

**Notice of Motion from Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick
for the Council Meeting on 21st February 2023**

Item 4 – Revenue Budget 2023/24 to 2027/28

Council notes the hugely challenging financial position facing the council as a result of sustained cuts to its revenue funding since 2007. In the context of West Lothian this has cumulatively amounted to over £150 million of savings having to be made over the period.

The Scottish Government's claim that the local government funding increase for 2023/24 was £570 million is misleading. COSLA subsequently demonstrated that the actual cash increase to core council funding was in fact a much smaller £71 million equivalent to a significant real terms reduction in funding.

Given the current extreme financial landscape, the ever increasing lack of flexibility for councils due to Scottish Government interference, most notably in respect of the recent announcements regarding teacher numbers, pupil support staff and learning hours, is resulting in very limited choices in how councils deliver services. This will inevitably impact on the provision of vital community services.

Council agrees that the Scottish Government in power since 2007 has regrettably demonstrated disdain and contempt for local government in Scotland and seems to have entirely given up on any pretence of partnership working or recognition of councils' legitimate authority to make decisions on services they deliver on behalf of valued local communities.

This continued ill-considered approach by the Scottish Government to centralising decision making and imposition of restrictions poses a very concerning threat to the continued ability of the council to maintain a range of high-quality services to the public in West Lothian.

Council therefore:

1. Notes and welcomes the engagement at the special PDSP meetings in January 2023, including comments from trade unions and community organisation representatives in attendance;
2. Notes the council faces a revenue budget gap of £43.4 million over the five years 2023/24 to 2027/28, and a gap of £31.7 million over the three years 2023/24 to 2025/26, as a result of Scottish Government grant funding not being sufficient to meet the increased costs faced by the council;
3. Notes the approach taken in relation to the integrated impact assessment (IIAs) of the budget as set out in Appendix 10;
4. Notes the feedback on the budget saving measures from the PDSP meetings as set out in Appendix 1;

5. Agrees the budget savings measures for the three years 2023/24 to 2025/26, as set out in Appendix 3, including the full year impact of savings in 2026/27 and 2027/28, with the exception of the following measures to be removed from the three-year budget, and agrees that officers should carry out a comprehensive review of all council funded transport services including subsidised bus transport, demand responsive transport and mainstream school transport, to be reported to PDSP and Council Executive;

	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000	3 Year Total £'000
Housing, Customer & Building Services				
H4a - Rationalise library facilities	0	121	0	121
Operational Services				
O1a - Removal of subsidised bus & DRT	1,463	487	0	1,950
O1b - Mainstream school transport	951	321	0	1,272
Indexation for O1a be added to model	94	80	82	256
Indexation for O1b be added to model	62	52	54	168
O2a - Removal of street crossing patrol	356	119	0	475
O4a - Removal of festive lighting	85	0	0	85
O4b - Street lighting electrician (50%)	31	0	0	31
O6a - Charges for garden waste	661	159	0	820
Chief Executive/Finance & Property Services				
F7a - Property savings from libraries	0	0	20	20
F7b - Closure of nine APCs (retain four at Livingston South Station, Bathgate Acredale, Broxburn and Linlithgow Water Yett)	50	60	0	110
Indexation for F7b be added to model	3	3	3	9
Total	3,756	1,402	159	5,317

6. Agrees that the impact of removing the budget savings in the above table is funded over the period 2023/24 to 2025/26 by increasing council tax by 5.8% in 2023/24 and assuming council tax increases of 5.8% in 2024/25 and 2025/26, and by utilising £6.3 million of one-off funding over the three-year period;
7. Notes the risks to deliverability of the revised budget savings measures, as summarised in Appendix 4;
8. Agrees that officers will continue to consider options, including the ideas and suggestions contained within Appendix 2, to address the remaining balance of savings to be identified to ensure a balanced recurring budget over the five-year period;
9. Agrees a schedule of charges for the three years 2023/24 to 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 5 of the report;
10. Agrees the proposed revenue budgets for the three years 2023/24 to 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 6 of the report and as amended by recommendation 5 above;
11. Agrees the 2023/24 level of recurring resources associated with the functions delegated to the West Lothian Integration Joint Board (IJB) of £95.2 million, with forecast resources of £97.8 million and £99.9 million for 2024/25 and 2025/26 respectively;

12. Agrees that, should additional recurring resources be forthcoming at a later date, that these resources should, in the first instance, be used to balance the five-year revenue budget on a recurring basis;
13. Agrees a council tax increase of 5.8% for 2023/24;
14. Agrees assumed council tax increases of 5.8% in 2024/25 and 2025/26 and 4.5% in 2026/27 and 2027/28 and agrees that these increases will be kept under review taking account of fiscal and economic circumstances, including future grant funding;
15. Agrees the application of identified one off resources to address anticipated time limited pressures and to support delivery of a balanced three-year revenue budget, as set out in Appendix 7 of the report, with the remaining balance, as amended by recommendation 5, being held in contingency to support the ongoing financial sustainability of the council;
16. Notes the position in regard to the General Fund Balance and other reserves, as set out in Appendix 8;
17. Approves a strategy of maintaining a minimum uncommitted General Fund Balance of £2 million;
18. Approves the prudential indicators, as set out in Appendix 9;
19. Agrees that officers should keep developments around funding and pressures under review and report to elected members as required.



Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick
Leader
West Lothian Council Labour Group