Your Council Your Say

Budget consultation

West Lothian Council continues to face constrained funding and substantial cost increases. Along with the West Lothian community, we will have to make hard decisions about local services.

We understand that residents and businesses are also experiencing difficulties and that it is a challenging time for everyone.

We want to work with you – our community and partners – as we strive to become more sustainable, address the funding challenges and meet the needs of our communities.

Please take the time to tell us your views on the proposals suggested by council officers as set out in this consultation.
Your feedback will influence future decisions.

Why does the council need to save money?

Chronic Government Underfunding

The amount of funding we receive from the Scottish Government is insufficient to pay for the cost of delivering council services.

Although the Council has received increased funding from the Scottish Government, and has increased Council Tax, this is not enough to pay for the increased demand for some services, and the increased costs of providing services.

The funding gap is growing.

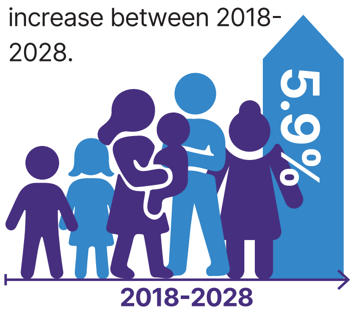
Since 2007 the council has had to deliver over £184 million of cuts to local services because funding provided to us is insufficient to meet increasing costs.

The Council is committed to doing the very best we can for West Lothian residents, but like all councils in Scotland, costs will rise faster than our funding over the next two years.

There is a projected funding gap of £23 million over the next two years.

Population Growth

Overall, West Lothian's population is growing faster than the Scottish average, with a projected 5.9% increase between 2018-2028.



However, West Lothian is growing and getting older. The area will see a 44% rise in people of pensionable age over the next 25 years- twice the Scottish average.

In contrast, the number of babies born in Scotland fell to a record low last year and birth rates have been falling for years. In West Lothian, the number of births registered has decreased by just over 18% over the past 20 years.

Demand for nursery and primary school places is expected to fall due to declining births, particularly in areas with small amounts of new build homes.

This matters for the council because around 80% of its budget is spent on health, social care, and education, and services must meet these changing demands.

Inflation

Inflation has affected the cost of providing services, as everything the Council has to pay for has become more expensive.

Funding

Councils receive funding from the Scottish Government to deliver particular policies but this is 'ring-fenced' meaning that the money cannot be spent on anything else. Councils have less control over their budgets, and there is less to spend on other services.

75% of our budget is now 'ring-fenced' for national policies

Legally, councils must balance their budget and ensure that the amount of funding we receive is equal to what we spend.

Unless Scottish Government funding increases significantly, there will be a continued need to make more cuts and the Council will have to make some difficult decisions about what services we can deliver.

As our budget decisions get harder, it is more important than ever to know what residents think about the tough choices we need to make.

The consultation is open until Sunday 16 November 2025.
You can complete the form online by going to:

- yoursay.westlothian.gov.uk
- or by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.

Alternatively complete and return your paper copy (turn to page 12 for details).

Doing nothing is not an option

Demand for services has grown much faster than the funding we receive to provide them. This is not sustainable.

Legally we must balance our budget – which means the amount we spend on services must be equal to the funding we receive.

Unless we are given sufficient levels of funding from the Scottish Government, further significant changes to local services are going to be necessary.

Some services will look very different in future and others may cease altogether.

Changing local services

In practice, what does this mean?

More details are included in the pages ahead however here is a snapshot of the likely spending reductions that may be necessary:

- The Council may own and operate fewer facilities. Maintaining fewer facilities will maximise the amount of funding available for other key services, but it may require you to access services in new ways or at different locations and times.
- The amount you pay in Council Tax and fees and charges could rise.
- You may notice changes to your services. This will include some positive changes, such as more efficient and accessible services.
- We may employ fewer staff.
- We may have to reduce spending on non-statutory services (which we receive no funding for or are not legally required to provide) which will allow us to invest the funding we do have to better maintain the quality of statutory services (those we have to provide by law).
- Some of the services we currently provide may reduce or stop entirely.
- In order to provide services for the sections of the population which are growing, the Council may need to look at savings in services for the parts of the population in areas where decline is forecast, for example, in services for children and young people.

There are no easy decisions and we will be guided by your views.

Council officers have identified five main ways in which we can balance the council's budget, become more sustainable and which would still allow us to deliver core services in future.

