



Linlithgow & Linlithgow Bridge Community Council

31st October 2017

West Lothian Council
Freepost BULLETIN SURVEY
Livingston
EH54 6FF

Dear Sirs

Transforming Your Council consultation

The above consultation was discussed at a Community Council meeting on 24th October and subsequently between members of the Community Council through e-mail exchanges.

We have a number of general points:

- It was not possible at the meeting to rate the priorities in order of importance. The conclusion of the meeting was that all were equally important. It may be that individuals may be able to rate priorities based upon their personal situation.
- The general mood of the meeting reflected an acceptance of an increase in council tax of 3% per annum for each of the five years of the financial plan period. We note that the deficit of £73 million assumes a 3% increase for each year between 2018/19 and 2022/23.
- Considerably more thought needs to go into each of the proposed savings to fully cost all of the implications. It is difficult to comment on proposed savings in specific areas when we do not know what the cost of that service is today and how the proposed savings are to be made. A yearly cash flow forecast would be helpful in promoting understanding.

Specifically with regard to the individual points:

1a Service redesign, integration and modernisation

To increase efficiency and effectiveness and the ongoing search for and eradication of duplication is a management function in any organisation. It was stated at our meeting that industry uses lean thinking and zero based costing in which each functional activity has to

bid for resources commencing from a zero cost base. Often this activity may result in a requirement for more training but would certainly result in more interesting jobs. Individual front-line workers should be given more responsibility to deal with local areas, instead of having inefficient ever-larger work squads.

It was also stated at our meeting that over the period of Delivering Better Outcomes minimal overall staff reductions had been achieved although very large and noticeable cuts in front-line services had taken place. We suggest that all functions of the Council which are entirely or largely office-based should be subject to a root and branch review. A £4million reduction in staff costs represents 100 jobs over 5 years, about what could be achieved by natural wastage on a staff of 8,000. A more realistic target is 5 times that amount with a £20million saving.

1b Rationalisation of central support to schools

We agree with the proposal for increasing headteachers responsibility for attainment and more direct control over funding but would suggest increasing the skills and training of school secretaries to assist headteachers thereby enabling a reduction in business support provision. Quality assurance is vital; the administration of which could be carried out by school secretaries with training. We oppose any reduction in educational psychology and instrumental music teaching.

1c Redesign scheme of devolved school management

We have no objection to a revised DSM funding model evolved after thorough investigation but would be extremely apprehensive of school management provision by third-party providers. Before taking any action look very closely at the Free School concept operating in England where an administrative company takes over the administration of a number of schools. Much could be learned from that experience by contacting people who are locally involved - phone headteachers and Councillors.

1d Redesign of early learning and childcare

Early learning and childcare will be increased from 600 to 1140 hours in 2020. Increasing the entitlement will require a substantially larger workforce, significant investment in infrastructure, and new, innovative models of delivery. With this in mind how will the money be saved? Further, is the council proposing integrating a full 10 hour 250 day nursery service? How is the new service to be integrated with current private sector nursery providers? There are too many unknowns to answer this question.

1e Service restructure of adult learning and youth services

We understand that More Choices More Chances key workers provide intensive support to individual identified young people and cover all 11 mainstream secondary schools and this is to be applauded. However valuable work is also undertaken by voluntary organisations, in Linlithgow LYPP, and we trust that this will continue to be supported. We would oppose basing youth services on only MCMC. Adult learning is vital we would oppose any cuts in this area.

1f Rationalisation of support to parents and carers

This sounds a useful suggestion that could have been included in the review proposed in 1a.

1g Workforce arrangements

We have no objection to this proposal but would contend that efficiency and effectiveness in the workforce can be realised through a process of continuous training and proper change management. Any change has to be properly managed and rumour and fear dispelled at an early stage.

1h General balance of savings to be identified

The collaborative efforts between Councils have been well reported. It seems that collaborative effort between Falkirk, North Lanarkshire, etc could yield more efficiency. Alternatively, West Lothian Council could become the centre of excellence for human resources, information technology, finance, facilities and property management and sell these services to other councils thereby retaining staff for a greater quantity of work carried out more efficiently. On the further unidentified £10 million cuts we can have no opinion.

