

**THE PARENT COUNCIL OF ST NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL**

**PARENT COUNCIL MEETING**

**13<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2023**

Present: J. Stewart (Joint Chair) ("JS")  
S. Reid (Joint Chair) ("SR")  
A. Wilmott (Vice-Chair) ("AW")  
Joanne Logan  
Mo Wright  
Michela Pagliocca  
Katrina Adams  
Chris McLaughlin  
Samantha MacConnell  
Lynsey O'Dwyer

Apologies: Chimeze Umeh  
Julie Flaherty  
Mairead Brophy  
Dougie Wilson

School: G. O'Neil (Head Teacher) ("Mr O'Neil")  
T. Creighton  
M. Gallagher  
C. McCrea  
J. Wilson  
A. Baxter  
D. Downie

**1. Welcome**

The Office-Bearers ("OB") welcomed the Parent Council ("PC") Members in attendance. JS led the meeting in an opening prayer.

**2. Apologies**

A note was taken of the PC Members & School staff in attendance, and of intimated apologies.

**3. Adjustment/Approval of Previous Minutes**

The OB apologised that no draft Minutes of the PC meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023 were yet available for adjustment/approval. The OB undertook to circulate the draft Minutes in early course on the PC WhatsApp Group.

#### 4. **Proposal for Learning Centre**

Mr O'Neil gave a presentation that set out his proposal for a "Learning Centre".

The School has noted an acute drop-off in attendance. A significant number of children are recording poor attendance, with others having chronic non-attendance. The Learning Centre is intended to facilitate a phased return of these children back into full-time education. It would accommodate and support the phased return of those children to the rigour of a full School week by providing a flexible and nurturing learning environment, supported by appropriate staff. The space would be flexible enough to accommodate other children with additional special needs, again on a phased basis only and as a transition into mainstream.

Mr O'Neil displayed plans of the proposed Centre. It would be located close to the Forum, with access to the garden, and would accommodate a (larger than standard) classroom with a separate office facility. Additional staffing of the facility remained under consideration.

If PC support was forthcoming, finance could be made available quickly from School funds, with the work being completed as early as August 2023.

After further discussion, the PC Members extended their whole-hearted and enthusiastic support for Mr O'Neil's proposal.

A name for the Centre remains under consideration.

#### **AGREED ACTION**

**The agreed action point was as follows:**

- 1. Mr O'Neil will update the PC on progress with the construction and use of the new Centre.**

#### 5. **Learning & Teaching Plan**

What does a good lesson look like?

This question is at the heart of a new Initiative called the "Learning & Teaching Plan" which the School is undertaking.

Mr Downie and Ms Baxter gave a full and engaging presentation to the PC Members on the Initiative.

Drawn from the School's Improvement Plan, the Initiative is designed to improve the quality, consistency and transparency of teaching methods across all disciplines.

It is audacious in scope. It will take 2 years to complete. It will involve a culture shift among teachers.

For example, the plan is to introduce a robust system of peer observation of lessons; with candid feedback and evaluation. Teachers will be placed in groups of three to share

good practice between themselves; to observe each other in their lesson preparation and delivery; to feedback observations; and to evaluate results.

The process is divided into discrete subject-headings - such as “ethos & culture”, “positive relationships”, “planning & purpose” - with each heading being explored in different school terms.

The essence of the Initiative is to identify and share good practice in teaching. Instead of having teachers plan and deliver lessons in isolation, the plan is to improve overall quality and consistency by observing and sharing best practices across a range of discrete target areas.

Preliminary consultations have already been undertaken with pupils and staff to identify the target areas for the Initiative.

The School’s intends to “hit the ground running” in August 2023 by initiating the system of tri-partite peer observation of lessons (focussing on the subject of “ethos & culture”; as well as inviting guest speakers along to assist the staff with best practice methods.

The School intends to produce an “inter-active” document to inform parents of the aims and progress of the Initiative.

The PC Members expressed much interest in, and enthusiasm for, the Initiative.

PC Members suggested that the “inter-active” document made available to parents should be written in plain English and stripped of much of its education jargon,

So, references to terms such as “pedagogical content knowledge”, “retrieval practice”, “learning intentions”, “metacognition”, “differentiation” and “formative and summative assessment” should be removed and rewritten for a lay readership.

## **AGREED ACTION**

**The agreed action points was as follows:**

- 1. Mr O’Neil will update the PC on progress with the Learning & Teaching Plan Initiative.**

## **6. The Hayward Review**

Mr Gallagher gave an exceptionally helpful update to the PC on the Interim Report of the Hayward Review.

The Interim Report sets out the proposed criteria for a “re-modelling” of the Scottish qualification and assessment system within Scottish secondary school education.

So far, the Interim Report’s proposals are:

- (i) To abolish external examinations at the end of S4
- (ii) To encourage inter-disciplinary learning
- (iii) The integration of academic and vocational qualifications

- (iv) The broadening of evidence of “achievement” (as collated during the senior school phases) to include non-academic skills and competencies
- (v) The creation of a digital profile for assessment and achievement
- (vi) The creation of a senior phase Leaving Certificate to provide an overall assessment of an individual’s qualifications and personal attributes

Importantly, it is proposed that the foregoing goals must be achieved without adding to the existing workload of teachers.

