

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC

**COUNCIL EXECUTIVE****WEST LOTHIAN COMMUNITY CHOICES – UPDATE****REPORT BY HEAD OF FINANCE AND PROPERTY SERVICES****A. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on wider developments in relation to community choices, a progress and learning update on the approaches already undertaken for West Lothian Community Choices, as well as setting out potential areas of further development and delivery of West Lothian Community Choices to embed deliberative democracy and dialogue in a number of activities across the council.

**B. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Council Executive:

1. Notes the areas of wider development for community choices and frameworks which are being set out at a national level for consideration and progression;
2. Notes the meaning and narrative for local authorities to move towards mainstream community choices as part of standard practice for deliberative budgeting and service delivery;
3. Notes the progress on delivery of the budget areas which were previously agreed to be part of the West Lothian Community Choices processes, as set out in section D.3;
4. Approves further investigation of the areas and activities identified, within sections D.4;
5. Agrees that a report setting out the approach and timescales for each future development proposal will be presented to Council Executive by December 2022;
6. Notes that the West Lothian Community Choices working group will continue to build on learning from other local authorities to implement best practice and to engage with community planning partners to further strengthen deliberative budgeting across community planning partnerships.

**C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

<b>I Council Values</b>	Focusing on customers' needs, being honest, open and accountable, providing equality of opportunity, developing employees, making the best use of our resources, working with other organisations.
<b>II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment.</b>	The council is required to have transparent planning and governance. COSLA and the Scottish Government have agreed a Community Choices Framework, with targets and frameworks that councils are required to deliver.
<b>III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers</b>	None.
<b>IV Impact on performance and performance indicators</b>	None at this stage.

<b>V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement</b>	Effective planning and prioritisation of resources will be essential to identify and achieve outcomes. Outcome 13 – We take a pride in a strong, fair and inclusive society.
<b>VI Resources (Financial, Staffing and Property)</b>	The budgets for West Lothian Community Choices have been identified and set out in section D.3.
<b>VII Consideration at PDSP</b>	West Lothian Community Choices was considered by Partnership and Resources PDSP on 19 January 2018
<b>VIII Other consultations</b>	An officer West Lothian Community Choices working group with service representatives from across the council has been developing the approach to Community Choices.

## **D. TERMS OF REPORT**

### **D.1 Background**

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is usually referred to as 'Community Choices' in Scotland, and is a democratic process which empowers communities to have a say in how resources in their area are used. Community Choices is one way of supporting a more participatory democracy sitting alongside community engagement, community empowerment and representative democracy. It enables communities (which can be a community of interest, a community of identity or community based on place) to be involved in and making decisions around their own needs. Community Choices is not necessarily about identifying separate and/or additional resources, and can be about involving communities in developing and influencing decisions on allocation of current resources.

A report was agreed by Council Executive in November 2019 setting out the initial budget areas that would be directed by West Lothian Community Choices. Update reports were provided in December 2020 and June 2021, which set out timescales as well as key areas of development, including digital engagement and the use of a consultation platform (Consul).

### **D.2 Community Choices National Development**

#### **D.2.1 Framework Agreement**

COSLA leaders committed to a 1% Framework Agreement in October 2017 which stated that at least 1% of local authority budgets (excluding council tax) would be subject to PB by the end of 2020/21. During 2020 local authority officers noted that whilst some work on PB was continuing, the majority of local PB activity (planning or delivery) had stopped in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Owing to the local response to Covid-19, COSLA's Community Wellbeing Board made clear that achieving the 1% Framework Agreement target by the end of 2020/21 was unachievable and agreed to work with Scottish Government officials to design solutions for a more flexible approach to delivering mainstream participatory budgeting.

COSLA, the National PB Officers Network and the Scottish Government have worked together to update the Framework Agreement for 2021 recognising the delays to local PB processes due to Covid-19. The framework was updated to state that, where councils required some flexibility to meet the target, it was expected that at least 1% of council budgets would be subject to PB by the end of 2021/22

The calculation for the 1% remains the same and is based on the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2021/22: 1% Target = Total Estimated Expenditure – Assumed Council Tax Contribution \* 1%

## D.2.2 Future of Participatory Budgeting in Scotland – Framework

A National Strategic Group has been created to provide a direction for PB in Scotland, particularly in light of the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and the opportunities to 'build back better' as part of the recovery. The group's members represent a wide range of involvement and experience in PB, with representation from local community organisations, national third sector intermediaries, local government, national bodies, funders, third sector interfaces and academia. The group has identified a shared ambition "that in five years' time PB is part of the core infrastructure of a constantly renewing democratic and community life across Scotland.

