

MINUTE

of

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (FIRST TIER)

Minute of Meeting held at 4.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 15 September 2022.

Present:

Provost Mary Montague
Councillor Andrew Anderson

Councillor Owen O'Donnell
Councillor Gordon Wallace

Union Representatives:

Karen Catlow (UNISON)
Debs Clarke (UNISON)

John Guidi (SSTA)
Des Morris (EIS)

Des Morris in the Chair

Attending:

Sharon Dick, Head of HR and Corporate Services; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Lesley Bairden, Head of Finance and Resources (Chief Financial Officer); Phil Daws, Head of Environment (Housing and Property Services); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager (Developing People); Linda Hutchison, Senior Committee Services Officer; and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

Apology:

Steven Larkin (UNISON).

HM QUEEN ELIZABETH II

1. Mr Morris referred to the recent death of HM Queen Elizabeth II and asked those present to observe a minute's silence in her honour.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

2. The committee considered and approved as a correct record the Minute of the meeting held on 16 June 2022.

BUDGET UPDATE

3. Under reference to the Minute of meeting of 16 June (Item 4 refers) when an update on the Scottish Government Spending Review had been noted, the Head of Accountancy

(Chief Financial Officer) commented on the budget outlook for 2023/24 to 2025/26, clarifying that the Council was planning a 3-year budget in line with good practice. Having confirmed that the Scottish Government had advised that local authorities would be awarded a flat cash settlement for the forthcoming 3 financial years, she highlighted that various current pressures, such as high inflation, pay increases and loan charges, had to be absorbed by the Council, with a financial shortfall of between £28m-£31.5m forecast, excluding savings that required to be met by the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust (ERCLT). The final position would become known as the position on spending pressures and grant issues became clearer. It was confirmed that the 2022/23 pay awards had not yet been finalised, that the level of grant the Council would receive would not be confirmed until December 2022, but that departments were already working on quantifying expected spending pressures for 2023/24. The Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) also confirmed that COVID pressures were expected to be covered by using the remaining earmarked COVID reserve, and therefore not expected to impact on the 2023/24 budget, as was the case for the current financial year.

The Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) explained that, over the forthcoming months, the Budget Strategy Group (BSG) would be considering various approaches to closing the budget gap, such as the use of reserves, increasing Council Tax subject to any conditions imposed by the Scottish Government, the use of efficiencies which would be challenging given those already made, spending reductions, increased income, and the use of fiscal flexibility to re-phase Public Finance Initiative (PFI) debt which had been permitted.

It was reported that savings options being developed would be shared with the Trade Unions (TUs) within the next 2 months to enable feedback to be provided by them to the BSG, as in the past, and confirmed that the TUs would be invited to make representations to the BSG in December. Reference was also made to public engagement to be undertaken on the financial outlook towards the end of October. The Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) confirmed that the date scheduled for approval of the budget by the Council was 1 March 2023.

On behalf of the TUs, Mr Morris thanked the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) for the high level summary provided, acknowledged that a range of factors remained unknown, and welcomed the consultation to be undertaken with the TUs and the opportunity to be afforded to them to present their views to the BSG.

The Committee noted the position.

PAY NEGOTIATION UPDATE

4. Under reference to the Minute of meeting of 16 June (Item 5 refers) when the position on pay negotiations had been noted, Ms Catlow confirmed that UNISON was balloting its members until 28 September on the current pay offer and that, subject to the outcome, the next steps would be considered as appropriate. In response to Councillor O'Donnell, she confirmed that both UNITE and the GMB were working to a similar timescale.

Mr Morris referred to the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) pay claim, confirming that a consultative ballot was underway with teachers on their current pay offer dated 19 August and also the willingness of EIS members to take industrial action. He clarified that, although the current offer had not been formally rejected, the EIS was recommending this. Whilst reporting on the way forward, he confirmed that one of the next steps could be a statutory ballot.

Councillor Wallace highlighted reference being made by the Scottish Government to funding pressures associated with meeting public sector pay awards, which was for example reported to be impacting on the funding of apprenticeships and the availability of such opportunities. He added that he sensed the overall direction of travel, anticipating the prospect of the centralisation of education services to be raised for example. The financial impact on the Council of pay awards was referred to.

The Committee noted the position.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT 2021-22

5. The committee considered the Education Department Health and Safety Report 2021/22, referring to the Department's commitment to health, safety, welfare and security improvement, as illustrated in the progress made during the past year in achieving objectives, and in setting targets for 2022/23. It was confirmed that the report related directly to the Corporate Health and Safety objectives, how they were supported across the Education Department, and set out progress made, areas for further development and proposed actions for 2022/23.

