

toughchoices

ahead for West Lothian

A Bulletin two-page special - The financial crisis and reductions in funding will result in difficult decisions for all public sector bodies in the UK.

Starting in March this year, a series of special features were included in Bulletin, that highlight the scale of the financial problems and the choices that will have to be made in order that the council delivers a balanced budget. The series is called 'Tough Choices ahead for West Lothian'.

In the second part of series, this two-page special looks at the main challenges that lie ahead and lets you know how the consultation process between the council, community groups and residents is progressing.



What you need to know

- 1 Although exact figures are still to be confirmed, West Lothian Council may face an unprecedented funding gap of £45 million over the three year period 2011 to 2014.
- 2 The council is operating from a sound financial position and has a balanced budget for 2010/11. This is a good solid base to work from.
- 3 The council has been planning for an uncertain future and wants West Lothian's residents to know what options are available.
- 4 Future budget changes are not yet known. However, COSLA (the association which represents all Scottish local authorities) has recommended that councils should plan on the basis of a 12 per cent real terms reduction in grant funding in the three years to 2013/14.
- 5 The national budget reductions will severely hamper the council's short, medium and long-term plans, and drastically constrain what the council can spend on local services.
- 6 The council is making significant efficiency savings but the reality is this will not be enough to close the gap.
- 7 Major service changes are needed and they will affect all services in West Lothian.

Key areas for West Lothian Council:



1 An increased focus on the Modernisation and Business Change programme

We have undertaken a review of all spending across the council.

The council is looking to identify appropriate work that might benefit from a fresh approach. The move to the Civic Centre has opened up opportunities to develop new ways of working and a series of modern and innovative ways of working will be implemented this year. For example, a review to look at ways of modernising administration and clerical services in the Civic Centre is currently underway.

2 Our Life Stages programme

Our Life Stages programme is innovative in its approach to target resources where they have most impact.

West Lothian is leading the way with this approach which focuses on shifting resources to prevention and helping people most at risk of not reaching their full potential. The council, police, health and voluntary sector are among those involved in making sure changes implemented now will have long-term benefits for communities across West Lothian.

3 Our future strategy

The council has always faced difficult issues proactively and delivered innovative solutions.

Our future strategy is to retain what we do best and to focus our reduced resources on delivering core priorities. We plan to do this by:

- Maximising savings through innovative approaches to service provision.
- Reducing, or discontinuing, services that are not cost effective or only make a limited contribution to our desired outcomes.
- Actively pursuing integrated partnership working and the sharing of service provision with other local authorities.
- Managing and controlling growth of our expenditure.
- Maximising the contribution of the voluntary sector. Within our current proposals, efficiency measures in the council equate to over half of the total we need to save (56%). The remaining percentage has been split between new or increased charges or removal of subsidies (20%) and changes to service provision (24%).

A snapshot of the Modernisation and Business Change programme:



Workforce planning: Over the course of the three years 2011 – 2014 we may have to reduce the number of staff working for the council by approximately 1,000.

Flexible working: Our flexible working scheme - Worksmart West Lothian - is currently being piloted in various services across this council.

Management: The council will also introduce a leaner management structure that aims to reduce senior management posts by approximately 25%.

Administration: Recent advances mean that pooling administrative and clerical resource is now feasible.

Buildings: Our property strategy has a challenging target of attempting to reduce the number of council offices from 43 to 17.

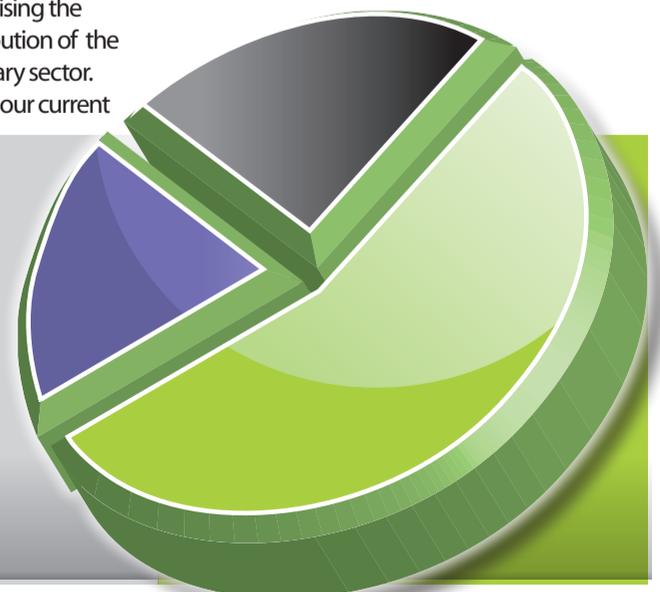
Shared services: Sharing services is about taking a fresh look at how we deliver our services, finding efficiency savings and identifying where these savings could be used to improve frontline services.

