

Councillor asked if huge rise in anti-social behaviour was 'printing error'

A huge rise in anti-social behaviour across West Lothian in the last year has been so extreme it prompted a councillor to ask if the figure was a "printing error".

A senior Labour member questioned the figures presented in a year end report from senior officers which showed a 12% jump on reports for 2023/24 compared to the year before.

Whitburn and Blackburn Councillor George Paul asked Divisional Commander Jocelyn O'Connor : "For quarter four 22/23 there's 9,160 and for quarter 4 23/24 there's 10,281, well over a 1,000 increase.

"Is that a printing error or is this the case?"

"This is the case there's been a 12.2% increase," Chief Inspector Jocelyn O'Connor told the meeting of the Public and Community Safety Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel.

Incidents of vandalism rose from 1,299 to 1,374, a 5.8% increase; fire-raising 133 to 141, a 6% increase; and Breach of the Peace 1,348 to 1,429, a 6% increase.

As for clear-up rates; the detection rate for vandalism was 27.1%. For fireraising 19.9% and for Breach of the Peace 72.5%.

In her report to councillors CI O'Connor said: "We continue to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in its various forms with our partners.

"Unfortunately issues at Livingston Shopping Centres and the retail parks have increased again with numerous incidents reported to police during this quarter. Although work has been ongoing in the background with various identified youths, incidents did increase, causing issues for both staff and members of the public.

"Partners continue monthly meetings with Centre management to address ongoing issues and find a long-term solution.

"In March, both the former Xcite Leisure Centres in Broxburn and Livingston (known as Bubbles), were subject to wilful fire raising. CID are continuing enquiries and are currently following up on several pieces of information. We encourage parents to discuss with their children the dangers of fire raising as well as gaining entry into disused buildings.

"WLC have currently secured these buildings although we have continued to receive reports of youths attempting to gain entry. "

CI O'Connor told the committee: "Police, Youth Action Project and Safer Neighbourhood Teams, have increased high-visibility patrols in ASB hotspots to deter any youth disorder, whilst providing reassurance to local businesses.

She detailed specific successes tackling ASB in Broxburn and in Blackridge.

"After an incident at Stewartfield Park, Broxburn where two vehicles were observed driving recklessly on the football pitches, we utilised social media to appeal for information from the local community.

"Due to this appeal, a 17 year old female was identified,

traced and charged in connection with the damage. Community officers thereafter attended the site with WLC staff and contractors to establish a plan to prevent vehicles entering the park.”

At Blackridge: “Our Community Officer analysed and collated almost 50 incidents from the previous 12 months, linked in with partner agencies resulting in a core group of youths being identified. Joint intervention visits were completed with all the youths being charged, and parental warnings issued.

“As a result of outstanding efforts, our officers solved 20 vandalisms with a collective damage value of around £11,000 and submitted a lengthy, complex youth offending report. This demonstrates the commitment our officers have in addressing ASB and sends a clear message that this behaviour will not be tolerated.”

Local Councillor Lynda Kenna thanked police for their work in Backridge she added that it proved that “by partnership working such behaviour could be controlled.”

CI O’Connor added that community teams had established regular high visibility patrols in areas of the county where ASB was reported.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter