What impact the Article 50 negotiations have had upon your business / organisation to date?

West Lothian Council has not identified any specific impacts upon the organisation to date that could be directly attributable to Article 50 negotiations. There have been some initial measures undertaken to start identifying potential impacts (direct and indirect), as a result of Article 50 negotiations undertaken, and the possible outcomes of either an agreed Framework or a ‘no-deal’ scenario. These are detailed below under question 2.

Council services have noticed two possible areas of impact, but cannot prove a direct correlation with the Article 50 negotiations.

Education: The council recently undertook a school roll projection exercise, which rolls forward existing school rolls and factors in migration and local population data, and provides a projection. A drop in the roll forward numbers was identified and on further investigation it seems that a significant number of pupils identified as white Polish who attended a West Lothian school last session did not register at a West Lothian school this session. The drop equates to about 8% of the number of white Polish pupils who attended West Lothian schools in session 2017/18.

Staffing: The council’s Social Policy section has identified current difficulties in staffing recruitment for care providers. Problems have been identified in both recruitment process and in retention of staff, leading to an increase in the number of unmet needs cases.

What preparations, if any, are being made by your business / organisation for the range of scenarios which may result from the Article 50 negotiations?

West Lothian Council has been undertaking a horizon scanning exercise for a number of months, and has identified a number of potential risks from the Article 50 negotiations that could impact on council service delivery and operations. In order to better understand these risks a corporate Brexit Working Group has been set up which is tasked with:

- establishing information on likely impacts on service delivery resulting from different Brexit outcomes;
- identifying any actions required to mitigate potential negative impacts;
- to work with partners to understand any shared risks and any joint response appropriate to manage any potential negative impacts and maximise any positive impacts;
- To take the lead for West Lothian in negotiations with the European Union via COSLA / Solace / SLAED etc. to help ensure that West Lothian’s voice is heard;
• To research activities and approaches of other local authorities and relevant bodies across the UK and to identify any best practice approaches being developed elsewhere.

West Lothian Council is also undertaking an exercise establishing workforce demographics to identify EU nationals who may require additional support in the event of the UK leaving European Union.

What you consider the impact of a no-deal outcome would be for your business / organisation?

In the event of a no-deal outcome, it is anticipated that there could potentially be wide ranging impacts on council service delivery and operations. At this stage, the council has insufficient insight or evidence to fully assess the impacts. However, areas of particular concern include financial impact, increased administrative burdens, and pressures on workforce. Some service areas identified that could be affected in particular include procurement, social policy services, education, IT services, housing and building services, planning, economic development and regeneration, and finance.

To what extent, the guidance issued by the European Commission and UK Government has been helpful in helping you to prepare for the UK’s withdrawal from the EU?

The ‘no deal’ technical notes published by UK Government and European Commission have helped to identify potential areas that West Lothian Council needs to consider that might impact on council services and operations, and the local economy. However, thus far they have been at a high level and have been of assistance with identifying generic risks they have not been helpful in assisting with understanding specific risks to the operation of the council.

What further support or guidance you consider the Scottish Government, UK Government and / or European Commission should be providing to enable individuals, businesses and organisations in Scotland to prepare for the UK’s withdrawal from the EU?

Further guidance from both Scottish and UK Governments would be expected once a Framework agreement has been agreed and outlined. For instance, these could cover identified potential skill shortages, impacts on supply chains (procurement bodies undertaking collaborative projections), projected trade tariff figures. Given the short time constraint between a potential agreed Framework in November / December 2018 and the date of exit at the end of March 2019, guidance would need to be issued quickly in order to provide local authorities sufficient time to identify negative impacts and undertake mitigating actions.