

Transforming Your Council Consultation: Feedback Report

In the Linlithgow Gazette of Friday, 13 October 2017 West Lothian Council announced its intention to hold a consultation from Monday, 16 October to Sunday, 12 November 2017 on the subject of cuts to public services. The consultation was designed to explore ways of bridging a £73 million budget gap over the next five years. Readers were directed to the website www.westlothian.gov.uk/transforming which went live on the afternoon of Monday, 16 October. On Friday, 20 October 2017 each household in Linlithgow received the West Lothian Council bulletin issue number 83 which contained an insert detailing the proposals made by Council officers of potential areas of savings.

Critique of the Transforming Your Council consultation

1. **Length of the consultation period:** the date for the completion of the consultation (mid November 2017) had been known since the date of the completion of the previous consultation in 2012. In the same way the date for the completion of the next consultation is mid-November 2022. It is difficult to understand therefore why the consultation period was so short, less than four weeks.
2. **Involvement of the Community Council:** the Community Council was not informed of the forthcoming consultation through its regular e-mails from West Lothian Council. There was no attempt to involve the Community Council at any stage of the consultation.
3. **The Spectrum of Community Engagement:** in its own guidelines West Lothian Council describes the purpose of community consultation as follows:
 - a. To provide the public with information to assist their understanding of an issue.
 - b. To collect information from the public about attitudes and opinions.
 - c. To work with the public throughout all stages of the process to ensure their concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.

It might be argued that West Lothian Council did undertake stages a and b above but certainly did not undertake stage c.

4. **Lack of Support:** West Lothian Council describes in its own guidelines the importance of support through various media but specifically meetings, phone lines, e-mail and most importantly a contact person. There was no medium through which to ask questions other than to the chief executive.
5. **Unanswered questions:** a number of significant questions posed by the Community Council remained unanswered. Some questions were answered on Wednesday, 8 November a few days before the end of the consultation and after the last posting time to ensure a response was received by Friday, 10 November.
6. **Complex reporting medium:** The printed version of the consultation document allowed 3 responses:
 - a. Have your say on priorities for a better West Lothian
 - b. Have your say on Council Tax
 - c. Have your say on West Lothian's proposals.

The on-line version invited responses on a. and b. above and comments invited on a further 35 specific proposals. Completion time on-line was reported to be between 60 and 90 minutes. The on-line portal did not allow saving of a part completion i.e.

the response had to be made in a single sitting. Those completing on behalf of an organisation on-line were not able to identify the organisation.

Conclusion

The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (51-2) states “In addition to any other purpose which a community council may pursue, the general purpose of a community council shall be to ascertain, co-ordinate and express to the local authorities for its area, and to public authorities, the views of the community which it represents, in relation to matters for which those authorities are responsible, and to take such action in the interests of that community as appears to it to be expedient and practicable”. Linlithgow and Linlithgow Bridge Community Council would have appreciated the opportunity to work with West Lothian Council in undertaking a sound Community Consultation.

John R Kelly
Secretary
22/11/2017