

MINUTE of MEETING of the WHITBURN AND BLACKBURN LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE held within SEAFIELD COMMUNITY CENTRE, REDHOUSE ROAD, SEAFIELD, EH47 7AL, on 3 DECEMBER 2018.

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

Absent - Councillor Jim Dickson

In Attendance –

Scott McKillop, Community Regeneration Officer, West Lothian Council  
Alan Cunningham, Scottish Fire & Rescue  
Kenny Stewart, Scottish Fire & Rescue  
Gary Stoddart, Housing Manager, West Lothian Council  
Archie Morrison, Ranger, West Lothian Council  
Beverley Akinlami, Education Services, West Lothian Council  
Christopher Nelson, Income Maximisation Manager, West Lothian Council  
Tracy Johnston, Whitburn Community 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 10<sup>th</sup> September 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 July to September 2018.

The report provided information on the Police Scotland National Policing Priorities delivered locally and the West Lothian policing priorities as per the West Lothian Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2013-2023. It gave an overview of the West Lothian Area Command Performance for the period April to June 2018 and provided a link to the Police Scotland website where ward specific performance statistics could be obtained.

The report then provided members with full information on the various actions undertaken within the ward to protect people; reduce anti-social behaviour and hate crime; reduce violence; tackle substance misuse; reduce home, fire and road casualties and tackle serious and organised crime and counter terrorism. The report concluded with information on the locality officers within the ward.

In the absence of an officer from Police Scotland, the committee agreed to

request that information on drink driving figures for the ward be included in future reports to committee.

#### 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 30<sup>th</sup> September 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.

Arising from the discussion regarding anti-social behaviour at Blaeberryhill Wood, the committee heard that a tree management plan was currently being developed for the area. The Fire Service confirmed that it would continue to monitor the area should problems be ongoing as the better weather approached in April. The committee also heard that partners had held a debrief meeting following the 2018 bonfire night issues in Blackburn with a view to alleviating problems in future years.

#### Decision

To note the contents of the report

### 5. WEST LOTHIAN COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT INSPECTION

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Education (Learning, Policy and Resources) providing an overview of the findings of the Education Scotland Inspection of Community Learning and Development in West Lothian which took place in August and September 2018.

A report arising from the inspection which had been provided as an appendix to the report outlined the findings from the strategic inspection of community learning and development and the place-based inspection

which had focussed on Armadale and Whitburn. The purpose of the inspection was set out in the report.

Members noted from the report that partnership had contributed to the preparation of joint self-evaluations, the collection of evidence and the inspection timetable and focus groups and visits. The inspection team had spoken to a variety of children, young people, adults and community organisations, as well as elected members, senior leaders and staff across the range of partner organisations.

The Interim Community and Policy Manager then spoke more about the variety of local groups within the ward who had been involved in the inspection. She also commented on the sense of civic pride which the inspectors had noted.

The report concluded that the inspection had noted the high quality of leadership, self-evaluation and that partners had a good understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement to ensure communities were achieving well and recommended that committee note the outcome of the inspection.

#### Decision

To note the terms of the report.

### 6. ADVICE SHOP SERVICE UPDATE

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Finance and Property Services reporting on the work undertaken by the Advice Shop Service from April 2017 – March 2018.

The report advised that the Advice Shop was a free, impartial and confidential service aimed to alleviate poverty and promote inclusion and equality through advice, assistance and advocacy. Activity across the service was informed and prioritised by the recently refreshed Community Planning Partnership Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The report explained that the Advice Shop had dealt with 7833 separate enquiries from 2315 customers, an increase of 21% compared to the same period in the previous year. An appendix to the report demonstrated local provision in more detail. The Court Advice Project, which was funded through the Scottish Legal Aid Board, had worked with 99 families to support them sustain their homes. The number had decreased from the previous year mainly due to improved early intervention.

The report went on to outline the priorities for development during 2018-19 and set out the intention to embed services into the local community; continue towards National Standards for Advice Providers; and to support customers affected by the introduction of the council's contribution policy.

