

# WL2028 – Your Council, Your Say (Phase 3)

## Our Budget 2026/27 to 2027/28

### Abstract

A summary of the findings and recommendations from a public consultation on officer Options to address the funding gap and rising costs.

West Lothian Council  
Data Label: PUBLIC

# Welcome

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*A public consultation in October – November 2025 was held to ask local people about council officer savings options and Council Tax.*

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## Background

Like other local authorities in Scotland, West Lothian Council faces constrained funding and substantial cost increases in the next five years. The council had projected a budget gap of £23 million over the two-year period at the time the Phase 3 consultation was launched in October 2025.

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.

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

Council officers 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.

The council remains committed to meeting the needs of local people and high performance across all areas of service delivery.

In preparation for the challenges ahead, we want to work with our community and partners in shaping the future of Council services in West Lothian.

**This report provides a summary of the feedback from the Your Council Your Say Budget Consultation – the final one in a series of engagements to help the council to become more sustainable and meet the challenges ahead.**

*Graham Hope, Chief Executive*

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# Summary

## Overview

1. The council held a public consultation on Your Council Your Say, to gather feedback on options to address the funding gap in years 2026/27 to 2027/28. The consultation asked people to:
  - ▼ Consider the **officer savings options** that are set out in the consultation to address the projected funding gap of £23 million.
  - ▼ Suggest any **other ways that may reduce council expenditure** and/or changes to council services to make them more efficient.
  - ▼ Have their say on **Council Tax** in West Lothian.
2. **Response rate:** A total of **10,051 people** responded to the consultation that was open for over 4-weeks (from 16 October to 16 November 2025). This total comprised; 79.9% who were responding as members of the public, 16.3% who were responding as council employees and 3.8% who were responding on behalf of a group or organisation. The council received over **28,400 comments** from respondents.
3. **Engagement approach:** The council used a variety of methods to engage customers, staff and partners, including a dedicated pull-out in the council's quarterly newsletter, Bulletin which is delivered to households, an online survey, face-to-face discussions and support provided to residents, and paper questionnaires made available in council offices.

## Consultation Feedback – Key Findings

### Your Council Your Say

4. **Increasing Efficiency and Developing New Ways of Working:** Comments favoured using AI/digital tools and process redesign to cut administration workload and allow staff to focus on key service delivery functions. Some comments highlighted that accessibility should be considered when services become more digitised. There were differing views on reviewing how education is delivered and the impact this would have on young people's learning. A recurring view suggested that savings could come from an organisational review and removal of any duplication in service processes and activities.
5. **Generating Income:** The parking levy was identified as a potential source of income but consideration was to be given to the impact on town centres and families on low income. A number of respondents did not agree with the workplace parking charges. There was support for generating additional commercial income (e.g. advertising, pest control and better use of council assets) and there were suggestions that visitor levies could be introduced to increase revenue.
6. **Reducing the Number of Council Facilities:** Some respondents supported combining libraries into partnership centres or shared spaces, as long as services stay accessible. Many felt community facilities support wellbeing, inclusion, and local quality of life. Overall, there was broad backing for toilet closures, particularly where alternatives are available in partnership centres or nearby premises. Several comments also suggested other ways to keep services available to the public such as partnership working, community led management or shared facilities.
7. **Responding to Demographic Change:** Many respondents accept that education and service provision should adapt to population change and demand but note that the impact on local families and communities should be considered if schools or nurseries are consolidated. Some respondents highlighted the role of early intervention and children's services and some commented that reductions in these areas could lead to higher long term costs. Comments also suggested that service planning should be coordinated with housing growth and infrastructure, so new developments do not place demand beyond local service capacity.
8. **Reducing Spending on Non-Statutory Services:** Comments highlighted differing views about prioritising statutory and non-statutory services, with some noting that services classed as non-statutory could still play a preventative role. There is relatively strong support for savings in areas perceived as non-essential such as funding for gala day bunting, parts of festive lighting, subsidised golf course maintenance, and broadcasting meetings with introducing or increasing charges for some discretionary services. Many comments also favoured exploring efficiencies and reductions in overheads first, alongside clearer information about what would change and the reasons for those changes.

## Council Tax

9. **Have your say on Council Tax:** Affordability was raised in a number of responses, with some noting that council tax increases could be more difficult to manage alongside wider cost-of-living pressures. Several comments suggested that improvements in collection and the efficient use of resources could be addressed. Some respondents also proposed reviewing council tax banding to better reflect current property values.

## Next Steps

10. The council will continue to analyse the detailed comments provided in the consultation and use this information to shape the Budget Strategy 2026/27 to 2027/28 for the council, due to be considered and approved in February 2026.
11. The comments provided through this consultation will be used as a valuable source of information for council officers and elected members to help inform decisions in the next few years.

# Response to the Consultation

## Response Rate

12. The consultation was open from 16 October to 16 November 2025 and received a total of **10,051 responses**. Most respondents engaged through the online survey, but we also received paper survey responses.

| Total number of responses | Online survey responses | Paper survey responses |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 10,051                    | 9,741                   | 310                    |

13. A significant proportion of paper responses were obtained through our in-person survey work with targeted customer groups, with the remainder submitted via the Bulletin pull-out that was distributed to West Lothian households in October 2025.

## Engagement Approach

14. The council has a strong record of involving the public, staff and partners in its corporate and financial planning. We recognise that to secure the long-term sustainability of our plans and services, it is essential that we actively engage all representative groups and ensure their voices inform our decision-making.
15. This consultation focuses on officer-developed options for closing the budget gap, identifying further ways to reduce council expenditure, and making changes to council services so they operate more efficiently. It also seeks views on the level of Council Tax in West Lothian. It is the third stage in a three-phase consultation programme that underpins the council’s corporate and financial planning for the period 2026/27 to 2027/28.
16. This staged approach ensures our corporate and financial planning is informed by meaningful engagement at each step, and that all representative groups have the opportunity to influence both the direction and the detail of our proposals.
17. The engagement approach was wide-ranging, using targeted messages across multiple channels to raise awareness and encourage participation. To ensure accessibility, consultation surveys were available both online and in print, and specific campaigns – including in-person engagement – were carried out with the third sector, schools and a range of representative groups to capture and record all comments. The consultation was also promoted directly to staff and partners through email and other correspondence, ensuring their feedback was actively sought and included in the overall findings.

18. To maximise reach, accessibility and participation, the council used a variety of communication and engagement methods to involve residents, young people, staff, partners and representative groups in the consultation. These included:
- ▼ the council newspaper, delivered to every household, to share information and invite responses
  - ▼ the council’s Facebook page to reach a wider audience
  - ▼ direct engagement sessions with a range of representative groups, including third sector organisations
  - ▼ an engagement programme with specific groups and individuals who may be less likely to take part to help provide support in completing the consultation
  - ▼ school focus sessions to capture the views of children and young people
  - ▼ regular global emails and internal communications to staff
  - ▼ discussion of the consultation at service team meetings to gather feedback from staff and managers

### Response Rate Comparison

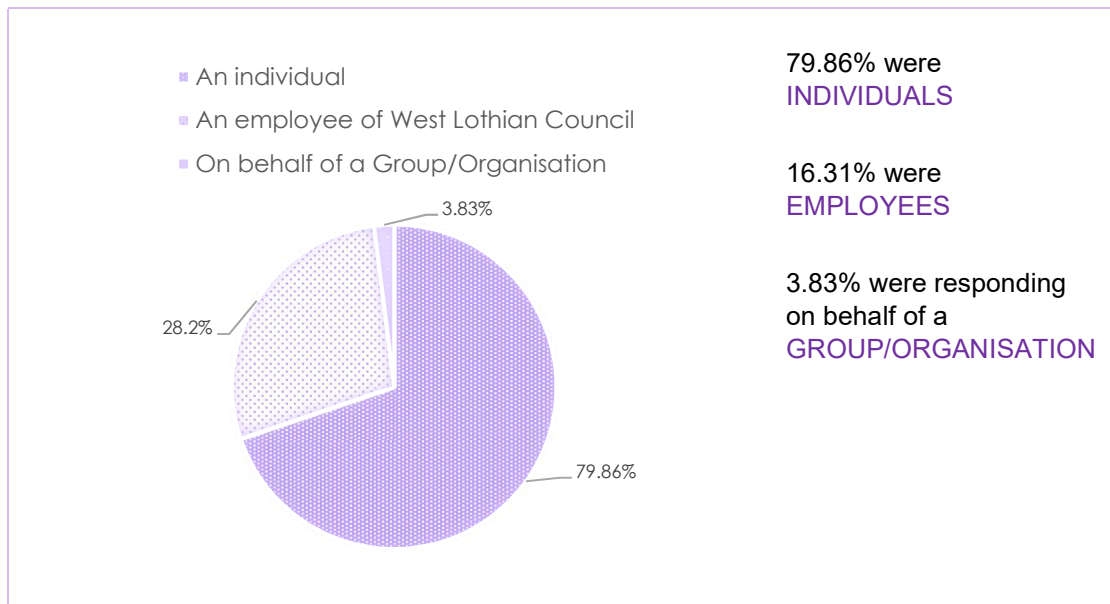
19. The council has undertaken previous public consultations on our priorities and transformation/budget setting plans. The response rates, as they compare to the current consultation programme, are set out below:

