



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
EAST LoTHIAN COUNCIL**

**TUESDAY 29 APRIL 2025
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON
AND VIA HYBRID MEETING FACILITY**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar	Councillor L Jardine
Councillor E Allan	Councillor C McFarlane
Councillor R Bennett	Councillor C McGinn
Councillor L Bruce	Councillor G McGuire
Councillor C Cassini	Councillor S McIntosh
Councillor D Collins	Councillor K McLeod
Councillor F Dugdale	Councillor J McMillan (Convener)
Councillor J Findlay	Councillor L-A Menzies
Councillor A Forrest	Councillor B Ritchie
Councillor N Gilbert	Councillor T Trotter
Councillor N Hampshire	Councillor C Yorkston

Council Officials Present:

Mr L Rockey, Chief Executive
Ms L Brown, Executive Director for Education and Children's Services
Ms S Fortune, Executive Director for Council Resources
Ms F Wilson, Director of Health and Social Care
Ms E Dunnet, Head of Finance
Mr D Hood, Head of Operations (Adult Social Care)
Ms N McDowell, Head of Education
Ms W McGuire, Head of Housing
Mr T Reid, Head of Infrastructure
Ms C Rodgers, Head of Communities
Ms E Barclay, Democratic Services Assistant
Mr S Cooper, Service Manager – Communications
Mr K Dingwall, Service Manager – Planning/Chief Planning Officer
Mr C Grilli, Service Manager – Governance
Mr C Hamm, Sustainability and Climate Change Officer
Mr E Hendrikson, Team Manager – Amenity Services

Visitors Present:

John Boyd, Audit Scotland

Clerk:

Mrs L Gillingwater

Apologies:

None

Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statements:

Item 3: Transparency statement – Councillor Jardine stated that she had a child at East Linton Primary School.

Items 4 and 15: Declaration of Interest – Councillor Forrest advised that he had a conflict of interest in these items due to work that he had done in relation to Common Good and that he would leave the meeting for the duration of those items.

Item 15: Declaration of Interest – Councillor Cassini advised that she had a conflict of interest, as a patron of the Honest Toun Association, and that she would leave the meeting for the duration of that item.

Item 15: Transparency statement – Councillor Menzies stated that she was a Council-appointed board member of EnjoyLeisure.

The Convener advised that the meeting was being held as a hybrid meeting, as provided for in legislation; that the meeting would be recorded and live streamed; and that it would be made available via the Council's website as a webcast, in order to allow public access to the democratic process in East Lothian. He noted that the Council was the data controller under the Data Protection Act 2018; that data collected as part of the recording would be retained in accordance with the Council's policy on record retention; and that the webcast of the meeting would be publicly available for six months from the date of the meeting.

The clerk recorded the attendance of Members by roll call.

Prior to the commencement of business, the Provost welcomed the Council's external auditor, John Boyd of Audit Scotland, to the meeting.

The Provost also welcomed the new Chief Executive, Laurence Rockey, to his first Council meeting. Mr Rockey thanked the Provost, and he also thanked Lesley Brown for acting as interim Chief Executive prior to his arrival. He noted that his first impressions of the Council were very positive, and that he was struck by the strong sense of culture and partnership working. He looked forward to his new role.

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL

The minutes of the following meetings of East Lothian Council were approved:

- (a) Special East Lothian Council, 18 February 2025
- (b) East Lothian Council, 25 February 2025

2. ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT 2023/24

The Provost invited Mr John Boyd of Audit Scotland to present the Council's Annual Audit Report for 2023/24.

Mr Boyd presented the report, drawing attention to the key messages of the audit, noting in particular that the Council had been given an unmodified audit opinion, effectively 'a clean bill of health'. He highlighted the Council's strong financial management arrangements, despite the current financial pressures. He warned that, with a potential financial gap of £79m over

the next five years, the Council would be required to take difficult decisions to meet rising cost pressures and service demands. As regards the Best Value thematic review, Mr Boyd reminded Members that the theme for 2023/24 had been Workforce Planning; for the coming year it would be Transformation. He also made reference to the Council's Best Value Report, due to be submitted to the Accounts Commission in June 2025, as well as the audit action plan (as set out in Appendix 1 of the report).

Councillor Menzies asked about the importance of the Council having an unmodified audit opinion. Mr Boyd explained that this meant 'free from error', and that he did not have to alter or caveat his opinion in any way when expressing his conclusions based on the audit work.

