

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



BATHGATE LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

REPORT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION ACTIVITY

REPORT BY DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE EDUCATION, PLANNING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the economic development, regeneration and local partners activities within the Bathgate ward during the reporting period.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Local Area Committee notes the report.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; developing employees; making best use of our resources; working in partnership
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Appropriate assessment will be carried out as deemed required.
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None
IV	Impact on performance and performance Indicators	None
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	This supports the delivery of the Single Outcome Agreement and other plans, in particular the Economic Recovery Plan.
VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	There are various sources of funding that support many of these activities.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	None
VIII	Other consultations	None

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 Background

The report updates the committee on the work of the Economic Development and the Community Wealth Building Team and its partners to support communities in Bathgate, one of 13 areas covered by the local plans required by the Scottish Government as part of their Community Empowerment approach and reported through the Community Planning Partnership.

These areas were identified as priority areas due to being within the bottom 20% of data zones in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

D.2 Jim Walker (Bathgate) Partnership Centre

The Jim Walker Partnership Centre is open to customers with some services still operating an appointment system such as the Customer Information Services, Registration and the Advice Shop. Footfall from August 2022 to end of September 2022 was 13,526.

Customer Information Services continue to operate an appointment system dealing U22 applications, blue badge applications, council tax enquiries, housing enquiries, waste management enquiries and many more council related enquiries.

Simpson Library is fully open offering customers the opportunity to sit and read a newspaper or book, along with browsing for books or using the public access PCs or using the library for study time. Customers can download the Cloud App within the library, allowing them to issue and return books via their mobile phone. Bookbug sessions are running twice a month. Class visits are taking place from local primary schools and schools are keen on participating in library activities with various clubs running such as Jigsaw Club, Calming and Colouring Club, Lego Club and a new book group as well. Posters advertising clubs are online and on notice boards within the centre.

Self-service days are in operation from 8.30am-8pm (Wednesday) and 9-10am (Saturday) where customers can use the self-service terminal for issuing and returning books. Photocopying or customer printing can be done by staff. Digital Resources are still available to customers.

The Bathgate payment office remains open for customers to continue to make payments to rent and council tax accounts. From 1 August 2022 to 30 September 2022, 3,669 payment transactions were made and £455,627 in income taken.

Staff continue to pay out Scottish Welfare Fund – Crisis Grant Payments and are now paying out Social Policy Payments for Social Policy clients. Ukrainian Refugee Payments also continue to be made.

Bathgate Community Centre is fully open with most groups returning along with some new groups, drama group on a Sunday morning. Bathgate Playgroup continue to provide morning sessions to under 3-year old from Monday to Friday. Simply Play after school club returned after the summer school holidays and operate on Monday to Friday afternoon.

Bathgate Registration Office continue to offer an appointment system for customers, this is only for customers to sign/pick up registration certificates. Other Registration Services are continuing to be done over the phone.

The Advice Shop are continuing to offer their services over the phone and have introduced MacMillan Cancer appointments and PIP/DLA. MacMillan Cancer also offer their appointments within the Macmillan Hub within Simpson Library Bathgate on a Wednesday.

Adult Learning are now operating classes within the Partnership Centre, some take place during the day and some are in the evening

The tender period closed for the existing vacant café facility within the centre at the end of August 2022. Property Services advised there has been interest noted from parties in running it, although as yet await any further confirmation.

D.3 Boghall Drop in Centre

The Centre continues to provide support to the local community in Boghall. Activities during the reporting period have included the following summarised clubs and sessions, all undertaken since last update in August 2022:

- Tuesday Club - p1-3 (numbers are steady around 12 per week: ideally increasing it)
- Wednesday Club - p4-7 (capped at 30 by staff levels and size of building).
- Friday Club - secondary age (steady attendance between 10 and 18 per week).
- Biscuit and Bingo - A new bingo group for the elderly (weekly numbers of 10).
- Dalguise PGL – 32 children and youths visited for free in October, thanks to fundraising through events and Kiltwalk.
- Halloween disco, guising times and Halloween parties in October 2022.
- Monster sessions (messy play, story time and music, and puppet show)
- Cooking workshop during October 2022.