| Public Consultation<br>2025<br>(WL2028 – Your<br>Council, Your Say) –<br>Phase 3 | Public Consultation<br>2022<br>(WL2028 – Your<br>Council, Your Say) –<br>Phase 1 and 2 | Public Consultation<br>2017<br>(Transforming your<br>Council) | Public Consultation<br>2014<br>(Delivering Better<br>Outcomes) |
|--|--|---|--|
| 10,051   | 7,605  | 7,026   | 3,467  |

20. Both the Transforming Your Council and Delivering Better Outcomes consultations asked for views on council priorities, five-year officer savings options and council tax within a single exercise. In contrast, Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the WL2028 Your Council, Your Say consultation were deliberately split to improve accessibility for respondents, with council priorities considered in Phase 1 and savings options and council tax questions addressed in Phase 2. Taken together, the two phases helped to increase overall participation and response levels.
21. The Your Council, Your Say Phase 3 consultation, which focused on the budget strategy and transformation options for 2026/27 and 2027/28, generated a markedly higher number of responses than previous consultations, demonstrating a significant increase in engagement.

## Respondents

22. Whilst it was not mandatory for respondents to provide this information, the majority of respondents were individuals – those who live, work or visit West Lothian. The council also received responses from respondents who identified themselves as Council employees, but it should be noted that over 70% of Council employees also live in West Lothian.



23. The council aims for an inclusive approach, engaging a range of representatives and capturing a diverse range of responses through the consultation. It is vitally important that we engage the public, in particular, on our priorities and options for change and that we use their feedback to shape future service provision. This is why the council continues to use a broad range of media to promote the consultation and continues to offer paper consultation surveys in order to ensure that we involve as many people and sections of the community as possible.
24. Gaining a good response from council staff is also important as they have a lot of knowledge and experience that will be key to shaping and delivering any transformation options that emerge from the full programme of engagement that the council has planned.

## Groups and Organisations

25. The council invited key partners, community groups, and other organisations to participate in the survey. A total of **159** named Groups/Organisations (as identified in the survey response) took part in the consultation, which represented **over 1600** people:

|     | <b>Group / Organisation</b>                                   |
|-----|---|
| 1.  | Acredale House  |
| 2.  | Addiewell Primary School pupils                               |
| 3.  | Almond Housing Association                                    |
| 4.  | Armadale Academy pupils                                       |
| 5.  | Armadale Primary School pupils                                |
| 6.  | Association of Heads & Deputes in Scotland                    |
| 7.  | Bankton Primary School pupils                                 |
| 8.  | Bathgate Academy pupils                                       |
| 9.  | Bathgate Community Council                                    |
| 10. | Bathgate FABB Club  |
| 11. | Bellsquarry Primary School pupils                             |
| 12. | Blackburn Primary School pupils                               |
| 13. | Blackridge Primary School pupils                              |
| 14. | Boghall Primary School pupils                                 |
| 15. | Braid House   |
| 16. | Bridge community project                                      |
| 17. | Bridgend Primary School pupils                                |
| 18. | Broxburn academy parent council                               |
| 19. | Broxburn Academy pupils                                       |
| 20. | Broxburn parish church  |
| 21. | Broxburn Primary School pupils                                |
| 22. | Calderwood Primary School pupils                              |
| 23. | Carmondean Primary School pupils                              |
| 24. | Chair of parent council of our lady of Lourdes primary school |
| 25. | Change in Blackburn   |
| 26. | Children First  |
| 27. | Citizens advice (CAB)   |
| 28. | CoWL Disability Social Group                                  |
| 29. | Craigsfarm Community Development Project Ltd                  |
| 30. | Craigshill community council                                  |
| 31. | Crofthead Farm Community Garden volunteers                    |
| 32. | Croftmalloch Primary School pupils                            |
| 33. | Cyrenians OPAL  |
| 34. | Deans Community High School pupils                            |
| 35. | Deans Primary School pupils                                   |
| 36. | Deans senior club   |
| 37. | Deans south road residents                                    |
| 38. | Dechmont Infant School pupils                                 |
| 39. | Dedridge Primary School pupils                                |
| 40. | Disability West Lothian                                       |
| 41. | Eastertoun Primary School pupils                              |
| 42. | Elev8 group   |
| 43. | Falla Hill Primary School pupils                              |
| 44. | Fauldhouse and Breich valley community development trust      |
| 45. | Friends of Polkemmet  |
| 46. | Girls Brigade   |
| 47. | Glitter Cannons   |
| 48. | Greenrigg Primary School pupils                               |
| 49. | Harrysmuir Primary School pupils                              |

|     | <b>Group / Organisation</b>                                   |
|-----|---|
| 50. | Hawkhill Primary School pupils                                |
| 51. | Holy Family RC Primary School pupils                          |
| 52. | Home start  |
| 53. | Howden St Andrew's RC Primary School pupils                   |
| 54. | Inveralmond Community High School pupils                      |
| 55. | James Young High School pupils                                |
| 56. | Kirkhill Primary School pupils                                |
| 57. | Kirknewton Primary School pupils                              |
| 58. | Kirsteen Sullivan MP  |
| 59. | Knightsridge Primary School pupils                            |
| 60. | Knightsridge Tenants and Residents Association                |
| 61. | Ladywell Neighbourhood Network service users                  |
| 62. | Letham Primary School pupils                                  |
| 63. | Linlithgow Academy Parent Council                             |
| 64. | Linlithgow Academy pupils                                     |
| 65. | Linlithgow Bridge Primary School pupils                       |
| 66. | Linlithgow Day Care Centre                                    |
| 67. | Linlithgow Heritage Trust                                     |
| 68. | Linlithgow Primary Parent Council                             |
| 69. | Linlithgow Primary School pupils                              |
| 70. | Livingston and District Dolphins                              |
| 71. | Livingston new farm breeders                                  |
| 72. | Livingston United Parish Church                               |
| 73. | Livingston Village Primary School pupils                      |
| 74. | Livingston Youth Action Project                               |
| 75. | Longridge Primary School pupils                               |
| 76. | Low Port Primary School pupils                                |
| 77. | Meldrum Primary School pupils                                 |
| 78. | Mental Health Advocacy Project                                |
| 79. | Mid Calder Primary School pupils                              |
| 80. | Murieston Community Council                                   |
| 81. | Murrayfield Primary School pupils                             |
| 82. | Narcotics Anonymous   |
| 83. | Our Lady Of Lourdes RC Primary School pupils                  |
| 84. | Parkhead Primary School pupils                                |
| 85. | Pathways day centre   |
| 86. | Peel Primary School pupils                                    |
| 87. | Play Works  |
| 88. | Polkemmet Daycare Ltd   |
| 89. | Polkemmet Primary School pupils                               |
| 90. | Pumpherstons & Uphall Station Community Primary School pupils |
| 91. | Ramblers Scotland   |
| 92. | Riverside Primary School pupils                               |
| 93. | Riverside Social Work   |
| 94. | Rosebury Centre, Pumpherston                                  |
| 95. | Scottish Countryside Rangers' Association                     |
| 96. | ScotWays (Scottish Rights of Way & Access Society)            |
| 97. | Seafeld Community Council                                     |
| 98. | Seafeld Primary School pupils                                 |

