



City of Douglas

City Hall,
Douglas,
11th December, 2024

At a MEETING of the COUNCIL of the CITY OF DOUGLAS, duly convened and holden at 2.30 p.m. on WEDNESDAY, the 11th day of DECEMBER, 2024, in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, within the CITY HALL, at which Meeting the following Members were present, that is to say: -

The Mayor

COUNCILLOR MRS NATALIE BYRON-TEARE, JP

Councillors

Mr S.R. Pitts

Mrs C.L. Wells

Mr J.E. Skinner

Mr F. Horning

Mr D.R. Watson

Mr P.J. Washington

The Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Environment and Regeneration, and the Director of Housing and Property were in attendance.

Apologies for absence were submitted by Mr Councillor A.J. Bentley, Mr Councillor I.J.G. Clague MBE, Mr Councillor S.R. Crellin, Mr Councillor F. Schuengel and Councillor Ms J. Thommeny.

1. Minutes – 13th November, 2024

The minutes of the monthly Council meeting held on Wednesday, 13th November, 2024, were approved and signed.

2. Standing Order 39 – Question – Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner

Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner asked the Leader of the Council:

How much does the Council have in outstanding loans currently and what is the current total interest payment on the loans per annum?

Reply by the Leader of the Council:

The total value of loans outstanding as at 30th November was £91,034,934.

The total loan interest paid by the Council for the 2023/24 financial year was £5,045,503. £4.3m of this was Housing Revenue Account-related and so funded through the Housing Deficiency arrangements.

3. Standing Order 39 – Question – Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner

Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner asked the Leader of the Council:

What is the Council's preferred amount to be held in its Reserves?

Reply by the Leader of the Council:

There is no prescribed level of reserves required or recommended for local authorities. The preferred level of reserves held for each local authority will depend upon a range of factors including the level, nature and range of financial risks faced, and the robustness of its own financial planning. This Council has a range of reserves, most of which are earmarked for a specific purpose (e.g. Plant Renewals Fund) or ringfenced (e.g. Housing Repairs Fund or the Community Facilities Reserve), and these are not available for general use. The General Revenue Reserve (sometimes referred to as the Council's "Balances") is the source of funds that is generally available to support the Council with the funding of one-off schemes and projects as well as to provide resilience in dealing with unforeseen events. The General Revenue Reserve should not be used for day-to-day revenue expenditure.

The Council should always seek to maintain a minimum working balance within the General Revenue Reserve of around 5% of the Annual Rate Requirement. This currently works out at around £0.75m. The working balance should remain untouched in order to provide the Council with resilience against major unexpected events, and so no commitments or guarantees should be made which could reduce this minimum level.

For this Council, an optimal level of uncommitted General Revenue Reserve ("Balances") of roughly 10% of the Rate Income Requirement would currently equate to roughly £1.5m. To hold an amount of uncommitted balance at this level would enable the Council to use its reserves to support with the funding of capital projects, help facilitate change programmes (such as digital transformation or invest to save schemes), as well as maintain an adequate level of working balance.

In practice, it has not always been realistic for this Council to maintain the optimal level of General Revenue Reserve. This is due to the number of schemes and one-off expenditure items which require urgent funding coming forward during the year after the rate has already been set. In recent years, this has sometimes been at a rate higher than the General Revenue Reserve could be replenished at financial year end outturn stage through an underspend against the approved budget. The preferred amount to be held in reserves should however be as close the optimal 10% level as can practicably and reasonably be achieved given the financial pressures faced at any time.

4. Standing Order 39 – Question – Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner

Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner asked the Leader of the Council:

4.1 Following Covid how much was built into the 2023 / 24 Budget in order to replenish depleted Reserves. How much was it anticipated that this would put back into Reserves?

4.2 From the beginning of the Financial Year 2023 / 24 to date, how many projects have been funded or are proposed to be funded from Reserves, what are they and what is the total amount of each?

