

tough choices

ahead for West Lothian

A Bulletin four page special - a look at how the council will face unprecedented financial changes over the three year period 2011 to 2014.

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Introduction by Council Leader Peter Johnston

For some time now, newspapers, radio and television news programmes have been full of information on the financial crisis and the reductions in funding for councils and other public sector bodies.

West Lothian Council is not immune to the massive problems.

The scale of the financial problems facing us was spelled out at a meeting of the Council Executive on 23 February 2010.

West Lothian Council may face an unprecedented funding gap of £45 million over the three year period 2011 to 2014. This is resulting from a combination of anticipated reductions in UK Government funding and a range of cost

spend on services, despite the cuts in our budget.

I can assure Bulletin readers that we are determined to continue to deliver first class services to meet the needs of the community, as effectively as possible.

I have asked council officers, led by Chief Executive Alex Linkston, to fully investigate the hard choices available to us. They have put forward options for consideration, some of which are outlined in this four-page pull

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pressures that will have to be met.

In the last few editions of Bulletin, we have included updates on the situation in West Lothian, and we are now able to illustrate some examples of the tough choices that lie ahead.

The choices are difficult to make – but they must be made.

We will be forced into facing up to some very difficult options, as we strive to deliver vital front line services and meet the needs of our communities, whilst managing cuts to our funding.

We are a forward thinking and progressive council and operate from a sound financial base. We also recognise that we still have a significant amount of money to

out, which would enable the council to continue to provide vital front line services within our drastically reduced budget.

However, before any decisions are made, I believe it is vital for the council to listen to the views of our community.

Members of the public are being asked to put forward their ideas and opinions, as we strive to consult with communities about the types of decisions that must be made.



This is the biggest challenge this council has ever had to face up to. We believe that it is essential for our council and our community to pull together to tackle the tough times ahead.

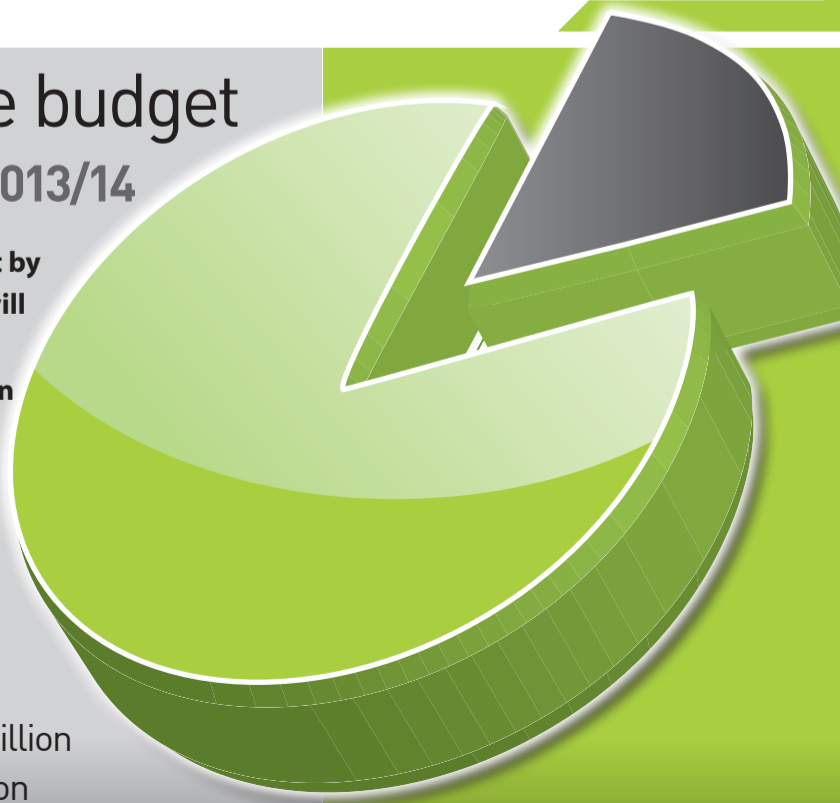
What you need to know

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

Revenue budget 2011/12 to 2013/14

This graph shows that by 2013/14 the council will still have a significant budget of £370 million to spend. However this can only be achieved by making budget cuts of £45 million by 2013/14.