In response to a question from Councillor McLeod relating to the Edinburgh Innovation Hub, Mr Boyd noted that at the 2023/24 year-end, the level of activity at the EIH was relatively low. As the level of activity was now increasing, he was questioning how the Council would ensure that it was getting value for this public investment: for example, monthly/regular reporting from the Joint Venture. Councillor McLeod also asked about the Council's self-evaluation process. Mr Boyd advised that he would strongly encourage self-evaluation, as it was better for the Council to evaluate and manage its performance before the involvement of the external auditor.

Councillor Akhtar asked for further detail on the Best Value thematic reviews. Mr Boyd pointed out that the Accounts Commission had published a report on Workforce Planning in 2024, and that they had set out their expectations in relation to Transformation. Work on this was now underway as regards how this aligned to the Council's strategy and corporate planning; this would be compared to the work of other local authorities, with good practice being shared.

After thanking Mr Boyd for his report, Councillor Hampshire indicated that the Council had had to make difficult decisions during this year's cross-party budget process, and that further difficult decisions lay ahead. He emphasised the challenges facing the Council regarding growth and increasing demand on services. On digital transformation, he stressed the need to progress this agenda.

As Convener of the Audit and Governance Committee, Councillor Menzies welcomed the report and pointed out that it was important for the public to see that the Council was working hard on their behalf and that money was being spent appropriately. She recognised that staff were under pressure in the current challenging financial climate, and she thanked them for their efforts.

Councillor Forrest thanked the Head of Finance and her staff for their work in ensuring that the Dr Bruce Fund was meeting its charitable objectives.

Councillor Akhtar thanked staff for their hard work during a period of significant growth. She welcomed in particular the independent view of the external auditor that the Council had strong financial management arrangements in place, and that the Council had been given 'a clean bill of health'.

The Provost thanked Mr Boyd for his report and for his attendance at the meeting.

Decision

The Council agreed to note the Annual Audit Report for 2023/24.

3. FINANCE UPDATE

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Council Resources providing an update on the final local government finance settlement following approval of the Council's budget for 2024/25; seeking approval of an amendment to the 2025/26 capital programme; and providing an update on the broader actions agreed as part of the budget, and next steps to develop the financial strategy and budgets for 2026/27 onwards.

The Head of Finance, Ellie Dunnet, presented the report, highlighting a number of funding streams that were still to be distributed, and updating Members on funding streams confirmed since the budget was set (outlined at Sections 3.2-3.5 of the report). On the capital programme, she drew attention to the need for work to be undertaken at East Linton Primary School, noting that this work would be funded through developer contributions, with no additional borrowing required. She noted that a report would be presented to Council in June as regards other paused capital projects. Ms Dunnet provided an update on a number of other budget actions, as set out in Section 3.8 of the report.

With reference to the Annual Audit Report, Councillor Menzies sought an update on the Council's reporting systems. Ms Dunnet explained that work was underway to improve internal processes, and a new financial system was being introduced which would result in significant changes and improvements to many processes; phase 1 would be implemented in the current calendar year.

Councillor Trotter asked for further information on allocations of the various funding streams highlighted in the report. Ms Dunnet advised that these funding streams would be used for their intended purpose, and that further details regarding the Council's allocations and also how the funding was being used would be provided in the regular finance update reports.

Councillor Jardine asked about the impact of the employers National Insurance contribution (ENIC) changes. Ms Dunnet indicated that there would be a shortfall of £1.8m, with provision for this having been made in the budget. The position regarding commissioned services was unclear at this time, but she estimated it could be between £1m and £2m. She added that £144m had been allocated by the Scottish Government for ENIC, with the Council receiving a share of that funding, but that the funding from the UK Government for Scotland would not be confirmed until May.

In response to questions from Councillor Allan regarding the use of reserves and support for services as they make efficiency savings, Ms Dunnet pointed out that using reserves to balance the budget was not sustainable and that having a reduced level of reserves presented a financial risk to the Council. She noted that the budget approved by Council in February did not rely on the use of reserves (other than earmarked reserves). She stressed the importance of focusing on sustainability in future financial planning. On the safeguarding of services, Ms Dunnet advised that the budget for 2025/26 was balanced, and it was hoped there would be no need to introduce short-term reactive measures during the year. She did warn, however, that in the longer term it may not be sustainable to safeguard services at their current level, and that resources would need to be directed towards key priorities.

