

MINUTE of MEETING of the BATHGATE LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within BATHGATE PARTNERSHIP CENTRE, ROOMS 14 AND 15, on 12 MARCH 2018.

Present – Councillors Harry Cartmill (Chair), William Boyle and Charles Kennedy

Apologies – Councillor John McGinty

In attendance -

Andrew Blake, Lead Officer, West Lothian Council
PC Iain Law, Police Scotland
PC Richard Rafeek, Police Scotland
Scott Williamson, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
Kate Ward, Housing Manager, West Lothian Council
Tony Fleming, Grounds Maintenance Manager, West Lothian Council
Nairn Pearson, BID & Town Centre Manager, West Lothian Council
Donald Stavert, Bathgate Community Council
Ronnie McLeod, Bathgate Community Council
Billy Johnston, Bathgate Community Council
Maureen Nagle, Bathgate Resident

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair agreed to bring forward Agenda Item 8 (Housing) and hear it immediately following Agenda Item 4 (Draft Minute).

3. MINUTE

The Committee approved the minute of its meeting held on 4 December 2017. The minute was then signed by the Chair.

4. HOUSING, CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES UPDATE

The Committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing an overview of the service activities within the ward for the period 1 October to 31 December 2017.

The report provided details of the property void and let performance for both mainstream tenancies and temporary tenancies.

There were 17 policy voids in the ward area. Reasons for policy voids included properties unable to be let due to health and safety reasons or property being held to assist with decants due to remedial works.

The report examined the ward arrears position and provided a table showing the number of tenants in arrears for Q3 of 2017/18 compared to the same reporting period in 2016/17, which showed an increase of £46,821 on the previous year's position. Despite the increase, the ward had a strong rent collection rate of 98.73%. Overall, the arrears position in West Lothian had also increased by £371,576 to £1,181,779. Details of the ongoing actions to be undertaken to recover rents was also provided.

The report then provided an overview of the Bathgate area team activity along with an update on the new build and capital programme. The Housing Manager advised that the only work ongoing at the moment within the ward area was the new build site at Wester Inch which was awaiting handover. The site completion date was also still to be confirmed.

An update on Tenant Participation was provided which included details of the annual rent consultation, the Good Neighbour Awards, the issue of the Winter Edition of Tenants News, the bi-annual Tenants Satisfaction Survey, the work of the Tenant Led Inspections Team, the nomination of the TPAS sub-group as a finalist in the Homeless Network Award at a recent awards ceremony and information about participation at recent jobs fairs in Craigshill and Fauldhouse.

The report concluded with an overview of the work that had been carried out by the council officer based in the Safer Neighbourhood Team from October to December 2017.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

5. POLICE WARD REPORT

The Committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by Police Constable Iain Law providing an update on performance, activities and issues across the ward for the period up to 31st December 2017.

The report was presented by Constables Iain Law and Richard Rafeek and provided statistical information in relation to crime Groups 1 to 5 along with a breakdown of Anti-Social Behaviour performance for the period up to 31st December 2017. Members heard that despite a slight increase in the youth call figures for the year to date, the monthly figures for October to December had seen a decrease in month on month calls. The position would continue to be monitored. They also heard that the slight increase in antisocial behaviour calls noted in the report was linked to the increase in youth calls.

Information on the variety of crime prevention activities and initiatives carried out within the ward were provided within the report which concluded with details of forthcoming events in the ward and ward officer contacts.

Constables Law and Rafeek provided a verbal update on the various methods that were being used by Police Scotland to improve engagement with the public. They encouraged members of the public to make contact via bathgatecpt@scotland.pnn.police.uk, their dedicated e-mail address.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

6. FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE REPORT

The Committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) providing an update on the activity within Bathgate Multi-Member Ward for the period up to December 2017.

Quarterly reports on the Multi-Member Ward Operational Plans had been produced by SFRS to ensure delivery of the Local Fire and Rescue Plan for West Lothian 2014-2017.

The report was presented by Local Liaison Officer Scott Williamson and provided performance information relating to the work undertaken by the service in the Bathgate ward comparing the number of recorded incidents for 2017-18 to the previous year relating to accidental dwelling fires, fire casualties and fatalities, deliberate fires, fires in non-domestic properties, non-fatal non-fire emergencies and unwanted fire alarm signals for Scotland, West Lothian and the ward.

The Local Liaison Officer explained that the number of non-fire emergencies would continue to rise particularly in view of the Fire & Rescue Service Transformation Plans for Scotland which would widen the role of firefighters to ensure they were trained and ready to respond to new and emerging risks in addition to fires and rescues.

The Committee was asked to note the contents of the report.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

7. SERVICE UPDATE – NETS, LAND & COUNTRYSIDE

The Committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Operational Services advising members of the recent activity of the NET's, Land and Countryside teams for the period 1 October 2017 to 31 January 2018.

The report provided information in relation to Grounds Maintenance, Garden Maintenance, Cleaner Communities Routine Works, Parks and Woodland Routine Works and Open Space and Cemeteries.