The committee was invited to note:-

- (a) The Advice Shop provision in the ward; and

- (b) The impact provision was having in terms of supporting the outcomes of the Community Planning Partnership's Anti-Poverty Strategy 2018-23.

Arising from the discussion, officers agreed to review publicity of the various Advice Shop initiatives and services within the town to ensure customers were aware of the options and engaged with officers at the earliest opportunity. They also agreed to explore whether MacMillan@WestLothian information and support service could be offered from the Harrison Hall whilst the new partnership centre was being created.

#### Decision

To note the terms of the report.

### 7. 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 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 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 in line with the target score.

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, officers agreed to explore the feasibility of placing No Dog Signs in distinct play park areas across the ward.

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

#### Decision

To note the terms of the report.

### 8. 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 1<sup>st</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> September

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 July to September 2018 there was a total of 69 properties let for mainstream tenancies and 20 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 94.9%. The arrears in the ward at the end of quarter 2 was £491,711, an increase of £145,989 on the same period in the previous year. The position overall in West Lothian had increased by £593,408 from the previous year and at 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018 was £2,405,181. Despite 112 serious arrears cases in the ward, 63% 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 address 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 the figures for property voids may change in future reports as they were now reported to ARC on the basis of the number of the days the property had been void which would give a clearer indication than the current 4+ weeks.

### Decision

To note the contents of the report.

## 9. 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 allocations made from the Pensioners' Christmas Fund 2018 to groups in the Whitburn & Blackburn Ward, Livingston-wide groups and West Lothian-wide groups.

The report recalled that the fund had been established to support groups

across West Lothian and £29,054 was available for allocation in 2018. The groups which had been supported and the amounts allocated to those within the Whitburn & Blackburn ward were detailed in Appendix 1 to the report. Appendix 2 detailed the award of grants to one Livingston-wide and two West Lothian-wide groups. A full report on the final allocations made from the Fund in 2018 would be submitted to the Voluntary Organisations PDSP later in the week.

The report recommended that committee note the 8 groups within the Whitburn & Blackburn ward had applied to the fund and had been supported.

#### Decision

To note the terms of the report.

### 10. 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.

Regeneration plans had been developed for both areas after extensive work between Community Regeneration Officers and steering groups from the local area.

The report set out in detail the main regeneration activities associated with the plans and the wider efforts of partners within Whitburn as follows:-

- progress to take forward the outcomes contained within the Whitburn Masterplan and first version of a regeneration plan for the town;
- the planned provision of a summer lunch scheme in 2019;
- a potential allotments project within Burnhouse school grounds;
- work with Community Action Blackburn and Whitburn Development Trust to support them to develop applications for funding from the Voluntary Sector Fund 2019/20;
- completion of the Twin Towns project;
- an update of the town centre shopfront improvement scheme;
- an update on the ongoing engagement with owners of vacant and under-utilised sites and buildings on West Main Street and throughout the town centre;
- environmental enhancements at the east end approach to/from Whitburn;

- an update on the ordering and delivery of town gateway signage;
- ongoing work of the Friends of Polkemet Park;
- an overview of the various updates on Whitburn Community Development Trust activities; and
- an update on the creation of a new Whitburn Partnership Centre.

The report then proceeded to inform the committee of regeneration activities and wider efforts of partners in Blackburn on:-

- the work of the Blackburn Future Group and production of a draft Blackburn's Future Plan and initiatives being driven forward by partner groups; and
- the official launch of the Blackburn's Future Plan and interactive map which would be added to various websites to promote use by local people;

The report concluded that the process for developing regeneration plans was underway with local action groups established with local action groups establishment with evidence gathering and consultation exercises undertaken to produce draft plans. The plans were 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) update on Whitburn regeneration group;
- (b) updates on Whitburn Town Centre related matters;
- (c) update on the progress of developing Whitburn Partnership Centre;
- (d) that a launch event was in place for the Blackburn Regeneration Plan; and
- (e) the update on Community Action Blackburn activity.

### Decision

To note the terms of the report.

## 11. WORKPLAN

The committee approved the workplan for the period to March 2019.

Decision

To approve the workplan.