

MINUTE of MEETING of the PARTNERSHIP AND RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEST LoTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, on 18 DECEMBER 2017.

Present – Councillors Lawrence Fitzpatrick (Chair), Kirsteen Sullivan, David Dodds (substitute for Councillor George Paul), Chris Horne, Peter Johnston, Dave King, Damian Timson

Apologies – Councillor George Paul

In Attendance – Tom Carr-Pollock (GMB), Maj Dickson (Unison) and Patrick Tedford (Unite).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. TRANSFORMING YOUR COUNCIL 2017 CONSULTATION

A report had been circulated by the Chief Executive providing a summary overview of the Transforming Your Council (2017) consultation and setting out the arrangements for reporting the consultation results to Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels in the week commencing 18 December 2017.

The Chief Executive presented the report, recalling that the Council had previously agreed to seek feedback from respondents on three areas. These were:-

- Priorities for the coming five years
- Views on the budget proposals that would seek to address the £73.3m budget gap
- Views on Council Tax levels

The report provided detailed information relating to the the communications campaign for Transforming Your Council (2017), including details of the range of stakeholders targeted.

The Chief Executive advised that a specific plan to target hard to reach groups had been developed as part of the consultation process. The aim of the work was to target individuals who did not easily engage with mainstream services and who might not readily respond to a survey about council priorities. Appendix 1 outlined the plan in detail and included the rationale for targeting each specific groups and the approach used for engaging with them.

The report examined the consultation results and provided the following

tables:-

Table 1 showed a breakdown on the number of responses received.

Table 2 showed the rankings in order of importance of the council's eight priorities for both 2014 and 2017.

Table 3 showed a summary of the number of comments per respondent category, grouped under the associated PDSPs.

Table 4 provided a summary of the number of comments grouped under aspects of the council tax options.

The Panel noted that in total the council had received 40,200 comments relating to the proposed budget measures and council tax questions.

The summary feedback from respondents relating to the themes and issues arising from the consultation was available to view online on the council's website. This summary feedback had been categorised and summarised to make the process more user friendly, therefore allowing Panel members to consider the key issues and trends.

Officers had also carried out a thorough analysis of the feedback to respond to each of the issues being raised and this was included on the council's website. A high level summary of the comments and feedback received relevant to the remit of individual PDSPs would be reported to each PDSP taking place between 18 and 21 December 2017.

The Chief Executive then advised that, following consideration at the relevant PDSPs week commencing 18 December 2017, officers would take account of the key themes and more detailed proposals when developing future strategies and plans.

The information would shape policy development in the future. Key decisions would be made when the council set its budget and financial plan at a meeting in February 2018. Before that, the information it was proposed to present to the council when it set its budget would be reported to a PDSP meeting on 19 January 2018.

The Panel was invited to note:-

1. The council faced a budget gap of £73.3 million.
2. The overview of the Transforming Your Council (2017) consultation process;
3. That the consultation responses would be used by the council to help balance its budget for the period to 2022/23.

Questions raised by Panel members were then dealt with by the Chief Executive and the Depute Chief Executive (Corporate, Operational and Housing).

### Decision

To note the terms of the report.

### 3. TRANSFORMING YOUR COUNCIL 2017 CONSULTATION

A report had been circulated by the Chief Executive providing the Panel with an update on the feedback received from respondents as part of the Transforming Your Council (2017) consultation.

The Depute Chief Executive presented the report, informing the Panel that the consultation document had been published on Monday 19 October 2017 and had closed on 12 November 2017. Details of the consultation process were outlined in the report.

The Panel noted that the number of responses received by the close of the consultation period was 7,026 which generated over 45,000 comments from all respondents.

In relation to consultation responses, the report provided the following tables:-

Table 1 A breakdown on the number of responses received from employees, individuals and organisations/groups.

Table 2 A summary of the number of comments per respondent category, grouped under the associated PDSP.

Table 3 A summary of the number of comments grouped under aspect of the council tax options.

Table 4 A breakdown of the 16,215 comments across 16 measures relating to service areas which reported to the Partnership and Resources PDSP.

Table 5 A summary of the categorised responses.

A detailed analysis of all the comments allocated to the Partnership and Resources PDSP was set in Appendix 2 and 3 to the report. Appendix 4 to the report provided the relevant extracts from the consultation document.

The Panel was informed that full detail of the officer response to each comment was available to view online on the council's website.

The Panel was asked to note that, at the time of publishing the Transforming Your Council (2017) consultation document, the detailed budget reduction measures had not been fully developed. During the period of the consultation process officers had undertaken further work to clarify how the proposed savings would be achieved and the timescales for delivery.

Whilst there remained further work to be done in developing the measures and timescales for implementation, officers had now identified, where

applicable, the potential number of reductions on Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts that would be required to deliver the proposed measure.

The potential number of FTE posts associated with each measure allocated to the Partnership and Resources PDSP was set out in Table 6 within the report. The actual number of FTE post reductions would become clearer as the measures progressed following the conclusion of the consultation process and approval of the council's budget strategy.

The Depute Chief Executive went to explain that, following consideration at the relevant PDSPs week commencing 18 December 2017, officers would take account of the key themes and more detailed proposals when developing future strategies and plans. The information would shape policy development in the future. Key decisions would be made when the council set its budget and financial plan at a meeting in February 2018. Before that, the information it was proposed to present to the council when it set its budget would be reported to a PDSP meeting on 19 January 2018.

It was recommended that the Panel note:-

1. The statistical information relating to the consultation (Appendix 1)
2. The high level summary of the comments and feedback received relevant to the remit of the Partnership and Resources PDSP (Appendix 2)
3. That the consultation results would be used by the council to help balance its budget for the period to 2022/23.

During discussion, a number of questions were raised and these were dealt with by the Chief Executive and the Depute Chief Executive. In addition, Heads of Service amplified aspects of the information contained in the report.

Panel members and participants made comments throughout the discussion and these were summarised as undernoted:-

- Councillor Sullivan pointed out that any resulting policy changes would have to go through PDSPs and so it was important for all members to take part there.
- Tom Carr-Pollock (GMB) expressed disappointment that detailed proposals, together with timescales for implementation, had yet to be fully developed and would not come back to the Panel for scrutiny until after the Budget Setting meeting in February 2018. Consequently, TU representatives could not feedback to its members on the number of posts affected.
- Councillor Johnston expressed concern that elected members had not been provided with details of the specific proposals and how these would be phased. Councillor Johnston specifically noted that those proposals to be implemented in Year 1 had not been identified in the report.

- Councillor Horne noted that some of the PDSPs did not meet again until after the Budget Setting meeting and he considered that it was important for elected members to be provided with the detailed proposals as early as possible. Councillor Horne spoke in general terms about partnerships between the council and economic organisations. He also questioned officers concerning council vacancies that were already in the pipeline.
- Bridget Meisak (Voluntary Sector Gateway) highlighted the need for clarity about phasing of proposed budget reductions as staff within the Third Sector would be affected. The Representative also wished to see a strengthening of collaborative working between the Council and the Third Sector.

#### Decision

1. To note the terms of the report;
2. To note the comments made by Panel members and participants.