

MINUTE

of

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (FIRST TIER)

Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 16 June 2022.

Present:

Provost Mary Montague
Councillor Andrew Anderson

Councillor Tony Buchanan
Councillor Owen O'Donnell

Union Representatives:

Maria Brown (GMB)
Karen Catlow (UNISON)
John Guidi (SSTA)

Simon Macfarlane (UNISON)
Kirsten Muat (GMB)
Mr Des Morris (EIS)

Chief Executive in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Louise Pringle, Director of Business Operations and Partnerships; Sharon Dick, Head of HR and Corporate Services; Graeme Hay, Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change); and Linda Hutchison, Senior Committee Services Officer.

Apology:

Steven Larkin (UNISON).

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

1. The Chief Executive clarified that, as this was the first meeting of the committee following the local elections, it was necessary for the committee to appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair and that she would act as Chair until the appointments had been made.

She explained that in terms of the committee's Constitution, the appointments would last for the duration of the Council, and that when the Chair was appointed from either the Council or Trade Union (TU) side, the position of Vice-Chair should be filled by one of the representatives from the other side. She clarified that notwithstanding the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair, the chairing of meetings would alternate.

Having heard the Chief Executive call for nominations for the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair, Councillor O'Donnell was nominated as Chair with Mr Morris (EIS) was nominated for the position of Vice-Chair. There being no further nominations, Councillor O'Donnell and Mr Morris were elected to the positions.

As Mr Morris had chaired the previous meeting, Councillor O'Donnell assumed the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

Councillor O'Donnell in the Chair

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

2. The committee considered and approved as a correct record the Minute of the meeting held on 10 February 2022.

INTRODUCTIONS

3. Councillor O'Donnell welcomed all those attending the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT SPENDING REVIEW - UPDATE

4. The Chief Executive referred to the Scottish Government Spending Review published in May 2022, explaining that a flat cash settlement for councils from the Scottish Government was expected for a number of years, and referring to various pressures faced including those linked to inflation, rising utility costs, pay rises and the demographic profile of the area. She reported that, based on some preliminary modelling, the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) had estimated that the Council was facing a £30m funding gap over the next 3 years, which was similar to the position faced before at one stage. The Chief Executive clarified that the gap was not expected to be addressed entirely through savings which had become increasingly more difficult to identify given that many possible efficiency related savings had already been made. The use of some reserves was cited as having potential, for example, to help address the shortfall.

The Chief Executive reported that in preparation for the Council budget meeting in 2023, work was being done on resurrecting the type of public engagement done with residents prior to the pandemic to help inform the finalisation of budget proposals.

In response to Ms Muat who referred to the real term cuts faced and asked what level of reserves were available, the Chief Executive confirmed that the use of over £5m of reserves had already been committed to balancing the 2022/23 budget, acknowledged the TUs' preference for using reserves rather than reducing expenditure, and highlighted that departments had been doing whatever they could to avoid non-essential expenditure. She explained that the reserves available would be reviewed to allow the Council to determine the extent to which they could be used in future to help ease financial pressures. Having commented on the income generated from the garden waste scheme which had also resulted in a number of jobs being saved, the Chief Executive commented that the further use of charges needed to be considered, acknowledging the difficulties of doing so when residents were facing cost of living pressures.

The Chief Executive commented on other budget related issues, including ongoing discussions with the Scottish Government on the accountancy treatment of Public Private Partnership funding which had potential to ease financial pressures a little. She reported that the delivery of all local services would be examined, which would be difficult.

It was confirmed that no written report on the funding gap and related issues was available yet to share with the TUs, but that information on the Council's reserves would be included in the draft Annual Accounts to be published shortly.

Mr Macfarlane commented that the Fraser of Allandar Institute had estimated that councils were facing real terms cuts of 7%, stressing that local government had again been singled out for different treatment to the rest of the public sector and forecasting that thousands of council jobs would be lost across Scotland. Faced with this grim outlook, the TUs were seeking assurances from Council Leaders that they would seek and press for change.

Councillor O'Donnell reported he had not yet seen detailed information on the issues raised, but that it was not pleasant to face such challenges as a new Council Leader. He added that COSLA, which would be discussing pay again at a meeting later in the week, had pushed for better pay awards and parity with those offered to others employed in the public sector, but confirming that requests for a meeting with the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy to discuss issues such as pay had been refused. Councillor O'Donnell emphasised that councils would continue to press for better funding and pay settlements for employees, acknowledging that the TUs were raising the same issues themselves and the importance of them doing so. Mr Morris requested as much consultation with the TUs as possible on the local budget.

Councillor Buchanan emphasised that COSLA had been unanimous for some time on arguing in favour of more funding for local government. He added that the Scottish Government and local government faced the same challenge of needing to identify where any additional funds required would come from, arguing for the need for these to be allocated by the UK Government. Having commented that English local authorities were also struggling, he highlighted that both Governments were facing challenges associated with inflation out with their control, which was a concern for all moving forward.

The committee noted the position and comments made.

PAY NEGOTIATIONS

5. Under reference to the Minute of meeting of 10 February (Item 2 refers) and Paragraph 4 above, when the position on pay claims for both local government and teachers had been noted, Ms Catlow confirmed that UNISON was balloting its members until 26 July on targeted industrial action in the current dispute over pay. She emphasised that the TU's members were very unhappy, facing spiralling costs such as for fuel and food, and that it was not just those on low pay now who were struggling. Ms Catlow expressed confidence that the outcome of the ballot would be in favour of industrial action, and hoped that a significantly improved pay offer would be forthcoming from COSLA.

Councillor O'Donnell acknowledged the concerns expressed and that there was a real possibility of strike action being taken, emphasising that COSLA was pressing for additional funds for pay awards and to address other issues which he hoped would be successful. He expressed sympathy for the position in which employees found themselves, particularly the lower paid.

Echoing these comments, Mr Morris referred to the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) pay claim and related negotiations, confirming that the current offer of 2% across the board had been unanimously rejected, and that there was very considerable strength of feeling amongst all of the TUs on the inadequacy of the current pay offers. Having commented on the 2021/22 pay award settled in March, he stated that the TUs now found themselves in completely different territory and therefore expected a significantly improved offer on which to negotiate. Mr Morris added that two issues needed to be resolved, not only the level of the award but also the timescale to complete a negotiated settlement, stressing that there was a very strong wish to avoid the protracted 15 month period of time it had taken to secure the most recent award which it was felt could have been

avoided. He highlighted that the situation had been even more galling because it had coincided with the pandemic, that none of the TUs would countenance any undue delay this time, and that there was a clear wish to avoid consultation on industrial action. He requested that the points made be impressed upon Council Leaders, emphasising there was considerable resolve to secure an appropriate pay award.

Councillor O'Donnell acknowledged this very clear message, assuring the TUs he would relay the comments made to COSLA, and stress that idle threats were not being made by the TUs and that employees were really suffering. He emphasised that only the Scottish and UK Governments could ultimately provide the solution.

Mr Macfarlane reminded the committee that there were other issues being pursued which remained outstanding, such as a 35 hour and 4 day working week, regarding which new, creative leadership was called for. In response, the Head of HR and Corporate Services confirmed that a Working Group was looking at such issues and related options, which were complex, and confirmed these would be discussed with the Leader of the Council.

The committee noted the position and comments made.

COUNCIL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

6. The committee considered and noted the Minutes of the meetings of the Council's Health and Safety Committee held on 15 February and 24 May 2022.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

7. It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 15 September 2022.

CHAIR