

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 the development and delivery of Community Choices (Participatory Budgeting) in West Lothian.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Executive:

1. Notes the content of the action plan in Appendix 1 and the range of projects currently subject to Community Choices processes; and
2. Notes the training plan for officers, elected members and community partners, to be delivered in the first quarter of 2023.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; making best use of our resources; working in partnership.
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 deliver.
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None.
IV	Impact on performance and performance Indicators	None.
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	Community Choices is relevant to all LOIP outcomes.
VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	At least 1% of council budgets, excluding council tax, should be subject to Community Choices processes.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	Not required.

VIII Other consultations

Community Choices champions within each service have been consulted.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 Background

Participatory Budgeting (PB), known as Community Choices in Scotland, is a democratic process which empowers communities to have a say in how local budgets are spent. It supports a more participatory democracy and enables communities (of interest, identity or place) to be involved in making decisions about their own needs.

COSLA leaders committed to a 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. A report agreed by Council Executive in November 2019 set out the initial budget areas that would adopt this approach. Further reports in December 2020 and June 2021 provided progress updates on key areas of PB development, implementation of a digital consultation platform (Consul), and additional budgets identified to be spent using a PB approach.

D.2 Community Choices Working Group and Action Plan

The Community Choices Working Group meets regularly to update and monitor the progress of PB projects and to discuss how to further roll out and imbed PB in the day to day operation of the council. The group has created an action plan which summaries the future areas of focus for the council in terms of PB and this is attached as Appendix 1.

An update is provided below on all current or planned programmes being delivered via a Community Choices approach:

D.2.1 Operational Services

Open Space – Play Areas

The capital budget for play areas focusses on the maintenance of existing play equipment within existing play areas. Where new play areas are being delivered to provide facilities for new housing developments and where there are large scale refurbishments of existing play areas, these will be delivered using a West Lothian Community Choices approach to consultation. Large scale refurbishments that would be subject to this approach will typically include replacement of several pieces of play equipment in its entirety and alteration of the play area footprint.

Eight West Lothian parks have now been improved using a two stage community choices approach. The local community are given an opportunity to suggest the improvements they would like to see within the park area and officers then work up these ideas and provide costings. The community are then asked to vote for their preferred options and the most popular options are implemented within the available budget.

Open Space Parks – Planned Improvements

The capital budget for parks will be focused on the maintenance of existing features to ensure parks remain fit for public use e.g. footpaths, fencing, gates, stairs, drainage, and seating remain safe. However, where typical park features are in

good repair but the scale and variety of recreation and sports facilities, access quality, amenity value, or biodiversity value could be improved, then works will be determined using a West Lothian Community Choices approach. This ensures that the local community directly decide how the park will be improved to an acceptable overall standard. For example, this could give the community a choice between habitat restoration or inclusive access, or between drainage upgrades or adding new sports facilities.

Grounds Maintenance

Grounds Maintenance officers are developing proposals for new routine maintenance programmes in conjunction with Ecology and Biodiversity Officers. These proposals will be informed by public feedback received during the now completed Community Choices consultation process.

Litter Bins

Smart compactor bins have now been installed across pilot locations suggested by the local community, along with using the knowledge of staff. The bin sensor data will be used to ensure that the type, size and location of the bins meets community needs and bins meet the criteria set out in the proposed Litter Bin Plan.

Longer term there will be a Community Choices consultation on bin provision across West Lothian. This will be carried out in two stages:

- **Stage 1** – a high level survey will be undertaken on a West Lothian wide basis on the priorities of the existing Litter Bin Plan. This will establish whether the communities of West Lothian agree that the current priorities are appropriate.
- **Stage 2** – this would involve the development of options for local areas and would 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 were being achieved.

Future Development Areas with Operational Services

There is an opportunity to investigate options for local communities to influence spending within the Winter Maintenance Programme. This could include locations of grit bins and identifying other priorities for communities. Officers will meet in summer 2023 to plan a Community Choices approach.