The group have published a framework for the future of PB in Scotland. Which sets out shared intentions and ambitions for PB and, looking ahead, outlines a series of priority recommendations to be carried forward along with indicators of progress.

The strategic framework can be found on the Scottish Government website. However, an overview of the priority areas for development and delivery are provided below.

The framework reflects calls for action from, amongst others, Social Renewal Advisory Board report and COSLA's Blueprint for Local Government, to shift the balance of power so that communities of place and identity have more control over decisions that affect their lives.

The framework has identified 16 priorities grouped under five themes as follows:

### Culture Shift, Leadership and Long-Term Thinking

- Priority 1 shared understanding of PB – The definition of PB is informed by the features outlined in the PB Charter for Scotland.
- Priority 2 making the links to the National Performance Framework - the links between the National Performance Framework, community empowerment and PB are made more explicit. To engage and align and integrate PB with wider policy development and implementation such as the Local Governance Review, Community Empowerment Act, New Democracy Bill, Children's Rights legislation, National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes and Scottish Government's participation framework.
- Priority 3 addressing inequalities – PB is constantly tested to ensure it is addressing and responding to the exclusion of marginalised groups right across representative and participatory democracy.
- Priority 4 continuous learning – development of a continuous learning culture through evaluation of processes, shared learning across community of practice and learning through research and lived experience evidence.
- Priority 5 holding PB processes directly – encourage Scottish Government to identify opportunities to hold direct PB processes with initial opportunities around tackling the climate challenge.

### Cross-Cutting Priorities

- Priority 6 evidence the long-term impact – evidence the long-term impact of PB processes and the benefit of empowered participation in a range of areas including health, social care, education and housing.
- Priority 7 climate justice – climate justice with a focus on Just Transition with opportunities for participation in tackling climate change.
- Priority 8 PB supporting equalities and rights-based budgeting – develop PB that compliments and supports equalities and rights based budgeting to achieve better outcomes.

### Health and Wellbeing

- Priority 9 public sector collaboration – focus on how public sector partners can use PB to collaborate and work more effectively with the community to support health and wellbeing.
- Priority 10 sustainable transport – support the use of PB to create opportunities for direct participation in decisions around sustainable transport options contributing to reducing inequalities and efforts to mitigate climate change.
- Priority 11 health and social care – support the recommendation of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care in Scotland for better participation in decision making by exploring PB as a way to share power over decisions about mainstream social care budgets. Bridging locality planning and the work of Integrated Joint Boards.

### Education

- Priority 12 PB across education – support high quality PB processes across education, supporting equality in setting agenda and making decisions where PB supports policy or budget that is locally identified as important. Allowing young people and the wider education community to feel listened to and participate in decisions and policies that affect them.
- Priority 13 PB in schools – encourage a focus on developing PB further in secondary schools, building on PB in primary schools. Encouraging PB activity in areas identified together by pupils, parents, school staff, education authorities and partners.
- Priority 14 PB addressing the attainment gap – ongoing development of PB as a tool to address challenges of poverty and inequality experienced by children by supporting Pupil Equity Funding and Scottish Attainment Challenge.

### Housing with Links to the Environment

- Priority 15 engaging in housing – PB as a mechanism for housing providers to engage with their tenants and the wider community in the allocation of funds that contribute to the wellbeing and place-based agenda.
- Priority 16 PB and homelessness – develop ways to include PB within efforts to end homelessness. Believing that this is done via a co-production approach alongside people with lived experience, front line workers, services and communities.

## **D.2.3 COSLA Support and Development**

COSLA has been funded to provide support to local authorities to support PB and community empowerment. There is an existing PB Officers Network which meet quarterly with representation from all local authorities. In addition to this, is at the March COSLA Community Wellbeing Board, members agreed that COSLA officers should establish a Strategic and Operational working group to support mainstreaming of PB across all areas of council services. This group will also advise COSLA officers in the drafting of national guidance and help inform COSLA input to the National PB Strategic Working Group, the first meeting was held on 26 May with discussions focussing on identifying policy barriers to implementing mainstream PB.

