

GROUP LEADERS MEETING WITH TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES

NOTES OF THE GROUP LEADERS MEETING WITH TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES MEETING HELD ON 14 FEBRUARY 2019 AT WEST WILTSHIRE ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Baroness Scott of Bybrook OBE, Leader of the Council & Conservative Group Leader
Cllr Ruth Hopkinson, Liberal Democrat Deputy Group Leader
Cllr Ricky Rogers, Labour Group Leader
Cllr John Thomson, Deputy Leader of the Council
Cllr Philip Whitehead, Cabinet Member for Finance

Union Representatives:

Mike Osment – Unison
Alan Tomala – Unite
John Hawkins – NEU
Sue Dawson – NEU
Andy Newman – GMB

Officers:

Alistair Cunningham – Corporate Director
Becky Hellard – Interim Director, Finance (S151 Officer)
Matthew Tiller – Chief Accountant
Joanne Pitt – Director, Human Resources & Organisational Development

1 Welcome and Introductions

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

2 Apologies

Apologies for absence was received from:-

- Cllr Ian Thorn who was substituted by Cllr Ruth Hopkinson.
- Robin Bassford – ASCL

- Michael Harrison – NUT
- Carole Valley – CMB

3 **Notes of the Last Meeting**

The notes of the previous meeting held on 8 February 2018 were received and noted as a correct record.

4 **Wiltshire Council Financial Plan Update 2019/20**

The Leader introduced the budget and invited Cllr Philip Whitehead, Cabinet Member for Finance, to provide an overview of the Council's proposed Budget for 2019/2020.

Cllr Whitehead reported that he was confident that the Council was currently in a good position to set a strong Financial Plan for the years ahead. He reported that budget proposals had been circulated to Overview & Scrutiny Task Groups in October 2018 and this had enabled a thorough examination of the proposals to take place. He did not foresee a problem with the proposed Budget which amounted to £332 million.

A key focus would be to ensure a strong sustainable financial base during the current challenging times. The key changes in the Plan reflected the revised forecast for the increasing demand for adult social care and children's services, in particular services for children with special educational needs. It was noted that this latter service was increasingly critical following the enactment of the Children and Families Act in 2014 which extended responsibilities to care leavers from the age of 21 to 25 years. Demographic growth across social care equated to £1.2 million.

The Council would no longer receive a Rate Support Grant (RSG) from the Government but would continue to receive income from Council tax and business rates which would lead to a greater degree of flexibility in managing the Council's finances and lead to a greater control of the Budget. Cllr Whitehead explained that greater emphasis would be placed on commercialisation and innovation, in particular the increased advancement in digitalisation.

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

Mr Andy Newman (GMB) referred to inflation on in house carers being estimated at 2% and contract inflation on external providers at 2.97% as per contractual arrangements. He noted that the total growth required for inflation in 2019/20 amounted to £0.792 million. In view of this and the increasing demand for in house carers, he enquired if there would be an increase in funding to enable staff who provided these services to receive an increase in pay, bearing in mind that they had not received one in the past five years. It

was explained that these staff were self employed and did not form part of the Council's workforce. Any pay increases would need to be met from the global sums allocated for the provision of this service. The Director of Finance pointed out that £5.699 million growth had been allocated to Children & Education Services in 2019/20. The Leader reported that the provision of sufficient funds especially for children with special educational needs was a national problem and she took every opportunity to lobby ministers at Westminster on this and in particular the specific problems besetting Wiltshire.

Mr John Hawkins ((NEU) noted the provision of traded services and enquired to what extent increases in income were being sought. Cllr Whitehead explained that there were a number of services for which charges were being made and increases would be introduced in line with inflation where possible. However, it was important to note that charges made needed to be competitive or else there would be a strong possibility that contracts for the provision of services would be lost. In answer to a further question, Cllr Whitehead confirmed that the Council was eager to expand the trading of services to organisations outside Wiltshire provided that this resulted in healthy financial returns.

Cllr Whitehead explained that a Fair Funding Review was currently taking place nationally. At present government funding was based on areas of deprivation rather than population, which resulted in local authorities like Wiltshire receiving rather less funding compared with more urban authorities. However, many of these less urban authorities did have large elderly populations, a significant number of whom required health/social care. Cllr Whitehead stressed that there was no indication from government that extra funding would be provided following this Review and thus it should not be expected that significant funding would be available to local authorities such as Wiltshire.

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

(Duration of meeting: 10.30am - 11.05am)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Roger Bishton, of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 713035 , e-mail roger.bishton@wiltshire.gov.uk

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