

MINUTE of MEETING of the WHITBURN AND BLACKBURN LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE held within EAST WHITBURN COMMUNITY CENTRE, HENS NEST ROAD, EAST WHITBURN, on 4 MARCH 2019.

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

In Attendance –

Ann Marie Carr, Interim Lead Officer, West Lothian Council
Scott McKillop, Community Regeneration Officer, West Lothian Council
Lee Clark, Fire and Rescue Service
Carol Ann Wilson, Police Scotland
Fergus Middleton, Police Scotland
Gary Stoddart, Housing Manager, West Lothian Council
Eirwen Hopwood, Parks and Recreation 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 3rd December 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 October to December 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 a summary of the West Lothian Area Command performance for the period October to December 2018 and provided a link to the Police Scotland website where ward specific information on performance statistics could be obtained.

The report then provided 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 to tackle serious and organised crime and counter terrorism. It then moved on to provide committee with other issues of note including the issue of bravery awards to five West Lothian officers and information on the first dedicated internet page and social media channel dedicated to the children and young people of Scotland. The report concluded with information on the locality officers within the

ward and contact details.

The chair requested that PC Wilson feedback to senior officer's the committee's disappointment with the new report format which had removed the local ward information and statistics previously provided. The Interim Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services advised that a job description for a new partnership analyst was currently being agreed with Police Scotland and hoped that once a new analyst had been appointed, local ward information could once again be provided.

The committee wished their congratulations to be recorded to the five local officers who had recently been recognised for acts of heroism and outstanding bravery at the Emergency Service and Voluntary Awards in Edinburgh.

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 31st December 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.

Lee Clark, Local Liaison Officer, provided the committee with a verbal update on the continuation of the Westdrive initiative in 2019 and urged members who had not attended the event previously to get in touch if they wished to go along. He then spoke of an incident that had occurred at the weekend in the Almond Park, Livingston, which had resulted in anti-social behaviour and a crew being attacked. Lee undertook to establish whether there was evidence to confirm that young people from all over West Lothian, including the Whitburn & Blackburn ward, had been involved.

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

Arising from a discussion, Lee undertook to provide the committee with an in depth analysis of the types of premises contributing to the unwanted fire alarm signals in future reports.

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 October to 31st December 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 97 properties let for mainstream tenancies and 34 properties for temporary tenancies. There were currently 5 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 94.8%. The arrears in the ward at the end of quarter 3 was £569,364, an increase of £198,071 on the same period in the previous year. The position overall in West Lothian had increased by £879,735 from the previous year and at 1st October was £2,698,513. Despite 161 serious arrears cases in the ward, 61% 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 then 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.

During the discussion on rent arrears, officers assured members of the ongoing support that was given to tenants who were on Universal Credit. They were also assured that issues noted by Housing Services staff during their dealings with tenants were fed back to the DWP at quarterly meetings.

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 2018 to 31 January 2019 and highlighting future works planned for the locality.

The report provided information on the grounds maintenance works carried out in the ward. The outcome of the most recent Land Audit Management System inspection in the East area was 67, which was the target score. Preparations were underway to prepare for the delivery of the new Grounds Maintenance services standards, as summarised in the appendix to the report that would result in changes to some grass areas and road verges. The report then gave an overview of 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 of the routine works and enquiries dealt with by the grounds maintenance and cleaner communities team before setting out an overview of the various community enforcement action actions that had been undertaken. It continued with information on park and woodland and the ranger service before concluding with an update on open space and cemeteries.

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

As a result of a discussion, the Parks and Woodland Manager undertook to provide members with a breakdown on the number of bonfire enquiries received by the service as it was felt to be low particularly in view of the issues that had arisen in the ward on bonfire night.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

7. 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. Thirteen 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 after extensive work between Community Regeneration Officers and steering groups from the local area which consisted of various community group representatives and personnel from public services and voluntary agencies. The first versions of both the Whitburn and Blackburn regeneration plans were presented to the committee in September 2018 and identified the priorities developed for the areas.

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

- Ongoing work by the Whitburn Regeneration Group to pull together the work of the various partnership groups in the town;
- Planning for the summer lunch provision 2019 and need for wider funding to be explored and a co-ordinator appointed;
- Proposed creation of a community garden at Burnhouse school and work with other schools to break down barriers;
- Potential to develop outreach courses by West Lothian College in the town;
- Update on the activities of the Whitburn Community Development Trust including the development of a Polkemmet Park Run and a dedicated financial inclusion worker for the town to offer financial and legal support;
- Various town centre initiatives including shopfront improvement scheme, environmental enhancements to the east of the town; procurement of three new gateway signs and ongoing fundraising for a memorial cairn in conjunction with the Ancre Somme Association Scotland;
- an update on the progress with the Whitburn Partnership Centre; and
- an overview of the work that was being carried out with two groups in the ward affected by the reduction in voluntary sector funding.

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 which was meeting bi-monthly with its sub-groups meeting monthly. The new Recreation, Learning and Youth Provision sub-group was branching out and a representative from West Lothian College would attend to discuss outreach learning in the community; and
- improvements to Redhouse Park which had been led by a sub-

group of the Blackburn Futures Group and had involved local residents and partners from the start of the project; and

- the Change in Blackburn Group that was looking at actions to look at different elements in the Poverty, Health and Wellbeing theme;
- joint work on The Keep Safe – I am Me initiative which aimed to provide safe venues for people who were vulnerable or afraid together with partnership working to support a reduction in anti-social behaviour around bonfire night and fireworks.

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.

The report recommended that committee note:-

- (a) updates on Whitburn regeneration activity;
- (b) updates on Whitburn Town Centre related matters;
- (c) the update on the progress of developing Whitburn Partnership Centre;
- (d) updates on Blackburn regeneration activity; and
- (e) the update on Community Action Blackburn.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

8. TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2019/2020

The committee noted the proposed timetable of meetings for the period September 2019 to June 2020 (copies of which had been circulated).

Decision

To agree the timetable of meeting dates for 2019/2020.

9. WORKPLAN

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

Decision

To approve the workplan.