It is important to stress that the proposals set out in the consultation are not an agreed list of measures which the Council has agreed to implement, but rather an illustration of action as suggested by council officers that could be taken under each theme. No decisions have been made at this stage. We welcome your feedback on these proposals over the next few pages.

1 Increasing Efficiency and Developing New Ways of Working

2 Generating Income

3 Reducing the Number of Council Facilities

4 Responding to Demographic Change

5 Reducing Spending on Non-Statutory Services

Further information is set out on the next pages and we are seeking your views on the way they could be taken forward.

your views matter

Please provide your comments on the proposed budget saving measures.

1 Increasing Efficiency and Developing New Ways of Working

Council services are designed to meet customer needs in a cost-effective way, but we will continue to look for new ways to reduce costs and reduce duplication. Overall, we will look at opportunities to make all services more efficient, including by new ways of working and reductions in council facilities.

We will also continue to use technology and new digital solutions to improve customer service, meet growing customer demand and drive down operating costs, building on the successful work already done to modernise services, improve access and increase efficiency. This will allow the Council to continue to provide some services at a lower cost, continuing with our 'digital first' approach. This means the Council will move to a default of online 24/7 access to key Council services, with access to in-person support being provided only in some services, where appropriate. Some options we intend to explore further include:

1a Introducing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve customer service and to provide the Council with enhanced systems to better understand service needs and performance.
(Saving approximately £390,000).

1b Ensuring that the Council has the right number of managers and staff to deliver its services as part of an organisational review. Integration of some services and removing and not recruiting to some vacancies.
(Saving approximately £940,000)

1c Reviewing how learning is delivered across the primary school day. Recognising different approaches to learning enhance children's experiences and wellbeing, consideration could be given to supervised activities and learning opportunities as well as breaks across the school day for play and learning. In addition, timetabling across all secondary schools in West Lothian would be reviewed to ensure consistency.
(Saving approximately £5.4 million)

1d Increasing salary savings by extending the employee benefit salary sacrifice scheme.
(Saving approximately £280,000)

1e Reviewing the range of vehicles used for school transport and use of smaller vehicles where possible.
(Saving approximately £220,000)

1f Reviewing contracts for commissioned care services within Children's Services, to align with targeted identified need.
(Saving approximately £200,000)

1g Reviewing contracts for goods and services purchased. For example, reducing the costs of maintaining the council's fleet of vehicles required to deliver front line services.
(Saving approximately £160,000)

1h Reviewing the council's mail service and utilising a digital alternative, where appropriate.
(Saving approximately £140,000)

1i Introducing a facility to reduce waste disposal costs and the need to use a contractor.
(Saving approximately £130,000)

1j Bringing together teams to focus on Transformation and Business Support.
(Saving approximately £80,000)

1k Stop using one-use water cartons in schools and replacing with a reusable bottle, which is also more environmentally friendly.
(Saving approximately £50,000)

Do you agree that the Council should look for more efficient ways of working? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, do you have any suggestions on how we should do this?

If no, can you suggest any alternative ways to make savings?

Complete the Budget Consultation online
West Lothian residents are encouraged to complete the form online by going to yoursay.westlothian.gov.uk or by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.

Your Council Your Say

Your Council **Your Say**

2 Generating Income

West Lothian Council currently set the lowest level of charging and fees for some services, per head of the population in Scotland.

There are areas in which we could look to generate more income to put towards funding for key services. This may include:

2a Increasing current fees and charges, and introducing new fees and charges.
(Income to be determined)

2b Bringing in car parking charges at council-owned car parks.
(Income to be determined)

2c Increasing the use of advertising on council-owned property and facilities, for example roadside and bus shelter advertising, which could generate in excess of £100,000.

2d Increasing the charge or outsourcing services such as pest control, to make sure the income received covers the full cost of delivering the service.
(Saving approximately £30,000)

The Scottish Government have recently granted powers to councils to allow them to introduce a local Visitor Levy. In West Lothian, this could potentially generate funds of between £350,000 to £500,000 per annum for tourism projects.

The Scottish Government also allows councils to look at a Workplace Parking Levy, which is a charge on employers in the area for providing parking spaces. This could generate up to £2 million of income in West Lothian. The Levy aims to reduce congestion and encourage alternative transportation. This is not something the Council is actively looking at in the immediate term.

Do you agree that the Council should look for opportunities to generate income, including by raising fees and charges? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

If yes, do you have any suggestions on how we should do this?

If no, can you suggest any alternative ways to make savings?