The plan seems to be that by removing S4 examinations, teachers ought to be “freed up” to focus on achieving the goals.

The time-scale for implementation is not specified.

Under questioning from the PC Members, Mr Gallagher explained that the S4 examinations are presently used as a mechanism to assess learning, and to inform the choice as to whether a pupil is suitable to progress to the Higher examination. It provides empirical data to support teacher evaluation.

Mr O’Neil suggested that the abandonment of the S4 examination might free up more time for senior phase teaching, rather than revising for S4 exams.

PC Members suggested that the S4 cohort who do not progress to Higher exams are likely to be most at risk by the Hayward proposals, as they may leave school with no certification of academic achievement. (That said, it was observed that a suite of certified qualifications, from Nat 1 to Nat 5 does exist at present.) Mr Gallagher agreed that some sort of exit certificate is important, but that it may require to be broadened to assessment of other competencies.

Mr Gallagher would continue to monitor the Review.

### **AGREED ACTION**

**The agreed action points was as follows:**

- 1. Mr Gallagher will update the PC on progress with the Hayward Review.**

## **7. Education Budget Cuts**

The OB reported that Joint Letters (from SNHS PC and other co-signing PCs) dated 17 February 2023 were duly issued to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and to the ERC Constituency and Regional MSPs.

Replies were received from the Constituency MSP (Mr J. Carlaw) on 24 February 2023 and from two Regional MSPs (Mr P. O’Kane and N. Bibby) dated 24 & 21 February 2023.

Copies of the correspondence are attached (Annex 1).

In addition, the OB reported that ERC had now approved its Budget. Reference was made to an extract of a Speech issued by the Leader of the ERC Council (Councillor Owen O’Donnell) (Annex 2).

While the intricacies of local authority financing remain opaque, the OB reported that the Council appears to have staved off the worst of the predicted cuts to the education and other budgets by extending the PFI “mortgage” over its school building portfolio, and increasing Council Tax.

In other words, it has borrowed money (approximately £14.8 million) from its existing secured creditors – described in the Council Leader’s Speech as a “one-off benefit” achieved by “fiscal flexibilities”.

The OB circulated a document to the PC Members a document kindly prepared by the Chair of another PC. This seeks to provide a detailed analysis of the cuts that have been made to the Education Budget (and those that have been avoided by the Council Tax increase). A copy of the analysis is attached (Annex 3)

One casualty of the Education Budget cuts is the funding (by ERC) of the PC’s CONNECT membership.

The OB explained that CONNECT provide a very useful resource for PCs (including our own) by providing informed, topical analysis of education-related issues, as well as lobbying the Scottish Government on behalf of parents on multiple issues. For example, CONNECT provided well-informed input and vocal opposition to the HWB Census. A potential consequence of ERC’s decision (which is replicated among several other local authorities) is that CONNECT may have to reduce its own staff and restrict its operations, with a knock-on detrimental consequence for PCs around the country.

Further, the withdrawal of the automatic local authority funding of CONNECT membership means that ERC PCs also lose one of the incidental benefits of CONNECT membership, namely insurance cover. This may be of less important for our own PC (that is not involved in fund-raising or event organisation), but it is likely to be a significant loss and risk for many primary school PCs.

Mr O’Neil agreed to make enquiries of ERC to ascertain what the current position is, and possible solutions.

Meantime, the OB agreed to complete the CONNECT survey that had been circulated recently.

### **AGREED ACTION**

**The agreed action points were as follows:**

- 1. Mr O’Neil will make enquiries of ERC to ascertain whether CONNECT membership funding has been withdrawn; if so, from which date; and whether any alternative solutions can be proposed.**
- 2. The OB shall complete the CONNECT survey.**

### **8. Head Teacher’s Report**

Mr O’Neill reported the following to the PC Meeting:

- (i) The Careers Convention was a huge success. (PC Member also praised the quality and range of volunteers from the public and private sectors.)

- (ii) Exams are underway
- (iii) Supported (Saturday morning) study is underway
- (iv) School trips to Rome and Salamanca are now organised (despite last-minute scares with price increases)
- (v) The S3 Netball team qualified for the final of the Scottish School Cup
- (vi) A raft of medals was won by the School's running teams – with notable national and, indeed, world class achievements by two particular pupils, who are outstanding in their fields.
- (vii) The Careers Convention has highlighted difficulties with traffic management around the entrance to the School. The lights on Rouken Glen Road (entering from the Eastwood Toll roundabout) are sequenced to change at intervals that are just too long).

A “make-do” remedy, suggested by the School, is to encourage parents to enter from the opposite entrance – that is, to approach the Park entrance along Rouken Glen Road but approaching from the Davieland Road end (NOT to approach from the Eastwood Toll roundabout).

