be able to do with the budget it is going to have over the next five years so therefore we do agree we need to be asking the partners, we need to be asking the public what we need to be giving them the full picture and making them very much aware of the restraints this Council has and cuts and the reductions in services this Council is going to be facing.

Councillor McCall

Okay, thanks for that, anyone else want to come in.

Councillor Alexander

Yes I would just like to report how important it is that we do move forward with passive housing in both schools and homes, we are looking at a future where energy and the climate may be more important than our finances.

Thank you, okay so we have the paper as proposed by Councillor Parry, seconded by Councillor Cassidy and Councillor Milligan has proposed to send it back to BTSG Councillor Milligan

Councillor Milligan

Just to continue until such time as we determine a financial strategy is agreed and make sure clear on the wording that participatory budgeting is through the budget setting process and through the particular projects such as schools etc.

Councillor McCall

Are you happy with that Democratic Services? Yes, Mr Turpie

Alan Turpie

Sorry just to complete the jigsaw as it were, we have had the amendment from Councillor Milligan and just to confirm that Councillor Virgo is happy with the wording of that minute.

Councillor McCall

And thank you Mr Turpie and what order should the vote be taken

Alan Turpie

Really I am quite happy (unable to pick up as Alan Turpie is turned away from the microphone and is inaudible)

Councillor McCall

Councillor Parry

Councillor Parry

Sorry Provost it is just a point of clarity before we move on, because I know there will be many of our community partners and community councils watching and they will want to know and be clear about what this means for the timescales of consultation so I just want to be sure, I don't know if the Chief Executive wants to pick that up around what that would mean in terms of our consultation programme which Councillor Milligan himself appreciates that it is very, very important and I am sure there will be some people disappointed that they cannot now do that or certainly looks like that might be the case so it is really important that we are clear about when people can have their say because if we don't do that until we agree the budget, what we are saying is that we have agreed the budget we have not consulted with you but now we are going to consult with you and that sits slightly uneasy with me so it would be good to get some clarity on that.

Councillor McCall

Thank you Councillor Parry. Dr Vickers

Dr Vickers

Thank you, so following November Council we have two other Councils, we have December Council and traditionally February Council, is the Council where we set the budget so if the plan and approach was agreed at December Council we would take the week consulting over Christmas, we know that is a challenge for people, many people are away so it would mean that it was a very short timescale but I am in the hand of the members in terms of the direction but if nothing is approved at the December Council then I would anticipate that we would need a Special Council after the February Council we can then hand over to Mr Anderson but that puts us in a challenging position in terms of setting Council tax and rates as well. I don't know if Mr Anderson wishes to come in with the deadline date for that.

Councillor McCall

Mr Anderson

Kevin Anderson

Thanks Provost. Certainly in terms of the deadline for Council Tax is very limited into the new year, we contract out in terms of the billing process but so do other local authorities and there are only limited provision of suppliers, so to answer the question we would be anticipating a setting by February at the latest because we need to give sufficient notice both in terms of the communities and residents of Midlothian so there can be to par a phrase a drop dead date in March but it absolutely very tight and we need to alert our suppliers if we were no able to set a date in February. Thank you.

Councillor McCall

Thank you. Councillor Milligan

Councillor Milligan

Yes just to be clear Chair, Provost sorry, I would be expecting, this is just not about setting a budget for this year, this is about a five year medium term financial strategy or as David said, Councillor Virgo said about a short term financial strategy, we need to have that strategy and I would expect we would not be just setting this year's budget with a five year financial strategy, we would be going out with a detailed plan on how we are going to reduce services over the next five years to be able to afford the budget that we have so therefore we would expect it to be going out at the same time as that.

Councillor McCall

Thank you for that. Before we move to the vote I was remiss in my duties and I should have stated at the beginning of the meeting: "This meeting of Midlothian Council will be broadcast live to the internet and will be stored as part of the Council's webcast archive. I have the discretion to terminate or suspend filming if, in my opinion, allowing filming to continue would prejudice the proceedings of the meeting. Equally so, items that are heard in private will not be made available to the public. Members are reminded that the cameras are activated by the sound system and that they must switch on their microphones when speaking and off when finished". Apologies for that.

So if we can vote on the motion first please.

So those in favour of Councillor Parry's motion hands up please. Thank you, and against. Thank you and for the amendment and against. The amendment is carried.

Mr Turpie is everything okay.

Alan Turpie

Yes in terms of standing orders (once again unable to pick up as Alan Turpie is turned away from the microphone and is inaudible).

Councillor McCall

Thank you.