**Report to Newtongrange Community Council Meeting. – Councillor Jim Muirhead**

Apologies for the late circulation of this report, but I wanted to update the Community Council on a number of important items that were agreed at today’s Council Meeting.

Recognising that our residents are coming under increasing financial pressures due to COVID-19 and the likelihood that this will get worse before it gets better, a number of key decisions were taken today which will see Midlothian Council use its spending power to help build our way out of the economic difficulties that are almost certain to arise.

Acknowledging the likely loss of jobs across many areas and locations, Midlothian Council agreed to accelerate its Capital Programme, bringing forward, as much as it can, the projects that were planned for future years and a number of projects which are in the pipeline. Our capital programme will result in record investment of £567 million between now and 2025 with a further £263 million of local project in the pipeline following on from that.

Projects approved include: -

* An investment of £343 million in Council house building and refurbishments, which will include **79 new homes at the Old Morris Club site** and **150 at the site of the Old Newbattle High School.**
* A number of new school building projects including a **new Primary School on the site of the old Newbattle High School** and a New High School for Gorebridge. Replacement for the Mayfield Primary Campus, Lasswade Primary, New High School at Shawfair. New High School on A701 and the refurbishment of Penicuik High.
* The new Danderhall Primary is nearing completion at a cost of £16.8 million.
* £10.5 million for the delivery of a revised digital learning programme as part of plans to provide every child of school age with a digital device and associated support.
* In Bonnyrigg the Council will build a new £12 million care facility on the site of the Old St Mary’s Primary School.
* New care facility and council housing on the site of the old Dalkeith High School.
* A £16.6m investment in improving roads, footpaths and lighting across Midlothian.
* As part of the planned investment in new research and technology facilities at Easter Bush arising from the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal will see major investment in a new A701 Relief Road and A702 link.

It is the Council’s intention to do all that it can to ensure that as much of the spending will be kept in Midlothian by maximising by all available means, the employment of local firms and workforce to build our way out of the current crisis.

Midlothian Council are about to appoint two new senior officers at Head of Service level who are to be tasked to drive all these capital projects forward as quickly and efficiently as they can which will help to make sure that we deliver on these plans.

Councillors also agreed to a recommendation from our cross-party Business Transformation Steering Group to approve a balanced budget for 2021/22 which will see revenue spending on council services at just under £228 million. The biggest spend will be in education at £103 million and health and social care at almost £48 million.

One Council officer made the point today that this was the first time that he could recall since 1996 that a proposed budget did not involve significant cuts in services. I suppose though that is because we have been prepared to take the hard decisions in previous years.

Council recognised the huge pressures placed on household incomes by the COVID-19 pandemic, and with unanimous support, the council agreed to freeze Council Tax and council house rents. Fees and charges set by the council will also be frozen at current levels. The decision means that the average Band D Council Tax will remain at £1,409 from April 2021 to March 2022.

A planned 3% rents increase has also been shelved. In the short term the proposed shelving of the planned rent increase will have no significant effect on our house building programme. This is important as we expect that there may be a greater demand on Council housing if people lose their employment or cannot afford mortgage payments.

**Councillor Jim Muirhead**
23rd February 2021