Reply by the Leader of the Council:

4.1 The reserves were not depleted following Covid. Although there were some very significant financial risks and challenges faced by the Council during and also post Covid, due to risk mitigation actions taken by the Council, the position of the Council's reserve was such that there always remained a reasonable working balance on the General Revenue Reserve, or at least a replenishment plan to rebuild to an adequate level. This is evidenced by the following year on year information on the

balance held in the General Revenue Reserve at the end of each financial year since 2019 (i.e. pre-Covid):

Balance Sheet Date	Actual Balance £'000	Balance after planned projects/ commitments £'000
31 March 2019	1,445	1,008
31 March 2020	1,919	1,544
31 March 2021	1,897	1,008
31 March 2022	2,293	1,389
31 March 2023	1,287	660
31 March 2024	1,740	937

As part of the approved 2023/24 Budget, the total budgeted contributions into the General Revenue Reserve was £42,310. During the 2023/24 year, however, measures were taken to bolster the General Revenue Reserve through transfers totalling £319k into the General Revenue Reserve from earmarked reserves. The approved 2024/25 Budget included £100,000 revenue contribution into the General Revenue Reserve, in order to help replenish the reduced funding position post-Covid.

- 4.2 It is assumed that the question refers to the use of the General Revenue Reserve as opposed to all of the Council's separate earmarked reserves also. There are currently 27 projects or schemes which have since 2023/24 been funded or approved for funding from the General Revenue Reserve. In addition, there are five capital schemes which although are planned to be funded through loan, there is in place a guarantee of funding from the General Revenue Reserve to cover initial design fees in the event that loan petition approval is ultimately not approved. Details of the various projects with funding from the General Revenue Reserve are shown in the table below:

	Scheme/Project	2023/24 Actual £	2024/25 Forecast £	Future Years £	Total £
1	Car parking equipment for Noble's Park	2,111			2,111
2	Planters & benches	14,152			14,152
3	Jubilee Kiosk link into Garden No.1	25,428	4,600		30,028
4	Golf course toilet	10,746			10,746
5	Additional funding for Promenade lighting	3,897			3,897
6	Plant for Groundworks Team	84,029			84,029
7	Sealing off old Queen's Prom toilets and associated lighting	1,028			1,028
8	Alternate Weekly Collections communications	43,651	17,276		60,927
9	CIPFA conference attendance	595			595
10	Demolition of Cemetery Cottage	19,450	3,070		22,520
11	Art Deco Toilet Refurbishment			42,000	42,000
12	Nobles Park Masterplan			35,000	35,000
13	Plant for Groundworks Team	84,029	162,000		246,029
14	War Memorial Environs			30,000	30,000
15	Spring Valley Pavilion design fees		40,100		40,100
16	Promenade & City centre improvement projects		8,493		8,493
17	Golf Course marketing strategy		8,000		8,000
18	Golf Course drainage works to three fairways		12,712		12,712
19	City Hall - main reception decoration & remedial works		40,000		40,000
20	Provision of two port-a-cabins for Spring Valley		1,742		1,742
21	Local authority elections 2025			25,000	25,000
22	Carbon Footprint external agency support		10,000		10,000
23	Bottleneck machine shelter		3,600		3,600

24	Nobles Park Pitch Improvements			30,000	30,000
25	Keep Britan Tidy Membership		3,885		3,885
26	Recycling Communications Campaign		2,000		2,000
27	LED Sea Defences		40,000		40,000
	SUB TOTAL	289,116	357,478	162,000	808,594
	Also, consultant fees for capital schemes guaranteed from reserve:				
G1	Loch Promenade kiosk roof replacements		83,420		83,420
G2	Summerhill Glen Improvements		6,000		6,000
G3	Operational Service Centre car park re-surfacing		24,000		24,000
G4	Loch Prom flood protection		14,000		14,000
G5	Douglas Promenade Gardens		124,410		124,410
	SUB TOTAL		251,830		251,830
	TOTAL	289,116	609,308	162,000	1,060,424

5. Standing Order 39 – Question – Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner

Further to the damage sustained to the Children’s Playground on Loch Promenade by Storm Barra in 2021, has the insurance claim yet been settled and if not, when is it anticipated to be so?

Reply by the Leader of the Council:

The insurance claim for the flood damage on Loch Promenade caused by Storm Barra was settled in July 2023. The claim monies received however did not cover the storm damage sustained to the Children’s Playground. The Capital Programme Scheme to build a new playground for Marine Garden No 4 is due to be funded through loan.

Supplementary Question:

What is the anticipated total cost for the new children’s playground and when is it likely to be reopened.

Reply by the Leader of the Council:

Anticipated completion is 2026. Unfortunately, as we have not had planning approval yet or petition approval, we cannot give the precise cost of how much it will be, but it will be provided when we have it in front of us.