Councillor McIntosh asked about the future plans for East Linton Primary School. Ms Dunnet explained that the proposed work was a short-term measure, and that long-term planning for East Linton Primary School was required. Nicola McDowell, Head of Education, added that, looking at the roll projections for the school, there was capacity for the expected numbers of pupils, but that the work to the toilets was required now. Tom Reid, Head of Infrastructure, noted that there was backlog maintenance on a number of assets, including schools. He hoped that, working in partnership with the Scottish Government, these maintenance issues could be addressed outwith the Local Development Plan process.

Councillor Akhtar asked when the additional funding for services relating to children and young people would be received and also about the roll-out of breakfast club funding. Ms Dunnet indicated that £0.6m of funding would be provided for Additional Support for Learning (ASL); other areas would be kept under review but that the work would be underway in advance of the funding being received. On breakfast clubs, she would report back in due course.

Councillor Jardine thanked Ms Dunnet for her responses regarding the challenges facing the Council. She noted in particular work underway to engage with communities as part of the budget-setting process.

The Provost then moved to the roll call vote on the recommendations, which were approved unanimously.

Decision

The Council agreed:

- i. to note the current funding position for 2025/26 based on the final local government finance order, as set out in paragraphs 3.2-3.5 of the report;
- ii. that provision would be made within the 2025/26 capital programme for East Linton Primary School toilet upgrades, noting that this would be fully funded from developer contributions;
- iii. to note that a further update on paused capital projects would be brought back to a future Council meeting; and
- iv. to note the wider updates and ongoing work to support budget development for 2026/27 onwards.

4. COMMON GOOD BUDGET 2025/26

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Council Resources providing an update on Common Good Funds and seeking approval of the proposed budgets for 2025/26.

Declarations of Interest: Having declared an interest in this item, Councillor Forrest left the meeting.

Sederunt: Councillor Cassini left the meeting.

The Head of Finance, Ellie Dunnet, presented the report, summarising the current financial position as regards the Common Good funds, as well as the risks and the 2025/26 budget considerations.

Councillor Trotter questioned if sufficient funding was being set aside for the maintenance of assets. Ms Dunnet confirmed that consideration had been given to the level of investment required in the coming year, and that this would be kept under review; she added that there may be an impact on grant funding for the 2026/27 financial year.

Councillor Gilbert sought an assurance that international tariffs would not adversely affect Common Good income. Ms Dunnet was unable to provide such an assurance, as the tariffs may have an impact on money invested, but that it was too soon to say. She noted that regular meetings were held with the investment managers, who would be monitoring the markets and would seek to ensure that the funds were protected from exposure. On the matter of the

Brunton Hall, raised by Councillor Gilbert, Ms Dunnet advised that this situation remained under review, and that over time the current level of grant funding may not be sustainable.

In response to questions from Councillor Bruce, Ms Dunnet advised that the fund balances for 2024/25, which would reflect the performance of the investments, were not yet available; she anticipated that the performance would be stronger than the previous year. With specific reference to the Musselburgh fund, she explained that there was a forecast overall positive fund balance of over £9m, so providing a grant budget at the proposed level for 2025/26 was affordable.

Councillor Allan asked about the medium-term planning for grant funding and how the expectations of communities would be managed. Ms Dunnet reminded her that the grant funding proposals covered only one year. The Common Good budgets would be kept under review in the context of the impact of inflation on repairs and maintenance.

The Provost questioned whether longer-term planning in relation to Common Good assets was required. Ms Dunnet noted that planning for future liabilities was an important aspect of the work around assets. Tom Reid, Head of Infrastructure, added that condition surveys on assets would be carried out, which would provide information on maintenance requirements and liabilities.

Opening the debate, Councillor Bruce expressed his concern about the medium- and long-term planning regarding Common Good funds. In particular, he didn't feel comfortable allocating grant funding without knowing what the plans for managing Common Good assets were, and he suggested that the Council should wait for the Head of Infrastructure reporting back to Council on the maintenance requirements for Common Good assets before approving grant budgets.

The Provost reassured Councillor Bruce about the rigorous process undertaken by Common Good Committees when determining grant applications.

Councillor Akhtar made reference to the positive community work being undertaken as a result of Common Good grant funding, and stated that she was in favour of continuing making this funding available to community groups.