|      | <b>Group / Organisation</b>                                   |
|------|---|
| 99.  | Second Steps Baby and Toddler group                           |
| 100. | Simpson Primary School pupils                                 |
| 101. | Sinclair Academy pupils                                       |
| 102. | Southdale Primary School pupils                               |
| 103. | Springfield Primary School pupils                             |
| 104. | St Anthony's RC Primary School pupils                         |
| 105. | St Columba's RC Primary School pupils                         |
| 106. | St John Ogilvie RC Primary School pupils                      |
| 107. | St John The Baptist RC Primary School pupils                  |
| 108. | St Joseph's RC Primary School (Linlithgow) pupils             |
| 109. | St Kentigern's Academy pupil council                          |
| 110. | St Margaret's pupil house captains                            |
| 111. | St Mary's RC Primary School (Bathgate) pupils                 |
| 112. | St Mary's RC Primary School (Polbeth) pupils                  |
| 113. | St Nicholas RC Primary School pupils                          |
| 114. | St Ninian's RC Primary School pupils                          |
| 115. | St Paul's RC Primary School pupils                            |
| 116. | Stoneyburn and Bents Future Vision Group                      |
| 117. | Swimming Club   |
| 118. | The Ark Community   |
| 119. | The Donaldson Trust   |
| 120. | The Larder  |
| 121. | The Pitstop   |
| 122. | Toronto Primary School pupils                                 |
| 123. | Torphichen Community Council                                  |
| 124. | Torphichen Primary School pupils                              |
| 125. | Uphall Primary School pupils                                  |
| 126. | Voluntary action fund   |
| 127. | Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian                         |
| 128. | WCDT  |
| 129. | West Calder High School pupils                                |
| 130. | West Lothian Faith Groups                                     |
| 131. | West Lothian 50+ Network                                      |
| 132. | West Lothian College  |
| 133. | West Lothian College Students                                 |
| 134. | West Lothian Community Race Forum                             |
| 135. | West Lothian Drama and Mime Group                             |
| 136. | West Lothian Family History Society                           |
| 137. | West Lothian Food Network                                     |
| 138. | West Lothian National Day Nurseries Association               |
| 139. | West Lothian Secondary Head Teachers and Acting Head Teachers |
| 140. | West Lothian Tenants Housing Network meeting                  |
| 141. | West Lothian Youth Action Project                             |
| 142. | West Lothian youth action project young persons forum         |
| 143. | West Lothian Youth Foundation                                 |
| 144. | Westfield Primary School pupils                               |
| 145. | WLDAS   |
| 146. | Whitburn Academy - Pupil council                              |
| 147. | Whitburn Academy pupils                                       |

|      | <b>Group / Organisation</b>                       |
|------|---|
| 148. | Whitburn and District Community Development Trust |
| 149. | Whitdale Primary School pupils                    |
| 150. | Williamston Primary School pupils                 |
| 151. | Willow Wood                                       |
| 152. | Winchburgh Academy pupils                         |
| 153. | Winchburgh Bike School                            |
| 154. | Winchburgh Primary School pupils                  |
| 155. | Winchburgh schools partnership                    |
| 156. | Winchburgh Seniors                                |
| 157. | Windyknowe Primary School pupils                  |
| 158. | Woodland Trust                                    |
| 159. | Woodmuir Primary School pupils                    |

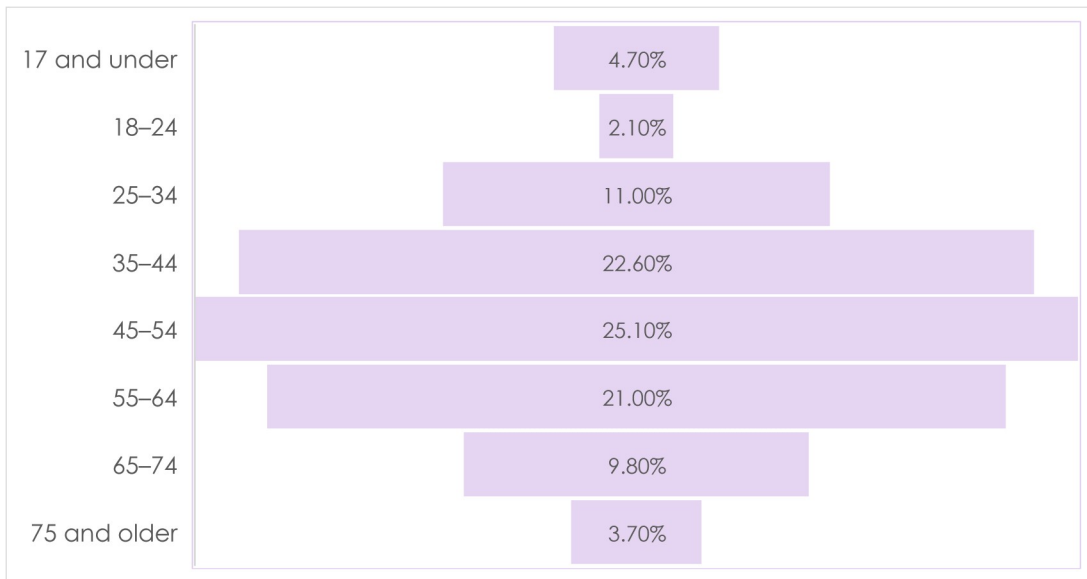
26. Many of the named groups and organisations identified in the survey responses were contacted directly and invited to take part in the consultation. The council will continue to encourage partners, community organisations and representative groups to engage in our consultations, to ensure that a wide range of views and the potential impacts on our partners are fully considered in our decision-making and future planning.

### Individual Respondents

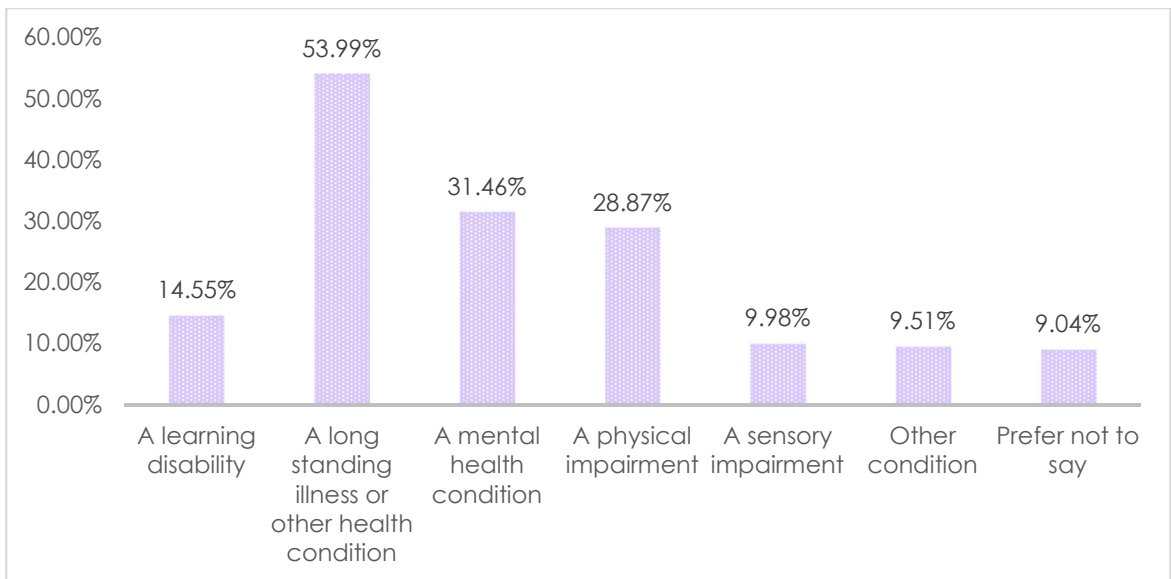
27. Respondents had the option to provide information about them as part of the response to the survey. This information will be used by the council to understand how successfully we are engaging with different groups across the community and how we might improve upon those engagement methods moving forward.
28. **Gender:** the highest number of respondents were women:

| Women  | Men    | Identify in another way | Preferred not to say |
|--------|--------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 55.02% | 36.06% | 0.48%                   | 8.43%                |

