DEVELOPING NEW WAYS OF DELIVERING SERVICES  
LOCAL AUTHORITY SAVINGS PLANS  
MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL

I refer to your letter of 17 May 2013 seeking information on the Council’s savings plans and specifically a response to the four questions set out in your letter.

Firstly may I apologise for the lateness of this submission and hope that despite this it is still helpful to the Committee.

In response to the specific questions:

1) Can you describe the approach that your local authority has taken to both short-term and long-term budget planning since the onset of the financial crisis? For example, has your local authority taken a “zero-based” approach, or has it set out a range of options for savings? Please supply any relevant supporting documentation, for example copies of any budget planning exercises?

Midlothian has continued with what is broadly a traditional incremental approach to budget planning. Our focus has been on how best to meet the budget challenge and Council has moved away from cuts in budgets across all services to the implementation of a Council transformation programme to deliver efficiencies and to minimise the impact of funding reductions on frontline service provision.

Since 2011/12 Council has removed a total of £13.184 million from the revenue budget with savings achieved through transformation and financial discipline amounting to £9.581 million. Over the same period performance across a range of Statutory Performance Indicators has improved.

The Council is continuing with the transformational approach as it plans for the period 2014/15 to 2016/17.

Further background can be obtained from the final 2013/14 budget report (http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/2216/16_revenue_budget_20013-14_and_2014-15) and the latest version of the Council Transformation Strategy (http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/2538/11_transformation_strategy_may2013).

2) Can you describe the consultation that your local authority undertook on your budget plans, both with stakeholders, and the general public?

The Council has adopted various approaches to consultation on budget plans.

- For 2012/13 the Council arranged a series of consultation meetings with community groups.
For 2013/14 the Council ran an online budget simulator asking the community to engage with the Council to firstly understand the budget and also for them to make choices on the prioritisation of services.

For 2014/15 to 2016/17 the Council has agreed to consider its budget plans on 24 September 2013 and then to consult on its priorities and spending plans before these are widely determined in December 2013.

3) How have the outcomes of your consultation fed into and influenced your budget plans?

It is difficult to be specific on the impact and influence of these.

In the main the consultations have assisted elected members by giving them a fuller insight into the communities views.

4) What involvement has there been from external consultants/advisers in your budget planning, and what influence has this involvement had on your final plans?

The only external involvement has been to utilise a hosted budget simulator application. Again it is difficult to be specific on the influence this eventually had on budget plans.

Yours sincerely

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