

MANAGEMENT COMMENTARY

The council is proud of its school estate which is one of the best in Scotland in terms of condition and suitability, despite challenges with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). The percentage of properties in satisfactory or better condition is above 91% for all building groups. The council has, over a number of years, invested considerable sums to ensure school pupils have the best possible environment to learn and develop. With funding constraints, the investment programme and the Corporate Asset Management Strategy to 2032/33 establishes that the focus for the council going forward must be on reducing the size of the operational property estate to ensure core property assets remain safe and statutorily compliant.

During 2023/24, achievements within the property asset category included securing funding from phase three of the Learning Estate Investment Programme to build a new primary school in the Craigshill area of Livingston to replace Riverside and Letham primary schools. Construction commenced on a new East Calder Primary School, which is jointly funded by the Scottish Government and the council, and the extension to Livingston Village Primary School was completed. The traditional summer school investment programme included 42 individual projects demonstrating the council's continued commitment to investment in the learning estate.

Through proactive investigation and monitoring works the council previously identified and managed RAAC in a number of buildings, including schools. Works to resolve RAAC in Whitburn Community Centre, Knightsridge, Windyknowe and Balbardie primary schools and Fauldhouse Partnership Centre were completed during 2023/24 ahead of schedule. Enabling works continue at St Kentigern's Academy in Blackburn ahead of the design works being finalised to address the RAAC roofing at the school.

Works continue on roads, footpaths and related assets, open space and ICT programmes to ensure assets remain safe, fit for purpose and kept in adequate condition to support service delivery. This includes the completion and ongoing design of active travel projects and the good progress in implementing the programme to address ash dieback, with a focus on trees in areas of highest risk.

The approved West Lothian Local Housing Strategy 2023 to 2028 includes a supply target of 316 affordable homes per annum (1,580 over five years) and 401 market homes per annum. The council is aiming to facilitate the delivery of a minimum of 1,621 new affordable homes over the next five years, with 383 provided by the council through new build and open market acquisitions (OMAS) and the balance delivered by registered social landlords. Good progress is being made in the delivery of the West Lothian Affordable Housing Programme with developments at Mossend in West Calder and Wellhead Farm in Murieston now complete. In 2023/24 a total of 54 new build completions were handed over and 29 houses were acquired through OMAS, bringing the total number of open market acquisitions since the scheme was introduced to 291.

In addition to the creation of new homes, the programme also includes a strong focus on the maintenance of quality standards across the housing estate. During 2023/24 over £16 million was spent on existing housing stock. This included £4 million on planned programmes, £3.9 million on major elemental upgrades and £7.6 million on compliance works to ensure homes remain safe for tenants. A strong focus on the refurbishment of existing housing stock will continue within the capital programme to 2027/28.

The council is committed to working in partnership to improve the quality of life for local people. Providing seamless services with partner agencies and organisations is at the heart of the council's ethos. This is demonstrated by an active Community Planning Partnership and other partnership arrangements, such as the West Lothian Community Safety Unit Partnership with Police Scotland.

The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 established the framework for the integration of health and social care in Scotland. A health and social care partnership, in the form of the West Lothian Integration Joint Board (IJB), is in place in West Lothian. The arrangements require the delegation of relevant functions and resources by the council and NHS Lothian to the West Lothian IJB. The level of resources associated with council functions delegated to the IJB in 2023/24 was £88.6 million (2022/23 £85.1 million).

The central location, infrastructure and range of industrial, commercial and office properties, along with the support of the council's Enterprise Centre, property and business advisors, ensure that new businesses are attracted to invest and locate in the West Lothian area and that existing businesses have opportunities to expand.

West Lothian has three country parks, Almondell and Calderwood, Beecraigs and Polkemmet. The area boasts a range of outdoor activities from golf courses and horse-riding to a renowned skate park, while the council's partners West Lothian Leisure Ltd. provide a range of facilities across the area.

3. Corporate Strategy

In July 2022, the council undertook a public consultation in order to set the priorities for the next five years. Over 5,000 respondents provided feedback on their needs and expectations and importantly, their aspirations for West Lothian including the actions needed to improve communities and the quality of life for people in the area.