

MINUTE of MEETING of the WHITBURN AND BLACKBURN LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE of WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL held within WHITBURN COMMUNITY CENTRE, 33 MANSE ROAD, WHITBURN, on 19 FEBRUARY 2018.

Present – Councillors George Paul (Chair) and Kirsteen Sullivan

Apologies – Councillor Bruce Fairbairn

Absent - Councillor Jim Dickson

In Attendance –

Alistair Shaw, Lead Officer, West Lothian Council
Scott McKillop, Community Regeneration Officer, West Lothian Council
PC Fergus Middleton, Police Scotland
PC Carol-Ann Wilson, Police Scotland
Des Donnelly, 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. ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Clerk advised the committee that in terms of the council's Scheme of Administration, the meeting was inquorate. Nevertheless, the meeting could proceed with only two ward members present but any resolutions made would require to be reported to the Council Executive for ratification before they became effective.

3. MINUTE

The committee noted the draft Minute of its Meeting held on 27 November 2017.

4. POLICE WARD REPORT

The committee considered a report by Inspector Forbes, Police Scotland (copies of which had been circulated) which summarised police activity in the ward for the period to 31st January 2018, along with the performance figures for Anti-Social Behaviour for the period November 2017 to January 2018.

The report was presented by the local Police Constables Fergus Middleton and Carol-Ann Wilson and provided information on the Police Scotland National Priorities (delivered locally), the West Lothian priorities and the ward specific priorities. It outlined performance and solvency

rates in the ward for the period from November 2017 to January 2018, together with comparator figures for the West Lothian area.

The report then went on to provide a full breakdown of the anti-social behaviour figures for the ward before moving on to provide an overview of the various crime prevention activities that had taken place in the ward during the reporting period. The report concluded with information on forthcoming events and local officer contact details.

In addition to the information contained within the report, members received an update on the outcome a recent unannounced search at Torcroft Home. Members were delighted to hear that the ward would benefit from the services of Police Scotland's Violence Reduction Task Force for 10 days. The team would target crimes of violence within the ward and undertake high visibility patrols to homes with known anti-social behaviour issues and licensed premises. Local officers would receive a debrief from the Unit.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

5. 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 31st December 2017.

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.

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 November 2017 to 31st January 2018 and highlighting future works planned for the locality. The outcome of the most recent Land Audit Management System inspections in the West area was also provided.

The report then provided an overview of the routine works and enquiries that had been carried out by the grounds maintenance and cleaner communities teams. It also provided an overview of environmental community action carried out by the enforcement officers.

The report then moved on to provide members with an overview of the tree and woodland routine enquiries dealt with during the reporting period including the establishment of a Friends of Polkemmet Group and concluded with information on the open space and cemeteries works and enquiries.

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

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

7. 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 October to 31st December 2017.

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 October to December 2017 there was a total let of 51 properties for mainstream tenancies and 32 properties for temporary tenancies. There were 19 policy voids in the ward due to properties requiring repairs for asbestos removal, fire damage and Health and Safety issues, 3 of which were being used as decant properties.

A graph within the report demonstrated the position for rent arrears in the ward to the end of Q3 for financial year 2017/18 against the same period in the previous financial year. The ward had a strong rent collection rate of 96.82%. The current arrears balance in the ward was £371,293, an increase of £99,844 on last year's position of £271,450. Overall the arrears position for West Lothian had increased by £371,576 and at the end of Q3 was £1,818,779.

A table within the report provided members with an overview of the level of arrears banding and number of tenants in arrears in the ward at the end of the 3rd quarter of 2017/18 compared to the same period in 2016/17. Although there were 76 serious arrears cases where tenants owed more than £1,000, members noted that 62% of cases fell into the lower bands with arrears of £300 or less. The rent strategy for 2017/18 would continue to improve rent collection methods and support customers in arrears. Officers were working closely with claimants of universal credits to minimise the risk of rent arrears whilst claimants were waiting

on their applications being processed.

Further information was also contained in the report on the following:-

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

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

Arising from discussions, the Lead Officer undertook to provide ward members with an indicative timescale for completion of the new council housing site at Redhouse, Blackburn and would also arrange for an officer from the Housing Strategy Team to attend a meeting of Blackburn Community Council.

Decision

To note the contents of the report

8. WEST LOTHIAN VILLAGES IMPROVEMENT FUND - APPLICATIONS

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration inviting consideration of a number of applications received for funding from the West Lothian Villages Improvement Fund.

The report recalled that in 2012 the Council Executive agreed the eligibility criteria for a West Lothian Villages Improvement Fund. Funding of £1.65m was made available to support eligible schemes with funding phased over five years. The fund had two work streams, details of which were outlined in the report.

The committee noted from the report the villages in the Whitburn & Blackburn ward that were eligible under the scheme and the amount remaining in each area as follows:-

- Blackburn - £125,000 (£30,000 remaining)
- Seafield - £55,000 (£47,750 remaining)
- Greenrigg - £55,000 (£24,230 remaining)
- East Whitburn - £55,000 (£55,000 remaining)

The report then provided a brief narrative on the 11 applications received with further information attached to the appendix to the report:-

- Blackburn Bowling Club Road – Funding of £23,500 to resurface the

Bowling Club road. Highways estimated the cost of the works to be £47,000. The council would meet 50% of the costs, with the Bowling Club responsible for the other 50% in terms of their lease.

