

MINUTE of MEETING of the ARMADALE AND BLACKRIDGE LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE of WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL held within CONFERENCE ROOM 3, CIVIC CENTRE, on 31 MAY 2013.

Present – Councillors Jim Dixon (Chair), Stuart Borrowman

Absent – Isabel Hutton

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dixon declared a non-financial interest in agenda item 13 (Strategy for Tackling Under-age Drinking/Diversionary Activities) as he was Chair of Armadale Youth Issues Group. He advised he would withdraw from the meeting thereby taking no part in the deliberation or decision.

The Clerk advised that the meeting would be inquorate for this item of business and it would therefore be unable to be considered. A report by the Lead Officer would be required to be submitted the Council Executive for approval of this item.

2. MINUTE

The committee noted the Minute of its meeting held on 22 February. The Minute was thereafter signed by the Chair.

3. HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING SERVICES

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing an overview of the service activities within the Armadale and Blackridge ward.

The report provided information relating to property void and let performance for mainstream and temporary tenancies from Jan 2013 to March 2013. Comparative arrears performance for April 2011 to March 2012 and April 2012 to March 2013 was also outlined in the report.

The report also provided details of the area housing office activity, locality planning and community engagement. It was advised that officers had a number of tenancies under supervision for issues such as child protection, anti social behaviour and poor tenancy conditions.

The report went on to advise that the Housing Benefit size criteria changes took effect from 1 April 2013 and showed the number of West Lothian Council tenants affected by the Welfare Reform.

The report also provided details on Mayfield Community Garden project, ward specific Capital & Environmental programme, Safer Neighbourhood

Council Officer ward information, WLC officer based in SNT and Youth Worker based in SNT.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

4. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Finance and Estates providing details of the implications for West Lothian Council and the likely impact on the Armadale and Blackridge community of the UK Government's programme of welfare reforms and the action to mitigate these impacts.

The report advised that the UK Government was undertaking a major programme of Welfare Reform which would have a significant impact on local authorities and communities in West Lothian.

Recent research by Sheffield Hallam University suggested that by 2012-17, the annual loss to people in West Lothian as a result of the changes would be £57 million per year.

This figure took into account the effects on the West Lothian community of measures in the Welfare Reform Act 1012, the impact of earlier reforms announced in 2010 affecting the private rented sector, the effect of limiting the up rating of benefits to 1% p.a. rather than using the Consumer Price Index figure, the substantial increase in the rates of non-dependent deductions from housing benefit and the major changes to rates and eligibility for Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credits and Child Benefits.

The report went on to provide details on specific issues in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 including:-

- Size Criteria in the Social Rented Sector
- Abolition of Council Tax Benefit
- The introduction of Universal Credit
- The introduction of the Scottish Welfare Fund
- The Personal Independence Payment
- The introduction of an absolute benefit cap

The Head of Finance and Estates advised that the council would continue to take a proactive approach in identifying the implications of Welfare Reform changes and to identify what further options could be considered to assist people affected by the changes.

In conclusion the report advised that the Welfare Reform programme would have significant consequences for people in West Lothian and on West Lothian Council for many years to come.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

5. WARD 9, ARMADALE AND BLACKRIDGE – POLICE REPORT

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by Inspector Ian Moffat, Police Scotland providing an update on police activity within the ward.

The report provided the committee with information on the key performance indicators for the ward, national and community engagement priorities and highlighted issues of note.

The report also provided details of performance statistics for the year to date compared to last year.

The report advised that the community team continued to carry out stop and searches to deter, disrupt, divert and detect offenders. The community team continued to carry out directed alcohol prevention patrols and continued to lead the partnership Operation Floorwalk and Operation Freeze initiatives that were specifically aimed at detecting youths in possession/consuming alcohol in public places.

The report provided details on the following initiatives and forthcoming events:-

- Making our Roads Safer
- Reducing Anti Social Behaviour
- Tackling Substance Misuse
- Community Action Days
- Torphichen – Kirking of the Queen on 9 June 2013
- Armadale Gals Day – 15 June 2013
- Blackridge Gala Day – 30 June 2013

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

6. WATSON PARK PROJECT UPDATE

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Area Services providing an update on progress with the pitch and changing pavilion project at Watson Park.