 Spend £370 million
 Cuts £45 million





Future changes at West Lothian Council

Chief Executive Alex Linkston explains what the council has been doing to cut costs over the years.



As a leading council, we have always looked at ways to reduce costs and deliver services more efficiently. Since West Lothian Council was created in 1995, we have consistently looked at ways to

work smarter and ensure best value for the people of West Lothian. This forward thinking will help us to protect some key front line services as we head into unpredictable and uncharted waters.

Over the past three years, we have managed to make efficiencies of £10.5 million which we have invested in front line services.

Making efficiencies such as this requires a considerable amount of planning and it puts the £45 million reduction, that we may face, into perspective.

Over recent years our change programme has led

to many positive outcomes. The creation of the Civic Centre, our property reduction strategy and a leaner management structure are just some of the initiatives to come out of the change programme.

However, the financial turmoil surrounding the economy has significantly accelerated the pace of our programme and we recognise that, internally, fundamental changes to the way we work now are required quickly to ensure we prioritise front line services for the people of West Lothian.

The council must also take into account several cost pressures over the three year period 2011 to 2014.

These cost pressures include:

- Increasing demand for Social Work services, including residential care and nursing placements, resulting from youth and older people demographics.
- Increased numbers of looked after children.
- An increased cost of £1 million in 2011/12 as a result of a rise in national insurance contributions.
- Increases in some operating costs such as energy, fuel and food.
- The requirement to invest to meet carbon targets and efficiencies.
- Increases in the numbers of children who have additional learning needs resulting in an increased requirement for support, more residential places and higher transport costs.
- Additional cost of waste treatment, recycling and land fill.
- Pressure for financial support linked to the risk of the withdrawal of commercial bus services.
- Increases in the number of secondary school pupils staying on at school due to the economic downturn.



Key areas for West Lothian Council:

1 An increased focus on the Modernisation and Business Change programme

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

The council is looking to identify appropriate work that might benefit from a fresh approach.

The move to the Civic Centre has opened up opportunities to develop new ways of working and a series of modern and innovative ways of working will

be implemented this year. For example, a review to look at ways of modernising administration and clerical services in the Civic Centre is currently underway. It will also tie in with a number of other recent modernising initiatives.

2 Our Life Stages programme

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

West Lothian is leading the way with this approach which focuses on shifting resources to prevention and helping people most at risk of not reaching their full potential.

The council, police, health and voluntary sector are among those involved in making sure changes implemented now will have long term benefits for communities across West Lothian. The wide-ranging nature of this project will affect nearly every service in the council, as changes are made to the way services are delivered to target

resources where they can make the greatest impact.

Life Stages programme manager Lorraine Gillies explained: "Life Stages is about outcomes not outputs, and making a real difference in our communities.

"It's about investing in our communities at the right time, to reap the benefits in the short, medium and long term. We recognise that people sometimes need extra help at key points in their lives, and it's important we get the right help to them at the right time."

3 Our future strategy

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

This has ensured the council is regarded as Scotland's leading local authority. This has been recognised through a series of awards including Charter Mark, Customer Service Excellence, the five star rating from the European Foundation for Quality Management and the council being named the UK Council of the Year in 2006. These accolades reflect that West Lothian Council is already focused on providing excellent customer services.

Our staff are committed to delivering high quality services and their valuable experience will be harnessed to ensure our plans are delivered to meet the required savings.

