Minutes of MCC Public Meeting (Zoom meeting)

Date: 16th May 2023

Chaired by Ian Doig, Chair of Merchiston Community Council (MCC)

Started: 19:00. Ended: 21.03

Present:

MCC Members: Ian Doig (ID, Chair), Vivien Kitteringham (VK, Vice-Chair & Zoom host), Frances Hawarden (FH, Treasurer), Mairianna Clyde (MC), Roma Menlowe (RM), Bridget Stevens (BS), John McKenna (JMK), Helen Zealley (HZ).

City Councillors: Cllr Mandy Watt (MW), Cllr Neil Ross NR), Cllr Val Walker (VW).

Residents: Morag Jones (MJ), Karl Chapman (KC).

Apologies received from: Daniel Cairns (MCC), Joan Houston (MCC), Ewan Klein (MCC), Cllr Ben Parker, Cllr David Key, Ian Murray MP.

PRESENTATION – *Edinburgh's Budget Decisions 2023-24 – Funding Edinburgh's ambitions in an era of budget constraint.*

ID welcomed City Councillor Mandy Watt, Convener of CEC's Finance and Resources Committee and Councillor for Morningside Ward.

Cllr Watt gave an informative presentation in which she explained how Edinburgh decides and uses its budget, illustrated with a series of slides. She explained the pressures involved in setting CEC's revenue and capital budgets. Slides were shown illustrating the profile of net expenditure by services, expenditure by cost types (staff costs etc), funding sources and trends.

Key Points:

- CEC receives the lowest Revenue Grant per head of population from Scottish Government, of all the 32 Scottish Councils.
- There has been a 15.7% reduction in CEC's Revenue Grant funding from Sc Government between 2019/20 and 2023/24, after adjusting for inflation.
- Council Tax consistently accounted for less than a quarter of the Council's funding.
- CEC proposes to introduce a Tourist Tax (Transient Visitor Levy). This may raise between £15m and £20m per year, depending on basis on which a charge is levied; a

2% tax is MW's current preference. Additional income from Tourist Tax will reduce the strain on CEC finances and contribute toward meeting additional costs generated by visitors, including additional litter and refuse disposal costs and infrastructure costs. However, implementation will require legislation by Scottish Government, and this may delay Tourist Tax introduction until 2026. MCC members expressed support for introduction of a Tourist Tax.

In discussion session, points discussed included:

- Airbnbs – CEC intends to introduce limits on the number of houses being used as short term lets businesses, whereas availability of housing in Edinburgh is in short supply. Limitation is supported by many citizens. However, legality of limitations is being challenged by lobbyists for Airbnbs.
- Additional financial resources. MW stated that some additional funds may be available to CEC, such as from Sustrans, and from ring-fenced Government grants, including City Deals and UK Leveling Up Funds.
- Safer lighting in parks – CW stated that additional funding is desirable to reduce public safety risks.
- CityFibre Project - Contactors have caused damage and disruption by extended works closing roads. Why no penalties for damage and disruption? MW stated that CEC does not have powers to impose penalties on contractors – would require Scottish Government legislation.
- CEC should co-ordinate contractors and utilities from digging up other contractors' work.
- Is population growth for Edinburgh sustainable? MW does not anticipate substantial population increase at present, contrary to previous projections.
- Green Bonds to raise finance have been used successfully by Gothenburg City Council in Sweden to finance expansion of its trams network and waste management – Does CEC have powers to issue Green Bonds? MW will investigate.

BUSINESS MEETING

Agenda Items 1-3.

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 March were agreed as an accurate record and approved.

Chair's report had been circulated and was noted.

4. Planning Report — MC gave an oral report. Issues discussed included:

- Watson's Playing Fields at Myreside – Proposal to install floodlight & artificial grass pitches. Formal planning application not yet submitted but there were 2

opportunities to view the plans. MC expressed concern about potential impact of floodlights on local residents.

- Objection Rights to Planning Decisions - MC explained that, while developers were able to appeal against planning decisions, residents and the community currently do not have equivalent rights to appeal.

4. **Licensing Report -** BS had circulated a written report. Issues discussed included:

- 155 Dundee Street - concerns about possible noise & disturbance. MCC had no objection at this stage; however, if excessive disturbance takes place, MCC will lodge an objection with CEC Licensing.
- Fountainpark Fun Station. MCC had no objection at this stage; however, if excessive disturbance takes place, MCC will lodge an objection with CEC Licensing. MCC had also requested assurance that changes to a ramped area would not restrict access e.g. for wheelchair users.
- Dalton's Scrap Merchant – Renewal of Dalton's scrap merchant licence has been turned down by CEC. Dalton is appealing against refusal & is taking CEC to court.

5. **Polwarth Pavements Improvement Project –** RM and JMK had circulated an update.

Police Scotland officer had observed safety problems with traffic at roundabout, including speeding traffic, illegal parking on zig zags, vehicles cutting across roundabout, and vehicles crossing Yeaman Place roundabout as a shortcut to Dundee Street, all leading to pedestrians being placed at considerable risk because of poor infrastructure.

RM reported that, despite initial support from CEC, she and JMK had been dismayed at subsequent comments received from CEC officials informing them that the Polwarth Pavements Project could not be funded by CEC because funding for all large programmes is already fully committed for years ahead. MCC, residents and businesses have been very supportive of need for improvements and will be disappointed at this negative response by CEC officials.

This setback was not the end of dialog. RM and JMK have identified options including a range of low-cost and priority changes. City Councillors NR and MW expressed their support for improvements to be implemented. It was agreed that a follow-up discussion between them and RM and JMK would be arranged to seek a way to progress the improvements that had been identified. RM stated that Sustrans may be able to assist in design & costing of proposals. Final Report was being finalised & will be circulated shortly.

BS suggested submitting an article to the media to highlight the project, risks identified and the proposed improvements. It was agreed that writing to the media might be helpful in due course, after further discussion with Ward Councillors. Remitted to RM and JMK to progress matters.

6. **Treasurers Report -** FH reported that the independent scrutiny of MCC's accounts for 2022-23 has been completed & no problems identified. Therefore, accounts will be submitted to the AGM for formal approval by MCC.

   Current financial year cash flow report had been circulated. MCC's finances were currently adequate & no funding problems were identified.

   MCC History Project – FH reported that a grant may be available for a project to document and update the history of Merchiston, currently on the MCC website.

   MCC agreed to apply for a grant -remitted to FH. If a grant application is successful, it was agreed that a history project will be undertaken and be coordinated by FH.

7. **City Councillors' Reports:**

   MW - Warrender swimming pool was about to reopen.

   - Potholes - CEC has acquired 2 innovative new machines for more effective filling of potholes.
   - Housing Trust at St Kenigern's in Fountainbridge for affordable housing development was welcome, rather than more students housing.

   NR - Parking permits - Temporary dispensation for parking have been paused, pending further discussion.

   VW - Shandon bridge about to reopen. Repairs costs will be met by CityFibre.

   - Complaints of poor resurfacing by one identified contractor have been reported throughout Edinburgh.

9 - 11. Other Reports and Any Other Business

Karl Chapman - Jawbone Arch Project in Meadows. Update: Bronze replica to be erected to replace original, which has deteriorated. Funds are being raised to finance a replica.