

MINUTE of MEETING of the WHITBURN AND BLACKBURN LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE of WEST Lothian Council held within BLACKBURN PARTNERSHIP CENTRE, ASH GROVE, BLACKBURN, EH47 7LJ, on 10 SEPTEMBER 2018.

Present – Councillors George Paul (Chair), Jim Dickson and Bruce Fairbairn

Apologies - Councillor Kirsteen Sullivan

In Attendance –

Laura Wilson, Community Regeneration Team Leader, West Lothian Council
Michelle Kirkbright, Community Regeneration Officer, West Lothian Council
PC Philip Wilkin, Police Scotland
PC Andrew Hendry, Police Scotland
Kenny Stewart, Fire and Rescue Service
Gary Stoddart, Housing Manager, West Lothian Council
Eirwen Hopwood, Country Park Manager, West Lothian Council

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. MINUTE

The committee approved the draft Minute of its Meeting held on 14th May 2018. The Minute was thereafter signed by the Chair.

3. POLICE WARD REPORT

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by PC Fergus Middleton providing an update on police activity within the ward for the period to 30th June 2018.

The report was presented by Police Constables Philip Wilkin and Andrew Hendry and provided information on the Police Scotland National Priorities delivered locally, the West Lothian policing priorities and the ward specific community engagement priorities. It provided an overview of the performance statistics and explained that full information could be accessed via the Police Scotland website.

The report then went on to provide members with full information on the number of crimes recorded, solvency rates, warrants issued, etc., that had taken place across the ward during the reporting period on the following before concluding with contact details for the local police team:-

- Reducing community and social harm caused by drug and alcohol misuse;

- Reducing violence and antisocial behaviour within our communities;
- Making our roads safer; and
- Tackling acquisitive crime.

In response to a comment about the time that had elapsed since the end of the reporting period, the committee noted that the majority of committee reports were produced by services and partners on a quarterly basis and depending on the meetings rota, the information could be slightly out of date.

Arising from the discussion PC Wilkin undertook to establish how many guns had been handed in during the recent National firearm surrender campaign. He also undertook to establish whether Police Scotland had capacity to support Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in the ward.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

4. FIRE SERVICE REPORT

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by Scottish Fire and Rescue Service providing an update on activity in the ward for the period to 30th June 2018.

The committee was advised that following the publication of the Whitburn & Blackburn Multi-Member Ward Operational Plan, the Local Senior Fire Officer for Falkirk and West Lothian had produced quarterly performance reports detailing activity against key priorities.

The seven key priorities for the ward were outlined in the report and a series of graphs provided a breakdown of accidental dwellings fires, deliberate fires, fires in non-domestic properties, non-fatal non-fire emergencies and unwanted fire alarm signals for Scotland, West Lothian and the ward.

It was recommended that the local area committee note and provide comment on the Whitburn & Blackburn Multi-member Ward Quarterly Performance Report.

In response to a question, Kenny Stewart undertook to provide an update on the park at Gleneagles Court in Whitburn in the next report on actions to address anti-social behaviour and fire raising in the park area.

Decision

To note the contents of the report

5. HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING SERVICES

The committee considered a report by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services (copies of which had been circulated) providing an overview of housing performance for the period 1st April to 30th June 2018.

The performance figures for property void and let for mainstream and temporary tenancies were detailed in the report and the committee noted that for the period April to June 2018 there was a total of 52 properties let for mainstream tenancies and 16 properties for temporary tenancies. There were currently 36 policy voids in the ward. The report explained that delays in re-letting properties occurred for various reasons.

The report provided an overview of the cumulative rent charge for the year and advised that there was a strong collection rate of 95.9%. The arrears in the ward at the end of quarter 1 was £385,509, an increase of £68,428 on the same period in the previous year. The position overall in West Lothian had increased by £261,111 from the previous year and at 1st July was £1,879,981. Despite 71 serious arrears cases in the ward, 69% of cases fell in the lower bands with rent arrears of £300 or less.

The overall increase in arrears compared to the previous financial year was attributed to the roll out of the Full Service Universal Credit, other Welfare Benefit reforms and the current economic climate. The report listed the priorities officers would focus on during the year to reduce arrears.

The report went on to provide members with information on the following:-

- Whitburn & Blackburn Area Team Activity;
- Capital Programme and New Build Council Housing;
- Tenant Participation Update; and
- Safer Neighbourhood Team Update.

The report recommended that members note the content of the Housing, Customer and Building Services activity report.

In response to a question, members noted that officers fully explained the allocations policy to tenants during the Housing Options interviews. It was also noted that officers would shortly be commencing a review of the housing allocations policy.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

6. SERVICE UPDATE - NETS, LAND AND COUNTRYSIDE

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Operational Services providing an update on the recent activity of the NETS, Land and Countryside Services teams for the period 1st May 2018 to 31st July 2018 and highlighting future works planned for the locality. The outcome of the most recent Land Audit Management System inspection in the West area was also provided. The drop in scoring had been due to the level of weed growth in shrub beds which had since been addressed.