6. Standing Order 39 – Question – Mr Councillor S.R Pitts

Mr Councillor S.R. Pitts asked the Mayor:

6.1 *What was the overall cost of the road closures on the North Quay in the past year?*

6.2 *How many days / evenings was it closed?*

6.3 *What is the breakdown of costs?*

Reply by the Mayor:

6.1 *Total cost of road closure for the whole year (1st April to end December) was £150. This is the cost of the Road Closure Notice applied by the Council.*

6.2 *In total, on 94 occasions to facilitate the weekend closures, the food markets, the Christmas lights switch-on, the Live nativity, TT, the Euros, bank holidays.*

6.3 *The only cost of the road closure notice was £150, there is no further breakdown.*

7. Standing Order 39 – Question – Mr Councillor S.R. Pitts

Mr Councillor S.R. Pitts asked the Leader of the Council:

7.1 *What was the amount paid to external advocates in 2023/24 and 2024 to date?*

7.2 *How many individual advocates firms were used in each year?*

Reply by the Leader of the Council:

7.1 *£121,824 in the 2023/24 financial year.*

£202,736 in the 2024/25 financial year to date.

7.2 *Three.*

Supplementary Question:

Is the Chair fully satisfied that no financial regulations are being breached and that the absence of tendering process for over 20 years still represents value for money for the ratepayers.

Response by the Leader:

Thank you Madam Mayor, in regards to the first part of the question about breaching financial regulations, according to the Chief Executive she has told me this afternoon we have not broken any financial regulations, with regards to question number 2, does it still represent value for money, I am not really sure if we can answer that question as we do not have anything to benchmark it on, though the Chief Executive assures me that the answer is yes it is all value for money but I personally cannot say yes to that as I do not know the answer.

8. Standing Order 39 – Question – Mr Councillor S.R. Pitts

Mr Councillor S.R. Pitts asked the Leader of the Council:

8.1 *What was the cost of the Letters Patent cabinet?*

8.2 *Why are the first and last words on each line partly covered?*

Reply by the Leader of the Council:

8.1 *The Letter Patent Display case cost £13,318.00 plus VAT.*

8.2 *That is the way in which they are issued by the Crown Office on behalf of the Monarch.*

Supplementary question:

What budget did it come from and who authorised it?

Response by the Leader of the Council:

It was funded from the Property Maintenance Budget, and the overall purchase was approved by the Chief Executive.

9. Executive Committee – 28th November, 2024

Motion moved by Councillor Mrs C.L. Wells, seconded by Mr Councillor D.R. Watson, “That the minutes of proceedings of the Executive Committee, as contained in report of meeting held on Thursday, 28th November, 2024, be received by the Council.”

Question put on Motion, a vote was taken electronically, and the Motion was carried unanimously.

10. Pensions Committee – 27th November, 2024

Motion moved by Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner, seconded by Mr Councillor F. Horning, “That the minutes of proceedings of the Pensions Committee, as contained in report of meeting held on Wednesday, 27th November, 2024, be received by the Council.”

Question put on Motion, a vote was taken electronically, and the Motion was carried unanimously.

11. Regeneration and Community Committee – 19th November, 2024 – Clauses A1 to A9

Motion moved by Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner, seconded by Councillor Mrs C.L. Wells, “That the minutes of proceedings of the Regeneration and Community Committee, as contained in Clauses A1 to A9 of report of meeting held on Tuesday, 19th November, 2024, be received by the Council.”

Question put on Motion, a vote was taken electronically, and the Motion was carried unanimously.

12. Regeneration and Community Committee – 19th November, 2024 – Clause C10

Motion moved by Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner, seconded by Councillor Mrs C.L. Wells, “That the minutes of proceedings of the Regeneration and Community Committee, as contained in Clause C10 of report of meeting held on Tuesday, 19th November, 2024, be received, approved and adopted by the Council.”

Further Motion moved by Councillor Mrs C.L. Wells, seconded by Mr Councillor D.R. Watson, “That the Council consider the Motion in Committee”.

Question put on further Motion, a vote was taken electronically, and there voted **For** the Motion, Councillors: Mr D.R. Watson, Mrs C.L. Wells, Mr F. Horning, Mr P.J. Washington, the Mayor - **5**

Against, Councillors: Mr S.R. Pitts, Mr J.E. Skinner – **2**

Motion carried.