The Centre is considering providing for a community based local facility (often referred to as a 'warm spaces') initially on a Friday, where residents can drop in for safe companionship, a chat, and perhaps some light refreshments available.

Looking ahead to the rest of the year there are activities planned for the community:

- Tree of Hope and Remembrance Day poppy display in November 2022
- Elf Academy (arts and crafts workshops)- for primary kids - Tuesdays in November 2022
- Pensioner's Festive Dinner (3 course meal) on Saturday 3 December 2022.
- Christmas Parties, four age group session, from 13 - 16 December 2022.
- Christmas Fayre, Breakfast with Santa and Santa's Grotto (on 10 December 2022).

Following a period of cessation, local residents from Boghall met twice back in early 2020, with support of Boghall Drop-In Centre staff and the Town Centre Manager. The objective then was to look to re-invigorate the Boghall Residents and Tenants Association, with purpose to discuss key local issues impacting the wider Boghall community. Unfortunately, the pandemic stopped momentum. More recently there

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has been interest expressed about group restart, in particular in context of a large residential development proposal situated within Boghall.

Access 2 Employment six month update

Access2employment provides employability support to residents throughout West Lothian, via a presence in local Partnership Centres, DWP offices and community initiatives, such as Community Fridge's, schools and Health Hubs across West Lothian. Support is provided to residents who are both unemployed or who are in employment and seeking to improve their employment situation due to uncertain employment, low pay or limited hours worked impacting on them financially and making it hard to make ends meet, or those whose skills are under-utilised.

Support is provided one to one consultation's with clients and through the provision of a range of courses including one day specific courses to 6-week personal development and employability courses, Women n2 Work and Men n2 Work.

A2E's Employment Adviser's offer tailored support to assist clients achieve their individual goals, with the ultimate aim of securing sustainable employment, improved household financial security and upskilling opportunities.

From 1st April 2022 – 30TH Sept 2022, the service registered 419 new clients, 50 from the Bathgate Ward, with 229 progressing into a positive destination, 31 from Bathgate Ward. This support has been mostly been provided remotely during the year due to the pandemic, however employment advisers are now delivering a hybrid service in line with client needs, with 22/23 delivery being a mix of face to face and online.

The service delivered 8 online workshops, including 1 face to face Women N2 Work course and 3 Wellbeing Workshops. In total 61 residents attending workshops. In 21/22 the service supported Connecting Scotland by securing over 200 Chromebooks and internet connections to give to unemployment clients seeking work that currently did not have any digital connectivity.

The service continues to provide a weekly Vacancy Bulletin, promoting information on the latest local vacancies for West Lothian job seekers. The Vacancy Bulletin is emailed out to on average 1200 clients and 200 stakeholders and partners weekly and is widely shared. It is estimated that 1500 individuals view the Vacancy Bulletin weekly.

Since Oct 21, with funding from the Scottish Government Long Term Unemployed provision, A2E have supported over 50 individuals aged over 25 and who have not worked for more than one year to secure employment. This support builds on a range of targeted interventions currently available which includes dedicated support for young people to assist them progress towards employment and support for parents. During 2021/22 the team introduced two additional services to support parents who are currently unemployed or in work but in insecure employment and an intense family support programme based within Social Policy. This provision seeks to address the identified need for a whole family intervention approach to combat the complex issues the families that are engaging have presented with.

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Business Gateway six month update

Council's Business Gateway team provides confidential and impartial support to residents looking to start-up in business, local firms, new and existing 3rd sector organisations and our major employers. All engagement with Business Gateway is

client-led. Support is provided to individual clients and business owners/decision makers.

Business Gateway supports a diverse portfolio of existing and new start social enterprises in West Lothian. Support is tailored to the needs of individual organisations. The support includes advice in areas such as business planning, finance raising, grant and loan applications, property, community benefit leases, asset transfers, income generation, governance and sustainability. In addition, social enterprises are signposted to the wider network of support programs available both locally and nationally. Business Gateway also work closely with the West Lothian Social Enterprise Network to ensure network members receive the business support they need.

The key outcomes for the team include helping residents to start their own business, enabling local firms to grow in a sustainable and inclusive manner and providing a single point of contact for our strategic employers.

