

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 14 MAY 2018.

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

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
Gordon McCaig, Fire and Rescue Service
Gary Stoddart, Housing Manager, West Lothian Council
Eirwen Hopwood, Country Park Manager, West Lothian Council
Tracey Johnston, Chair, Whitburn Community Centre

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. MINUTE

The committee approved the draft Minute of its Meeting held on 19th February 2018. The Minute was thereafter signed by the Chair.

3. 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 March 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.

Decision

To note the contents of the report

4. 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 February 2018 to 31st March 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 parks and woodland routine enquiries dealt with during the reporting period along with an overview of recent activities at Polkemmet Country Park, including a very well attended Easter egg hunt which had attracted more than 1000 people, an update on the Friends of Polkemmet Group. The report concluded with information on the open space and cemeteries works and enquiries.

Arising from the discussion, officers undertook to provide figures in the next report on the number of fly-tipping complaints received within the ward pre/post the introduction of the charge for bulky uplifts.

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

Decision

To note the terms 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 January to 31st March 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 January to March 2018 there was a total of 58 properties let for mainstream tenancies and 20 properties for temporary tenancies.

The Housing Manager provided a verbal update on rents arrears explaining that information that had traditionally been provided within the report had been removed to allow it to be updated to ensure it provided ward members with a more informative picture of arrears within the ward.

She explained that the final year end arrears figure for 2017/18 for West Lothian was just under £1.4m, up £180,000 from the previous financial year. Rent arrears would continue to be a priority task for area team staff and tenants would continue to be offered support, advice and assistance.

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.

In response to a suggestion, the Housing Manager undertook to disseminate a leaflet produced by the Housing Customer Services Manager with useful contacts to community groups across the ward. In response to questions, the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services assured members that there was a council wide action plan in place to mitigate the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit on rent arrears.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

6. 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 activities in Whitburn as follows:-

- progress to take forward the outcomes contained within the Whitburn Masterplan;
- progress towards developing a regeneration plan for the town;
- the planned provision of a summer lunch scheme at Whitburn community centre;

- Whitburn “place branding” and marketing;
- ongoing work of the Friends of Polkemet Park and its formal establishment;
- uptake of the shop front improvement scheme;
- work to continue to advance twinning with Oswaldtwistle in Lancashire;
- support for projects being carried out by the Whitburn Traders;
- farmers market held in November and plans to run on a more frequent basis during 2018;
- provision of financial support to Whitburn Community Council to support the use of the Harrison Hall over the next 12 months;
- engagement with owners to improve vacant sites on West Main Street; and
- 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;
- The ongoing work of Community Action Blackburn which continued to go from strength to strength in supporting local groups;
- The planned Week of Action which would concentrate on priorities identified by Police Scotland, the community and local steering group;
- The significant progress that had been made with the Blackburn Partnership Centre Interface Agreement which would allow services to be transferred in the coming weeks and ensure that staff from Whitburn Housing Office could be accommodated within the new facility to allow the Whitburn Partnership Centre works to progress.

The report then provided details on Aspiring West Lothian, a consortium of five key community organisations that had successfully applied for £248,000 from the Scottish Government’s Aspiring Communities Fund. The fund had allowed a full time development worker to be employed within the ward for 16 months 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 concluded with information on the arrangements that were

underway to approve the Village Improvement Fund applications through the Council Executive.

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 progress of the Blackburn Partnership Centre;
- (f) Progress of the Aspiring West Lothian project which Whitburn Community Development Trust and Community Action Blackburn were participating in and receiving funding; and
- (g) That the outstanding Village Improvement Fund applications referred by the committee to the Council Executive in February would be considered by the Council Executive at its meeting on 15th May 2018.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

7. WORKPLAN

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

In response to a question raised, the committee agreed to request that a report be presented to the next meeting on whether a pedestrian crossing in the vicinity of the new Blackburn Partnership Centre was necessary and if so, the best location.

Decision

- (a) To approve the workplan.
- (b) To call for a report on the need for a pedestrian crossing at Blackburn Partnership Centre.

8. 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 March 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 explained that performance statistic could be accessed through the Police Scotland website.

The report provided the committee with an overview of the changes to the West Lothian Community Police Team following the council's decision to withdraw funding towards 21 community officers and a subsequent review of the community team tasks carried out by Police Scotland. Members heard that all school link officer posts had been withdrawn and that where demand allowed, a named single point of contact officer would have weekly contact with schools. The Community Action Team would cease on 16th May 2018 and would be replaced by a smaller Community Enquiry Team led by an Inspector and two Sergeants who would task officers based on threat, risk and harm at any time. Officers who had been redeployed from community roles had been redeployed locally into posts within the West Lothian Command, which was a positive outcome for their welfare. The 9 current community wards with 2 beat officers would be altered from 16th May 2018 and incorporated into 4 locality areas aligned to response policing hubs as follows:-

1. Linlithgow, Broxburn, Uphall, Winchburgh, East Livingston and East Calder (excluding Craigshill)
2. Livingston North, Livingston South and Craigshill
3. Armadale, Blackridge and Bathgate
4. Whitburn, Blackburn, Fauldhouse and the Breich Valley

The report then went on to provide members with information on the variety of prevention activities that had taken place across the ward during the reporting period and concluded with information on the forthcoming events.

In response to concerns that had been expressed to ward members, Police Scotland undertook to establish whether Pinewood School had signed up to the Parksmart Scheme although officers suspected in the vicinity of the school were not caused by parents.

The committee was disappointed with Police Scotland's decision to end the CAT Team and remove all 6 school link officers return the officers to response duties, particularly as the council had only made a contribution towards the officers in the Community Action Team and 1 of the school link officer posts. They hoped that affected officers being redeployed to response duties in West Lothian would offset the loss of dedicated community officers.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

