

Lothian Valuation Joint Board

Local Joint Consultative Group

Edinburgh, 3 February 2012

Present:-

City of Edinburgh Council – Councillor Morris

East Lothian Council – Councillor Bell

Midlothian Council – Councillor Beattie (Convener)

West Lothian Council – Councillor Anderson

Representing the Employees

UNISON – James Hood and Allan Rogers

In Attendance – Joan Hewton (Assessor) and Graeme Strachan (Depute Assessor)

1 Revenue Budget 2012/13

The Board's revenue budget for 2012/13 and the Assessor's budget report 2012-2013 were presented. A detailed risk analysis had been undertaken as part of the budget process which had identified a number of potential risks inherent in the process, not all of which could be quantified. The budget reports would be considered by the Board following this meeting. The Treasurer and the Assessor had recommended that the Board approve the retention of the 2010/11 and 2011/12 underspends to meet costs in respect of early release measures.

UNISON had submitted a paper which outlined their understanding of the history of the underspend set aside and its purpose in assisting the Assessor with voluntary early release and redundancy measures. UNISON's paper also included the following motion for consideration by the Joint Consultative Group (JCG):

“That the underspend contribution of the constituent Councils currently held in reserve by Lothian Valuation Joint Board specifically for the purposes of redundancy be returned to the constituent Councils.”

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James Hood and Allan Rogers (UNISON) spoke in support of the motion and highlighted concerns about references in the budget papers to possible staff reductions to make budget savings. They referred to the Board's decision of 4 February 2011 which approved "the retention of the 2010/11 underspend for any required redundancies necessitated by budget constraints". They sought clarification of the purpose of retaining the underspends. It was their view that the sole purpose was to fund staff redundancies. Today's budget papers also referred to increased workloads in certain areas of the service and they questioned why, if this was the case, experienced staff should feel anxious about possible redundancies. UNISON sought an assurance that there were no plans for compulsory redundancies.

The Assessor explained that the retention of the underspends allowed management flexibility to grant requests for voluntary early retirement and also, should the need arise, to adapt to budget constraints. This mirrored similar budgetary arrangements throughout the public sector. The Assessor gave an assurance that there was no question of compulsory redundancy measures being implemented without prior consultation with the full Board and this would only occur after all other avenues had been exhausted.

The Board's Treasurer concurred that it was financially prudent to maintain the flexibility to fund voluntary retirement arrangements for those wishing to take up the option. Should the overspends be returned, the Board may find itself in the position of seeking additional funding from constituent Councils whose budgets had already been set.

Jim Hood and Allan Rogers asked again, in light of the wording of the decision of 4 February 2011, if there were plans for compulsory redundancies. The employer's side emphasised that there was no question of the underspend being retained other than for VERA (Voluntary Early Retirement Arrangements). Compulsory redundancy would not be considered without prior consultation with, and approval of, the full Board.

The elected members of the JCG, having considered the views expressed by UNISON and the management side in private, invited both parties back to hear a summary of their deliberations.

The Convener stressed that the elected members recognised the significance of the wording in the Board's decision of 4 February 2011 and apologised for any potential for confusion that may have arisen. The Board's intention in approving the retention of the underspend had been to allow management flexibility to respond to staff requests for early retirement and not an opportunity for redundancy.

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Further, UNISON was assured that compulsory redundancy measures would only be invoked as a last resort and only considered following consultation with the full Board once all other avenues had been examined and exhausted. An apology was offered to the staff side for the confusion caused by the wording of the Board's decision.

Decision

- 1) To note the submission by UNISON and the reports by the Treasurer and Assessor.
- 2) To recommend that the views expressed at the Joint Consultative Group be noted by the Board.

(References – submission by UNISON, reports by the Treasurer and the Assessor, submitted.)