

**East Renfrewshire Council**  
**Budget Event Feedback Report**  
**January 2015**

## **Introduction**

East Renfrewshire Council is in the process of setting its budget for the next three years (2015-18). The Council prepared a budget pack which set out savings proposals to help meet the estimated funding shortfall of £20million between 2015-18 and this was sent out to all households in early November. The budget consultation process took place from 10 November and closed on 5 December 2014 and included a community event for key service user groups affected by the proposals.

The purpose of this report is to provide all participants with feedback on all the views gathered during the event and to show how the Council is using this information.

## **Consultation Process**

Residents and staff were informed about the budget savings proposals and process through a range of methods including ER magazine to all households, Council website, social media, local press, libraries and Citizen Space. All residents could complete an online survey or a paper copy accessed through local libraries.

The Council invited service users, representatives from local groups and elected members to the evening event at St Ninian's High School on Wednesday 19 November 2014. The purpose of the event was to provide an opportunity for service users to be informed about savings proposals, give their views on how East Renfrewshire Council could reduce the impact of the proposals on service users and where possible, suggest any alternative ideas.

The event was opened by Lorraine McMillan (Chief Executive) and Councillor Jim Fletcher (Leader of the Council) who provided an overview of budget savings proposals, followed by discussion groups across four areas: Community Health Care Partnership (CHCP), Education, Leisure & Culture and Environment & Community Services. There was representation from across East Renfrewshire and 99 community representatives attended the event, as well as six elected members and two Trade Union representatives.

## **Key Messages**

Here are the key themes discussed in the workshops:

- The CHCP workshop discussion focussed on the proposed sale of Bonnyton House; day care provision; proposed closure of Learning Disability Centre and changes in services for children and families. The most notable concern and disagreement was regarding plans for Bonnyton House and day care services.
- Discussion in the Education workshop concentrated on reduction of school librarians, support staff; potential increase in class sizes and changes in campus police provision.

- The Environment & Community Services workshop participants focussed on closure of Barrhead Amenity Site and changes in community warden services, with less focus on common themes by participants.
- The Leisure & Culture workshop discussed the challenges and benefits of moving to Trust status as well as reduction in library facilities and staff. The discussion around the Trust was on points of clarification and how a Trust would function in practice, rather than wide discontent with the idea.

Many of the themes discussed reflect the most common topics in the online survey and social media except community wardens and reduction in library facilities didn't generate significant references online.

Participants had the opportunity to ask a wide range of questions and the officers leading the workshops were able to respond to main points directly. The alternative suggestions will be considered on a service by service basis. The full findings will be published in a separate report along with confirmations of the final decisions of the consultation.

## Workshop Notes

The following notes have been collated to provide a more detailed picture of the discussion with each workshop. All of the workshops began with a presentation from workshop lead officers to describe the savings proposals in more detail.

### 1. Notes of discussion from the Environment & Community Services Workshop

**Workshop Leads: Jim Sneddon (Corporate & Community Services Head of Service), Iain McClean (Head of Environment), Andy Cahill (Director of Environment) and Andy Corry (Head of Cleansing, Parks & Protective Services).**

**Number of Participants: 16**

Participants raised questions about proposed savings in relation to staff costs. The workshop leads advised many conditions were nationally agreed conditions which ERC could not change. Also, local conditions have been changed and examples were given. One attendee indicated that changes to terms and conditions could generate significant savings, avoiding service cuts.

Questions were asked relating to Area Forums and Community Grants. Workshop leads advised that community groups would be supported to identify other funding sources including external funding or other Council Department budgets, highlighting community grants budgets have a history of being under-spent in recent years.

Participants expressed their concerns around the closure of the Civic Amenity Site at Barrhead. Workshop leads acknowledged that this would have implications for service users.

Further questions and discussion followed about proposed changes to the overnight warden service and local gardening initiatives. On wardens, workshop leads advised that the Corporate and Community Services Department would remove warden services between the 0100 to 0800 period, however where evidence suggested increases in incidents/cost of vandalism flexibility would be utilised within the service to respond on a reduced basis. Regarding garden initiatives, an option appraisal exercise had recently been undertaken and it has not been possible to identify a more cost effective way of delivering services and

provided explanation around the difference (Council tax bandings) between the garden assistance and Mr Diggitt schemes.

Participants suggested improving energy efficiency within Council buildings. Workshop leads advised that programmes are in place for component replacement/energy efficiency measures to improve performance of buildings. Also, staff behaviour change programmes are being introduced. The Council is also looking at using our land assets for renewable technologies to generate income.

Questions were asked about the Council's position on Shared Services. Workshop leads advised that the Council does support sharing where it is right for the Council to do so i.e. saves money, improves service delivery, increases resilience etc.