Procurement: A full review of all of the council's procurement activity is being undertaken.

Resources: Further efficiencies will be sought from a review of our IT platforms, software and support contracts.

Partnership working: The move to the Civic Centre has opened up opportunities for reviewing how we work across our services and with our other partners in the public sector.

- Service changes
£10.9 million, 24%
- Efficiencies
£25.3 million, 56%
- Charges/subsidies
£8.8 million, 20%





It is your future, help shape it

The consultation so far...

Around 70 people from across West Lothian attended the first consultation on the council's contingency planning strategy in April. Following introductions by Peter Johnston and Alex Linkston, and presentations by each of the Executive Councillors on their remit, there was a lively debate with many community representatives giving their views.



Council Leader Peter Johnston said:

"The public meeting focused on the officer-led contingency proposals to make budget savings of £45 million by 2014. West Lothian Council's Chief Executive Alex Linkston and I thought that the turnout was excellent and the participation at the meeting was very insightful. The council has a balanced budget for this year 2010/11 and this means that we have this time to plan for a 12 per cent real terms reduction in

grant funding in the years 2011/14.

"It is important during this process to remember that even if the reductions in funding are on the scale that

The aim of this consultation is to ensure that we prioritise the services that are most important to you and our communities.

is being planned for, West Lothian Council will still have a significant budget of £370 million.

"Senior officers have developed proposals for saving money which are based on the remits of our nine Policy, Development and Scrutiny Panels (PDSPs). The nine sets of proposals are presented in a pack.

"The packs have already been issued to community representatives and groups. They are also available at CIS centres and libraries.

"Our aim is to be open and honest about the proposals and to provide you with all of the information. Downloadable versions of these packs are also available on the council's website: westlothian.gov.uk/change

"We would urge you to write back to us with your feedback by 30 June. Your input is vital. Written submissions will be considered as part of our planning process which will take place over the summer.

"Over the summer the feedback we receive from members of the public and community groups will be gathered and reports written for the council's Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels (PDSPs)."

The next step:



Chief Executive Alex Linkston said:

"There is no doubt that with a possible £45 million shortfall we have hard decisions to make. Given the huge cutbacks it is important that we plan ahead and we would encourage groups and individuals to provide their feedback on the proposals.

"We have a difficult task ahead and tough choices have to be

made. West Lothian has a strong culture of facing issues proactively and I assure you that we will remain focused on providing excellent core council services through these uncertain times.

"We are asking community groups and our citizens to provide written feedback by 30 June. Then we will have a period over the summer to analyse the feedback.

"Officers will prepare reports for discussion and consideration at the council's Policy, Development and Scrutiny Panels. These are public meetings and members of the public are welcome to attend. No decisions will be taken until after 30 November.

"We look forward to seeing your comments over the coming month."

What are Policy, Development and Scrutiny Panels (PDSPs)?

Like most council meetings PDSPs are open to the public. Each PDSP represents one of the council's main areas such as the environment, education, health and care, social policy, and services for the community.

PDSPs are made up of groups of councillors who develop new policies for the council, or review existing policies to see if changes are needed.

Each panel can invite community representatives, stakeholders and community groups to participate in discussions.



Alison Kerr of Blackburn Community Council and Danny Mullen, of the Five Sisters Housing Tenants Network, looked over one of the packs before it was distributed.

Alison explained: "From the public meeting in April, we knew that there was going to be a lot of detail in the packs and suggested that we could look over them to try to help make them as user friendly as

possible. Of course there is a lot of financial information and detail to take in. We can see that reducing the council budget by £45 million is going to be hard, but we all need to be constructively involved."

Danny added: "Our advice is to take a look at the information consider what your priorities are and let the council know before the deadline. Your views can't be considered if you don't take part."

How to have your say by 30 June

If you have any suggestions you can send your comments and ideas to Change Comments, West Lothian Council, West Lothian Civic Centre, Howden South Road, Livingston, EH54 6FF or email: change@westlothian.gov.uk Residents can also complete an online feedback form and send it to us. You can get more information by visiting westlothian.gov.uk/change

