

Council will survive squeeze on funding

West Lothian's Council leader has responded to a national survey which claims one in four Scottish local authorities is facing bankruptcy.

While West Lothian faces an "eye watering" budget deficit of £39m, Lawrence Fitzpatrick says the council can survive.

A study by the Local Government Information Unit Scotland comes hard on the heels of news of several bankruptcies declared by English councils.

Some north of the Border may not.

Councillor Fitzpatrick, Labour leader of the council told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: "Like any household, we can only spend the money we have and we need to make some very difficult decisions in order that we can deliver a balanced budget – something we are legally required to do.

"Failure to agree a balanced budget with ongoing cuts to Scottish Government grant funding would push any council into a precarious financial situation.

"Thankfully we have a dedicated team who have a plan to deliver the required savings to ensure that is not the outcome.

"However, there's no getting away from the fact that this results in significant cuts to local services and changes to

service provision.”

West Lothian’s budget gap is predicted to be more than £39m over the next five years. This is in addition to the £150.7m worth of savings that had to be made between 2007 and 2023.

The economic climate and sustained budget pressure caused by increased costs and growing population are not being addressed by Scottish Government funding

The Scottish Government provides the council with 80% of its budget and grant funding from the Government is expected to be less than required for the council to deliver essential local services. This creates the budget gap.

The council has to reduce spending and change some local services as they are legally required to close the budget gap and balance their budget.

Councillor Fitzpatrick said: “As we have said on many occasions, we have sustained real term cuts to our core budget since 2007 and we have made cuts of over £160 million to local services.

“We are now faced with reducing our budget by a further £40 million over the next four years, while additional government policy commitments are continually being introduced with funding ring fenced. That ties our hands and removes local decision making for local people.

“This drastic situation has been caused by insufficient funding given to councils by the Scottish Government and going forward it will simply be unsustainable for councils to continue to deliver all existing local services as they are currently delivered.”

by Stuart Somerville Local Democracy Reporter



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