The report advised that West Lothian Council had allocated funds within the Property Capital Programme to develop and enhance outdoor sports pitch and associated changing facilities within Watson Park Armadale. The investment would contribute towards the locality recommendations detailed within the West Lothian Council Outdoor Sports Facilities.

The project, originally planned for completion in the previous capital programme, was re-phased awaiting agreement on a combined master plan for the Watson Park area. The agreement of a master plan was subject to existing planning permissions in place for the site as pre-school and primary school development proposals.

It was advised that there was outline planning permission in place for a retail development linked to the re-provision of existing community facilities. Unfortunately these proposals were no longer economically viable. For this reason it was not intended to seek to renew the existing planning consent when it expired.

Educational provision on this site was still to be agreed and would be subject to the agreement of provision elsewhere in Armadale.

It was proposed that council officers progress with the formation of a draft brief for the pitch and pavilion project, taking cognisance of the aforementioned factors which would influence the master plan.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

7. COMMUNITY REGENERATION – PUBLIC HEALTH ACTIVITY

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Area Services providing an update on public health activities within the ward.

The report advised that public health work was a key component of regeneration in communities. A healthy community supported social gain and economic activity, building strong resilient communities.

The Armadale Employability Group was a multi disciplinary group that had been working together over a period of 18 months. Initial primary research to gather insight into the needs of local people in respect of employment and work informed and directed the work of the group. The report highlighted the work carried out as follows:-

- Increased provision of Business Gateway support in the area, increasing number of clients supported and an increase in business start ups.

- Development and delivery of customer service training responding to findings of the primary research.
- New IT course delivered alongside highly successful work club in Armadale.
- An oral history project with an exhibition of “Work in West Lothian” opened in Armadale Library.

The report went on to provide details on the Stop Smoking in Pregnancy Pilot, Armadale Community Garden/The Dale Food Group, Together for Health Project and local Breastfeeding Plan.

In conclusion the report advised that the above work demonstrated the diverse nature of the work in the area promoting healthy behaviours in the Armadale and Blackridge ward and how it contributed to wider regeneration work.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

8. COMMUNITY REGENERATION – WARD ACTION PLAN 2012-13

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Area Services providing information on key achievements relating to Regeneration and Employability in 2012-13. The report also outlined the ward action plan which set out further initiatives for 2013-15.

The report advised that the Regeneration and Employability team delivered a range of services to support some of the most disadvantaged communities and individuals with a particular emphasis on engaging with people to build personal and community capacity.

Appendix 1 to the report contained the completed ward action plan for 2012-13. The plan showed Regeneration, Employability and partner activity across the Armadale and Blackridge ward area.

Appendix 2 to the report contained the ward action plan for 2013-15. The plan showed regeneration, employability and partner activity across the Armadale and Blackridge ward area. The plan was designed to show what the various services would be working together to achieve over the coming year, what outcomes they were working towards and how they would measure progress.

In conclusion the report reflected achievements against planned activity from Regeneration, Employability and partners in 2012-13. A new ward plan was developed for 2013-15 and was aimed at making a significant contribution to improving the quality of life for the citizens of the Armadale and Blackridge ward.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

9. SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENTS WITHIN THE ARMADALE AND BLACKRDIGE WARD

The committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Education (Quality Assurance) providing an update on school developments and improvements with the Armadale and Blackridge ward.

The report advised that four schools were identified for development and improvement and one (Southdale) was a new build that was required due to the scale of new housing in the south of Armadale to allow the council to meet its statutory education responsibilities.

The report went on to provide details of school developments and improvements to Armadale Primary School, St Anthony's Primary School, Eastertoun Primary School, Blackridge Primary, Southdale Development (new school) and Armadale Academy

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

10. WORKPLAN

The committee noted the workplan and agreed to the following item being added.

- Armadale Partnership Centre

11. STRATEGY FOR TACKLING UNDER-AGE DRINKING/DIVERSIONARY ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Councillor Dixon had previously declared an interest and would take no part in consideration or decision of this item of business. At that stage the meeting was inquorate and this item of business could not be considered.