



Paper A

Summary findings of the 2017 public consultation on Midlothian Council's savings proposals

Final Report - February 2018

www.midlothian.gov.uk/shapingourfuture

Shaping our Future 2 – the 2017 consultation

The public consultation on Midlothian Council's Savings Proposals 2018/19 to 2021/22 took place over an eight-week period from 16 October to 14 December 2017. The consultation built on the findings of the initial 'Shaping our Future' consultation and 'Choices for Change' survey held in 2016.

Responses to the 2017 consultation were received from residents, community groups, businesses, external organisations, partner organisations, employees and other stakeholders. These took the form of emails, letters, public comment forms (made available in local libraries), online comment forms, social media comments and public petitions. A breakdown of responses received can be found on page 3.

Community engagement meetings

Representatives from local groups were invited to a series of five community engagement meetings held during November 2017. Two consultations were also held with young people from across Midlothian. These meetings were attended by the Council Leader, Depute Leader and senior council officials and included presentations on the Council's budget challenge followed by question and answer and discussion sessions. The Council Leader and Depute Leader also met separately with a number of local groups to discuss the budget position, including representatives of voluntary sector organisations and the Federation of Community Councils. Details of the number attending the main engagement meetings appear on page 3 and feedback from each of these is included in this report.

Publicity

The consultation was publicised widely in the local, regional and national media; on Facebook and Twitter; online, and by placing posters, savings summary documents and comment forms in local libraries. The Shaping our Future pages on the council website included background information, the full Change Programme and savings summary documents, infographic factsheets and online survey forms.

Coverage of the council's budget challenge and the public consultation appeared in the Midlothian Advertiser, Evening News, The Herald, Daily Record and Sunday Mail; on Black Diamond FM, Radio Forth, STV news, BBC online and Midlothian community news websites.

Public understanding of budget issues

Those attending the engagement meetings and/ or completing the online survey were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement. "I have a clearer understanding of the budget challenges and the measures proposed to address these." Over 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. 14.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed and just under 10% had no opinion either way.

This was reinforced in a number of the comments received. Despite the strength of feeling about the actual savings proposals, many of those responding said that they understood and sympathised with the council's position and welcomed the fact that they were being consulted. However, a small number raised concerns about the quality of the consultation and difficulties in understanding the main Change Programme document, along with the need for more financial information, a better explanation of how the budget problems had arisen, and a more detailed impact analysis on the proposals.

Number of responses

Total number of comments received on individual savings proposals <i>These individual responses have been collated in supplementary Paper B, under appropriate service headings. This paper also includes group responses and links to some paper-based submissions which have been electronically scanned. The feedback in Paper B runs to more than 300 pages. An additional 118 documents have been scanned as appendices 1 and 2 to Paper B.</i>	2000+
Total number of individuals submitting written responses <i>Single and multiple comments on savings proposals contained in:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 327 emails • 217 electronic survey forms • 191 letters and comment sheets • 52 'Tell Ken' staff suggestions (October to December 2017) • 33 social media comments 	820
Number of community groups and external organisations submitting responses	31
Number attending community engagement meetings <i>Meetings were held over five nights in early November with representatives of community groups in Midlothian.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number attending: 158 <i>2 meetings were held with school students from across Midlothian in late November 2017</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number attending: 34 	192
Number of known petitions	5
Online petition Save Our Libraries – number of signatories as at 18.01.18	1,922
Online petition against cuts in Instrumental Music Tuition – as at 18.01.18	2,755
Paper petition against the removal of the School Crossing Service – residents of Mayfield and nearby areas	407
Keep Danderhall and other Community Libraries Open – paper petition	60
Joint Midlothian Trades Unions paper petition against public sector funding cuts (submitted to the Scottish Government)	3000+

Summary of key findings

- **Libraries**

Significant opposition to the proposal to shut libraries is reflected in the number of comments from individuals and local groups (over 200); the strength of feeling expressed in these comments and the number of signatories to the external petition (1,922 signatories as at 18 January 2018). A number of concerns and questions on library closures were also raised at all 5 of the community consultation meetings and at the Young People consultations. Group submissions against library closures have also been received from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (CILIP); The Scottish Library & Information Council (SLIC) and Literature Alliance Scotland.