There was a general feeling that literature issued and consultation event itself tended to focus on "cuts" and not enough information given regarding all the other savings (efficiencies), which would give residents a better feeling for all the other ways the Council was looking to save money. This was recognised as a good suggestion. Some examples were given of efficiency savings not featured in budget pack. It was agreed to take this suggestion back for consideration.

Suggestions:

1. Garden Assistance and Mr Diggitt Schemes - this could be undertaken by volunteers or charge for service.
2. Council moves to fortnightly brown bin collection – the Environment Department is currently looking at this.
3. Residents given annual update on progress with savings proposals – workshop leads acknowledged this was a good idea which would be taken back for consideration and advised we would be looking at ways to keep information following, particularly utilising online methods.

## **2. Notes of workshop discussion from the Community Health Care Partnership**

**Workshop Leads: Julie Murray (Director of CHCP), Frank White (Head of Health & Community Care) and Candy Millard (Head of Strategic Services).**

**Number of Participants: 21 invited and 30 attended.**

The initial discussion focussed on the sale of Bonnyton House. Concerns were highlighted by participants regarding proposing changes without meeting families; whether all alternative savings and efficiencies had been considered, monitoring quality of care provision if going to voluntary or private provider; guarantee that Bonnyton House remains a Care Home and information about timescale of change.

Workshop leads provided further clarity, highlighting that meetings with families are already happening and more are planned including with the Bonnyton Action Group chairman to explore savings alternatives; the Care Inspectorate who monitor Care Standards and in addition to this there is a contracts monitoring team that work closely with local homes on improving quality; This savings would be phased for later in the budget cycle in 2017/18.

Participants were involved in discussion around Older People's Day Care services including the use of current provision and informing service users who are currently unaware. Workshop leads provided clarification that there hasn't been contact with all service users as yet and this will affect more people than those who use Bonnyton House. If this saving is agreed, the message would need to be communicated with all service users.

There was further discussion around looking at alternative ideas including charging for day care like other areas and preventative work in the community.

Workshop leads explained that as services move towards self directed support it becomes difficult to charge for services so the CHCP may need to charge in a different way. There is a possibility of looking at charges not currently collected, however, when charges were raised to £20 for a blue badge there was a great outcry so this must be taken into account.

There followed discussion and further questions around priorities and Council spend relating to vulnerable groups. There was a feeling that the Council prioritises education over working with vulnerable people as they want to stay at top of league tables. More specific questions were asked regarding numbers of children in East Renfrewshire schools who are from outwith the area.

Responses highlighted that most CHCP money is spent on vulnerable people, therefore, when savings are being made it will impact on these particular groups. Numbers of children from outwith East Renfrewshire is available in Planning for the Future document on the website. Funding is provided for numbers of children in school rather than numbers resident in the area. East Renfrewshire schools operate more efficiently if they are full.

This discussion then focussed on specific queries around which Learning Disability day centre is closing, the scale of savings for this particular group and timing relating to self directed support (SDS).

Workshop leads clarified that no decisions have been made around which centre will close as options will be fully considered as part of ongoing engagement following closure of budget strategy process. It was stressed that the best way of making savings, is to take it out of buildings, not support for people.

There was a general feeling that savings were achievable as hospital closures put in place expensive packages and it is possible to reduce these.

Workshop leads advised that they are really working hard together with learning disability clients, providers and communities to see if we can do things differently, get good outcomes for people and save money.

There was a recognition that it is difficult for people at the start of the process but hopefully when people can see what has worked for others, it will clarify what is meant by redesign and doing things differently. There was an understanding that the timing relating to self directed support (SDS) was unfortunate and this was unavoidable.

There was some positive comment from a participant to say that East Renfrewshire is seen from outside as good example of redesign.

A specific question was asked about how money will be saved by transferring Children and Families Services from third sector to statutory sector. There was an understanding regarding youth counselling however, and a range of partners will be working together to redesign this which is why the saving is not planned for the first year.

Other general questions included queries about changes to the budget booklet, hearing about good news stories, impact on older people re: reduction in community wardens and issues for disabled people. It was clarified that no changes have been made to the budget booklet. The Chief Executive highlighted that the community warden service is being discussed in another workshop but the plan is to only reduce the service at times when there is least demand for them as the police have a duty to respond as needed.

Participants were reassured that any unrelated issues such as wheelchair taxi's, wider support and representation for disabled people will be fed back to the Council.