3 Reducing the Number of Council Facilities

We have reduced the number of council owned facilities and buildings significantly over recent years in an effort to reduce costs and protect services.

The Council will continue to provide services but with fewer buildings and facilities. This will allow us to spend money on maintaining services, rather than maintaining buildings.

We will also explore ways of maintaining access to services in ways which require fewer facilities. This could include:

3a A review of leisure, arts and cultural facilities ***(Saving approximately £390,000)***

3b Increasing our digital library stock to meet the increasing demand for online library services, enhancing the library services available at our Partnership Centres and reduce the number of standalone library facilities.
(Saving approximately £150,000)

3c Closing the four remaining automated public toilets at Livingston, Linlithgow, Bathgate and Broxburn, where alternative toilet facilities are available at Partnership Centres and other premises.
(Saving approximately £160,000)

3d Continuing to support groups in the delivery of community asset transfer, where the ownership and operation of Council buildings and facilities are transferred to community groups to deliver the services they choose.
(Saving to be determined).

Do you agree that the Council should reduce the number of facilities and buildings to help focus spending on maintaining key services? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

If yes, do you have any suggestions on how we should do this?

If no, can you suggest any alternative ways to make savings?

Complete the Budget Consultation online
West Lothian residents are encouraged to complete the form online by going to yoursay.westlothian.gov.uk or by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.

4 Responding to Demographic Change

Changes in the size and age structure of the population will have an impact on the demand for public services across Scotland.

As demographics change, so does demand for services.

To allow us to run services efficiently, services need to continually change to allow us to meet changes in demand.

The population of West Lothian has grown significantly over the last 10 years and this is forecast to continue. The largest areas of growth are within those aged over 65.

Over the next 25 years, West Lothian is forecast to have the fastest growth in people of pensionable age in Scotland. At the same time the number of children being born and entering our schools in some parts of West Lothian is forecast to fall.

Unless we act and design services around changes in our demographics to meet demand, the overall quality of service will decline as we do not have the funding to continue to deliver services as they currently are.

To respond to demographic change, here are some areas we could look at:

4a In many areas, there is an oversupply of schools when compared to the demand for places. Reducing the number of school buildings in communities where the number of available school places is more than is needed to meet future demand, and where pupils can access an alternative school, would allow the council to maintain the quality of learning in the remaining schools.
(Saving approximately £3.4 million).

4b Review of the delivery of Children and Justice Services social work and family support services to inform future provision of targeted earlier intervention and intensive whole family support.
(Saving to be determined).

4c Reviewing nursery capacity in council facilities to better meet demand.
(Saving approximately £260,000)

Do you agree that the Council should respond to demographic change and shape services around the local population/demographic? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

If yes, do you have any suggestions on how we should do this?

If no, can you suggest any alternative ways to make savings?

5 Reducing Spending on Non-Statutory Services

Statutory services are the services the Council is required by law to provide and receives funding from the Scottish Government to provide. Broadly, these include education, waste collection and disposal, housing and social care.

Although the Council must provide these services by law, they can be made more cost effective, and can benefit from the use of new technology and new ways of working. It may also be possible to provide services using fewer facilities, and the amount of money spent on them can change in response to demographic change, as we have explained earlier in this consultation.

Non-statutory services are the services the Council is not required by law to provide. Some are funded by the Scottish Government and others rely on funding generated by the Council. The non-statutory services which are funded by the Scottish Government are normally 'ring-fenced' which means that the Council cannot spend the money on anything else.

Out of the Council's total annual revenue budget of £545 million, £503 million is spent on statutory services, and the remaining £42 million is spent on non-statutory services.

It is important to be aware that a number of these non-statutory services help to improve lives and are considered vital to many people.

With this in mind, there may be options to reduce or change spending in non-statutory services. A list of services where there is significant spend associated with the delivery of non-statutory functions are set out below.