At the most recent PB Officers Network meeting a number of support developments and updates were presented, these included:

- The Scottish Government, COSLA and Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) are meeting to focus on green and climate change PB and community led climate action and there is potential for a national PB process being planned for announcement in late September 2022.
- The Young Scot platform have undertaken further upgrades to their PB platform and are supporting a number of councils for youth participation.
- There have also been presentations from South Lanarkshire and North Ayrshire on their approaches to PEF allocation using PB and Health and Social Care funding for youth PB.
- Education Scotland are rolling out professional learning for attainment advisors on PB and this was scheduled to commence in May 2022.

- A new SCQF Level 5 qualification has been launched by Fife College for young people and communities to learn more about PB, the distinction between grants based PB and Mainstream PB processes and to engage in local decisions on services and budgets. free places will be available for 750 participants who are volunteering with PB and/or Grant Making processes in Scotland.
- The Improvement Service has developed an elected member briefing note on mainstream PB.

### **D.3 West Lothian Community Choices Update**

Following Council Executive in June 2021, officers have been developing West Lothian Community Choices processes, as well as providing information on progress to COSLA for national data collection.

#### **D.3.1 COSLA Data Collection**

As part of the 1% Framework Agreement local authorities are required to provide information to COSLA to allow them to collated and feedback to the Scottish Government on the progress of PB delivery by local authorities. Based on the framework West Lothian has a target of £3.467 million. The West Lothian Community Choices approved target was £3.810 million, and during 2020/21 £1.139 million was subject to West Lothian Community Choices, with an update provided to Council Executive in June 2021 on the delivery of these budgets, and a further £2.003 million undertaken during 2022/23 giving a total of £3.142 million.

The pandemic has had an impact on the deliverability and engagement of West Lothian Community Choices along with capital budget constraints meaning that previously identified capital investment budgets cannot be fully delivered in line with West Lothian Community Choices; However, progress is underway on processes to ensure the initial target is achieved as well as identifying areas for progress towards mainstream West Lothian Community Choices and a shift away from purely identifying a budget amount to achieve a monetary target. An update on the processes undertaken to date is provided in D.3.2 and the proposed development of ongoing and mainstream West Lothian Community Choices is set out in D.4.

#### **D.3.2 West Lothian Community Choices Delivery Updates**

The West Lothian Community Choices working group has service representatives, who are the community choices champions for their service area, as well as representatives from key enabler services and supports the delivery of West Lothian Community Choices. The working group ensures that everyone involved in the processes is supported, are fully aware of the relevant standards and principles, to ensure that value for money is achieved. The working group undertakes research and liaison with other local authorities to gain further learning and knowledge on Community Choices processes to ensure that the best and most practicable approaches are taken. This shared learning across the working group has been beneficial to the below processes.

##### Education – Pupil Equity Fund (PEF)

Head Teachers have the authority to decide on the allocation of PEF monies for their school. The original West Lothian Community Choices target was £156,762, however all schools in West Lothian ran West Lothian Community Choices processes totalling £180,254.

Predominantly schools have consulted with pupils, parents and staff with a few schools including the wider school community. A variety of consultation processes have been utilised including meetings, parent council discussions, floorbook activities with children, surveys, pupil group discussions, school assemblies, tutor group discussions and voting with tokens. The outcome of processes has been shared with the school community via newsletters and school app.

The outcome of the West Lothian Community Choices process has resulted in a wide range of decisions, including:

- Residential support
- Enhancement of outside areas
- Funding for extra-curricular clubs
- Learning packs
- Outdoor clothing
- Additional playtime resources
- Super study support
- Free fruit tuck shop
- Family learning programme
- External providers of activities
- Funding for additional learning opportunities – school trips, workshops and activities

#### Social Policy – Children and Families

Around 60 young people were empowered to participate in the redesign of supported accommodation services. The participation process involved young people who have utilised services in the recent past and currently, as well as some of those who will be using services in the immediate future. Engagement methods included esurveys, face to face and virtual focus groups and one to one discussion. This resulted in young people having a direct influence over the design and delivery of the service and a budget of £946,664.

#### Open Space Parks – Planned Improvements

Planned improvements for parks and open spaces within the capital programme were identified and the Community Choices process was undertaken during November 2020 and April 2021 for a budget of £167,000, with more processes planned in 2022.

The 2020/21 West Lothian Community Choices park improvements process focussed on five parks with the engagement process involving surveys to gather information on the park and the community uses of the park and the council's participation platform CONSUL was used to ask local communities to prioritise the identified options to ensure the budget was spent to meet the needs of the community.