Suggestions:

1. Charging for day care services.
2. Preventative work in the community.

### **3. Notes of Discussion from the Leisure & Culture Workshop**

**Workshop Leads: Louise Pringle (Head of Customer & Business Change Services) and Ken McKinlay (Head of Education).**

**Number of Participants: 34**

The workshop was primarily used by participants to ask questions about proposals, seek further clarification and learn how this would work in practice. Therefore, few suggestions were made. It was also made clear that savings still have to be made, whether services are transferred to a Trust or not. If savings are not found by going to Trust they would have to be found elsewhere within services.

Workshop participants asked specific questions relating to management structures and required further clarification regarding salary costs, tax and charitable status.

The Trust will have a close working relationship with the Council, despite being a separate charitable organisation. Evidence shows that other councils' performance has improved through implementation of a Trust. This will not create new management, it's a transfer of existing management – residents will be dealing with the same people.

The Trust and Council will have Service Level Agreements between the two organizations. There will be a Trust Board in place to oversee the organisation working to both Company and Charity Law. There will be elected members on the Board and two staff observers to help the Board make informed decisions or understand the impact of decisions; also the Trust will report its performance regularly to Council.

The management of a Trust requires a distinct set of skills and this is not just the same job as the existing Head of Education Services currently undertakes. It needs a member of staff with relevant experience for the position. A management post does need to be funded which has been accounted for in quoted savings. Concerns were raised over senior management costs incurred through setting up a Trust and some felt that this was a duplication of work.

The Council has been looking for reductions across the whole management team and the number of senior managers has fallen. This will fall in future with reduction of at least one other senior member of staff in another area with duties being redistributed and the Council will be continually looking to keep its management structure lean.

The Trust will take advantage of the discounts on VAT and Non-Domestic Rates available to charitable organisations. Around two thirds of councils in Scotland have implemented Trusts. It would be wrong not to explore potential of this given that this helps protect the services and jobs but yet generates substantial financial savings each year. Experiences of Trusts elsewhere suggest service improvements will be delivered after the Trust is implemented with a continued contribution to help the Council achieve its outcomes.

There are no plans for government to make changes to benefits of charitable status and there isn't concern around this. Council also remains responsible for ensuring the delivery of these services, Trust cannot just close its doors and there would no longer be any services anymore. The Council pays the Trust to deliver these services and there is a management fee.

Further queries were raised regarding where responsibility lies if residents have issues, closure of library buildings, looking at ways that halls can generate income without increasing charges, financial implications involved in moving to Trust and impact on services. The Council is trying to avoid closing libraries and aiming to reduce costs where

possible. There are a range of options being considered include renting or selling space if services move out but aim is to be creative in how to reduce costs.

The aim is to increase income generation through new business e.g. use of all rooms in a hall and also more cost-covering activity like social functions or commercial lets. Workshop leads explained that this opportunity could raise funds that can be ploughed back into services and how this has enabled other Trusts to make improvements in performance.

There are one-off transition costs of £140,000 for the Trust which have been budgeted for to cover set up of the Trust offices, legal fees, initial marketing and a contingency allowance. Sports clubs would be partners with the Trust in working to increase participation. The Trust would not result in pressure on clubs to increase income.

It was clarified that questions about sports pitches were out of the remit of the Trust or the services being covered in the workshop as these are supported by Environment Department and will not be moving to the Trust. It was suggested that comment be made online re: impact of proposed charges.

The total saving targets for leisure and culture services is £1.3 million with £400,000 of that coming from savings in VAT and Non-Domestic Rates. Whilst the Trust will have a savings target, it will, however, be able to explore other means of meeting the £900,000 as well as the proposals being presented tonight. The Trust savings are not being built in for the first year of this budget cycle which provides some cushion and the ability to meet one-off costs.

In response to questions about Trusts in other areas, officers stated that Trusts set up in last few years have learned from others, from mistakes made in past and now doing better. Not all are successful, but becoming an increasingly successful model and highlighted that it is very important to the Council that the Trust is set up to succeed.

Additional questions were asked about how customer dissatisfaction would be dealt with, the make-up of the Trust Board, representation from customers on the board, considerations for those living in deprived areas, charging for identified services and other possible implications.

The Trust will be accountable if customers are unhappy and likely to follow a similar complaints process as ERC, although this is still being negotiated, however elected members are on the Board. Trust would also have performance indicators they must meet on complaints and customer satisfaction.

Once the Council decision goes through in December then the Trust Board will be recruited early in 2015 with independent members being sought bringing a range of skills and experience. Participation would be based on level of experience and knowledge that could be brought to the Board. This will be an open application process. There are likely to be between 7 and 9 Board members with equal split of Councillors and independents plus a Trade Union representative.

