

**JGHS Council – Report from Chair, Ann Henderson
2nd February 2010.**

City of Edinburgh Budget 2010-2013

Parent councils were invited to attend a presentation from Council officials, on Wednesday 16th December 2009. The meeting was well attended, with primary, secondary and special school reps all in attendance. The meeting was chaired by Councillor Marlyne Maclaren, Gillian Tee Director of Children and Families, Mike Rosendale Head of Service Schools and Community Services, and David Robertson, Resources Manager Children and Families also on attendance. The presentation outlined proposals under consideration for the next three years, although the discussion concentrated on the first budget year, with Children and Families department seeking to save £13.7m. Parents sought clarification on many points, including: How thorough was public scrutiny of CEC budget across all departments, and was sufficient priority really being given to education?; concern over the impact on Devolved School Management budgets, when the local authority transferred costs for water and waste disposal half way through the 2009-10 financial year; concerns that there had not been full examination of all community use options for school buildings; reductions in learning assistants, removal of foreign language assistants, removing specialist music and art teaching input from early primary years, and sharing or reducing school librarian service had all be outlined as possible centrally imposed budget reductions- concern over the impact on children's education and opportunities, but also questions over removal of so many resources from the Head Teacher and local school control. Teacher numbers across the city also likely to reduce. JGHS Council had already been advised that the Secondary Head Teachers in Edinburgh considered savings could not be made on the scale requested, without impact on teaching numbers and on options and support for the pupils.

As this was the first time that most Parent reps had seen the proposals, they were to be fed back to the wider parent bodies in all schools. The presentation and City Council notes of the meeting were posted on the JGHS Council website, and an email sent round to our distribution list. Councillors have been written to, and lobbied by, parents.

On Thursday 17th December, the full Edinburgh City Council meeting confirmed its decision to close four primary schools, despite considerable parent and community opposition. (This was not contained in the 2010 budget options – it followed from previous financial year's projections)

The City Council arranged a follow up meeting for Monday 25th January, to take feedback from parent reps. Additional information was made available regarding the whole Children and Families Budget. The official's presentation placed more emphasis on centrally managed cutbacks, but concerns were expressed again

that this undermined local decision making, and parental involvement. Parent reps questioned the local authority's ability to implement Curriculum for Excellence whilst proposing to cut back on so many staff, across different jobs. Protecting 'front line services' was strongly argued. Concern expressed over 'invisible' cuts which could impact on life chances for vulnerable families. A number of parent reps are still expressing concern that there has not been a wider view taken across Edinburgh Council and all departments, exploring impact and unintended consequences? In addition, reps are repeatedly questioning the City council's contract with BT, ORACLE provision, and the current procurement processes which do not seem to give best value. A number of examples were given where a local School could have sourced a service or product considerably cheaper. Whilst David Robertson indicated that the Procurement process is complex and contracts have to be tightly managed, he also advised the meeting to contact the Head of Procurement services, Grahame Hastie, direct, if they had alternative services and providers in mind. The meeting also considered longer term budget issues, and Councillor MacLaren gave an assurance that parents would be involved far earlier in the process for the next two years. (This raises some questions about representation and wider parent consultation, to be discussed at JGHS further)

Cluster Group

On Wednesday 13th January, we hosted a meeting for Parent Council Chairs and Head Teachers of the schools in our 'cluster'. We invited all fourteen local authority councillors who represent wards which overlap with the JGHS catchment area. (Note that with Tollcross and the Gaelic Unit catchment, families actually come from right across the city) Councillors who attended: Marlyne MacLaren, Jim Lowrie, Gordon Buchan, Paul Godzik, and Alison Johnstone. Apologies were received from most of the others. The meeting gave us all an opportunity to outline the concerns over the impact on education in Edinburgh, with some local school input, and covered all the political parties, except the SNP who offered alternative meeting times. (not followed up yet)

Next actions?

The elected members are considering the reports from officials, lobbying is continuing, and the opposition groups are finalizing alternative budget proposals. The formal Budget setting meeting will be on Thursday 11th February. On **Tuesday 9th February**, parents from Bruntsfield Primary School have taken the initiative in calling a **Carnival event outside the City Chambers on the High Street 4.15pm – 4.45pm**, to celebrate the excellent work that our schools and pupils do. This is receiving wide support from other schools, staff, students and parents, so do please add your voice if you can. Further details on our website. To assist with organization, drop us a note (council@jghs.org.uk) if you intend to go along – advance numbers have been requested, if possible.