

MINUTE of MEETING of the JOINT CONSULTATIVE GROUP (TEACHING STAFF) of WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL held within the EMERGENCY PLANNING ROOM, WEST LOTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, on 27 JANUARY 2015.

Present – Councillors Lawrence Fitzpatrick (Chair), David Dodds, Danny Logue, John McGinty, Andrew Miller and Cathy Muldoon; John MacKinnon (EIS), Elsie Aitken (EIS), Heather Hughes (EIS), Stuart Hunter (SSTA).

Apologies – Councillor Jim Walker; Appointed Representatives John Hendrie, Myra MacPherson and Lynne McEwen, Louise Storrar (EIS) and Linda Gray (NASUWT).

In attendance

Graham Hope, Chief Executive

Moira Niven, Depute Chief Executive, Education, Planning and Area Services

Donald Forrest, Head of Finance and Estates

Elaine Cook, Head of Education (Development)

James Cameron, Head of Schools with Education Support

Fiona Russell, Group Accountant

Lynda Fraser, Group Accountant

Fraser Mackenzie, HR Manager

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. MINUTE

The minute of the meeting of the Group held on 18 December 2013 was approved as a correct record.

3. REVENUE BUDGET 2015/16 TO 2017/18 AND GENERAL SERVICES CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2015/16 TO 2017/18

The Head of Finance and Estates and the Group Accountant presented the Group with information on the council's proposed Revenue Budget for 2015/16 to 2017/18 and the General Services Capital Programme 2015/16 to 2017/18.

The Group was informed that the council faced a projected budget gap to 2017/18 of £29.5m and required to make substantial savings and efficiencies. A consultation was carried out in 2014 on Delivering Better Outcomes (DBO) which received 3,467 responses, with over 40,000 comments, in support of the thirty-nine proposed budget measures across eight work streams. Feedback of the consultation responses was reported to a series of PDSPs held in December 2014.

The presentation went on to outline the proposed three year strategy which would fully balance the revenue budget for 2015/16 to 2017/18 and also provided more detailed information on the budget for Education Services and the challenges ahead for the service. Education service developments included the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare for

two year olds, free school meals for P1 to P3 pupils and enhanced broadband in schools. Core teacher numbers were also estimated to increase by 3 FTE.

The Head of Finance and Estates then provided a summary of the council's capital investment programme which included details of the proposed significant capital investment in school projects.

Finally, the Group was advised that the council would be invited to consider the Revenue Budget Strategy 2015/16 to 2017/18, the Revenue Budget and Council Tax Levels for 2015/16 and the General Services Capital Programme 2015/16 to 2017/18 at its meeting being held on 29th January 2015.

John MacKinnon, EIS Union Representative, then asked for clarification on how the proposed increase of 3 FTE teaching staff was calculated. The Head of Finance and Estates explained that taking account of the growth required to meet the projected increases in school rolls over 2015/16 to 2017/18 and the proposed budget measures over the 3 year period would result in an increase of 3 FTE teaching staff. John expressed his concerns in relation to the workload of teachers and stated that the teaching side would continue to engage with management to seek to lessen the impact of the proposed budget measures.

Elsie Aitken, EIS Union Representative, highlighted concerns in relation to the proposed reduction in support staff and the impact this would have on children in schools. Concerns were also raised about the pupil-teacher ratio and Elsie asked how local government funding impacted on the council to meet staffing standards. The Head of Finance and Estates advised that the commitments attached to the local government funding package 2015/16 was that each local authority was required to maintain the council tax freeze for 2015/16 and secure places for all probationers who required one under the Teacher Induction Scheme. Sanctions in relation to meeting existing teacher number commitments were suspended but were due to be reviewed in early 2015. The proposed three year budget strategy would allow the council to maintain teacher numbers and maintain the pupil-teacher ratio of no more than 14.5 pupils to each teacher.

The Depute Chief Executive stated that West Lothian Council has an excellent record of providing high quality support services for children with additional learning needs. Every effort would be made to continue to deliver this service.

The Chair concluded the meeting by thanking the teaching unions for their comments advising that elected members were aware of the commitment of the teaching staff who worked hard to deliver the best possible outcomes in school.

Decision

To note the budget proposals and the comments made.