

MINUTE of MEETING of the ARMADALE AND BLACKRIDGE LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE held within THISTLE SUITE, ARMADALE PARTNERSHIP CENTRE, ARMADALE, on 21 MARCH 2019.

Present – Councillors Andrew McGuire (Chair), Stuart Borrowman and Sarah King

In attendance –

Elaine Cook, Lead Officer, West Lothian Council
Michelle Kirkbright, Community Regeneration Officer, West Lothian Council
Graham Paris, Head Teacher, Armadale Academy
Lorraine Donnelly, Housing Manager, West Lothian Council
Eirwen Hopwood, Park & Woodland Manager, West Lothian Council
PC Fergus Middleton, Police Scotland
Lee Clark, Local Liaison Officer, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
David Lees, Cleaner Communities Manager, West Lothian Council

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Borrowman declared an interest in Agenda Item 10, Community Regeneration Update, as he was a season ticket holder of Armadale Thistle Football Club.

2. MINUTE

The committee confirmed the minute of its meeting held on 13 December 2018 as a correct record. The minute was thereafter signed by the Chair.

3. ARMADALE ACADEMY UPDATE

The committee considered a report by Graham Paris, Head Teacher, Armadale Academy (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the school's arrangements for continuing improvement. The committee noted the contents of a presentation which was tabled at the meeting by the Head Teacher.

The report set out the context of the school for the benefit of members and explained that the Head Teacher had recently taken up his post on 4th March 2019.

The report explained that a team of inspectors from Education Scotland had visited the school in October 2018. They had spoken to parents/carers and young people and worked closely with the former Head Teacher and staff. A note of the key strengths identified by the inspection team was listed within the report, together with 4 areas of improvement identified. The inspectors were confident that the school had the capacity to continue to improve and would make no more visits in connection with their recent inspection.

The Head Teacher then spoke of his plans to continue to develop the schools plans and drive forward the improvements identified during the 2018 inspection. He felt it was important for the school to have a high visibility in the community and spoke of his keenness to engage with the community to build positive relationships with the school. He had an ambitious programme to ensure community confidence and trust in the school was restored, that successes and achievements were celebrated, there were clear lines of communication and a strong presence in the community through a range of forums, a settled climate for learning to ensure students were safe, happy and reached their potential and a relentless focus on student health and wellbeing.

On behalf of the committee, the Chair thanked the Head Teacher for his informative update and wished him and the school every success in the future.

Decision

To note the terms of the report and verbal update by the Head Teacher.

4. POLICE WARD REPORT

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by PC Ross Walker, Police Scotland, providing an update on performance activities and issues across the ward for the period December 2018 – March 2019.

The report was presented by PC Fergus Middleton and provided information on the Police Scotland National Priorities (delivered locally), the West Lothian priorities and the ward specific priorities. The report gave members an overview of the performance statistics for the West Lothian Area Command for the period December 2018 to March 2019. Ward specific figures were not available as there was currently no partnership analyst within the Community Safety Unit and therefore no access to the previously provided statistics.

The report then provided the committee with an overview of the variety of prevention activities that had taken place across the ward during the reporting period, which included:

- Protecting People;
- Reducing Antisocial Behaviour and Hate Crime;
- Reducing Violence;
- Tackling Substance Misuse;
- Reducing Home, Fire and Road Casualties; and
- Tackling Serious and Organised Crime and Counter Terrorism.

The report concluded with information on the recent increase in the number of Theft by Housebreakings across West Lothian where rural properties, business premises and homes with high value vehicles had been targeted. A rural Crime Prevention Day was planned to be held by local officers and additional Hi-Viz patrols during evening hours were being carried out. A link to crime prevention advice for local residents on the Police Scotland website was provided within the report. Finally the report referred to Operation Glistening, a festive campaign that had operated across West Lothian which had seen officers focussing on licensed premises, the night time economy, priority warrants and substance misuse.

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

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

5. FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REPORT

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service providing an update on the service's activity within the Armadale and Blackridge Multi-Member Ward for the period to 31st December 2018.

The quarterly reports were produced to ensure delivery of the Local Fire and Rescue Plan for West Lothian 2018, which was a requirement under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, Section 41E. A list of the seven key priorities for the ward, against which performance had been monitored, was listed within the report.

An appendix to the report provided members with a series of graphs showing details of accidental dwelling fires, fire casualties and fatalities; deliberate fires, fires in non-domestic properties, special services casualties (excluding RTC's), unwanted fire alarm signals and RTC casualties and fatalities for Scotland, West Lothian and the ward.

The report recommended that the local area committee notes and provides comment on the Armadale and Blackridge Multi-member Ward Performance Report.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

6. HOUSING, CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES UPDATE

The committee considered a report (copies of which were tabled) by the Head of Housing Customer and Building Services providing an overview of housing performance for the period 1 October to 31 December 2018.

