

Group Leaders Meeting with Trade Union Representatives

MINUTES OF THE GROUP LEADERS MEETING WITH TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES MEETING HELD ON 5 FEBRUARY 2020 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Ernie Clark, Cllr Simon Jacobs, Cllr Ricky Rogers and Cllr Philip Whitehead

Union Representatives:

John Hawkins (NEU),
Alan Tomala (UNITE),
John Drake (UNISON)
Mike Osment (UNISON)

Officers:

Terence Herbert and Deborah Hindson

5 Welcome and Introductions

The Leader welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

6 Apologies

Apologies for absence was received from:-

- Cllr Ian Thorn
- Sue Dawson – ATL

7 Notes from the previous meeting

The notes of the previous meeting held on 14 February 2019 were received and noted as a correct record.

8 Wiltshire Council Financial Plan Update 2020/21

The Leader reported that the Financial Plan had been circulated in advance of the meeting and that the Trade Union Representatives would have had an opportunity to consider the detail of the Plan and formulate questions based around the Plans contents. He explained that the other consultative groups had

recently considered the Plan, in particular the Schools Forum, Financial Planning Task Group and Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which has enabled a thorough examination of the proposals to take place. This meeting was the final round of consultation.

The Leader stated that a key focus would be to ensure a strong and sustainable financial base during the current challenging times. He referred to the Council embracing the transformation of services and how this would provide improvements to those service areas to generate greater financial gains for the Council's overall budget.

Cllr Jacobs, in supporting the comments of the Leader, explained that a large portion of the budget is allocated to the increasing demand for the vulnerable, including adult and children with complex care needs and special educational needs. It was noted that this was an area of concern and one that the Council would manage as efficiently as possible.

The union representatives then had an opportunity to make statements and ask questions regarding the Budget.

Mr John Drake (UNISON) asked the following questions:

1. The representations made to local MPs in relation to the increasing demand for adult social care and children's services. The Leader reported that the provision of sufficient funds especially for these areas was a national problem and he took every opportunity to lobby local MPs. He also mentioned that lobbying was undertaken on behalf of Wiltshire Council by the County Council Network and the Local Government Association. It was noted that with the formula's review was ongoing and current funding based on areas of deprivation rather than population, local authorities like Wiltshire received rather less funding compared to more urban authorities.
2. The potential for an assessment of the number of officers employed by the Council in light of the ongoing financial climate. The Leader confirmed that there were no planned redundancies within the workforce and that officer turnover was managed very effectively through retirement and vacancies being created when officers move onto other employment opportunities. Cllr Jacobs referred to the creation of new employment openings within the Council, for instance a new team to manage the Council's proposals around the climate emergency.
3. The potential for transferring services back inhouse. The Leader confirmed that consideration of this matter was not a priority for the Council at this stage. Although, the Council would investigate any possibilities if the need arose.

Mr John Hawkins (NEU) highlighted concerns about the level of high needs spending. The Leader reported that Wiltshire's demand for high needs spending remained in excess of the high needs block allocation, which reflected the

experience of the majority of other local authorities. There was a recognition within government that the funding allocation needed to be considered further as it was a national issue. The Leader thanked the Schools Forum for their support in this area.

Cllr Ricky Rogers asked about the increase in Council House rents and how the increase compared to other local authorities. The Leader reported that the Council aimed to keep any increase within the rent setting process in line with the CPI figure plus 1%. The same figures applied by other local authorities to their Council House rents.

The Leader thanked those for attendance for offering their views and questions

(Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 10.20 am)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Kieran Elliott of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718504, e-mail Kieran.elliott@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line (01225) 713114/713115