



Shaping our Future

Choices for Change

Paper A*

Summary findings of the public consultation
on service changes and savings options 2016

www.midlothian.gov.uk/shapingourfuture

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***This report (Paper A) is one of three and summarises the main consultation findings. Supplementary papers are also available with the full results of the Shaping our Future consultation:**

Paper B: Choices for Change Public Opinion Survey and Citizens' Panel Results 2016

Paper C: List of individual comments received from residents and joint responses received from local groups – Shaping our Future 2016

About the consultation

Shaping our Future

The Shaping our Future campaign was launched in February 2016 in response to the financial pressures and other challenges facing the Council. The aim was to let local people have their say on spending priorities, service changes and savings options.

Unlike traditional local authority budget consultations, which normally take place over a relatively short period in the lead up to the budget setting, Shaping our Future was planned to run over a ten month period*, with two distinct phases based on the need to inform, consult and engage with our communities.

Phase 1 (Feb-Mar and May-Sept 2016)*	
Aim	Actions
<p>Inform residents, community groups, partners and other stakeholders about the scale of the Council's budget challenge.</p> <p>Set out the need for the Council to work in new ways to be able to meet future service demands.</p> <p>Set out ways in which the Council has already taken action to reduce costs and transform services.</p> <p>Consult residents and community groups on service priorities and seek their suggestions on new ways of working, making savings and generating income.</p>	<p>Shaping our Future campaign launched in local media, on council website, on social media, posters and banners.</p> <p>'Have Your Say' email account set up and public comment cards distributed.</p> <p>Information provided directly to 30 local groups and on our behalf by MVA (voluntary organisations' umbrella group) to over 100 voluntary organisations.</p> <p>Offer of group discussions for local groups with members of Senior Management Team attending. Meetings held with Federation of Community Councils, Midlothian People's Equality Group, Neighbourhood Planning umbrella group, residents and carers groups.</p> <p>Easy Read guide to Shaping our Future produced in consultation with local People First group.</p> <p>Easy Read 'infographics' factsheets produced setting out 'Our budget challenge' and 'How we spend your money'.</p>

* There was a moratorium on campaign publicity during the Scottish Parliamentary Election (purdah) period from mid-March to early May 2016.

Phase 2 (Oct-Nov 2016)	
Aim	Actions
<p>Produce a more detailed series of options for service changes/ savings covering each of the Council's key service areas, to go out to public consultation.</p> <p>Produce detailed options for a separate consultation covering Libraries and Customer Services.</p> <p>Seek suggestions from residents, local groups and partners on new ways of working, making savings and generating income.</p>	<p>'Choices for Change' consultation paper and opinion survey published (Oct-Nov 2016).</p> <p>'Shaping our Future – Libraries and Customer Services' consultation paper and survey published (Oct-Nov 2016).</p> <p>'Choices for Change' publicised in newspaper articles, newspaper adverts, local radio news, local radio interview, web content, on social media, and new-style posters and comment cards in libraries and other council facilities.</p> <p>Over 100 local groups and organisations advised directly of Phase 2 consultation and notification distributed through Midlothian Voluntary Action (MVA) umbrella group.</p>

Breakdown of responses

Shaping our Future – Phases 1 and 2	
Total number of individual and group responses received during both phases of the campaign from February to November 2016 (including emails, letters, comment cards, citizens' panel returns and survey responses)	1,713
Survey responses received in the phase 2, 'Choices for Change' consultation (number of completed public opinion surveys from October to November 2016)	486
Those received as part of Citizens' Panel survey (spring 2016)	609
Number of local groups and voluntary organisations contacted during the consultation period. Some of these groups held specific discussions on Shaping our Future and their feedback has been included in the consultation findings	c.130
Survey responses received in the separate, phase 2, Libraries and Customer Services consultation (completed public opinion surveys from October to November 2016)	447
Total number of additional public comments, suggestions made to save money; ideas to transform services or stated preferences for spending priorities (excluding comments received with the Libraries and Customer Services surveys)	1,059
Money saving ideas and comments received to date from employees as part of the internal engagement campaign – running in parallel with 'Shaping our Future'. (Figure not included in the total number of public responses above)	120

Responses to Choices for Change survey (Oct-Nov 2016)

- Of the 484 responses received to the Choices for Change consultation, the greatest number came from Penicuik, Bonnyrigg, Gorebridge, Dalkeith and Newtongrange.
- 65% of respondents were female and 32% male. (3% preferred not to say.)
- More than 98% described themselves as White Scottish, White British or White other. Just under 2% were from other ethnic groups.
- 69% were employed full- or part-time. 7.49% were self employed and 12.39% retired. 1.44% were unemployed.
- 79.5% were homeowners and 15.73% lived in rented accommodation.

A full breakdown of answers to questions on respondents' backgrounds is included in supplementary Paper B: *Choices for Change Public Opinion Survey and Citizens' Panel Results 2016*

Summary of key findings

Choices for Change survey (Oct-Nov 2016)

The following is a summary of key findings based on service area. Most additional comments/ concerns included with individual survey responses (listed in supplementary Paper C) related to waste collection, education, roads, and sport and leisure. These additional comments largely reinforced the opinions expressed below.