- **Education**

219 comments have been received on a range of issues relating to the education proposals. More than 60 of these relate to concerns about **After School Care fees** (with many of these coming in the form of emails from parents and carers with responses coordinated through Loanhead After School Club). This was also raised as a concern at some of the community consultation meetings.

The proposal to cut **Learning Assistants** is also strongly opposed in a number of responses (50+). The proposal to introduce charges for **Instrumental Music Tuition** has attracted over 30 comments in opposition and has also attracted a very large number of signatories to the external online petition (2,755).

- **Street cleaning, waste collection and disposal**

Of 247 comments received on waste services, many concerns relate to the proposal to close **Penicuik Recycling Centre**, with over 75 strongly opposed. A large number of respondents also raise concerns about the potential increase in fly tipping as a result of this and other proposals to alter collection frequencies or charge for certain services. Fly tipping, and the potential for more of it, was also raised as a concern at some of the community engagement meetings.

- **Removal of School Crossing Service**

A paper petition signed by 407 people from the Mayfield area has been received in opposition to the proposal to remove the non-statutory **school crossings service**. Opposition to this cut has also been expressed in 24 of the responses received.

- **Roads maintenance and street lighting**

Of 88 respondents, almost all are strongly opposed to cuts to the **roads maintenance**, **winter maintenance** and **street lighting** budgets.

- **Transport and travel**

Specific and strongly felt concerns about the possible loss of the **51/52 bus service** were raised by over 50 individual respondents and in group responses, including those from Tynewater Parent Council, Pathhead and District Community Association and Passenger

Transport, Scottish Borders Council. Cutting **supported bus grants/ ring and go/ taxi card** was raised as a concern by representatives of a number of community groups at the community consultation events. The impact of this and other proposed savings on vulnerable members of society was raised in these meetings and is reflected in a number of the comments under transport, communities and general comments.

- **Communities and economic development**

Possible cuts in **support to the voluntary sector** was a key issue at the consultation meetings and the impact of this and other savings proposals on more vulnerable members of the community is a recurring theme in the individual written responses and submissions from community groups (79 relating to communities and economic development).

Employee submissions from three of the **Welfare Rights** team have been received in response to the proposal to transfer this function to external agencies.

A plea that the council's budget should include funding for **Gullane Home** (Whatton Lodge) has been received from 26 residents using a proforma response form.

- **Environmental health and trading standards**

Of 26 comments received, most are concerned about cuts to the **noise nuisance** and **pest control** service.

- **Parks and open spaces**

There are mixed views on the proposals to **cut the provision of floral displays and shrub beds** in the 97 responses received although most are opposed to the proposals. The majority, although not all comments on the proposal to cut support to gala days, are opposed to it.

- **Council Tax**

Around 34 of the 56 comments received on **Council Tax** say that Council Tax should go up with only three or four respondents raising concerns about any increase.

- **Staffing/ management/ councillors**

Of 107 comments received, most support cuts to **senior management** roles/ pension costs/ car leasing/ councillor costs and expenses. A number suggest that there should be reductions in management/ senior officer posts greater than those already included in the savings proposals.

- **Town centres/ town and village impact**

Some of the comments make it clear that some communities are feeling much harder hit than others as a result of the proposals, particularly **Penicuik** and **Newtongrange**.

- **Health and social care**

17 comments have been received, most of these recognising the difficult financial challenge and the need to maintain support for **adult social care services**.

- **Children's services**

16 comments have been received, all opposed to a reduction in **early intervention and prevention** services.

- **Property and facilities management**

Wide-ranging comments (99) were received, with a number concerned about the proposed changes to the **schools meal service** and others raising concerns about the proposals to share **janitorial services** and to **transfer the running of local facilities** to community groups.

