

2019/20

Spending Choices

Findings of the public consultation on Midlothian Council's Spending Choices

Summary Report - January 2019

www.midlothian.gov.uk/spendingchoices



Midlothian

The consultation

A public consultation on Midlothian Council's Spending Choices for 2019/20 was held over ten weeks from 6 November 2018 to 18 January 2019. This followed a wider consultation on more detailed savings proposals for 2018/19 to 2021/22, which took place over an eight-week period from 16 October to 14 December 2017.

Responses to both consultations 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, online survey responses, social media comments, public petitions and comments received at community engagement meetings.

For the 2018/19 consultation, most respondents completed the online survey form available on the council's website. Two engagement meetings were also held with community organisations in December 2018 (appendix 2) and consultations held with employees, trades union, and community representatives.

Consultation responses 2018/19

Single and multiple comments contained in emails, electronic survey forms and social media comments

Number of individuals submitting written responses

380

Number of individual comments and suggestions received in 2018/19 (multiple comments/ ideas from some respondents)

1,900+

Consultation responses 2017/18

Single and multiple comments contained in emails, electronic survey forms, letters, comment sheets and social media comments

Number of individuals submitting written responses 2017/18

820

Number of individual comments and suggestions received in 2017/18 (multiple comments/ ideas from some respondents)

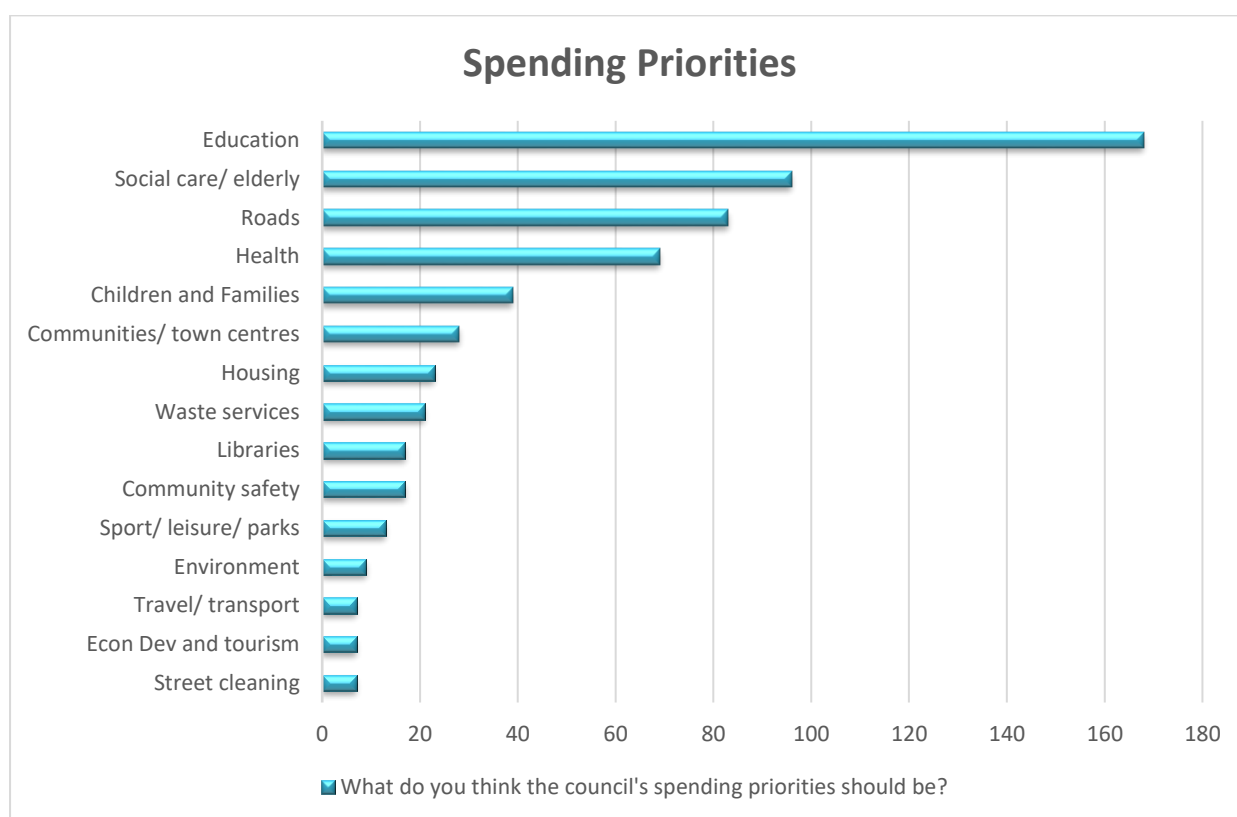
2000+

Survey responses

Full details of the response to the online survey are contained in appendix 1, 'Our Spending Choices 2019/20' Survey.

