

THE GOVAN LETTER

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Community Council members at Govan Cross on 19 August campaigning against cuts at the local fire station – and its potential closure.

They were joined by members of the Fire Brigades Union and the GMB whose members deal with large amounts of flammable materials at the Shieldhall depot



Fire and emergency services under threat

This summer the Scotland's Fire and Emergency Services announced cuts across Scotland. These included the reduction in the number of appliances at Govan to one – when the minimum necessary for operational safety is considered to be two. The local Fire Brigades Union began a campaign supported by the Community Council – citing the existence of major industrial workplaces, densely packed tenements and Scotland's biggest hospital – still with flammable cladding. At Govan Cross Govanites were asked to sign letters to be sent to the relevant Scottish government minister, Siobhán Brown.

Worryingly the Fire Brigades Union has since warned that, on top of the 1,100 jobs lost over the past decade in Scotland, the Scottish government is requiring another £25 million of cuts by 2026-27. This would make the closure of Govan, with one appliance, even more likely and is why we need to maintain the campaign.



GOVAN'S BANK OF SCOTLAND BRANCH SCHEDULED FOR CLOSURE IN JANUARY 2024

Govan's last remaining bank is scheduled for closure on 7 January 2024. Former officer of the Community Council Gordon MacKay forwarded materials to the October meeting of the Community Council on stopping closure. It was unanimously agreed to back the campaign.

Gordon stressed the importance of LINK as a campaigning body against closures. Link lists a number of legally valid reasons to stop closures: a community with 70 local retailers, a population of 7,000 and no other bank, 30 minutes distance by bus to nearest bank, financial and digital vulnerability (Govan scores very highly on both) as it does with the numbers of people aged over 60. The meeting agreed to back the campaign (which includes that led by MP, Chris Stephens).

TAKING UP THE ISSUES RAISED AT OUR APRIL PUBLIC MEETING

Letters were sent to the First Minister and the Prime Minister. The Community Council set out the problems caused by the current funding cuts in social provision - amid very high inflation - to one of Scotland's poorest communities. Proposals were made for remedial action as agreed at our April public meeting. These were that:

- Scottish government funding for local government be on a two year, rather than one year, budgetary cycle.
- That the borrowing powers of the Scottish Parliament be radically increased for investment purposes from the current very low level (continued p. 2)

Govan Community Council PUBLIC MEETING To discuss local services and provision

Ruby Kelly - Maslows
Kevin Burke - Govan Youth Information
Inspector Bob Anderson - Police

MONDAY 13 NOVEMBER
7 pm Pearce Institute



The Pictish gravestone unearthed at Govan Old



Pat Cassidy: forty-two years at Govan Workspace

The discovery of an eighth century Pictish warrior burial stone in the Govan Old churchyard should remind us just how long Govan has existed as a community – and that it has always had to fight for its existence. Today Pat Cassidy, of Govan Workspace, is one of those who represents that continuing struggle. Of all Govan’s organisations Workspace has probably done more than any to ensure that Govan has maintained its community identity through the past four decades.

Pat Cassidy has been there from the start. He began as a community worker with Govan Area Resource Centre almost half a century ago in 1977. GARC helped channel funds to local community organisations at a time when Govan faced great physical challenges. The old tenements were being torn down. Families were being rehoused miles away in Castlemilk and Easterhouse and, as the population shrank, Govan’s vibrant centre with shops and community organisations withered. Then, worse still, came the closure of the engineering plants, the reduction of shipbuilding after 1979 and mass unemployment.

In was in response that Govan Workspace was launched in 1981. Its objective was to rescue abandoned buildings, St Anthony’s School, the Lyons Bakery in Elderpark and then the offices of the old Stephens shipyard and create places where small local businesses could operate and provide jobs. While externally-run initiatives disappeared, Govan Workspace survived and did so, says Pat, because it always kept its roots in the community.

A further key turning point came twenty years ago. This was when, after 20 years of continuing population loss, unemployment and school closures, Govan was chosen by the City fathers as the site for an industrial-sized waste dump – shifting thousands of tons of rubbish from the Partick waterfront to allow property development on the other side of the river.

The Govan community rose in rebellion. Led by Flora Pagan and Jean Melvin in the Govan Reminiscence Group and Dick Carabine in the Community Council – and with Pat Cassidy giving support - the plans were stopped. A key part of the struggle was to secure recognition for Govan’s heritage as the birthplace of Scotland’s modern shipbuilding industry as well as being one of Scotland’s most ancient settlements.