- **Sport and leisure**

The proposal to reduce **lifeguard cover** is a matter of concern for many of the 81 respondents, as are the proposals to **reduce astro and grass pitches** and to **increase charges**.

- **Income generation/ money saving**

The suggestion that more should be done to **increase developer contributions** features in a number of the written responses and was a recurring theme at the community engagement meetings. **Shared services** with other local authorities also received support in the written comments. Most of the ideas for money saving and income generation are fairly 'low level' or are already proposed or being implemented – e.g. increase advertising income, reduce printing and postage costs, reduce admin costs. A series of savings/ income generation proposals also appear in Unison's Budget Proposals document, listed with the group responses in this paper.

- **Community safety/ CCTV**

Of the 38 submissions, there is opposition from around 20 to the proposal to stop CCTV maintenance and 17 are opposed to the withdrawal of the Community Safety service. An employee submission can also be found in the scanned documents (group submissions) circulated to councillors.

- **Housing and homelessness**

Of 28 submissions, a number raise concerns about the amount of new house building in the area. Others support the proposal to withdraw B&B provision and to examine the proposal for a shared service option to integrate Housing Services.

- **Planning and building standards**

A group submission from members of the Planning Team can be found in this section of Paper B. This is one of 5 responses received on the Planning proposal.

- **Revenues and Benefits**

2 of the 9 submissions received support the shared services proposal. The other 7 comments cover a range of issues.

- **Group responses**

The responses from 31 community groups and external organisations cover a range of issues, some in considerable detail. These responses are not summarised here but appear in Paper B, pages 220 to 274.

Shaping our Future 1 – the 2016 consultation

The council's first Shaping our Future consultation was held between February and November 2016, and included a Citizen's Panel survey (April 2016) and 'Choices for Change' survey (October to November 2016).

Although the savings options presented in 'Choices for Change' did not fully mirror those in the 2017 consultation, there are sufficient similarities in this, and in the Citizen's Panel survey, to make it worthwhile reviewing the key findings alongside those of the 2017 consultation.

The following is a summary of a number of the key findings from 'Choices for Change' 2016, based on responses from 486 residents.

Education

- Over 48% agreed that we should review charges for (musical) instrumental tuition with 29% disagreeing.
- Over 51% agreed/ strongly agreed that we should review the provision and cost of school meals. Around a third disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Health and social care

- Nearly 84% of respondents agreed that we should reduce the demand on social care by developing preventative approaches within communities, to support people to live independently for as long as possible.
- Nearly 63% disagreed/ strongly disagreed with the option of increasing charges for personal care and housing support. 19% agreed/ strongly agreed.
- 57% disagreed/ strongly disagreed with introducing charges for transport to day centres and day services. Just over a quarter agreed/ strongly agreed.

Children's services

- Nearly 79% agreed that we should reduce demand in Children's Services by continuing to develop early intervention and preventative approaches which achieve greater efficiency, both in working practices and use of resources.

Property and facilities management

- Nearly 85% agreed that we should review how we manage facilities services in our larger schools and community hubs.

- More than 72% agreed that we should explore opportunities to generate income from selling goods and services.

General support services

- Nearly 56% of respondents agreed that we should continue to review and make savings to support services, staffing and accommodation.

Street cleaning, waste collection and disposal

- 57% disagreed with reducing the frequency or charging for the green garden waste service. A third agreed/ strongly agreed with this option.
- 60% disagreed/ strongly disagreed with reducing the frequency of grey bin (general household waste) collections from fortnightly to every 3 weeks. 34% agreed/ strongly agreed.

Roads maintenance and street lighting

- There was significant opposition to the idea of reducing spending on roads. Almost 85% disagreed, 43% of them disagreeing strongly.
- Around 80% were also against reducing the amount spent on winter gritting and snow clearing. 43% strongly disagreed and over 36% disagreed.

Communities and economic development

- 60% disagreed/ strongly disagreed with reducing grants to local groups. 34% strongly disagreed compared to only 5% who strongly agreed.
- Respondents were evenly split on reducing contributions to organisations who support business and tourism – around 37% agreed and 37% disagreed with over a quarter having no strong opinion.

