

MINUTE of MEETING of the JOINT CONSULTATIVE GROUP (TEACHING STAFF) (PRIVATE) held within WEBEX VIRTUAL MEETING ROOM, on 23 FEBRUARY 2021.

Present – Councillors David Dodds (Chair), Alison Adamson (Ordinary Member), Lawrence Fitzpatrick (Ordinary Member), Dom McGuire (Ordinary Member), Andrew Miller (Ordinary Member) and Cathy Muldoon (Ordinary Member); Mark Bonallo, (EIS), Douglas Bringham (SSTA), Mairi Green (EIS), Heather Hughes (EIS) and Shirley Thomson (EIS)

Apologies – Councillor Damian Doran-Timson (Ordinary Member)

In attendance – Elaine Cook, (Depute Chief Executive), James Cameron (Head of Education (Learning, Policy and Resources)), Catrina Hatch (Interim Head of Service Secondary Schools), Donald Forrest, (Head of Finance and Property Services), Fiona Russell (Group Accountant) and Greg Welsh (Interim Head of Education Primary)

1      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2      MINUTES

The group confirmed the minute of its meeting held on 27 February 2020 as a correct record.

3      REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22 TO 2022/23 AND ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND GENERAL SERVICES CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/22 TO 2027/28

The Head of Finance and Property Services presented the Group with information on the council's proposed Revenue Budget 2021/22 to 2022/23 and the Asset Management Strategy and General Services Capital Programme 2021/22 to 2027/28.

In February 2020 the council had agreed the detailed revenue budgets for 2020/21 to 2022/23, an updated capital investment strategy, and housing revenue and capital plans. A number of financial constraints were highlighted, which included increasing cost of providing council services, growing population in West Lothian, ongoing government constraints on public spending, and Scottish Government grant funding being insufficient to meet the increasing costs of providing local services. Details of funding and expenditure assumptions for the next two years were then provided. Considering the proposed saving measures, the updated budget gap would be £20.6 million. Impact on staffing would be an overall net decrease of 40 FTE; any staffing changes would be implemented after consultation with the unions and the council's no compulsory redundancies policy would continue. Time-limited investments, including

Covid-19 expenditure, were summarised and the proposed General Services Capital Investment for 2021/22 to 2027/28 was shown.

More detail was then provided on the budget for Education Services in particular. The two-year budget would allow the council to deliver key priorities including improving attainment and positive destinations for school children and delivering positive outcomes and early interventions for early years. Further budget commitments included full implementation of additional Early Learning & Childcare hours to 1,140 and free School Meal provision during school holidays for all eligible pupils. The outcomes sought through the proposed budget included improved attainment and achievement, reduced poverty and improve health and wellbeing.

The proposed Revenue Budget 2021/22 to 2022/23 and the Asset Management Strategy and General Services Capital Programme 2021/22 to 2027/28 would be considered at a special meeting of West Lothian Council scheduled to be held on 25 February 2021.

Following conclusion of the presentation, a number of questions were asked by members of the group in relation to budget proposals, which officers responded to.

The teaching unions wished to thank West Lothian Council for always having education at its core, for prioritising children and for doing its very best to fund and protect education despite any restrictions. They also spoke of the recovery task education was facing and the need for investment in mental health and wellbeing. They praised school staff and pupils for their resilience and noted that the unions would continue to collaborate with the council towards recovery.

The Chair expressed gratitude to all West Lothian school staff and children for their response to the extraordinary circumstances of the previous year and to praise their commitment and creativity, which went well beyond expectation in the most difficult circumstances created by the Covid pandemic, as well as to assure West Lothian schools of the council's continued support to the best of its ability.

### Decision

To note the contents of the presentation.