

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



WHITBURN AND BLACKBURN LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

COMMUNITY REGENERATION UPDATE

REPORT BY DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE, EDUCATION, PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to update members on the Community Wealth Building Team and its partners activity within the Whitburn and Blackburn ward.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that members note the updates on:

1. regeneration activity in both Blackburn and Whitburn;
2. Whitburn town centre matters including the planned heritage trail for the town;
3. Acces2employment support being provided within the ward and;
4. Support that Business Gateway are providing.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs. Being honest, open and accountable. Providing equality of opportunities. Making best use of our resources. Working in partnership.
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Community regeneration reinforces the council's commitment to community planning at a local level. Local authorities have a statutory requirement for developing locality plans for targeted communities in their area. Regeneration Plans fit this requirement for West Lothian. The projects set out do not require a strategic environmental assessment. The projects to different degrees seek to address health and equality issues.
III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None.

- IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators** Performance indicators relating to the activity within the plans are captured within the set of Regeneration key performance indicators.
- V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement**
- We are better educated and have access to increased and better-quality learning and employment opportunities.
 - We live in resilient, cohesive and safe communities.
 - We live longer, healthier lives and have reduced health inequalities.
 - We make the most efficient and effective use of resources by minimising our impact on the built and natural environment.
- VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)** The activities set out are funded from existing budgets and relevant external sources but also Town Centre Fund budgets:
- 2019/20: £310,131 allocated to ward.
 - 2020/21: £110,845 allocated to ward.
 - 2022/23: £82,822 allocated to ward.
- VII Consideration at PDSP** Annual updates on regeneration plans will be presented to the Community planning Partnership.
- VIII Other consultations** None.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D1 Background

The report updates the committee on the work of the Community Wealth Building Team and its partners to support communities in the Whitburn and Blackburn ward with a particular focus on the towns of Whitburn and Blackburn. These are two of 15 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.

D2 Blackburn Updates

Blackburn Future Group (BFG)

The BFG is holding its 6-monthly meeting in June. This will enable the subgroups who meet more frequently to provide updates in the actions they are delivering to address the identified needs in the Blackburn Future Plan.

One of the subgroups is the newly named Blackburn Action Group (BAG). This group was formed from the Blackburn Drug and Alcohol Action Group and the Blackburn Health and Wellbeing Group who joined together. The BAG has delivered two reducing stigma and raising awareness events in Blackburn Partnership Centre that involved a range of partners. One was delivered in December with the second being delivered just before Easter. A third event is being

planned for June and again will involve a range of partners who can provide information to the community. The next meeting of the BAG will see Angela Constance MSP attending to discuss her new role as Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs. Angela Constance MSP was first invited to attend the BAG due to her previous role as Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy. Due to the change in cabinet roles, the new Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy, Elena Whitham MSP has been invited to attend a meeting in June. The members of the BAG have developed a list of questions to put to both MSPs.

The Community Regeneration Officer (CRO) has been attending the Scottish Government Firework Control Zone Working Group facilitated by Scottish Government. This involvement has come from the work that the Blackburn Bonfire Night Action Group (BBNAG) has undertaken over the last few years. The CRO has been supporting the design of the guidance that communities can follow if applying for Firework Control Zones.

D.2.1 Community Action Blackburn (CAB)

Community Action Blackburn (CAB) has been successful in securing funding from West Lothian Council's Third Sector Community Support Fund. They have been awarded £33,199 for 2023/24 and £33,199 for 2024/25 in principle which will enable them to continue to provide support to many groups, families and individuals in the Blackburn area.

CAB are continuing to deliver and support a number of projects including the Food Insecurity Group (FIG), Women's Social Service Club (WSSC), Change in Blackburn Group (CIB) and Climate Action Towns (CAT).

The CRO has been supporting CAB during their development sessions that have been facilitated by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC). The three sessions have been completed with some internal sessions being planned to help CAB plan and move forward.

D.2.2 Climate Action Town (CAT)

Work is continuing with Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS) on incorporating Climate Action projects within the Blackburn plan. A&DS have carried out walkabouts in the area with both young people and members of the community with mobility issues. This highlighted barriers for moving around and is providing evidence to explore funding options to improve accessibility within the community. Various actions within the draft action plan for the plan are incorporating aspects that link closely to Climate Action including exploring better use for open space and a mobile fruit and veg van attending the area on a weekly basis.

D3 Whitburn Updates

Whitburn Services Group

The Whitburn Services Group has been reinitiated with the aim to support and develop collaborative working between services operating in the town. As with other locality-based steering groups, this will be through:

- Sharing information on service provision/activities within the town;
- Acting as a consultative forum on service changes and developments;
- Helping identify wider community needs within the town; and
- Being a conduit for community engagement.

The group have been meeting approximately every 6-weeks with the next meeting

planned for the 8 June. The work being developed within the group will support the refreshment of the locality plan and actions for the town.

D.3.1 Whitburn & District Community Development Trust (WCDT)

WCDT has been successful in securing funding from West Lothian Council's Third Sector Community Support Fund. They have been awarded £25,000 for 2023/24 and £25,000 for 2024/25 in principle which will enable them to continue to provide support to many groups, families and individuals in Whitburn.

D.3.2 Whole Systems Approach – Type 2 Diabetes, Whitburn

As mentioned in previous reports Whitburn has been selected take part as a pathfinder area for a 'Whole System Approach (WSA) aimed at reducing obesity and type 2 diabetes (T2D).

The working group looking at the Whole Systems Approach is continuing to meet with the last meeting exploring the option of two specific themed action groups being set up. The first group will look at Physical Activity and Open Space with the second group looking at Food and Nutrition.