Education

- Investment in education is seen as a priority with nearly 86% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing.
- Nearly 54% agreed that we should review our legislative requirement to provide transport to high schools.
- 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.
- Over 85% of respondents agreed that we should extend existing schools or build larger primary schools to address a growing pupil population.

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 disagreement with 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

- Nearly 40% agreed that we should end our contribution to the Pentland Hills Regional Park and over 35% disagreed. Around a quarter had no strong opinion.
- 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”.
- Overall, 83% of respondents stated that the information provided within the supplementary panel questionnaire “Shaping Our Future” was useful.

Local group discussions (May-Sept 2016)

- Over the spring and summer of 2016, we engaged directly with around 30 local groups – distributing campaign materials and encouraging local group discussions. The Chief Executive and Directors also attended some of these meetings to make presentations and to answer questions relating to the Shaping our Future consultation. Contact was made with organisations including tenant and residents’ groups, the Federation of Community Councils, equalities groups, disabilities groups, mental health groups, carers’ groups and Neighbourhood Planning groups.
- The Midlothian voluntary organisation umbrella group, the MVA, also circulated campaign materials on our behalf to over 100 groups including the Voluntary Providers’ Forum; the Voluntary Sector Forum; the Voluntary Sector Children & Young People sub-group, and a wide range of local voluntary organisations.
- The following groups accepted an invitation from members of the Senior Management Team to attend discussions on the Council’s budget challenge and the Shaping our Future consultation:
 - Midlothian People’s Equality Group
 - Midlothian Federation of Community Councils
 - Midlothian-wide Neighbourhood Planning Group
 - Cowan Court Tenants’ Group

In addition, the following also held discussions and/ or submitted a group response:

- Orchard Centre Services (Health in Mind)
- Forward Mid (disabled people’s organisation)
- Midlothian Financial Inclusion Network
- People First Dalkeith Group

The detailed feedback from these group discussions and other group responses appear in supplementary Paper C: *List of individual comments received from residents and joint responses received from local groups – Shaping our Future 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.

Comments received in Phase 1 of consultation (Feb-Sept 2016)

- It proved difficult to engage the public during the early phase of the campaign when we asked them very broad questions about service priorities, how they would save money, what they would do differently, etc. Publicity for the campaign was also held back during the election campaign period (mid-March to early May 2016), due to legal restrictions. As a result, the initial response in the short ‘pre-purdah’ period (early February to mid-March) was slow, with comments and suggestions relating for the most part to transport, parking and environmental issues and concerns about the amount of new house building in the area.

- By way of contrast, where the Council made specific spending decisions around the 2016/ 17 budget in early March (mostly relating to increased charges) the number of comments (albeit mainly negative) increased markedly, most of these on social media.
- Similarly, when the more detailed 'Choices for Change' consultation papers and public surveys were launched in late September 2016, public interest rose. In addition to the survey responses themselves, there was an increase in separate comments received through social media, comment cards, by letter and email.

Libraries and Customer Services survey

A separate Libraries and Customer Services consultation ran in parallel with the main Choices for Change survey from early October to mid November 2016 and attracted 447 returns. The results of the public opinion survey will form a separate report to be presented to the Council's Customer Services Project Board in December 2016.

Employee consultation and engagement

An employee engagement campaign was launched by the Chief Executive in early October 2016 to encourage staff to contribute ideas for saving money and improving services. The 'Tell Ken' campaign will run until the end of the year, and has received an encouraging response to date, with well over 100 ideas submitted. Details of the best ideas will be published early in 2017 and further engagement activity is planned with the development of the Council's new Internal Communications and Engagement Strategy.

Next steps

Reporting to Council

The findings of the Shaping our Future consultation 2016 will be reported to a meeting of Midlothian Council on 20 December 2016, and will form an appendix to the financial management report presented to the Council at that meeting. The findings will be used in discussions leading to the Council setting its budget for 2017/18 and in considering options for service transformation and forward budget planning for 2018/19 and beyond.

The findings of the separate 'Shaping our Future - Libraries and Customer Services' consultation will be presented to the Council's Customer Services project Board in December 2016.

Further consultation and engagement

The Council plans further public consultation on service transformation and budget saving proposals as these emerge as part of the wider communications and engagement strategies which will be developed during 2017. A second phase consultation is also planned on proposals for service redesign in Libraries and Customer Services.

The Shaping our Future campaign will remain in place during the early part of 2017, with residents and local groups able to submit comments or suggestions at any time up until mid-March. The future of the campaign will be reviewed, and other public consultation options considered, following the local council elections in May 2017.

More information on the Council's budget challenge and updates on Shaping our Future can be found at www.midlothian.gov.uk/shapingourfuture

Comments and suggestions can be forwarded by email to HaveYourSay@midlothian.gov.uk or in writing to Have Your Say, Communications and Marketing, Midlothian Council, Midlothian House, Buccleuch Street, Dalkeith EH22 1DN.