#### Blackburn Community Choices

A pilot grant budget of £25,000 was subject to West Lothian Community Choices and aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of the community of Blackburn. Groups and organisations were asked to put forward their ideas and potential projects with eleven applications received. Information on each of the projects was posted on the dedicated webpage and a community newsletter was sent to every household detailing all the projects. The local community was invited to vote for the three projects they felt best met the needs of the community. The process was originally to pilot a digital only approach; however, it was recognised that there are potential limitations of a digital only voting process and therefore a telephone line was set-up to enable local residents to place their vote over the phone.

An evaluation report was prepared to allow other council processes to take learning points from the pilot. As follows:

- A purely digital approach is not enough. Digital should be used in conjunction with other methods so participants have a choice in how to get involved.
- Using mandatory voting helped to balance out the vote and ensure that individuals did not just vote for their own group or favourite project.
- Face to face, community-based publicity is likely to be advantageous and offers opportunities and different avenues to promote the project and enable people to get involved.
- Engagement with primary and secondary schools will ensure participation of young people.

- The use of more interactive methods would be useful e.g. videos, interactive voting (Mentimetre)
- Targeted engagement to particular groups in the community may widen engagement e.g. schools, homeless unit, clubs.
- Timing of processes is important, for example for processes not to coincide with school and public holidays.

#### Tenants Environmental Improvements

Housing capital allocates £150,000 per annum to deliver environmental improvement projects to improve the environment for council tenants. It has been agreed that a West Lothian Community Choices process will be used going forward for this budget with the first processes now being completed for Blackburn, Whitburn & Bathgate. The West Lothian Community Choices approach to this budget area was undertaken in three stages:

Stage 1 Idea Generation – the community was encouraged to put forward suggestions, via the CONSUL platform, for improvements in their local area with maps setting out which areas of HRA land were suitable. This was promoted via Facebook and by asking local community councils and relevant groups to participate and encourage engagement.

Stage 2 Project Refinement – The tenants Capital Working Group was the steering group and worked alongside council officers to establish project viability and to further develop the suggested projects.

Stage 3 Decision Making – There were insufficient viable projects to require a community voting process. But the tenant's participation panel were involved in agreeing that the viable projects were progressed for delivery.

As this was the first time undertaking a West Lothian Community Choices approach for this budget, areas of development has been identified, including better and timelier liaison with tenants including face-to-face engagement and engaging directly with community councils and local community groups to get buy-in for the process.

#### Whitburn Public Art

A West Lothian Community Choices approach was completed for the capital budget for the design and installation of public art outside the new Whitburn Partnership Centre. This involved the contracted artist engaging with the local community and schools with promotion of the process via social media channels, local groups and the community council. Following the artists engagement and design work, three design concepts were created and the community of Whitburn were asked to vote on which design they would like to be developed for the art installation. The voting process was done online as well as face-to-face during the artists reveal event.

The learning taken from this approach is:

- Consider promotion approach –the promotion used the council's Your Whitburn page but there may be better opportunities to use wider council social media sites. Flyers and banners for promotion could also be considered.
- School involvement in the voting process would help to better engage the full community.
- Timing of the process, which was rescheduled due to Covid19, meaning the voting stage was held over the school and public holidays.
- Online CONSUL and face-to-face voting is compatible and can be recorded and made transparent on CONSUL.

### Youth Climate Change

Funding of £6,321 was received following COP26 to engage young people in developing small scale ideas related to mitigating the impact of climate change. This involved young people who had been selected for their roles as COP26 Local Champions by Youthlink Scotland. Providing input to the process and helping with screening of funding applications. There was sufficient funding for all proposed projects, and therefore a vote was not required; However, the young people were active participants in reviewing the projects and were empowered to decide on whether the funding was appropriate for disbursement.

The timescales given by the Scottish Government to run the process following COP26 was very short and this again highlights that timing is a key consideration of West Lothian Community Choices processes to allow sufficient time to engage local groups and citizens.

### Grounds Maintenance

A high-level survey was undertaken on a West Lothian wide basis to confirm whether the communities of West Lothian feel that the focus and priorities of the service standards are appropriate. The results of the survey were analysed and the majority of the responses were supportive of the priorities set out in the service standards for Grounds Maintenance. In addition, the feedback was analysed and council officers were able to identify three key themes suggested by the public as areas for improvement in the service:

- Grass cutting – The majority of the comments received 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 - Feedback from participants suggests increasing the frequency of cutting at junctions to maintain sightlines. The survey results also 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
- Wildflower meadows and summer bedding - 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

The next stage in the process will commence in late Summer/Autumn 2022 which will see officers develop options based on the public feedback and comments received with the public being invited to vote on the developed proposals. The vote will be available via the digital engagement platform CONSUL with alternative options, including telephone, being made available to ensure everyone who wants to take part is able to do so. Consideration will also be given to holding community drop-in sessions to discuss the options being put forward.