- Blackburn Community Council – Past, Present, Future – Funding of £7,500 to relocate historical boulders to an identified site at Blackburn Partnership Centre, install a touch screen within the Partnership Centre to provide the community with up to date information on groups and services in the area and to provide raised flower beds and a small seating area within the external garden of the Partnership Centre inside the secure perimeter fencing.
- Seafield Community Centre Management Committee – Seafield Play Area Improvements – Funding of £40,218 to fund additional equipment in the park, improvements to the multi-use games area and general park improvements.
- Seafield Gala Day Committee – War Memorial – Funding of £7,532 to create a memorial area at the existing millennium stone site to create a surrounding wall and commemorative plaque on one side to honour the ward dead and plaque on the other side to honour the Bungrange disasted.
- Greenrigg Community Council – Greenrigg Puffin Crossing – Funding of £18,216.50 to contribute towards the costs of funding a puffin crossing on the B7066 to help residents cross from Baillie Avenue to the main part of the village.
- Greenrigg Community Council – Woodland Enhancements – Funding of £6,103.50 to install a 1.8m fence along the path to the north of the playpark on Polkemmet Road to help prevent fly-tipping in the area.
- Central Scotland Green Network Trust – East Whitburn Enhancements – Funding of £32,500 to improve the various greenspaces in the community including improvements to Blaeberry Woods; greenspaces at the war memorial area and Pottishaw Cottages; between Drum Place and Redmill Park; and Colquhoun Pass, the path parallel to Redlands Court.
- East Whitburn Community Education Centre – Community Noticeboard – Funding of £3,132 for a community noticeboard to be installed outside the grounds of the Gothenburg store.
- East Whitburn Community Education Centre – Defibrillator Units – Funding of £6,800 to fund the purchase and installation of defibrillator units in disused phone box in the village and in the community centre.
- East Whitburn Community Education Centre – Mining Plaque and Remembrance Seating – Funding of £6,288 to fund remembrance themed seating at the war memorial, remembrance themed seating in the existing bus stop area and a commemorative plaque and seating at the current mining wheel feature on Whitrigg bing.
- East Whitburn Community Education Centre – Funding of £3,600 to purchase six new Christmas light features for the village to replace the

existing features.

It was recommended that the committee;-

- (a) Notes the applications received for funding;
- (b) Notes that the proposals met the eligibility criteria for supported projects;
- (c) Supports funding for the applications; and
- (d) Agrees that the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration should make an offer of funding as per the details set out in the report

Decision

To endorse the terms of the report and refer the applications to the Council Executive for approval subject to offering reduced funding to Blackburn Bowling Club of £22,500 which would address the shortfall of available village improvement monies in the area.

9. 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.

The report then provided the committee with an update on progress to take forward the outcomes contained within the Whitburn Masterplan. The outcomes in the plan were being developed through the Regeneration Advisory Group alongside Whitburn Town Centre Management Group. The report then moved on to highlight progress that had been made to develop a regeneration plan for the town; finalisation of a Whitburn logo as part of the Whitburn place branding project; the development of a heritage trail in the town; the ongoing work of the Friends of Polkemmet Park to focus on greater community involvement in running the park and increasing running community events at the park; the latest update on take up of the shop front improvement scheme; work to continue to advance twinning with Oswaldtwistle in Lancashire; an overview of projects being carried out by the Whitburn Traders; an update on the successful farmers market held in November and plans to run on a more frequent basis during 2018; the award of funding to Whitburn Community Council to support the Harrison Hall over the next 12 months; and finally an update on engagement with owners to improve vacant sites on West Main Street. The report also gave an update on the Whitburn

Partnership Centre project.

The report then proceeded to inform the committee of regeneration activities in Blackburn including the development of an interactive map which had taken all of the community asset mapping and incorporated it into an online resource for the area; an overview of engagement activities with the Change in Blackburn group, information on the support offered to Blackburn Bowling Club and Blackburn Community Council to apply for village improvement funding; and details of the ongoing work of Community Action Blackburn to support various activities in the area for a wide range of ages. The Blackburn update concluded with information on the anticipated deadlines for concluding legal agreements for Blackburn Partnership Centre to allow council services to move in.

The report concluded with information on Aspiring West Lothian, a consortium of five key community organisations who had successfully applied for £248,000 from the Scottish Government's Aspiring Communities Fund. The fund would allow each organisation to employ a full time development worker for 16 months to work in each of the five regeneration areas of Whitburn, Blackburn, Armadale, Polbeth and Livingston Centre. Recruitment had recently taken place and it was hoped the development workers would be in post at the beginning of March. The aim of the project was to build capacity in the host organisations and local community. A project plan had been developed across the consortium to ensure the outcomes were achieved whilst still allowing for specific local needs to be met.

The report recommended that committee note:-

- (a) Progress to date with the Placemaking in Whitburn initiative and developing a regeneration plan for the town;
- (b) Updates on Whitburn Town Centre related matters;
- (c) Update on progress of the Whitburn Partnership Centre;
- (d) Progress in Blackburn with developing a regeneration plan for the area;
- (e) The update on Blackburn Partnership Centre; and
- (f) Progress of the Aspiring West Lothian project which Whitburn Community Development Trust and Community Action Blackburn were participating in and receiving funding.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

10. TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2018-19

The committee endorsed the proposed timetable of meetings for the period September 2018 to June 2019.

Decision

To endorse the proposed timetable of meetings.