Councillor McIntosh sympathised with Councillor Bruce's position, particularly in view of the situation with the Brunton Hall and Musselburgh Town Hall. However, she felt that, pending the outcome of the place-based review, the Council should continue to provide a Common Good grants budget for the current financial year. She added that she had not felt comfortable varying the 2024/25 Common Good budget to allow for additional grant funding to be awarded, and she was not in favour of that happening again.

The Provost then moved to the roll call vote on the recommendations:

For (19): Councillors Akhtar, Allan, Bennett, Collins, Dugdale, Findlay, Gilbert, Hampshire, Jardine, McFarlane, McGinn, McGuire, McIntosh, McLeod, McMillan, Menzies, Ritchie, Trotter, Yorkston

Against (1): Councillor Bruce

Abstentions (0)

Decision

The Council agreed:

- i. to note the ongoing financial challenges relating to the current economic climate and the risks that this presents to the Common Good Funds; and
- ii. to approve the 2025/26 grants budget for Dunbar, Haddington, Musselburgh and North Berwick, as set out in Appendices 2a-2d, noting the context for future budget development.

Sederunt: Councillors Cassini and Forrest returned to the meeting.

5. EAST LOTHIAN INTEGRATION JOINT BOARD BUDGET-SETTING REPORT

A report was submitted by the Director for Health and Social Care proving the Council with an understanding of the outcome of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) budget-setting process and the implications for Council delegated services.

The Director of Health and Social Care, Fiona Wilson, presented the report, drawing particular attention to Tables 1 and 2, which set out the Council's budget offer and the IJB's financial plans. She made reference to the challenges and risks associated with the funding challenges, noting that additional in-year pressures were emerging that would require efficiencies to be identified and delivered.

Councillor Menzies asked questions in relation to prescribing and preventative work. David Hood, Head of Operations, provided detail on work underway to deliver savings on prescribing, which he anticipated could generate savings of c. £900,000. On partnership working with EnjoyLeisure, Mr Hood stated that one of the strategic priorities was early intervention and prevention, and that there was an agreement in place whereby GPs could refer people to EnjoyLeisure for an activity programme – this programme would continue, albeit there were capacity and funding challenges which would need to be considered. He also spoke of social prescribing and the opportunities to reduce prescription drug spend – this work was at an early stage, but he anticipated that this would generate savings.

Councillor Forrest requested an update on the provision of day centre services in Musselburgh. Ms Wilson indicated that the planning for a new day centre was ongoing and an integrated impact assessment had been undertaken; however, it would be difficult to commit to this project due to the current financial situation.

Councillor Allan asked about contingency plans should the IJB be unable to balance its budget. Ms Wilson reported that the IJB had a balanced budget for the current financial year, with plans in place to deliver efficiency savings. She highlighted the need to balance risks with service delivery, noting that the partners would work together should additional pressures emerge.

Responding to a question from Councillor Hampshire on the pay awards for 2025, Mr Hood advised that the Council had allocated funding based on a 3% pay increase. The NHS pay review body had recommended an increase of 4.25% for 2025 and 3.75% for 2026. This proposal had now been presented to the trade unions for consultation with members.

Councillor Menzies raised the idea of social prescribing, in particular making better use of East Lothian's leisure facilities for some health conditions and as a preventative measure, rather than medication; she pointed out the long-term health benefits related to exercise, as well as

the economic benefits. She suggested that the Council and the IJB should consider this idea going forward.

Councillor Akhtar highlighted the importance of the Council seeing how the additional IJB funding would be spent. She spoke in support of Councillor Menzies' comments, adding that day centres also provided support to residents, as well as early intervention and prevention measures. She recognised the financial challenges facing health and social care services. She also stressed the need to keep people in their own homes, and to have integrated community-based support services.

Decision

The Council agreed:

- i. to note the contents of the report and the implications of the Council funding allocation on their delegated services; and
- ii. to note that the budget offer reflects the funding required for 2025/26 but does not consider the substantial forecast financial gaps in funding beyond 2025/26 which remains a significant risk for the IJB in delivering a balanced budget position.

6. HOUSING MANAGEMENT IT SYSTEM AND RENT REVIEW UPDATE

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place updating the Council on the progress and current position of two key interlinked projects: the Housing Management IT System (HMIS) and Rent Review.

