

MINUTE of MEETING of the JOINT CONSULTATIVE GROUP (TEACHING STAFF) of WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL held within the EMERGENCY PLANNING ROOM, WEST LOTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, HOWDEN ROAD SOUTH, LIVINGSTON EH54 6FF, on 9 FEBRUARY 2018.

Present – Councillor David Dodds (Chair), Martyn Delargy (EIS), Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick, Heather Hughes (EIS), Councillors Dom McGuire and Andrew Miller, Shirley Thomson (EIS), Councillor Damian Timson and Beth Vanson (SSTA).

Apologies – Councillor Dave King

Absent – Councillor Alison Adamson

In attendance – Elaine Cook (Depute Chief Executive), James Cameron (Head of Education, Learning, Policy and Resources), Donald Forrest (Head of Finance and Property Services), Donna McMaster (Head of Education, Curriculum, Quality Improvement and Performance) and Fiona Russell (Group Accountant).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dodds declared an interest as an EIS member.

2. MINUTE

The minute of the meeting of the Group held on 15 February 2017 was approved.

3. REVENUE BUDGET 2018/19 - 2022/23 AND ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND GENERAL SERVICES TEN YEAR CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2018/19 - 2027/28

The Head of Finance and Property Services presented the Group with information on the council's proposed Revenue Budget for 2018/19 to 2022/23 and the Asset Management Strategy and General Services Ten Year Capital Investment Programme 2018/19 to 2027/28.

In February 2017 the council agreed that officers should prepare a new Corporate Plan for 2018/19 to 2022/23, a priority based revenue financial plan for 2018/19 to 2022/23, a ten year capital plan and Housing revenue and capital plans. The Corporate Plan set out the strategic priorities for the council and identified the outcomes that the council aimed to achieve to support the delivery of positive outcomes and the modernisation of council services in West Lothian.

The current financial position confirmed a balanced budget for 2017/2018. However, a number of financial constraints were highlighted which included increasing costs of providing council services, the growing

population in West Lothian, ongoing government constraints on public spending and the Scottish Government's grant funding not being sufficient to meet increasing costs of providing local government services. Details of the funding assumptions for the next five year period were then provided. The Group noted that there was a projected budget gap of £65.3 million over five years. Savings were therefore required so that priorities could be delivered and budgets balanced.

In addition to the five year financial strategy, a detailed revenue budget was being presented for the three years 2018/19 to 2020/21. This provided greater certainty surrounding the detailed budget for the first three years of the five year financial strategy.

More detailed information was then given on the budget for Education Services in particular. The five year budget strategy and three year detailed revenue budgets would allow the council to deliver key priorities including improving attainment and positive destinations for school children and delivering positive outcomes and early interventions for early years. School budgets have increased to reflect anticipated growth in pupil numbers over the next five years and Pupil Equity Funding in 2018/19 of £5.161 million would be available for direct use by schools, at the discretion of Head Teachers, to reduce the poverty related attainment gap.

Further budget commitments included:

- the continued roll out for expansion of Early Learning & Childcare provision, including 1,140 hours and free lunches for all 3 & 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds from August 2020;
- protection for school clothing grants, school clothing stores and free school meals and breakfast club provision;
- commitment to secure probationer places under the Teacher Induction Scheme; and
- funding of full year effect of the Teachers pay offer for 2017/18.

The council's proposed general services capital investment programme was then discussed which highlighted areas of substantial capital investment across the school estate.

In conclusion, the budget would enable the council to continue to deliver on key priorities, providing a sustainable financial position. The proposed Revenue Budget 2018/19 to 2022/23 and Asset Management Strategy and General Services Ten Year Capital Investment Programme 2018/19 to 2027/28 would be considered at a special meeting of West Lothian Council scheduled to be held on Tuesday 13 February 2018.

Following conclusion of the presentation a number of questions were asked by members of the Group in relation to the budget proposals, which officers responded to.

The Group then noted the following comments from Heather Hughes on behalf of the teaching unions:

- Union members were appreciative of the support and protection given to education services and acknowledged the budget constraints. They also welcomed investment in the early years' service and commended the council for the capital investments in schools and IT infrastructure. However, concerns were raised about the proposed cuts over the next five year period.
- Concerns were raised about colleagues in the Instrumental Music Service due to budget cut proposals as this provided a valuable service across education services.
- Concerns were raised about the salaries paid to Chartered Teachers and the impact this would have on Head Teachers devolved budgets.
- The Group noted the update in relation to the ongoing teachers' pay claim for a 10% salary increase.
- Union members acknowledged that there would be challenges ahead due to budget cuts and highlighted the critical staff shortages, particularly within the primary school sector, and the unsustainable workload for staff. However, teachers would continue to do their best.

The Chair, on behalf of elected members, thanked the teaching unions and the wider teaching community for their hard work and commitment, particularly within the difficult financial climate.

Decision

To note the budget proposals and the comments made.