

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

WEST LOTHIAN COMMUNITY CHOICES – UPDATE ON GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONSULTATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY

REPORT BY HEAD OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to update the Panel on the approach for the delivery of Community Choices for Grounds Maintenance and to provide the Panel with an update on the results from the consultation on Grounds Maintenance activities.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Panel:

1. Note the Community Choices approach for Grounds Maintenance.
2. Note the findings from the consultation for Grounds Maintenance.
3. Note the officer recommendations that the council continues with its current priorities and service standards for Grounds Maintenance activities.
4. Note the officer recommendations that officers develop options based on the three key themes identified from participants' feedback for consultation with communities in Summer/Autumn 2022.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; developing employees; making best use of our resources; working with other organisations.
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	The council is required to have transparent planning and governance. COSLA and the Scottish Government have agreed a Community Choices Framework, with targets that councils are required to meet.
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None
IV	Impact on performance and performance	None at present, however the outcome of the implementation of new maintenance plans and

	Indicators	strategies may result in a change to current service standards.
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	<p>Effective planning and prioritisation of resources will be essential to identify and achieve outcomes.</p> <p>Outcome 12 – We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.</p> <p>Outcome 13 – We take a pride in a strong, fair and inclusive society.</p>
VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	The budgets for West Lothian Community Choices have been identified. The budget value for Grounds Maintenance is £1.593m
VII	Consideration at PDSP	Community Choices options were considered by Partnership and Resources PDSP on 19 January 2018.
VIII	Other consultations	<p>An officer Community Choices Working Group has been established and has service representatives from across the council to review and develop the approach to Community Choices.</p> <p>COSLA</p> <p>A report was presented and agreed at Council Executive in November 2019.</p>

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D1 Background

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is usually referred to as Community Choices in Scotland and is a democratic process which empowers communities to have more say on how resources in their area are used. It is based on the view that communities are best placed to be involved in or make decisions around their own needs.

A report was presented to Council Executive in November 2019 setting out budget areas which will be subject to the West Lothian Community Choices process; this included the Grounds Maintenance revenue budget of £1.593m.

It should be noted that Community Choices is not about identifying separate and/or additional resources. It is about involving communities in decisions on the allocation of current resources.

A pilot of the Community Choices processes was launched in November 2020 for planned park improvement projects within the capital programme for 2021/22. The survey has been promoted via social media and promotional material has been distributed to relevant community councils, local groups and schools. Feedback from the survey was used to give communities the opportunity to agree park improvements.

Learning from this process was used to review and inform the Community Choices process for Grounds Maintenance.

D2 Approach to Grounds Maintenance

NETs, Land and Countryside Services already undertakes a number of consultations and engagement exercises, including budget consultations. However, these consultations are primarily Place Based approaches that focus on the implementation of Open Space Capital Projects.

Following the Transforming Your Council consultation process the council introduced new service standards for Grounds Maintenance on 1 April 2019 and the council has set out its priorities within these service standards.

Through the Community Choices process there was an opportunity to review the current service standards and there was also an opportunity to further engage with stakeholders to enable members of the public to influence the service. By listening to communities, the service could be potentially delivered with different priorities and outcomes.

The officer Community Choices Working Group considered the Community Choices approach taken to Grounds Maintenance in North Ayrshire and feedback from COSLA before considering the best approach and use of resources for West Lothian to undertake the process. It was determined that the approach in West Lothian would be to undertake the consultation in two stages as follows:

- Stage 1 – a high level consultation was undertaken on a West Lothian wide basis on the existing service standards. The consultation took place in June and July 2021 and was successfully concluded. The findings are set out in section D3 of the report.
- Stage 2 – this will involve the development of options for local areas and will be undertaken on a phased ward by ward basis. This will enable officers to have more detailed conversations with communities to better meet the priorities of each ward and to direct resources to ensure that community needs are being achieved. Carrying out the process on a phased ward by ward basis would also acknowledge the different priorities and diversity of the wards to better meet the needs of the local area, with the potential that the wards could identify slightly different priorities and changes to the Grounds Maintenance needs in the ward area. It is planned that that this would be undertaken online, with the development of the CONSUL platform currently underway; and would be supported via staff presence within open space areas and partnership centres to encourage discussions and engagement with people in their local area. Stage 2 would be undertaken during Summer/Autumn 2022.

