

MINUTE of MEETING of the ARMADALE AND BLACKRIDGE LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE of WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL held within CONFERENCE ROOM 1, WEST LOTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, on 16 SEPTEMBER 2016.

Present – Councillors Jim Dixon (Chair), Stuart Borrowman and Sarah King

In attendance

Elaine Cook, Lead Officer, West Lothian Council
Laura Wilson, Community Regeneration Manager, West Lothian Council
Inspector Andrew Elliot, Police Scotland
Lorraine Donnelly, Area Housing Manager
Tony Fleming, Grounds Maintenance Manager
Karen Cawte, Customer and Community Services Manager
Carol McDonald, Head Teacher, Armadale Academy

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. MINUTE

The committee confirmed the minute of its meeting held on 3 June 2016 as a correct record. The minute was thereafter signed by the Chair.

3. ARMADALE ACADEMY PRESENTATION

The committee received a very informative presentation by Carol McDonald, Head Teacher, Armadale Academy which provided details of the outcome of the school's 2016 examination results and an overview of their plans for the future.

The Head Teacher was delighted to advise the committee that the Higher results for 2016 were at the highest level ever for the school and was a huge affirmation for staff that their effective teaching methods were reflected in student's results excellent results.

The Head Teacher explained that results for National 5 level were strong in most areas although poor results in maths were a concern for the school. Results in science had also been disappointing. The Head Teacher assured the committee that work was underway with the maths and science departments to work out what needed to be done to ensure better examination outcomes in future years. Both departments had been asked to evaluate what they were doing well and to visit other schools to establish best practice within both departments. Members heard that students re-sitting exams in both subjects would be targeted and monitored very closely. In response to a question, the Head Teacher explained that as none of the maths department staff marked National 5 papers for the SQA there was not a full understanding of the SQA

requirements. This was being reviewed for the future to ensure the right emphasis was placed on course work.

The presentation then moved on to provide members with an overview of the most recent figures available for positive and sustained destinations of pupils in 2015. Committee noted that the number of pupils entering positive destinations in 2015 was 93.6%, higher than the West Lothian average of 91.6%. The largest destination for school leavers was employment (37.6%), followed by higher education (26.4%), then further education (25.6%) and training (3.2%).

The Head Teacher then provided the ward members with information on the next steps for the school on the following:-

- Review the Board General Education as preparation for the Senior Phase
- Sustain current attainment and achievement level at Higher
- Advanced Higher/Preparation for University

In order to achieve the next steps, the school would develop students to ensure they were confident individuals, successful learners, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

On behalf of the committee, the Chair thanked the Head Teacher for the interesting presentation and extended best wishes to the school for the future.

Decision

To note the terms of the school presentation.

4. ARMADALE & BLACKRIDGE WARD 9 POLICE REPORT

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by Inspector Andrew Elliot providing an update on performance, activities and issues across the ward for the period up to 31st July 2016.

The report provided information on national priorities, West Lothian priorities and the specific community engagement priorities for the ward. The report detailed recorded crime for the ward and for the whole of West Lothian providing comparisons to the same period the previous year.

The report then went on to provide details of exceptional circumstances relating to the statistics provided and confirmed that the new Community Police Model had allowed two dedicated Ward Officers to focus on local issues and priorities supported by the Community Action Team. During the reporting period they had undertaken a range of activities including speed checks, youth disorder issues, parking at schools and anti-social behaviour throughout the ward.

The report also provided details of the prevention work carried out and

highlighted the activities and initiatives in place to reduce antisocial behaviour within the community and reduce community and social harm caused by drug and alcohol misuse.

The report then provided the committee with information on the initiatives within the ward to reduce anti-social behaviour, tackle substance misuse, make roads safer and to tackle acquisitive crime. It concluded with information on forthcoming events including police surgeries, involvement with West Drive and plans to support more local schools with the Park Smart and other schemes.

Following a discussion, the Inspector agreed to raise the possible alteration to the sequencing of the traffic lights at Armadale Cross at the next joint road safety meeting with officers from highways.

Decision

To note the contents of the report and thank the ward officers for the results of the excellent work they had carried out in Blackridge.

5. ARMADALE PARTNERSHIP CENTRE UPDATE

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing an update on progress with the development a Partnership Centre in Armadale and advising of the management arrangements in place for frontline services following the implementation of a service restructure.

The report recalled the background to the development of a partnership centre for Armadale. It explained that a consultation group had been established and held its first meeting in June 2015 then on a further 7 occasions to work through potential engagement methods, identify groups to engage with and design considerations.

During May and June 2016, a wide range of engagement techniques had been used, including postcard surveys, electronic surveys, street work and focus groups, to gather views about the development of a partnership centre to which over 570 responses had been received.

The consultation group had agreed to progress with a two-phased approach to the development with an extension and reconfiguration of the community centre so it was the main service delivery location for the council and a change of use for the building at the cross to be developed as the youth space in Armadale.

The report explained that in August 2016, the Council Executive had agreed to progress the two phased proposal on the understanding that the youth space element would only progress if external funding was secured. An initial bid to the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Fund Grant had been submitted with the outcome of the 1st round of the bid process expected soon.

In order to progress the partnership centre, a project board would be

established to include key services and representatives of key community groups. A project team would also be established to progress the detailed drawings, planning applications, decant arrangements, etc. Detailed timescales would be established once the project team had met. The Neighbourhood Manager would take on the role of project manager.