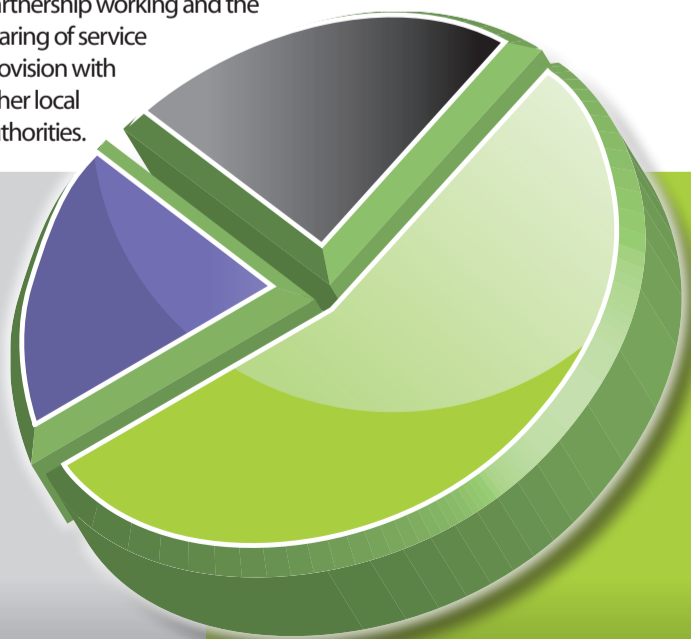
Our future strategy is to retain what we do best and to focus our reduced resources on delivering core priorities. We plan to do this by:

- Maximising efficiency through innovative approaches to service provision.
- Reducing, or discontinuing, services that are not cost effective or only make a limited contribution to our desired outcomes.
- Actively pursuing integrated partnership working and the sharing of service provision with other local authorities.

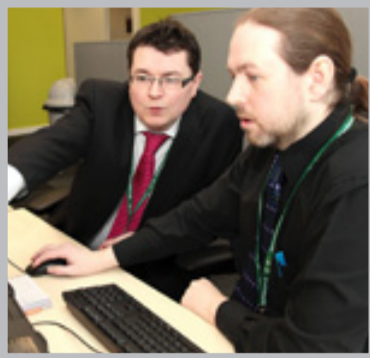
- Managing and controlling growth of our expenditure.
- Maximising the contribution of the voluntary sector.

Within our current proposals, efficiency measures in the council equate to over half of the total we need to save (56%). The remaining percentage has been split between new or increased charges or removal of subsidies (20%) and changes to service provision (24%).

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



A closer look at the Modernisation and Business Change programme:



Workforce planning



Over the course of the three years 2011 to 2014 we may have to reduce the number of staff working for the council by approximately 1,000 (this accounts for 14 per cent of the council's workforce). Wherever possible this will be achieved through

effective workforce planning and natural turnover of staff. This means that, for example, if a member of staff leaves or retires, they may not be replaced. Recruitment of new staff may also be restricted.

Flexible working



Our flexible working scheme - Worksmart West Lothian - is currently being piloted in various services across this council. Once the pilot period is complete a wider deployment phase will begin which will see it rolled out

across the council in a structured programme. Overall average improvements in productivity of around 15% are forecast and this will mean that fewer staff will be required to deliver the same outcomes.

Management



The council will also introduce a leaner management structure that

aims to reduce senior management posts by approximately 25%.

Administration



The use of technology to assist in administrative and clerical work has long been embedded within the council. However, recent advances such as Electronic Document and Records Management (EDRM)

means that pooling administrative and clerical resource is now feasible. This approach is being piloted within the Civic Centre and it is anticipated that sizeable efficiencies can be delivered from this initiative.



Buildings



A programme to reduce the number of council office buildings will be supported by the rollout of Worksmart West Lothian, an initiative which will enable staff to adopt mobile and flexible work styles and reduce the requirement

for a fixed desk for each member of staff. We are looking at ways to reduce the number of properties while improving service delivery and the quality of the working environment for our staff. We review our assets constantly and

our property strategy has a very challenging target of attempting to reduce the number of council offices from 43 to 17. This has the potential to cut our overheads and bring in extra money by selling surplus sites.



