

MINUTE

of

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (FIRST TIER)

Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 14 February 2019.

Present:

Councillor Caroline Bamforth

Councillor Tony Buchanan

Union Representatives:

Ms Karen Catlow (UNISON)

Mr Gordon Lees (UNISON)

Ms Sharon Kelly (EIS)

Mr Des Morris (EIS)

Mr Mark Kirkland (UNISON)

Mr James O'Connell (UNITE)

Mr Steven Larkin (UNISON)

Councillor Tony Buchanan in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Sharon Dick, Head of HR and Corporate Services; Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager; and Linda Hutchison, Senior Committee Services Officer.

Apologies:

Councillors Paul O'Kane and Stewart Miller; and Mr Joe Lynch (UNISON).

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1. The committee considered and approved as a correct record the Minute of the meeting held on 15 February 2018.

REVENUE BUDGET 2019/20

2. Councillor Buchanan confirmed that the Scottish Government had recently approved the final 2019/20 grant allocation for local authorities, quantifying the level of additional grant allocated to the Council recently over and above the provisional grant announced in December 2018.

The Head of Accountancy reported that the last time discussions with the Trade Unions had taken place, a budgetary shortfall of approximately £14m had been indicated, this having been reduced to approximately £4m, taking account of the 2019/20 savings approved by the Council in March 2018 as part of the indicative future budgets set at that time covering 3 financial years. Having commented on the grant allocation mechanism used by the Scottish Government, she reported that the recent announcement of an additional £1.78m was welcome and helpful.

Whilst referring to various changes and elements of flexibility that had been announced by the Scottish Government, the Head of Accountancy clarified that local authorities were required to limit any Council Tax increase for 2019/20 to a maximum of 4.79% which equated to 3% in real terms. It was explained that, through the settlement, local authorities had also been given discretionary powers to introduce a new tourist tax and a workplace parking levy, both of which would require to be considered further if the Council opted to consider doing so. Whilst referring to flexibility promised regarding Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) in advance of the next property revaluation in 2022, the Head of Accountancy clarified that the settlement offered Councils discretion to vary the level of NDR empty property relief in the future. It also offered local authorities discretion to vary loans fund repayment arrangements for advances made before April 2016. She clarified that detailed guidance and legislation to enable these options to be considered in future remained outstanding, adding that the provision on loan repayments could be helpful in future years but not necessarily in 2019/20.

The Head of Accountancy confirmed that the Scottish Government had also given a further commitment to move to 3 year settlements from 2020/21 which would greatly assist the Council with future financial planning, and also to publish legislation during the term of the current Parliament on options to replace the Council Tax system of funding local government. Further developments and guidance on both issues were awaited.

Whilst referring to the remaining budgetary shortfall of £1.9m for 2019/20 which remained to be identified over and above savings already agreed, the Head of Accountancy commented on the restriction on the level of savings that could be applied to Integration Joint Board (IJB) budgets and related issues. She also explained that the increase in contributions to the teacher superannuation scheme had not been quite as severe as anticipated originally.

In response to Mr Lees, the Head of Accountancy confirmed that the provision to vary loans fund repayment arrangements would apply to historic loans entered into prior to April 2016 rather than future ones. She further clarified that it did not apply to PPP/PFI schemes. Councillor Buchanan referred to the need to await the exact terms of related guidance and legislation to confirm the extent to which related savings could be achieved.

Having welcomed the forthcoming introduction of multi-year budget settlements, Mr O'Connell expressed the view that the workplace parking levy, if introduced locally, would only impact on the Corporate Management Team and Elected Members for whom dedicated parking places were provided. Councillor Buchanan clarified that the Council's position on such provision still required to be determined formally, but that a lot of additional work would be required to introduce this and that the Council had no intention of imposing additional costs on employees. He welcomed devolved powers being given to local authorities, but clarified that they would not all necessarily be utilised in East Renfrewshire at present.

Mr Morris welcomed the opportunity that had been given to the Trade Unions to make representations on the budget, referring to the extent of the concerns that existed on budget savings including those associated with Pupil Support Assistants. Mr Lees also referred to concerns regarding the future of bilingual services and technical services commenting on the extent to which they were used and would be missed if related savings were made. In reply, Councillor Buchanan referred to the need to look at all costs to identify savings, clarified that representations made by the Trade Unions were considered, and commented on the efforts being made to limit the impact of savings on services and to do so as well and as fairly as possible. Having heard Mr Lees welcome the opportunity to contribute to the redesign of services to contribute to the identification of savings, Councillor Buchanan referred to related benefits of such reviews and the importance of involving those delivering services in them.

In response to Mr Lees, Councillor Buchanan confirmed that some discussion had taken place on the discretionary power being given to local authorities to vary the level of Council Tax empty property relief in future, adding that consideration was always given to what benefits could be accrued from the use of discretionary powers. The Head of Accountancy confirmed that costings associated with such proposals would be considered.

It was agreed to note the position and comments made.

HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

3. The committee considered the Minutes of the meetings of the Council's Health and Safety Committee held on 24 January, 25 April, 29 August and 12 December 2018.

Mr Morris referred to discussions on communications on the reporting of accidents and incidents at the meeting on 12 December and subsequently, welcoming that a further staff newsletter was to be issued and other action being taken to promote awareness of health and safety issues and procedures. Councillor Buchanan welcomed this also.

The committee noted the Minutes and comments made.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

4. The committee noted that confirmation of the date of the next meeting, which was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 9 May 2019, would be circulated.

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