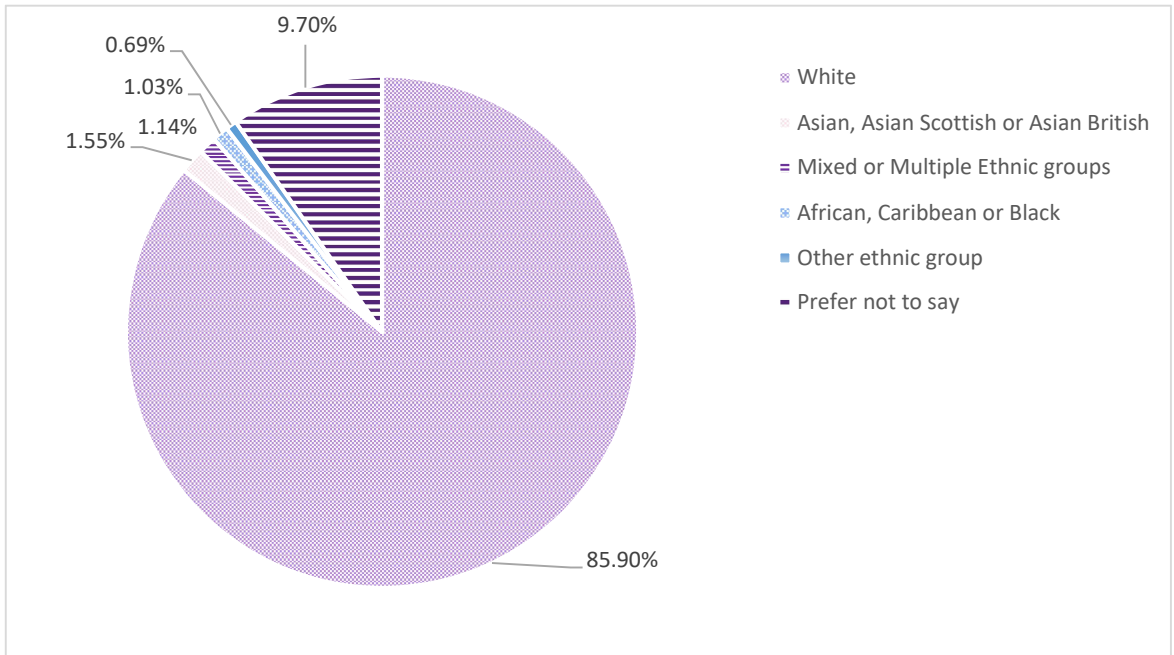
29. **Age:** 48 was the average age of respondents, with an age range of 7 to 95 years. The age profile by band is set out in the chart below:



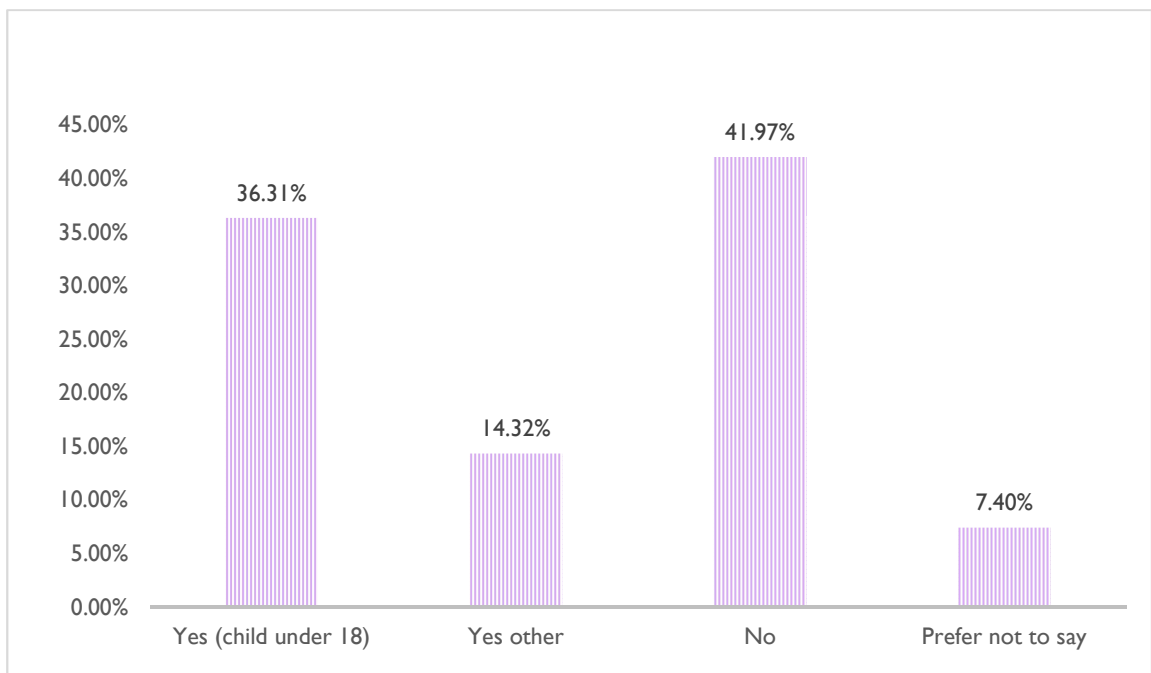
30. **Disability:** a total of 18.05% of respondents consider themselves to have a disability. Of those who identified as having a disability, some respondents elected to provide details of their condition:



31. **Ethnicity:** the biggest proportion of respondents were White (85.90%), with responses also from Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British (1.55%), Mixed or Multiple Ethnic groups (1.14%), African, Caribbean or Black (1.03%), Other ethnic group (0.69%) and Prefer not to say (9.70%).



32. **Caring responsibility:** 50.63% of respondents to the survey have a caring responsibility.



### Towns / Village

33. The council asked respondents to tell us their town or village in their survey response. This information is intended to be used to analyse need and improvements that are required in the different towns and villages in the area.

34. 71 towns and villages were named by respondents. The highest proportion of respondents come from the larger settlements; 25.87% from Livingston, 15.77% from Bathgate, 8.24% from Linlithgow, 6.76% from Whitburn, and 5.80% from Broxburn.

| Town/Village | Percentage of all respondents | Town/Village       | Percentage of all respondents | Town/Village  | Percentage of all respondents |
|--------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Livingston   | 25.87%                        | Livingston Village | 0.44%                         | Glasgow       | 0.05%                         |
| Bathgate     | 15.77%                        | Addiewell          | 0.42%                         | Harthill      | 0.05%                         |
| Linlithgow   | 8.24%                         | East Whitburn      | 0.42%                         | Wester Inch   | 0.05%                         |
| Whitburn     | 6.76%                         | West Lothian       | 0.42%                         | Wilkieston    | 0.05%                         |
| Armadale     | 6.54%                         | Dechmont           | 0.39%                         | Airdrie       | 0.02%                         |
| Broxburn     | 5.80%                         | Longridge          | 0.39%                         | Bagaduish     | 0.02%                         |
| East Calder  | 3.88%                         | Knightsridge       | 0.37%                         | Balerno       | 0.02%                         |
| Winchburgh   | 3.18%                         | Uphall Station     | 0.37%                         | Bents         | 0.02%                         |
| West Calder  | 2.59%                         | Eliburn            | 0.35%                         | Calders       | 0.02%                         |
| Blackburn    | 2.44%                         | Ladywell           | 0.30%                         | Dalkeith      | 0.02%                         |
| Fauldhouse   | 1.85%                         | Torphichen         | 0.30%                         | Dunbar        | 0.02%                         |
| Uphall       | 1.63%                         | Edinburgh          | 0.27%                         | Ecclesmachan  | 0.02%                         |
| Mid Calder   | 1.53%                         | Greenrigg          | 0.27%                         | Falkirk       | 0.02%                         |
| Blackridge   | 1.01%                         | Westfield          | 0.27%                         | Harburn       | 0.02%                         |
| Kirknewton   | 0.77%                         | Breich             | 0.22%                         | Kelty         | 0.02%                         |
| Stoneyburn   | 0.74%                         | Bridgend           | 0.20%                         | Lanark        | 0.02%                         |
| Deans        | 0.69%                         | Calderwood         | 0.20%                         | Motherwell    | 0.02%                         |
| Pumpherston  | 0.64%                         | Bellsquarry        | 0.17%                         | Newmains      | 0.02%                         |
| Polbeth      | 0.57%                         | Howden             | 0.17%                         | Shotts        | 0.02%                         |
| Craigshill   | 0.52%                         | Newton             | 0.15%                         | Tarbrax       | 0.02%                         |
| Seafield     | 0.52%                         | Carmondean         | 0.10%                         | Threemiletown | 0.02%                         |
| Murieston    | 0.47%                         | Philpstoun         | 0.10%                         | Uddingston    | 0.02%                         |
| Boghall      | 0.44%                         | Linlithgow Bridge  | 0.07%                         | Westwood Park | 0.02%                         |
| Dedridge     | 0.44%                         | Adamabrae          | 0.05%                         |               |                               |