Out of this came the proposal for a Conservation Area and finally, between 2005 and 2008, Conservation Area status. This new status unlocked the funds that enabled the rescuing of the Victorian offices of the Fairfield shipyard and then the vacant Govan Old Parish Church and its historic site dating back to the fifth century. Workspace, says Pat, was sorely tested by Covid and by the continuing economic crisis. Some proposed projects have been scaled back. But the core work continues. Workspace still retains its community base and this, Pat argues, is what will power its continuing development.

Govan Community Council AGM

The AGM on 2 October paid tribute to the outgoing chair, Alan Bell who had served for seven years. Danny O’Neill was elected new Chair, with Esme Clark Secretary, Reinhild Gorniak Treasurer, Hannah Salome Vice Chair and Betty Ross as Assistant Secretary. It was agreed that meetings be made more accessible.

The main issues facing the community were identified by the chair as cuts to all services, the need to secure public ownership of transport, making full use of the new bridge to rejuvenate the community and securing better prospects for youth.

Meetings of the Community Council are open public meetings. The next will be Monday 6 November at 7 pm in Elderpark Workspace, 100 Elderpark Street, G51 3TR

Letters to governments and the responses (cont.)

On the proposal that the government should review local government boundaries to include, as in the past, its wealthy suburbs and thereby increase the revenue base for the city

- d) That asylum seekers be granted the right to work
- c) That the lack of community space as a result of the closure of schools, community centres and public halls (as well as the closure for the past four years of the Library) be recognised and that steps be taken to re-provision this essential component of community life.

Scottish Government

The response was initiated by Shona Robison, deputy first minister. It said that the government had supplemented the initial Scottish local government grant of £13.5 billion by £793m in light of the special circumstances. Of this Glasgow received an additional £62m (or a 4.2 percent addition). The letter went on to say that the City Council had its own powers to borrow and to raise additional funds through council tax.

On the proposal that the government should review local government boundaries to include the city's very wealthy suburbs, the letter replied that there were no plans to do so. The letter noted that the Scottish government had no responsibilities for the support of asylum seekers or refugees but opposes people being pushed into destitution.

The meeting expressed disappointment with the reply – particularly with the failure to consider the issue of boundary realignment and the failure to acknowledge the magnitude and social consequences of the cuts in the 2023-24 budget. Councillor Bell noted, very politely, that the response did not admit what was the elephant in the room: that the 2023-24 settlement failed to make adjustment for rates of inflation of near 11 percent – and that the 4.2 percent supplement had required cuts of £64m to essential services.

Alister Jack, Secretary of State for Scotland

This reply dealt with the following issues.

Local industry and employment:

the government had allocated £4.2 billion for BAE naval construction, generating 1,700 jobs, and a further grant of £33m for the Glasgow innovation accelerator.

Scottish Government and borrowing requirements:

Scottish budgets decisions were outwith the jurisdiction of Westminster but the Scotland Acts of 2012 and 2016 had increased borrowing powers for current spend to £3 billion (annual spend £450m) and for resource spend to £600m – and additionally in light of the economic shock of 2023 there had been additional allocations of £600m for 23-24 and £300m for 24-25. There was also an ongoing review of grant funding in light of tax and welfare devolution.

Glasgow boundaries

These were the responsibility of the Local Government Boundary Commission, an independent body tasked to ensure proportionate electoral constituencies.

Refugee and Asylum support

The response detailed current levels of financial support as well the support in kind. It suggested that £45 a week was sufficient to cover food, clothing, transport and toiletries and that in special circumstances funding might be available. It noted that asylum seekers were allowed to undertake unpaid volunteering activities though not paid work and that this regime was designed to deter illegal immigration.

Levelling Up

Under this heading the letter stated that the UK government has committed £79m to Glasgow City including £13m for a community centre in Pollok and another £27m under the government's Shared Prosperity Fund for climate change initiatives. Glasgow shared in the £523m investment in the City Regional Deal that included the Govan-Partick pedestrian bridge. There was also £150m under the Community Ownership Fund with grants of up to £1m when back by community funding of at least £100k.

Similar disappointment was voiced at this reply

Better Buses Campaign



By Danny O'Neill

A publicly-owned Lothian bus

Night Buses Fiasco

The recent night buses fiasco highlighted the terrible state of bus services in Glasgow and the failures of bus privatisation.

In July First Glasgow announced the closure of all eleven night bus services. Since bus services in Glasgow are privatised Glasgow City Council had no legal powers to stop this, leading to the pathetic sight of politicians from all parties begging a private company to continue running an essential public service. Eventually McGills stepped in to "help". Now the night bus services have been divvied up between First and McGills, but two routes have been closed altogether.

This doesn't affect Govan directly because we haven't had any night buses for years. For us the nearest night bus runs to Paisley along Paisley Road West. The closest stop is over a mile from Govan Cross. The QUEH, the biggest hospital in Scotland, has no bus services after midnight.

