

MIDLOTHIAN FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

For the attention of:

Dr Grace Vickers

Chief Executive, Midlothian Council

Cllr Kelly Parry

Leader of the Council & SNP Group Leader Midlothian Council

Cllr Derek Milligan

Labour Group Leader, Midlothian Council

Cllr David Virgo

Scottish Conservatives Group Leader, Midlothian Council

Owen Thompson MP

Member of Parliament for Midlothian

Colin Beattie MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Midlothian North and Musselburgh

Christine Grahame MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale

Jeremy Balfour MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Lothian

Sarah Boyack MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Lothian

Miles Briggs MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Lothian

Foysoyl Choudhury MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Lothian

Sharon Dowey MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for South Scotland

Emma Harper MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for South Scotland

Craig Hoy MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for South Scotland

The Rt Hon. Alison Johnston MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Lothian

Carol Mochan MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for South Scotland

Lorna Slater MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Lothian

Colin Smyth MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for South Scotland

Sue Webber MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Lothian

Martin Whitfield MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for South Scotland

Brian Whittle MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for South Scotland

Shona Robison MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing & Local Government, The Scottish Government

27th January 2023

AN OPEN LETTER IN RESPONSE TO 'SAVING PROPOSALS FOR 2023/24'

On behalf of the Midlothian Federation of Community Councils, we write to express our deep disappointment and grave concern regarding the 'Saving Proposals for 2023/24' published by Midlothian Council on Friday 20 January 2023.

The consensus of all Midlothian Community Councils, representing our respective Communities, is that the proposed cuts are detached from any meaningful social analysis or consideration. They represent a rushed technocratic economic response; one which will disproportionately sacrifice community services and resources which are vital to the social cohesion of the county, relied upon by those most in need, and will damage the provision of education and safety within this Council area.

We note the lack of focus on inward expenditure; administration or management. Similarly, no mention of repurposing the considerable level of income received in recent years from developer contributions (Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)); works which largely proceeded against the wishes of the wider communities.

Given the timeframe for identifying, assessing, and agreeing proposed saving cuts is tight, we had hoped for much more visible challenge from our elected politicians; especially given the current political synergy between the Midlothian Council administration, our Holyrood & Westminster elected representatives, and the current Scottish Government. The proposals in their current form would devastate much of the progress which has been achieved over many years and would risk wiping out the efforts of many volunteer and community groups, merely on the grounds of economy.

The proposals place an unrealistic and wholly inappropriate dependence upon volunteers, presumably expecting volunteer groups across the county to make up for Midlothian Council withdrawing their own support, resource and expertise from numerous pieces of work and services. As a group we would gently remind the Council, both officers and the elected representatives, that volunteer groups themselves have been stretched for many years, especially during and since the COVID pandemic at a time when local authorities withdrew from providing visible, coalface services and support (many which have yet to return to pre-COVID levels). To rely upon volunteers to this degree (volunteers who themselves will be significantly disadvantaged by these cuts) speak of a mindset of panic in the Council. This at a time when we should all be focused on devising plans and priorities which serve the public and our communities as best as possible during the current challenging economic conditions. The plans published at present fall very short of achieving this.

The feedback we have received has remarked on the notion that these proposals were formulated or inspired by the responses to public consultation (a consultation which incidentally appeared to be administered predominantly online) is not persuasive.

While we recognise the considerable financial restraints facing the public purse over the coming years, the saving proposals published at the present time are entirely inappropriate in their present form. We believe the bigger issue is the formula that is used to determine how much funding each local authority receives. Midlothian Council has been one of the fastest growing areas in Scotland for some years, yet we receive the same proportion of funding from COSLA as we always did. To build and maintain the infrastructure required to host the many, many, new developments in Midlothian, a *much* fairer division is required. We insist that you apply pressure on The Scottish Government to conduct an independent review of Council Funding.

In conclusion, none of the proposed cuts would be necessary if Midlothian Council was funded appropriately and fairly. We do not accept them. We do not want to pit group against group trying to fight for whose cause is more important, they are all important. We must stand together in solidarity.

Signed:

Bonnyrigg and District Community Council

Dalkeith and District Community Council

Danderhall & District Community Council

Damhead and District Community Council

Eskbank & Newbattle Community Council

Gorebridge & District Community Council

Howgate Community Council

Loanhead & District Community Council

Mayfield & Easthouses Community Council

Moorfoot Community Council

Newtongrange Community Council

Penicuik & District Community Council

Rosewell & District Community Council

Roslin & Bilston Community Council

Tyne water Community Council

Correspondence: CONTACT-MIDLOTHIANFEDERATION@GOOGLEGROUPS.COM