

Knox Academy Parent School Partnership
Knox Academy
Haddington
EH41 3HA

30th November 2009

David Spilsbury
Head of Corporate Finance
East Lothian Council
John Muir House
Haddington
EH41 3HA

Dear Mr Spilsbury

**YOU PAY...NOW HAVE YOUR SAY
RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION**

I am writing as Chairman of Knox Academy Parent School Partnership. I am pleased to respond to the Council's 2010-13 budget consultation and contribute the following views and advice as compiled by school Partnership members. It complements responses to be lodged by individual parents, East Lothian Parent Councils and ELCAPM.

This letter is timed to meet your consultation closing date of 04 December 2009.

We note that while last year's consultation paper posed five distinct questions, this year's document simply postulates a series of more general questions and answers. There are a number of sections in the document where the financial data simply fails to add up. The consultation document offers insufficient information on which to base a fully comprehensive response. My response is therefore couched in similarly strategic terms.

While recognising that all areas of Council spend are under pressure, Knox Academy Parent School Partnership strongly submit that:

1. The Council's commitment to education, as set out in the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) and its statement that Educational attainment and ensuring that all children have the best start in life underpins the achievement of all our priorities must be held firm.
2. Any reduction in schools' budgets, whether for staff or support needs, will compromise this commitment, the standards of education that have been achieved over recent years (but which could still be further improved) and the requirement upon the Authority to deliver the new Curriculum for Excellence.
3. The current level of spending on the Education and Children Services Budget, i.e. the proportion of total Council expenditure allocated to education, must therefore at least be maintained.

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4. Suggestions that class sizes should be revised upwards would be a retrograde step and contrary to earlier commitments in respect of maths and English.
5. Any proposals for schools' management via a Trust or Trusts needs to be supported by some outline costs, methods and benefits before it can begin to be evaluated. At present it remains impossible to identify what financial or other advantages it might offer.

Furthermore Knox Academy Parent School Partnership notes that the SOA population projections for East Lothian between 2006 and 2031 show a growth of around 21.2%. We understand that the primary school roll is set to rise by 8% over the next 3 years. Thus the budget requirement for education will clearly continue to rise.

The Knox Academy Parent School Partnership also notes the impending high level 'Clyde Valley Review' undertaken by Sir John Arbuthnott, which trailed in the press and media earlier this week. The report focuses on the potential for shared services activities and collaboration and makes recommendations on key opportunities that the authority could pursue, moving away from the traditional 'salami slicing' of budgets by traditionally risk adverse authorities.

The report aims to deliver on a number of objectives, including prioritisation of services most likely to deliver improved services and savings. The report recommends further involvement of Education Services in the core shared services agenda, particularly on social transport, asset management and supply teaching. It is the view of Knox Academy Parent School Partnership that East Lothian Council could usefully absorb the findings of this report and collaborate with adjoining authorities to prepare a similar East of Scotland road map for delivery of services.

We do of course appreciate that the current economic climate requires tough decisions to be made. But myopic 'salami slicing' of budgets, if that is what is being proposed, will not improve services and will lead to long-term damage. The education of our children is a long term investment which the Knox Academy Parent School Partnership urges you to continue to promote and ensure that there will be no holes in a generation of East Lothian youngsters' learning.

Yours sincerely

Tim Holden

For Knox Academy Parent School Partnership