## Consultation – Our Budget

35. It is expected that West Lothian Council will have to make significant savings over the next two years due to insufficient funding and rising costs. This means that the council, along with the West Lothian community will have to make difficult decisions about local services.
36. The council is legally required to set a balanced budget – we cannot spend more than we receive through funding and Council Tax. Because our budget is insufficient, we must reduce spending on some local services. Our aim is to make sure the resources we do have are focused on the services that matter most to our communities.
37. The purpose of this consultation was to consult with local people, staff and partners on officer options, from the senior leadership team in the council, to save £23 million over the next three years – from 2026/27 to 2027/28.
38. The council invited people to comment on the proposed savings options and to put forward any other ideas that could help reduce spending while protecting local services. This feedback will support the council in making the difficult decisions required to achieve a balanced budget.
39. There were **27,324 comments** received relating to the questions in this section of the consultation.
40. The savings options were grouped under themes:
  - ▼ 1 Increase Efficiency and Developing New Ways of Working - 6,593
  - ▼ 2 Generating Income - 3,904
  - ▼ 3 Reducing the Number of Council Facilities - 3,475
  - ▼ 4 Responding to Demographic Change - 3,006
  - ▼ 5 Reducing Spending on Non-Statutory Services -10,346
41. Each comment has been categorised, assigned to an appropriate council service and topic and responded to by a council officer.
42. The information contained in this section will be used to influence and shape the development of council services, transformation options and the budget strategy in the next five years.

## 1 Increase Efficiency and Developing New Ways of Working

43. A total of 9,852 respondents provided a response to the question “Do you agree that the Council should look for more efficient ways of working?”
44. 91.37% said they agreed, demonstrating very strong public support for the Council’s efforts to improve how it operates and make better use of resources.
45. 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.
46. There were eleven options contained in this section of the consultation. A summary of the options and the emergent themes from the analysis of the 6,593 comments received is outlined below.

### Option 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.

Estimated saving: £390,000

47. **Option:** 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.
48. A total of 476 comments were received for this option.
49. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:
  - ▼ Many respondents liked the idea of modern, joined-up digital systems and AI to reduce paperwork, speed up processes and improve efficiency.
  - ▼ A minority made comment about changes to job roles, data security and AI replacing face to face contact, particularly for older or vulnerable customers.
  - ▼ Some comments suggested using AI only where it clearly adds value, and keeping phone or face-to-face options for those who need them.

### Option 1b: Review of Management arrangements / Management efficiencies

Estimated saving: £940,000

50. **Option:** 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.

51. A total of 1,317 comments were received for this option.
52. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:
  - ▼ A number of comments suggested that the council's structure should be reviewed, including the review of processes to reduce the administrative burden for frontline staff.
  - ▼ A number of comments suggested reviewing a range of HR functions including pay and benefits, alongside strengthening performance management, including how sickness absence is managed.
  - ▼ Concerns that reducing posts without redesigning key processes may lead to an increased burden on staff and an impact on the quality of services.

### Option 1c: Reviewing how learning is delivered

Estimated saving: £5.4 million

53. **Option:** 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.
54. A total of 551 comments were received for this option.
55. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:
  - ▼ There were favourable comments in relation to the review of timetables, holiday patterns and education staffing provision with the caveat that children's learning is not negatively affected.
  - ▼ Concerns were raised around the possible reduction of teaching time or that it may lead to reduced support for additional support needs (ASN) pupils.
  - ▼ Some respondents suggested that savings in central or administrative education functions and improving the use of buildings could be progressed before reducing classroom support.

### Option 1d: Increasing salary savings

Estimated saving: £280,000

56. **Option:** Increasing salary savings by extending the employee benefit salary sacrifice scheme.
57. A total of 142 comments were received for this option.

58. The main theme emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Most respondents agreed that this option was a favourable way to achieve savings that could benefit both the council and staff.

### Option 1e: Reviewing the range of vehicles used for school transport

Estimated saving: £220,000

59. **Option:** Reviewing the range of vehicles used for school transport and use of smaller vehicles where possible.

60. A total of 353 comments were received for this option.

61. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Support for using smaller vehicles or changing routes where buses are under-used which would provide a cost saving.
- ▼ Some respondents highlighted that changes could lengthen journey times for service users, particularly in rural areas.
- ▼ Comments included suggestions to review eligibility rules, look at the sharing of taxis, and promote active travel and public transport where appropriate.

### Option 1f: Reviewing contracts

Estimated saving: £200,000

62. **Option:** Reviewing contracts for commissioned care services within Children's Services, to align with targeted identified need.

63. A total of 193 comments were received for this option.

64. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Comments supported the review of contracts and to align them more closely with assessed need, particularly where this reduces duplication.
- ▼ Comments felt that children's care services are a priority area and that any savings should not compromise safeguarding or the quality of support.

### Option 1g: Reviewing contracts for goods and services

Estimated saving: £160,000

65. **Option:** 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.
66. A total of 416 comments were received for this option.
67. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:
  - ▼ There was support for smarter procurement, renegotiation of contracts, working in partnership with other councils and reducing the size and cost of the vehicle fleet.
  - ▼ Some respondents suggested bringing more work in-house to reduce reliance on external contractors and consultants.
  - ▼ Comments noted that changes to maintenance or vehicles need to be managed well to avoid increasing costs and affecting essential frontline services.

### Option 1h: Reviewing the council's mail service

Estimated saving: £140,000

68. **Option:** Reviewing the council's mail service and utilising a digital alternative, where appropriate.
69. A total of 178 comments were received for this option.
70. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:
  - ▼ Comments indicated that reducing paper mail and printing is seen as a practical efficiency and environmental improvement, with email and online options used where appropriate.
  - ▼ Some respondents raised that older and digitally excluded customers would still require access to paper forms.
  - ▼ Comments suggested reviewing large paper packs for meetings and mass mailings as potential areas for savings.

### Option 1i: Introducing a facility to reduce waste disposal costs

Estimated saving: £1.1 million

71. **Option:** Introducing a facility to reduce waste disposal costs and the need to use a contractor.

72. A total of 215 comments were received for this option.

73. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Comments indicated this could be a practical way to reduce waste disposal costs and reliance on external contractors.
- ▼ Comments linked this to improved recycling, reduced contamination and greater value from recovered materials.
- ▼ Comments noted the setup costs and the need to ensure that efficiency measures do not lead to wider service reductions.

### Option 1j: Bringing together teams

Estimated saving: £80,000

74. **Option:** Bringing together teams to focus on Transformation and Business Support.

75. A total of 127 comments were received for this option.

76. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Comments indicated agreement that a joined-up approach to transformation and business support could help improve efficiency and reduce duplication.
- ▼ Suggested that transformation and business support functions should be closely aligned with frontline services.

### Option 1k: Stop using one-use water cartons in schools

Estimated saving: £50,000

77. **Option:** Stop using one-use water cartons in schools and replacing with a reusable bottle, which is also more environmentally friendly.

78. A total of 317 comments were received for this option.

79. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Most comments supported ending single-use cartons, seeing this as an easy environmental and cost saving, and noting many pupils already bring reusable bottles.
- ▼ Some respondents were concerned about families who cannot afford bottles, children forgetting them, or the cost of the council supplying bottles.