Sport and leisure

- Just over 50% agreed with increasing leisure charges by up to 10%. 45% disagreed.
- 61% agreed that inefficient and ageing leisure facilities should be closed. 25% disagreed.
- 50% supported a review of leisure centre opening hours with over 20% disagreeing.
- There was more of an even split on reviewing concessionary charges for sports and leisure. 42% agreed and 37% disagreed.

Travel and fleet services

- A review of bus and supported travel grants was supported by 39% of respondents with 40% disagreeing.
- Over 40% disagreed that the taxi card and 'ring and go' services should be removed. 30% agreed and nearly 30% had no strong opinion.

Parks and open spaces

- 45% were against reducing the number of grass areas cut regularly with 36% agreeing.
- There was an even split on removing underused playing fields. 41% agreed and the same number disagreed. However, 19% disagreed strongly compared to 10% who strongly agreed.

Planning and building standards

- 46% disagreed with the option of ending agreements to secure expert advice on archaeology and biodiversity with 24% agreeing. Nearly 30% had no strong opinion.

Council Tax

- Over 80% agreed that we could increase income by charging more for long-term empty properties.
- 58% supported a 3% increase in Council Tax – 32% agreeing and 26% strongly agreeing. Around a third disagreed, 22% of them strongly.

Community safety

- Nearly 56% agreed that we should change to a co-located partnership for community safety with our partners. 28% had no strong opinion.
- 71% agreed that we should carry out a complete review of how we provide community safety services

Housing and homelessness

- 90% agreed that we should take people out of bed and breakfast accommodation and place them in purchased houses or other converted properties.
- 90% agreed that we should sell underused garage sites or make alternative use of them.

Citizens' Panel findings (April 2016)

Key questions on 'Shaping our Future' were included in the Spring 2016 Citizens' Panel questionnaire, sent to a representative sample of 998 Midlothian residents and resulting in a 61% response rate.

- 77% of respondents said that they "would accept the Council closing some operational properties to protect and develop others."
- 74% said that they "would accept additional charges for some services if this would protect essential services."
- 58% said that they "would be willing to pay more Council Tax to help protect public services in Midlothian."
- The top money saving option from those presented was to "merge services or functions to save on administration and management costs".
- The second preference was to "increase savings from the joint approach to procurement of goods and services" and the third was to make "better use of properties, including co-locating services, disposing of properties which are in poor condition, transferring management/ ownership of community spaces/ buildings to community groups".
- The issue that respondents were least likely to select as a priority was to "buy more services from the private or voluntary sectors".

Local group discussions (May-Sept 2016)

Summary of group responses

- Protecting the most vulnerable in our communities was seen as a priority. There was strong opposition to increasing charges for social care services and transport to day centres and day services.
- Concerns were raised about the future of the welfare rights advice service and other services supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities.
- The importance of volunteers and voluntary groups in the life of our communities was highlighted, with the need for the Council to provide appropriate financial and other support to these groups.
- A number of the groups emphasised the need for the Council to be open and transparent in communicating, consulting and engaging with its communities, and for its services to be more 'joined up' in responding to and working with community groups.

- The Midlothian-wide Neighbourhood Planning group made specific suggestions around revenue raising, including the idea of a local Lottery.
- The amount of new house building in the area and the challenge of providing the appropriate infrastructure was also a concern.
- The importance of local libraries and the services they provide was emphasised by a number of group members.

For full details of feedback received during the 2017 consultation, see Paper B - Individual comments received from residents and joint responses received from residents, businesses, community groups and other organisations. See also appendices 1 and 2 to Paper B, which contain comments from individuals and groups in written responses which have been electronically scanned. These are available in the council's Committee Management System at www.midlothian.gov.uk

The summary findings of the 2016 Shaping our Future consultation can be found at: https://www.midlothian.gov.uk/downloads/file/1620/shaping_our_future_-_summary_findings_of_the_public_consultation_2016

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