The Head of Housing, Wendy McGuire, presented the report, summarising the progress made as regards the implementation of the new HMIS. She could not confirm at this time if the system would be ready to go live on 1 October, but noted that the contract with the current supplier could be extended to the end of 2025, if required. On the rent review, she explained that the review was not concerned with seeking to increase income levels or aligning rent levels with the Scottish average, but that it would ensure fairness and equity across different property types and sizes to provide a clear and transparent rent structure. She drew attention to the project plan, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

In response to questions from Councillor Bruce, Ms McGuire indicated that the scope of the review had been set in consultation with the appointed consultant. Councillor Bruce expressed his concern that Members had not been involved in this decision, remarking that the Council should be seeking to remedy the fact that East Lothian's rents were much lower than the Scottish average, which he believed was impacting on the Council's ability to invest in housing. Ms McGuire noted that with a 6.5% rent increase for 2025/26, she did not expect the Council rents to remain at the lower end of rent levels. She stressed that the purpose of the rent review was to ensure the financial sustainability of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) going forward, and that setting rent levels was a separate process.

Councillor Gilbert questioned the timings of the delivery of the HMIS and the rent review. Ms McGuire explained that the rent review was dependent on the HMIS; if the HMIS was not live before the end of 2025, then the new rent structure could not be implemented until 2027.

With reference to the issues experienced regarding the implementation of the new HMIS, Ms McGuire advised that, as project sponsor, she would be looking at 'lessons learned'. She added that the Improvement Service, in conjunction with local authorities, was looking at a national housing system, and she was on the working group for that project

Councillor Allan asked if protections were in place should vulnerable tenants be 'priced out' of Council accommodation as part of the rent review. Ms McGuire assured her that this aspect was included as part of the modelling work, and that transitional relief would be available to protect tenants.

Councillor McIntosh asked about mitigation measures in the event that the new system has teething problems. Ms McGuire advised that officers were working with the Tenants and Residents' Panel to ensure that vulnerable groups would be supported. She indicated that the new system would have a lot of benefits, one of which would be allowing officers more face-to-face time with vulnerable tenants.

Councillor Jardine opened the debate, advising that, as a housing professional, she was satisfied with the governance around the linking of these two projects, and that she was content that the rent restructure was concerned with aligning systems rather than setting rent levels, as the latter was part of the Council's budget-setting process.

Councillor Hampshire spoke of the importance of implementing the new technology, but he recognised the frustrations in progressing these two projects. He assured Members that there would be no sudden change to rent levels, adding that it was a Council decision to set rent levels, and the Council had always sought to make rents affordable. He noted, however, that there were disparities in rent levels between certain types of property and that this issue needed to be resolved.

Councillor Menzies thanked Ms McGuire and her team for progressing these projects without being allocated additional resource, at a time when there was increased demand on that service. She was of the view that the Council rents were set at too low a level, but she recognised that this could not be addressed as part of the rent review.

Concluding the debate, Councillor Bruce expressed his disappointment that the delivery of the projects had been delayed, given that the need for a new rent system had been identified in 2019. He argued that Members, rather than officers, should have determined the scope of the rent review, and that the process undertaken was not correct. He agreed with Councillor Menzies that rent levels should be increased.

Decision

The Council agreed to note progress on the Housing Management IT System and Rent Review projects, recognising the complexities and challenges with each.

7. A1 ROAD NETWORK: LITTER MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place seeking approve for the Chief Executive to write to Scottish Ministers on behalf of the Council requesting a review of responsibilities for litter management on the A1 in East Lothian.

The Team Manager for Amenity Services, Ed Hendrikson, presented the report, advising of the current arrangements for litter management on the A1, and highlighting the two sections of the road that were within the Council's responsibility. He set out the risks and challenges associated with this, and proposed that the current arrangements should be reviewed to provide consistency.

In response to questions from Members, Mr Hendrikson explained that the cost of lane closures to undertake litter management on the two sections managed by the Council were borne by the Council. He indicated that much of the litter was thrown out of vehicles or fell from lorries, and that only the Council and not BEAR had enforcement powers. He hoped that

publicising the issue would lead to a reduction in litter. Mr Hendrikson pointed out that other local authorities were also looking at the issue of litter management on trunk roads.

Councillor McGinn welcomed the report, highlighting that the anomaly should be corrected, and there was a need to consider the safety of the workforce.

Councillor Hampshire spoke of his own frustration about levels of litter, and of complaints from residents on this issue. He hoped that the proposed letters would have an impact when the contract is next reviewed.