Further Motion moved by Councillor Mrs C.L. Wells, seconded by Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner, “That the Council resume proceedings in Council”.

Question put on Motion; a vote was taken electronically, and the Motion was carried unanimously.

On resumption in proceedings in Council, question put on substantive Motion, a vote was taken electronically, and there voted **For** the Motion, Councillors: Mr J.E. Skinner, Mr D.R. Watson, Mrs C.L. Wells, Mr F. Horning, Mr P.J. Washington - **5**

Against, Mr Councillor S.R. Pitts, the Mayor – **2**

Motion carried.

13. **Environmental Services Committee – 18th November, 2024**

Motion moved by Mr Councillor F. Horning, seconded by Mr Councillor P.J. Washington, “That the minutes of proceedings of the Environmental Services Committee, as contained in report of meeting held on Monday, 18th November, 2024, be received by the Council.”

Question put on Motion; a vote was taken electronically, and the nomination was carried unanimously.

14. **Adjournment and Resumption**

The meeting adjourned at 3.30pm and resumed at 3.40pm with the same Members and officers present.

IN PRIVATE

15. **Standing Order 39 – Question – Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner**

Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner asked the Chair of the Housing and Property Committee:

What rate do Council tenants living in sheltered accommodation pay for their gas. Is it a domestic rate or in line with the newly proposed rates for tenants of at least two other local authorities?

Reply by the Chair of the Housing and Property Committee:

The rate is a commercial level agreement that was negotiated a number of years ago, therefore Council sheltered tenants are paying a reduced rate. The Council benefit in negotiation due to the significant gas usage at the Crematorium.

16. **Executive Committee – 28th November, 2024 – Clauses A1 to A6**

Motion moved by Councillor Mrs C.L. Wells, seconded by Mr Councillor F. Horning, “That the minutes of proceedings of the Executive Committee, as contained in Clauses A1 to A6 of private report of meeting held on Thursday, 28th November, 2024, be received by the Council.”

Question put on Motion, a vote was taken electronically, and the Motion was carried unanimously.

17. **Executive Committee – 28th November, 2024 – Clause C7**

Motion moved by Councillor Mrs C.L. Wells, seconded by Mr Councillor D.R. Watson, “That the minutes of proceedings of the Executive Committee, as contained in Clause C7 of private report of meeting held on Thursday, 28th November, 2024, be received, approved and adopted by the Council.”

Question put on Motion, a vote was taken electronically, and there voted **For** the Motion, Councillors: Mr S.R. Pitts, Mr D.R. Watson, Mrs C.L. Wells, Mr F. Horning, the Mayor - **5**

Against, Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner – **1**

Motion carried.

Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1985, Mr Councillor P.J. Washington and the Chief Executive declared an interest in the item and retired whilst it was considered.

18. **Housing and Property Committee – 16th October, 2024**

Motion moved by Mr Councillor D.R. Watson, seconded by Mr Councillor P.J. Washington, “That the minutes of proceedings of the Housing and Property Committee, as contained in private report of meeting held on Wednesday, 16th October, 2024, be received by the Council.”

Question put on Motion, a vote was taken electronically, and the Motion was carried unanimously.

19. **Pensions Committee – 27th November, 2024**

Motion moved by Mr Councillor J.E. Skinner, seconded by Mr Councillor F. Horning, “That the minutes of proceedings of the Pensions Committee, as contained in private report of meeting held on Wednesday, 27th November, 2024, be received by the Council.”

Question put on Motion, a vote was taken electronically, and the Motion was carried unanimously.

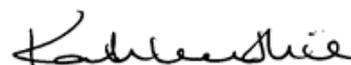
20. **Environmental Services Committee – 18th November, 2024**

Motion moved by Mr Councillor F. Horning, seconded by Mr Councillor P.J. Washington, “That the minutes of proceedings of the Environmental Services Committee, as contained in private report of meeting held on Monday, 18th November, 2024, be received by the Council.”

Question put on Motion, a vote was taken electronically, and there voted **For** the Motion, Councillors: Mr J.E. Skinner, Mr D.R. Watson, Mrs C.L. Wells, Mr F. Horning, Mr P.J. Washington, the Mayor - **6**

Against, Mr S.R. Pitts – **1**

The Council rose at 4.15pm.



Town Clerk & Chief Executive