

49. The 2023/24 capital investment programme and treasury management plan agreed to the use of council's capital fund to support investment in the general services assets of £72.2 million.

50. The council understand the funding constraints that are currently in place across Scotland and the capital investment programme and the Corporate Asset Management Strategy to 2032/33 confirms that the council will focus on reducing the size of the operational property estate to ensure core property assets remain safe and statutorily compliant.

Borrowing levels are operating within the authorised limit and operational boundary set by the treasury management strategy

51. At 31 March 2024, borrowing stood at £668.0 million, an increase of £20.1 million on the 2023 level of £647.9 million. During the year, the council undertook new borrowings of £24 million. The borrowing levels increased to support new council house supply and general services borrowing to deliver RAAC remediation works and investment in the learning estate.

52. Total external debt, which includes the council's long-term liabilities, was within the authorised limit and operational boundary set by the treasury management strategy.

53. The Prudential Code 2021 confirms a requirement for local authorities to produce an annual capital strategy. The capital strategy should ensure that elected members of the Council understand the overall capital strategy, governance procedures and risk appetite entailed by the strategy, and includes capital expenditure, investments and liabilities and treasury management plans which allows members to understand how stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability will be secured. The Capital Strategy 2024/25 to 2032/33 was approved by Council in March 2024.

West Lothian Council has appropriate financial control arrangements in place

54. From our review of the design and implementation of systems of internal control (including those relating to IT) relevant to our audit approach, we did not identify any internal control weaknesses which could affect West Lothian Council's ability to record, process, summarise and report financial and other relevant data that could result in a material misstatement in the financial statements.

Standards of conduct and arrangements for the prevention and detection of fraud and error were appropriate

55. In the public sector there are specific fraud risks, including those relating to tax receipts, welfare benefits, grants and other claims made by individuals and organisations. Public sector bodies are responsible for implementing effective systems of internal control, including internal audit, which safeguard public assets and prevent and detect fraud, error and irregularities, bribery and corruption.