### Operational Services – Litter Bins

The litter bin budget is for the provision and servicing of litter bins in West Lothian. Presently the installation and provision of public litter bins throughout West Lothian is based on a demand driven service. This has led to a provision of bins that may not always be the most effective in dealing with the issue of littering. Part of the modernisation of this service has involved the installation of electronic sensors within the bins to provide data showing how often bins need to be emptied.

Smart bins have now been installed across key locations in West Lothian and the bin sensor data, will be used to review of all existing litter bins to ensure that the type, size and location of litter bins meets community needs and bins meet the criteria set out in the proposed Litter Bin Plan. All communities will be consulted on the review of litter bins.



### Open Space – Play Areas

The capital budget for play areas is constrained and focusses on the maintenance of existing play parks. However, where new play areas are being delivered due to new housing and where there are large scale refurbishments these will be delivered using a West Lothian Community Choices approach with the local community on the provision of the play equipment for that community. There is a review of the proposed budgets is underway to identify future opportunities.

### Craigshill Community Choices

A £25,000 pilot grant budget was allocated to the community of Craigshill to address key issues in the community that have arisen due to Covid-19 and to improve the wellbeing of the local community. The process asked for projects which would focus on at least one of the following themes:

- Digital innovation, inclusion and connected communities.
- Poverty
- Community Collaboration

Seven projects were identified and the public were asked to vote online. This was done through direct engagement with the Craigshill community at pop-up events, via the local primary and secondary school and local community groups blending the online vote with face-to-face engagement to support the online voting.

129 people participated strengthening the learning that a blended approach should be used with face-to-face and online engagement.

### Equalities Community Choices

A £25,000 pilot grant budget has been allocated to address equalities issues across West Lothian. The pilot is being developed to build on the learning from previous events and the community choices process will be held later this year.

### Digital Engagement and Communication

#### CONSUL

The CONSUL platform is an open source platform which has been developed in partnership with COSLA and supported by the Scottish Government for the purpose of Community Choices (Participatory Budgeting) to be undertaken by Local Authorities in Scotland. The platform provides security, balances and checks whereas a simple survey is open to manipulation and corruption. CONSUL also has wider capabilities than purely voting on projects and it is planned to be further developed to increase community engagement and dialogue.

The platform is a significant element of West Lothian Community Choices processes; allowing people to submit ideas for funding; host discussions and deliberation of ideas; allocate budgets to projects or areas; and vote for ideas and projects to receive funding. The use of a CONSUL for West Lothian Community Choices is to;

- Involve more local people in decision making;
- Publicly demonstrate collaboration and partnership work;
- Enable all areas of a community to participate by overcoming barriers of place and time;
- Help to gather evidence and data about engagement work;
- Facilitate learning of new digital skills.

Since implementation of the platform officers have identified and implemented a number of improvements. These include the integration with MyAccount meaning that the 59,255 people who have a MyAccount in West Lothian are able to access the platform through their one set of login details. The platform has had artificial intelligence added which is designed to improve the user experience on the platform when deliberating and commenting on proposals. In addition to this more of the functionality of the platform has been tested through a number of the West Lothian Community Choices processes, this has including devising a way so that only certain postcodes can vote on a process, linking face-to-face voting with online, idea generation functions and adding additional documentation.

The platform has many functions and benefits, with a number of the benefits arising from increasing community engagement and traffic through the platform. These areas of development are set out in D.4.

#### Digital Engagement and Support

Digital engagement is wider than the use of CONSUL. iPads and tablets are now available to allow staff to be in a number of community buildings and partnership centres at different times of the day to engage with local communities' face to face to support them in using the digital engagement platform, and other online tools, and to raise awareness of the new approaches to engagement and consultation.

A dedicated email address ([westlothiancommunitychoices@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:westlothiancommunitychoices@westlothian.gov.uk)) has been created which will be added to the Community Choices webpages and the CONSUL platform. This will allow people who are having issues to email the mailbox for help.

There is awareness that face-to-face engagement is required to compliment the online processes and this is being built into the processes.