## 9. Parent Questions

The following question was raised by the Parent Forum:

- (i) *“Fund-raising? What does the School use the funds for?”*

Mr O’Neil explained that funds raised from parents are used for all number of diverse School needs, such as, recently, to subsidise the School mini-bus, and school transport (For example, funds were recently raised from parents to transport the School football team to away games.)

The OB reiterated their enthusiasm to support School fund-raising activities – but explained that, as a necessary corollary, if it was to adopt that role, it considered that it was necessary to be more transparent with the Parent Forum as to how funds raised would be, and had been, spent.

A good example was the “easyfundraising” initiative.

The OB were happy to promote this – if the School wished it to do so – but would welcome greater clarity as to whether the School wished that support from the PC; how funds were intended to be applied; and how the School would account for funds raised.

The number of parents signed up to easyfundraising was presently relatively modest – but it could readily be promoted by the PC, if the School could clarify its position on two questions:

- (i) Did the School wish the PC to do so?; and
- (ii) How did the School intend to spend, and account for its spending of, funds raised?

Mr O’Neil agreed to consider the matter further.

## **AGREED ACTION**

The agreed action points was as follows:

1. **Mr O'Neil will consider:**
  - (i) **whether it wishes the PC to promote fund-raising among the Parent Forum; if so,**
  - (ii) **In what manner would it welcome that support;**
  - (iii) **How does the School intend to use funds raised from the Parent Forum; and**
  - (iv) **How does the School intend to account for/disclose its use of funds raised?**

## 10. **AOCB**

One issue was raised:

- (i) University Access – The OBs raised again the issue of restrictions on University access.

It appears that University access to certain courses (such as Law at Edinburgh University) was now precluded to pupils at, for example, SNHS, due to a (presently opaque) policy of favouring pupils who were categorised as satisfying certain “widening access” criteria.

Details of the criteria to qualify for “widening access” status were not presently known to the OB – but were understood to operate in such a way as to effectively preclude access to Edinburgh University’s School of Law for many SNHS pupils who would otherwise attain (and exceed) the published academic entrance qualifications.

The OB asked Mr O’Neil whether he was aware of any such issue; whether it was restricted to Edinburgh University; and whether it was a matter of concern to the School and/or ERC.

The OB expressed the view that the PC had an obligation to look into the issue, at least to better understand it, if some form of policy or practice existed which would adversely restrict the ability of a proportion of SNHS pupils to access certain Scottish University courses.

Mr O’Neil agreed to make enquiries of ERC.

The OB also agreed to make further enquiries of their own.

## **AGREED ACTION**

The agreed action points were as follows:

1. **Mr O’Neil shall make further enquiries (of ERC) into the existence of any policy-driven restrictions on University Access that may potentially affect SNHS pupils.**
2. **The OB shall make further enquiries into the existence of any policy-driven restrictions on University Access that may potentially affect SNHS pupils.**

The business of the Parent Council Meeting was then concluded.

The next PC Meeting on Monday 8 May 2023 has been **CANCELLED** as this is now the date of the Kings Coronation, and a public holiday.

Instead, the next PC Meeting will be held on **TUESDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2023 at 7pm** in St Ninian's High School.



**SUMMARY  
OF  
AGREED ACTION POINTS**

<i>Learning Centre</i>	<i>Who?</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
<b>1. Mr O'Neil will update the PC on progress with the construction and use of the new Centre.</b>	<b>HT</b>	<b>May 23</b>
<i>Learning &amp; Teaching Plan</i>		
<b>1. Mr O'Neil will update the PC on progress with the Learning &amp; Teaching Plan Initiative.</b>	<b>HT</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>
<i>The Hayward Review</i>		
<b>1. Mr Gallagher will update the PC on progress with the Hayward Review</b>	<b>MG</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>
<i>Restricted University Access for SNHS Pupils</i>		
<b>1. Mr O'Neil shall make further enquiries (of ERC) into the detail and operation of any policy-driven restrictions on University Access that may potentially affect SNHS pupils</b>	<b>HT</b>	<b>May 23</b>
<b>2. The OB shall make further enquiries into the detail and operation of any policy-driven restrictions on University Access that may be potentially affect SNHS pupils.</b>	<b>OB</b>	<b>OB</b>
<i>Fund-Raising</i>		
<b>1. Mr O'Neil will consider: (i) whether it wishes the PC to promote fund-raising among the Parent Forum; if so,</b>	<b>HT</b>	<b>May 23</b>

<p>(ii) In what manner would it welcome that support;</p> <p>(iii) How does the School intend to use funds raised from the Parent Forum; and</p> <p>(iv) How does the School intend to account for/disclose its use of funds raised?</p>		
<p><i>Education Budget Cuts</i></p>		
<p>1. Mr O'Neil will make enquiries of ERC to ascertain whether CONNECT membership funding has been withdrawn; if so, from which date; and whether any alternative solutions can be proposed.</p> <p>2. The OB shall complete the CONNECT survey.</p>	<p>HT</p> <p>OB</p>	<p>May 23</p> <p>27 Mar 23</p>

