

MINUTE of MEETING of the JOINT CONSULTATIVE GROUP (TEACHING STAFF) (PRIVATE) held within EMERGENCY PLANNING ROOM, WEST LOTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, on 20 FEBRUARY 2023.

Present – Councillors Andrew McGuire (Chair), Tom Conn (Ordinary Member), Lawrence Fitzpatrick (Ordinary Member), Pauline Orr (substituting for Councillor Moira McKee Shemilt), Pauline Stafford (Ordinary Member); Mark Bonallo, (EIS), Douglas Bringham (SSTA), Michael Donnelly (EIS), Heather Hughes (EIS) and Shirley Thomson (EIS)

Apologies – Councillors Harry Cartmill (Ordinary Member) and Moira McKee Shemilt (Ordinary Member); Shona Walker (EIS)

Absent – Councillor Damian Doran-Timson (Ordinary Member)

In attendance – Elaine Cook (Depute Chief Executive), Donald Forrest (Head of Finance and Property Services), Siobhan McGarty, Head of Education (Secondary, Community Learning and Inclusion), Fiona Russell (Group Accountant) and Greg Welsh (Head of Education (Primary, Early Years and Resources))

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick stated that he was a Unite trade union member.

Councillor Tom Conn stated that he was a retired Unison trade union member.

Councillor Andrew McGuire stated that he was a Unison trade union member.

Heather Hughes stated that she was joint Chair of the LNCT and a national office bearer for EIS.

2 MINUTES

The group confirmed the minute of its meeting held on 21 November 2022 as a correct record.

3 REVENUE BUDGET 2023/24 TO 2027/28 AND CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND GENERAL SERVICES TEN YEAR CAPITAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2023/24 TO 2032/33

The Head of Finance and Property Services and council Senior Officers presented the Group with information on the council's proposed Revenue Budget 2023/24 to 2027/28 and Asset Management Strategy and General Ten-Year Services Capital Investment Strategy 2023/24 to 2032/33. 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 five years were then provided. Considering the proposed saving measures, the projected budget gap would be £43.4 million over five years and £31.7 million over the first three years. Measures would inevitably impact staff with an estimated overall net reduction of 42 FTE over the period 2023/24 to 2025/26; any staffing changes would be implemented after consultation with the unions and the council's no compulsory redundancies policy would continue. More detail was then provided on the revenue budget for Education Services in particular. The proposed 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. Significant investment in new school provision, ELC provision and school improvements was also planned. The outcomes sought through the proposed budget included improved attainment and achievement, reduced poverty and improved health and wellbeing. Details on the Education Capital Investment 2023/24 to 2032/33 were also provided.

The proposed Revenue Budget 2023/24 to 2027/28 and Asset Management Strategy and General Ten-Year Services Capital Investment Strategy 2023/24 to 2032/33 would be considered at a special meeting of West Lothian Council scheduled to be held on 21 February 2023.

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 were understanding of the financial difficulties faced by the council and expressed their appreciation that the proposed budget would not impact on school staff numbers nevertheless, although concerns remained over the budget deficit overall. The teaching unions also expressed their gratitude to officers for their continued work on education matters. Finally, they renewed their commitment to keep working with council members and officers towards the same goals concerning education in West Lothian.

Decision

To note the contents of the budget briefing presentation.