Councillor McIntosh commended the work of the Amenities Team, as well as volunteer groups, regarding litter management. She stated that it should be socially unacceptable for people to throw litter from vehicles; she also commented this was a particular issue around 'drive-thru' food establishments, and proposed that as part of Local Development Plan 2 there should be a presumption against such outlets. She suggested that the Council should do everything in its powers to prevent littering, and that this matter should be better publicised.

The Provost then moved to the roll call vote on the recommendations, which were approved unanimously.

Decision

The Council agreed:

- i. that the Chief Executive should write to Scottish Ministers requesting a review of litter management responsibilities for the full section of the A1 and a move towards consistency with areas part of the special road order to allow the Council to focus resources on population centres, local road network and area of ownership/responsibility; and
- ii. that the Chief Executive should write to other local authorities with trunk road litter management responsibilities and CoSLA, providing information on the local context and seeking support for the requested review.

8. CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY UPDATE AND SUMMARY

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place providing the fifth annual update to Council on the progress of delivering the actions and commitments in the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2020-25, and summarising achievements of that Strategy in anticipation of beginning the delivery of the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2025-30.

The Sustainability and Climate Change Officer, Cheyne Hamm, presented the report, drawing attention to the progress made on the seven outcomes (set out in Appendices 2 and 3 to the report).

Councillor Gilbert asked for further detail on progress as regards recycling and waste. Tom Reid, Head of Infrastructure, pointed out that the information in the report was now out of date, and that with the introduction of the three-weekly refuse collection, it was likely that there would be an improvement in recycling rates. He added that the data related to domestic waste, with commercial waste being treated separately.

In response to questions from Councillor McIntosh, Mr Hamm indicated that officers were looking to implement the introduction of e-bikes for Council staff, but that issues around insurance needed to be resolved. On a flood protection scheme for Haddington, Mr Reid advised that the Council was awaiting information from the Scottish Government. He added

that it was likely that a special meeting of Council would be required in the autumn to consider the Musselburgh Flood Protection Scheme.

Councillor Menzies questioned why emissions from Council buildings had not reduced after the heating had been set at 18C. Mr Hamm explained that the Council's estate had expanded; however, the emissions per square metre had reduced. On Key Priority Area 8, Mr Hamm advised that officers were working on a 'learning for sustainability' strategy as part of the Curriculum for Excellence, which would determine how the Council engages with young people on climate change and sustainability matters.

Councillor Trotter requested an update on Bikeability. Mr Hamm reported that the Council had achieved 100% success rate for the third year in a row, with 1,300 children being involved in the initiative this year.

Responding to questions from Councillor Jardine, Mr Hamm stressed the importance of the e-learning module on Council staff commuting, and highlighted the benefits of the cycle to work and electric vehicle schemes. He also indicated that promoting car sharing schemes in rural communities were a priority for officers in order to reduce emissions. Mr Reid added that the concept of journey hubs was being explored, and that the Council would be working with communities to promote car sharing; there were now also cars available that could be booked by Council staff and members of the public.

Councillor asked for an update on the installation of public water fountains and taps. Mr Hamm pointed out that there was currently no funding available for this, but noted that drinking water was available at all Council work sites.

Concluding the questions, Councillor Dugdale asked about the environmental impact of staff travelling to work versus working from home. Mr Hamm advised that home working resulted in significant lower emissions. He added that there had been no impact analysis undertaken of staff travelling to work by bus rather than car.

Councillor Hampshire welcomed the support from across the Council to deliver on the climate change actions. He accepted there was still a lot of work to be done, and that additional financial assessment would be required to achieve this.

Decision

The Council agreed:

- i. to note the progress made in decarbonising the Council's services and operations, and making a climate-positive East Lothian; and
- ii. to note the key projects and achievements delivered by members of the Climate and Nature Emergency Group, and the key risks set out in the report.

9. EAST Lothian Council Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2025-30

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place present the proposed East Lothian Council Climate Change Strategy 2025-30 and its associated Action Plan for approval.

The Sustainability and Climate Change Officer, Cheyne Hamm, presented the report, referring to the development of the Strategy and its four themes. He noted that there were more than 200 actions set out with the Strategy, progress on which would be monitored and reported on annually.