D.2.2 Education

Pupil Equity Fund (PEF)

Education Services has agreed a stretch aim that will commit all schools to spend at least 3% of their PEF budgets (a total of £167,000) via a community choices approach. In 2021/22, 67% of schools utilised their PEF budgets in this way. The focus of these devolved budgets will be 'the cost of the school day' and all schools will have an updated poverty proofing statement which has evolved through participatory budgeting approaches with the school community, and through which they can demonstrate the impact of improvements on learning, engagement and families.

Opportunities will also be explored with schools to pilot the use of the Young Scot platform, which has been designed for PB processes. This could be via a

Community Choices PEF process or for a school to use the Young Scot platform to encourage engagement in another West Lothian Community Choices process.

CLD Youth Services

It has been agreed that 1% of the youth club budget will be subject to a community choices approach. This amounts to £10,417 in 2022/23. Work is underway to engage young people who attend youth clubs to enable them to decide how this budget is spent. The process in this first year will take the form of a small grant fund and applications will be invited from individual youth clubs. The process for evaluating and approving the grant applications is currently being decided.

Future Development Areas Within Education

A joint project is being undertaken by Education and Operational Services to increase the uptake of free school meals, and PB processes will be incorporated into that project, ensuring that pupils are able to influence any changes being made.

Further suitable budgets are also being considered, including within Adult Learning and Sports Development/Active Schools.

D.2.3 Social Policy

Children's Services Plan

West Lothian Children's Services joint commissioning plan relates to services for children and young people based on the Children's Services Plan, The Promise and strategic needs assessments and is a broad process for making decisions on utilising available resources. The plan will be a partnership approach with the third sector and is proposed to be planned for a three to five year period with overarching areas of: early intervention and prevention, mental health and wellbeing, support for families of children with a disability, supporting vulnerable young people to transition to adulthood and specialist support services.

Engagement with local communities provides a key mechanism for ensuring that services are planned and led in a local way. It has been identified that children, young people and their families should be able to participate in four ways: as individuals, as communities, at strategic level and national level (participation engagement strategy). The aim is to ensure that children, young people, care experienced, parents and carers have the opportunity to have a say and have a range of ways of engaging including Having Your Say Forum, Advocacy services, Kinship Care Group, Listen and Link direct referral service.

The formation of the mental health PSP (Roots) and the Listen and Link service are approaches of working alongside children, young people and their families to improve and sustain emotional mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Integrated Joint Board (IJB) Strategic Plan

The IJB is currently considering a strategic plan and scope for a community choices approach will be assessed by IJB officers as they prepare delivery and commissioning plans.

Future Development Areas Within Social Policy

Further budgets suitable for adopting a PB approach will be sought across all Social Policy thematic areas.

D.2.4 Community Wealth Building/Community Planning

Grants/One-Off Projects

Community wealth building and community empowerment are part of a shared vision to improve outcomes for local communities, and PB is one of the tools available to support this vision.

Pilot small grant projects in Blackburn and Craigshill in the past year have demonstrated the potential benefits of PB processes for the award of grants. The benefits include not only directing resources to meet the needs and priorities of communities but also the potential for increased community participation in other community engagement exercises. Therefore, it is proposed that further work is undertaken in conjunction with third sector partners to consider the potential role of PB going forward.

Equalities Project

A £25,000 grant budget has been made available to help address equalities issues across West Lothian. The Community Choices process to engage relevant groups and communities of interest will build on the learning from previous events carried out in Blackburn and Craigshill and will be delivered in March 2023. Officers from the Community Planning and Community Wealth Building teams will lead on the delivery of the project with support from the council's Equalities Officer.

It was initially planned to deliver this project solely via the online Consul platform. However, further consideration of the target communities has led the team to conclude that a broader range of engagement tools is required, including face to face methods. This is to ensure that as many people as possible can participate in the event and influence the outcome.

Future Development Areas within Community Wealth Building/Community Planning

Community Choices can be used as a tool to support the delivery of community wealth building. Community Choices champions for each service area will seek to identify areas of crossover and provide support to engage with the West Lothian Community Choices target audience.