The report then provided an overview of the routine works and enquiries that had been carried out by the grounds maintenance and cleaner communities' and garden maintenance teams and provided information on the grounds maintenance enquiries received during the reporting period against the same period in 2017.

The report then moved on to provide members with an overview routine works and enquiries dealt with by the cleaner communities team before moving on to provide an overview of the various community enforcement action activities that had been undertaken. It continued with information on park and woodland and open space and cemeteries routine works along with statistical information for the same period in 2017.

Arising from discussion, the committee requested that officers should carry out maintenance and a tidy up at the roundabout at J4 of the M8. They also requested that officers make arrangements to replace the recently erected sign at Polkemmet Park from "Polkemmet Park Hartill" to "Polkemmet Park Whitburn".

The committee was invited to note the content of the report.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

7. PENSIONERS' GROUPS CHRISTMAS FUND ALLOCATIONS 2018

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration advising of the groups invited to apply for the Pensioners' Groups Christmas Fund 2018 in the Whitburn & Blackburn ward, Livingston-wide groups and West Lothian-wide groups.

In 2018, the total amount available was £29,054 with the fund being divided by the total number of beneficiaries. Eight applications had been issued to groups across the Whitburn & Blackburn ward, with three returned to date. The intention was to support all eight groups upon submission of their application. Appendix 1 of the report details those groups proposed to be supported and the approximate number of beneficiaries in each.

One application had also been sent to a Livingston-wide group and three applications to West Lothian-wide groups. The intention was to support

all of these groups once the applications had been returned. Appendix 2 provided further details on those applications and the approximate number of beneficiaries.

The committee noted that a full report on the final allocations would be presented to the Voluntary Organisations PDSP later in the year with letters to be issued to groups in late October advising of the level of funding they would receive.

The report recommended that the committee note eight groups within the ward that had been invited to apply to the fund and would be supported if applications were received.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

8. COMMUNITY REGENERATION UPDATE

The committee considered a report by the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on regeneration activity within the Whitburn and Blackburn ward.

The report recalled that the West Lothian Regeneration Framework approved in 2014 contained a commitment to develop regeneration plans in key areas of deprivation in West Lothian. Eight regeneration areas had been identified based on the data zones within the bottom 20% of the West Lothian, which included areas of Whitburn and Blackburn.

Regeneration plans had been developed for both areas and provided as appendices to the report. The overarching aim of the plans was to tackle inequalities.

The report provided the committee with an update on activities in Whitburn as follows:-

- progress to take forward the outcomes contained within the Whitburn Masterplan;
- the first version of a regeneration plan for the town;
- the provision of a summer lunch scheme at Whitburn community centre;
- Whitburn “place branding” and marketing;
- an update on the Town Centre Shop Front Improvement Scheme;
- ongoing work of Whitburn Traders and Whitburn Community Council Twin Town Initiative with Oswaldtwistle in Lancashire;
- ongoing work to engage with owners of vacant and under-utilised

sites on West Main Street and throughout the town;

- enhancements at Whitburn East End;
- delivery and installation of new bespoke Whitburn town gateway signage;
- ongoing work of the Friends of Polkemmet Park;
- an overview of the various updates by Whitburn Community Development Trust; and
- an update on the staff moves that had taken place to allow the creation of a new Whitburn Partnership Centre.

The report then proceeded to inform the committee of regeneration activities in Blackburn including updates on:-

- the work of the regeneration group to identify projects and develop actions and its renaming to Blackburn Future Group which had been well received;
- details of the Blackburn Week of Action;
- activities of Community Action Blackburn including the “Hungry Holiday” club and Blackburn Fun Day; and
- the current position with a variety of projects in the area that had been awarded money from the Villages Improvement Fund.

The report concluded that the process for developing regeneration plans was underway with local action groups established and evidence gathering and consultation exercises conducted. The first draft action plans had been produced and would become “live” documents that would be monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

In response to the discussion, the committee requested that Property Services ensure that ward members and Mill Centre tenants be kept informed of ongoing discussions with the Head Tenant following the council’s decision to terminate its lease at the Mill Centre, Blackburn.

The report recommended that committee note:-

- (a) Progress to develop regeneration plans for the towns and associated activities;
- (b) The first drafts of the Whitburn and Blackburn Regeneration Plans;
- (c) Update on progress of the Whitburn town centre related matters;
- (d) The update on the progress of developing Whitburn Partnership Centre;
- (e) The report on the Blackburn Week of Action;

- (f) The update on Community Action Blackburn activity; and
- (g) An update on projects within the ward supported by the Villages Improvement Fund.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

9. WORKPLAN

The committee approved the workplan for the period to September 2018.

Decision

To approve the workplan.