

MINUTE of MEETING of the COUNCIL EXECUTIVE of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEST LoTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, LIVINGSTON, on 7 JANUARY 2015.

Present – Councillors John McGinty (Chair), Cathy Muldoon, Frank Anderson, Tony Boyle (substituting for Danny Logue), Tom Conn, Jim Dixon, Lawrence Fitzpatrick, Peter Johnston, Dave King, Anne McMillan, Angela Moohan and George Paul

Apologies – Councillor Danny Logue

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

2. FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2015/16 TO 2017/18 UPDATE FOLLOWING CONCLUSION OF DBO CONSULTATION

The Council Executive considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Finance and Estates providing an update on the budget strategy, following the conclusion of the Delivering Better Outcomes (DBO) consultation and to seek approval for the basis and timing of revenue and capital budgets to full Council.

The Head of Finance and Estates advised that it was reported to Council Executive on 19 June 2014 that budget reductions of £30.4 million would be required in order to secure a balanced budget position over the period 2015-16 to 2017-18, as funding provided by the Scottish Government would not meet the council's budget pressures.

The Council Executive agreed that officers would develop draft budget measures for the three years 2015-16 to 2017-18 based on the detailed responses received from the initial Delivering Better Outcomes (DBO) consultation in 2012. The 2012 consultation resulted in agreement of eight priorities and nine workstreams.

The second DBO consultation, launched in October 2014, provided stakeholders with a range of proposed budget reduction measures aimed at meeting the £30.4 million budget gap. In total there were 39 proposed measures across the agreed workstreams. The second DBO consultation ran for six weeks between 9 October 2014 and 21 November 2014 and the consultation document sought feedback from respondents on measures that would allow the council to balance its budget and continue to deliver its key priorities for the period to 2018.

The Head of Finance and Estates continued to provide information on the Local Government Finance Settlement and included details of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. These in turn provided an updated revenue budget position for 2015-16 to 2017-18 which was summarised in the report. A number of key expenditure assumptions for 2015-16 to 2017-18 were also detailed in the report.

It was further reported that it had been previously agreed by the Council Executive that following conclusion of the budget consultation and PDSP process, a three year revenue budget strategy for 2015-16 to 2017-18 and a detailed revenue budget for 2015-16 should be presented to Council for consideration. This was consistent with the strategic approach to financial and corporate planning agreed by the Council in January 2013. Therefore in line with this decision it was proposed that the Head of Finance and Estates would present a report to full Council in early 2015, setting out budget measures for 2015-16 to 2017-18 that would allow the council to meet the revised budget gap of £29.544 million

With regards to the General Services Capital Programme for 2015-16 to 2017-18 Council Executive had approved a revised capital programme in June 2014 which had taken account of the latest circumstances such as the phasing of projects. Therefore in line with the established approach it was recommended that the Head of Finance and Estates would present a report to full Council in early 2015 setting out the latest position for the General Services capital programme.

Therefore it was recommended that the Council Executive :-

1. Note the conclusion of the DBO consultation;
2. Agree that the consultation response would be used to inform measures to balance the revenue budget for the period up to 2017-18;
3. Note the updated revenue budget gap of £29.544 million facing the council over the period 2015-16 to 2017-18;
4. Agree that the Head of Finance and Estates present a report to full Council in early 2015 on the revenue budget for 2015-16 to 2017-18, incorporating proposals to meet the budget gap of £29.544 million; and
5. Agree that the Head of Finance and Estates present a report on the General Services capital programme for 2015-16 to 2017-18 to the same full Council meeting to meet the agreed requirement for integrated financial and corporate planning.

Motion

“Council Executive notes the update on the latest position in financial strategy for 2015/16 to 2017/18 and welcomes the successful conclusion of the Delivering Better Outcomes consultation. Council Executive agrees that the consultation responses should be used by officers to inform the measures to balance the revenue budget up to 2017/18.

Council Executive further notes that Scottish Government funding restrictions have resulted in a budget gap of £29.544 million for the period 2015/16 to 2017/18.

In view of the difficult budget position caused by the Scottish Government

funding settlement, Council Executive welcomes the provision in the budget model for the living wage of £7.85 to be paid to all council employees in 2015/16, and the provision for a further 2% uplift in the living wage in 2016/17 and 2017/18. Council Executive further notes that the council's procurement strategy includes promotion of the living wage for council contracts.

Council Executive instructs officers to prepare a report by Spring 2015 for a meeting of the Partnership and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel that considers how the council could strengthen the commitment to promoting the living wage for council contracts and also fully considers all the associated issues with paying the living wage to craft and modern apprentices. The report should take account of the position in other Scottish local authorities and involve appropriate consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Council Executives agrees that the Head of Finance and Estates should report to a meeting of full Council early in 2015 on the revenue budget for 2015/16 to 2017/18, including proposal to cover the budget gap of £29.544 million, and also report to the same meeting on the General Services capital programme for 2015/16 to 2017/18."

- Moved by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Muldoon

Amendment

"West Lothian Council Executive notes with concern that 98% of our community has failed to be engaged by the DBO "consultation".

Council Executive further notes that the PDSP consideration of the DBO "consultation" was unable to scrutinise a single proposal to deliver the budget savings and that PDSP's were repeatedly advised that "no detailed plans were available".

Council Executive expresses its serious concerns at the complete lack of detail presented during both the DBO "consultation" and PDSP process and asserts that the council's key principles of honesty, openness and transparency have been totally disregarded and, that with the council's consideration of budget proposals only a matter of days away, that both the DBO "consultation" and the PDSP process have been a complete and utter sham.

Council Executive recognises the difficult position facing the Scottish Government, due to Westminster Government's "austerity" agenda, but agrees that the 2015/16 local government financial settlement is fair, and the best possible, given the budget cuts imposed upon the Scottish Government, and accepts that the Scottish local government share of the Scottish Budget remains higher than at any period under previous Labour Scottish Executives and considerably higher than that provided to local government in England and Wales.

Council Executive therefore agrees :-

1. That prior to the Council agreeing any budget savings proposals

full details of all such proposal must be presented for discussion and scrutiny through the council's PDSP process.

2. That the Head of Finance presents a report to full Council, following the completion of the PDSP scrutiny of all budget saving proposals, with regards to the 2015/16 Revenue Budget.
3. That the Head of Finance reports a report on the General Services Capital Programme for 2015-18 to the same council meeting.

Decision

Following a vote the Motion was successful by 10 votes to 2 and it was agreed accordingly.