- ▼ There were several suggestions that the council should ensure no child loses out because of affordability.

### Theme 1: General comments

80. A total of 2,308 comments were received that were general comments.

81. The main themes emerging from responses to the Theme 1 general comments include:

- ▼ Many respondents provided efficiency suggestions around council assets, vehicles, energy use and digital systems. This included: rationalising or better using council buildings, reducing vehicle/ fleet costs and travel, improving energy efficiency (for example, insulation, solar panels) and making more use of online and digital processes.
- ▼ There was a general theme in the comments that any efficiencies should avoid further cuts to schools, social care and support for children, young people and the vulnerable in the community.
- ▼ A number of comments were linked to reducing bureaucracy, reviewing the organisational structure, reviewing councillor and officer pay, and cutting non-essential spending before reducing frontline services.

## 2 Generating Income

82. A total of 7,507 respondents answered the question “Do you agree that the Council should look for opportunities to generate income, including by raising fees and charges?”
83. Overall, 59.48% of respondents agreed, indicating a clear majority in favour of the Council exploring opportunities to generate income, including through increases to fees and charges.
84. 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.
85. There were four options contained in this section of the consultation. A summary of the options and the emergent themes from the analysis of the 3,904 comments received is outlined.

### Option 2a: Increasing current fees and charges

(Income to be determined)

86. **Option:** Increasing current fees and charges, and introducing new fees and charges.
87. A total of 1,084 comments were received for this option.
88. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:
  - ▼ There was support for targeted or modest increases in charges, particularly for non-essential services, planning, commercial users or visitors, as a way to raise income.
  - ▼ Comments highlighted the cost-of-living pressures, potential impacts on vulnerable residents and possible effects on town centres and local businesses.
  - ▼ A number of comments suggested a more targeted approach to charging rather than across-the-board increases, including higher fees for tourists and improved enforcement of fines such as those for littering and dog fouling.

### Option 2b: Car parking charges

(Income to be determined)

89. **Option:** Bringing in car parking charges at council-owned car parks.
90. A total of 1,071 comments were received for this option.
91. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Charging for parking in busy or central locations was seen as a potential income stream, with suggestions for different rates for visitors, workers and residents.
- ▼ Comments also noted that parking charges may affect town centres, encourage a shift to out-of-town or online shopping, and have an impact on residents with limited alternatives to driving.
- ▼ Comments expressed concern about parking being moved into residential areas and suggested that there should be effective enforcement in place including fines for illegal parking.

### Option 2c: Increasing the use of advertising

(Potentially in excess of £100,000)

92. **Option:** 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.
93. A total of 464 comments were received for this option.
94. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:
  - ▼ Supportive comments saw advertising as a way to raise income and preferable to service cuts.
  - ▼ Some suggested additional areas to expand advertising including the sponsorship of roundabouts, buildings and events.

### Option 2d: Increasing the charge or outsourcing services

(Saving approximately £30,000)

95. **Option:** Increasing the charge or outsourcing services such as pest control, to make sure the income received covers the full cost of delivering the service.
96. A total of 243 comments were received for this option.
97. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:
  - ▼ Supporters felt it was reasonable for businesses and users of optional services to cover the full cost rather than being subsidised.
  - ▼ Suggestions included careful impact assessment and tiered or means-tested approaches, to help ensure low-income households can still access essential support.

## Theme 2: General comments

98. A total of 1,042 comments were received that were general comments.
99. The main themes emerging from responses to the Theme 2 general comments include:
- ▼ A number of comments suggested specific ways for the Council to generate income or make better use of its assets including increasing or introducing targeted fees (e.g. planning, specialist services), visitor/tourist levies, more advertising, and selling or better using under-used land, vehicles and buildings.
  - ▼ Comments were mixed on increasing charges overall. A number of comments mentioned fees and charges in general. Some supported carefully targeted, fair increases (e.g. on non-essential services, businesses, visitors or higher-value properties), while some did not agree with further rises.
  - ▼ Some respondents stressed protecting vulnerable customers and essential services when raising income. The impact of the cost-of-living crisis was commented on, suggestions included new or higher charges could be means-tested or offered with flexible payment options, and emphasised safeguarding services for families, children and young people and those on low incomes.

## 3 Reducing the Number of Council Facilities

100. A total of 7,007 respondents answered the question “Do you agree that the Council should reduce the number of facilities and buildings to help focus spending on maintaining key services?”
101. Overall, 55.59% of respondents agreed, indicating a clear majority in favour of this approach.
102. We have reduced the number of council owned facilities and buildings significantly over recent years in an effort to reduce costs and protect services.
103. 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.
104. There were three options contained in this section of the consultation. A summary of the options and the emergent themes from the analysis of the 3,475 comments received is outlined.

### Option 3a: A review of facilities

Estimated saving: £390,000

105. **Option:** A review of leisure, arts and cultural facilities

106. A total of 824 comments were received for this option.

107. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Rationalising or consolidating some facilities was viewed as appropriate where this helps protect priority services and direct resources to areas of highest demand.
- ▼ Reducing the facilities were seen as potentially affecting the role of local leisure, arts and cultural spaces in supporting communities, wellbeing and opportunities for young people.
- ▼ Other feedback proposed alternative savings, including improved management, additional income generation and partnership working, before reducing or centralising facilities.

### Option 3b: Increasing our digital library stock

Estimated saving: £2.3 million

108. **Option:** 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.

109. A total of 541 comments were received for this option.

110. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Comments recognised the increase in digital use and viewed more e-books and online resources as positive, particularly if it broadens access.
- ▼ Some comments noted the role of libraries as an inclusive space, particularly for children, older people and people on low incomes.
- ▼ Several comments suggested improving and promoting existing libraries, co-locating services, or reviewing opening hours.

### Option 3c: Closing the four remaining automated public toilets

Estimated saving: £500,000

111. **Option:** 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.

112. A total of 695 comments were received for this option.

113. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Feedback indicated that where suitable alternative toilets are available in places such as Partnership Centres or other premises, closing the automated public toilets was viewed as a reasonable saving.
- ▼ Some statements raised issues around accessibility for older people, disabled people, families with young children and visitors, and about the adequacy and opening hours of alternative facilities.
- ▼ Some other comments suggested charging for public toilets or widening access to toilets in public buildings as ways to balance cost and provision.

### Option 3d: Continuing to support groups in the delivery of community asset transfer

(Saving to be determined)

114. **Option:** 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.

115. A total of 522 comments were received for this option.

116. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Support was expressed for empowering communities through ownership or management of local assets.
- ▼ Some comments noted the need to maintain a clear council role, ensuring the sustainability of the community group model.
- ▼ Other feedback focused on practical requirements, such as clear transition support, fair funding and ensuring facilities are not transferred in poor condition and have a clear business plan.

### Theme 3: General comments

117. A total of 893 comments were received that were general comments.

118. The main themes emerging from responses to the Theme 3 general comments include:

- ▼ A number of comments were suggesting consolidating office space, making more use of home working, sharing or co-locating services in fewer buildings, selling or repurposing unused sites, and in some cases renting out council facilities.
- ▼ Some accepted consolidation of council facilities if front-line access is protected.
- ▼ Some comments noted there is already limited opportunities to carry out further reductions. It was highlighted the impact of losing local leisure, library, toilet and community services on wellbeing, older people, disabled residents and low-income communities.
- ▼ A number of comments suggested using buildings and spaces to raise income by renting out rooms or parts of buildings, increasing hall hire charges, sharing space with other organisations, or converting vacant properties for housing or business use to protect services.

## 4 Responding to Demographic Change

119. A total of 6,658 respondents answered the question “Do you agree that the Council should reduce the number of facilities and buildings to help focus spending on maintaining key services?”
120. Overall, 76.36% of respondents agreed, showing clear support for this approach and giving the Council a strong basis to focus spending on key services by reducing the number of buildings and facilities.
121. 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.
122. There were three options contained in this section of the consultation. A summary of the options and the emergent themes from the analysis of the 3,006 comments received is outlined.

### Option 4a: Reducing the number of school buildings

Estimated saving: £3.4 million

123. **Option:** In many areas, there is an over supply 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.

