

**Minute of Special Meeting**  
**ELAPCM/ Director of Education and Children's Services**  
**John Muir House**  
**Tuesday 8 December 2009**

Those in attendance

Don Ledingham – Director of Education and Children's Services  
Liz Woodsend – Kings Meadow PC  
David Wilkie – Campie PC  
Andy Mackay – Haddington Infant School PC  
Lynne Turnbull - Law Primary PC  
Nicola Semple - Athlestaneford PC  
Ian Smith – Knox Academy PSP  
Fiona Mackenzie – Knox Academy PSP

Introduction

1. Don Ledingham (DL) thanked the Parent Group (PG) for attending this special meeting at such short notice.

Purpose of the meeting

2. DL set out the purpose of the meeting which was, in the short term to provide an update. He acknowledged the series of questions put to him before the meeting, (Annex A to the minutes), whilst recognising parents were anxious to have more information.

Background.

3. DL noted he is scheduled to attend cluster meetings to provide updates and answer questions including the ELCAPM meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> February which co-incides with an ELC budget setting meeting. The PG opined the issues could be divided into three key areas:

- Consultation
- Budgets and cuts
- Longer term

4. DL provided background to the consultation exercise. In October, Departments were asked for a list of possible savings. DL listed what was necessary to achieve 'stand still'. The Administration asked for a note of options, a slightly 'out of kilter' approach to the Council's own views. A list comprising savings/associated risks/timescale to implementation has been prepared. However implementation will have real implications within the Council and DL will require to comply with due process, including consulting with staff before details could be released. DL noted standstill requires 12% savings over 3 years or £1.5 m over a £95m budget, a total of £4.5m. DL explained that each % equates to £1m, and the actual savings of 12% will more accurately be £1.2m or £3.6m. DL further noted standstill will cost £4.2m, of which £1.14m (will be spent on teachers salaries – check this)

5. DL explained the position re cuts as highlighted in the consultation document. He further noted as of last week a 3% increase in (budget allocation) was announced.

6. The PG asked how the uplift is distributed over the service. DL responded this was with a view to how best to deliver local authority administrative priorities and Central Government education policies, (Free school meals, minimum class sizes in p1-p3). But delivery of the objectives would impede standstill and increase the savings required, bringing it closer to £6m. Costs would increase around 3%, or another £3m.

7. DL noted a meeting is scheduled for W/C 14 December during which the Administration may decide on priorities ( post meeting note, Central Government has announced Local Authorities will not be held to manifesto commitments re class sizes and the Administration may re-evaluate their own position) .

8. The PG asked if Education receives a 3% share of the budget and do nothing to implement Central Gov policies will savings of 1.5 % be required, or will a cut in budgets be implemented. DL noted until the meeting next week it is not possible to state what may or may not happen.

9. The PG asked whether DL was hopeful of a good outcome. DL reassured the PG that Education was a key priority and advised parents he has been asked to meet the Education Minister next week. The parent group asked if any other head teachers would join DL in meeting the Education Minister and DL advised no other HT's will be attending.

10. The PG noted the reference by DL to £1.2 and £1.5 and asked why the figures varied. DL advised he was painting the worst possible scenario and budgeting accordingly. While a 12% saving over the next 3 years was required, the £1.5 p.a. would indicate a budget cut of £4.5 is planned while a cut of £3.6 is required.

11. DL noted he is looking at a roadmap for delivery of education over the medium to longer term. New ways of delivering education to meet the new challenges are required. DL advised he has been asked to reduce costs within his Department. DL advised he would hope to be in a position to share his education roadmap with parents in February. But given the implications for his Department there is an amount of internal consultation required.

12. DL noted he is considering appointing an external consultation to draft this education roadmap. While recognising the cost implications it will help speed up the process and has the attraction of producing unbiased recommendations. The PG asked what skills and knowledge external consultants could bring to the process and DL advised it was partly because of a lack of resources within his own department and the need to offer transparency to any possible solutions. External consultants offered a more transparent approach than undertaking the work in house.

13. The PG noted the vague numbers in the consultation document and asked DL whether there are any more concrete figures. DL responded there were no other figures.

14. The PG noted the timetable for putting together the spending Choices document and opined that two weeks seemed out of proportion with the significance of the exercise. Whilst the figures may be accurate the document did not provide evidence of detailed thinking. DL noted there is detailed thinking behind the figures, a moratorium on staff exists.

15. The PG asked if all the proposals were implemented would savings still be required. DL replied that yes, savings would still be required. The PG asked whether there was any other option. Would a detailed menu of proposed cuts be made available? DL replied this would only happen once the budget setting process was complete. This is scheduled for the 9 February. DL advised he is limited on the options he can offer.

16. The meeting moved to the questions contained in Annex A, the response from DL is noted to each question. DL suggested a slight revision to the statement (remove the 96% and replace with 'a substantial') The PG asked where money for the consultants would come from. DL replied the £1m was held in a Charge Fund for this purpose.

17. Discussion moved to the question of Trusts. The PG noted this issue seemed to rise from nowhere. DL replied he has considered this for the past three years, as evidenced by his learning blog. He is developing a paper at the moment, holding a conference in March with a view to a consultation exercise in December 2010. He noted the difference between Community schools and Trusts. The latter have the ability to receive rates relief amounting to £1.9m per annum over three years. He noted it was possible to have Community based schools without Trusts.

18. The meeting ended at 6:15 pm with DL thanking the PG again for attending at such short notice. The PG thanked DL for the opportunity to discuss matters and advised they would take findings from the meeting to their respective PC's and ELAPCM.

## ANNEX A – QUESTIONS AND STATEMENT

### **"Budget Consultation**

- What early outcomes are there from the recently concluded consultation process?

The responses are being analysed and early findings are due to be reported on Thursday 17 December.

- What are the timescales for the various proposed methods for reducing the education budget?

The Council will set their budget on 9 February 2010.

#### 1. **Detailed items**

- What are the current plans for shared school Heads around the county?

While there is an absolute commitment to protect rural schools given the current climate nothing can be ruled out? It is certain teaching Heads will become the norm. Parents may need to think if Heads are to be non teaching they may have to be shared. A paper covering shared heads will be prepared by March.

- What is the current thinking and plans for transferring schools to the control of trusts?

It is likely independent consultants will be appointed to draft a roadmap for education over the next 3-6 years. Conference to be held in March and working group to be set up. Consultation in December 2010.

- Can the future operation of rural schools be guaranteed in the medium term (5 years)?

The Commitment to rural schools is absolute. But nothing can be ruled out.

## 2. **Statement**

The East Lothian Association of Parent Council Members welcomed the opportunity to engage with East Lothian Education department when it met with Don Ledingham, Director of Children's Services and Education. This is both a worrying and a potentially exciting time for education in Scotland, particularly for East Lothian. Never before has there been such a tight financial squeeze on resources, demanding new and innovative solutions that deliver a more efficient and effective education system for the young people of East Lothian.

That there is the prospect of further budget cuts to education in East Lothian demands careful thought on how it is to be achieved; it will require a close working relationship with parents and teachers; and it will require a clear agenda and timetable for progress. It is recognised that a substantial proportion of the education budget is spent on teachers and any further chipping away will make efficient delivery extremely difficult and will damage the education of our children and their futures.

ELAPCM will continue to work with the department of education and anticipate that our next meeting will be in January 2010 when more details of the proposed budget are known."