A West Lothian Community Choices toolkit for officers has been created, which links in with the engaging communities toolkit, to support officers to develop an inclusive engagement and collaborative process.

#### Communication

The West Lothian Community Choices processes so far have heavily relied upon social media interaction to promote awareness of the processes and to encourage participation. There have also been articles in the Bulletin as well as flyers for certain processes.

The wording of these promotions has been tested to try and catch attention and to build intrigue while also following plain English language.

Community Councils, local groups and other local organisations were directly contacted and asked to support and promote relevant local West Lothian Community Choices processes. There is scope to enhance this partnership working going forward.

Building on the learning to date, a communications campaign template has been prepared for officers, to support officers in creating the most appropriate communications campaign and to help to improve community engagement. The template asks:

- What is the objective of the process?
- What are the key messages to be communicated?
- What is the aim of the process?
- Who is your key and target audience?
- What are the key milestones for the process?
- It then provides information, including costing, for the various campaign communication materials available to allow the officers to decide on the appropriate approach.

## **D.4 West Lothian Community Choices for the Future**

Council Executive in June 2021 approved a number of key actions to develop West Lothian Community Choices, which have been progressed over the course of 2021/22. One of the actions was to identify areas of development to embed West Lothian Community Choices. Officers from across the council's service areas have been involved in identifying areas with the potential for implementing a West Lothian Community Choices approach.

Potential areas have been identified and mapped to the 16 priorities of the Future of Participatory Budgeting in Scotland – Framework as follows:

### **D.4.1 Education**

National PB Framework priorities 12,13 and 14.

#### **Schools**

- Continuing with the West Lothian Community Choices approach with PEF funding, there will be an ongoing requirement for at least 3% from each school's pupil equity funding to be allocated via West Lothian Community Choices.
- Opportunities will be explored with schools to pilot the use of the functionality on the Young Scot platform which has been designed for PB processes, this could be via a West Lothian Community Choices PEF process or for a school to use the Young Scot platform to encourage engagement in another West Lothian Community Choices process.
- The school West Lothian Community Choices processes will ensure they align with the national framework
- The Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh will provide an opportunity to build more robust procedures around West Lothian Community Choices processes and evidence gathering. Consideration will be given to include a West Lothian Community Choices stretch aim putting the pupil voice central to the approaches, removing barriers to involvement ensuring that the approaches meaningfully involve children, young people, parents and carers in the decision-making process. By using a stretch aim details measures for gathering evidence and report on impact will be available.
- There is willingness and ambition for education and schools to be a key feature and community of engagement.

The ambitions of West Lothian Community Choices in schools will be set out in the next update report to Council Executive.

#### **CLD Youth Services**

Youth Services has previously undertaken a West Lothian Community Choices process with COP26 funding and have identified a member of staff who will be key to supporting West Lothian Community Choices approaches within schools, mainly secondary schools. In addition to this the service can see the benefits of empowering and engaging with young people on budget decision processes and the service are proposing that part of the funding available for delivering youth provision is allocated using a West Lothian Community Choices approach. The service will explore, develop and design a West Lothian Community Choices approach to be reported in the next Council Executive update.

#### **D.4.2 Social Policy**

National PB Framework priorities 8, 9 and 11.

##### **Children and Families**

Work is currently underway to inform the development of the West Lothian Children's Service Commissioning Plan. This plan will aim to ensure that partners get the right balance between universal and targeted services and plan services which meet the needs of and improve the quality of life for children and families in West Lothian by:

- having the vision and commitment to improve services
- connecting with the needs and aspirations of users and carers
- making the best use of all available resources understanding demand and supply
- linking financial planning and service planning making relationships and working in partnership
- ensuring Best Value
- placing the equalities agenda at the centre of our service planning and delivery.

To ensure that children and young people in need have a head start in life, we are focused finding strengths within families, and in providing help at the earliest opportunity, as well as providing statutory early intervention and child protection services.

We are committed to providing services that are:

- holistic and developed with families themselves and partner agencies;
- that tackle inequalities and focus on improved outcomes for children.

The development of any new services will be done to ensure the inclusion of West Lothian Community Choices processes. The Commissioning Plan will be focused on improving outcomes from children, young people and their families. Partners in West Lothian recognise that in order to plan, develop and deliver services that have an impact and improve outcomes for people, the services users need to be empowered to be involved in the planning, design and decision making of the development of these services. There are a range of Public Social Partnerships (PSP) which are underpinned by the principles of Community Choices.