Analysis will be carried out on how other local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships are delivering Community Choices, and consideration will be given to whether best practice examples can be replicated in West Lothian.

D.2.5 Housing

Tenants Environmental Improvements

An allocation of £150,000 per annum is made available to deliver environmental improvement projects on land that sits within the Housing Revenue Account.

Further Development Areas Within Housing

Officers within Housing are considering opportunities for PB across all other budget areas.

D.3 Training Plan

The following training has been planned for the first quarter of 2023:

PB Scotland

PB Scotland has been developed by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) with funding from the Scottish Government. It acts as a hub for sharing learning about the work being done by PB initiatives around Scotland. It also provides updates on events, policy and resources relevant to PB in Scotland, and profiles good examples of PB in action. PB Scotland has agreed to provide two training sessions, for 15-20 council officers, in the new year.

- The first session, to be held in late January 2023, will be an opportunity to take stock of where West Lothian is in terms of mainstreaming PB and look at what the challenges and opportunities are.
- The second session, to take place at the end of February 2023, will look at best practice nationally and the digital systems available to support PB processes and engagement.

CoSLA

CoSLA is responsible for managing and promoting use of the online engagement platform Consul. CoSLA officers have offered to provide training on the system in the first quarter of 2023 and the following three sessions have been agreed:

- The first session will be delivered on Teams and will provide an introduction and overview of the Consul system. This session should take around 90 minutes.
- A three-hour practical session will be delivered face to face and participants will learn how to set up and manage PB projects on the Consul system.
- The final session will provide support to officers to set up live PB projects.

Other Training

Council officers are developing Community Choices training that can be delivered to elected members, community planning partners and community councils. The training will be delivered by March 2023.

E. CONCLUSION

Progress continues to be made towards embedding Community Choices processes across all relevant and appropriate council service areas. Further updates will be reported to Council Executive annually, following reporting against the yearly 1% Framework Agreement target to CoSLA in August.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Previous reports to Council Executive in November 2019, December 2020, June 2021 and June 2022.

Appendices/Attachments: One
Appendix 1: West Lothian Community Choices Action Plan.

Contact Person: Laura Wilson, Community Planning and Community Choices Lead Officer,
laura.wilson2@westlothian.gov.uk, 07500 608575

Donald Forrest
Head of Finance and Property Services

Date of meeting: 17 January 2023

WEST LOTHIAN COMMUNITY CHOICES ACTION PLAN (JANUARY 2023)

Actions agreed at Council Executive

Action	Responsible Officer	Target Timescale	Next Steps	Update
Toolkit / Checklist for Implementing WLCC Processes				
Develop a WLCC checklist (incorporating engaging communities toolkit) for officers to work through in the development/go live of a process.	Ailsa MacKerrow	November 2021	Development of checklist and circulate to members of the WLCC working group for review	Completed – checklist in place.
Training and Partner Engagement				
Elected Member training	Laura Wilson	March 2023	Build on existing training material, consider training timescale, develop engagement checklist of WLCC processes to ensure elected members are aware	An Elected Member training booklet from the Improvement Service is available.
Community Council and Third Sector training and engagement	Susan Gordon / Laura Wilson	March 2023	Provide training to Community Councils and the wider third sector. Discuss how WLC can involve community councils and how community councils can support.	An Elected Member training booklet from Improvement Service can be used. Incorporate community engagement toolkit into training
Community Planning Partner Training and Engagement	Susan Gordon / Laura Wilson	March 2023	Update CPP on current processes, consider partnership working (what processes can be done jointly but also what can partners support/promote etc)	Use elected member training for CPP. Incorporate community engagement toolkit into training.

