

Employees' Consultative Forum

Minutes

25 January 2021

Present:

Chair: Mr D Searles

Councillors: Camilla Bath
Pamela Fitzpatrick
John Hinkley
Angella Murphy-Strachan
Mina Parmar
Varsha Parmar
Adam Swersky

**Teacher
Representatives:** Ms L Crimmins - NEU
Ms A Lyons - NAHT

**Unison
Representatives:** Mr J Royle

**GMB
Representative:** Ms P Belgrave

**Apologies
received:** Ann Jones - GMB

Absent: Gary Martin - Unison

In attendance: Mr J Nobelmann Regional Organiser, Unison

54. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:-

Ordinary Member

Councillor Philip Benjamin
Councillor Graham Henson

Reserve Member

Councillor John Hinkley
Councillor Varsha Parmar

55. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members.

56. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2020 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

57. Petitions, Deputations, Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions, petitions or deputations were received at this meeting.

58. Statement by Unison

A representative of Unison read a statement to the Forum in relation to the reports on Health and Safety included on the agenda and claimed that fraudulent activity appeared to have taken place and, as such, Unison could not participate in the discussion on these items as the matter had been referred to the police.

Resolved Items

59. Draft Revenue Budget 2021/22 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22-2023/24

The Forum received a report of the Director of Finance which set out the draft revenue budget for 2021/22 and draft Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2021/22 to 2023/24. The budget and MTFS would be submitted to Cabinet in February 2021 for final approval and recommendation to Council.

The Director of Finance introduced the budget report and explained that it had been challenging to produce due to uncertainties and as the Council had only received a one year, rather than three year, settlement. The draft budget had been prepared prior to the Council receiving its indicative settlement from the government. The report also advised the Forum that there was a proposed increase in Council Tax of 4.99% and the Director explained that Reserves of £6 million had been used to 'plug' the budget gap. She reassured Members that this figure would reduce to approximately £1 million when the final budget was reported to Cabinet in February 2021.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Finance confirmed that 3% of the 4.99% increase in Council Tax was the Adult Social Care precept and that the Adults directorate was forecasting £6.3 million of pressures in

2021/22. In terms of the remaining 1.99%, the Director advised that the largest areas of growth were in Children Services placement costs and in the Community Directorate in terms of waste services. She advised that the underspend on the costs of Freedom Passes could be transferred into front line services for growth. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources added that there were some priority areas, a whole programme of transformation as well as a focus on equalities work and the London Living Wage.

A Member questioned whether there was any likelihood that the Council would be considering cuts in services and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources confirmed that there were no proposed cuts to front line services in the budget. He added that the Council was awaiting financial certainty for the future and that if the position remained the same at the end of the next financial year some cuts were to be expected as there was a limit to what services the Council could offer within the financial constraints it was under. The Council did not want to be in the position of serving a Section 114 notice.

A representative of Unison stated that he wished to repeat the question that he asked last year in that there was a rumour circulating at the Depot site that the Administration was considering outsourcing some services, including waste and gardening. The Portfolio Holder advised that the Council was investing in the Depot site and that he was keen to insource services where possible and wished to strengthen internal teams but added that some services would always be contracted out. He confirmed that there had been no discussion in terms of outsourcing waste and gardening services and this was endorsed by the Corporate Director of Community. The Corporate Director added that the Corporate Strategic Board were immensely proud of the work being undertaken by Depot staff, particularly during the ongoing pandemic, and was committed to strengthening the in-house service. He offered to discuss this issue with any members of staff that had concerns.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the comments made by the Forum be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

60. Annual Health and Safety Report

Further to the statement made by Unison, Members indicated that it was important that they had sight of health and safety issues but expressed concern that there might be implications in having a discussion on the reports. In response to a Member's question, the Proper Officer advised that it was a matter for Unison to determine whether they wished to take part in the discussion but that, as there were other Unions in attendance, debate could take place if the Panel were so minded.

Members commented that they were happy to meet with the union colleagues but that given the referral to the police, acknowledged that the reports could not be discussed informally. It appeared that the reports had not been discussed at the Health and Safety Forum and officers would need to respond to any inquiry on this matter. The consensus was that it was hoped that the matter could be resolved informally.

Following the discussion, Members indicated that without details of the alleged fraud and therefore the implications/ potential consequences for the Council, discussion on the health and safety items could not take place.

RESOLVED: That the consideration of the report be deferred.

61. Health and Safety Board Update

RESOLVED: That the consideration of the report be deferred.

62. Employees' Side Report

RESOLVED: That the consideration of the report be deferred.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 5.03 pm, closed at 5.50 pm).

(Signed) Davis Searles
Chair