As part of the action plan the CRO will deliver an FAA Award in First Aid for Mental Health at SCQF Level 5 from Whitburn Partnership Centre on 28 June. This will be 100% free and open for practitioners working in Whitburn. A maximum number of 10 people will be able to access this full day accredited training course.

D.4 Whitburn Town Centre Updates

Whitburn Town Centre Management Group

Whitburn Town Centre Management Group continues to meet on a monthly basis – currently by virtual means – facilitated by the Council's Town Centre Manager. The group acts primarily as a local forum to discuss town centre related matters and to seek to develop improvement projects or activities, utilising the Council's Town Centre Improvement Fund, and other external funding that may be available.

Town Centre Occupancy

Whitburn Town Centre continues to act as a community focal point and 'hub' for local employment opportunities, services and amenities. The town centre is subject to a quarterly occupancy and vacancy survey, by the Town Centre Manager, as a measure of its relative vitality and viability. In April 2023 there was a vacancy rate of 9.8%, This did not take account of properties under refurbishment, e.g. such properties are noted vacant. As context, this remains favourable in comparison with UK (11%) and Scottish national averages (10.6%), and is improvement from a peak vacancy level of over 16% back in January 2017.

Shopfront Improvement

Whitburn traders are continuing to be eligible for capital grant support through the town centre shop front improvement scheme, which helps with external frontage works. This is promoted by the Town Centre Manager across services with our clients, and is funded by budget from the Council's Whitburn Town Centre Improvement Fund. This remains available to March 2024, or whenever funds are exhausted. There have been 45 grants awarded since Autumn 2012.

Whitburn Public Art

The Whitburn public art project - associated with the Whitburn Partnership Centre, at East Main Street – has recently been completed. The installation of the final art work sculpture – created by the successful artist, Ailsa Magnus – was completed on 8 May 2023. This now takes its place in the dedicated central plinth within the civic space outside the building. The project overseen by the Council's Public Art Officer and the Town Centre Manager, has created an original permanent artwork referencing local themes. It has universal appeal, has a contemporary approach whilst also referencing the town's important heritage. The artist is providing a short poster/leaflet to help raise local awareness of the process and art work.

Whitburn Heritage Trail

This town wide heritage trail project is being supported by the Council's Whitburn Town Centre Improvement Fund, and managed by the Town Centre Manager, with the collaboration of the Council's Heritage Manager. The development process to date has included two phases of local community engagement and once completed will be linked to community museum facility within Whitburn Partnership Centre. Officers are currently progressing the delivery stage: finalising the trail route, circa 20 points of physical interpretation display around the town, as well as each panel content. It is anticipated there will be a complimentary promotional trail booklet.

Heartlands Village Square

The neighbourhood commercial development at Heartlands is nearing completion, and will include a Scotmid supermarket with adjacent parade of shops. It is understood that the Scotmid convenience store will open later this year. At the time of writing, the Scotmid are currently advertising and recruiting for staff members for their new Whitburn store.

D.5 Access2Employment

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 – 31st March 2023, the service registered 786 new clients, 117 from the Whitburn and Blackburn ward, with 488 progressing into a positive destination, 92 from the Whitburn and Blackburn ward. This support has been a mixed of face to face in various locations throughout west Lothian and online delivery.

The service delivered 22 online workshops, including 2 face to face Women and Men N2 Work courses and 6 Wellbeing Workshops. In total 159 residents attending

workshops and courses.

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 1700 clients and 250 stakeholders and partners weekly and is widely shared. It is estimated that 1700 individuals view the Vacancy Bulletin weekly.

Since Oct 21, with funding from the Scottish Government Long Term Unemployed provision, A2E have supported over 60 individuals aged over 25 and who have not worked for more than one year to secure employment. This support has successfully built 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.

A2e Parental Employability support and Intense Family Support teams continue 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.

D.6 Business Gateway

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 308 new start firms in 2022/23. These businesses created 416 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 £16.1 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 622 local firms in the financial year to end of March 2023. This included 79 social enterprises. Our priority sectors include Life Sciences, Manufacturing, Engineering, Construction and enabling technologies. While navigating a path through macro-economic challenges including fears of recession, weaker value of sterling, inflation

and interest rate pressures, West Lothian firms engaged with us around a range of business-change projects. These included larger premises, new markets, recruiting/training, working capital, Research & Development, export regulation, digital marketing and carbon reduction projects.

In partnership with West Lothian College, a successful pilot project was trialed to encourage local firms to invest in upskilling and retraining their staff. The project is called the Flexible Workforce Development Fund. Against a backdrop of unfilled vacancies and skills shortages, £120,000 of Economic Development grant funding was awarded to more than 30 businesses. Sectors included construction, technology, manufacturing, engineering and food & drink. More than 300 staff have benefited from a range of courses provided by the college. These included: Leadership & Management, Business Administration and Project Management. A further programme has been agreed with greater emphasis on higher-level accreditation to reflect the current and future needs of businesses.

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 formally launched 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.

In the 12 months to March 2023, a further 27 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 20 existing firms in the Ward who between them employ 337 staff and have sales of £54.01 Million.

Whitburn and Blackburn Ward	West Lothian
April 2022– March 2023	April 2022– March 2023
New Business Starts 27	New Business Starts 308
Existing Businesses Supported 45	Existing Businesses Supported 622

The Business Gateway team continues to deliver value-added services to clients, businesses and communities. Customer feedback is consistently positive. Performance is good and the team remains highly motivated to deliver quality business support in challenging economic circumstances.

E. CONCLUSION

Members are asked to note the range of activities taking place across the ward and, in particular, the work to support regeneration within the Whitburn and Blackburn areas.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None.

Appendices/Attachments: None.

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