It was recommended that the Committee:

1. Note the work carried out by the service within the local area; and
2. Advise of any areas that required further information or investigation.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

8. BATHGATE WARD SERVICE UPDATE

The Committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration providing an update on progress towards developing regeneration plans within the ward and other ward activity.

The report commenced with an overview of the number of visitors to the Partnership Centre between November 2017 and January 2018. A breakdown of the usage of a variety of structured programmes that had taken place within the centre was also given. The new self-service Payment kiosk was fully operational and its use continued to steadily increase. The Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre continued to support members of the West Lothian community through their drop in surgeries within Simpson Library and their Counselling Sessions within Bathgate Partnership Centre. They also provided services at Strathbrock Partnership Centre, Fauldhouse Partnership Centre and Carmondean Connected. An overview of the activities on offer at Simpson library were listed along with details of events arranged by community playgroups, youth clubs before finishing with information on new groups who were now hiring space within the partnership centre.

The report then moved on to provide an update on town centre related matters which were discussed through the regular meetings of the Bathgate Town Centre Management Group, including the completion of the pedestrian precinct and reinstatement of the car park at Acredale Car Park which had been used as a compound by the contractors, information on the annual Christmas events in Bathgate and of the plans that were in place for the forthcoming West Lothian Highland Games, Bathgate Procession and John Newland Festival, amongst others.

The report also provided members with details of the busy programme of groups, classes and other events taking place through the week at Boghall Drop-In Centre/Community Wing and its base for local agencies to work in partnership for the benefit of the Boghall community before moving on to provide an update on recent initiatives by Bathgate Community Council and Fairtrade Fortnight.

The report concluded with an update on progress towards developing regeneration plans in 8 key areas of deprivation across West Lothian. Community engagement activities had commenced in Bathgate with

further work to be undertaken over the coming months using a variety of engagement methods to ascertain local issues. Profiles were being generated for each area which would provide a range of supporting statistical information on issues such as poverty, income, unemployment, health and access to services that required to be considered in those areas. It was anticipated that the Bathgate regeneration plan would be in place in April/May 2018 and an update would be provided to the next meeting of the committee.

It was recommended that the Committee notes the content of the report and advise of any areas that required further detail or investigation.

In commending the success of the Boghall Drop Inn Centre and acknowledging how the variety of services delivered from it provided a great sense of community in Boghall, the BIDS Manager undertook to liaise with colleagues to establish whether the success of the Drop Inn Centre could be replicated in other facilities in the ward and across West Lothian. He would also consider whether actions could be incorporated into the regeneration plans being developed.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

9. WORKPLAN

A copy of the Workplan had been circulated for information.

Decision

To note the Workplan.

10. PROPOSED TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2018/19

The committee considered the proposed timetable of meetings for the period September 2018 to June 2019 (copies of which had been circulated).

Decision

To approve the timetable of meetings.

11. LEASE OF THE REGAL THEATRE, BATHGATE TO RECONNECT

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Finance and Property Services and Head of Education (Learning, Policy and Resources) providing an update on the council's decision to grant a five year lease of the Regal Theatre, Bathgate to Reconnect.

The report recalled that at the meeting of the Council Executive on 19th

December 2017, members had noted the outcome of a community consultation exercise on the proposals for the future use of the Regal Theatre, Bathgate and agreed that officers should engage with West Lothian Leisure and Reconnect to explore and develop the proposals presented by the organisations for their planned use of the Regal Theatre.

The report explained that officers had engaged with both groups and invited them to that they develop an outline business plan with detail on the financial viability and sustainability of their proposals, to clarify what financial assumptions had been made and to demonstrate how their proposals would satisfy council objectives.

Following careful consideration of their overall financial position, West Lothian Leisure subsequently decided to withdraw their interest in operating the Regal Theatre, leaving Reconnect the sole interest.

The report went on to outline the purpose of Reconnect and explained that their business plan proposed operating the Regal Theatre as a community theatre space and to promote a range of art, music and drama-related activities. They had proposed two options for Reconnect's occupation of the property, firstly to transfer ownership of the building to Reconnect via community asset transfer and secondly, to lease the building from the council.

Officers considered that the transfer of ownership of the Regal via community asset transfer should not be considered since the long-term viability and sustainability of Reconnect's proposals for the property had not been proven. Instead, officers had recommended to the Council Executive that it was in the council's best interest that Reconnect be granted a five year lease of the Regal Theatre, with a two year break clause, in accordance with the lease terms which were set out in the report.

The report advised that council officers would continue to work with and assist Reconnect in fully developing their business plan for the operation of the Regal Theatre, including arrangements for engagement with users and the community.

As no officer was present at the meeting to speak to the content of the report or answer questions from committee members and community representatives, the committee agreed to request that the responsible officer attend the next meeting of the committee to discuss the report and community consultation process.

Decision

To note the terms of the report and continue the matter to the next meeting of the committee for further discussion.