

MINUTE of MEETING of the VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEST LoTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, on 17 DECEMBER 2014.

Present – Councillors Jim Dixon (Chair), Angela Moohan, William Boyle, Tom Conn and David Dodds

Absent – Councillor Jim Dickson

In attendance – Jim McGregor, Voluntary Sector Gateway, West Lothian, Tom Carr-Pollock, GMB Representative and Martin Murray, Unison Representative

1. OPENING REMARK

The Chair opened the meeting by advising that, on behalf of the Panel, he would like to pass on his best wishes to Jim Gallacher, Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian, in his future retirement.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor William Boyle declared a general non-financial interest arising from him being the Chair of the Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian.

3. DELIVERING BETTER OUTCOMES CONSULTATION - OVERVIEW

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Area Services 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 Area Services 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 Area Services 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 Area Services 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. Councillor Boyle did not support the proposal to amend the recommendation.

Decision

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

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DELIVERING BETTER OUTCOMES CONSULTATION

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

The Head of Area Services 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 836 comments allocated to the service areas which reported to the Voluntary Organisations PDSP. The Head of Area Services advised that, due to the nature of the measures, two of the three measures outlined in the report had been reported to more than one PDSP. Table 4 provided details of the categorised comments received. An analysis of all the comments allocated to the Voluntary Organisations 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 Area Services 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, details of which were outlined in Table 5.

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 Boyle commented on the additional PDSP meeting called to discuss the outcome of the Delivering Better Outcomes 2014 consultation and suggested that an additional PDSP meeting be called prior to the budget setting meeting, which would allow more information to be made available and enable further consultation to be carried out.

The Voluntary Sector Gateway representative then highlighted concerns raised within the voluntary sector regarding legal obligations to members of staff should redundancy measures be required. He asked if consideration could be given to the voluntary sector being given a year's notification of any changes proposed within the sector to allow organisations to prepare and respond to their legal obligations. He also stated that the voluntary sector was against proposals to cut funding and commented on the lack of detail and quality of the responses within the report.

The Head of Area Services 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.