The new Mental Health Developments embeds the values and principles of the Community Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Supports and Services Framework in practice within West Lothian. The Roots PSP includes ten local third sector partners that will pilot a streamlined approach to mental health supports for children, young people and their families. This has been developed to expand the range of services available, working with young people and families to understand mental wellbeing needs and support them with making decisions about the services they receive. Groups of young people and parents have been identified to explore current mental wellbeing supports with a view to increasing involvement in designing, planning and evaluation of services. Individual families have also expressed interests and links are established. Roots partners are planning participation summer events with a range of opportunities to promote engagement with children and families.

##### **Integration Joint Board**

A new IJB strategic plan and strategic needs assessment is to be developed and implemented and this has been identified as an opportunity to utilise mainstream community choices processes. The approach would engage with residents in West Lothian and staff on how to best use the IJB budgets to meet the needs of service users. It is intended that a paper is presented to the IJB on how this approach can be used to progress community choices.

**D.4.3** Operational Services

National PB Framework priorities 7, 9 and 12.

NETs and LandOpen Space Capital

The previously approved open space budgets will continue to implement West Lothian Community Choices approaches, including park improvements, play areas, public art and litter bins. Another area where a mainstream Community Choices approach is considered suitable is for the refresh of the Open Space Plan and it is proposed that this is further investigated and reported back to Council Executive as part of the next update report.

Grounds Maintenance

Information provided in D.3 set out the progress being made to fully completing and implementing the Community Choices grounds maintenance process. This will link in with the biodiversity strategy and will be completed for implementation in 2023.

Roads

Certain capital budgets for roads improvements have been identified as potential areas of West Lothian Community Choices to increase community engagement and empowerment. It is proposed that the following areas are considered and developed:

- Prioritisation of road improvement budgets – for example where there is block funding for road improvements, the condition and suitability information will identify a number of roads of similar standard identified as requiring improvements. A Community Choices approach could be used asking the relevant community to prioritise the order in which the improvements are undertaken.
- Accident, investigation and Prevention Programme - engage with communities to try and devise engineering measures to reduce the risk of accidents occurring.
- Winter maintenance programme
- Pothole improvement budget – engage with communities on the locations of grit bins and the priorities of the community.

Free School Meals

There is an opportunity to engage with pupils, parents and teachers on the foods available within schools. The current uptake of free school meal provision highlights a potential to engage to identify if there remain barriers to uptake or if the food on offer needs to be refreshed to be more attractive.

**D.4.4** Planning and Economic Development

National PB Framework priorities 3, 4, 8 and 9.

Grants, One-off and Project Funding

Key learning from other local authorities in Scotland and elsewhere has demonstrated the potential benefits of community choices processes for the award of grants. The benefits not only include directing resources to meet the needs and priorities of communities but also increased community participation in other community engagement exercises, part of increasing the sense of community as well as the benefits realised from shared and partnership working that can result with third sector organisations. Therefore, it is proposed that further work is undertaken in conjunction with third sector partners to consider the potential role of West Lothian Community Choices going forward, including investigation the options for making West Lothian Community Choices the first approach to be considered for all grant and one-off funding.

### Community Wealth Building (CWB)

CWB and community empowerment are part of a shared vision on improving outcomes for local communities and PB is part of the tools available to support this vision. Therefore, CWB is a key enabler to supporting West Lothian Community Choices delivery through community engagement skills and contacts as well as local knowledge, needs assessments and links with CPP. It is acknowledged that CWB is part of support delivery for West Lothian Community Choices and will link in with the work of the West Lothian Community Choices champions for each service area to identify areas of crossover as well as providing support to engage with the West Lothian Community Choices target audience.

#### **D.4.5** Housing, Building and Customer Services

National PB Framework priorities 15

### Tenants Environmental Improvements

Set out in section D.3 is the process which has been agreed for West Lothian Community Choices for engagement with tenants and residents of West Lothian on improvements to areas of HRA land to benefit the tenants of WLC. The order that West Lothian Community Choices Tenants Environmental Improvements will follow that of the cyclical maintenance programme and will therefore be a continuous process building on the learning and evaluation of the previous approach.

#### **D.4.6** Other Areas for Development

National PB Framework priorities 3, 4, 8 and 9.