1. Spending Priorities

The 2018/19 survey asked respondents what they thought the council's spending priorities should be. Half of all those who took part in the online survey said that education should be the top priority, followed by social care/ services for the elderly and vulnerable. Roads maintenance and infrastructure was the third top priority.



2. What could we do differently to save money?

A wide range of comments (306) were received. Many of these called for savings in management costs, cutting councillor costs, cutting staffing costs, improved efficiency, less bureaucracy, cutting out waste and unnecessary expenditure. Shared and merged services with other councils and other organisations and streamlining of departments were also suggested. A number of respondents also called for greater use of digital and technological solutions and energy saving to cut costs.

3. Are there services that we could reduce?

A large number answered 'No, None or Not sure' or expressed the view that services had already been cut enough or that more money needed to be spent. Some called for a reduction on staffing and management costs. Other suggestions were wide ranging with no common theme developing.

4. Could communities do more to help deliver services?

There were mixed views on this, with some suggesting that community groups and businesses could do more and others saying that it is the council's responsibility to deliver services. Some suggested that communities could only do more if provided with the appropriate funding, other resources or support. Examples of the positive contribution made by community groups and volunteers were also cited by a number of respondents.

5. What services, if any, should we stop providing?

Again, the majority of respondents answered 'None, Not sure' or similar. A few suggested that support for Christmas lights and gala days could be stopped or funded from elsewhere, or that charges should be introduced for some services.

6. Do you have any other ideas that would help us bridge our budget gap?

Reducing staffing and management costs; increasing charges for some services, improving energy efficiency again featured. Some called for an increase in council tax or looking at new opportunities for income generation.

7. Other comments

A wide range of comments were received, many reiterating points made earlier in the survey. A large number of these responses related to local issues, questions and concerns and suggested new or improved facilities and services for their local areas.

2017/18 consultation

The following is a summary the key findings from the previous public consultation, carried out in 2017/18, in the run up to the 2018/19 budget meeting.

- **Libraries**

Significant opposition to the proposal to shut libraries was reflected in the number of comments from individuals and local groups (over 200); and 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 held in late 2017. Group submissions against library closures were also 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 were received on a range of issues relating to the education proposals set out in the run-up to the 2018/19 budget. More than 60 of these related 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 was also strongly opposed in a number of responses (50+). The proposal to introduce charges for Instrumental Music Tuition 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 in 2017/18, many concerns related 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 was received in opposition to the proposal to remove the non-statutory school crossings service. Opposition to this cut was expressed in 24 of the responses received.

- **Roads maintenance and street lighting**

Of 88 respondents, almost all were 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 supported bus services were raised by over 50 individual respondents and in group responses. Cutting supported bus grants/ ring and go/ taxi card was raised as a concern by representatives of a number of community groups at 2017/18 community consultation events. The impact of this and other proposed savings on vulnerable members of society was raised in these meetings and was 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 was a recurring theme in the individual written responses and submissions from community groups (79 relating to communities and economic development).
- **Environmental health and trading standards**

Of 26 comments received, most were concerned about cuts to the noise nuisance and pest control service.
- **Parks and open spaces**

There were 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 said 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 supported cuts to senior management roles/ pension costs/ car leasing/ councillor costs and expenses. A number suggested 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 made 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 were 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 were 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 was a matter of concern for many of the 81 respondents, as were 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 featured 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 were fairly 'low level', are already proposed or are being implemented – e.g. increase advertising income, reduce printing and postage costs, reduce admin costs.

- **Community safety/ CCTV**

Of the 38 submissions, there was 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 raised concerns about the amount of new house building in the area. Others supported the proposal to withdraw B&B provision and to examine the proposal for a shared service option to integrate Housing Services.

- **Revenues and Benefits**

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

Communications and Marketing
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