

Group Leaders Meeting with Trade Union Representatives

NOTES OF THE GROUP LEADERS MEETING WITH TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES MEETING HELD ON 8 FEBRUARY 2023 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Ricky Rogers and Cllr Nick Botterill

Trade Union Representatives:

Michael Harrison – NEU

Tom Hill – NEU

Mike Osment – UNISON

Michael Sweetman – UNISON

Jaqueline Walford – GMB

Officers:

Andy Brown - Corporate Director Resources & Deputy Chief Executive (S.151 Officer)

Parvis Khansari – Corporate Director Place

Tamsin Kielb – Assistant Director HR&OD

Terence Herbert – Chief Executive

Lucy Townsend – Corporate Director People

Lizzie Watkin – Assistant Director - Finance and Deputy s151 Officer

1 Welcome and introductions

Councillor Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

2 Apologies

Apologies were received from the following councillors:

- Councillor Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council
- Councillor Ernie Clark, Independent Group Leader
- Councillor Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader of the Council
- Councillor Ian Thorne, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

3 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the previous meeting held on 1 February 2022 were received and noted as a correct record.

4 **Wiltshire Council Financial Plan Update 2023/24**

Councillor Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning, introduced the budget which would be taken as read, and invited trade union representatives to ask questions.

In response to a question from Mike Osment (UNISON) regarding staff savings it was highlighted that the staff savings would come from deleting vacant posts and holding open vacancies with a vacancy factor of 6.5% applied to the budget.

Michael Sweetman (UNISON) queried the pay award and whether inflation was expected to go down, he also highlighted that the award did not account for the long term decline in pay rates when compared to the actual cost of living. Andy Brown (Corporate Director Resources & Deputy Chief Executive (S.151 Officer)) explained that most of the savings came from reducing vacant posts. The 4.5% pay award was budgeted for 2023/24, reducing to an estimated 2.5% for the following 2 years. This was what had been budgeted for based on Bank of England predictions that inflation would decrease. The Council were bound by the national negotiations on pay. If the award was higher then the council would award the higher amount to staff. This would be managed as a budget pressure.

In response to a question from Mike Osment (UNISON) on the expenses rate for mileage possibly increasing and whether that had been budgeted for Andy Brown explained that the budget was based on existing rates, if it was higher the Council would have to manage the increased budget pressure.

Michael Sweetman (UNISON) queried market supplement rates in social care and raised concerns about staff who did not receive these. Lucy Townsend (Corporate Director People) stated that in order to help increase recruitment and retention in social care staff a review of salary rates was undertaken and compared to the market. As a result, some staff including social workers and occupational therapists would receive a market supplement. Reviews were underway for those that did not receive the supplement. All market supplements would be subject to annual review.

Michael Harrison (NEU) queried how confident the Council were that the budget for education would be maintained due to the continued squeeze on public finances. Officers explained that this meeting was dedicated to discussing the council budget and that the amount of the Dedicated Schools Grant awarded was determined by the government and that formed the majority of education funding. It was also highlighted that the Council had forecasted increased demand for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and school transport, as well as new burdens around school attendance. Savings would be identified in the budget to cover these.

Councillor Botterill highlighted that there had over recent years been some large shocks to the economy, including COVID, increases in gas and oil prices and

inflation. All the Council could do was take the best advice and forecasting available and work from that. The Bank of England had predicted that inflation would come down. The Council took that advice and mitigated for risks as much as possible. Therefore, subject to no further unexpected shocks to the market, he felt confident that the Council was taking the correct actions.

Tom Hill (NEU) welcomed the increased prioritisation of SEN, which he hoped would continue, but highlighted issues with the current Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process, in particular the time it took to get an EHCP. Terence Herbert (Chief Executive) explained that this point did not fall within the remit of this meeting on the budget and would be better directed to the Children's Select Committee. However, when looking at the business plan and commitments made in various meetings it could be seen that this was a priority of the current administration.

Michael Sweetman (UNISON) raised issues regarding social care, the difficulties discharging patients from hospitals due to a lack of social care provision and whether there was anything within the budget to address those issues. Officers explained that there was nothing in the budget which reduced the responsibilities of the Council in terms of supporting social care and discharging patients from hospital. Health and social care was a priority for the Council. However, this was one small part of the complex, wider issues affecting the NHS and social care.

There were no further questions and Councillor Botterill thanked everyone for attending.

(Duration of meeting: 3.00 - 3.30 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Tara Hunt of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718352, e-mail tara.hunt@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line 01225 713114 or email communications@wiltshire.gov.uk