### Partnership Working

The introduction of PB in Scotland was focussed on being delivered by local authorities, however there is now acknowledgement that this should be widened to include other public sector organisations. A report was presented to the CPP Board in March 2020 which set out areas where partners could become involved in the processes ranging from assisting with the promotion and advertising, becoming part of community choices steering groups to facilitating Community Choices events within partner buildings. It is proposed that a report is provided to Community Planning Partners, including some high-level training on West Lothian Community Choices, to looking at where West Lothian Community Choices could be delivered in partnership with the CPP to identify opportunities to leverage in additional funding or to reprioritise funding.

Engagement with the Joint Forum of Community Councils has been positive on West Lothian Community Choices and the use and potential future use of CONSUL. Therefore, it is proposed that through liaison with the Joint Forum a presentation is delivered to community councils setting out the planned approach to West Lothian Community Choices and the areas this would cover. The objective would be to have a dialogue on delivering these processes for community empowerment through promoting the West Lothian Community Choices approaches and supporting their local communities to engage in the processes which will be available on the platform.

### CONSUL and Engagement Tools

While the development of CONSUL has taken significant steps to improving the interaction and access to the platform, the platform will further demonstrate its true value when there is increased usage via traffic through the site as well as the use of the platform. Therefore, based on the learning from other local authorities who are using CONSUL to engage communities on the development of various council policies and strategies, it is proposed that options will be explored to link in with other areas of increased community engagement to use CONSUL as a tool for engagement and not solely for community choice focused engagement.

COSLA has previously rigorously tested CONSUL for ease and inclusiveness of use, however officers think there is potential for more to be done and it is proposed that options for adding additional support tools will continue to be investigated with COSLA.

The development of CONSUL so far has been focussed on the service user, however through the processes it is evident that some of the reporting from the system could be improved reducing the need for manual interventions to run reports and data extraction. COSLA has already an established connection with the Alan Turing Institute with regards to the development of CONSUL and it is recommended that officers work alongside COSLA to identify opportunities for artificial intelligence being applied to the administration side of the platform to improve reporting as well as consider what information would be useful to be available via those reports.

Young Scot have developed their own PB platform for engaging and empowering young people to have a say on the allocation of spending, logging on to the platform can be done by using their National Entitlement Card or a temporary pass can be provided (for example for primary school children) to ensure that all pupils and young people can participate and feel listened to. As set out in section D.4.1, there are opportunities to use the Young Scot platform either via a school PEF process or another West Lothian Community Choices process to try and improve the engagement of young people in decisions related to their community. It is proposed that officers liaise with education and Young Scot to investigate the potential to use the engagement tool to increase the participation of young people.

#### Inclusiveness

The West Lothian Community Choices working group has contacted responsible officers across the council who work with groups and communities of interest which would be classed as 'hard to reach' to support promoting relevant Community Choices processes. There will be further consideration as to how the council can directly encourage and support participation from those classed as hard to reach including consideration of how the relevant areas of the council can work together to ensure all aspects of communities are encouraged and supported to participate. Part of this will be now be covered with the communications campaign template.

### **E. CONCLUSION**

This report provides an update on national developments with regards to PB. The report also sets out the progress of West Lothian Community Choices for the budget areas that have previously been approved, as well as setting out proposed areas for further development and roll-out of West Lothian Community Choices.

### **F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

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

General Fund Revenue Budget Report – report to West Lothian Council February 2018

General Fund Capital Budget Report – report to West Lothian Council February 2018

Housing Revenue Account Capital Budget Report – report to West Lothian Council February 2018

Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration (PED&R) Revenue Grants Budget - 2019/20 – report to Council Executive October 2018

West Lothian Community Choices – report to Council Executive November 2019

West Lothian Community Choices – Update on Delivery – report to Council Executive December 2020

West Lothian Community Choices – Update – report to Council Executive June 2021

If Not Now, When? – Scottish Renewal Advisory Board

Blueprint for Local Government – COSLA

1% Framework Agreement – COSLA

As marked in report - [Future of PB in Scotland - Framework](#)

As marked in report - [Social Renewal Advisory Board report](#)

As marked in report - [COSLA's Blueprint for Local Government](#)

As marked in report - [PB Charter for Scotland](#)

As marked in report - SQCF Qualification - [Business Enterprise: Administration, Accounting or Legal Services: Advanced Certificate \(fife.ac.uk\)](#)

As marked in report - Improvement Service - [Elected Member Briefing Note: Mainstream Participatory Budgeting \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](#)

Appendices / attachments: None

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**21 June 2022**