5a Providing environmental enforcement and education. ***(£192,000)***

5b Broadcasting council committee meetings online. ***(£51,000)***

5c Funding support for non-West Lothian Children at Private Partner Provider Early Learning and Childcare settings. ***(£700,000)***

5d An adult learning service which delivers a wide range of courses for adults. ***(£516,000)***

5e Provision of a Counter Fraud Service which investigates and tackles instances of fraud against the council. ***(£133,000)***

5f Support to gala day committees for installing bunting. ***(£45,000)***

5g Providing school transport where the distance from home to school is below the statutory minimum and where a suitable walking route exists. ***(£1 million)***

5h Education improvement and performance service which helps to drive improvement across all schools and increase attainment for learners. ***(£800,000)***

5i Providing a subsidised bulky waste collection service ***(£240,000)***

5j Support to employability and businesses and match funding for external grants and funding provided by other organisations to local businesses. ***(£740,000)***

Continued on next page →

Your Council **Your Say**

5 Reducing Spending on Non-Statutory Services (continued)

5k Provision of financial support to bus services whereby the council provides a subsidy to private and commercial bus operators. ***(£2.2 million)***

5l Installing and removing festive lighting across the area. ***(£88,000)***

5m Supplying school crossing patrols. ***(£723,000)***

5n Provision of a non-statutory winter footway service, in which the service treat footpaths as well as carriageways (roads). ***(£505,000)***

5o The provision of income maximisation, energy and housing advice. The service provides advice, assistance and advocacy to individuals. ***(£1.4 million)***

5p Instrumental Music Service which provides free instrumental music lessons to primary and secondary school pupils, which goes beyond the statutory minimum. ***(£501,000)***

5q The delivery of youth services, including support to youth clubs and outreach work with vulnerable groups and individuals. ***(£1.6 million)***

5r Providing Summer of Play activities and support during the school holiday period. ***(£450,000)***

5s Providing information, education and news to customers on both council and local services, and events via the council's social media channels, and the council's newspaper, Bulletin. ***(£56,000)***

5t Providing environmental education, management and patrols of open space assets, such as country parks and play parks, by the Ranger Service and Waste Services. ***(£322,000)***

5u Grounds maintenance and upkeep of public amenity golf courses. ***(£252,000)***

5v Education business and customer support service which provides pupil placement and support to individual schools with HR, health and safety, and financial advice for head teachers. ***(£1.8 million)***

5w Planning enforcement action beyond the statutory minimum and delivering initiatives such as the promotion of tree preservation orders. ***(£137,000)***

5x Membership of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). COSLA works on the behalf of Councils to engage with governments and others on policy, funding and legislation. ***(£113,000)***

5y The provision of a service which works with individuals and community based projects to assist regeneration, and to deliver targeted campaigns and support to reduce inequality in these communities, and associated financial support to the voluntary sector. ***(£1.5 million)***

5z Disbursement payments which are small sums of monies provided to community groups for local projects. ***(£98,000)***

Do you agree that the Council should reduce spending on non-statutory services? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

If yes, do you have any suggestions on how we should do this?

If no, can you suggest any alternative ways to make savings?

Complete the Budget Consultation online

West Lothian residents are encouraged to complete the form online by going to yoursay.westlothian.gov.uk or by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.

Your Council **Your Say**

Council Tax **Facts**

Council Tax provides much-needed funding to ensure the delivery of sustainable local services.

This provides significant positive impacts for communities and is vital to the council's ability to balance our budget, which is a legal requirement.

It supports local capital investment in key areas, from the construction of new community facilities to maintaining vital local infrastructure such as roads and schools.

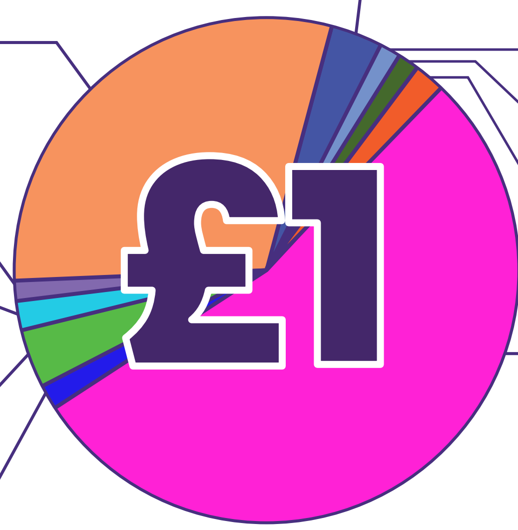
It is a key element of local democratic decision-making. Council Tax rates are set by democratically-elected councillors based on the needs of local communities.

Increases in Council Tax rates can, therefore, help prevent reductions to vital frontline services throughout communities. Council Tax, however, only makes up around 19% of the total funding that Councils receive. This is a significant amount of money, but within the context of the total spent by Councils each year on essential local services such as education, collecting bins, maintaining roads and providing care services, Council Tax income is a relatively small amount. Because of the relatively small proportion of total council spending met by Council Tax, increasing Council Tax alone cannot resolve the financial challenges facing Councils.

