

MINUTE

of

NEWTON MEARNS SOUTH, BUSBY CLARKSTON AND EAGLESHAM AREA FORUM

Minute of Meeting held at 7.00pm in Mearns Castle High School on 3 March 2015.

Present:

Provost Alastair Carmichael
Councillor Barbara Grant

Councillor Ian McAlpine
Councillor Jim Swift

Inspector Alan Dickson (Police Scotland); Bill Duguid, (Eaglesham and Waterfoot Community Council); George McLachlan (Busby Community Council); John Seenan (East Renfrewshire Neighbourhood Watch Association); and Irene Yona (Newton Mearns Community Council).

Provost Carmichael in the Chair

Attending:

Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager.

Apologies:

Councillors Alan Lafferty, and Stewart Miller and John Divers (Scottish Fire and Rescue Service).

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1. The forum considered and approved the Minute of the meeting of 2 December 2014.

MATTERS ARISING

2. Under reference to Item 2 of the Minute of the previous meeting, Mr McLachlan reported that he had now seen the breakdown of costs for the installation of the slide at the playpark at Cartside Road, Busby. He expressed concern that the costs were in his view excessive and questioned whether some of the work listed in the price had actually been carried out.

In the course of discussion around the prices quoted for potential projects to be funded by the forum, Mr Daly clarified that officers had to follow strict procurement processes, and suggested that Mr McLachlan e-mail him with his concerns about the project which would be taken up with the relevant officers.

The forum noted the position.

BUDGET ALLOCATION 2015/16

3. The forum considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive, giving details of the general services budget allocation for 2015/16.

It was noted that the Council was required to make significant savings across all departments, and that as part of the agreed savings the funding available to area forums had been reduced, with the funding available for 2015/16 being £4,600.

The forum noted the report.

PROJECT PROPOSALS 2015/16

4. The forum considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive regarding proposed projects for 2015/16.

1 project, for the installation of a bench on Kirkhill Road, Newton Mearns, had been submitted for consideration.

Following discussion on the background to the request and possible locations for a bench. the forum agreed that the following project be approved:-

General Services Budget £4,600

PROJECT	COSTS/COMMENTS
Installation of bench on Kirkhill Road.	£800, subject to the identification of an appropriate location and confirmation that there were no landowner permission issues
TOTAL	£800
REMAINING BALANCE	£3,800

POLICE UPDATE

5. Inspector Dickson provided an update on the activities of the police locally since the last meeting.

Referring to the 2014/15 Quarter 3 Ward update Inspector Dickson was heard on some of the work that had been carried out. He explained that in the Busby, Clarkston & Eaglesham Ward there had been a reduction in the number of offences of drug dealing although possession offences had increased, particularly around the Whitelee Windfarm where stop and search was being used by the police and producing positive results. With regards to the Newton Mearns South ward, Inspector Dickson explained that although there had been a slight increase in the number of housebreakings for the reported period, preliminary figures for Quarter 4 were showing a reduction.

Inspector Dickson also reported that following the public consultation exercise towards the end of 2014, the 2015/16 ward plans were in the final stages of preparation prior to being introduced from 1 April 2015. He reported that the results of the research work carried out had shown that the same public priorities in the same order had emerged for both wards for 2015/15, these being:-

- Drunkenness and anti-social behaviour
- Dishonesty, housebreaking and other theft
- Violent crime
- Speeding and inconsiderate motorists.

He explained that the answers to the consultation reinforced what the police already knew about crime patters and public concerns in the area.

Inspector Dickson also made reference to the success of the Christmas initiative conducted by the police over the festive period. As part of this initiative visits had been made to businesses such as bookmakers and post offices to provide them with advice and guidance on steps to take to reduce the likelihood of robbery. It was noted that there had been no robberies in East Renfrewshire over the festive period.

Thereafter in response to a question from Councillor Grant on the perception of crime levels against actual crime levels, Inspector Dickson explained that whilst people may be concerned about crime levels, the reality was that crime levels in East Renfrewshire were low. By way of example he explained that whilst people may be concerned about violent crime, there were only 2 crimes of this type in East Renfrewshire the previous year. However, he explained that people being concerned about crime did have an effect on their quality of life and it was the role of the police not only to deal with crime when it happened but to provide reassurance and also act as a deterrent.

Provost Carmichael questioned whether in the light of a general reduction in crime levels, there was any future likelihood of a reduction on the number of police officers in East Renfrewshire. In reply, Inspector Dickson provided details of current staffing levels and indicated that any reduction from current levels would be very challenging in terms of local operational management.

Further discussion also took place on crimes of dishonesty and scammers in the course of which Inspector Dickson outlined some of the very positive work that had been taking place in conjunction with local banks and local trading standards officers.

In addition Inspector Dickson welcomed the retention of the campus cops for 2015/16.

The forum noted the information.

CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

6. The forum considered and noted a report by the Deputy Chief Executive providing details of the dates for meetings of the forum in 2016 as follows:-

Tuesday 1 March 2016
Tuesday 24 May 2016
Tuesday 6 September 2016
Tuesday 29 November 2016

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

7. The following issues were raised

(i) Citizens UK Refugee Campaign

Mr Seenan advised the forum that he was a member of the National Commission for Justice and Peace, and that that organisation had been approached by another organisation, Citizens UK, to support work to increase the number of refugees settled in the UK. As part of this campaign, Citizens UK were suggesting that councils actively participate in the resettlement of refugees.

Citizens UK had produced a leaflet and Mr Seenan circulated copies for information.

(ii) Online planning Information

Mrs Yona referred to the Council's decision that copies of objections to planning applications would not be available online and to the difficulties this posed for people now having to go to the Planning Offices to view these in hard copy.

Discussion took place in the course of which Councillor Grant queried why someone submitting a representation to a planning application would actually need to see online what other people had said in respect of an application, whilst Mr Duguid suggested that it may prove helpful to see how much support or opposition a being generated to a particular proposal.

(iii) Discontinuation of area forums

Mrs Yona referred to discussions that had taken place at the recent meeting of the Neilston, Uplawmoor, Newton Mearns North and Barrhead Area Forum about the perceived ineffectiveness of the area forums and to the suggestion from by that area forum that the forums be wound up and new methods of community engagement introduced. It was also suggested that the funds currently allocated to area forums could be disbursed to community councils.

In the course of discussion that followed, in response to questions from Councillor Grant on the review of area forums, Mr Daly explained that the review was being conducted on the back of the community empowerment legislation going through the Scottish Parliament. As this had been delayed there had been a subsequent knock on effect to the area forum review.

Councillors Swift referred to the lack of participation in forums by some of the Council's partner organisations, and supported by Councillor Grant suggested that the area forums in their current form had outlived their usefulness.

Mr Daly explained that any decisions on the future of area forums, future community engagement methods, and the destination for any residual funding in the event forums were wound up would be matters for the Council.

The forum noted;

- (a) the campaign by Citizen UK to increase the number of refugees in the UK;
and

- (b) the recommendation made by the Neilston, Uplawmoor, Newton Mearns North and Barrhead Area Forum and the comments made at this meeting.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 8. It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 26 May 2015 at 7pm in Mearns Castle High School.