Councillor Hampshire suggested that it would be helpful for Members to have an idea of the investment required and of the benefits of savings made. Mr Hamm advised that further work on the costings was required, noting the need for transparency about the challenges and the need for investment to deliver the actions. Councillor Hampshire also asked about how coastal erosion would be tackled. Tom Reid, Head of Infrastructure, reported that funding had been received from the Scottish Government to enhance coastal management, and that a report would be presented to Council in the next 12-18 months advising of mitigation measures and costs. However, he warned that there would be significant challenges in tackling coastal erosion.

In response to questions from Councillor McIntosh, Mr Hamm indicated that the 'transformative future' was the best option for achieving net zero; if the targets were met each year, there would be less climate change and sea level change to adapt to, and savings could be made in the long term. He made reference to community consultation on the various projects, which was included in the action plan, and hoped to get a high level of youth engagement. As regards scope 3 emissions, particularly re. financial investments, Mr Hamm advised that officers were starting to prepare for this in a more robust way; he expected that the Scottish Government would provide methodology to public bodies so that there was a consistent approach to reporting.

Councillor Akhtar asked about the management of food waste. Mr Hamm reported that the Council was working with partners to produce a 'good food nation' plan, which was a national initiative. He also advised that an East Lothian-wide Climate Change Strategy would be developed, in partnership with partners and communities.

Councillor Ritchie welcomed the report. She particularly welcomed the proposed engagement with young people and looked forward to seeing their ideas develop. She also highlighted the importance of considering climate change alongside planning and development, as well as the provision of high-quality local jobs.

Councillor Jardine spoke of the cross-party approach to tackling climate change. She was particularly impressed with the graphic on mitigation, contained within the Strategy.

The Provost then moved to the roll call vote on the recommendations, which were approved unanimously.

Decision

The Council agreed:

- i. to approve the proposed East Lothian Council Change Strategy 2025-30;
- ii. to approve the proposed East Lothian Council Climate Change Action Plan 2025-30; and
- iii. to approve the monitoring arrangements in the draft Climate Change Strategy, which is to review documents annually to monitor progress and update as needed.

10. MEMBERSHIP OF THE CROSS-PARTY CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY FORUM

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Council Resources seeking approval to add Councillor McMillan as a permanent member of the Cross-party Climate Change and Sustainability Forum.

The Clerk presented the report, advising of the recommendation put forward by the Cross-party Climate Change and Sustainability Forum to appoint the Provost as a permanent member of that group.

The Provost welcomed the invitation to join this group. As Chair of the group, Councillor McIntosh looked forward to working with him in this regard and having his expertise and perspective.

The Provost then moved to the roll call vote on the recommendations, which were approved unanimously.

Decision

The Council agreed to approve the appointment of Councillor McMillan as a permanent member of the Cross-party Climate Change and Sustainability Forum.

11. APPOINTMENT OF RETURNING OFFICER

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Council Resources seeking approval to appoint the Council's new Chief Executive, Laurence Rockey, as the Returning Officer for the East Lothian area.

The Clerk presented the report, reminding Members that following the retirement of the previous Chief Executive, the Head of Corporate Support had been appointed as Returning Officer pending the arrival of Laurence Rockey as the new Chief Executive. With Mr Rockey now in post, she proposed that he be appointed as Returning Officer with immediate effect.

The Provost welcomed this appointment and wished Mr Rockey well in the role of Returning Officer. Mr Rockey indicated that he looked forward to taking on the role and being involved in elections.

The Provost then moved to the roll call vote on the recommendations, which were approved unanimously.

Decision

The Council agreed to appoint Laurence Rockey to carry out the role of Returning Officer within the East Lothian area, with immediate effect.

12. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2025/26

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Council Resources setting the Schedule of Meetings of the Council, committees and other forums for 2025/26.

The Clerk presented the report, advising of the proposed meeting dates for 2025/26, noting that the pattern of meetings broadly reflected that of recent years. She noted that the schedule was subject to change, and that any changes would be communicated to Members and officers as soon as practicable.

In response to questions from Councillor Gilbert, the Clerk provided the rationale for holding meetings on certain days of the week, pointing out that a number of Members had other employment outside Council and that some may have contractual arrangements to allow them time off to undertake Council business that could not be easily changed mid-term. She

welcomed feedback from Members, noting that she had taken account of feedback in advance of preparing the 2025/26 schedule. On the question of adjusting the start time of meetings with long agendas, Councillor Gilbert was advised that this could be considered where appropriate.

Councillor Findlay raised a question regarding the timing of Local Review Body site visits.

Post-meeting note: the clerk to the Local Review Body confirmed that the timings of a small number of site visits had been altered due to clashes with other committee meetings.