2 Modernising social care

Education and social care are the two primary local authority functions. We are therefore apprehensive of such huge cuts to social care and without understanding what is involved and are unable to effectively comment. Without more information we would oppose any cuts in this area. Our comments below are based on individual's concerns.

2b Adult and older people assessment

We are very concerned at the proposal to reset the threshold level at critical before intervention is entertained. This appears a cruel cut.

2c Care for adults

We understand that Self-Directed Support is a term that describes the ways in which individuals and families can have an informed choice about the way support is provided to them. It is understood that this is going to be largely in their own home. However we have major concerns if this will result in a reduction in respite sleepovers to allow carers some time off. Once care/respite facilities are closed it is unlikely that they will be reopened.

2d Commissioned services

Do these provide value for money?

2e Building based care

We agree with the proposal of providing housing with care for older people throughout West Lothian but would strongly suggest that no existing services are cut prior to this provision being made across the whole of West Lothian (including Linlithgow), which makes savings in this financial period very unlikely.

3 Managing our relationship with customers

We agree with the proposal to improve the quality and accessibility of customer services in the Council.

4a Review approach to delivery of culture and sports

Without knowing how much funding is provided to West Lothian Leisure we would be opposed to reducing that funding.

4b Support for community groups and organisations

£600,000 is a pitifully small saving for what is in many instances a voluntary service supported by a small Council grant. We are absolutely opposed to any cuts to grants to LYPP and other groups in Linlithgow.

4c Support to business improvement districts (BIDS)

The Linlithgow BID is beginning to demonstrate an impact on Linlithgow High Street. It is still in its infancy and now is not the time to make cuts of such a small amount.

4e Review of external funding for police

Community policing in Linlithgow has been a major success. It is tackling the prime priority areas of concern to residents. To compromise community policing would be absolutely opposed.

5 Managing Assets and reducing energy

For the community to benefit from the disposal of council assets those assets need to be identified and discussions held with Community Councils/Community Development Trusts over a long period of time. Asset transfer is not a quick process. It is unlikely that the savings proposed can be realised during the financial period unless there is a wholesale disposal of assets without consultation which we would oppose.

Burgh Halls Linlithgow benefits from a major asset in the context of the Burgh Halls. However, much more needs to be done to promote the venue which means investing more to generate increased income. This is a primary money earning asset that is currently not fulfilling its potential.

Community Centres provide a useful venue for various community groups. The statement "an opportunity to consolidate the number of community centres" sounds like closure which we would oppose in Linlithgow.

6. Reviewing income and concessions

The Council should at least double its aspiration for income during the financial plan period. Things to consider are:

- Lobby the Scottish Government for an immediate increase in planning fees, particularly for major projects, such that Development Management becomes self-funding.
- Increasing licensing fees to cover the cost of staff.
- Charging for **all** West Lothian owned car parks (Monday to Saturday 8am to 4pm). This is money that could be directed as a contribution to subsidising bus services.
- Discontinue elderly rail concession where there is an adequate bus service.

7 Environment

The matters which concern Linlithgow residents are:

- No cuts to bus subsidies. Those that use the L1 and the 31 do so because they have no choice. Without these services how could those people who don't drive get to the doctor's surgery, to the library, to the shops, to St John's hospital? It is vital that these services are maintained. Further no buses means more cars and we have the worse polluted High St in Scotland at present.
- Whereas we are not opposed to charges for bulky uplifts we are absolutely opposed to the closure of the recycling centre in Linlithgow. To require a town of 13,500 people to drive 16 miles to their nearest recycling centre is environmentally unsound, both from the perspective of fuel consumption and the inevitable fly tipping.
- Charging for brown bin collection needs considerable thought. What is the current cost of the brown bin collection service and what does it add to the Council Tax of properties in say band D and above? Better to charge everyone and avoid piles of grass cuttings accumulating in hedgerows and on verges.

Conclusion

In conclusion we would observe that the focus of Transforming Your Council is on cuts to services rather than making the Administration more efficient and effective. We would wish to see an undertaking that a root and branch review of the Administration is undertaken to maximise the functional benefit to the West Lothian community before any cuts are made to services. £4million over 5 years can be achieved by natural wastage. A more realistic target would be £20million over 5 years. If this is achieved then many of the high value services can be retained.

Yours faithfully

John R Kelly
Secretary
Linlithgow and Linlithgow Bridge Community Council