The performance figures for property void and let for mainstream and temporary tenancies were detailed in the report. The committee noted that for the period October to December 2018, a total of 59 properties had been let for mainstream tenancies and 13 properties had been let for temporary tenancies. There were 36 policy voids in the ward.

A graph within the report demonstrated the position for rent arrears for Q3 compared to the same period the previous year. The Ward arrears position for Q3 was £296,378. This was an increase of £110,590 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position has increased by £879,735 from the previous year and on 1 October 2018 was £2,698,513.

The Housing Manager advised the committee that the overall increased arrears in comparison to the previous year were as a result of Full Service Universal Credit being introduced in West Lothian from May 2018, along with other Welfare Benefit reforms and the current economic climate. Information on the various initiatives to continue to tackle rent arrears was given.

Further information was contained within the report on the following:

- Local area team activity;
- Capital programme and new build activity;
- New build programme;
- Tenant participation update; and
- Safer neighbourhood team update.

The report recommended that members note the contents of the Housing, Customer and Building Services activity report for the period 1 October to 31 December 2018.

Arising from a discussion, the Housing Manager undertook to provide ward members with a breakdown of the average time void properties had been empty. She also undertook to provide ward members with drawings to demonstrate the environmental improvements and reconfiguration of rear gardens planned at Lower Bathville.

Decision

To note the contents 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 November 2018 to 31 January 2019 and highlighting future works planned for the locality.

The report provided an overview of the works that had been carried out on grounds maintenance, garden maintenance and cleaner communities' routine operations. An overview was also provided on the various environmental community activities that had been carried out by the enforcement officers, together with information on the work they had carried out on behalf of other council services and partnership agencies.

The report concluded with information on Parks and Woodland enquiries and the routine works carried out by the Open Space and Cemeteries teams.

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

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

8. COMMUNITY REGENERATION UPDATE

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration providing an update on regeneration activity within the Armadale and Blackridge Ward.

The report recalled the background to developing regeneration plans which were the local plans required by the Scottish Government as part of their Community Empowerment approach that were reported through the Community Planning Partnership. The Active Armadale Plan had been developed in September 2018 and had been showcased at two community event in December. It was live on the council's website for the community to view and would be updated on a monthly basis to ensure it was current.

The overarching priority determined by the Regeneration Group was Poverty, Health and Wellbeing, with specific actions around reducing inequality. The main themes to be addressed by the overarching priority were mental health, children living in poverty, education, training and employment. Other priorities identified by the community through the consultation were:-

1. Traffic and parking;
2. Derelict sites, streets and space;
3. Play, leisure and recreation.

Further community engagement with males had commenced with customers in the Goth public house completing H-diagrams. It was planned to continue engagement to help reduce the gap in specific demographics. All new data would be compiled and added to existing data to ensure the planned actions were addressing the needs of the community of Armadale.

The Health & Well Being sub-group was led by an NHS Lothian representative and their second meeting had been attended by the Practice Manager from Armadale Medical Practice. The issues raised through community consultation had been discussed and the sub-group had agreed that specific projects to support communication between the Medical Practice and the community be planned with campaigns highlighting key elements such as missed appointments, services offered by local pharmacies and social prescribing.

Members then noted that Scottish Mental Health First Aid (SMHFA) training had commenced on 22nd February looking at young people's mental health. The training was taking place at Armadale Academy and was being delivered to 20 people including class teachers and pupil support workers.

The report provided the committee with updates on The Dale Hub and Westfield Big Smiles Little Smiles project.

The report then moved on to provide an overview of the work that was underway to support various proposals for projects utilising the Town Centre Improvement Fund. Members were invited to note applications for funding from the Town Centre Improvement Fund for projects at the Goth signage and historic notice board; derelict land at Armadale Thistle Football Club; and increasing usage of the Blackmoss Nature Reserve.

In response to questions, the Community Regeneration Officer confirmed that town centre funding applications were indicative only at this stage and ward members would be consulted once applications had been fully assessed and final details and costs received. The Community Regeneration Officer undertook to ensure the Blackmoss Nature Reserve fell within the boundary and was eligible for consideration for financial assistance from the scheme and establish whether the application from the football club was the same as one received directly by Councillor Borrowman.

Finally, the committee noted that arrangements would be made for ward members to meet with representatives from the Dale Hub to hear how recent funding reductions would impact on the group's ability to deliver services in the town.

It was recommended that the committee notes:

- The progress to date with regards to the Active Armadale Plan for the town and associated activities relating to actions within the plan;
- The support being provided to Westfield Big Smile Little Smile parent council regarding community engagement to determine the needs of the community; and
- That members support the proposals for projects through the Town Centre Improvement Fund.

Decision

- (a) To note the contents of the report.
- (b) To note that full information on the Town Centre Improvement Fund applications would be presented to ward members to allow them to make final decisions on the funding applications.

9. TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS

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

Decision

To approve the timetable of meetings.

10. WORKPLAN

The committee considered the workplan for the Local Area Committee (copies of which had been tabled).

Decision

To note the contents of the workplan.