The vision and commitment of local people to start their own business, especially in such challenging economic circumstances since 2020, is commendable. Across West Lothian, the Business Gateway team supported 325 new start firms in 2021/22. These businesses created 407 new jobs. The main business sectors are personal, professional and local services. Around 20% of all early stage firms go on to take premises, employ staff and grow the scale of the business. New starts are worth over £10.5 million to the local economy every year.

The Business Gateway team also includes advisers who deal with existing, growing and relocating firms to West Lothian. The advisers provided direct support to 811 local firms in the financial year to end of March 2022. This included 41 social enterprises, 20 of whom operate across West Lothian. Our priority sectors include Life Sciences, Manufacturing, Engineering, Construction and enabling technologies. West Lothian firms engaged with us around new premises, new markets, recruiting/training, working capital, Research & Development, export regulation, digital marketing and carbon reduction projects. All against a background of macro-economic challenges including fears of recession, weaker value of sterling, rising inflation and interest rate pressures.

Council's Business Gateway advisers support firms who have combined annual sales in excess of £1.41 Billion per annum. While these businesses employ over 12,000 staff, this represents 15% of total jobs in West Lothian. However, the supported firms account for more than 30% of the annual gross value add (GVA) of the West Lothian economy.

As part of Council's long-term commitment to retain and attract the best businesses, and to grow our value-added sectors, a commercially-focused website, [Why West Lothian? - Invest in West Lothian](#) has been developed to highlight the range of support available for our local firms. It also promotes West Lothian as an inward/mobile investment destination. Our key inward investment partner is Scottish Enterprise (SE). We have built close and productive links with SE over the years. Their ongoing strategic investment in key firms has helped strengthen the West Lothian economy. Feedback from stakeholders is positive with work on-going to ensure the website remains credible, relevant and compelling. The site is responsive and details the range of support for our local firms, highlighting assistance with energy costs, options for low-carbon heating, managing cashflow and also help which is sector-specific [Find Business Support Launches: Cost of Doing Business Section \(investinwestlothian.com\)](#)

In the 6 months to September 2022, a further 20 new start businesses have been established in the Ward with the team's support. This is a healthy level of starts, especially in a strong jobs market with many vacancies. Over the same timescale, the Business Gateway team assisted 67 existing firms in the Ward who between them employ 730 staff and have sales of more than £268 million.

West Lothian	Bathgate & Boghall Ward
April – Sept 2022	April – Sept 2022
New Business Starts 134	New Business Starts 20
Existing Businesses Supported 363	Existing Businesses Supported 67

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In summarising the work of Business Gateway, it is not all about sales and wider economic impacts. The business advisers have the trust of local people, working with them to find solutions often in complex economic circumstances. The Bathgate Local Area Committee is asked to note the team's ongoing contribution to a sustained and inclusive economic recovery.

Bathgate Town Centre

Bathgate town centre acts as a community focal point for local services, amenities and employment. The town centre is subject to a quarterly occupancy survey as one measure of its relative vitality and viability. At the time of reporting (October 2022) the occupancy level was around 92% (vacancy 8%). To provide context this remains favourable to national averages of 10% and above, published by Springboard, and is improvement from a Bathgate recent peak vacancy level of 9% in July 2019.

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The Council facilitated Bathgate Town Centre Management Group resumed in person meetings in August 2022, having ceased face to face meetings in March 2020, due to pandemic. The group continues to meet on a regular basis, usually ten times per annum, and acts as a forum to discuss town centre related issues and to identify potential improvement projects and initiatives.

Bathgate Together

Two further meetings of the Bathgate Together group (formerly Project Collaboration) have been held in the Reconnect Regal Theatre in August and October 2022.

Whilst initiated in the early stages by the Council's Town Centre Manager, Bathgate Community Council have coordinated the follow-on meetings. These have been relatively well attended by a range of groups and representatives, including the elected ward members and Town Centre Manager. This approach has led to positive information sharing amongst local groups and wider discussion on possible actions ahead to improve the town and community.

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The most recent meeting was held 26 October provided a forum to discuss the findings of the 'Crazy Eight' exercise, where people had been asked to list their ideas and thoughts on what they would like to see improved or amenities provided for wider community benefit. The next meeting will take place in January 2023.

