

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

Present – Councillors Tom Conn (Chair), Barry Robertson, Tony Boyle, Robert De Bold, Dave King, Greg McCarra

In Attendance – Derek Moore (West Lothian Association of Community Councils), Tom Carr-Pollock (GMB Representative) and Martin Murray (Unison Representative).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. DELIVERING BETTER OUTCOMES CONSULTATION - OVERVIEW

A report had been circulated by the Head of Operational Services providing a summary overview of the Delivering Better Outcomes (2014) consultation and setting out the arrangements for reporting the consultation results to Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels in the week commencing 15 December 2014.

The Head of Operational Services recalled that, in June 2014, the Council Executive was advised that the council faced a budget gap of £30.4 million. The Council Executive had 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.

The Delivering Better Outcomes consultation document had been published on 9 October 2014 and contained a proposed set of priorities and options on how the council could deliver services in a better way and balance its budget. The consultation ran for six weeks and had closed on 21 November 2014.

The report provided detailed information concerning the communications campaign for Delivering Better Outcomes (2014). The report also informed the Panel that a specific plan to target hard to reach groups had been deployed as part of the consultation process. The aim of the work was to target individuals who did not easily engage with mainstream services. Appendix 1 to the report outlined the plan in detail and included the rationale for targeting each specific groups and the approach used for engaging with them.

In relation to the consultation results, the Head of Operational Services reported that the number of responses received by the close of the consultation period had been 3,467 generating 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 39 proposals and a table within the report showed the number of comments per respondent category, grouped under the associated PDSP.

The Panel was informed that 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 at www.westlthian.gov.uk/yoursay. 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.

Finally, the Head of Operational Services 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 Operational Services recommended that the Panel note:-

1. that the council faced a budget gap of £30.4 million.
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 discussion, the Panel heard a suggestion by the Chair that recommendation 1 be changed to read:- *"that the council faced a budget gap of £30.4 million as a consequence of under-funding by the Scottish Government."* This suggested amendment was supported by the majority of Panel members. However, Councillors McCarra and De Bold did not support the amendment as they considered that the fault lay with the Westminster Government.

Decision

1. To note the report by the Head of Operational Services and the recommendations therein.
2. To note that the suggested amendment to recommendation 1 was supported by the majority of Panel members.

3. DELIVERING BETTER OUTCOMES CONSULTATION

A report had been circulated by the Head of Operational Services providing the Panel with an update on the feedback received from respondents as part of the Delivering Better Outcomes (2014) consultation.

The Panel was informed that the number of responses received by the close of the consultation period was 3,467. A breakdown of this figure by Type of Respondent was set out in Table 1 to the report.

The report also provided the following tables relating to the consultation responses:-

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

Table 3 An analysis of the 4,576 comments allocated to the service areas which reported to the Environment PDSP. It was noted that there were two measures that had been reported to other PDSPs and had been included in the information being reported to the Environment PDSP.

Table 4 A summary of the categorised responses.

An analysis of all the comments allocated to the Environment PDSP was set out in Appendix 2 and 3 to the report, and full details of the officer response to each comment was available to view online on the council's website.

The Head of Operational Services advised that, whilst there remained further work to be done in developing the measures and timescales for implementation, officers had 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 FTE posts and the measure was set out below in Table 5 within the report.

The Panel was asked to note that the council had a no compulsory redundancy position and all reductions in staffing would be managed in accordance with the council's Organisational Change policy.

The Chair then invited questions from Panel members on each of the measures shown in the tables within the report. The Chair reminded Panel members that the PDSP had no decision-making powers.

Questions raised by Panel members were then dealt with by the Head of Operational Services. In response to a question concerning measure 1h "Changes to Waste Services", the Head of Operational Services undertook to provide Panel members with information on the council's target for waste recycling.

The Head of Operational Services recommended that the Panel note:-

1. the statistical information relation 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 Environment 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.

Finally, Councillors McCarra and De Bold commented that they considered that there was a lack of detail presented to the Panel in relation to the specific measures identified. Similar views were expressed by the two Trade Union representatives in attendance.

Decision

To note the terms of the report and the contributions by Panel members.