

## **COUNCIL BUDGET PROTECTS FRONTLINE SERVICES AND OUTLINES MAJOR INVESTMENT PROGRAMME**

East Renfrewshire residents are set to benefit from a new budget agreed today (Thursday 9 February 2017) which protects frontline services and jobs.

The council will balance its budget in 2017/18 and has announced a £4.1m programme of key investments for services that residents value most.

These investments include an extra £1.6m for improving local roads and footpaths, £1.1m for exciting projects in our schools and plans to slash the cost of wraparound child care in council nurseries by 50 per cent, saving some parents more than £1,200 per year.

In setting the budget councillors also approved proposals to increase council tax by three per cent - the first increase in a decade - following the Scottish Government's decision to lift the council tax freeze.

East Renfrewshire Council Leader, Jim Fletcher, said: "Even with the late grant settlement changes announced last week we have once again seen a like for like cash reduction in the grant received from the Scottish Government.

"This grant reduction, combined with increasing service pressures and rising inflation, presented the council with a significant savings gap for 2017/18. This is despite the ability to retain the money raised locally by the separate Scottish Government increase in council tax for those in bands E to H.

"Today however we have agreed a package of measures to close this gap, protect frontline services and jobs and ensure vital investment in the services our residents have told us matter most to them."

These measures include:

- A £4.1m programme of investments for key improvement projects across a range of core services
- An investment of more than £131m in capital infrastructure projects to drive growth over the next eight years
- Agreeing efficiencies and savings totalling £7m
- Raising local council tax by three per cent for the first time in a decade
- A commitment to increase the living wage for staff to £8.45 per hour from April 2017
- A commitment that no compulsory redundancies will be required in this financial year
- Council also agreed to defer a number of savings proposals until next year and committed a one off payment to the East Renfrewshire HSCP Integration Joint Board to allow them more time to find a new purchaser for Bonnyton House.

Despite the increases to council tax help is still available to support East Renfrewshire residents on low incomes.

Councillor Fletcher continued: "Agreeing to raise local council tax by three per cent, the first increase for a decade, was a particularly tough decision for administration councillors to take.

“We know however from our long term financial planning that, if anything, the situation will worsen in the coming years and we will be faced with increased savings and reduced opportunities to invest in vital services.

“Regrettably, therefore, the only way to prepare for future years, protect against cuts and invest in services, is to raise council tax by three per cent across all bands.”

Outlining ambitious investment plans to be made in the coming financial year, Councillor Fletcher, said: “I am delighted to announce a £4.1m one-off programme of investment which has been designed to make a real and lasting difference to our residents. This includes an extra £1.6m for local roads, £1.1m for our schools, helping families by halving the cost of wraparound child care in our nurseries and committing extra support for vulnerable residents.

“Roads improvements were identified by our residents as a top priority for the council to address following our most recent citizens’ panel survey. We already spend around £4.2m every year to maintain our roads but this extra investment is earmarked specifically for local residential roads as opposed to trunk roads which tend to get priority.

“We also fully recognise that council tax increases will impact on our residents and one of the biggest areas where we think we can help them is by halving the cost of wrap around childcare at our nurseries - which for some parents will mean a saving of well over £1000 per year.

“The extra investment in schools will put ERC firmly at the forefront of digital learning in Scotland through the introduction of new 3D virtual reality learning resources for every school - a first in Scotland - and the provision of computer tablets to pupils from less affluent households.”

Councillors also heard today how the pace and scale of modernisation right across ERC was helping to offset the need for cuts by ensuring the council is as efficient as possible.

Of the savings needed from council budgets, more than 70 per cent - £3.9m - has been achieved through being more efficient.

The administration warned however of increasingly tough times ahead for local authorities and the need to continue to steer a course which delicately balances the protection of services and jobs with further cash reductions from the Scottish Government.

In light of these future challenges the ERC administration called on the Scottish Government to provide longer term settlements in future years, as opposed to the recent pattern of annual settlements which makes long term financial planning all the more difficult.

## **ENDS**

For more information please contact ERC Communications on 0141 577 3998 or e-mail [communications@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:communications@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk).

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**The full list of investments as part of the £4.1m package is:**

- £1.6m for improvements to roads and footpaths
- £84,000 for improvements to Town and Village centres
- £755,000 for a broad range of wider environmental improvements, including major improvement to Cowan Park by creating a new playpark and improvements to the War Memorial. Improvements to Kingston playing fields and a playpark are also planned. It will also include improvements to mixed tenure house sites and introducing a cycle hire scheme at Rouken Glen Park
- £645,000 to provide more than 1250 East Renfrewshire school children who are from less affluent households with a tablet so that all pupils can benefit from digital learning. In addition we will also introduce 3D learning in all our schools
- £150,000 to slash the cost of wraparound care in our nurseries by 50 per cent by reducing it from £4.60 to £2.25 per hour
- £107,000 to create an early years pupil equity fund
- £200,000 for significant enhancements to outdoor learning landscapes
- £50,000 for a reading recovery scheme in our primary schools
- £73,000 to support our looked after young people gain access to employment
- £100,000 for additional graduate trainee places
- £100,000 for more aids and adaptations in the home for vulnerable residents
- £10,000 to further increase the number of disability friendly taxis in East Renfrewshire
- £155,000 to East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust for extra resources and books in our libraries, new mobile theatre equipment for shows being performed in our community halls, new technology to allow live streaming at Eastwood Park Theatre and extra gym and fitness equipment for both the Barrhead Foundry and Eastwood Park Leisure
- £100,000 to support the ongoing regeneration of Dunterlie and Auchenback.

**Some of the key capital projects that will be delivered over the next eight years as part of the £131m capital investment plan include:**

- Completion of the new Barrhead High School - £30.8m
- Construction of a new railway station for Barrhead South - £11.5m
- Investment in Eastwood Park Leisure and Theatre complex - £6m
- Dams to Darnley Country park visitor centre and infrastructure - £4.8m
- New Maidenhill Primary School and nursery - £14.7m
- Completion of world's first faith schools' joint campus - £17.5m
- Replacement of Arthurlie Family Centre with new community hub in Auchenback - £5.3m
- Upgrade of Barrhead Foundry pool and gym - £1.9m

More information about the new Council Tax rates for East Renfrewshire Council for 2017/18 can be found on our [Council Tax page](#).