## **ANNEX 1**

1. Copy Joint PC Letter dated 17 February 2023 to the Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills
2. (Sample) Copy Joint PC Letter dated 17 February 2023 to Constituency & Regional MSPs
3. Copy Reply Letter dated 24 February 2023 from Paul O'Kane MSP
4. Copy Reply Email dated 24 February 2023 from Jackson Carlaw MSP
5. Copy Reply Email dated 21 February 2023 from Neil Bibby MSP

THE PARENT COUNCIL FORUM  
OF  
EAST RENFREWSHIRE

St Ninian's High School Rouken Glen Road Giffnock  Email: pcstninansgiffnock@gmail.com	Williamwood High School Eaglesham Road Clarkston  Email: williamwoodpc@gmail.com	Woodfarm High School Robslee Road Thornliebank  Email: woodfarmpc@gmail.com	Crookfur Primary School Newton Mearns  Email: crookfurparentcouncil@gmail.com
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The Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

17 February 2023

Dear Minister,

***Education! Education! Education!***

We represent the Parent Councils of the undernoted Secondary and Primary Schools within East Renfrewshire.

The Scottish Government will shortly announce its annual funding Grant to Scottish local authorities.

At best, the Grant is expected to be frozen. This will equate to a “real terms” reduction in local authority funding.

This reduction follows repeated Scottish Government cuts to Council budgets (equating to 7 per cent in real terms) between 2013/2014 and 2019/2020 – despite a cut in the UK Settlement Grant to the Scottish Government of only 2 per cent over the same period.

Many Scottish local authorities have voiced grave concern as to the inevitability of cuts to, among other things, their Education Budgets, in light of this persistent decline in local authority funding.

Cuts to local authority Education Budgets would significantly worsen the educational provision for children of all abilities within Scotland's schools, particularly after the ravages inflicted upon the education of our children during the COVID pandemic lockdowns.

Such cuts would damage educational standards for a generation and blight the opportunities of our children for a lifetime.

The Scottish Government's recent interventions to protect minimum learning hours and pupil teacher ratios are welcomed – but they are not the solution to the problem.

That is because other essential elements of local authority Education Budgets remain unprotected.

Besides, absent additional funding, the Scottish Government's recent interventions (which merely restrict local government autonomy) simply “pass the buck” to local authorities to cut other valuable local services in order to plug a budget deficit that is directly attributable to the Scottish Government's inadequate funding of local authorities over many years.

Accordingly, we respectfully call upon the Scottish Ministers to:

- (i) Increase local government funding in real terms to allow Scottish local authorities to maintain local services at a proper level, recognising their increased responsibilities to local communities post-COVID; and
- (ii) Ring-fence and protect local authority Education Budgets.

The education of our children is our most valuable capital asset.

It must be prioritised – by both central and local government.

In 2015, the First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon MSP) asked that she be “judged” on her record on education. Regrettably, by any objective measure, that record has been sorely deficient.

By way of illustration:

1. **Poor scores in Maths & Science:** In 2018, Scotland achieved its lowest PISA scores on record for maths and science.
2. **Elimination of independent comparative data:** The Scottish Government has withdrawn Scotland from comparative international league tables for education, specifically the “Trends in International Maths and Science Study” (TIMSS) and the “Progress in International Reading Literacy Study” (PIRLS). The Scottish Government also discontinued another tried-and-tested literacy and numeracy survey (the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy). The removal of such independent comparative educational data from public scrutiny has attracted renowned expert criticism. The Government's preferred metric is “continuous assessment”, an opaque process which failed to withstand scrutiny during the pandemic.
3. **Failure to reduce pupil-teacher ratios:** The pupil-teacher ratio is higher now than when the Scottish Government came to power in 2014 (despite a manifesto pledge in 2007 to decrease class sizes). In 2021, the pupil-teacher ratio was 13.2; in 2007, the pupil-teacher ratio was 13.

4. **Failure to reduce attainment gap:** Attainment in numeracy and literacy in Scotland's schools has declined. In response, the Scottish Government abandoned its own 10 year target (announced in 2016) to eliminate the poverty-related attainment gap. Eliminating this gap was proclaimed, by the First Minister herself, to be "the yardstick by which the people of Scotland can measure [the Government's] success".
5. **Failure to reduce endemic school absence:** Increasing numbers of children are absent long-term from school. Absenteeism has worsened since lockdown was lifted. There is no national strategy to address this emerging social calamity.
6. **Declining school inspections:** Two thirds of schools have not been inspected for at least five years. One in four schools have not been inspected for over 10 years.
7. **Lowest spending on secondary education:** Scotland has the lowest spending per High School pupil in the United Kingdom. In 2019-20, Scotland spent the least per head at secondary school level in the UK: England spent the most, with £709 per head; Wales spent £639 per head; Northern Ireland spent £604 per head; whereas Scotland spent a mere £571 per head.
8. **Reduced University access for Scottish students:** The Scottish Government has capped the number of University places that are available for Scottish-domiciled students. In practice this means that, every single year, thousands of Scottish schoolchildren fail to gain a place at University despite fully meeting entry criteria.