The Council will continue to aim to support groups from deprived areas and work to the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) across all services. There will continue to be concessionary policies and discounts. The Council will be assessing what is reasonable in terms of charge increases and a paper submitted for December Cabinet with changes proposed for April. The Council will be writing out regarding any changes early next year. Steps would be taken to ensure that charges increases remain manageable and do not get out of hand.

There were specific questions asked about self-service proposals for libraries and uptake of volunteers. It was made clear that this is not agreed and these were proposals in a list of options around libraries which have been singled out in the media. If adopted this would not apply to all libraries as there is a need to understand what works and where.

There was further discussion around proposed closure of Auchenback Community Centre. Workshop leads explained that representatives of each user group received a letter in October before the proposals went to Cabinet and a further correspondence has been sent out since then to explain that Cabinet had agreed a closure. Further explanation was provided regarding the closure which is due to the unsustainable nature of the building, low use, high costs and significant maintenance issues, however, this would not occur until groups find alternative premises – currently aiming for summer 2015.

Further questions were raised about how Arthurlie House management committee will be affected by the Trust and about charity regulator Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and if Trust was tasked with making further savings whether OSCR would have an issue with this. It was clarified that Community Facilities staff will be meeting with the Management Committee shortly on this.

Suggestions:

1. Customer representation on Trust Board.
2. Making sure rates were competitive to encourage income generation.

#### **4. Notes of discussion from the Education Workshop**

**Workshop Leads: Mhairi Shaw (Director), Fiona Morrison (Head of Service), John Fitzpatrick (Head of Service), Mark Ratter (Senior Manager), Marie Kelly (Senior Manager) and Mary Docherty (Quality Improvement Officer).**

**Number of Participants: 49**

Participants were primarily concerned about the impact of the various proposed reductions in the service. Questions were raised about how the impact on larger classes would be assessed. Workshop leads advised that subjects other than English and Maths have a maximum of 30 and practical classes 20 phased in over 3 years. Membership of Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) ensures regular sharing of good practice.

In response to a question relating to the guidelines about prioritising services the workshop lead advised that each service department have been asked to propose where savings proportionate to their allocation of the budget could be made. Education receives 50% of the Council budget and have to make proposals equivalent to 50% of the shortfall.

Participants asked whether the staff had been informed of saving proposals and this was clarified that proposals to date have been published in the budget booklet although none have been agreed at this time.

There was a question as to whether the savings would be weighted across the authority and deprivation taken into account. The workshop leads advised that the Council are taking account of this and that elected members have asked services to manage this sensitively.

Workshop participants raised concern as to what would happen to staff where a service is removed. The workshop lead indicated that staff would be redeployed, particularly where there is an area of growth such as in pre-five provision.

Concerns:

- Impact on attainment of proposed class size increase in English and Maths especially when new National qualifications are being introduced and increased workload for teachers with less pupil interactive time.
- Impact on staff and pupils of proposed reduction of Pupil Support Assistants (parent and senior pupil).

- Impact of the “dramatic” increase of instrumental music tuition fees with some parents unable to pay the increase and on the future opportunity to stage events such as the Commonwealth Concert.
- Disagreement with proposal to reduce the school library service and use of senior pupils as volunteers in school libraries and the time involved.
- Impact on the reduction of the school librarian service on pupils’ reading attainment and experiences and whether extra payment could be justified to maintain the present level.
- Impact of the proposals on the Council’s reputation for providing excellent education.
- Impact of the removal of breakfast clubs on most vulnerable youngsters.
- Impact on vulnerable families of the removal of the Family Learning Service.

Alternative suggestions put forward during the workshop were as follows:

1. Raise Council Tax.
2. Increase charges for Easter schools.
3. Approach developers for contributions.
4. Negotiate locally as not all P1 and P3 pupils in East Renfrewshire need a free lunch.
5. Access text books on line.
6. Make more use of school premises.
7. Withdraw from the National Glow network.
8. Use funding from City Deal to reduce the level of cuts.
9. Instead of reducing services find a way to get more revenue from parents.
10. Merge social justice managers and absence management.
11. Update the online payment facility to be more user friendly.

## Evaluation of the Event

60% (58 out of 107) of event participants completed evaluation forms at the event and this feedback showed that 75% (44) of participants found the event informative and made positive reference to the opportunity for a two-way conversation with the Council regarding the savings proposals. 80% (49) of participants felt that they had the opportunity to share their views and make alternative suggestions within each workshop.

## Next Steps

East Renfrewshire Council values the participation and feedback from all those who attended the event. All feedback and alternative suggestions are currently being considered and were presented to East Renfrewshire Council’s Budget Strategy Group in December and January. This will help make the final decisions in January 2015., A full Council meeting will take place on 12 February where final savings will be formally agreed and a feedback report will be made available during this time.

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