A NETs, Land and Countryside steering group has been established to ensure all staff are engaged in the process and this will be expanded to include representatives from the community as part of stage 2.

D.3 Findings from Consultation

Officers have now reviewed all the responses and comments returned from the Grounds Maintenance consultation. In total, the council received 1,208 responses and 849 comments from the consultation.

From the responses received, 730 (61%) participants agreed that the council's current service priorities and service standards are appropriate for Grounds Maintenance activities; therefore, it is recommended that the council continues with its current service standards for Grounds Maintenance activities.

Themes

When considering the comments and feedback from participants, the comments can be grouped into three key themes:

- Grass Cutting
- Maintenance of Roadside Verges and Roundabouts
- Wild Flower Meadows and Summer Bedding

Grass Cutting

Over 1000 of the participants said they used parks and open spaces on a daily basis with 470 of those participants stating that grass cutting should be the council's top priority.

Whilst the feedback suggests that grass cutting is a top priority the comments don't suggest additional grass cutting. Instead the majority of the comments suggest that the council adopts a more flexible approach to grass cutting; introducing the collection and removal of grass in some high amenity areas whilst leaving grass uncut to grow naturally in some areas of parks and open spaces to improve biodiversity.

Maintenance of Roadside Verges and Roundabouts

Nearly 700 of the participants said they drive daily within West Lothian with approximately 23% of all participants saying that they viewed the maintenance of roadside verges and roundabouts as a key priority.

The feedback from participants suggests that the council should consider increasing the frequency of cutting at junctions to maintain sightlines. The survey results also suggest that verges are untidy on the approaches to towns and villages, and ask the council to consider introducing some planting or wildflowers on the approaches to towns and villages, and on roundabouts to improve the appearance of roadside verges and roundabouts at key locations throughout West Lothian.

Wild Flower Meadows and Summer Bedding

Nearly 500 participants said they wanted to see more wildflower meadows and summer bedding areas across West Lothian to improve the natural habitat and biodiversity within West Lothian. In particular, the comments suggest introducing wildflowers along roadside verges and on roundabouts to improve the appearance of these features which links to the other comments regarding the maintenance of roadside verges.

D.4 Next Steps and Timescale

Following the successful completion of the Stage 1 consultation that confirmed that the services current priorities and service standards are appropriate for existing Grounds Maintenance activities, the council will now focus on developing options to progress the stage 2 consultation.

For the stage 2 consultation, officers have acknowledged the three key themes identified from the participants feedback and will develop a suite of detailed options for the delivery of each of the themes identified in D3. Once the suite of options is developed the council will consult with communities as outlined in D2 – Stage 2 of the report.

The options will be developed in Spring 2022 for consultation with communities in late Summer/Autumn 2022. The consultation period in Summer/Autumn 2022 is planned to coincide with the growing season to allow officers the opportunity to show some real live sample areas as part of the discussions and engagement with participants for each of the three key themes.

Following the conclusion of the consultation and voting process on options, the results and any proposed changes to service standards will be presented to the Council Executive for consideration in late 2022. If approved, changes will then be implemented from 1 April 2023.

E CONCLUSION

Community Choices is a process to empower communities to have more say on how resources in their areas are used; the process should be an inclusive process bringing together all communities to be involved in or make decisions around their own needs.

This report provides an update on the findings from the Stage 1 consultation for Grounds Maintenance and sets out the proposed stage 2 consultation based on three key themes identified from participants feedback.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

West Lothian Community Choices - report to Partnership and Resources PDSP
January 2018

Participatory Budget Charter for Scotland – making good PB Happen

West Lothian Community Choices – report to Council Executive November 2019

Appendices/Attachments: None

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