West Lothian Council’s Response to Finance and Constitution Committee Questionnaire

This questionnaire is being sent to those organisations that have an interest in, or which may be affected by, the Planning (Scotland) Bill — Financial Memorandum (FM).

In addition to the questions below, please add any other comments you may have which would assist the Committee’s scrutiny of the FM.

Consultation

1. Did you take part in any consultation exercise preceding the Bill and, if so, did you comment on the financial assumptions made?

Yes.

West Lothian Council responded to the initial consultation exercise on the review of the planning system and to the consultation on places, people and planning – A consultation on the future of the Scottish planning system.

Financial assumptions were not commented on because no figures were produced at those stages. Resource implications were commented on for certain proposed policies e.g. production of local place plans.

2. If applicable, do you believe your comments on the financial assumptions have been accurately reflected in the FM?

N/A

3. Did you have sufficient time to contribute to the consultation exercise?

Although the response to the consultation paper went through one less governance stage than is normal, there was sufficient time to respond.

Costs

4. If the Bill has any financial implications for your organisation, do you believe that they have been accurately reflected in the FM? If not, please provide details.

No.

The figures in the FM are aggregated Scotland-wide figures and do not provide information on local level spending. Without local spending stated in the FM it is difficult to comment on the overall financial implications for WLC.

5. Do you consider that the estimated costs and savings set out in the FM are reasonable and accurate?
As above, it is difficult to determine the accuracy of the costs and savings when the figures stated are Scotland-wide.

To note, the section on Simplified Development Zones (SDZs) bases the assumptions for costs on two existing simplified planning zones (SPZs) for a business park and change of use in a town centre. The Bill intends to use SDZs as an approach for new housing development; however, the costs for SDZs are not based on similar development types. The accuracy of such costs is therefore questionable.

6. If applicable, are you content that your organisation can meet any financial costs that it might incur as a result of the Bill? If not, how do you think these costs should be met?

No, the council will not be able to meet any additional costs. The Bill must be cost-neutral and any additional costs should be met by the Scottish Government given the levels of savings required to be made at local government level over the next five financial years.

Additional costs should be met either through additional revenue support or by an early review of the fee structure to ensure that the service moves to a full cost recovery basis.

7. Does the FM accurately reflect the margins of uncertainty associated with the Bill’s estimated costs and with the timescales over which they would be expected to arise?

No. The FM does not provide margins of uncertainty for any of the costs set out within it.

Wider Issues

8. Do you believe that the FM reasonably captures any costs associated with the Bill? If not, which other costs might be incurred and by whom?

Costs will be incurred by planning authorities in providing support to communities in the preparation of local place plans in terms of officer time. The FM sets out the cost of preparing a local place plans through evidence of costs of preparing a neighbourhood plan in England. However, this analysis does not quantify the cost to planning authorities or other parts of local authorities that would advise in this process. All that is mentioned in the FM under the cost implications of local place plans for planning authorities is “Discretionary spend to support communities”.

9. Do you believe that there may be future costs associated with the Bill, for example through subordinate legislation? If so, is it possible to quantify these costs?

The council’s wider response sets out that it is difficult to fully assess the impact of the Bill as much of the detail is held over to secondary legislation. Until the full detail is know it is not possible to fully comment on the effectiveness of the measures. This applies equally to cost implications. The council would expect there to be costs associated with subordinate legislation.