Rightly or wrongly, it has been said that the Scottish Government has squandered time and money in the futile pursuit of ideological objectives, and non-priority marginal issues, all to the evident neglect of that simple aspiration of ordinary, hard-working parents – namely, that their children receive the best education to equip them for success in adult life.

To meet that universal parental aspiration, we urge the Scottish Ministers to set aside ideological distractions and to focus instead on improving educational standards and attainment for all children. Only by reversing the decline in local authority funding, and ring-fencing Education Budgets, can we hope to achieve that noble objective.

Yours sincerely,

*S. Cunningham (Chair), J. Stewart (Joint Chair), A. Steele (Chair), D. Henderson (Chair)*

On behalf of

The Parent Council of Williamwood High School

The Parent Council of St Ninian's High School

The Parent Council of Woodfarm High School

The Parent Council of Crookfur Primary School

THE PARENT COUNCIL FORUM  
OF  
EAST RENFREWSHIRE

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Jackson Carlaw MSP  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

17 February 2023

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***Education! Education! Education!***

We represent the Parent Councils of the undernoted Secondary and Primary Schools within East Renfrewshire.

The Scottish Government will shortly announce its annual funding Grant to Scottish local authorities.

At best, the Grant is expected to be frozen. This will equate to a "real terms" reduction in local authority funding.

This reduction follows repeated Scottish Government cuts to Council budgets (equating to 7 per cent in real terms) between 2013/2014 and 2019/2020 – despite a cut in the UK Settlement Grant to the Scottish Government of only 2 per cent over the same period.

Many Scottish local authorities have voiced grave concern as to the inevitability of cuts to, among other things, their Education Budgets, in light of this persistent decline in local authority funding.

Cuts to local authority Education Budgets would significantly worsen the educational provision for children of all abilities within Scotland's schools, particularly after the ravages inflicted upon the education of our children during the COVID pandemic lockdowns.

Such cuts would damage educational standards for a generation and blight the opportunities of our children for a lifetime.

The Scottish Government's recent interventions to protect minimum learning hours and pupil teacher ratios are welcomed – but they are not the solution to the problem.

That is because other essential elements of local authority Education Budgets remain unprotected.

Besides, absent additional funding, the Scottish Government's recent interventions (which merely restrict local government autonomy) simply “pass the buck” to local authorities to cut other valuable local services in order to plug a budget deficit that is directly attributable to the Scottish Government's inadequate funding of local authorities over many years.

Accordingly, we respectfully call upon you to urge the Scottish Ministers to:

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To meet that universal parental aspiration, we request that you urge the Scottish Ministers to set aside ideological distractions and to focus instead on improving educational standards and attainment for all children. Only by reversing the decline in local authority funding, and ring-fencing Education Budgets, can we hope to achieve that noble objective.

Yours sincerely,

*S. Cunningham (Chair), J. Stewart (Joint Chair), A. Steele (Chair), D. Henderson (Chair)*

On behalf of

The Parent Council of Williamwood High School

The Parent Council of St Ninian's High School

The Parent Council of Woodfarm High School

The Parent Council of Crookfur Primary School

# Paul O’Kane MSP

West Scotland Region

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The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

1002 Mile End Mill, Paisley, PA1 1JS



**To:**

The Parent Council of Williamwood High School  
The Parent Council of St Ninian’s High School  
The Parent Council of Woodfarm High School  
The Parent Council of Crookfur Primary School

24 February 2023

Dear parents,

**Scottish Government funding for Local Government**

Thank you for taking the time to contact me to outline your concerns regarding the Scottish Government’s agenda of reducing local authority funding, which is having an impact on the provision of education services across Scotland.

In the period between 2013/14 and 2021/22, in real terms, the Scottish Government’s budget has increased by 2.3%, whilst the Scottish Government has cut funding for local government by 2.1%.

In East Renfrewshire, the impact of these budget cuts has been particularly pronounced. In the period between 2013/14 and 2021/22, per head of population, the Scottish Government have cut East Renfrewshire’s funding by 6.6%.

This year, East Renfrewshire are facing a £30 million shortfall. The impact of this reduction is compounded by the £80 million of funding cuts which have been imposed on East Renfrewshire by the Scottish Government since 2015/16.

In Parliament, my colleague, Daniel Johnson MSP, Scottish Labour’s Finance and Economy Spokesperson, has forensically held the Scottish Government to account on their Budget proposals, highlighting the damaging impact their decisions will have on communities across the country.

**Paul O’Kane MSP**

Member of the Scottish Parliament for the West Scotland Region  
Scottish Labour and Scottish Co-operative Party  
Shadow Minister for Social Care and Public Health

He has highlighted that, increasingly, a greater proportion of local authority budgets are being ringfenced by Scottish Government policy directives, which is giving less autonomy for councillors to make decisions over how to spend the money that is available to them. I voted against the Scottish Government budget in the Scottish Parliament on Tuesday 21 February.