Shared services



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

of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian, Scottish Borders and Fife Councils are working together to explore options for sharing services, which would improve quality and deliver financial savings

Procurement



A full review of all of the council's procurement activity is being undertaken and it is anticipated that this will draw on the potential for procurement efficiencies through joint purchasing including Scotland Excel, Procurement Scotland and also more effective council projects.

Resources



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

and reductions will also be made to seminars, office consumables, fleet vehicles and twinning activity.

Partnership working



With an excellent record in working with other agencies in delivering outcomes, the council is investing in aligning activities to produce more efficient and effective services.

The move to the Civic Centre has opened up opportunities for reviewing how we work across our services and with our other partners in the public sector. Further integration with NHS Lothian through our CHCP (Community Health and Care Partnership) will be progressed and we will also look to achieve further economies from joint purchasing arrangements.

Partnership working with Lothian and Borders Police will be strengthened through the creation of a joint Community Safety Unit. A strategic assessment will identify long-term trends and current issues that will be used to inform and influence our joint planning and decision-making, ensuring our resources are appropriately targeted at a local level.



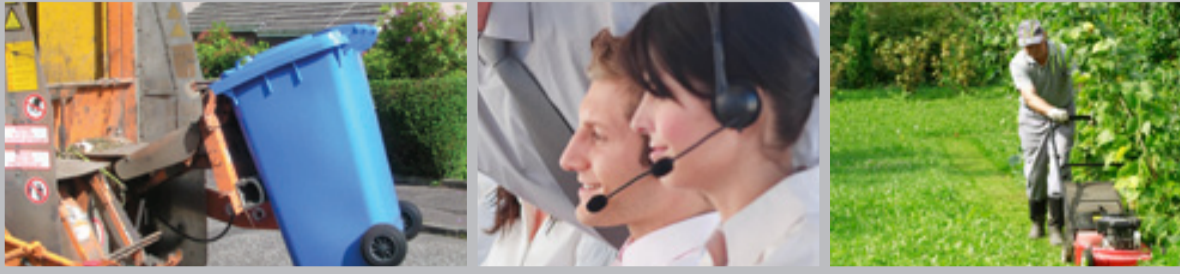
We have established close working relationships with West Lothian Council and we are committed to ensuring this partnership develops further. At the moment, we are working to develop a partnership Community Safety Unit which will deliver huge benefits to the people who live and work in West Lothian.

Lothian and Borders Police, Chief Superintendent Ronnie Liddle



The tough choices for tough times:

the decisions that we may have to make



Chief Executive Alex Linkston is certain that, in the future, the council will not have the funds to deliver all the services that are currently provided.

He said: "I have worked with West Lothian Council and its predecessor authorities for over forty years, and this is undoubtedly the biggest challenge that I have ever encountered.

"The cuts in funding will mean that we will have to reduce or remove some of the services that we have delivered over the years. Senior council officers and I have been looking at ways to ensure we can continue to provide as many front

line services as possible with less funding available to us.

"Some of the possible options are identified on this page.

"We appreciate that many people will be disappointed to hear that charges may have to be introduced or increased for some services, or that some facilities may have to close or reduce their opening hours. However, we hope that the people of West Lothian will understand that if we have fewer resources available, we need to act now to ensure that we prioritise the services we deliver to reach those within our communities."



Here are some of the options that we may have to consider in the future.

Social Work



We remain committed to providing high quality care and support to vulnerable people. However we may need to consider:

- Increasing the role of the private sector in providing care at home.
- Reducing provision of council run older people care homes and day facilities.
- Reviewing the services offered at adult day centres and the charge for transport.
- Providing light lunches rather than full meals at day centres.
- Targeting Advice Shop provision to focus on core benefit and debt issues.
- Removing the subsidy on frozen meals.
- Reinstating charges for the Home Safety Service.
- Introducing personal care charges for those under 65.
- Reviewing the current charges made for community support services.
- Reducing grants to the voluntary sector and outside bodies.

