

MINUTE of MEETING of the SOCIAL POLICY, POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEST LoTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, on 16 DECEMBER 2014.

Present – Councillors Danny Logue (Chair), Frank Toner, Tony Boyle, Diane Calder, Angela Moohan and John Muir

Apologies – Maureen Finlay, Senior People's Forum Representative

In attendance – Tom Carr-Pollock (GMB Representative) and Jane Ridgway (Unison Representative)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Danny Logue declared a general non-financial interest arising from him being an employee of NHS Lothian.

Councillor Frank Toner declared a general non-financial interest arising from his position as a Non-Executive member of NHS Lothian and as a council appointee to West Lothian Community Health and Care Partnership.

2. DELIVERING BETTER OUTCOMES CONSULTATION - OVERVIEW

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Social Policy providing a summary overview of the Delivering Better Outcomes 2014 consultation which set out the arrangements for reporting the consultation results to the Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels (PDSPs) in the week commencing 15 December 2014.

The Head of Social Policy stated that in June 2014, the Council Executive was advised that the council faced a budget gap of £30.4million. The Council Executive then approved a further budget engagement exercise as part of the council's medium term financial strategy to assist in the prioritisation and allocation of resources to activities that had the greatest impact on the council's outcomes, whilst ensuring balanced budgets for the period to 2017/18

A proposed set of priorities and options on how the council could deliver services in a better way and balance its budget was brought together in one consultation document which was published on 9 October 2014. The consultation ran for six weeks and closed on 21 November 2014.

The report went on to provide detailed information regarding the communications campaign for Delivering Better Outcomes (2014). A specific plan to target hard to reach groups was also implemented as part of the consultation process, which aimed to target individuals who did not easily engage with mainstream services. Appendix 1 to the report outlined the plan in more detail and included the rationale for targeting each specific group and the approach used for engaging with them.

The Head of Social Policy then provided the Panel with an overview of the consultation results and reported that 3,467 responses were received which generated over 40,000 comments from all respondents. A breakdown of the number of responses received from employees, individuals and organisations/groups was set out in a table within the report. The consultation questionnaire comprised of 39 proposals seeking the views of respondents, details of which were also provided within a table in the report highlighting the number of comments per respondent category, grouped under the associated PDSP.

In conclusion, the Panel was advised that following consideration at the relevant PDSPs between 15 and 18 December 2014, the consultation responses would be used by the council to help balance its budget and continue to deliver its priorities for the period to 2018.

The Head of Social Policy recommended that the Panel note:

1. That the council faced a budget gap of £30.4million;
2. The overview of the Delivering Better Outcomes (2014) consultation process;
3. That the consultation responses would be used by the council to help balance its budget for the period to 2018.

During the course of the discussion, the Chair suggested that recommendation 1 be changed to read as follows:

“That the council faced a budget gap of £30.4million as a consequence of under-funding by the Scottish Government.” The suggested amendment to the recommendation was supported by the majority of Panel members. However, Councillors Calder and Muir did not support the proposal to amend the recommendation.

Decision

- To note the contents of the report by the Head of Social Policy and the recommendations therein; and
- To note that the suggested amendment to recommendation 1 was supported by the majority of Panel members.

3. DELIVERING BETTER OUTCOMES CONSULTATION

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated by the Head of Social Policy) providing an update on the feedback received from respondents as part of the Delivering Better Outcomes (2014) consultation.

The Head of Social Policy advised the Panel that the number of responses received by the close of the consultation period was 3,467. A breakdown of this figure from employees, individuals and

organisations/groups was set out in Table 1 to the report.

The report went on to provide details of the consultation feedback and the summary feedback from respondents relating to the themes and issues arising from the open questions asked in the consultation. Table 2 in the report provided details of the number of comments per respondent category for the associated PDSP. Table 3 provided an analysis of the 5,631 comments allocated to the service areas which reported to the Social Policy PDSP. The Head of Social Policy advised that an additional 2 measures were also included, due to the nature of the measures, which were allocated to other PDSPs. Table 4 provided details of the categorised comments received.

An analysis of all the comments allocated to the Social Policy PDSP was attached as Appendix 2 and 3 to the report, and full details of the officer response to each comment was available to view on the council's website.

The Head of Social Policy then explained that the detailed budget reduction measures had not been fully developed. Officers had undertaken work during the consultation process to clarify how the proposed savings would be achieved and the timescales for delivery. Further work was required to develop the measures and timescales for implementation, however, officers had identified, where applicable, the potential number of reductions on Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts that would be required to deliver the proposed measures. The potential number of FTE posts associated with each measure allocated to the Social Policy PDSP was set out in Table 5 within the report.

The Chair then invited questions from Panel members on each of the measures outlined in the report. Comments were then invited at the conclusion of the question/answer session.

Councillor Muir stated that he did not support the recommendations in the report due to the lack of detail therein.

The GMB Representative then spoke on behalf of the Trade Union and highlighted his disappointment that there were no details available in relation to proposed job cuts which would have allowed more scrutiny and discussion to have taken place.

The Chair then reiterated that the council had a no compulsory redundancy position and that all reductions in staffing would be managed in accordance with the council's Organisational Change policy.

The Head of Social Policy recommended that the Panel note:

1. The statistical information relating to the consultation (outlined in Appendix 1 to the report);
2. The high level summary of the comments and feedback received relevant to the remit of the Social Policy PDSP (outlined in Appendix 2 to the report); and

3. That the consultation results would be used by the council to help balance its budget for the period to 2018.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.