Action	Responsible Officer	Target Timescale	Next Steps	Update
Communication and Engagement				
Consider a corporate dedicated telephone number	Laura Wilson	March 2023	Discuss whether this is necessary/practical and what alternatives there are.	Discussions have been held. An existing telephone number needs to be identified. Officers will consider further.
Develop approach to directly encourage and support participation from those classed as hard to reach	Laura Wilson / Susan Gordon/ Pamela Roccio	March 2023	Prepare and get agreement on a standard approach	Meeting held with Community Planning staff to discuss a standard approach to engagement.
CONSUL and Digital Technology				
Explore options to use CONSUL as a tool for wider engagement and not solely for Community Choices focused engagement. Deliberation and dialogue functionality could be further developed.	Digital Transformation Team/Laura Wilson	Ongoing	Increase interest and traffic to the CONSUL site via interest in other consultations and conversations using CONSUL. Investigate possible uses of the deliberation and dialogue functionality and a test process	Officers will use CONSUL where appropriate in future Community Choices processes.
Work with COSLA and other local authorities to identify best practice for digital engagement and consultation (CONSUL and other digital options). Also consider alternative and suitable methods of communication, engagement and support for people who are unable to access information online.	Laura Wilson – in liaison with Digital Transformation team and working group	Continuous	Report to working group on identified best practice in other local authorities and how this can be incorporated into West Lothian Community Choices. Support working group to implement hybrid engagement options and increase use of CONSUL.	Three officer training sessions, delivered by CoSLA, are scheduled for early 2023

Action	Responsible Officer	Target Timescale	Next Steps	Update
Work with COSLA and the Alan Turing Institute to build artificial intelligence (AI) functionality onto the CONSUL platform	Digital Transformation Team	Pre Dec 2022	Liaise with COSLA on development and implementation. Include options to benefit customers and WLC.	CoSLA advised that summarisation of free text comments can be done in partnership with Warwick University
Investigate development of CONSUL to incorporate online support tools, for example Recite Me	Kian MacKay / Lewis Carr	June 2023	Gather stats regarding use of Recite Me on WLC website.	There would be an annual cost of using Recite Me. Officers will explore using existing CONSUL accessibility functions.
Consider how Community Councils could support the development of CONSUL	Laura Wilson / Kian MacKay / Susan Gordon	March 2023	Include in discussions with Joint Forum of Community Councils – how are they developing Community Councils to embrace technology?	Funding bid by JFCC submitted – result of bid due early 2023.
Accessible technology to support engagement and access to CONSUL	Kian MacKay	24 January 2022	I-Pad/tablet bank now available	Complete
Education - Schools				
All schools will engage in Community Choices and PEF budgets will be aligned to this	Arlene Black / Laura Wilson /	All schools to be participating by June 2023	Consider what training schools need to fully understand PB and enable them to deliver robust Community Choices processes	Education Services has agreed that 3% of PEF budgets will be aligned to Community Choices and this is being implemented.

Action	Responsible Officer	Target Timescale	Next Steps	Update
Development of approaches and engagement in schools. This could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification and sharing of good practice • Schools engaging with other WLCC processes in their local area. 	Laura Wilson / Arlene Black /	June 2023	Discuss training requirements of schools in order to fully understand and utilise Community Choices processes	Community Choices continues to be implemented in schools.
Education evidence gathering on impact of WLCC processes in schools	Arlene Black	June 2023	Agree what information would be useful to gather and create a template in Forms.	Officers will create a template.
Opportunities to be explored with schools to pilot the use of the Young Scot platform which has been designed for PB processes. This could be via a Community Choices PEF process or for a school to use the Young Scot platform to encourage engagement in another West Lothian Community Choices process.	Arlene Black/Laura Wilson/Jane Alexander	Pilot schools to have delivered a process by June 2023	More info/research of Young Scot platform required. Consider a pilot with a small number of secondary schools. Discuss opportunity for Regeneration/Youth Services to support the engagement	Officers will progress.
Education – Non-School Services				
Funding available for delivering youth provision is allocated using a West Lothian Community Choices approach	Jane Alexander / Laura Wilson	March 2023	A small grant process is currently being developed and rolled out.	£10,417 (1%) of the youth club budget has been allocated for WLCC in 2022/23
Identify an Adult Learning budget that would be suitable for a PB process	Laura Wilson	March 2023	Adult Learning to identify a budget and look at options for allocating via Community Choices	Officers are reviewing this.
Identify a Sport/Art Team budget that would be suitable for a PB process	Shirley-Anne Smith/Laura Wilson	March 2023	Consider whether a PB approach could be taken to the allocation of a £40k sports grant fund. Look for suitable Arts budgets.	Discussions are continuing with the Sport Development team to discuss Sports budgets