Indeed, I have raised the issue of local government budget cuts in the Scottish Parliament directly with Scottish Government Ministers. On 26 January, I asked Ben MacPherson MSP, Minister for Local Government, why the Scottish Government have claimed that they have provided £500 million in additional funding for local authorities when research by the Coalition of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) has revealed that the true figure is around £38 million, with local authorities like East Renfrewshire facing a significant funding shortfall.

You are right to outline that the First Minister asked to be judged on her record on education. In the final weeks of her Premiership, it is evident, by her own standards, the First Minister has failed across a range of areas in Scottish education. Perhaps, most concerningly, her Government's failure to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap, which the First Minister described as 'the yardstick by which the people of Scotland can measure success.'

In my previous role as the Councillor for Newton Mearns North and Neilston, I served as Convenor of Education for East Renfrewshire Council, as many of you will know it was my top priority to protect the education budget and deliver the highest quality education services in the country and I enjoyed working closely with parent councils. Now, in my role as a Member of the Scottish Parliament for the West of Scotland, I remain steadfast in my commitment to protecting and investing in education services in East Renfrewshire.

I know that education is the top priority for my Labour colleagues in East Renfrewshire Council. I know they will do whatever is necessary, and explore every possible avenue, to protect education services in East Renfrewshire.

The 2023/24 Budget will be set by East Renfrewshire in the coming weeks. They are facing unprecedented financial pressures and despite being forced to operate with one-hand tied behind their back, I know that my Labour colleagues will leave no stone unturned to support education as there is no issue more important than the education of our children.

If I can be of any further support on this issue, or with any other issue, then please do not hesitate to get in contact and I will do whatever I can to help.

In the meantime, I will continue to work with my Scottish Labour colleagues in the Scottish Parliament to hold the Scottish Government to account for their record on education and funding for local government.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul O'Kane', written in a cursive style.

**Paul O'Kane MSP**  
**Convenor of the Cross Party Group on Learning Disabilities**  
**Member of the Scottish Parliament for the West Scotland Region**  
**Scottish Labour and Co-operative MSP**  
**Shaw Minister for Social Care and Public Health**

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Carlaw J (Jackson), MSP** <Jackson.Carlaw.msp@parliament.scot>  
Date: Fri, 24 Feb 2023 at 15:54  
Subject: Re: Letter to Jackson Carlaw MSP: Education Budget Cuts  
To: [pestniniangiffnock@gmail.com](mailto:pestniniangiffnock@gmail.com) <[pestniniangiffnock@gmail.com](mailto:pestniniangiffnock@gmail.com)>

Dear Parent Council Chairs,

Thank you for taking the time to contact me and for the incredibly important issues that you have raised.

For a government that promised Education would be the No.1 priority, the track record of delivery over the years has shown that the issue has been anything but it's key mission. The current Scottish Government has presided over a litany of failures in Education and you have very well articulated a significant number of them in your letter.

The Scottish Government's continued derisory annual budget settlements for local government is a disgrace. For the past decade, it has resulted in cuts to essential local services, new and increased charges and the cessation of important services. It has also resulted in significant increases to council tax but the proceeds raised from the higher charges is not for investment in local services such as our schools but simply to offset Scottish Government cuts. It is an unacceptable situation and the impact on local service provision in East Renfrewshire and all other councils has been devastating.

As you are aware, East Renfrewshire Council has set out a range of very challenging savings options in Education and I know that there is serious concern about many of the proposals. When the council published it's public consultation document on the savings options to be considered in the latter part of last year, it was set out that the local authority anticipated having to make £30 million of cuts to core service provision.

The vast majority of local finance is provided to local authorities directly as a grant from the Scottish Government and given the derisory further settlement for core council funding coupled with the legal requirement to set a balanced budget, it is regrettably the case that East Renfrewshire Councillors appear to have little option but to accept some of the difficult proposals previously set out.

It is particularly disappointing that the Scottish Government continue to cut core council funding in a period where they are receiving significant additional finance from the UK Government per year. Sadly, more money for the Scottish Government has translated into less funding for councils because of decisions made by Ministers in Edinburgh. It has also been revealed that the Scottish Government underspent on it's

2021/22 budget by £2 billion and this is money that could have been used to support public services in Scotland.

One of the key reasons for why East Renfrewshire Council and all other local authorities in Scotland have been forced to push through such drastic cuts in their core budget areas is due to Ministers ring fencing large parts of local authority funding meaning the money has to be spent delivering on Scottish Government policies.

Therefore and whilst, I completely appreciate the sentiments expressed in your letter, as ring fencing is one of the key reasons for the challenges councils are facing, I am not persuaded that further reducing the autonomy of local authorities to determine their own budgets is the solution to the existing difficulties.

What I believe needs to happen is for the Scottish Government to finally start funding councils fairly after a decade of unsustainable cuts.

