Emergency motion on Council Tax – Motion as adjusted approved, after division.

10 Councillor Molyneux, seconded by Councillor Anderson, moved

"Council notes the announcement on 17th October 2023 of proposals by the First Minister to freeze Council Tax next year.

Council believes that the way the policy was announced at SNP Conference, without the agreement of CoSLA, was unacceptable and not in line with the principles of partnership, trust and mutual respect which underpins the spirit and letter of both the Verity House and the Bute House Agreements. Council believes that Council Tax is a local tax and it should always be decided by local councillors and that failure to respect this damages trust between local and national government.

Council also reiterates its belief that Council Tax is an inherently regressive tax and acknowledges that freezing Council Tax disproportionately benefits those who are better-off at the expense of the less well-off, who rely more on local services.

Council notes that the First Minister has said the freeze will be "fully-funded" but also recognises that there is not yet an agreed definition of what that means, creating considerable uncertainty for Councils in the context of their respective medium-term financial strategies.

Council therefore agrees to write to the First Minister urging him to step back from this announcement and engage constructively with local government, in line with the values of the Verity House Agreement, to agree an overall, fair financial settlement which ensures Councils can autonomously make appropriate choices on Council Tax and funding for local services, in the context of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Council also agrees to ask the First Minister to guarantee immediate and meaningful progress on the long-overdue reform to local taxation by setting out a timetable for finally replacing the council tax."

Councillor Bell, seconded by Bailie Pike, moved as an amendment to delete all after the first paragraph and replace with the following:-

"Council understands the context of political speeches at party conferences where policy proposals are set out.

Council agrees that this proposal will give households certainty about their Council Tax bill which as citizens, including those who are eligible to pay full Council Tax, continue to deal with the impact of rampant inflation and the cost-of-living crisis. Council agrees that this freeze must be fully funded.

Council notes the First Minister has said that acceptance of funding to implement a freeze is optional for local authorities, however, Council agrees that where the opportunity for additional funding exists, it would rather support its services from funding from the Scottish Government rather than leaving any gap to be borne by our citizens at such a challenging time.

Council notes the concern around the way that this announcement has been made and agrees that engagement with local government and COSLA is crucial to determine how this proposal will work.

Council agrees that local taxation reform is long overdue and instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Scottish Government to seek urgent clarity on how funding will be made available for a Council Tax freeze and what progress is being made to replace Council Tax with local taxation methods that are progressive, fairer to both households and individual local authorities, and provide a more diverse and resilient local tax base."

Councillor Brown, seconded by Councillor McAveety, moved as an amendment to delete in the fifth paragraph:

"Council also agrees to ask the First Minister to guarantee immediate and meaningful progress on the long-overdue reform to local taxation by setting out a timetable for finally replacing the council tax" and replace with the following:-

"Council also agrees that any future reform of Council Tax, as per the verity House Agreement should include local government representatives through COSLA, both in consultation and in decision making process."

Councillor Molyneux, with the approval of his seconder, accepted part of the amendment by Councillor Brown, resulting in the following adjusted motion:-

"Council notes the announcement on 17 October 2023 of proposals by the First Minister to freeze Council Tax next year.

Council believes that the way the policy was announced at SNP Conference, without the agreement of CoSLA, was unacceptable and not in line with the principles of partnership, trust and mutual respect which underpins the spirit and letter of both the Verity House and the Bute House Agreements. Council believes that Council Tax is a local tax and it should always be decided by local councillors and that failure to respect this damages trust between local and national government.

Council also reiterates its belief that Council Tax is an inherently regressive tax and acknowledges that freezing Council Tax disproportionately benefits those who are better-off at the expense of the less well-off, who rely more on local services.

Council notes that the First Minister has said the freeze will be "fully-funded" but also recognises that there is not yet an agreed definition of what that means, creating considerable uncertainty for Councils in the context of their respective medium-term financial strategies.

Council therefore agrees to write to the First Minister urging him to step back from this announcement and engage constructively with local government, in line with the values of the Verity House Agreement, to agree an overall, fair financial settlement which ensures Councils can autonomously make appropriate choices on

Council Tax and funding for local services, in the context of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Council also agrees to ask the First Minister to guarantee immediate and meaningful progress on the long-overdue reform to local taxation by setting out a timetable for finally replacing the council tax. Council also agrees that any future reform of Council Tax, as per the verity House Agreement should include local government representatives through COSLA, both in consultation and in decision making process."

On a vote being taken electronically and by roll call, 35 members voted for the amendment and 44 for the motion as adjusted which was accordingly declared to be carried.