Education



The priority is to continue to provide an excellent service in schools. However we may need to consider:

- Reducing childcare funding projects.
- Replacing some teachers with nursery nurses in nursery classes.
- Increasing pupil teacher ratios in primary and secondary schools.
- Reducing the pupil support worker resources within schools.
- Reducing the subsidy for wraparound care.
- Phasing the removal of cluster resource funding from schools.
- Removing subsidies for school milk, fruit and bread.
- Reducing free school transport to the statutory minimum and withdrawing non statutory transport for fare paying pupils.
- Charging for instrumental music tuition.

The Environment and Public Protection



We remain committed to providing well maintained public spaces and a safe and clean environment.

However we may need to consider:

- Reducing the frequency of grass cutting, pruning and weed control in open spaces.
- Reducing the frequency of garden maintenance, and removing the subsidy applied for home owners who have the means to pay.
- Reducing the number of Environmental Wardens and increasing the Neighbourhood Environment Teams' (NETs)
- response time for complaints.
- Stopping the provision of hanging baskets and annual bedding plants.
- Reducing the frequency of street sweeping and gully cleaning.
- Reducing the winter maintenance service.
- Charging for bulky uplifts.
- Reducing opening hours at civic amenity sites.
- Increasing commercial waste collection charges.
- Stopping the additional works council officers do to help prepare for gala days.
- Charging communities for festive lighting.
- Charging developers for new street signs and for provision of bins.
- Introducing charges for the pest control services.
- Discontinuing the out-of-hours noise service.
- Removing the trading standards customer advice service and routing enquires to Consumer Direct.

Arts, Sport and Communities



We will concentrate on providing accessible facilities at affordable prices.

However we may need to consider:

- Reducing youth engagement and diversionary activities.
- Reducing the number of community education buildings.
- Rationalising service provision at Community High Schools.
- Reducing support and subsidy to a number of voluntary organisations.
- Rationalisation of swimming pools.
- Providing swimming vouchers to allow pupils to use West Lothian Leisure pools.
- Removing free swimming arrangements which are currently in place for under 16s.
- Removing infant and senior peoples' swimming subsidies.
- Closing under used libraries.
- Increasing charges for arts, sports and community facilities.

Customer Service



Our aim is to make customer access more efficient.

However we may need to consider:

- Reducing the opening hours of the Customer Service Centre.
- Removing the Mobile Registration Service so that all registration will take place in Bathgate and Livingston.
- Closing smaller Customer Information Services (CIS) centres and using some libraries for customer enquires instead.

Homelessness



- Reducing resources through focusing on preventing homelessness.

Transport



Our aim is to concentrate on providing essential services and encouraging people to use public transport.

However we may need to consider:

- Reducing the subsidy on some routes.
- Substituting responsive transport for some low use local bus services.
- Restricting Carlink hours.
- Withdrawing support for PassPlus and Operation Opal.
- Removing support for Westdrive.
- Introducing charges for council owned car parks.

Your comments

Over the coming months the council's Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels (PDSPs) will be tasked with gathering information and views from community representatives about suggested changes to services.

The PDSPs represent each of the council's main areas such as the environment, education, health and care, social policy and services for the community.

These are small groups of councillors who develop new policies for the council, or review existing policies to see if changes are needed. PDSPs make recommendations to the Council or Education Executive where decisions, which are binding on the council, are made.

Each of the PDSPs has the power to invite community representatives, stakeholders and community groups to participate in discussions and ultimately influence the decision-making process.

Alternatively, you can participate directly by writing to Change Comments, West Lothian Council, West Lothian Civic Centre, Howden South Road, Livingston, EH54 6FF or email: change@westlothian.gov.uk More information is available online www.westlothian.gov.uk/change