The private operators receive over half their income from public subsidies (£329 million across Scotland last year), so they should be more grateful, but they are only interested in making profits rather than providing a public service.

How Did We End Up Here?

Bus deregulation in 1986 has left the public with no control over bus services. Despite massive public funding, we have no say over fares, services, routes, or timetables. The private bus companies can increase fares, close services, alter routes, and change timetables with no input from the public or the politicians elected to represent us. They can do what they like. This isn't normal. Other countries treat public transport as a public service and not just a way of funnelling cash to private companies.

How Can This Be Improved?

Edinburgh and the surrounding councils can provide superior, and cheaper, bus services, because they managed to keep the buses in public ownership through Lothian Buses.

On 24 September 2023 Manchester became the first English council to exercise the new franchising powers provided in England in 2017. The process took 6 years, but despite legal challenges from the bus companies, Manchester now has public control of its buses. Liverpool is planning to do likewise.

The same thing can and should happen here. In 2019 the Transport (Scotland) Act gave councils powers to bring buses back under public control, either by setting up their own bus companies, or by franchising (where private operators run the buses but services, routes, timetables and fares are specified by the council).

Unfortunately the Scottish Government has dragged its heels ever since. The Act wasn't even brought into effect until 2022. Unlike England, where the necessary franchising regulations were published immediately in 2017, that still hasn't happened here. So councils in Scotland have powers in theory but not in practice. Nor has the Scottish Government shown any willingness to provide funding to councils. They would rather hand over millions of pounds every year to private companies who put profits before public service. Without the political will, there is no chance in the near future of Glasgow matching Manchester's success in taking back the buses.

How Can We Change Things?

- **Complain to your councillors, MSP, MP and demand better bus services**
- **Support campaigns for better public transport such as Get Glasgow Moving or Better Buses for Strathclyde**
- **Get involved with Govan Community Council. We have been campaigning for years for better public transport.**



Elderpark Library due to re-open before the end of the year

The Library, closed since 2020 has undergone a complete refurbishment of the interior layout. This will improve accessibility for all users, and introduce a new community hall and increased bookable space - developing Elder Park as a highly-valued community hub. The installation of solar panels, along with more energy efficient heating and upgrading all lighting to LED will significantly reduce the library's carbon footprint, while additional works will see new fire alarm and security systems installed, and a full electrical rewiring carried out. The revitalised building will also provide a better link to the adjacent park area and help to maximise use of the park.

Kevin Burke reports on work done by the Govan Youth Information Project over the summer

This year's Summer Holiday Programme benefited 317 individual young people over the six week summer period – with over 565 young people registered by the end of the summer period. The scheme paid for 3,360 healthy lunches as well as 6,720 snacks. The scheme ran 28 sessions from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and 56 sessions in total over the summer. On the last day we took 131 young people on a full day trip to Ayr. In all there were 112 hours of programme activity.

Providing paid employment

Running the scheme provided paid employment for four long term volunteers who have supported the delivery of our work over a number of years. This enabled us to cater safely for the large numbers attending including other volunteers and the Positive Role Models. A local café in Govan was provided with business in cooking the lunches, keeping business local. Young people were given experiences most families would have struggled to provide. Trips included Wonder World, Bowling, Laser Quest, Glasgow Green, dodgem riding and the trip to Ayr.

Over the course of the summer 1,338 hours of volunteer work were contributed by nineteen Positive Role Models – learning valuable life skills in planning, preparation, delivery, risk assessment, communication and supporting full-time staff. They have been invaluable this summer and were praised when First Minister Humza Yousaf visited the out-door residential.

Rock Climbing

In August we took sixteen young people on a three day residential to Newtonmoor near Aviemore, to participate in gorge scrambling, rock climbing and abseiling. Ten young people completed a Dynamic Youth Award with this experience. Later in August we took 21 young people to Belfast to learn more about Ireland, the troubles and to think about how they can bring about change in their own community.

GYIP also continued our street work programme three nights a week, working closely with Police Scotland and Glasgow City Council's Early and Effective Intervention Team with some young people who have been offending – delivering workshops and outdoor activities.



One of the more scary out-door activities



Govan's Christmas Tree will again be at Govan Cross this December thanks to the Area Committee

Govan Community Council

Community Councils represent the third layer of government. They exist to represent the needs of local communities – on planning and the provision of services. Their success depends on how far they represent all sections of the local community. If you want to be involved, contact either the Secretary Esme Clark (0141 425 1318) or the Chair Danny O'Neill (07753 126593). This newsletter is produced with financial assistance from Glasgow City Council.