As such, Scottish Conservatives have set out proposals for a new council funding law. The aim of the law would to ensure fair finances for local authorities and in future, it would serve to prevent the unacceptable situation where central government can raid the budgets of councils at a whim with very negative consequences on a range of services that are crucial to the day-to-day lives of communities in Scotland.

The ongoing dire funding position of councils is such that our local authorities now need legislative protection from the Scottish Government and this is an issue that we will continue to highlight.

I fully understand the range of concerns expressed in your letter and as the MSP for Eastwood, I am greatly saddened that such widespread changes to education services in the local authority area are now having to be considered. East Renfrewshire has the best schools in Scotland and our local authority is known nationally for the strength of it's Educational standards and performance. There is no getting away from the reality that the extent and types of the cuts proposed is a major concern locally.

The council's annual budget setting meeting is to take place on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> March and within the limited confines of the approved Scottish Government settlement for local authorities, I ask that elected members do all they can to protect as many services in Education as possible.

Thanks again for contacting me.

Kind Regards,

Jackson

**Jackson Carlaw CBE MSP**  
Member of the Scottish Parliament for Eastwood

F: [@Jackson4Eastwood](https://twitter.com/Jackson4Eastwood)

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Bibby N (Neil), MSP** <Neil.Bibby.msp@parliament.scot>

Date: Tue, 21 Feb 2023 at 11:29

Subject: RE: Letter to Neil Bibby MSP: Education Budget Cuts

To: PC St Ninians Giffnock <[pcstniniansgiffnock@gmail.com](mailto:pcstniniansgiffnock@gmail.com)>

Good morning,

Thank you for your email and attached letter to Neil Bibby MSP.

Neil shares your concerns about the Scottish Government's local government budget settlement and the impact that will have on vital services, such as Education. The treatment of councils by this government across Scotland, is disgraceful. As you may be aware, Neil raised this with John Swinney in the Scottish Parliament the other week as an urgent topical question. In a heated exchange, the DFM continued to press the line that they are giving councils a £570m cash increase – a deeply misleading figure, to say the least.

A few days later, Neil raised the issue again following Finance questions during which the DFM again used the £570m figure. Rising on a point of order, Neil explained at length how misleading this figure is, and that the Deputy First Minister must know how misleading it is.

The Scottish Government's disgraceful treatment of councils amounts to austerity-by-proxy. Neil will continue to make the case strongly at every opportunity in the run-up to Stage 3 of the budget – on behalf of councils across West Scotland.

I hope this is helpful.

Best wishes.

## **ANNEX 2**

1. Extract from Speech of Leader of ERC Council (Councillor Owen O'Donnell).



**EXTRACT  
FROM  
COUNCIL LEADER'S BUDGET SPEECH (2023)**

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“Most of the Council’s funding comes from the Scottish Government in our annual grant settlement. Residents are often rightly concerned about what their council tax is spent on but it is important to remember the money raised from council tax only accounts for around 18% - less than one fifth - of our total funding.

It has also been a growing trend in recent years that the money we receive from the Scottish Government comes with strings attached and can often only be spent on national policy initiatives. These include important services like the expansion of early years child care, moving towards universal free school meals in primary schools and paying the real living wage to those working in social care. These are initiatives we support but it does leave us with less flexibility on what we can spend money on here in East Renfrewshire.

It is also the case that much of our funding can only be spent on specific projects – such as housing or transport – and can’t be used in other areas. That lack of freedom for local politicians also restricts us when it comes to making savings, with some parts of our spending protected from cuts. This means areas such as roads, parks, refuse collection and money advice for the most vulnerable often face more pressure. Just a few weeks ago, we were notified of more planned restrictions on education spending by the Scottish Government. In East Renfrewshire, we are proud to provide the best council run schools in the country, a success built on making the best decisions locally to suit our local circumstances.

Denying councils the power to decide how best to close the attainment gap will only mean more cuts to other essential services.

For 2023/24, our grant settlement from the Scottish Government is £223.1m. This represents a small increase on last year but much of that has again been committed to national priorities, leaving us with £1.5m extra. Once an increased rates bill for buildings such as our schools and offices is factored in, the Council is actually left with £800,000 extra, an increase of just 0.4% on a like-for-like basis on last year’s settlement.

Given that the Council has been hit by the same financial challenges as everyone else over the last year, it is clear that small amount of extra money falls well short of what we require to even attempt to maintain current levels of service. And coupled with the £80m in savings which we’ve already had to make since 2015/16 due to years of under-funding that has left the Council’s finances in a perilous position.

When we announced in October that the Council was facing a Budget gap of more than £30m over the next three years. I warned then that, with no extra money likely to come our way from the Scottish Government, we would have to consider cutting services and jobs. The year ahead was always going to be the toughest and our Budget gap for 2023/24 stands at £18.1m.

