The Committee would like to hear your views on some or all of the following specific questions (please provide any other information you think would be relevant to the Committee’s work)—

(Q1) Given recent trends in local authorities’ spending on schools, what are likely to be the main pressures on education budgets in financial year 2015-16? Will there be any impacts on pupils and families; attainment; teacher numbers; the length and scheduling of the school week; teachers’ terms and conditions; developing and strengthening links between schools, colleges and employers; etc?

The main areas of budget pressures include:

- Growth in pupil numbers and restriction in class sizes which brings both capital and revenue budget pressures.

- Demands as a result of growth in ASN, the implementation of the Inclusion agenda / ASL Act are increasing and are unfunded nationally.

- Children and Young People’s legislation - issues around adequacy of funding brings challenges e.g. offer of a flexible 600hrs provision someway off, two year olds who family circumstances meet free school meals criteria.

- Future long term maintenance of the fabric of school buildings after investment in refurbishment or rebuild initiatives. It is challenging to find adequate lifecycle maintenance funding given the financial situation.

- Running costs of school buildings after investment in refurbishment and rebuild initiatives e.g. increased property rates.

- Energy prices.

- Lack of acknowledgement of inflationary pressures across many budget lines means that local authorities are having to manage this. This includes changes to rates poundage.

- Gaelic funding has been reducing in recent years with the suggestion this will continue yet the national priority remains.

- Increasing costs passed on from the SQA for new national qualifications.

- GIRFEC - Reduction in programmes for supporting children from the most disadvantaged groups runs contradictory to GIRFEC but savings difficult to achieve in some other areas of education given the statutory nature of functions within schools.

- The ability to continue to maintain teacher numbers and continue to make savings in the Education budget will not be achievable going forward.
(Q2) How should schools, local authorities and the Scottish Government be preparing to deal with these spending pressures?

Within South Lanarkshire Council, Education has received priority in terms of financial investment e.g. commitment to school building modernisation, and a proportionately lower level of savings than other areas of the Council. Education continues to review options for efficiency, and consider areas outwith statutory obligations. Service reviews are part of the Council process and consider the model and level of service delivery and also the targeting of limited financial resources. However some education service areas have seen a reduction in the level of provision available in recent years and we may require to consider this further in future years given the financial challenges.

The Scottish Government should acknowledge that recent changes in legislation e.g. ASN has brought with it significant demand, and that local authorities are required to meet these demands with a lack of additional funding. More dialogue on identifying priorities and of competing priorities is required. A review of teacher national agreements is essential as the majority of education costs lie in staffing.

Schools are always aware of best value, and make good use of sourcing external funding and also school fundraising where appropriate.

(Q3) Will the allocation to be provided via the 2015-16 Draft Budget be sufficient to enable local authorities to provide a quality education; meet all their statutory obligations in relation to schools; and deliver the Scottish Government’s national educational priorities?

Given the level of savings applied over the years, it is becoming increasingly difficult to continue to achieve local and national priorities e.g. there is still concern over the level of funding being made available to meet legislative changes in respect of early years provision. In addition, the commitment to protecting teacher numbers causes difficulties e.g. in implementing efficiency savings which do not impact on priorities such as more efficient primary class configurations. ASN growth in demand has been an increasing financial pressure for which no specific financial resources have been received. Another issue can be that even although a Council’s pupil population may increase, if this is at a lower rate than other Councils, then you will receive less grant.

(Q4) The Scottish Government’s national performance framework (NPF) “provides a strategic direction for policy making in the public sector, and provides a clear direction to move to outcomes-based policy making”. How has the NPF helped the Scottish Government and education authorities move towards ‘outcomes-based policy making’ in
relation to schools?
The NPF provides some clarity for schools and education authorities in moving towards an outcomes-based policy making approach in relation to schools. The direct link between the NPF and HMIe school inspection model has helped education authorities and schools concentrate their policy on an outcomes based approach. The reporting of the inspection evaluations of ‘Improvements in Performance’, ‘Learners’ Experiences’ and ‘Meeting Learning Needs’ within the NPF ensures continued focus and direction. The limitation of this approach can mean that there is more emphasis placed on a narrower range of exam based outcomes, such as SQA exam and PISA results, rather than the wider development of the four capacities within Curriculum for Excellence. The implementation of the new National Qualifications and recognition of the wider achievement of pupils within the Senior Phase Benchmarking Tool may help address this issue.

(Q5) How do the Scottish Government and local authorities ensure that funding for schools is spent in a way that best delivers value for money?

Within the Council, devolved management to schools allows flexible spending including carry forward into future years.

Certain spends are retained centrally to ensure that efficiencies and equality is achieved across education e.g. ICT core level of provision, central co-ordination of school transport, efficient and equal primary class configuration exercise, and fair distribution of school support assistant time after consideration to priority need.

Work is undertaken to secure contracts that meet service requirements while offering value for money e.g. procurement contracts at national and local levels.

Creation of the Education Plan, individual Service Plans and School Improvement Plans are in place.

At school level there is also some involvement with teachers and parents.

(Q6) How are pupils, parents, teachers, and communities able to contribute to discussions on
- the allocations that should be set out in the draft budget;
- how these allocations should be spent on schools?

Each school has an improvement plan and then uses the resources available, employees and school running costs budgets, to achieve the aims set for the year. All teachers within a school participate in the development and implementation of the plan. Parent Councils are also engaged in this process. Aspects of budgets can be devolved to teachers e.g. within faculties or where they may be leading on a certain piece of work.

Pupil Councils can raise issues with school management which they feel are important to them, which can potentially shape decisions taken within school. Pupil Councils can also be
allocated some funding if they are undertaking a specific project connected with the life of the school.

(Q7) How will the draft budget advance the preventative spending agenda in relation to school spending?
Commitment to fully fund priorities such as free school meals P1-P3, and aspects of the Children’s and Young People (Scotland) Act is welcomed however ongoing discussions continue around identifying that these areas are indeed fully funded.

When and whether this will impact on school spending is something that cannot be identified clearly at this time and work to clarify what measures we should use to track preventative spend achievement is ongoing.