124. A total of 1,390 comments were received for this option.

125. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ There was support for reviewing and rationalising the school estate where school rolls are low and buildings are expensive to run, provided educational quality is maintained.
- ▼ Some comments included possible longer or less safe journeys, loss of local community schools and impacts on children, particularly in rural or growing areas.
- ▼ Feedback suggested analysing demographic data, considering future housing growth before deciding to close schools, and looking at options like sharing or re-using buildings instead of closing them.

#### Option 4b: Review of the delivery of Children and Justice Services (Savings to be determined)

126. **Option:** 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.

127. A total of 347 comments were received for this option.

128. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ A number of responses recognised the need to prioritise statutory duties, target resources more effectively and focus on earlier intervention and intensive whole-family support.
- ▼ There were comments that further efficiencies may increase pressures on social work teams and impact on preventative work around children, families and people in the justice system.
- ▼ Other comments suggested clearer thresholds, stronger partnership working with organisations such as health and third sector partners, and ensuring any redesign is informed by social workers' experience.

#### Option 4c: Reviewing nursery capacity Estimated saving: £260,000

129. **Option:** Reviewing nursery capacity in council facilities to better meet demand.

130. A total of 549 comments were received for this option.

131. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ There was support for matching nursery provision more closely to where children live and to actual demand.
- ▼ There were comments that highlighted the potential loss of local provision, limited hours in council nurseries, impacts on working parents and the possibility that families may have to use more expensive private options.
- ▼ Other feedback emphasised the need for detailed analysis of demographics prior to implementing change, fair access across communities and careful planning so that changes to capacity do not affect the quality of early learning.

#### Theme 4: General comments

132. A total of 720 comments were received that were general comments.

133. The main themes emerging from responses to the Theme 4 General comments include:

- ▼ Feedback highlighted the importance of protecting older people, disabled people, those with long-term conditions and other vulnerable groups, while balancing support fairly across age groups and not reducing essential care.
- ▼ Views varied on how services should adapt to demographic change, with some supporting reshaping services to better meet changing needs. There was a view that any changes should protect frontline services, focus on efficiencies and be planned using good data.

## 5 Reducing Spending on Non-Statutory Services

134. A total of 6,115 respondents answered the question “Do you agree that the Council should reduce spending on non-statutory services?”
135. Overall, 61% of respondents agreed. This demonstrates clear support for reducing spending on non-statutory services so that essential services can be protected.
136. 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.
137. 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.
138. There were 26 Options contained in this section of the consultation. A summary of the Options and the emergent themes from the analysis of the 10,346 comments received is outlined.

### Option 5a: Providing environmental enforcement and education.

Current budget: £192,000

139. **Option:** Providing environmental enforcement and education.
140. A total of 312 comments were received for this option.
141. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:
- ▼ There was support for removing environmental enforcement and education to protect statutory services
  - ▼ Comments also highlighted that cuts may increase fly-tipping or longer-term impact to the local environment.

### Option 5b: Broadcasting council committee meetings online.

Current budget: £51,000

142. **Option:** Broadcasting council committee meetings online.

143. A total of 396 comments were received for this option.

144. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ The majority of comments suggested that live streaming was non-essential with a limited audience and suggested that costs could be reduced by stopping streaming.
- ▼ There were some comments where live streaming was seen as helpful for transparency and public access, with suggestions for lower-cost or alternative approaches.

### Option 5c: Funding support for non-West Lothian Children

Current budget: £700,000

145. **Option:** Funding support for non-West Lothian Children at Private Partner Provider Early Learning and Childcare settings.

146. A total of 432 comments were received for this option.

147. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ The majority of comments suggested that the council should not subsidise childcare for children from other council areas. The priority should be to west Lothian residents.
- ▼ Some comments suggested that cutting any support linked to early years and in the childcare setting should be carefully considered.

### Option 5d: An adult learning service

Current budget: £516,000

148. **Option:** An adult learning service which delivers a wide range of courses for adults.

149. A total of 360 comments were received for this option.

150. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Supportive comments suggested that adult learning could be reduced, or include more charging, with some activities viewed as non-essential
- ▼ Some comments saw the role of adult learning in a positive way, particularly for disadvantaged adults.

### Option 5e: Provision of a Counter Fraud Service

Current budget: £133,000

151. **Option:** Provision of a Counter Fraud Service which investigates and tackles instances of fraud against the council.

152. A total of 332 comments were received for this option.

153. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Many comments supported a continuation of the counter-fraud service, where it potentially saves more than it costs.
- ▼ A small number of comments questioned whether the dedicated team could be reduced.

### Option 5f: Support to gala day committees

Current budget: £45,000

154. **Option:** Support to gala day committees for installing bunting.

155. A total of 527 comments were received for this option.

156. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Most comments felt that galaday bunting is non-essential and could be funded by communities rather than the council.
- ▼ A minority of comments highlighted the importance of gala days which enhances the sense of community and indicated that the council could provide a modest level of support.

### Option 5g: Providing school transport

Current budget: £192,000

157. **Option:** Providing school transport where the distance from home to school is below the statutory minimum and where a suitable walking route exists.

158. A total of 557 comments were received for this option.

159. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ There were suggestions that providing council-funded transport where walking routes exist or distances are within statutory limits was difficult to justify, particularly given free bus travel for under-22s.

- Some comments highlighted safety issues, including longer routes on rural paths.

### Option 5h: Education improvement and performance service

Current budget: £800,000

160. **Option:** Education improvement and performance service which helps to drive improvement across all schools and increase attainment for learners.

161. A total of 326 comments were received for this option.

162. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- Education improvement and performance functions were seen as an area where activity could be streamlined, allowing more resources to be directed to schools.
- Some comments suggested that school improvement support is important for maintaining standards and attainment and noted that reducing this support could affect educational outcomes over time.

### Option 5i: Providing a subsidised bulky waste collection service.

Current budget: £240,000

163. **Option:** Providing a subsidised bulky waste collection service.

164. A total of 388 comments were received for this option.

165. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- There was a general acceptance that a reduction in subsidy or higher charges is appropriate. There was a view that people using the service should meet a greater share of the cost.
- Some comments suggested that removing the subsidy for bulky uplifts could lead to increased fly-tipping and higher remedial costs over time.

### Option 5j: Support to employability and businesses

Current budget: £740,000

166. **Option:** Support to employability and businesses and match funding for external grants and funding provided by other organisations to local businesses.

167. A total of 323 comments were received for this option.

168. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Many comments saw this as an area where some savings could be made or funding better targeted.
- ▼ There were a number of comments suggesting that employability and business support are crucial for developing local job opportunities and that care should be taken when reducing programmes that bring in external funding.

### Option 5k: Provision of financial support to bus services

Current budget: £192,000

169. **Option:** Provision of financial support to bus services whereby the council provides a subsidy to private and commercial bus operators.

170. A total of 385 comments were received for this option.

171. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ There were a number of comments that questioned subsidies to private bus companies and wanted to see better value from contracts, with support focused on essential bus routes.
- ▼ There were comments that valued subsidised bus routes since they were perceived to be important for rural areas, older people and those without cars.

### Option 5l: Installing and removing festive lighting

Current budget: £88,000

172. **Option:** Installing and removing festive lighting across the area.

173. A total of 474 comments were received for this option.

174. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ The majority of comments viewed festive lights as non-essential and something that could be reduced or funded by communities particularly when core services are under pressure.
- ▼ A minority of comments noted the positive effect of festive lights in town centres and their role in supporting a sense of community.

### Option 5m: Supplying school crossing patrols.

Current budget: £723,000

175. **Option:** Supplying school crossing patrols.

176. A total of 403 comments were received for this option.

177. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ The majority of comments made a range of suggestions including removing patrols where traffic lights or pelican crossings are already in place.
- ▼ A number of comments emphasised that crossing patrols have an important safety role, particularly for younger children and at busy junctions, and were cautious about reducing this provision

### Option 5n: Provision of a non-statutory winter footway service

Current budget: £192,000

178. **Option:** Provision of a non-statutory winter footway service, in which the service treat footpaths as well as carriageways (roads)

179. A total of 346 comments were received for this option.

180. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Suggestions for making savings included limiting overtime, focusing on main routes and carrying out more gritting within normal working hours.
- ▼ Other views emphasised that gritting footpaths is important for preventing falls and keeping routes to schools and services usable.