There are a number of ways we can bridge this funding shortfall; we can raise more income by increasing Council Tax 5 or charging more for services; we can use any remaining reserves or we can make cuts to services. We can also work with the Scottish Government to

see if the rules around our budgets can be more flexible. On this issue of what are known as fiscal flexibilities, we have received some good news which allows us to spread the debt charges on certain major infrastructure projects like new schools. This is the approach we will take after agreeing the Service Concessions paper earlier on today's agenda.

We will receive a one-off benefit of £14.8m to our financial reserves, plus savings of around £2.7m-a-year starting from 2023/24. In the year ahead, we will use £7.5m of this one-off money, together with the £2.7m recurring saving, to reduce our Budget gap from £18.1m to £7.9m. We have decided not to use all the money at once so we can spread this benefit over the following two years when we will also face very challenging savings targets.

Our officers' financial modelling for this Budget is based on a 5% rise in Council Tax. And although we are implementing cuts and using our reserves, a 5% increase would still not be enough to completely close our funding gap. As a result – and as outlined in my earlier motion - I am today recommending East Renfrewshire Council increases Council Tax by 6% for 2023/24 which will reduce the level of cuts required. It is worth pointing out that to close our Budget gap over the next three years by only using Council Tax and not making any 6 service cuts would mean a rise of more than 50% in Council Tax bills. The 6% increase I am recommending is almost half the rate of inflation we have seen in recent months but I fully accept another increase in household bills will impact many people. However, if we had not opted to raise Council Tax by this level, we would have had to make further reductions in funding to our schools, our roads, our parks and our waste collection services.

For a Band D property in East Renfrewshire, this will mean an annual increase in Council Tax of £80.11 or £1.54 a week.

And there will be smaller increases for the almost one third of our 41,000 households who already receive a 25% single person discount. If they live in a Band D property, they will instead pay just £1.16 a week more. Families on low incomes, who make up about 11%, or almost 4,500, of all households in East Renfrewshire, will not have to pay the full increase, with some households continuing to pay no Council Tax at all because of their circumstances.

Just as we have offered the most vulnerable people in our communities direct financial assistance as part of our Cost of Living support, so they will also be protected from the proposed increase in Council Tax.

It is also important to note that in the last 10 years, Council Tax bands in East Renfrewshire have been below the Scottish average and are expected to remain around the Scottish average in the coming year.

And this is whilst consistently delivering well above average vital services.”

*[Extracted from East Renfrewshire Council website: 9 March 2023]*

## **ANNEX 3**

1. Informal Analysis of Cuts to Education Budget

Ref:	Description of Saving	2023/24		2025/25	
		Proposed	Impact/ Advance Approval	Proposed	Impact/ Advance Approval
		E'000s	E'000s	E'000s	E'000s
EDU 4.2	Income Generation - School Meal price increase	91	25		
EDU 1.1	Primary Teaching Staffing Model - Remove Equity Management time Allocation	90	54		
EDU 2.1	Remove Outdoor Education Subsidy	26			
EDU 2.2	Remove behaviour support PSAs who support pupils across secondary schools	211	276		
EDU 2.3	Reduction in other staff groups (excluding teachers) based in ELC/Schools	44			
EDU 2.4	Specialist Therapies and Support	45			
EDU 2.5	Reduction in Classroom supplies budget	89			
EDU 2.6	Reduction in Support for Quality in Education budget	44	140		
EDU 3.1	Reduction in centrally based business support and budget teams	56	108		
EDU 3.2	Reduction in Centrally Based Support Posts	188			
EDU 3.3	Reduction in Psychological Services	135			
EDU 3.4	Removal of Early Intervention and Prevention Resource	16	197		
EDU 3.5	Reduction in Janitorial Service (ELC & Schools)	103	510		
EDU 3.6	Reduction in Catering Service (ELC & Schools)	15	527		
EDU 3.7	Reduction in Cleaning Service (ELC & Schools)	10			
EDU 3.8	Reduction in Parent Pay transaction fees	4			
EDU 3.9	Remove annual authority subscription to Connect	30			
EDU 3.10	Reduction in recruitment advertising budget	44			
EDU 3.11	Removal of service agreement with Glasgow CC to provide hospital tuition	21	15		
EDU 3.12	Reduction in centrally managed budgets which support schools	79	40		
EDU 3.13	ELC - Delay in eligibility for statutory entitlement				

1

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EDU 3.14	Removal of funding for junior conservatoire	5	3		
EDU 3.15	Remove funding for Glasgow CC services	40			
EDU 3.16	Reduction in Centrally Managed Replacement teaching budget	216			
EDU 3.17	Reduction in CLP budget (50%)	11			
EDU 3.18	Reduction in Modern Apprentices Posts	39			
EDU 3.19	Reduce Adult Learning Staffing	18			
EDU 4.1	Full Year Impact - School Transport - Removal of Mealmakers Plus Services	14			
EDU 4.1	Full Year Impact - School Transport - Removal of FME Transport Additional Eligibility Criteria	6			
EDU 4.1	Full Year Impact - Income Generation - School Meals price from August 2022	11			
EDU 4.3	Remove Balance of Repairs and Renewals	400	-400		