Action	Responsible Officer	Target Timescale	Next Steps	Update
Social Policy WLCC Processes				
Development and approval of Children and Families commissioning plan. Identification of WLCC suitable contracts, including Public Social Partnerships. Identify support required to implement a WLCC approach.	Susan Mitchell	Dec 2023	Officers to look at the approach and support required.	
Investigate opportunities to increase engagement of children and young people supported by the Children and Families services in other relevant council engagement processes	Laura Wilson	Dec 2023	Investigate how current contact with children and young people can be used to empower them in other engagement processes.	
IJB – a new IJB strategic plan and strategic needs assessment is being developed. A community choices approach will be considered by IJB officers.	Sharon Houston	Dec 2023	The new strategic plan is being prepared and IJB officers will consider scope for a community choices approach.	
Operational Services				
Continue delivery (and support to delivery) of WLCC processes for previously approved budgets – park improvements, play areas, public art, litter bins and grounds maintenance (including biodiversity)	Laura Wilson / Andy Johnston	Throughout year	Continuing support – increase planning within the area.	
Investigate options and report back to Council Executive on using WLCC engagement for the refresh of the Open Space Plan	Andy Johnston / Laura Wilson	Spring 2023	A report will be prepared.	

Action	Responsible Officer	Target Timescale	Next Steps	Update
Investigate and develop WLCC approach for roads capital 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 as requiring improvements, the community can be asked to prioritise the order in which the improvements are undertaken.	Gordon Brown / Laura Wilson	Spring 2023	Gather information to consider prioritising work in non-adopted areas such as roads, footways, car parks, garage sites and playgrounds. Information received could help to shape improvements to non-adopted infrastructure.	Gather public opinion through an online survey to determine if appropriate improvements could be considered.
Investigate options for engagement and influence on the Winter Maintenance Programme (locations of grit bins and priorities for the communities)	Gordon Brown / Laura Wilson	Summer 2023	The winter maintenance policy is agreed annually by Council Executive. It is not suitable for engagement to influence this policy or the council's statutory requirements under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. Consideration could however be given to investigating minor amendments within budget.	Investigate community expectation in terms of grit bin/self-help salt point locations for consideration. Laura and Gordon to meet to discuss options.
Investigate options for engagement with pupils, parents and teachers on the foods available within schools, including identifying barriers to uptake of free school meals.	Jamie Fisher / Laura Wilson	Summer 2023		Info provided from Jamie on progress so far. PB processes to be built into the project.
Community Wealth Building Team				
Further work to be undertaken in conjunction with third sector partners to consider the potential role of West Lothian Community Choices in terms of future grants, one-off payments and project funding.	Laura Wilson / CWB Team	Spring 2023		Annual Vol Orgs funding will not be subject to PB. Other opportunities to be examined.

Action	Responsible Officer	Target Timescale	Next Steps	Update
West Lothian Community Choices can support the delivery of CWB. 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.	Laura Wilson / CWB Team	Ongoing		
Housing, Building and Customer Services				
Continue delivery (and support for delivery) of WLCC processes for previously approved budgets – Tenants Environmental Improvements.	Jodie Fullerton / Laura Wilson	Ongoing	Improve planning for Housing to deliver WLCC process	
Other Areas of Development				
Future WLCC processes – Strategy Development - WLCC working group consider opportunities for Community Choices to be part of future developments.	Laura Wilson/ working group	Ongoing	Review opportunities for more WLCC projects and prepare an update and planning report	Laura to consider additional budget areas which could be subject to PB processes.
Research best practice nationally and consider how similar processes can be adopted in West Lothian, where appropriate.	Laura Wilson	Ongoing	Desk top research to be carried out and discussions with PB Scotland and the PB Network	