### Option 5o: The provision of income maximisation, energy and housing advice.

Current budget: £1.4 million

181. **Option:** The provision of income maximisation, energy and housing advice. The service provides advice, assistance and advocacy to individuals.

182. A total of 376 comments were received for this option.

183. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Some comments noted the service should be reviewed to identify any overlap with other advice providers
- ▼ Other comments described advice on issues such as debt, energy and housing as important for low-income households and a key way of addressing poverty and inequality.

### Option 5p: Instrumental Music Service

Current budget: £501,000

184. **Option:** Instrumental Music Service which provides free instrumental music lessons to primary and secondary school pupils, which goes beyond the statutory minimum.

185. A total of 391 comments were received for this option.

186. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Comments highlighted the value of free instrumental tuition for children and young people, noting a range of benefits and preferred to see the service maintained.
- ▼ Other comments saw this as an area where charging could be considered before making changes to the service.

### Option 5q: The delivery of youth services.

Current budget: £1.6 million

187. **Option:** The delivery of youth services, including support to youth clubs and outreach work with vulnerable groups and individuals.

188. A total of 422 comments were received for this option.

189. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Some comments saw youth work, clubs and outreach as important for young people's safety, wellbeing and the prevention of anti-social behaviour.
- ▼ Other comments regarded youth services as a non-statutory service where some savings might be made, while still recognising their benefits.

### Option 5r: Providing Summer of Play activities

Current budget: £450,000

190. **Option:** Providing Summer of Play activities and support during the school holiday period.

191. A total of 349 comments were received for this option.

192. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ A range of comments accepted that short-term or one-off programmes such as Summer of Play could be reduced or reshaped if required.

- Others highlighted the importance of affordable holiday activities for children and families.

### Option 5s: Providing information, education and news to customers.

Current budget: £56,000

193. **Option:** 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.

194. A total of 347 comments were received for this option.

195. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- The majority of comments favoured reducing or restructuring communications, with numerous suggestions to stop the Bulletin newspaper and rely more on digital channels.
- A minority of comments suggested that not everyone is online and that clear communication from the council is important for accountability and information, especially for older or digitally excluded customers.

### Option 5t: Providing environmental education, management and patrols of open space assets.

Current budget: £322,000

196. **Option:** Providing environmental education, management and patrols of open space assets, such as country parks and play parks, by the Ranger Service and Waste Services.

197. A total of 337 comments were received for this option.

198. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- Suggestions included a review of the roles across these activities where there is potential for partnership working in line with wider changes to environmental enforcement.
- Other responses emphasised that rangers and environmental education are important for biodiversity, outdoor learning and responsible use of parks, and that reductions could affect both the environment and community use of country parks.

### Option 5u: Grounds maintenance and upkeep of public amenity golf courses.

Current budget: £252,000

199. **Option:** Grounds maintenance and upkeep of public amenity golf courses.

200. A total of 369 comments were received for this option.

201. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ A majority of comments regarded golf course maintenance as a non-essential leisure spend that could be reduced, rationalised or moved towards more self-funding.
- ▼ Some comments suggested that affordable public golf provides physical and social benefits.

### Option 5v: Education business and customer support service.

Current budget: £1.8 million

202. **Option:** 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.

203. A total of 321 comments were received for this option.

204. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ A number of comments indicated that the support services were seen as larger than necessary with suggestions including shared services or more streamlined processes.
- ▼ Some comments highlighted that head teachers rely on HR, health and safety and financial advice, and that reducing this support could increase the workload on schools.

### Option 5w: Planning enforcement action beyond the statutory minimum.

Current budget: £137,000

205. **Option:** Planning enforcement action beyond the statutory minimum and delivering initiatives such as the promotion of tree preservation orders.

206. A total of 285 comments were received for this option.

207. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ Comments saw scope to scale back non-statutory planning enforcement or focus on the most serious breaches, to help prioritise limited resources.

- Other responses highlighted the importance of effective planning enforcement, including protection of trees and the local environment.

### Option 5x: Membership of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

Current budget: £113,000

208. **Option:** 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.

209. A total of 297 comments were received for this option.

210. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- Some comments raised questions on the value of COSLA membership during a period of budget cuts and saw it as an area where the council could show it is reducing costs.
- Others noted that COSLA represents councils nationally on funding and legislation and expressed concern about the council losing the collective voice.

### Option 5y: The provision of a service which works with individuals and community based projects to assist regeneration.

Current budget: £1.5 million

211. **Option:** 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.

212. A total of 404 comments were received for this option.

213. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- Comments were made which recognised that some rationalisation of the regeneration and voluntary sector support may be required.
- Comments noted that community work and voluntary organisations play an important role in addressing inequalities and supporting vulnerable people, and that reductions in this area could have wider impacts.

### Option 5z: Disbursement payments.

Current budget: £98,000

214. **Option:** Disbursement payments which are small sums of monies provided to community groups for local projects.

215. A total of 302 comments were received for this option.

216. The main themes emerging from responses to the option include:

- ▼ There was a view that small grants could be reduced or more tightly targeted, with stricter criteria used so that statutory and critical services can be prioritised.
- ▼ Additional comments noted that even relatively small amounts of funding can make a significant difference to local groups and to maintaining a strong sense of community.

### Theme 5: General comments

217. A total of 585 comments were received that were general comments.

218. The main themes emerging from responses to the Theme 5 General comments include:

- ▼ Some comments accepted that savings are needed but said they should be carefully targeted, with reductions focused first on services the council is not legally required to provide. Suggestions included making proportional reductions or redesigning services rather than stopping them completely.
- ▼ A number of comments highlighted that many of these non-statutory services are still important for communities, families and vulnerable people.
- ▼ Other comments said the council should reduce waste and overheads before changing frontline or community services, for example by reviewing non-essential spending, councillor costs and management structures.

# Consultation – Council Tax

## 6 Have your say on Council Tax

219. A total of 5,953 respondents answered the question “Would you support an increase in Council Tax if all funding raised was spent on key services?”
220. Overall, 51.79% of respondents agreed. This gives the Council a clear and positive basis to consider this option.
221. Council Tax 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.
222. 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.
223. 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.
224. There were 769 comments received relating to the questions in this section of the consultation.
225. The main themes emerging from responses to the Option include:
- ▼ Some comments expressed concern about further Council Tax rises, noting that bills already feel high for the level of service received and referring to ongoing cost-of-living pressures
  - ▼ A number of comments supported some level of increase, usually on the basis that rises should be modest, clearly linked to protecting key services, and combined with stronger recovery from non-payers and better use of existing income.
  - ▼ General comments raised points including Council Tax banding, discounts and the need to tackle waste and inefficiency before increasing council tax

## Theme 6: General comments

226. A total of 337 comments were received that were general comments.

227. The main themes emerging from responses to the Theme 6 general comments include:

- ▼ Many respondents highlighted that households are under financial pressure and felt any future Council Tax increases should be kept to a minimum and clearly linked to visible improvements in services.
- ▼ Some comments suggested that before increasing Council Tax, the council should look at reducing waste and bureaucracy and reviewing internal costs, including checking for unnecessary spending, management layers and duplicated activity.
- ▼ Some comments suggested exploring ways for contributions to better reflect ability to pay including through property revaluation, higher charges for larger or second homes and stronger action on persistent non-payment.
- ▼ Other comments suggested that key services should be better funded by national government or through changes to wider spending priorities and asked for more transparent information about how council tax income is used.

## Next Steps

228. The council will continue to analyse the detailed comments provided in the consultation and use this information to shape the Budget Strategy 2026/227 to 2027/28 for the council, due to be considered and approved in February 2026.
229. The comments provided through this consultation will be used as a valuable source of information for council officers and elected members to help inform decisions in the next few years. More immediately, we will:
- ▼ Use the comments to shape and develop the budget savings options, taking into consideration the views that have been expressed;
  - ▼ Analyse and assess the feasibility of any suggested efficiencies or service changes that have been proposed through the consultation;
  - ▼ Use any feedback on the consultation approach to inform future engagements and consultations.
230. The council will also share the feedback and suggestions that relate to other organisations with the appropriate partners, for example, NHS Lothian and Police Scotland.