The report recalled that frontline services had been modernised and merged to create generic job roles which had come into effect in April 2016. Geographic neighbourhoods and management teams had been created with Armadale falling in to the Armadale and Whitburn neighbourhood. A list of the key locations within the neighbourhood was provided in the report. The services run by the new team for Armadale and Whitburn were libraries, CIS, community centres and the Fauldhouse Partnership Centre. An overview of the team structure and members was provided in the appendix to the report.

The committee was invited to note the progress of the project and the management arrangements in place for frontline staff.

Decision

- a. To note the progress of the development of the project to create a partnership centre in Armadale.
- b. To note the management arrangements in place for frontline services.

6. SERVICE UPDATE – NETS, LAND AND COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES

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 May – 31 July 2016 and highlighting future works planned for the locality.

The report provided an overview of the works that had been carried out on grounds maintenance and street cleansing routine operations. It also provided a summary of the enquiries dealt with and enforcement taken by the environmental wardens.

The report then gave members an overview of the ranger services events and activities programme up to Christmas 2016 and the tree and woodland enquiries dealt with.

Finally, the report concluded with information on the open space and cemeteries works that were being carried out in the ward.

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

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

7. HOUSING, CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing an overview of housing performance for the period 1 April to 30 June 2016.

The performance figures for property void and let for mainstream and temporary tenancies were detailed in the report. Committee noted that for the period April to June 2016, a total of 24 properties had been let for mainstream tenancies and 19 properties had been let for temporary tenancies. There were 14 policy voids in the ward, 4 awaiting demolition, 1 for insurance work, 1 legal dispute and 8 due to major works such as asbestos removal, electrical and upgrade/modernisation.

A graph within the report demonstrated the position for rent arrears in the ward for the first quarter of financial year 2016/17 against the previous financial year. The current arrears balance in the ward was £151,080.88, an increase of £8,096 on last year's position of £142,985. Overall the arrears position for West Lothian had significantly improved by £102,375.

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 first quarter of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015. Although there were 21 serious arrears cases where tenants owed more than £1,000, members noted that 72.48% of cases were in the lower bands with arrears of £300 or less. Officers were currently working on the strategy for 2016/17 to continue to improve rent collection methods and support for customers in arrears.

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

- Local Area Team Activity;
- New Build Council Housing and Capital Programme Updates;
- Tenant Participation Update; and
- Safer Neighbourhood Team.

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

Decision

To note the contents of the report

8. COMMUNITY REGENERATION – REGENERATION PLANS

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration advising of the process for developing and implementing regeneration plans.

The report recalled the council's committee in February 2014 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 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. These were Armadale, Blackburn, Boghall, Bridgend, Craigshill, Fauldhouse & The Breich Valley (Fauldhouse, Stoneyburn, Addiewell & Polbeth), Livingston Centre (Knightsridge, Ladywell and Dedridge) and Whitburn.

The report went on to explain that Community Planning Partnerships were required by October 2017 to have locality plans in place for areas experience the poorest outcomes. Regeneration plans met with the requirements for local plans, addressed the themes within the Regeneration Framework at a local level and would focus on developing local actions. The themes in the framework were:-

- Employability or Employment
- Early Years and Family Learning
- Health and Wellbeing
- Economic Development
- Community Capacity and Cohesion

The framework would provide a long-term plan for targeted action to improve the life chances of people living in the most disadvantages communities in West Lothian and would give fresh impetus and greater clarity to the targeting of interventions to address deprivation and economic exclusion within the specific areas. Not all interventions would apply in every area and plans would be developed dependent on the needs of each target area and the assets available.

The report then outlined the process to develop regeneration plans, including launch events and themed workshops. It was anticipated that the draft plans would be presented to local area committees towards the end of 2016 with final plans implemented by April 2017.

Steering groups would be established in each area. They would initially be co-ordinated by Community Regeneration Officers and it was hoped that they would eventually be community led. The groups would comprise key community organisations, local community planning partners, council services, community councils and other relevant agencies.

The report concluded with information on the work that would be undertaken to map community assets, how statistical information would be analysed to ensure evidence gathered was a robust mix of primary and secondary research and that the regeneration plans would be live documents which would reflect the need for long term transportation chance and allow for short, medium and long term plans.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

9. PENSIONERS' GROUPS CHRISTMAS FUND PROVISIONAL ALLOCATIONS 2016

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration advising of the provisional allocations to be made from the Pensioners Groups Christmas Fund 2016 to groups in the Armadale ward, Livingston-wide groups and West Lothian-wide groups.

In 2016, the total fund available was £29,106.54. The provisional number of beneficiaries was 2862. In the Armadale ward, there were 360 beneficiaries and a provision allocation of £3661.20.

Eight applications were issued to groups across the ward, with six having been returned. The intention was that the six groups would be supported. Appendix 1 of the report detailed those organisations that would be supported, together with the provisional allocation to each. The outstanding applications were being followed up and until such time, the figures provided were to be considered provisional.

One application had been sent to a Livingston-wide group but not returned and two applications to two West Lothian-wide groups, of which only one had been returned. The outstanding applications would be followed up. Appendix 2 provided further details on these applications.

The committee noted that a full report on the final allocations would be presented to the Voluntary Organisations PDSP later in the year with letters to be issued to groups in late October advising of the funding they would receive.

It was recommended that committee note that to date six groups within the ward had applied to the fund and would be supported.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

10. WORKPLAN

The committee considered the workplan (copies of which had been circulated) by the Lead Officer for the Local Area Committee.

Decision

Noted the contents of the workplan.