The Education Senior Manager highlighted key aspects of the report, during which she commented that 2021/22 had been a year of recovery, that COVID-19 remained a significant area of focus, and that while the majority of objectives had been pursued, a few had been carried forward to 2022/23 but were now complete. Other issues commented on included increased in-person training and the continuation of some hybrid training sessions, ongoing work with Head Teachers on outstanding actions from risk assessments, and the implementation of recommendations following inspections which were being taken forward. The Education Senior Manager also referred to support required on the use of the Alcumus system, accidents and incidents and related statistics, and on-going work with Head Teachers and the TUs to address concerns regarding incidents of violence to staff in relation to which the positive impact of the work of the Violence to Staff Group was commented on.

In response to Provost Montague, the Education Senior Manager confirmed that she did not have precise details to hand on why the fire risk assessment for Our Lady of the Missions Primary School was high, but that such ratings tended to relate to the age of a building, on which work was ongoing with Property and Technical Services because addressing such issues was out with the control of the Education Department.

Mr Morris welcomed the amount and depth of training available, and the joint approach to inspections in which TU representatives were now involved. He commented that levels of violence to staff continued to be concerning, whilst welcoming a significant reduction in such incidents relative to the most recent two comparable years of 2018/19 and 2019/20. He also welcomed ongoing work on this issue, the re-establishment of the Violence to Staff Group, and the biannual meetings between the health and safety advisor and TU representatives to discuss specific incidents and approaches to addressing them.

The committee noted the report.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT 2021/22.

6. The committee considered the East Renfrewshire Council Corporate Health and Safety Report for 2021/22. The report referred to progress made on the Council's Health and Safety objectives during 2021/22, and provided detail of the proposed objectives and priorities for the year ahead. It concluded that health and safety continued to be a

fundamental priority for the Council, with a significant amount of work having been delivered by the Corporate Health and Safety Unit (CHSU) to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure continued delivery of health and safety support to address the needs of operational services. It was hoped that, as recovery from COVID-19 continued, the CHSU could focus more on delivery of health and safety compliance improvements across the Council.

The Head of Environment (Housing and Property Services) highlighted key aspects of the report, including on the impact of COVID-19 which had required resources to be refocused, such as on building inspections. He cited the example of COVID risk assessments which had been completed for all Council buildings, each one of which had been revisited during 2021/22. He also confirmed that 74 service task COVID risk assessments had been put in place during the previous year, each one of which had required to be revisited and amended up to 4 times during 2021/22. Other issues commented on included hand and arm vibration risk assessments, fire risk assessments of council property, and a survey of managers conducted to identify what support and training they required from the CHSU.

Having itemised some of the key objectives for 2022/23, the Head of Environment (Housing and Property Services) commented that, whilst COVID remained a priority during recovery from it, it was hoped to focus more on delivery of health and safety compliance improvements across the Council.

In response to Provost Montague who sought clarification on actions taken to address the adverse effects of sitting for long periods of time whilst working, the Head of Environment (Housing and Property Services) referred to related guidance issued, such as on taking breaks from laptops, and more generally to guidance to address other aspects of the physical and mental health well-being of employees. He confirmed that some officers had high desks, enabling them to stand whilst working.

Amongst other things, the Head of HR and Corporate Services commented on the Switch Off and Shift initiative, clarified that all employees had been encouraged to include a health and well-being objective as an action to be taken forward from their Quality Conversation, and other ways in which mental and physical well-being were promoted. She confirmed that further information on such issues would be included in the annual report on Managing Absence to be submitted to the forthcoming meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee through which it could be made more widely available to Elected Members. In response to Councillor Anderson, she confirmed that DSE assessments had been carried out for those working at home, and how related issues identified had been addressed such as through the provision of chairs if required.

The Head of Finance and Resources (Chief Financial Officer) referred to the role of the wellbeing officer in the HSCP, and the related sharing of information, to support the mental and physical well-being of employees.

In response to Councillor Wallace who asked if officers were reluctant to indicate that stress was work related, Ms Clarke referred to the process to be concluded to attribute stress to work, expressed hope that the position on this would improve, and commented that when occupational health discussions took place the position was better as these were done regarding return to work.

In relation to the Education Service, Mr Morris referred to the implementation of the stress policy when required, commenting that he had always found this to be a useful and supportive process which worked well, and one which could be used with confidence without fear of repercussions. In support of the comments made, the Education Senior Manager confirmed that a collegiate approach was taken as soon as such an issue was identified with a view to putting in place appropriate mitigating adjustments to address any issues identified.

The committee noted:-

- (a) that further information on various initiatives to help address the mental and physical well-being of staff would be included in the annual report on Managing Absence being submitted to the forthcoming Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting, through which it could be made more widely available to Elected Members; and
- (b) otherwise, the report and related comments made.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

7. It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 16 February 2023.

CHAIR

BLANK PAGE