Bathgate Hills Venture Group

The first 'Bathgate Hills Storytelling Day' was held on 9 October as a joint collaboration between the Bathgate Hill Venture Group and various local partners

including Reconnect Regal, Napiers the Herbalist, Bathgate Youth Band, Bennie Museum, Danceworld and Bathgate Academy.

The storytelling competition far exceeded expectation, by attracting 460 school pupils with amazing stories and art work. These were initially displayed in Linlithgow Burgh Halls and a suitable display location in Bathgate is being identified.

Balbardie Primary School (P7s) did especially well in designing covers for each of their stories as well as being really creative in the tales they told. Scott Fleming (Bathgate children's author) is to visit the school as a prize (free of charge), to share tips and inspire a generation of writers.

The herbalist/foraging walk sold out within 24 hours and proved popular even on a cold wet day (limited to 20). The storytelling afternoon, hosted by Libby McArthur attracted 50 people (target numbers). The evening performance was attended by around 100 people and featured the Reconnect Regal Panto actors, Bathgate Youth Band and Danceworld.

- D9** The group is being supported by the Town Centre Manager and Housing Strategy & Development colleagues to progress forward with their project proposals to deliver environmental enhancements at the Chapel Well Garden at Marjoribanks Street, Bathgate. This work is being funded following a successful application through the Council's Tenant Environmental Improvement programme for 2022/23. The scope of work has been agreed and is out for tender with works being proposed to commence from January 2023.

Party in the Park

Friends of Kirkton Park once again this year successfully delivered the annual Party in the Park event, held at Kirkton Park, Bathgate, on its traditional first Sunday of September. This was the first event since 2019, and the pandemic, and the tenth anniversary of this well attended and valued local extravaganza in Bathgate. It is estimated that there were around 2,000 visitors throughout the day's programme, mostly family based.

- D10** The committee is reviewing the future of this long-standing event, as sponsorship, fundraising and committee numbers are all becoming difficult to secure. The event costs around £12,000 per annum to host, and with significant increases in costs this last year, the position is challenging. Over the years, the numbers attending has generally been upwards, but an outdoor event in Autumn is always dependent on the weather.

Town Centre Manager has supported the Committee group through additional event promotion and linked connections to other local organisations that could support or participate on the day.

African Women's Network

The West Lothian African Women's Network, established in May 2021, held an open day of celebration in Bathgate town centre on 24 September 2022. The main aim was towards building stronger communities through integrating and celebrating African and Scottish cultures. The displays included African and Scottish crafts, arts, food and dance/entertainment

- D11** It was hugely a successful event with a good turnout where the community had the opportunity to interact, connect and celebrate together. The event was made possible

through fundraising, including National Lottery Community Fund support. It is estimated that about 350 people in total attended.

The Town Centre Manager provided the group with practical guidance around the hosting of the event and supported the promotion/awareness of the activities to wider community.

Bathgate Twinning Association

The Bathgate Twinning Association convened an open meeting in October, held at Reconnect Regal on 23 October 2022, inviting all Bathgate organisations.

- D12** Approximately 20 local groups were represented at this fair, which was intended to offer local groups the opportunity to meet, network and raise awareness of what is going on in the community.

Town Centre Manager assisted them in helping to publicise/communicate the event locally. It is anticipated that this will become an annual gathering in Autumn each year for the local community and organisations.

Trash Panda CIC

Trash Panda CIC is a social enterprise based in the arts and mental health. They are currently in the process of securing the former Farmfoods building in Bathgate town centre, and applying for change of use planning permission, to enable them to establish an arts and wellbeing hub.

- E.** The organisation is focused upon primarily sound engineering for bands and equipment hire for gigs and events, whereby the profits generated are invested into a free support service. This provides for free 1-1 support for anyone in the local community. Trash Panda work with local bands and on the support side have helped over 120 people.

The new hub will in time host; state of the art rehearsal rooms, music teaching spaces and the wellbeing hub which will be utilised for youth groups, yoga classes and more activities. The Town Centre Manager has been in contact with the organisation to offer initial advice on local assistance that is available to help guide and support the proposal going forward.

CONCLUSION

Bathgate Local Area Committee is asked to note the activities taking place across Bathgate ward by the Council's Economic Development, Community Wealth Building Team and local partners.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

Appendices/Attachments: None

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Date of Meeting: 14 November 2022