The scale of the ongoing financial challenges facing all councils requires honest conversations with communities about the decisions required to deliver balanced budgets, including the trade-offs that exist between tax and spending decisions.

Council Tax contributes towards the cost of council services but 80% of the council's budget is provided by the Scottish Government. **Council Tax income makes up less than 20% of the council's budget.** Whilst Council Tax is an important source of funding, it does not pay for all council services.

How is each £1 of council funding spent?



Over 90% of the council's revenue budget is spent on three broad areas: Education, Social Care, Operational Services (parks, roads, waste, land maintenance, bus and community transport).

Further one off investment comes via capital funding and housing budgets, both are extremely limited. Council Housing is funded exclusively by rent generated via council housing tenants.

Thanks to the vast majority of West Lothian residents who pay their Council Tax for their continued support of the vital local services we all rely on.

The collection rate for council tax in West Lothian was **96.7%** for 2023/24, which was above the national average of **95.5%**. The Council Tax collection rate in West Lothian is the 9th highest of Scotland's 32 councils.

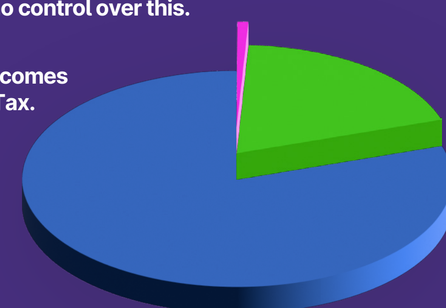
Does Council Tax pay for all council services?

No, Council Tax does not pay for all services.

80% of our funding comes from Scottish Government and we have no control over this.

19% of our income comes from Council Tax.

1% of our income comes from income and charges.



Have your say on Council Tax

Would you support an increase in Council Tax if all funding raised was spent on key services? Yes ☐ No ☐

If no, can you suggest any alternative ways to make savings?

Complete the Budget Consultation online

West Lothian residents are encouraged to complete the form online by going to yoursay.westlothian.gov.uk or by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.

Your Council Your Say

Tell us about you - please complete the details below

The data you provide is confidential and individuals cannot be identified from the information provided.

I am responding as...

An individual:

An employee of West Lothian Council:

Name of service area:

On behalf of a Group / Organisation

Name of organisation:

If on behalf of a Group, how many are in your Group?

Gender Identity

How would you describe your gender identity?

Man

Woman

In another way

Prefer not to say

If you are responding as an individual or an employee of the council, please complete the following information:

Age:

Nearest town/village:

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

YES

NO

Prefer not to say

If you consider that you have a disability, please indicate if you have any of the following conditions:

A learning disability

A longstanding illness or other health condition

A mental health condition

A physical impairment

A sensory impairment

Other condition

Prefer not to say

Do you have caring and/or parenting responsibilities for a child, children or for anyone else (e.g. a family member, friend, neighbour etc)?

Yes (children under 18)

Yes other

No

Prefer not to say

What is your ethnic group - Choose one section from A to E, then tick ONE box which best describes your ethnic group or background

A White

Scottish

British

English

Irish

Welsh

Gypsy/Traveller

Northern Irish

Polish

Any other White ethnic group:

B Mixed or multiple ethnic groups

Any mixed or multiple ethnic groups:

C African, Caribbean or Black

African, African Scottish or African British

Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British

Black, Black Scottish or Black British

Other:

D Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British

Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British

Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British

Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish or Bangladeshi British

Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British

Other:

E Other ethnic group

Arab

Other:

F

Prefer not to say

Your Council **Your Say**
Budget Consultation

The consultation is now open and closes on Sunday 16 November.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the consultation.

Please:

- **Complete and remove pages 7 to 12** from Bulletin
- **Place them in an envelope**
- Post to:

West Lothian Council
Freepost BULLETIN SURVEY
Livingston EH54 6FF (no stamp required)

Alternatively, you can hand in your completed survey at any **Partnership Centre or Customer Information Service (CIS) office**.

What Happens Next?

We will analyse the feedback we receive and the results will be reported back to a meeting of West Lothian Council's Council Executive.

Your views will help to shape the final budget proposals to be developed by council officers that are presented to elected members, and will help them to make a final decision about West Lothian Council's budget in February 2026.

Consultation timeline

Consultation opens
16 October

Consultation closes
16 November

Under review
Responses to this consultation are closed for review and analysis

Consultation feedback reported to Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels
January 2026

West Lothian Council budget meeting
February 2026