The Provost then moved to the roll call vote on the recommendations, which were approved unanimously.

Decision

The Council agreed:

- i. to approve the proposed Schedule of Meetings for 2025/26; and
- ii. to authorise the Head of Corporate Support to make minor adjustments to the schedule, as necessary, and to communicate any such adjustments to Members as soon as practicable.

13. MOTION: SECURITY OF THE NATION'S ENERGY SUPPLY

A motion was submitted by Councillors Hampshire and Akhtar:

East Lothian Council has for over 20 years been supporting the energy industry to deliver significant change in our energy supply. We are continuing to consider every opportunity that will help the nation reduce its reliance on fossil fuels and reduce their energy demands and costs. We will deliver more with the energy industry in East Lothian in the areas included in this motion if we have more support from both of our governments.

Changing World

The UK's Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, in partnership with the International Energy Agency (IEA), will host an international summit on the future of energy security in London on 24–25 April 2025. The summit will focus on the geopolitical, technological and economic factors influencing global energy security, with a focus on the growing role of clean energy and its supply chains, as well as the availability of critical minerals and metals.

Affordable Energy

To give the country the best possible chance to deal with the global uncertainty of our energy supply, our governments must consider the development of all possible technologies to secure our energy security. This needs to secure an affordable energy cost for our industry, commercial and domestic consumers.

Renewable Energy

To deliver this, our governments must continue to expand the availability of all renewable technologies and their associated infrastructure. They must also urgently support new net zero base load generation. The replacement of the two nuclear reactors at Torness Power Station with new modular reactors is vital for the stability of the National Grid.

Hydrogen Production

Our governments must continue their work with the energy industry to expand the sites available for hydrogen production and storage to reduce our use of natural gas that is currently used by our industrial, commercial and domestic consumers.

UK Oil and Gas Production

Oil and gas will continue to be required by the UK economy for many years, but we must do all we can to reduce what we use. However, in a changing world we must continue to protect our current oil and gas fields so the UK has a secure energy supply and a sustainable transition strategy. The government's commitment to continue the development of carbon capture and storage is vital to reach net zero and support our economy.

Proposal

East Lothian Council calls on the Council Leader to write to UK Government Secretary of State for Net Zero and to the First Minister of Scotland to request that they take whatever action is necessary to secure the nation's net zero energy supply and reduce the cost of energy for our industrial, commercial and domestic consumers, and:

- request that all decisions on any energy projects, not just the projects under 50mw in a council area, are decided by the local planning authority through the normal planning process. The Energy Consents Unit would still be responsible for granting a licence to the applicant, but communities would feel their views on any application were fully considered by their local elected representatives;
- request that local government is an integral part of any planning for the delivery of new technologies that they will be expected to accommodate in their area. Councils will also have the appropriate powers and resources to deal with any proposals they need to consider;
- request that government develops a national energy master plan, so we understand the full extent of the nation's future demands. This will allow a fair allocation of energy sites that are required for new developments so we can properly consult and plan projects. This will help us reduce the cumulative impact on our countryside that will accommodate the renewable technology and its infrastructure.
- Request that the fees for energy applications are set at a reasonable level to cover the full cost of planning assessments by the relevant professionals.

In accordance with Standing Order 11, Councillor Hampshire, seconded by Councillor Jardine (who, together with Councillor McIntosh had submitted an amendment to the motion), proposed that the motion be continued to a later date, to allow for further discussion at the Cross-party Climate Change and Sustainability Forum.

The Provost then moved to the roll call vote on the proposal to continue this item of business, which was approved unanimously.

Decision

The Council agreed to continue the motion.

14. SUBMISSIONS TO THE MEMBERS' LIBRARY SERVICE, 10 FEBRUARY TO 13 APRIL 2025

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Council Resources noting the reports submitted to the Members' Library since the meeting of the Council in February 2025.

Councillor Menzies urged Members to read the reports submitted to the Members' Library.

Decision

The Council agreed to note the reports submitted to the Members' Library Service between 10 February and 13 April 2025, as listed in Appendix 1 to the report.

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS – EXEMPT INFORMATION

The public were excluded from the following business containing exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 6 of Schedule 7A to the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

Common Good Applications

A private report seeking determination of an application for Common Good funding was approved, with funding being awarded as follows: The Honest Toun Association [Musselburgh]: £15,000.